

POiESiS

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POIESIS

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Preface

Nathan Brown

Classically, poetry is identified with *poiesis* – with “making,” or also “an act or process of creation.” In Aristotle’s theory of drama in the *Poetics*, *poiesis* is aligned with *mimesis*, such that tragic representations involve the *making* of an *imitation* of an *action*.

In his 16th century *Defence of Poetry*, Sir Phillip Sidney defines the poet as a “maker,” emphasizing the priority of *invention* over *imitation* in poetic making. “Only the poet,” he writes,

disdaining to be tied to any such subjection, lifted up with the vigour of his own invention, doth grow, in effect, into another nature, in making things either better than nature brings forth, or, quite anew, forms such as never were in nature, as the heroes, demi-gods, cyclops, chimeras, furies, and such like; so as he goes hand in hand with nature, not enclosed within the narrow warrant of her gifts, but freely ranging within the zodiac of his own wit.

For Sidney, “making” is only “an act or process of creation” (*poiesis*) insofar as it exceeds the mimetic representation of action or of nature by bringing forth, inventing, new forms that exceed the boundaries of the given world.

In the 20th century, Heidegger will theorize *poiesis* as a kind of “bringing forth,” aligning it with *aletheia*, revealing or unconcealment, thus aligning philosophical truth with the evocative capacity of poetic saying. For Heidegger poetry is “a kind of building,” insofar as it opens a relation between language and thinking that lets us “dwell.”

But while Heidegger thinks of poetry as a kind of building, he does not emphasize the physicality of poetic making as a practice of construction or fabrication, working with the concrete materials of language. On the contrary, for Heidegger this material element of poetic practice is inessential to its vocation as the speaking of being.

Yet this materialist approach to *poiesis* as physical making is precisely the way of thinking about poetic practice advanced by any number of modernist avant-garde movements emphasizing the graphic and phonetic material of the linguistic sign. “Don’t read,” advises El Lissitzky on the opening page of his *Tale of Two Squares*, “take paper, columns, blocks; fold, color, build.” This is an orientation toward *poiesis* as material fabrication that also runs through the Pound tradition, and through Zukofsky’s emphasis upon “the materials of poetry.” Such a materialist theory

and practice of *poiesis* potentially places poetic production on a continuum of making, or formal invention, with such fields as architecture, engineering, materials science, and the plastic arts.

If we situate *poiesis* within this expanded field of material production, then poetics will not only be proper to the province of literature. Where there is making, there we find poetics: theory of the formal practice of production. If, when the first volume of Marx's *Capital* descends into "the hidden abode of production" we descend also into the realm of *poiesis*, that is because making is not only the vatic enterprise of an author reposing in pensive mood. What gets made, and how, depends upon configurations of social and technical forces, and this puts every practice of artistic making – film, sculpture, painting, architecture, performance, poetry, etc. – on a common, though uneven, ground of historical determination. Poetics can be, in one register, the thinking of this historical codetermination of the arts – as in Fredric Jameson's multivolume project, *The Poetics of Social Forms*. The theory and practice of making, *poiesis*, traverses any particular art form, drawing the methods and materials of discrepant productive practices into relation, articulating their common conceptual, formal, and ideological problems across boundaries between specific media, institutional contexts, and disciplinary protocols.

But as it applies to poetry in particular, understanding *poiesis* as making also helps us to address poetic language within its own element. This element cannot be language *per se*, because language is *made up*, fabricated, continually produced: the process of its production is ongoing. Philology is the study of the history of language, the ongoing process of its historical production. But as Werner Hamacher points out in his recent book *Minima Philologica*, the object of philology – language – is also the medium of its investigation, and this infinitely reflexive structure inscribes it within the perpetual making of what it observes. This is precisely the domain of *poiesis*, and thus Hamacher declares "that philology is founded in poetry." So, poetry is that perpetual outside of language which is the internal process of its production – perhaps we could say: the making of what language is into what it will be. As Celan puts it in the *Meridian*, "poetry holds its ground on its own margin," and this margin is not only its own, not only the margin of poetry, but also the margin of language itself. *Poiesis* is a rich conceptual nexus for philosophical and critical investigation because both the concept and the practice performs this sort of boundary work, situating language at the edge of what it is in order to draw it into relation to other modes of formal articulation.

With a few additions, most of the essays collected in this volume were presented at a three-day symposium of the same title in Zagreb in 2015. This was also the occasion for a performance of Marjana Krajač's choreographed dance piece, *Variations on Sensitive*, which in turn occasioned the poetic response by Angela Rawlings, *Si Tu*, included here as an attached volume. Within the event we also organized a lecture and a concert by David Grubbs (together with Andrea Belfi), a film-screening by Oleg Tcherny and a performance by Angela Rawlings.

Our symposium on *Poiesis* carried on a larger sequence of events titled *Conjuncture: Twenty-First Century Philosophy, Politics, and Aesthetics*, which Petar Milat and I have been coordinating at MaMa, Multimedia Institut since 2009. Those events will continue with a symposium on the topic of Structure in 2017 and hopefully into the future. I want to express my gratitude to all of the staff at MaMa, particularly Tomislav Medak, Marijana Rimanić, and Igor Čolić, who have done so much to make these events possible and successful. Indeed, MaMa is one of those rare and inspiring places that continues to *make* genuine intellectual community possible, to make it up from scratch year after year, and thus to hold open the boundaries and parameters of thought to the as-yet-unknown, to the process of their constantly renewed articulation. This book is one small testament to the energies and ideas it continues to create and bring together.

Poiein

Thomas Schestag

What am I doing here? Here, where I speak; where I *do* speak as they say even while revealing a *tacit* complicity, perhaps even a dissent, between *to do* and *to say* when stating simply: *I speak*. *Doing* thus – saying or speaking – may simply emphasize the actual taking place of speech as an *act*, an action or activity. Speech not only as a performance (out of the blue and into the blue), but a performance performing some *thing*, in view of a certain *production* or *perfection*: *forma perfecta*. *I do* speak, thus, means (or seems to mean to say) that I speak in order to have spoken: that my speech will have given shape to... a (linguistic) *form*. I say (something) in view of something having been, and having actually been, *said* (in the past perfect). When I *do speak*, I *speak* in order to *do* something (with words). I consider my *dictum a factum*.

To say that I *do* speak seems to undo a powerful common place, a saying or *dictum*, about the relation between language and action, or deed. In Latin the *dictum* goes *dictum factum*, in German: *Gesagt, getan*. A saying – proverb, *Sprichwort*, *dictum* – is always built in such a way; not only relating to a fact as evidence, but incorporating the fact itself. This fact, here, in the saying *dictum* : *factum*, emphasizes the subordination of language to action. Words only speak, in order to prepare for (speechless) deeds (to be done). As if saying, stammeringly: I do not speak, I do do...

The most accurate description of this theory (of practice), according to which speech is always *categorical* speech, that demands its annihilation for the sake of deeds, appears in the funeral speech, recorded or invented by Thucydides in the second book of *The Peloponnesian War*, which Pericles delivers before the mass graves of the *demos* situated at the border of the *polis* and filled with Athenian soldiers killed during the first year of the war. The task of Pericles' *epitaphios logos*, his funeral speech, is to praise the deeds of the dead. The axis around which his talk revolves is the relation between *logos* and *ergon*. Words have to be spoken not only in remembrance of deeds done, but in order to uphold the dead as glorious models for the undertaking of deeds to come. But because of this *declared* asymmetry between words and deeds; an asymmetry that stems from the fact that words have to *serve* the deeds they are going to provoke, while those who receive spoken order to act accordingly have to *obey* to words; because of this *oscillation* between words and deeds, which undermines hierarchy, Pericles has to speak using words *against* words; he has to speak against the very words he speaks because although words prepare the works and deeds they are calling for, they also postpone and

delay, slow down and deviate, they endanger and threaten what they announce for as long as they continue to announce the deed. As long as words are spoken, deeds are not being done. Thus Pericles has to speak in favour of a *political* use of words, against a *poetical* use of words. This at least is the distinction drawn in his funeral speech. Good words, the politicians' words, will provoke effective deeds – *kairios ergon* –; bad words, the poets' words – *logos kompos* –, are pompous words: spoken for the sake of pleasing the ear, according to Pericles. The model for this latter, dangerously useless use of words is Homer: "We have no need of a Homer to sing our praises, or of any encomiast whose poetic version may have immediate appeal but then fall foul of the actual truth" [2.41.4]. (The word *poetic* here isn't in the Greek text, but inserted, as if emanating from the Greek, into the latest English translation of the *Peloponnesian War*, by Martin Hammond, 2009).¹ Yet, Pericles concedes, it remains difficult to turn words into the measure – *metron* – for the *kairos* of effective deeds. As if there were no measure and no guarantee for either a useful use of words or a useless use of words. Even their uselessness cannot be guaranteed. In *using* words no line of demarcation separates their usefulness from uselessness. Nevertheless there is a sign (*semeion*) that marks the effective, deed-provoking use of words in the Athens of Pericles, and this sign is the polis itself. The polis, including the graves – *semata* – of fallen soldiers situated at its borders, is a monument, a mute and monumental sign of political power. Athens is a sign of power, as are her graves: *sema* and *semeion*, both words that Pericles uses interchangeably in his funeral speech. For Pericles, the *polis* is the better *poem*. But the shape or skyline of this *polis* is that of a city of the dead: *nekropolis*. The poem — a tomb: *tombeau*.

* * *

The turn of phrase *I do speak* not only undermines a current distinction, so current or common indeed that it may be called an undercurrent (of our everyday relation to language and the world), between necessary but *mere* speech and speechless but *real* or effective deeds and actions. To say *I do speak* does not simply turn *doing* into the autopoietic, teleologically oriented performance of *speech* as act or deed in view of finally providing a *given* semiotic form considered a container for semantic contents. To say that *I do*

1 Thucydides, *The Peloponnesian War*. Translated by Martin Hammond (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 93. The Greek word translated here as *poetic version*, and in Thomas Hobbes (1629) as *poems*, is *epos*.

speech does not simply emphasize (irritatingly enough) speech as an act or activity or deed; but opens the ear for other, less audible undercurrents, murmuring questions: What am I doing to –; what do I do to speech (or language) when I do speak? What is done through –; what does doing do through language (that speaks)? And what is that we call doing?

What am I doing (here), when saying that I speak? The question touches upon what in ancient Greek is called *poiein* and, in German, *tun*. According to Jacob Grimm's etymological and lexicographical research, in the two volumes of *Deutsche Mythologie* (first published in 1835, republished in 1844 and 1854) as well as in the entries *Anthun* and *Abthun* written for the first volume of *Deutsches Wörterbuch* (published in 1854 and co-edited with his brother Wilhelm Grimm); two main semantic layers divide the verb *thun*, both intimately linking *doing* and *saying*, *deed* and *speech*, as well as – more *graphically* or incisively – *doing* and *writing*. As I set out to discuss *poiein*, I want to pause here for a moment, emphasizing both of these semantic layers that are cut apart from one another while sharing a strange complicity with the *one* (but not necessarily the *same*) word, *tun*, on my way to a discussion of *poiein*. The verb *Anthun*, literally to do something to someone [*ad* and *facere*: *afficere*], relates back to *thun* – to do – as *zaubern*: to conjure, charm or fascinate, to spell by way of spelling letters, words or sounds (and signs). In middle high German already it was in common linguistic use, as Jacob Grimm points out in *Deutsches Wörterbuch*, to avoid saying what exactly speech could do to someone, by preferring the formulaic notion to do it: *ez tuon*. Still today you can hear someone say in German *Du hast es mir angetan*: you have done it to me, you charm me, you attract me, I am under your spell, thus, you affect me (never without erotic undertones). But instead of someone causing the charm, it could also be something: a word, or sound, a smell, a name, or gesture. The verb *Abthun* instead, literally to do or take away, to remove something from someone, but also – more incisively – to cut or rip apart, to slaughter – *schlachten* – [*ab* and *facere*, thus, *afficere* again, though this semantic version, this mortal affect, never made it into the Latin dictionary]² relates back to *thun* – to do – as *opfern*: to cut into parts, to sacrifice. The verb *tun*, in both forms, *antun* – to charm – and *abtun* – to slaughter –, seems to *taboo* conjuring and mutilating gestures, which are both inseparable from *speaking*. The word *tun* – as well as its variations *antun* and *abtun* – *does* (so it seems) say something without saying it. The same counts for

² In Karl Ernst Georges' Latin-German Dictionary [*Ausführliches lateinisch-deutsches Handwörterbuch*, vol. 1, Hannover 1919, col. 227], *afficio*, exclusively considered a compound of *ad* and *facio*, includes, according to its use in Roman authors, also lethal aspects; the affect of doing away with someone's life – a privation, cessation or subtraction – is considered an augment or *addendum*. Georges mentions *afficere* as "aliquem uno vulnere in mortem, mit einem Stoße zu Tode verwunden" [fatally wounding with one stroke]. Other dictionaries mention notions such as *supplicio afficere* [to execute, put to death] and *cruce afficere* [to crucify, nail to the cross].

the Latin verbs *facere*, *operari* and *agere*, all designating (without saying so) the killing of a victim (for sacrificial ends), as well as for ancient Greek where the verb *rhézein* (drawn from *erdein* [= *ergein*] by commutation and mutilation of letters), translated (in the dictionaries) as *to do* and *to make*, designates the same immolating gesture (in the context of ritual slaughter or sacrifice).³ The verb *tun* – to do – proceeds, so it seems, *undercover*. Explicitly *undercover*. It provides what is called a *doublespeak*. Oscillating between protective detection and detective protection. Thus, undercutting the integrity of both its gestures: to cover, to uncover. Conjunction, as Jacob Grimm suggests in the chapter *Zauber* (magic) of his *Deutsche Mythologie*, has never been ascribed to gods nor human beings, to neither mortals nor immortals, but designates a certain capacity, ability, or power of those living in between the sphere of gods and men: giants, elves and dwarfs. But their proficiency is less a skill, an art or technique; it is, writes Grimm, *mehr angeboren*: more (or less) innate. Conjunction and slaughter, *zaubern* and *schlachten*, *anthun* and *abthun*, the two most distinct aspects of *tun*, do have, according to Grimm in the same chapter, their common origin in two inseparable pagan practices: "gottesdienst und dichtkunst": divine service (performing the killing and slaughter of an animal) and the art of poetry. Grimm also calls these two extremes *opfern und singen*: sacrifice and song⁴. In his dictionary Grimm translates the Greek code or cover word for ritual slaughter, *rhézein*, as *opferbrauch verkünden*: to announce ritual slaughter.⁵ Poet and priest, to speak and to kill, seem to embody two aspects, but both remain inseparable from one another, inseparable of one (but never the same): of what is called *doing*. *Tun*.

Extremes meet: still in the same chapter *Zaubern* of *Deutsche Mythologie*, Jacob Grimm, in order to emphasize the co-originality of *conjunction* (as *incantation*) and *slaughter*, reminds us that both the Latin *facere* – to do, to make – and the Greek *erdein* and *rhézein* – to make, to do – are not only used as covers for the *undercover* designation of ritual slaughter, but also for what is called *zaubern* and *bezaubern*: to bewitch, to enchant, to charm and captivate, to fascinate.⁶ As if slaughter were a mode of incantation – between speech and song –, as if incantation – between song and speech – were a mode of slaughtering or immolation (of what seems to be a given language). I do speak: I touch upon, I cut into a given word. What am I doing here?

- 3 Jacob Grimm, *Deutsche Mythologie* vol. 1 (1875), 33, n.3.
- 4 In his essay *Die Ursprünge der indoeuropäischen Poetik* [The Origins of Indo-European Poetics] (*Poetica*, vol. 13, n^o3-4 (1981), 197), Vladimir N. Toporov mentions a striking similarity between priest and grammarian in the early Vedic period: “[...] die auffällige Ähnlichkeit der Operationen des Grammatikers mit der Tätigkeit des Opferpriesters [...]”. So wie der Opferpriester das Opfertier, zergliedert auch der Grammatiker den Text, er zerteilt die ursprüngliche Einheit des Textes [...]” [the striking similarity between the operations of the grammarian and the sacrificial priest [...]]. The grammarian dismembers the text, he cuts into the original unity of the text, as the sacrificial priest cuts the sacrificial animal apart]. The suggested *similarity*, though, avoids the question of how – *precisely* – grammarian and priest do cut in each case, and *incomparably* so. The suggested *originality* of the Vedic text covers a rather complicated situation: indeed the Vedic text does already, in its turn, result from operations, which cut into given (grammatical, metrical, semiotic and semantic) patterns. Such a text, originating from *cuts* into a given (linguistic material), barely does *result* at all. Assembling *disjecta membra* of given linguistic elements, the Vedic text cannot be called a *given*. Grammarians cut into such texts – *après coup* – in order to learn how they resulted from cuts into what seems to be a *given* language. Further down in the essay, Toporov refers to the medieval Irish treatise on grammar and poetics, *Auraicept na n-Éces* [The Scholars Textbook], and its notion of *berla etarscartha*, “zerteilte Sprache” [split language], “die auf die charakteristische Operation des *Zerschneidens* und *Zerdehnens* verweist. [...] Eine der wichtigsten Deformationstechniken ist die *Aphäresis* des anlautenden bzw. die *Apokope* des auslautenden Konsonanten; dieses Verfahren heißt *dichned* ‘Enthauptung’ [...]” [referring to the characteristic operation of *splitting* and *stretching*. [...] *Aphaeresis* of the initial consonant or *apocope* of the terminal consonant are among the most important techniques of deformation; this method is called *dichned* ‘decapitation’ [...]]. Still further down, Toporov also mentions the notion *entrebrescar los motz*, a technical term in Provençal poetry, designating the “Zusammenbinden”, ‘Aufeinanderreihen’, ‘Flechten’ von Wörtern” [‘connecting’, ‘serializing’ ‘weaving’ of words]. But the very verb designating this technique, *entrebrescar*, seems to amalgamize, like a paralinguistic knot, aspects of connecting and disconnecting – or splitting – words: “Das Verb *entrebrescar* (von *bresca* ‘Wabe’) scheint selbst als Resultat einer Kontamination mit einer Reihe von Wortstämmen der gemeinsamen Bedeutung ‘brechen’, ‘krümeln’, ‘bersten’ entstanden zu sein; vgl. spätlat. *brisare*, **brisiare* ‘zerstückeln’, altprovenzal. *brizar* ‘brechen’, ‘reißen’, neuprovenzal. *bresar*, *brizo* ‘Stück’, ‘Krümel’ (‘Bruchstück’), altfrz. *entrebriser* ‘entzweireißen’ usw.” [The verb *entrebrescar* itself (from *bresca* ‘honeycomb’) seems to be resulting from a contamination of several radicals, sharing the common designation of ‘to break’, ‘to crumble’, ‘to burst’, comp. late Latin *brisare*, **brisiare* ‘cut into pieces’, old provençal *brizar* ‘to break’, ‘to rip’, new Provençal *bresar*, *brizo* ‘piece’, ‘small crumb’ (‘fragment’), old French *entrebriser* ‘to rip apart’, etc.]. The abbreviation etc., cutting short the series of further contaminations, interruptions, shortcuts, indicates that the supposedly *common designation* of, say, *to break*, condensed into *entrebrescar*, remains exposed to irregular and unforeseeable cuts into the coherence of a word’s semiotic and semantic core: the one word designating breaking words remains itself (and therefore neither *one* nor *self* at all) exposed to *cuts* which are no longer corresponding to or compatible with the word or verb *to cut*. What is at stake in *entrebrescar* is more (or less) than insistance on a common *radix*, more than just *radicality*; rather *irradicality*, eradication (of languages and words, and syllables, and letters).
- 5 Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm, *Deutsches Wörterbuch* [DW], vol. 1 (Leipzig 1854), col. 138.
- 6 Jacob Grimm, *Deutsche Mythologie*, vol. 2 (1876), 862.
- 7 J. and W. Grimm, *DW*, vol. 5 (Leipzig 1884), col. 3144-3150.
- 8 In the *Iliad* a formulaic notion repeatedly appears, as if hesitating between designation and conjuration, to indicate the *binding* character of a contract or covenant, by way of a *cut*. It is the formula *horkia pista temnein*, translated by Wolfgang Schadewaldt (1975) as “verlässliche Verträge schließen” (*Il.* 3.94: *horkia pista támonen*) [to *make* (or *conclude*) durable contracts]. But *horkia temnein* literally means to slaughter (or cut apart) the sacrificial animal. As if, paradoxically – or apotropai-cally – so, only a *cut* were able to mark – incisively – the strictly binding, unviolable character of a contract, covenant, or deal -- *to be cut* (once and for all), in order to never be cut, or broken. How exactly do *bonds* (ban, or spellbind) and *cut* intersect in such a *scene* – of slaughter? What takes place in this location: *horkia temnein*? This is Peter Karavites’ question (in his book *Promise-Giving and Treaty-Making. Homer and the Near East* [Leiden 1992, p.62]): “[...] what about the locution *horkia temnein*? Just what does it refer to, and how did it emerge? Does the verb *temnein* designate the cutting of the victim’s throat?

[...] the formulas are older than than the Homeric writings [...] may be associated with similar formulas used in the Ancient Near East prior to Homer. [...] According to a story in Stesichorus, Tyndareos, Helen's father, had asked all those who sued for his daughter's hand to stand on the *tomia* [genitals] of a horse he had sacrificed and to swear that they would go to the aid of his daughter and her future husband – whoever he might be – if any injustice befell them. [...] Before the Greeks departed for Troy, Calchas cut a boar into two parts at the market place and had each man pass with drawn sword between the two pieces in such a manner as to have his sword smeared with the victim's blood. The ritual is supposed to have symbolized sworn enmity towards Priam's people. [...] Among the Israelites [...] a common way of establishing a covenant was to cut up the animal and pass between the parts." The reference is to *Jer.* 34.18-19: "And I will give the men that have transgressed my covenant, which have not performed the words of the covenant which they had made before me, when they cut the calf in twain, and passed between the parts thereof [...]" A

passage, that echoes *Gen.* 15.9-21: "Take me an heifer of three years old, and a she goat of three years old, and a ram of three years old, and a turtledove, and a young pigeon. And he took unto him all these, and divided them in the midst, and laid each piece one against another: but the birds divided he not. [...] And it came to pass, that, when the sun went down, and it was dark, behold a smoking furnace, and a burning lamp that passed between those pieces. In the same day the LORD made a covenant with Abram, saying [...]" [*The English Bible. King James Version. The Old Testament*, ed. by Herbert Marks, New York 2012, pp. 1378 and 41-42]. Karavites pursues: "*Horkia temnein*, then, stood not just for any oaths or agreements, but for those solemnized by the ritual slaughter of animals, though not always horses and boars, and reflected the ancient practice of standing upon the animal's genitals (*tomia*) or passing through the severed parts." Such a passage is reported in Livy's *Ab Urbe Condita Libri*, 40.6.1-3 [*From the Founding of the City*, English translation by Evan T. Sage, vol. 12, Cambridge, Mass. 1938], where it is referred to as a ritual among the Macedoni-

ans: "It so happened that the time for purifying the army had come, for which there is a ritual of this sort: the fore part of a dog is cut off and placed on the right side of the road, the hind part, with the entrails, on the left; between the parts of the victim, thus divided, the troops are marched" [Forte lustrandi exercitus uenit tempus, cuius sollemne est tale: caput mediae canis praecisae et pars ad dexteram, cum extis posterior ad laeuam uiae ponitur: inter hanc diuisam hostiam copiae armatae traducuntur]. And Karavites concludes: "In the course of the ritualistic sacrifice, the animal was cut up or dismembered, and the making of treaty metonymized as 'cutting a covenant', or 'to cut a covenant.'" That the *making* – *poiein* – of a treaty indeed a *cutting* – *temnein* – is emphasized at two moments in Herodotus' *Histories*. Both passages split apart the formula *horkia temnein*, replacing each time the verb *temnein* by *poiein*. In the first passage [1.74.6] Herodotus confirms that Lydians and Medes, two oriental people, *make sworn compacts* as do the Greeks: *horkia poiēetai* [= *horkia poiein*]. The second passage [7.191.2] describes the appeasement of a devastating

storm by magicians – Magoi – of the Persian army, using victims, *entoma poieutes* [= *entoma poiein*] literally *to make what has been cut in or cut apart*, in other words to "make" *sacrificial animal: cut into pieces*. — This formula – *horkia temnein* – not only has an exact equivalent in Latin – *foedus ferre* – but also in Hebrew: *krt berit*. Dennis J. McCarthy (*Treaty and Covenant: A Study in Form in the Ancient Oriental Documents and in the Old Testament*, Rome 1963, pp. 53-55) writes: "The expression 'to cut a covenant' is surely based on this association of symbolic rite and covenant, and it is widespread: it occurs in cuneiform texts from Qatna dating to the fifteenth century B.C., and is found in Hebrew, Aramaic, and Phoenician. When the Hebrews "cut" a covenant they split a heifer and goats or a calf, while the Arameans of Arpad cut, or, with the Assyrians, beheaded and dismembered a sheep. [...] The odd connection between cutting and covenant is found among various languages and various nations, but the phenomenon is not simply a matter of linguistics. There is no question of the development from a common root. Different words appear for *cut* and for *covenant*. [...] the Hebrew

krt brt. Strikingly, the noun here departs from the universal tendency to refer to covenant in terms of the word [...]. The Hebrew word seems to reflect the idea of a binding tie, and that even in a material sense (cf. *Acc. birtu* 'fetter'). Here the linguistic short circuit has produced a paradox: to cut a binding tie has come to mean not to free from it but to bind it on." In another text (*Old Testament Covenant. A Survey of current opinions*, Richmond 1972, p. 3), McCarthy points out that "the essential word itself, *berit*, is related to the root *brh* which indicates food and eating." The root, in other words, relates to the region of the mouth as a most critical intersection of articulation and disarticulation, *dismembering* and *remembering*: speaking (words) – eating (meat). But what, if what is called *articulation*, in *poetry*, in the *making* – *poiein* – of a *poem*, covers a most incisive, most disrupting practice of cutting – *temnein* – into what is called a given word, a syllable, a letter, and cutting *apart* what, at first glance, makes one think of a given word (to be read: reading as reconfirmation and collection: *legere, legere*), but what, at second glance, disposes the word to further cuts (reading as cutting:

temnein, nemein)? On *poiein* as *undoing* – *Abthun* – or *slaughter*, and on the comparison of poems with sacrificial animals in Ancient Greek poetic practice, see Jesper Svenbro, *La découpe du poème* (*Poétique*, n° 58, 1984, pp. 215-232): "Dans certaines conditions, il semble donc que le poème peut occuper la place de la victime sacrificielle et subir la violence du couteau afin d'être partagé et mangé" [Thus it seems, that under certain conditions the poem may occupy the place of the sacrificial animal and suffer the violence of the knife in order to be divided up and eaten]. It is the *metrical* composition of the poem, that allows for its comparison with a living being, in other words for its disposition to *slaughter*: "Le modèle du métricien est [...] le *mageiros*, le boucher-sacrificateur [...] le *mageiros* est le héros secret [...] de la métrique. La tâche du métricien grec c'est précisément de découper le discours versifié, 'par membres' – pour arriver à une connaissance de sa constitution" [The metrician's model [...] is the *mageiros*, the sacrificial butcher [...] the *mageiros* is the secret hero [...] of metrics. The task of the Greek metrician is, precisely, to cut apart the versified discours, 'into

members' – to gain knowledge of its composition]. Thus, the task of the metrician is to find out more, but *après coup*, by way of cutting into the (*dis*) *membered* body of the poem, about *poiein* as a *cutting* practice out of which the poem seems to emerge as a word-thing, disposed to nothing but – *discussion*. The secret of *poiein* as an incisive *paralinguistic* practice remains condensed into the question of the cut – *temnein* –.

One more observation from this incursion into the linguistic layers of *tun*. The one word *tun* – *facere*, *erdein*, *to do* – is not the only one. It provokes or provides others, up as well for undercover operations, like Latin *agere* and *operari*, like German *machen*, and probably like – this at least is the direction I suggest to take – Greek *poiein*. The German word *Gemächt*, which I resist translating here, a derivative of *machen* – to make – provides a particularly fascinating and incisive place of encounter – or *knot* – of (at first glance) most distinct semantic tendencies. Its least visible semantic layer today, according to Grimm’s *Deutsches Wörterbuch*,⁷ is the coupling or copulation of sexes, a sexual pairing, intimately linked to language as the sphere of contractual preparation for or manifestation of such encounters – *Abmachung* –; *Gemächt* is a more or less obvious, more or less secret encounter of sexes no less than words fascinating each other in view of a *spell-bound text*, in other words a covenant, or *contract*. (Each contract has its *charm*, each one its *harming* aspects, each one is bound to conjuration).⁸ This contractual tendency (in and between letters, words and languages) mixes juridical and magical traits; thus, *Gemächt* also names the (temporary) metamorphosis of (living) beings by way of conjuration or incantation; this transformation, in its mechanical aspects, prepares *Gemächt* for the designation of all things *made*, fabricated and produced, including works of art: “*kunstarbeit*,” and particularly linguistic works of art: old high German *gimahhôn* and *machôn* – to make – means *dichten* (to make, or compose, poetry), *gimahhida* is a *Dichtwerk*, or *poem*. This *making* or *make-up* of linguistic works of art is most often described as proceeding from what is called *Zuschnitt* (literally a *cut-up*) or disposition: *Dichten* initially is bound to cutting and incisive gestures (cutting into words and syllables and letters), thus echoing the so-called *sacrificial layer of tun*: a slaughter. The technical or artificial aspect of *Gemächt* or *Machen* – to make – more generally is always coupled with or visited by a *generating* aspect: *Gemächt* as *genesis* of as well as the quintessence of *creation* (in a religious sense): the world, or *cosmos*. A more visible variation of the most forgotten or repressed aspect of *Gemächt* – the more or less contractual encounter between sexes – is to be found in the plural *Gemächte*, designating male and female *genitalia* as those things or parts apt for procreation, able to engender or, in other words, less to *have* than to *make* – a child. As if *child* and *poem* were only two sides, two faces of – *poiein*.

What inconspicuously takes place (without occupying and determining a clear-cut space) when looking closer at these cover-words, between *tun* – *erdein* – *facere* – *machen* – and (among others) *poiein*, is the indistinction (or indetermination) of the strict separation between *physis* and *téchne*, *ars* and *natura* (but neither in the name of *téchne* nor in the name of *physis*).

What about *poiein*? When looking into Franz Passow’s Dictionary of the Greek Language [*Handwörterbuch der Griechischen Sprache*],⁹ you find all the (fascinatingly imbricated) facets between *incantation*, *fabrication*, *generation* and *immolation*, syncopating the semantic areas of *tun* and *machen*, to *do* and to *make*. The first two translations of *poiein* provided by Passow are *machen* and *thun*, in their technical, workmanlike or mechanical aspect: to produce or fabricate something designed to last (for a while). *Poiein* means to *build* and refers to men as well as animals, for instance bees (in the *Iliad* [12.167-168]: *mélissai* / *oikía poiésontai* – bees, building their house). But the second semantic layer provided by Passow has to do with the generative, procreative aspects of *poiein*: *poiein tékna* – to make children; part of the same semantic facet (but including *contractual* aspects of language) is *poiein* in the sense of choosing and making (by taking or giving away) a woman as wife, as husband a man. In Passow’s dictionary, this *genetic* facet of *poiein* is immediately followed by *poiein* as *dichten* – making a *poem* (recurrent since Herodotus), from which to *poiéma* – the poem – is drawn (a use recurrent since Plato). *Poiesis* is the making of things, their fabrication, in a most general sense; in a less general, more juridical sense it indicates the acceptance – as adoption – of a child, opposing the adoptive or if one could say so the *made-up* father – *ho poiétós patér* – and the father as progenitor, who *made* the child – *ho góno patér* –: *poiein* (as fabrication) against *poiein* (as generation); but the word ends up designating fabrication in a strict sense, of *linguistic* works of art – *poiémata* – by a *poietes*; *poet* is the word to replace the former *aidós* (a term recurrent in Homer, Hesiod and Pindar) – a singer who *does* not sing but receives his words from the *muse*. The distinct quality of the *poietic*, of what the *poietes* – or *poet* – does, is neither *praktikós* nor *theoretikós*, is neither *theory* nor *praxis*, but does something *with* words, not without doing something *to* words in such a way that the *poem* remains as some (*paralinguistic*) *thing*, *word-thing* (provoking *theoretical* and *practical* approaches without coinciding with either of them). *Poiesis* is also neither a mere *technical* process or procedure out of an encounter between

⁹ Franz Passow, *Handwörterbuch der griechischen Sprache*, vol 2.1 (Leipzig 1852), 973-977.

a poet and the realm of words in view of a *poem* to be formed, nor mere *natural* procreation out of the (more or less contractual) encounter between sexes in view of a *child* to be born. But *poiesis*, conceived as poietic craftsmanship, remains entwined or interwoven with a drive or desire as if for procreation. In Plato's *Symposium*, to which I will turn in a second, it is said, by Diotima, telling the story of *Eros*' conception out of the encounter between *Penia* – Poverty – and *Poros* – Resource – late at night in a garden, in the fringes of a great feast given by the gods in honor of Aphrodite's birth: "Now Resource, grown tipsy with nectar [...] went into the garden of Zeus, and there, overcome with heaviness, slept. Then Poverty, being of herself so resourceless [*aporian*: she is the figure of *aporia*] devised the scheme of having a child by Resource, and lying down by his side she conceived *Eros*" [203b-c].¹⁰ *To have* (a child by Resource) is Lamb's rather pale translation of the Greek verb *poiésasthai*. Friedrich Schleiermacher's German translation (1824) relates to the same passage, more pregnantly, as: "ein Kind mit Poros zu erzeugen": she devised the scheme of *begetting* – *poiésasthai* – a child with Poros.

How does the oscillation between *technical* and *physical* aspects in *poiein* affect the making of *poems*? If, according to Plato's *Cratylus*, the two most current considerations of words and naming – *onomata* and *onomazein* – take words either *physei*-, that is as natural correspondences, as if grown out of the things they name, or *nomo*-, tending towards a contractual and conventional, that is contingent and variable shape of words –; what then is the *poetic* relation to naming and words? What exactly *does* a poet do to words when *making* a poem? What *does* a poem do to the language in which, at first glance, it had been traced or written, of which it seems to be a part, to which it seemingly belongs? What are they doing here, these words, I drew together – or felt drawn to – in order to build a text, or *poem*? What do they do to each other?

* * *

At one point in Plato's dialogue *Charmides* [163b-c], Socrates and Charmides are discussing the difference between *prattein* – to do – and *poiein* – to make –; Charmides insisting on the difference between both: *poiesis* is not a *praxis*, nor is it (hard) work or labour – *ergázesthai* – in view of some *ergon*, a work to be worked out or crafted. *Poiein*, says Charmides (as I have learned from

¹⁰ Plato, *Lysis. Symposium. Gorgias*. Translated by W.R.M Lamb (Cambridge, Mass. 1925).

Hesiod, he adds, according to whom work – *ergon* – is no disgrace, whereas worklessness or idleness – *aergíe* – is); *poiein*, he says, may be disgraceful, as long as the beautiful is not involved. And to describe the making of the thing – *poiema* – or *poem* to be made, he uses the verb *gignesthai* (which is also used for what comes more or less naturally, for what is born). Charmides considers *poiesis* a *genesis*, the making of a *poem* – *generation*.

The call for beauty – *kalós* –, in order to avoid disgracefulness in the making of what is called a *poem* (in the passage I just mentioned), recalls Diotima’s speech on Love – *Eros* – in Plato’s *Symposium*. At one point in her speech, to better explain whom or what *Eros* embodies, Diotima turns toward *poetry*. This turn is nothing less than illustration. It cuts deep into the mechanics, if one can say so, of *poiein* taken in the strict sense of the word: to do something with words; to do something to words. *Eros*, the son of *Poros* (who always finds a way where others don’t) and *Penia* (or *aporia*: waylessness; but she will find, as you have heard, a way to begett [make] – *poiein* – a child with *Poros*: *Eros*), *Eros*, says Diotima, is neither god nor man, neither mortal nor immortal but a great *daimon* – *Daimon mégas* –, moving in between and commuting – *hermeneuein* – between gods and men, mortals and immortals which, without *Eros*, wouldn’t know about each other. *Eros Daimon* is not only moving in between but cutting into both ends of the relation he initiates and supports, thus opening them for each other. What *Eros* carries (explains, interprets) and provides are both extremes of what *poiein* is about: *incantation* and *slaughter* (to spell-bind : to cut apart). This resonates with Diotima’s words, in Lamb’s English translation [202e]: “Through *Eros* are conveyed all divination and priestcraft concerning sacrifice and ritual and incantations, and all soothsaying and sorcery.” *Eros*, Diotima explains to Socrates, who feels (he says) drawn to *Eros* because of his beauty; *Eros* is not the beautiful, but love for what is beautiful [204b]. *Eros* is not the beloved – *erómenos* – but the lover – *erastés* –. Love only loves what is beautiful, but only the beloved appears beautiful to the lover. If *Eros* (the son of *poros* and *aporia*), who embodies love, is not the beloved but the lover, then what love loves, the beloved of love, is the lover: love *for* love. Love loves in what it loves that which escapes the beloved: a lover. [The beauty of the beloved appears, and only the beloved is beautiful, for who loves, where love touches upon the beloved, cuts into the beloved in such a way that the beloved turns into a lover, and lover and beloved vanish without *being* vanished]. *Eros*, the lover, loves in

the beloved beauty, both tendencies: what goes beyond the beloved – *an excess* – and what remains behind the beloved – *a lack* –. Eros embodies the restless place where excess and lack (of love) encounter each other: in the lover as a *porous aporia*.

Love, it seems, is always (only) love for love (always already more than it is). Love, in other words, is not, but loves. Diotima makes more explicit this strange coupling or doubling of love with love [Eros d'estin éros peri tò kalón (204b)], love loving love, when she inquires into the nature of the most beloved, namely *eudaimonía* [205a]. Schleiermacher translates the word as *Glückseligkeit*: supreme happiness, bliss, ecstasy. Eros had initially been called, as you remember, a great *daimon* – *Daímon mégas* –, but his highest aim is *eudaimonía*; the prefix *eu-* indicating the intensification of *daimonía*. Eros is *Daímon eudáimon*. But what exactly is this *daimon* longing for when longing for nothing but for *daimonia* in its most intense manifestation: *eudaimonia*? [The characterization of the gods, or immortals, as *eudáimones* early on in Diotima's speech [202c] doesn't help to unfold *daimonía*]. What, then, is a *dáimon*? *Daímon* refers back to the ancient Greek verb *daíomai*, describing the gesture of cutting into and cutting apart (something). Walter Porzig, in his article “Δαίμων” (1923) writes: “Der Gegenstand der Zerteilung ist Beute, konkret Speise, d.h. aber Fleisch. [...] Danach scheint die konkrete Bedeutung der Wurzel *dai*, *da* im Griechischen, soweit es sich aus Homer noch unmittelbar erkennen läßt, gewesen zu sein: ‘zerreißend fressen, fressend zerreißen’ von Raubtieren oder Raubvögeln an einem Kadaver [...]. Heißt also *daíomai* ursprünglich ‘zerreißen, fressen’, so wird damit das Wesen des *daímon* klar: er ist der Zerreißer, Fresser der Leichen [...]“ [The object of division is prey, more precisely food, that is meat. [...] Accordingly, the actual meaning of the Greek root *dai*, *da*, as far as it can be perceived in Homer, seems to have been this: ‘devouring by dismembering, dismembering by devouring,’ related to predator animals and birds of prey over a carcass [...]. This initial meaning of *daíomai* as ‘ripping up and devour’ helps to clarify the *daímon*'s character: he is the one disrupting and devouring the corpses].¹¹ It is almost impossible, at this point, not to think of *Penthesilea* near the end of Kleist's play [of mourning], who, after having killed and literally bit into the corpse of the beloved, Achilles, ripping out parts of flesh, becomes aware of what she just did and says: “– So war es ein Versehen. Küsse, Bisse, / Das reimt sich, und wer recht von Herzen liebt, / Kann schon das Eine für das Andre greifen“ [– So it was a

11 Walter Porzig, Δαίμων, in *Indo-germanische Forschungen*, vol. 41 (Berlin 1923), 169-173.

mistake. Kisses, bites, / They rhyme, and whoever loves with a true heart, / Can easily take the one for the other].¹²

At this point in her speech, when she presents Eros as *Dáimon eudáimon*, the one who oscillates between *no longer* and *not yet*, a love at once bereft of love (love longing for love) and excessively beyond the beloved, Diotima turns to *names* and *naming*, to *poiein* and *poiesis*. Eros, she states, though seemingly the name for love in general, only names a particular mode, a single form of love [*érotós ti eidos*]: its highest manifestation. There are names for other (minor) forms of love. Take for example – and now she turns to *poetry* – what is commonly called *poiesis*: “you know that *poetry* [*poiesis*] is more than a single thing. For of anything whatever that passes from not being into being the whole cause is composing or poetry; so that the productions of all arts are kinds of poetry, and their craftsmen are all poets. [...] But still [...] they are not called poets: they have other names, while a single section disparted from the whole of poetry – merely the business of music and meter – is entitled with the name of the whole. This and no more is called poetry; those only who possess this branch of the art are poets” [205b-c]. An *excessive lack* – I have no better word (or name) at hand –; an *excessive lack* of naming affects both *love* and *poetry*. The name *Eros* is commonly in excessive use, naming all kinds of *longing*, no less than the name of *Poiesis*, commonly naming all kinds of fabrication or formation (from not being into being). But only one particular form of *love*, only one particular form of *poetry* deserve bearing the name of *Eros* and *Poiesis*. It is the love that is in *lack* of love, longing for nothing but love. Only love that loves (to) love, only love that is not nor simply is *not love does* – in fact – relate to the name. Only love (excessively) incompatible with love coincides with the *name*.¹³ The rest, not only common use of love (and poetry), but of names and naming, is mere somnambulism, sleepwalking speech. At first glance the turn toward *poiesis* seems to happen out of the need for illustration: the common ubiquitous use of *poiesis*, just like the excessive use of *Eros* in everyday speech and life, works like a cover: as if to make forget, to extinguish or repress (without the least chance of return) remembrance (of the unforgettable): the only (use of) poetry and (of) love, deserving this name. But the relation between *Eros* and *Poiesis*, as will become clear in what follows, is not sheer similarity or illustration; it is unimaginably, irritatingly intense and intimate. The first hint, taking place almost undercover, as if not happening at all, is Diotima’s emphatic repetition that to long for *eudaimonia*

- 12 Heinrich von Kleist, *Penthesilea. Ein Trauerspiel* (1808), in *Sämtliche Werke und Briefe*, Edited by Roland Reuß and Peter Staengle, vol. 1 (Munich 2010), 497.
- 13 *Der Name [...] ist der Schrei der nackten Lust* [The name [...] is the cry of naked lust]. Walter Benjamin, *Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 5.1, *Das Passagen-Werk*. Edited by Rolf Tiedemann (Frankfurt/Main 1982), 613.

– *eudaimonein* – is “the most mighty, most beguiling love for all” [205d]. The turn of phrase *most mighty, most beguiling love for all* seems to be cut out of a poem (by some unknown poet). But the poem doesn’t simply name *Eros*; instead, it offers a strange, and strangely disfiguring reduplication, as if stammering, of the name or word or particle or sound pattern *-eros*. *The most beguiling love* is an expression rendered in Ancient Greek as *doleròs éros*. *Eros* is the most mighty form of love in that it is the most cunning, most deluding, artful, tricky form of love. But to call the highest manifestation of *Eros* *doleròs éros* is not just a designation. The poetic turn of phrase *doleròs éros* does something to language no less than to love. The excessive doubling of *eros* here is nothing less than sheer mechanical repetition of one and the same (linguistic) form. The sequence *doleròs éros* cuts twice into a given form, mutilating the evident selfsameness of both *doleròs* (spelled with O mikron) and *eros* (spelled with O mega): (*dol-*)-*eròs éros*: oscillating between small and big, poor and rich, lack and excess. What happens here comes close to the devastation of a (linguistic) form. Love, when it happens, is a disaster to all known forms of love: it *does* something to love; poetry, when it happens, is a disaster to all known forms of poetry: it *does* something to language. But if the comparison between *Eros* and *Poiesis* in Diotima’s speech is not simply due to the need of illustration, if it is not only about superficial similarity, as the twisted turn of phrase *doleròs éros* seems to indicate – how exactly then do *Poiesis* and *Eros* relate to each other? The explanation of this intimate complicity or co-implication takes place in the heart of Diotimas’s speech.

Eros, it has been said, is the highest manifestation of love, leaving behind all other forms of *longing*: it is (paradoxically) love *in lack* of love, love longing for nothing but love. Accordingly, *Poiesis* names the highest manifestation of *making*, the making of *linguistic* artifacts, exceeding all other forms of making in that it remains *in lack* of a perfect form. The poetic doing *does* something to language, but not in order to be *done*. What, then, is *poiesis* *longing* for? Diotima’s first move as she approaches *Eros* and *Poiesis* is to introduce the notion of *genesis*, immediately splitting it in two. *Eros*, she explains, is not of the beautiful; “it is of engendering and begetting upon the beautiful” [*Tes gennéseos kai tou tókou en to kalo*] [206e]. This longing, for generation and birth upon the beautiful, proceeds according to either the body or the soul. Body and soul share the desire for generation and birth.

Mortals do engender mortals, but this proliferation of mortals upon generation is itself, Diotima goes on to say, something immortal – *athanatos* – [206c], mixing once again *lack* and *excess*, for it remains dubious whether continuous, excessive procreation of mortals by mortals will overcome mortality, or will remain forever exempt from what it tries to reach. But wouldn't remaining forever exempt (as I just said) lead or *promise* (or *pretend*) to lead to something like the *immortalization of mortality*? What remains with such a notion is neither solution nor relief, but a porous aporia. To engender is an effort of the nature of all mortals [*thnetè phúsis*] to reach immortality [207d]. Therefore, love also longs for immortality, or more precisely: Eros is all mortals' longing (humans and animals alike) for immortality. The impression of a lasting, even everlasting presence among mortal beings is due to the mechanics of substitution upon generation: "another new [*hétéron néon*] in place of an old [*anti tou palaiou*]" [207d]. The impression of enduring presence of one and the same living body – *autos* – is due to sexual encounters (driven by *Eros*): *heterogeneous* interruptions. A similar operation, according to Diotima, affects the soul. Here, the incapacity to last, the intermittent rhythm of disappearance and appearance, growth and decay, touches upon knowledge – *episteme* – [208a]; the arrival of each single knowledge being affected by departure – *éxodos* –. The desire to keep incoming knowledge present, at hand and by heart, is threatened by forgetting – *léthe* –. In the case of mortal bodies what compensates their loss is generation; in the case of knowledge visiting the soul what mitigates its departure and forgetting – *léthe* – is what Diotima calls *meléte*, which Lamb translates as *conning*, and Schleiermacher as *Nachsinnen*. Literally, *meléte* designates the (anxious) *care* for somebody or something. *Meléte*, not unlike the poetic fragment *doleròs éros*, echoes *léthe*, as if retaining the name for what causes its loss: forgetfulness. As if saying: *Don't forget to remember that forgetting takes place. Méléte* – a conning or care for – *does* something. In order to compensate for a vanishing piece of knowledge it inserts – *empoiein* (literally to *do* something into) – a reminder, memory or recollection – *mnéme* – into the soul in such a way, that the vanished piece of knowledge still seems to be (present), seems to remain, and seems to remain the same – *autos* – [208a]. The procreated *child* – *tókos, goné* –, as if to make forget, or at least as if to delay (almost infinitely) the vanishing of mortal bodies (including its own), exactly correlates with the imposition of *memory* – *mnéme* – into the soul, as if to

make forget the vanishing of knowledge, in other words the soul's forgetfulness. But in between these two operations, the generation of a child and the implantation of a memory – both being related to *poiein* –, there takes place a third operation, as Diotima suggests, this one linguistic or *paralinguistic*. This operation is about *naming* and *names*. The experience of constant change, constant inconsistency, in the case of a child or, more generally speaking of a human mortal being, seems to be suspended or delayed because of the name it bears: “as someone is called the same [*ho autòs légetai*] from childhood until old age” [207d]. The *name* gives the impression of selfsameness and duration as does a *child* and *memory*. But all three are operations in the sense that they are trickery (Diotima at one point uses the word *mechane* [208b] [Lamb: *device*; Schleiermacher: *Veranstaltung*]).

How does *Poiesis* fit into this constellation – of *child* and *memory* and *name*? Diotima's speech takes another turn toward a further modification of *Eros*, now determined as the singular affection [among mortals] “of winning a name and laying up immortal fame – *kléos* [...] *athánaton* – for all time to come.” The desire for an (immortal) *name* *undoes* the desire for a *child*. “For this”, Diotima continues, “even more than for their children – *hupèr ton paidon* – they are ready to run all risks [...] and sacrifice [*huperapothnéskein*] their lives” [208c]. For the *spell* of a *name* they put up even with the possibility of being *slaughtered*. Diotima again: “Do you suppose [...] that Alcestis would have died for Admetus, or Achilles have sought death on the corpse of Patroclus [...] if they had not expected to win ‘immortal memory’ – *athánaton mnéme* – [...]” [208d]? The two key terms Diotima comes up with in this passage describe the two pillars of Greek Epic poetry.¹⁴ Language is considered the immortal memory – *athánatos mnéme* – in order to provide unwithering fame – *kleos aphthiton* – of a name. The highest manifestation of love according to the body (longing for immortality) is the procreation of a child, bearing a name; but the highest manifestation of love according to the soul is the procreation, by *poets* – *poietai* – of a *poem*. *Poems*, Diotima concludes, are the better *children*: “Every one would choose to have got children such as these [she calls them “more beautiful and more immortal – *kallíonon kai athanatotéron* –”] rather than the human sort – merely from turning a glance upon Homer and Hesiod and all the other good poets – *poietàs* –, and envying the fine offspring – *ékgona* – they leave behind to procure them immortal glory and memory [*athánaton kléos kai mnémen*]” [209c-d]. They all,

14 *Kléos aphthiton* is mentioned once in the *Iliad* [9.413]. The second notion – *athánatos mnéme* –, as it appears intimately linked to *kléos aphthiton* in Plato's *Symposium*, can be considered an extrapolation of the first. Compare Hector (*Il.* 22.304-305), aware of his fate (being slaughtered by Achilles), and accepting “nasty death” – *thánatos kakós* –, but “not without glory – *akleios* –, no, / in some great clash of arms – *méga rhéxas* – that even men to come will remember – *essoménoisi* – down the years” [transl. by Robert Fagles, modified]: *kléos aphthiton* necessitates *athánatos mnéme*. The words characterizing Calchas, the seer – *mántis* – of the Greek army in the *Iliad* (1.70) – “He knew things present, past, to come” [*hos éde tá t'éonta tá t'essóména pró t'éonta*] – are repeated in Hesiod's *Theogony* (38) to characterize the muses, daughters of memory's personification – *Mnémosune* –; they sing (teach the poet to sing as well) “things present, past, to come” [*tá t'éonta tá t'essóména pró t'éonta*]. “The poet”, states Jean-Pierre Vernant, “possessed by the Muses, is the interpreter of *Mnémosune*” [“Aspects mythiques

says Diotima, earlier on in her speech, all mortals do – *poiein* – all they can [208d], to gain unwithering fame (of their *name*). They will even die for immortality, that is for immortal memory. Many consider dying for their child. But poems are the better children. This (tacitly) implies (it is not *said*, but *does take part*), that the love – *Eros* – for *poems* is the highest manifestation of love; as well as that poems – *paralinguistic artifacts* –, the highest manifestations of *poiein* in general, embody *Eros* in its most *excessive* drive: a most *excessive lack*. *Eros*, always the lover, never the beloved beauty, is not and is not *love* (it never coincides with itself, with what is called its name, with the name calling for love), but loves to love...; longing for nothing but for longing for... (almost nothing): going beyond everything one could imagine longing for and thus remaining irretrievably behind what is called (and understood as) *longing for*. *Eros* loves to *undo* what it seems to be as well as what it seems to love. The *poem*, accordingly, is not, is not a *poem*, not a generated, fabricated linguistic form, a *given*, but does something to linguistic forms that *undoes* both, the words' letters' and syllables' apparent selfsameness, coherence and indivisibility, as well as the impression of their *being*, being *there* as if having something *to say*. Poems *do say* as if they were saying (this or that) but never reach the point where one could say that what had to be said finally has been *said*. In other words *done*. And that we are done here. We're not. But what, then, are we *doing* here? And who: *we*? The only poems deserving that name, remember, are not poems and not deserving the name. The only poets deserving that name are not, nor are they poets. Both, poets and poems, but *poet* and *poem* are not their names, embody (just like children, names and memory, but more intensely so) *porous aporias*.

* * *

The strange complicity of children with poems, poems with children, as if undoing the more or less strict, more or less porous distinction between *phusis* and *téchne*, *ars* and *natura*, is taken up in a passage of Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*. This passage, which appears in book 9, relates to a passage in book 8. Both books are dedicated to a discussion of *philia* – friendship, love –. The poets' relation to their poems seems to illustrate a particular form of friendship: that between parents and their offspring, and more precisely that between a mother and her child. In book 6 Aristotle

de la mémoire," in *Mythes et pensées chez les grecs*, Paris 1990, p. 111]. For the co-implication or complicity of *kléos áphthiton* and *athánatos mnéme* see also Nicole Loraux' discussion of Pericles' funeral speech – *epitaphios logos* – in Thucydides' *Peloponnesian War* (*L'invention d'athènes*, Paris 1981, p. 51): "comme l'éloge poétique, le discours en prose promet aux guerriers la Mémoire des générations à venir; entre le *kléos áphthiton* (la gloire impérissable) des aristocrates et l' *athánatos mnéme* (le souvenir immortel) civique, la ressemblance est trop évidente pour être fortuite" [like poetic eulogy, prosaic discourse promises the warriors Remembrance of future generations; the similarity between aristocratic *kléos áphthiton* and civic *athánatos mnéme* is too evident to be just accidental].

states a difference, almost a strict distinction, between *poiesis* and *praxis* (according to H. Rackham's English translation a distinction between *making* and *doing*): "[...] making is different from doing [...]. Doing is not a form of making, nor making a form of doing" [1140a].¹⁵ But what, then, does *making* – *poiesis*, *poiein* – mean? There is no art – *téchne* –, explains Aristotle, that is not, by way of *logos*, concerned with making – *poietiké* –: "All art deals with bringing something into existence – *gésin* – [...] the origin of which lies in the maker and not in the thing made; for art does not deal with things that *are* or *become* – *ónton è ginoménon* –, of necessity [*anágkes*], or according to nature [*katà phúsin*], since these have their origin in themselves. But as doing and making, *Praxis* and *Poiesis* are distinct, it follows that art, being concerned with making, is not concerned with doing. And art and chance, in a certain sense, are dealing with the same, as Agathon says: 'Art loves chance as chance – art' [*téchne túchen ésterxe kai túche téchnen*]" [1140a]. A poem's *genesis* is neither due to nature – *phúsis* – nor to necessity – *anágké* –. All things natural or necessary have their origin in themselves (one may call them *autogenetic*); they develop (and vanish) according to what seems inevitable, calculable, *fate*. [Always in time]. A poem instead – call it *heterogenetic* – has its origin in the maker or the making. This origin is neither a given pattern, matrix, term, *idea* or paradigm; it is nothing but *chance* – *túche* –, or more precisely (according to a *poet's* line) *love* of chance, which in its turn (or in return) is not a given or possession (nor a *tool*), but *love* of *téchne*: *téchne* and *túche* do love each other. What results from their encounter (with language) is the *making* of what remains unforeseen and unforeseeable, out of *love* for the divisibility, precarity and porosity of generated forms: *poems*. Indeed, poems result – unnecessarily, incalculably, unnaturally, and *excessively* so – from interventions into, from the *love* of interventions into given (linguistic) forms. No poem comes *into its own*. Their *making* doesn't simply follow rules or devices; it isn't *application*; it *happens* at the brink of *artlessness*. Therefore, each poem differs – as *poets* do from *poets* – from what is called a *poem*: different from what seems to be [and to be *itself* (a poem)]. [Es ent-springt, ohne entsprungen zu sein. Springt – ur-sprünglich – entzwei. Sprengt: noch den Zusammenhalt mit sich.] The poem does not exist. It ek-sists existence, ek-sists *excessively*. *Ek-* without *-sistence*. [Im Gedicht setzt Eksistenz, setzt das Ausgesetztsein – aus.] The poem *itself* is not (itself), but *selfless* (as if incorporating the most accomplished form of friendship, according to Aristotle: the *selfless*

- 15 Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, Translated by H. Rackham (Cambridge, Mass. 1926).

friend). This selflessness, not only of the *poem* but *poet* too, brings up, again, the question of the *name*, of the *appropriate* or *proper* name. Aristotle touches upon it at one point in book 8. Friendship, one reads at the outset of book 8, is an object of dispute. Some say that those similar to each other are attracted by each other; some say that similarity provokes repulsion and distaste, as (for example) in the case of potters – *kerameis* – and *pottery*. No potter wants to be lumped together with any other. No potter wants to be called a potter, sharing one and the same name, that would annihilate differences for the sake of similarity, uniformity and corporate identity. Each one is almost simultaneously attracted and repelled by two options. To say either: “I am the only potter“ or: “What I do has nothing to do with what all the other potters do: my pottery is not pottery at all: I am not a potter.” This also goes for *poets* and *poetry*. And in fact, the text from which Aristotle draws the example of the potter, a passage in Hesiod’s *Works and Days*, also names the poet *avant la lettre*: *aoidós* (the Homeric singer): “And potter is angry with potter, and craftsman with craftsman, and beggar is jealous of beggar, and minstrel of minstrel [*aoidòs aoido*]” [25-26].

Referring back to the description in book 6, of *Poiesis* as generation of those things which don’t have their origin in themselves but in the artist’s – *technites* – love for chance, Aristotle, at one point in book 9, distinguishes poets among all other artists – *technitai* – because of their *excessive*, overwhelming *love* for their own work, the *poems*. “Every artist“, says Aristotle, loves his own work more – *mallon* – than that work if it were come to life would love him. But most of all – *málista* – this is true among poets – *poietàs* –, who love their poems – *poiémata* – beyond all measure – *hyperagaposi* – as parents love their children” [1167b-1168a]. The love of the generated work, if it were come to life, for its procreator, would never reach the love of the procreator for his or her work. All artists love their work *more*, more than their work could ever love them. But the maximalisation of this *more* (of love), beyond any measure, takes place in a poet’s relation to his or her poem. Comparable only to the love of parents for their children. A poet’s relation to the poem, as if to his or her child, is *hyperbolic*. Love beyond love. [A poet’s love for his or her poem loves more than the poem and the poet –; more than love can bear. A poet’s love (for love) bears the unbearable. It bears in what it bears – the unbearable –, and bears *out*, the *unborn*. Each poem bears not only the unborn (poem), but

the unbearable]. But how do parents love their children – *tékna* –? Aristotle takes up this question in book 8, as part of his discussion of *philia* – friendship –. All friendship, says Aristotle, involves community – *koinonía* –. “But the friendship between relatives is different from friendship between members of a comradeship” [1161b]. Each (form of) friendship, each one forming a community – *koinonía* –, seems to be generated by its distinction from another form of friendship. What all these communities share, is separation (and separability). Though different from all other forms of friendship, the friendship between relatives seems to differ from itself, seems to appear under various forms – *polyeidès* –. Nevertheless, this internal differentiation and diversity seems to have its model in parents’ love for their child, but this couple’s love – involving at least two faces, sexes, figures, names – seems to be modeled according to a *paternal* face or sex or shape. *Paternal* affection seems to dominate, it seems to be the *name* for, *parental* affection toward a child. “Parents love their children as part of themselves, whereas children do love their parents as the source of their being” [1161b]. No child has its origin in itself. A child’s generation therefore, its *poiesis*, does not happen according to necessity nor nature, but exclusively because of love of chance. Children – like *poems* – don’t have their origin in themselves, but in their parents. But their parents, children themselves, don’t have their origins in themselves either. Where, then – this is, as Freud knew, a child’s question –; where do children come from? Where do poems come from? Their origin takes place, so it seems, in an incisive encounter between sexes –; in a most incisive encounter within, no less than in between, letters, syllables and words, in a moment of excessive, hyperbolic love of chance (or chance of love) [*paregklisis*, *clinamen*]. Parents seem to be, without being their origin, *at* the origin of their children (exposed to what takes place). And the paternal shape or shade seems to provide, at least at first glance, a simulacrum of origin. Another remark, further down in the same section, introduces asymmetry into the parents’ relation to each other as well as to their child. Parents love their children as a part of themselves, but they themselves do not form a whole, neither *in part* nor together. Separate from each other, they entertain separate relations to their child, which seems to be the bond – *súndesmos* –, giving birth to the parents *as* parents, as *one pair* so to speak, at the moment of birth. But Aristotle’s other remark shatters this impression. Parents do love their children earlier (from birth on) and thus longer than a child its parents, but

the parents' love for their offspring is not one. "Mothers – *metéres* – do love [the verb here is *philein*] more – *mallon* –"; not only more than a child could love its parents, but also more than a father loves his child. The sentence immediately following this remark introduces (in parentheses), as if preparing for an explanation of this more of love in mothers, the notion of *separation*: "Parents then love their children – *tékna* – as themselves – *heautoús* – (one's offspring being as it were another self – *héteroi autoi* –, – other because of separation – *kechóristhai* –)" [1161b]. The mother's love for her child introduces a cut into unity and immediacy of what has been described further up as the parents' love for their child. Only the child's birth – a separation – gives birth, it has been said, to the parents *as* parents: not only do they separate from each other in the moment of the child's separation from its mother, but they immediately separate from each other in their relation to their child. Mothers do love their children *more*. They do bear, or carry, as is said, a child *to term*: which is not a given or *datum*, but the experience of birth as separation. The unfolding of a mother's *more* of love develops around this *cut*. It could have its origin in a mother's love to overcome a child's loss in the moment of birth, to *outdo* separation. It also could be love *for* separation, in at least two different ways: love for separation as for the necessary condition of possibility for reappropriation (of the child); or love for separation, *unconditionally*. Parents do love their children as themselves it is said immediately before the sentence introduces *separation*. If separation is (at) the origin of the experience of myself as another self, in other words of each self as other, different not only from each other self but from itself, then *separation* is another word for chance (or love): the love of chance, which is neither natural nor necessary. *Separation*, the *more* of love for separation, at this point, is another word for the experience of *Poiesis* in general; for the experience of *Poetry* or, more precisely, for *Poetry as* experience, in particular.

For according to what is developed in this passage of book 8, focusing on asymmetries in the parents' love for their offspring, condensed into a mother's *more* of love, in book 9 it is not only said that every artist – *technites* – loves his own work more – *mallon* – "than that work if it were to come to life would love him," but also that poets do love this more of love *the most* – *málista* –: "For they love their own poems – *poiémata* – beyond all measure – *huperagaposi* –, as they would love their children" [1167b-1168a]. Does a poet's love for his or her poem look more like a father's

or a mother's love for their child? It seems that a mother's *more* of love, growing out of the experience of separation, serves as a measure here, for the end of this passage marks her reappearance. A remark on similarities between *poiein* and *philein* prepares for her return: "To love – *philein* – seems to resemble a making (or doing) [an active experience] – *poiesis* –, being loved an enduring [a passive one]; [...] Moreover, everybody loves a thing more – *mallon* – if it has cost labour – *epipónos* –. [...] This is why mothers love their children more than fathers, because to bear a child takes more labour" [1168a]. A mother's *more* of love (for her child) (than a father's) is due to more pain in the making of, bringing forth and separating from, a child. But in a poet's making and separating from a poem, this more of love, due to more pain, goes beyond measure, it exceeds the excess of maternal love. Why? Why this excess of immeasurable, unimaginable love and pain, love as (if) pain, love for pain in the *poiein* of a *poem*? [Isn't a poem the least important, most useless thing in the world? Neither natural nor necessary? An excess of lack and deficiency? Like – a child? As if no longer –; or not yet –; bound to language?] Aristotle does not waste a word on it, passes – in silence, leaving the question unraised, untouched. It is left behind, almost abandoned, like a *poem*, or *child*. [But whenever, wherever, the question of *Poiesis* is raised, posing *itself*, and discussed, this other question tacitly passes, unraised and unbound. As if it were impossible to *raise* it; as if it were impossible to *do away* with it.]

The excess of pleasure or love, inseparable from excessive pain, in the making of a poem, goes beyond a mother's love for her child due to the experience of loss or separation. The painful pleasure in the case of a poem's *poiesis* doesn't simply separate the poet from a *linguistic* artifact, which then would be considered part of the language in which it was composed. What happens in the making of a poem is *more*, for every *poiesis* *cuts* into the language – these *incisions* are the poet's pain and pleasure –, it separates both poet and poem from the language – *logos* – to which they seemingly belong. The making of a poem *does* something to language: it *undoes* the poet's, *undoes* the poem's – natural or necessary – bonds with language. *Poems* loosen the hold onto language, considered not only a given (*possession*), but the quintessence of man. What is at stake with each poem (anew) is Aristotle's definition of man as *zoon logon echon*. The hyperbolic pain and pleasure taking place in the making of a poem are bound to the experience of loosing language considered as a hold, a

property, and scheme – *schema* –. But this experience secures no hold. The experience of loosing language affects the poet's *energetic* relation to life as *feeling alive: zoon* [...]; the excess of love and pain involved in the making of a poem touch upon *anaesthesia*: feellessness. *To feel : not to feel*. The poem abounds with *chance*, it is not bound to language, nor to *itself*. Poems don't belong. Poets abound with *love for chance*. They undo their bonds with language, undoing language, the language of men, language in general. They don't belong, neither to mankind nor to *themselves*. Poets are not poets. And a poem never coincides with what is called a *poem*.

* * *

Recent texts are rife with distaste, almost hatred, among those called *poets* for what is called a *poem*, and *poetry*. In 1947 Georges Bataille published a book under the ambivalent title *La Haine de la Poésie*,¹⁶ which could be read as either *The Hatred for Poetry* or *The Hatred of Poetry*. The book is composed of three sections: *L'Orestie* [Oresteia]; *Histoire de rats* [Story of Rats]; and *Dianus*. No preface or introduction is provided, but between the *exergue* (two quotations from Catherine of Siena and Teresa of Avila) and its first part, the book offers, on a separate page, an *Invocation à la chance* [Invocation of chance]. This other insertion or insection into the book's shape [or margins] echoes the excessive *love for chance – tûche* –, detached from nature and necessity alike, as sole criterion of *poiesis*, as distinct from *praxis*, in Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*. And indeed, at one point in the book's first section it is said: "Un poète ne justifie pas – il n'accepte pas – tout à fait la nature. La vraie poésie est en dehors des lois" [50] [A poet does not justify – does not accept – nature at all. True poetry is outside of laws]. True poetry refuses the necessity of nature, nature as necessity: the law (of nature). The first part of this book – *L'Orestie* –, itself divided into seven sections, is composed in its first six sections out of poems and poetic prose, whereas the seventh part – *Être Oreste* – assembles a series of aphorisms on poetry. Between the book's first and second part a further page, separate from both parts, refers back to the composition of the first part: "Sur la publication, en un même livre, de poésies et d'une contestation de la poésie [...] j'aurais peine à m'expliquer" [59] [About the publication, in one and the same book, of poetry and a contestation of poetry [...] I remain almost unable to explain myself]. This note provides a precision

¹⁶ Georges Bataille, *La Haine de la Poésie* (Paris 1947). — The title echoes a passage in Charles Baudelaire's last "Projet de préface pour *Les Fleurs du mal*": "Ce livre restera sur toute votre vie comme une tache, me prédisait, dès le commencement, un de mes amis qui est un grand poète [Théophile Gautier]. [...] Mais j'ai un de ces heureux caractères qui tirent une jouissance de la haine [...]" ["This book will remain upon your life like a spot, predicted, from the beginning, one among my friends, who is a great poet. [...] But I dispose of one of those happy characters who are able to draw pleasure from hatred"]. Charles Baudelaire, *Œuvres complètes*. Edited by Claude Pichois, vol. 1 (Paris 1975), 184-185. — See also Mathieu Bénézet / Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe, *L'intimation*, in "Haine de la poésie" (Paris 1979), 7-21.

of the book's title; a *contestation of poetry* invites to read *La Haine de la Poésie* as *Hatred for poetry*: a violent renunciation or refusal of *poetry*. But this book has been republished, slightly modified here and there and re-composed, under the title *L'Impossible* [The Impossible] in 1962, the year of Bataille's death.¹⁷ This time not only the arrangement of the book's three parts has changed, the former first part – *L'Orestie* – with its aphoristic contestation of poetry at the end – *Être Oreste* – now marking the end of the whole book, but Bataille also adds a preface in which he refers back to the book from 1947, commenting on both books' titles: "Il y a quinze ans j'ai publié une première fois ce livre. Je lui donnai alors un titre obscur: *La Haine de la Poésie*. Il me semblait qu'à la poésie véritable accédait seule la haine. La poésie n'avait de sens puissant que dans la violence de la révolte. Mais la poésie n'atteint cette violence qu'évoquant *l'Impossible*. A peu près personne ne comprit le sens du premier titre, c'est pourquoi je préfère à la fin parler de *l'Impossible*. // Il est vrai, ce second titre est loin d'être plus clair. // Mais il peut l'être un jour..." [10] [Fifteen years ago I published this book for a first time. Back then I gave it an obscure title: *La Haine de la Poésie*. It seemed to me that only hatred was able to access true poetry. Only in the violence of revolt was the power of poetry. But poetry attains this violence only by evoking *the Impossible*. Almost no one understood the sense of the first title, that's why I finally prefer speaking of *the Impossible*. // It is true, this second title is far from being more clear. // But one day it could ...]. The preface thus offers a third reading of the book's first title: not just hatred *for* nor *of* poetry (these two readings tend to block access to the title's undercurrent). But: only hatred for what is *not* (true poetry), only hatred for what is and for what is *called* poetry, breaks a way where there was none, no trace or track before, in other words nothing but *aporia* shows the way – to poetry. As if Bataille were saying here: only the experience of *Aporia* (waylessness), only her (sexual) encounter with *Poros*, the making and birth of *Eros* – *porous aporias* – opens – not without violence – access (by excess of rupture) to *Poetry*. In one of his notes preparing the making of the preface for *The Impossible*, Bataille writes: "Le premier [titre] soulignait seulement la haine d'une poésie prétendue liée au goût du possible, mais ce n'était pas dit clairement. *L'Impossible* est encore, est avant tout la violence tout entière [...]. C'est ce qui excède les conventions d'une poésie littéraire" [The first [title] only emphasized the hatred for *so called* poetry bound to the taste of the possible, but this hadn't been

17 Georges Bataille, *L'Impossible. Histoire de rats suivi de Dianus et de L'Orestie* (Paris 1962).

clearly said. *The Impossible* still is, is above all, mere violence [...]. It is what exceeds the conventions of literary poetry].¹⁸ The hatred for what is called and known as poetry does violence to linguistic and literary conventions, including violence to the convention of doing violence to such conventions; it does violence to violence in all its possible forms, and in so doing (but one may call this *the impossible*) undoes the impression of language and poetry as a *given* – whether this given is understood as a gift by nature, convention, or chance –. But Bataille holds on to the name of *poetry*. There seems to be something encapsulated in the *name*, in what is called *poetry* that exceeds – excessively – what is called *poetry*. A violence (to violence) from within that rips poetry, poetic *forms* apart, thus opening poetry to the impossible – for what Bataille calls *la poésie véritable* [true poetry]; true to the hatred that does away, that does a way with (what is called) poetry. This violence (to violence), inseparable from *poiesis*, refers back to the two extremes, two most extreme manifestations of *poiein*, as distinguished and related to each other by Jacob Grimm under two opposite modifications of the German verb *thun* – to do –. *Anthun*: magic spell and incantation (*Zaubern*); and *Abthun*: sacrifice or slaughter (*Schlachten*). In his preface to *The Impossible* Bataille indicates these extremes as *la mort* [death] and *le désir* [longing for]: “La mort et le désir ont seuls la force qui oppresse, qui coupe la respiration. L’outrance du désir et de la mort permet seule d’atteindre la vérité” [10] [Death and desire only have the power that oppresses, takes your breath away. Solely overdoing or excess of death and desire allows to attain the truth]. Only *poiein* in its most extreme manifestations, where *extremes meet*, only the *excessive desire for slaughter* will *undo* poetry (that is the outcome of *poiesis* in its most conventional understanding as the making or fabrication of something in order to be *made*), and to attain – *poetry*.

The violence or violent desire to *outdo*, *undo* poetry – the violence of *linguistic* fabrication – and reach poetry – violence done to this violence *from within*, in order to *undo* linguistic violence, language considered a *weapon* (of mass destruction) – is at the *core* of the aphorisms included in *La Haine de la Poésie* under the title *Être Oreste* [Being Oreste]. At one point among these aphorisms it is said (but I only offer scattered fragments here), almost excessively explicitly: “La poésie ouvre la nuit à l’excès du désir. La nuit laissée par les ravages de la poésie est en moi la mesure d’un refus — de ma folle volonté d’excéder le monde. — La poésie aussi excédait ce monde, mais elle ne pouvait *me changer*.”

18 Georges Bataille, *Œuvres complètes*, vol. 3 (Paris 1971), 512.

Ce qu'elle substitue à la servitude des liens naturels est la liberté de l'association, qui détruit des liens, mais verbalement" [56] [Poetry opens the night to an excess of desire. The night that is left by poetry's ravages marks inside myself the measure for refusal [rejection] — of my mad desire to exceed the world. — Poetry also exceeded this world, but remained unable to *change* me. It replaces the slavery of natural chains with *free association*, destroying those chains, but verbally]. Poetry exceeds the world, replacing the terror of what seems to be the necessity of natural ties and restrictions by *free association* (another version of what Aristotle calls the *love of chance*), but poetry's deliberate excesses seem to remain themselves restricted: they destroy the world of *words*, a world bound by *syntactic* chains. This last sentence seems to be colored by regret for poetry's limited power of destruction. But Bataille will excise this sentence from the second version of the book, *The Impossible*. The text continues (further down): "La poésie fut un simple détour: j'échappai par elle au monde du discours, devenu pour moi le monde naturel, j'entrai avec elle en une sorte de tombe où l'infinité du possible naissait de la mort du monde logique. // La logique en mourant accouchait de folles richesses" [57] [Poetry was a simple detour: she helped me to escape the world of discourse which had become for me the natural world, with her I entered some kind of tomb where, inside the death of the world of logics the infinity of possibles took birth. // Logics, at the moment of death, gave birth to mad riches]. Poetry, in this passage down toward some silent space, into some kind of tomb, turns out to have a *sex*: with *her* I went down there. Due to her I escaped from the world of *logics – logics –*, where the sway of *discourse* had imposed itself on all and everything as if (being) the *nature* of the world. But this escape *from* the world of logics – language as logis, logis as logics, melting nature and necessity into an amalgam of unavailability: fatal attraction –; this escape away from discourse, along with *her*, with poetry, escapes *into* the world of logics as if into some kind of *tomb*, where dying logics give birth to *mad riches* – another variation of hyperbolic love for chance –. It is as if Bataille had written this (emblematic) passage of descent accompanied by Mallarmé's *La destruction fut ma Béatrice* [Destruction was my Beatrice],¹⁹ for poetry here takes the shape of devastation: the night she leaves behind, night of some kind of tomb, is a night of *ravages*: language dismembered. This night of *dissecta membra* is an opening, here compared to birth, à *l'excès du désir*. This excess of desire remains inseparable from what has been called *slaughter*,

19 Stéphane Mallarmé, *Correspondance. Lettres sur la poésie*. Edited by Bertrand Marchal (Paris 1995), 349 [Letter to Eugène Lefébure, May 27, 1867].

from what Bataille in the section *Être Oreste* calls *ravages*. Some among the most precise descriptions of this opening are given in the section *Digression sur la poésie et Marcel Proust* [Digression on poetry and Marcel Proust] in Bataille's *L'Expérience intérieure* [The Inner Experience] (1943). At one point it is said: "Oreste ou Phèdre ravagés sont à la poésie ce que la victime est au sacrifice" [Orestes or Phèdre destroyed are to poetry what the victim is to sacrifice]²⁰. Orestes here is Orestes near the end of Racine's tragedy *Andromaque*: abandoned, devastated, mad; scattered remainders of what once seemed to be, to bear – a *name*: Oreste. Orest remains as some remainder of Oreste; as one could say in French: *au reste, les restes d'Orestes*. The title *Être Oreste*, in *La Haine de la Poésie* lends itself for such incisions (into a given proper name). What Racine does to Oreste in *Andromaque* is – this at least is how Bataille sees it – an emblem of what poetry does to words. For further up in the *Digression* it is said: "De la poésie, je dirai maintenant qu'elle est, je crois, le sacrifice où les mots sont victimes. [...] [le] sacrifice de mots qu'est la poésie" [Of poetry I would say now that it [she] is, I think, that sacrifice where words are victims. [...] [the] sacrifice of words that is poetry].²¹ And in *Méthode de méditation* [Method of Meditation], written around the same time, Bataille is still more precise about this sacrifice: [La poésie est] "une hécatombe des mots sans dieux ni raisons d'être" [[Poetry is] a hecatomb of words, without gods nor reason].²² The sacrifice in poetry is not a ritual, it is not *sacer*, but slaughter. The word *hécatombe* here allows to get a better shape of [deepen the impression of] what, in *Être Oreste*, is called some kind of tomb – *une sorte de tombe* –. Hecatomb, in ancient Greek – *hekatómbe* – is a composit of *hekatón* – hundred – and *bous* – ox or cow: cattle –: the ritual killing, slaughter and burning of cattle (for the gods). The comparison of words with cattle goes back at least to ancient Greek poetry. But in poetry the reason for slaughtering words, according to Bataille, goes missing, is fading away, fails. In common terms it could be called a sacrilege, an act of heresy, a crime. ["La poésie," Bataille writes in *Digression*, "[...] le simple holocauste de mots" [the simple holocaust of words]²³]. What at first glance could be called poetry's crime against language and words is not a crime to which *jurisdiction* would apply, for it is a crime against juridical language, the language of sentences, *sentencing* language: *Urteilssprache*. Poetry, in what it *does* (to words and language) goes beyond all known, all recognized forms of crime, an *excess* of crime and (therefore) remaining behind everything that ever has been called and will be called a *crime*.

²⁰ Georges Bataille, *Œuvres complètes*, vol. 5 (Paris 1973), 169.

²¹ Bataille, *Œuvres complètes*, vol. 5, 156-157.

²² Bataille, *Œuvres complètes*, vol. 5, 220.

²³ Bataille, *Œuvres complètes*, vol. 5, 158.

Bataille calls poetry a *simple* holocauste (or hecatomb). It could be called a *childrens' crime*, a crime most *innocent*. "Poésie [...]" is to be read in one of Hölderlin's letters, "diß unschuldigste aller Geschäfte" [Poetry [...] this most innocent of all businesses]²⁴.

[Similar to what a child – *infans* – does to language.]

But poetry is not, what it is called or taken for – not poetry.

Near the end of *Digression*, Bataille states (parenthetically):

"(Ce qu'on ne saisit pas: que la littérature n'étant rien si elle n'est poésie, la poésie étant le contraire de son nom, le langage littéraire – expression des désirs cachés, de la vie obscure – est la perversion du langage un peu plus même que l'érotisme n'est celle des fonctions sexuelles. [...])" [(What remains unseized: that literature is nothing if it isn't poetry, poetry being the opposite of its name, literary language – expression of hidden desires, of shady life – is perversion of language, and even more so than eroticism is perversion of sexual functions. [...]).]²⁵

* * *

The last sentence of Bataille's preface to *L'Impossible* asserts that the impossible imposes itself: "[...] nous pouvons, et même nous devons répondre à *quelque chose* qui, n'étant pas Dieu, est plus forte que tous les droits: cet *impossible* [...]" [we are able to, and even have to respond to *something* which, not being God, is more powerful than any law: that *impossible* [...]].²⁶ One among the notes written for this preface reads: "L'impossible c'est la littérature" [The impossible is literature].²⁷ That impossible, access to which is broken by poetry – which is not poetry nor what is called poetry – is (another name for) poetry. It imposes poetry's exposure. Seven years after the publication of *L'Impossible*, Paul Celan notes: "La poésie ne s'impose plus, elle s'expose" [Poetry no longer imposes itself, it exposes itself].²⁸ The aphorism doesn't say that poetry imposes its exposure, it shifts away from imposition, from poetry as imposition (or demand for poetry), but *some* imposition, though unsaid, seems to remain, as if encapsulated in the adverb *ne plus* [no longer], as if saying (without saying so): poetry exposes the imposition to expose *itself*. The imposition to expose, exposure of that very imposition, does not go without suspicion, almost hatred, for certain aspects *at work* in *poiein*. In a letter to Hans Bender, from May 18 1960, refusing a request to contribute to an anthology [*Mein Gedicht ist mein Messer*], Paul Celan writes: "Man

- 24 Friedrich Hölderlin, *Sämtliche Werke und Briefe*, Edited by Michael Knaupp, vol. 2, Munich 1992, p. 736 [Letter to his mother, January 1799].
- 25 Bataille, *Œuvres complètes*, vol. 5, 173.
- 26 Bataille, *L'Impossible*, 11.
- 27 Bataille, *Œuvres complètes*, 519.
- 28 Paul Celan, *Gesammelte Werke*. Edited by Beda Allemann and Stefan Reichert, vol. 3 (Frankfurt/Main 1983), 181 [March 26, 1969].

komme uns hier nicht mit ‘poiein’ und dergleichen. Das bedeutete, mitsamt seinen NÄhen und Fernen, wohl etwas anderes als in seinem heutigen Kontext” [Don’t bother us with ‘poiein’ and the like. That may have meant, with all its nearnesses and distances, something other than in its actual context].²⁹ And among the notes for *The Meridian* [Celan’s Büchner-Prize-Speech in 1960] one reads: “Gedichte sind nicht herstellbar” [Poems are not to be produced or fabricated]; and: “Poesie der Poesie’ – zu deren Verständnis keinerlei etymologische Gemeinplätze von ‘Mache’ etc. verhelfen; die Machart erklärt das Gedicht nicht” [The ‘poetry of poetry’ – the understanding of which is not provided by any etymological common place of ‘make’ etc; the make does not explain the poem]³⁰. Poems are not made in order to be made; what they do (to language) *undoes* their *making* and *make-up* as linguistic artifacts.

Among the most violent attacks against the word *poetry* are certain remarks in the writings of Francis Ponge. In January 1948 a note for *My Creative Method* in which Ponge refers back to the distinction between *Poiesis* and *Praxis* reads: “Deux choses portent la vérité: l’action (la science, la méthode), la poésie (merde pour ce mot)” [Two things bear [carry] truth: action (science, method), poetry (shit for this word)].³¹ Back in 1941, in what Ponge calls “Appendice au ‘Carnet du Bois de Pins’” [Appendix to my ‘Notebook of the Pine Forest’], he writes: “[...] il s’agit, au coin de ce bois, bien moins de la naissance d’un poème que d’une tentative (bien loin d’être réussie) d’assassinat d’un poème par son objet” [what is at stake, in the haunt of this forest, is less the birth of a poem than a (far from being successful) attempted killing of a poem by its object].³² The language of description and *expression*, of saying something about something in order to express, give birth to its meaning –; to replace the thing itself by what is said about it (its truth) in a poem –; this desire of expression finds itself *cornered* here, this at least is the attempt – a most violent desire – of the *notebook*, in order to be killed by the very pine wood that language tries to catch in and as a *poem*. My desire here is not to express the meaning of a pine-wood, but to *slaughter* a *poetic* language that pretends to enclose its truth into a *poem*. And further down, in the same appendix, excerpts from two letters to Gabriel Audisio, written in 1941: “[...] je ne me veux pas poète [...] J’ai besoin du magma poétique, mais c’est pour m’en débarrasser” [[...] I don’t want (consider myself) a poet [...] I need the poetic magma, but in order to get rid of it].³³ Years later, in an unpublished dossier, dedicated to the *Sun – Soleil* –, the most

29 Celan, *Gesammelte Werke*, vol. 3, 177.

30 Paul Celan, *Der Meridian*. Edited by Bernhard Böschenstein and Heino Schull (Frankfurt/Main 1999), 113, 153.

31 Francis Ponge, *Œuvres complètes*. Edited by Bernard Beugnot, vol. 1 (Paris 1999), 534.

32 Ponge, *Œuvres complètes*, vol. 1, 409.

33 Ponge, *Œuvres complètes*, vol. 1, 410-411.

34 Francis Ponge, *Le Soleil* [The Sun], unpublished; typewritten page, dated Paris, le 4 janvier 1954 (4).

35 *Entretiens de Francis Ponge avec Philippe Sollers*, Paris 1970, p. 73.

36 In a conversation with Jean Daive (November 23, 1990) [Jean Daive, *Anne-Marie Albiach. L'exact réel*, Paris 2006, pp. 45-52], Anne-Marie Albiach mentions a moment in her book *État* (Paris 1978), where the word *couteau* [knife], in italics, appears. Here a fragment: „[...] : formes apparemment aiguës / concentrées en un point, *couteau*, volumes, le vide / à la lumière – / et découpant [...]“ [“[...] : forms, apparently acute / concentrated in one point, *couteau*, volumes, void / into the light – / and cutting [...]”] [Anne-Marie Albiach, *Cinq le Chœur. 1966-2012* (Paris 2014), 97-98]. In her conversation, or discussion, with Jean Daive, talking about talking about *couteau*, she says: “Si je parle de couteau... c'est pour le plaisir. Il y a là un très vieux souvenir. C'est dans *la Condition humaine* de Malraux: je n'ai jamais oublié la première scène de l'assassinat avec le couteau; mais lui-même il devient autre à partir du moment où le personnage a

planté le couteau dans le corps de sa victime. Et pour moi c'était ça le couteau dans *État* [...]” [When I talk about *couteau*... it is for pleasure. There is a very old memory in there. It is in Malraux' *The Human Condition*: I never forgot the first scene about the assassination with the knife; but he himself does change from the moment on where the character has planted the knife in his victim's body. And for me, this was the knife in *État*. Further into the discussion, Albiach links *couteau* – *assassinat* – *plaisir* and *writing*: “En fait pour écrire il faut que j'aie du plaisir” [In order to write, indeed, I do need pleasure]. But how exactly do they intersect, *couteau* – *assassinat* – *plaisir* and *writing*, and unforgettably so, in the opening pages – the description of an assassination, *couteau* at hand – of André Malraux' *La Condition humaine*? The body into which Tchen will plant *couteau* is lying, sleeping, on a bed at *half past midnight*, covered by the fine mousseline texture of a mosquito net, to prevent those insects from planting their stings into the sleeper's skin. But most surprisingly, the word *couteau* does not appear in Malraux' description of the killing. In one hand Tchen holds a

razor blade [*rasoir*], so tight that it cuts into his fingers, his other hand clasps a dagger [*poignard*], which he is going to plant into the sleeper's body. But even *poignard* – the word – will fall apart. Tchen's attention is more and more focused on *la lame* [the blade], and a few lines further down – *la lame* now has been planted into the man's body – the dagger will be called *l'arme* [the weapon]. As if *lame* and *l'arme* were opening – silently – a porous space of mutual incisions: *lame* – *l'âme* [the soul] – *l'arme* – *larme* [tear]... Just before the killing takes place, encapsulated into a sentence opening with the words *D'un coup* [Out of a sudden], these insections remind a moment when Tchen feels a shiver: “Tchen frissona: un insecte courait sur sa peau. Non: c'était le sang de son bras qui coulait goutte à goutte” [Tchen shivered: an insect moved across his skin. No: it was the blood flow in his arm, drop by drop]. The word *couteau*, not *word* at all, into which Anne-Marie Albiach condenses the unforgettable pleasure of reading and re-reading – of writing *into* – this scene, encapsulates this moment: it encapsulates – as if an *insect* (but living on) in a miniature chamber of

amber – the pleasure of *insections* [or, in ancient Greek: *entoma*] into this moment. The sensation of an insect moving across his skin – *sa peau* – is interrupted by a sensation of blood dropping underneath his skin. This interruption, tacitly, cuts into *peau*, cuts *peau* apart, turning the letters composing *peau*, apostrophized, into *d'eau* [of water]: drop for drop, as if of water: *gouttes d'eau* – *coup d'eau* – *couteau* ... Further down, in her conversation with Jean Daive, Albiach says this – about writing –: “En fait pour écrire il faut que j'aie du plaisir. Et il se trouve que depuis des années je n'éprouve pas le plaisir suffisant qui me force à écrire. Parce que même si ce que j'ai écrit est assez dur ou violent, je crois qu'il venait toujours du plaisir et du désir. Et il se trouve malheureusement que depuis des années je n'éprouve plus ce plaisir. Je l'attends. (Rire.) [...] Il faut, il faut que je me sente complètement libre pour écrire” [Indeed, to get to write I need pleasure. And it turns out that since years I don't experience sufficient pleasure that would push me to write. For although what I have written is quite hard and violent, I think it always came from pleasure and desire. And it turns out that since years, unfor-

tunately, I no longer feel that pleasure. I am waiting for it. (*Laughter.*) [...] I need, I need to feel completely free, to write]. Free, that is, from words, and syllables, and letters, to *insect*: *s'éc...*, *éc...*

37 Francis Ponge, *La Table* [*nouvelle édition revue et augmentée*], Edited by Jean Thibaudau (Paris 2002), 57.

exquisite and extreme of objects, being the very condition of (birth and decay of) all things (on earth), Ponge writes [1954]: “Le Soleil n’est pas à former mais à éventrer Poésie éventrée, Formulation éventrée” [The Sun is not to be formed but to be disemboweled Disemboweled poetry, disemboweled formulation].³⁴ “L’Éros qui fait écrire” [Eros that makes (me) write], Ponge says somewhere:³⁵ the excessive, (and because of its excess) most innocent, desire to slaughter – dismember, disembowel – the *making* of a language, *poetic* language, that was up, up in words (as if in arms) to embrace (and kill) the world.³⁶

The almost constant rejection of the name *poet* in Ponge’s writings rehearses a gesture that Ponge once found in one of Horace’s *Satires* [1.4]. In November 1970 he inserts the Latin text of the decisive passage into his latest dossier – *La Table* [The Table] –, along with a French translation (by François Richard): “... Agedum, pauca accipe contra. / Primum ego me illorum, dederim quibus esse poetis, / Excerptam numero. (Écoute ma réponse: elle sera courte. / D’abord, je ne me mets pas au nombre de ceux que j’appelle poètes [...])” [Listen to my answer: it will be short. / First of all, I don’t count myself among the number of those I call poets [...]].³⁷

As if asking: What am I doing here? And saying: Listen: I don’t count. I don’t count myself among the number of those called *poets*. I take myself out of their number. I do love, for the love of chance, to listen, to slaughter, the number – a given –, the name. But don’t count on what *I do*. Don’t count on me. I, myself, don’t count.

Thing-Poems: On Marta Werner’s and Jen Bervin’s *The Gorgeous Nothings: Emily Dickinson’s Envelope Poems* Branka Arsić

It isn't clear that the experience of reading Emily Dickinson can easily be classified as pleasure since both the content, with so many variants blurring its meaning, and the structure, which often negotiates everything we keep telling ourselves that we know about form, frustrates. If, however, it does remain related to pleasure, that might be because pleasure is often about what comes with difficulties, in the form of the sudden perception and apprehension of what was receding from us. *The Gorgeous Nothings* propounds that kind of pleasure.¹ It collects fifty-two late "envelope fragments" – most of them stanzas or sentences that often emerge as the beginnings or endings of poems or alternatively find their place in letters that Dickinson wrote between 1864 and 1885 – that Marta Werner has detected and collected to date. {FIGURES 1-7} Chronologically ordered, facsimiles of the envelope fragments (Werner calls them "envelope poems" but also "lyric" [GN, 207]) are reproduced in actual size, front and back, and followed by drawings by Jen Bervin that outline the shape of the envelopes and into which are inserted the transcriptions of the Dickinson text inscribed on the envelopes. The envelope manuscripts are thus also understood as "visual productions" (GN, 10), and the edition resembles a luxurious art catalog that, in the words of Susan Howe's short preface, turns reading into a haptic event enabling the reader to "look, and touch, and turn from one to another" (GN, 6). But *The Gorgeous Nothings* does more than turn reading into an experience of the palpable.

There is a tone of gentleness in Marta Werner's editorial voice. By that I mean that unlike Thomas H. Johnson's or Ralph W. Franklin's tone of editorial definitiveness, Werner sides with propositions and suggestions, often giving her claims the form of intimations only: "If the envelopes addressed by Dickinson to others relayed communications ...," "If, as may also be possible, these envelopes never left her possession," "Could the poems inscribed on envelopes be the true messages she wished to transmit?" (GN, 210). However, what she so gently proposes radically transforms our understanding of what Dickinson was doing late in her life.

While "the earliest 'envelope-poems' may have been composed around 1864, the date Ralph W. Franklin assigns to the last of Dickinson's bound fascicles" (GN, 207), writing on scraps and envelopes clearly becomes a contracted habit after 1870, signaling a shift in Dickinson's relation to how she envisaged the embodiment of her writing. As Werner puts it, "At this juncture

1 Marta Werner and Jen Bervin, *The Gorgeous Nothings: Emily Dickinson's Envelope Poems*. Preface by Susan Howe (New York: New Directions, 2013) (quoted parenthetically in the text and abbreviated as GN)

Dickinson no longer thinks of keeping what she acquires through the labor of writing, and her attitude of astonishing recklessness is reflected in her new practice of writing on anything and everything near to hand: chocolate wrappers, the margins of books, scraps of paper” (GN, 207). Werner is cautious in proposing how to understand Dickinson’s relation to scraps in general and envelopes in particular (“The nature of Dickinson’s connection to these works remains obscure” [GN, 207]). Yet, despite that caution, she does formulate a claim that guides her reading of Dickinson’s late productions. As Werner comes to see it, the late fragments, postdating the fascicles, occur at a “juncture when [Dickinson] was testing, differently, and for a final time, the relationship between message and medium” (GN, 208), trying to found a different poetics. How, then, is her fascicle-poetics different from her envelope-poetics?

As Sharon Cameron influentially argued, variants of the poems that Dickinson collected in the fascicles signaled a preoccupation with questioning the boundaries and hence the identity of the poem. Variants were the force that pushed the poem outside its frame toward its margin, rendering what is external in fact integral to it and in so doing renegotiating if not canceling its coherence and its form. While signaling such a “desire for the limit” the variants embodied the “difficulty in enforcing a limit to the poems,” so that their proliferation “turns into a kind of limitlessness, for ... it is impossible to say where the text ends because the variants extend the text’s identity in ways that make it seem potentially limitless.”² But when Cameron talks about a potential limitlessness and dissipation she has in mind the form and meaning of the poem; that is, she is concerned with the status of the text’s identity and the ways in which it somehow perseveres in its singularity even if the words that compose it multiply. In being concerned with the identity of the text, in presuming that what holds it together is an immanent relation of the words that compose it, and in investigating how such a relation creates an entity called a poem, Cameron raises the question of poesis as a weak form of creation, one that doesn’t generate beings and things but, in their stead, words and poems. She doesn’t investigate the more primitive possibility by which what gathers words into a poetic entity is not just the relation of their meaning and their distribution according to the logic of versification but also the shape of the fascicle’s material base. According to this crude possibility, Dickinson’s fascicle literally coerces her poetic entities

- 2 Sharon Cameron, *Choosing Not Choosing: Dickinson’s Fascicles* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 6.

into physical limits and thus saves the poem from tipping over into a space – into other materials and objects – where it would dissipate into real limitlessness. The shape of the material object therefore sets limits to the proliferation of the variants; regardless of how words would be distributed within a leaf of the fascicle, they are always shaped into a rectangle by its material borders. The matter of the fascicle, manufactured by Dickinson into more or less the same rectangular size and shape, would thus be what watches over the form of the poem. According to this crude scenario the poet would then be someone who, in order to exercise poetics and versify words, must also create an object – form matter – that will then generate and sustain the form of the poem. A poet would have to be someone who practices poiesis not as a weak form of creation – where the creation of a poem is analogous to, but doesn't coincide with, the creation of a material thing – but instead as a strong form of creation that produces something palpable and embodied. Poiesis would then be a question not only of aesthetic but also ontological generation.

The pleasure of reading *The Gorgeous Nothings* stems from how it represents the relationship between text and medium, showing how differently that is negotiated when it comes to an envelope. Envelopes are clearly opposite from the patiently crafted and gathered fascicles in that they arrive ready-made, shaped and sized elsewhere. Objects of the world, their form has nothing to do with poetic intention, yet it is precisely the contingency of that form that nevertheless plays a crucial role in shaping the poem. Both Werner and Bervin detail how Dickinson's envelope poems follow the edges of envelopes, as in the exemplary case "Had we our senses" (A 202). Her writing, as Bervin puts it, "fill[s] the space of the envelope like water in a vessel" (GN, 10). The form of the poem thus comes to coincide with the shape of the object on which it is inscribed. The shape of the object becomes the destiny of the poem's form and turns the poem into an outline of an object, for when the envelopes are unfolded, they display a variety of shapes and offer the poem astounding possibilities of unpredictable figuration.

This radically challenges our understanding of what counts as a poem, disturbing the belief that it derives from the manner in which the tension between semantic and semiotic, meaning and prosody is negotiated by the mind.³ According to Clive Scott's precise formulation, prosody is not only what relates the a-semantic elements of meter and rhythm to the semantic units

3 Thus, for instance, Giorgio Agamben argues that "poetry lives only in the tension and difference (and hence also in the virtual interference) between sound and sense, between the semiotic sphere and the semantic sphere." *The End of the Poem*. Translated by Daniel Heller-Roazen (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1999), 109.

of speech; it is also concerned with paralinguistic phenomena such as “loudness, tempo, degree of stress, tone, intonation,” whose motion generates what Scott calls the “fundamental ‘I’” of personhood. On Scott’s understanding such paralinguistic phenomena inhabit meter – meter being the “originary source” of rhythm – and so come to represent the “foundation of inner experience.”⁴ Prosody is thus a “mental synthesis” rather than a rhetorically quantifiable object. The fact that envelope-poems are mostly fragments of experience, its flashes recounted in a sentence or a line, doesn’t exclude them from the operation of prosody, which must be active in order for a mind to synthesize even a line. But in the case of envelope-poems the inner experience gathered by prosody is shattered onto an object whose form will then reshape the inner rhythm of the poet’s mind. Inner or subjective experience is revised into something objective, for in Dickinson the shape of a thing checks the rhythm of the mind. In the case of envelope poems the subject is reformed or generated otherwise by an object: the poem is not the take a subject might have on an object but the perspective the object has of the subject.

Because the form of the object unmediated by the poet dictates the form of the poetic utterance, poetics comes to be about mediating less the relation between rhythm and meter than the shapes of objects, less poetics than objectics, treating every object as a predetermined frame of a poem that the poem has to mirror. For that reason Bervin organizes the index of the envelope poems not, as is the custom, according to their first lines but visually, according to the shape into which a poem mutated upon being inscribed on an envelope. In a taxonomy worthy of Borges’s famous encyclopedia, Dickinson’s envelope-poems are thus divided into flaps and seals, arrows, pointless arrows, envelopes with columns, with penciled divisions, with multidirectional text, with erased text, with variants, and those turned diagonally. The taxonomy of the poems coincides with the taxonomy of objects.

* * *

I have tried here to develop Werner’s editorial remarks concerning Dickinson’s late fragments by outlining an object-poetics. In discussing object-shaped poems in such a generalized way I do not, however, wish to minimize the special relevance of the envelopes, on which Werner rightly insists. Dickinson wrote fragments of

4 Clive Scott, *The Poetics of French Verse: Studies in Reading* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), 102–3.

poetry on a variety of objects: “chocolate wrappers, the margins of books” (GN, 207), but also on strips of brown wrapping paper, white wrapping paper, a brown bag, or fragments of quadrille stationery. What biographers reconstruct about the lifestyle of the Dickinson house hold allows us to believe that wrapping paper or brown bags were as readily available as envelopes, and yet only envelope writing becomes something of a ritual. One can thus argue that the existence of fifty-two envelope-texts points to a preference for envelopes over other writable objects, raising the question of what it was that Dickinson found so peculiar in the envelopes that afforded them this primary status. Jen Bervin proposes that writing on scraps was Dickinson’s way of obeying the injunction formulated by Lydia Maria Child in *The Frugal House wife*, “a book Dickinson’s father obtained for her mother when Emily was born,” the opening of which insisted that house wives gather up “all the fragments, so that nothing is lost. I mean fragments of time as well as materials” (GN, 9). From that point of view, Dickinson wrote on envelopes for economic reasons, as a form of recycling.

But Bervin’s argument is unconvincing, not just because it fails to explain why Dickinson used envelopes ostensibly more than other things – if it was a question of recycling, why not use other paper-objects circulating through the house hold in equal quantities? – but more crucially because many of the envelopes were in fact not from letters received from others and then put to a new use. Instead they were envelopes Dickinson herself meant to send to friends (Helen Hunt Jackson, Mr. and Mrs. Holland) but didn’t. Dickinson reoriented their purpose to write her fragment-poems, never sending the envelopes to anybody. In economic terms, it wasn’t a question of saving through recycling but, oppositely, of overspending, a luxurious expenditure that contradicted the ideology of surplus value (even more so since Dickinson’s correspondence itself, but also that of other members of the house hold, was lively enough to supply her with plenty of used envelopes). As Werner remarks, Dickinson’s reasons for addressing but never sending envelopes remain arcane, rendering equally credible a variety of options: “If ... these envelopes never left her possession, why did she address them at all? ... Could the poems inscribed on envelopes ... be the true messages she wished to transmit but never did? To whom were they directed – to the living or to the dead?” (GN, 210).

While such questions can give rise to only speculative answers, one thing about Dickinson's envelope-writing seems unquestionable, and it clearly distinguishes envelopes from other writables and points to a practice that might reveal something crucial about her late poetics. Unlike other scraps, which are often simply torn, envelopes are carefully unmade. Regardless of whether the envelopes were addressed to or addressed by her, Dickinson never wrote on them in their rectangular folded form but instead always sliced them open. As Bervin reconstructs, the practice of undoing envelopes was quite rigorous: "These envelopes have been opened well beyond the point needed to merely extract a letter; they have been torn, cut, and opened out completely flat rendered into new shapes" (GN, 9), or, alternatively, returned to their "original" – unfolded – shape. Even objects from Dickinson's room bear witness to the ritualistic rigor of the envelope-unmaking. For, as Bervin notes, cuts would be made on objects, inscribing on them the traces of the act of undoing: "Where do those cuts fall and what shape do they prefigure when the space is opened out? ... At Amherst College Library, Margaret Dakin has acquired what is believed to be Emily Dickinson's lap desk; its painted wooden surface is positively riddled with myriad fine cuts" (GN, 9–10). The repeated attention to undoing cancels the hypothesis that fragments written on the envelopes were jotted down in a hurry on what ever was nearest; Dickinson was not "blindly grabbing scraps in a rush of inspiration, as is most often supposed, but rather reaching for writing surfaces that were ... collected and cut in advance" (GN, 10). Rather than something spontaneous, the act of undoing envelopes suggests that Dickinson was invested in practices of crafted decomposition, to be distinguished from destruction, since the matter of the envelopes perseveres. This was rather a type of defiguration that sent the paper back to the condition it assumed when it was matter not yet formed into an envelope, that is, before it was able to contain. If the fascicles were driven by a desire for closure – being literally enclosed in a drawer that, like a crypt, kept them out of circulation in the world – the envelope writings signal an opposite desire to erode closures by returning what was designed to contain to what doesn't contain or contains only loosely and contingently. As Werner puts it, "slit open, [an envelope] functions not as a soothing bandage, but, rather, as ... a site of rupture" of form (GN, 213). If Dickinson's poetics in the period of her fascicle-gathering suggested that a poet should create not only a poem but an object to host it, her late

poetics required a poet who would need to first de-create an object before letting it fashion the form of the poem. It is as if she wanted her poems to be shaped by objects that were themselves on the way out of form, unfolding into surrounding objects, connected to them by the cuts she inflicted simultaneously on the envelope and the desk. Dickinson's practice of unmaking objects that would then fashion the shape of the poem thus invites us to consider de-creation rather than creation as defining the poesis of her late poetics.

* * *

As Werner argued in *Emily Dickinson's Open Folios*, if Ralph Franklin omitted Dickinson's late fragments and scraps from *The Manuscript Books of Emily Dickinson*, that is because he made a decision to offer "a portrait of the artist as bookmaker: what is central – that is, canonical – is what was/is bound in a book."⁵ And even if, after Franklin, influential readers of Dickinson from Sharon Cameron to Susan Howe questioned his "book theory," most fascicle interpreters were nevertheless invested in discovering relations among the poems in fascicles or among the fascicles themselves, detecting secret connections among poems both at the formal level and at the level of content, and sometimes even questioning the status of poems as discrete entities, regarding them instead as variants of one another.⁶ The fascicles allow for endless possibilities of interpreting order and how it gets disturbed, of reading linearity and its curvatures. The search for relations and connections acting as forces that congeal a fascicle into individualized existence – predicated on the ontological presumption that what is gathered together must be inherently related, forming an interiority or compact entity and positioning it in relation to what is external to it – thus signals yet another hypothesis regarding what constitutes poetry in general and Dickinson's poetics in particular. It suggests that embedded in a poem there must be a coherent tale snatched out of historical temporality but returnable to it once its narrative is disclosed. Even when it looked merely to establish a sequence among poems, rather than argue that poems tell a story or point to extrapoetical events – biographical, political, or historical – such a search revealed the desire to uncover a continuity in what is separated and so restore Dickinson's poem to some sort of history. Or, as Mary

- 5 Marta L. Werner, *Emily Dickinson's Open Folios: Scenes of Reading, Surfaces of Writing* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1995), 3.
- 6 Mary Loeffelholz offers a long list of interpretations of what a Dickinson fascicle meant to different readers in "What Is a Dickinson Fascicle? Reading Emily Dickinson's Manuscript Books," *Harvard Library Bulletin* 10, no. 1 (1999): 23–43, 25–27.

Loeffelholz put it, the understanding of the fascicles hinges on placing them in a narrative that would “give them a beginning and ending,” implying “that chronology and narrative sequence may well matter.”⁷

7 Loeffelholz, “What is a Dickinson Fascicle,” 29.

The envelope writings tell a different story about continuity, connectivity, and history. Werner’s privileged example of how envelopes escape the continuities of narrative or context is manuscript A 821. Here is how she describes it:

A 821 is a sudden collage made of two sections of envelope.

The principles of its construction are economical ...

The larger section of the collage is the inside of the back of an envelope, the address face of which has been ... cut away. One vertical crease bisects the document, turning the halved envelope into a simple diptych that resembles the hinged wings of the bird the holograph is becoming. Initially, the wings appear to have been folded, perhaps even pinned closed ... Another section of text is composed on an unfolded triangular corner of an envelope’s seal ... A single straight pin, in place when I first found the manuscript, but since removed, originally impeded ... the collage elements together.

On the right wing, the lines “Afternoon and/ the West and / the gorgeous / nothings / which / compose / the / sunset / keep” slant upward into the west.

On the left wing, the lines “Clogged / only with / Music, like / the Wheels of / Birds” slant diagonally upward into the east.

On the smaller, pinned wing, writing rushes beyond the tear or terminus where the visible meets the invisible in “their high / Apoint / ment.” (GN, 200)

Werner details how those fragments traveled from one context, which she calls its “condition” (GN, 201), to another. For instance, “Clogged / only with / Music” first appears in different drafts of a letter to Helen Hunt Jackson, who had reported to Dickinson that from her Los Angeles window she was “looking straight off toward Japan.” To that Dickinson replied: “That you compass ‘Japan’ before you breakfast, not in the least surprises me, clogged only with Music, like the Wheels of Birds” (GN, 203). In the second draft of the letter to Hunt Jackson, the fragment is rephrased: “That you glance at Japan as you breakfast, not in the least surprises me, thronged only with Music; like the Decks of Birds”

(GN, 204). But the fragment traveled further; in describing its itinerary as well as that of other fragments, Werner systematically compares it to the flight of a bird – the bird imagery being perhaps one of the features of her discourse that renders it most pleasurable – so that after each “flight” the fragment is pinned anew to a new condition and becomes something like an “imped” feather inserted into a bird’s wing: “In examining the body of A 821/821a still more closely, four additional sets of pinpricks, two along the outer edges of the left wing, and two along the outer edges of the right wing, are revealed. These tiny holes may be signs that the fragment was impeded to other texts composed and circulated before or after the letter to Hunt Jackson” (GN, 205).

The argument was often made that it is context that furnishes the meaning of such fragments or even poems; a fragment receives meaning from a stanza, a stanza from a poem, and a poem from the larger context of the historical and the biographical: a dead insect, a pressed rose, an accompanying cake, the Civil War, a secret love affair, a book, or a recipe would thus illuminate otherwise obscure lines in much of Dickinson’s poetry. Accordingly, a fragment such as “Clogged / only with / Music, like / the Wheels of / Birds” would begin to mean only as the reference to a fact both external to it and relinking it to a meaningful historical, political, or biographical whole. In this particular instance, the fragment would receive its meaning only once it is positioned in Dickinson’s letter in which she writes that even though Hunt Jackson was so sick she couldn’t walk, she could nevertheless enact a mental flight to Japan, her mind behaving like birds on wheels, legless but nevertheless capable of covering great distances. Additionally, the localization of a fragment or a poem in a letter, thank you card, or note not only relinks it to the clarity of Dickinson’s (small town) world – often turning what appears to be the metaphysical complexity of a line into a trivial remark – but also changes its form. The different locations in which the poem or fragment is positioned change its genre and make it mean differently.

Werner doesn’t contradict this reading but she does modify it. She confirms that a context remakes meaning, which is why, as I’ve mentioned, she calls context a “condition.” However, the word “condition” is used only once and in passing: “the instantaneous translation from one condition into another, radically different one, defines the experience of Dickinson’s late ecstatic writings” (GN, 201). But the choice of the word “condition” to name context

seems significant to me in that it suggests that context is less what generates the meaning of a poem than what acts as its affect or mood. Such a proposition affects both how we understand the nature of a fragment/poem and how we understand its relation to the site in which Dickinson places it. Thus, a fragment/poem that travels from a card to a letter to a fascicle, for instance, wouldn't be treated each time as a discrete entity independent of its other instantiations and fashioned by the mood of the ultimate letter, the objects accompanying it in the envelope, or the poems preceding it in the fascicle. Instead it would be treated in terms of the compartment it assumes among the events and things that accompany it, and in the ambience in which it appears. It would be a question of mannerism: a condition changes a fragment/poem without exhausting it. The different sites through which it passes, different objects that happen to accompany it, different historical or political events that occur as it relocates might add to and illuminate its sense, yet a fragment/poem can't be reduced to any of its conditions. For that to be the case, there would have to be one condition only, such that the sense bestowed upon the poem/fragment by that condition would coincide with it. But Dickinson's fragments/poems cannot do that, for they routinely transcend their conditions to appear in different contexts, which stipulate them otherwise. Thus, because Werner presumes that the appearance of a fragment/poem in a different environment at a different time is the appearance of a manner of its being, each of the poem's conditions enacting its manners would function as a perspective calling into existence one of its meanings. The poem would become a succession of perspectives: "pinned, unpinned, and repinned, the fragment's flights shatter the deep, one-point perspective of the letter and keep the texts/birds flying in a splintered mode of time, in the 'terrifying tense' of pure transition" (GN, 205). Werner makes clear that the perspectivism in question is not subjectivism, since a fragment's condition is an assemblage of objects (other words, pressed flowers or insects that Dickinson sometimes includes in the letters containing the fragments, but also letters and envelopes), events (a response to a letter from a friend, to an emotion, to an encounter), and changing historical or political backgrounds. Each of those assemblages into which a fragment/poem is deposited functions as its archive, and, as archives do, governs how we are going to understand the poem. Thus, neither Dickinson's intention nor the recipient's/reader's interpretation but instead its archive, composed of material and

immaterial fragments, constitutes the perspective through which a fragment/poem reveals itself.

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However, the question raised by Werner's discussion of fragments reveals not only how a condition of a fragment affects its sense but also whether a fragment, even as strange as "their high / Apoint / ment," can mean outside any condition. The fragments' and poems' migratory movements "between and among texts," as well as the probability that many of them were formulated outside any context (GN, 205), testifies for Werner to their "capacity to survive outside all the texts that briefly shelter" them (GN, 201) and to mean independently. But how possibly could a fragment or a poem – or even more generally, anything whatsoever – mean independently? First, it seems to me, this asks us to start thinking about Dickinson's fragments not as fragments of something. If they indeed precede the poems that come to host them or another context in which they emerge, then they are not scraps that have lost the connections and, extrapolated from all relations, are waiting for a context to adopt them and incorporate them into a meaningful whole. They are not the ruins that fragments were for the Romantics, and Dickinson's poetry would thus be antiromantic in its orientation. That her fragments (but the same holds for her poems insofar as they are made of such fragments and also occur in a variety of contexts) precede their contexts, or can be independent of them, signals that in the ontology outlined by Dickinson's poetics, a whole – a context or a world – is not posited as an abstract unity awaiting or enabling instances it will come to contain: the one is not before the many that it keeps gathered. In Dickinson's scenario the world comes after what inhabits it; it begins with scattered multiplicities rather than with any unity. Thus, conditions or contexts function only as "makeshift and fragile homes," locations that are themselves constantly revised through relocation of the parts-fragments that constitute them.

However, that the fragments precede the whole in which they will be positioned and which will in turn affect them doesn't mean, on the other hand, that they are little disconnected wholes on their own. They don't harbor essences of sense abstracted from the concreteness of material that embodies them, the writing practices that keep relocating them, or worldly events that could reconfigure their meaning. For that to happen they would have to be determined: they would need closure and a subject and a predicate. But that is what they most often lack, cautioning us, as Susan Howe indicates in her preface to *The Gorgeous Nothings*, that form

doesn't envelop everything (GN, 7). To say, as I just did, that they "lack" something as if they were unfinished is highly imprecise, though, for it suggests a virtual narrative that has failed to adopt them, in which they have failed to unfold, which is just another way of saying that they are fragments of something. Instead, we must read them as open bits always on the verge of nonmeaning, barely meaning something, precisely gorgeous nothings. A world – a poem, a letter, perhaps even a fascicle – would then come into being just as Dickinson's sun does, as an assemblage of gorgeous nothings: "the gorgeous / nothings / which / compose / the / sunset / keep." Keep what?



**The Poetics of Inanimate Life:
Mallarmé, Cixous, Celan***
David Wills

What defines what lives when it comes to forms of writing, particularly those about which we commonly say that they “live on?” That question has determined the orientation of work that I have published in a series of three books: *Prosthesis* (1995), *Dorsality* (2008), and the forthcoming *Inanimation*, from which this presentation is drawn. I have tried to explore the question both intuitively and analytically, performatively as well as constatively. It began as a reflection on our most ingrained and automatic sense of the natural state of the human or animal body, with the idea that the body is one of the major paradigms on the basis of which we presume to know where what is natural begins and ends. Standing naked, we think we see that in all its clarity, even though we see ourselves standing on something decidedly non-natural, or inanimate, like a floor, in front of something else decidedly non-natural or inanimate, such as a mirror; and even though upon closer examination certain of our borderline excrescences such as hair and nails are seen to constitute different forms of life from our flesh and organs, forms closer to the inanimate. Add to that the decidedly mechanical, even automatic operation of limbs and organs, and the fact that that naked animate body doesn’t get to do much without very soon wanting to put on inanimate clothes and spectacles, and to pick up tools, indeed to connect to a whole technological network, and one begins to think that the supposed natural animal body is in fact a prosthesis that is constantly, and from the beginning, involved in a complex articulation of natural and non-natural, animate and inanimate.

In *Inanimation* I am interested more precisely in the question of what *survives*, in the French sense of *qu’est-ce qui survit*? What lives over and above what we presume to live? What lives as super-life, extra-life, extra to life, outside of it yet belonging to it, inseparable from it? What are some of those forms of life that *animate* our existence, yet as if from its *inanimate* outside. The now obsolete verb “to inanimate” used to function in English to “to *enanimate*,” as a synonym for “to animate” (although in rare cases it also meant “to deprive of life”). “Inanimation” is therefore my term for the dynamic relation between inanimate and animate that persistently reappears within our conception of what constitutes life.

Today I’d like to consider a case or question of *inanimation* that seems to be tied to a straightforward conception of materiality, to something with an evident material presence. It is a seemingly marginal question but, as I hope to show, it is intimately

- * A number of the ideas developed in this text were sketched out in my “La techno-poétique de l’autre... en pointillé” in *Rêver croire penser: autour d’Hélène Cixous*. Edited by Bruno Clément and Marta Segarra (Paris: Campagne Première, 2010).

tied to the highest ethical and political stakes of poetic expression. I'd like to begin with the relation between printed letters and blank space on a page, specifically as they appear in a poetic text, in the hope of showing that that seemingly simple black and white relation is inseparable from the production, or technological *poiesis* that determines all utterance, and thus inseparable from the whole vexed question of literary representation, precisely the relation of a text to what we call real life. Specifically, I'll argue that the relation between poetic expression and breathing, the play of inhalation and exhalation thanks to which we live and are able to express ourselves, in fact relies on its own (inanimate) interruption; that a turning of the breath out of the breath occurs in order to *inanimate* the life that breathing sustains, and that that turning can be identified as a poetic function. In order to make my argument – and in order to move the discussion from a semiotic tradition represented by Jakobson as much as from a semantico-tropological tradition represented by De Man, or, for that matter, the new hermeneutics of Meillassoux, approaches for which I have varying degrees of respect and affinity – I'll concentrate less on the words themselves that constitute what is expressed than on spaces of rupture within that expression, spaces between or within the words, the periodic pauses that punctuate and so interrupt what is printed. I'll make my argument by presenting a necessarily partial – in the time I have today, even truncated – snapshot from the work of three writers of the modernist period, for this is in the first instance a modernist inanimation. Those writers are Mallarmé, Cixous, and Celan, each of whom, in their own way, are and are not “French” or francophone writers (that is a whole discussion of its own, which I won't get sidetracked into now).

The surviving capacity of a written text, what permits it to relive, potentially indefinitely, in every rereading, functions in strong contrast with the finitude of its formal materiality, its formal beginning and end, first word and final period. But if the life of a text has no clear analogical relation to how we understand organic life, can we, conversely, still presume to call the usage of the word “life” as it relates to a written text, metaphorical? Is there simply real, literal, organic life on the one hand, and a series of metaphorical extensions of that literality, loose figurative usages of the word, on the other? Or rather, doesn't life function through a variety of forms that never reduce to organic examples, however dominant and numerous the organic examples be?

So in what way is it that the words of a text end when they reach their final period or full stop, there where they leave off precisely in order to live on, given that their closure is also an opening to limitless commentary? Where is the end itself to be situated, in a final word, in a black punctuating mark, or in the white space that succeeds that mark? The blank white page has of course a whole scriptural history and mythology: it is *incarnated*, given flesh and substance, but also made to grow abysally into itself, by Mallarmé. By the time he writes *Un coup de dés* white space is no longer either the basis or background, the support or *subjectile* for the printed word. It no longer appears at the end of a line only: it has come to represent, rather, another type of poetic existence, another script or figure that conjoins with the black letters themselves and puts itself into play with them. On the one hand it speaks for itself, at once enunciating and contradicting the void: we see nothing there, but we don't see it as nothing at all. On the other hand, blank space has been let loose to the extent of invading the words themselves and composing their very letters.

We see that in Belgian artist Marcel Broodthaers' 1969 version of Mallarmé's poem. {FIGURES 8-9} His "Un coup de dés... Image" reproduces Mallarmé's text, in every way, we might say, except for the words themselves, which are replaced by solid black bars.¹ It is as if the whole contour of the lines of the poem had been redacted, for security reasons, with a black felt pen, leaving for our eyes only white space and solid blocs of print. One is led to ask where Mallarmé's words have gone, whether they remain drowned or entombed under the solid black lines; whether and how they survive there, by means of memory for those who know them by heart, indeed whether they exist like the still beating heart of the poem buried alive below the now uniform printed surface. Or have they simply been erased, suffocated and died, their scriptural and legible form made to succumb to the pure graphic force or pictorial weight of undifferentiated solid black print? On further reflection, however, it becomes clear that what has in fact disappeared in the difference between Mallarmé and Broodthaers, what has been subtracted from the one in order to produce the other, is not the black print that previously spelled out the letters, for that remains – virtually at least – in the amalgamated black bars. Rather, what has been blacked out is the white space within and around the letters, their immediate white environment, which again reinforces the fundamental, material positivity of such blank whiteness in the monochrome play that constitutes a written text.

- 1 Marcel Broodthaers, *Un coup de dés jamais n'abolira le hasard. Image*. Print on paper. Musées royaux des Beaux-Arts de Belgique, Brussels. See also Rachel Haidu, *The Absence of Work : Marcel Broodthaers, 1964-1976* (Cambridge, Mass: The MIT Press, 2010).

As I read it, the arrangement of the words on the page of Mallarmé's *Un coup de dés* represents poetry's ultimate rupture from its oral origins. {FIGURE 10} If we presume poetry to have evolved from song, from the intoning of a chant, then the form of its deployment on the page, as written text, will have been determined by the rhythms of the voice. That is what is called, precisely, versification: the arrangement in lines that turn, or *versify*, to suit an oral recitation. Within that schema, the more or less regular insertions of white space that begin to invade the page – between one line and the next, or between one stanza and the next, but also the caesurae within or between words – will be akin to the periods, commas, colons, dashes and so on that are otherwise used to transcribe effects of human breathing. No doubt the massive institutionalization of the alexandrine, in the French tradition, obeys a similar pneumatic necessity. Racine's or Corneille's lines come like the calm, or fitful breathing of the characters who speak them: *Ariane, ma sœur, de quel amour blessée, / Vous mourûtes aux bords où vous fûtes laissée!* (Phèdre).

But once verse becomes free, once it is freed from that metric regularity, it also emancipates itself from the voice, or at least from an oral delivery that respects the relation between voice and breath: *l'acte vide / abruptement qui sinon / par son mensonge / eût fondé / la perdition / dans ces parages / du vague / en quoi toute réalité se dissout* (*Un coup de dés*). Free verse no longer promotes a voice that allows breathing to function undisturbed, and increasingly, or in certain instances, it seems not to promote voice at all (which is not to say that the history of poetry since Mallarmé does not continue to deal with the questions of breathing and orality).

The white space of the poem is thus to be read, in the first instance, as the linear transcription of pauses and inhalations that prose, presumed not to be for reciting, treats much more liberally. It is precisely the versified poetic line, with its vocal and pneumatic rhythms, that comes to be interfered with by the modernist experiment, as announced by Mallarmé's breaking news delivered in Oxford in 1894: *on a touché au vers*.² Once the poetic line is interfered with, violated even, by modernism, it is no longer just a matter of its being punctuated by the white space at its end; rather it has been interrupted within its very structural formation. Henceforth it will be, in a far more explicit way, as much a matter of catching the breath as of enabling it. The invasive white space of *Un coup de dés* is thus less the expansion of "unused" scriptural space – even a whole stormy ocean of it – than another face of

2 Cf. Mallarmé, "La Musique et les lettres": "On a touché au vers"

the words themselves, one that, in spite of manifesting an empty existence, pulsates with inanimate life. Conversely, the life of the words themselves derives, henceforth, less from the breathing voice that emits them, and instead from the *inanimated* play of *blank* and *blackened* space.

- 3 Gertrude Stein,
Lectures in America
(New York: Random
House, 1935)

* * *

In 1935, in “Poetry and Grammar” (*Lectures in America*), Gertrude Stein, in another version of modernism that relates, in the French context, to surrealism, delivered her own breaking news to America:

When I first began writing I felt that writing should go on I still do feel that it should go on but when I first began writing I was completely possessed by the necessity that writing should go on and if writing should go on what had commas and semi-colons to do with it what had commas to do with it what had periods to do with it what had small letters and capitals to do with writing going on which was at the time the most profound need I had in connection with writing.³

The writing that goes on is there an unstoppable flux, a type of automatic writing impelled by its own expressive force to exceed the strictures of punctuation or syntactical closure. In terms of what I was just describing it would represent a type of pure pneumatics, a prolonged exhalation, an overwriting of both punctuation and the blank space that poetry had introduced in order to replace that punctuation.

We find a very different example in the writing of Hélène Cixous. Early in *Jours de l’an* [*First Days of the Year*], a text from 1990, her third-person “author/narrator” is discussing how she has spent thirty years trying to write a book. {FIGURE 11} She recalls Paul Celan’s poem “Cello-Einsatz” from his 1967 collection *Atemwende*, and how Celan’s writing unfailingly makes her cry, producing an amalgam of poem, grief and sobbing, that is expressed specifically by means of its interrupted breath, the pant or gasp of its rhythm:

Just as the cello had been created to moan the animal music of our entrails and the oboe to give wings to the triumphal moods of our adolescences, so a Celan had been created for singing,

his mouth full of earth, under the century's cleaver, under the pickax, the unique little slip of fleshy paper that will have succeeded in escaping the shovel of the Apocalypse. . . . And she had wept for several years with one of Celan's tears. A God had provided for her need to weep by inventing Celan, the poet with the name in reverse . . . [jump to after the italics] and behold him standing on the silent soil, his chest full of cello boughs. Only thus are we able to advance, by beginning at the end, death first, life next, teetering life next [*ensuite la vie chancelante*], teetering so [*si chancelante*], chance so [*si chance*], concealing/"celaning" so [*si celante*],

Mused she, the author, trembling
Sensing it was useless to deny the event.⁴

What I wish to draw attention to here is the strange play of punctuation and spacing by means of which Cixous, under the express influence of a Celan made verb, allows her prose to become poetry. The portmanteau of chance and Celan, packed into the participial form of the verb *chanceler*, is followed first by a comma, as in normal prose. But, following the comma, that line breaks off in mid-line, giving the appearance of a poetic format that is reinforced by the following indented line, which also breaks before reaching the right hand margin, this time without any punctuation (*Songeait-elle, l'auteur, tremblante*). Another indented line follows, but it is printed all the way to the right margin and ends with a period, ostensibly signaling a return to prose format.

What of it, one might ask? In the first place one can track similar lapses in the use of punctuation in many other texts by Cixous; it is a trademark of her writing.⁵ Perhaps it means nothing more than her hesitancy faced with the syntactic closure represented by a period or full stop; or else her stubborn resistance to grammatical law; in any case a desire here and there to impose or maintain a formal suspension of the sentence. But the liberties Cixous takes with the codes of punctuation also point to the problematic status of diacritical marks within writing conceived of as a transcription of spoken language. A period clearly does not represent a spoken sound but signals rather the absence of sound or a type of pause, and the precise taxonomy of such "unsounded" pauses used in prose – period, comma, semi-colon, colon, dash – would be difficult to establish. Punctuation, like the blank space of poetry, both closes off a phrase, clause or sentence, and also opens a new type of textual space, one that will always threaten to

4 Hélène Cixous, *First Days of the Year*. Translated by Catherine A. F. McGillivray (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998), 9-10 (translation modified). Further reference to this text will be included in text, preceded by the mention *First Days*; translations will often be slightly modified in order to conform to what I am emphasizing. Cf. *Jours de l'an* (Paris: Des Femmes, 1990), 13-14.

5 An inventory of such lapses would include, to give but a tiny sampling: 1) a chapter toward the middle of *Dedans* (1969) that ends with a colon (*Un jour, il me depose ; ainsi :*); 2) forward slashes at the beginning or end of a paragraph in *Le Troisième corps* (1970), in the second case following a period; 3) in *Angst* (1977), paragraphs that end with an ellipsis, a comma, or a period plus a dash; 4) in *First Days of the Year*, the first two paragraphs end with commas (3), and the unwritten book is referred to by means of a colon between two dashes (5); 5) from the first page of *Insister* fragments of a conversation end, seemingly indiscriminately, with or without a period. See Hélène

proliferate and threaten the status of the syntactic sequence that it interrupts. There is in punctuation a certain punctual visuality, or materiality, but the absence or removal of it is far from non-visual or non-material, as I have already argued. The life of textual marks, even when they reduce to points, *points*, or dots, cannot reduce to a simple relation of presence and absence. In Cixous, as we shall shortly see, punctuation can *live* as much in its disappearance as in its self-manifestation.

As I explained, it is Cixous's narrator's idiosyncratic experience of Celan's writing that causes her own words to teeter and fall out of prose into poetry. But poetry was already an explicit consideration for her. Indeed, "poem" was the precise word she had decided on as most appropriate to refer to the book she had been carrying within her for thirty years but hadn't managed to write, the book that *Jours de l'an* will, to some extent at least, become: "She had tried to figure out how to call this unwritten book . . . and, lacking a name for designating a thing that was not of this world, our own, the visible, had proposed to herself the word *poem*. . . . And what this book and a poem had in common was the physical sensation, the cardiac certainty, of their both belonging to a wholly other time" (*First Days* 5-6). {FIGURE 12} Before the word "poem" comes to her, however, the thing without a name that haunts her for thirty years, "this voice stronger than my voice, but which doesn't pronounce words," is represented in the preceding paragraph by the three dots of an ellipsis: "This . . . , this poem, then" (5), and the same formulation is repeated on the opposite page (6). That suggests at first reading that what will be called a poem before becoming a book, what is held back, waiting like tears behind the pain, unpronounceable, wordless, throbbing or beating with cardiac certainty and force in another time before emerging as poetico-fictive writing, is an inspiration experienced like a holding of the breath: it is held in suspense before finding release as pneumatic expression, a palpitation, sob or lachrymal overflowing:

Eyes closed, reading the music with her heart's eyes, *Cello-Einsatz, von hinter dem Schmerz*, the poem between her breasts . . . taking pleasure from each line she hadn't written. . . . Taking pleasure from each pain she hadn't had the chance to feel, but which, fortunately, had been felt – sung. And whose scansion, whose rattle she recognized . . . At each reading, an unbearable sweetness upon hearing the words she might have moaned in that other life – with the two, with the four first accents – would

Cixous, *Dedans* (Paris: Des femmes, 1986), 95 (note that in French text semi-colons and colons, like question and exclamation marks, are preceded as well as followed by a blank space); *Troisième corps* (Paris: Des Femmes, 1970), 60, 78; *Angst* (Paris: Des Femmes, 1977), 71, 233, 200, 232; *Insister*. À Jacques Derrida (Paris: Galilée, 2006), 13-15.

burst into her chest, coming from the source of regrets, Cello-Einsatz, and for the hundredth time as for the first, the sob would rise, rise and with the poem's last accents break upon her heart's rock. (8)

On the one hand, therefore, Cixous's narrator conveys there a something like Stein's idea of creative poetic expression bursting through the pain with a type of pneumatic automatism, unable to be held back any longer. From that point of view the ellipsis points mark what is not expressed, what cannot find words, what language hesitates to state, what it retains in an unuttered reserve that is necessarily a type of silence and an interruption of breathing. But that holding back, that wordless suspension, that poem to come is *literally* or *scripturally* inscribed as a series of points – *points de suspension* is exactly what the ellipsis is called in French. If they represent the word that cannot yet be found, those dots also function as the sign of a potential or imminent fall into blankness, a spluttering that precedes a more irreparable breakdown but that nevertheless gestures toward a different form of expressivity unhindered by syntactical law. The dots represent a crumbling of the graphic façade, requiring and inaugurating a more radical structural redesign of writing, and of its relations between black and white traces.

In the “. . .” there occurs, in my reading, not just an emotive poetic encounter between Celan and Cixous but also an *inanimation* of bodies and discourses via the writing. For the points, which will become a poem (representing a book taking thirty years to emerge), which will become the emotion Celan stirs up, will in another context finally become no points, *point de point*, as if prose could generate poetic life thanks to the inanimating absence of an inanimate mark. That is what occurs in an encounter, comparable to this one with Celan, that will occur in Cixous's work fifteen or so years later. It is prompted by another work of mourning, that for the departed Jacques Derrida. In the central section of *Insister. À Jacques Derrida* [*Insister of Jacques Derrida*], Cixous is drawn, through another rediscovery of a text left in suspension or abeyance, to the point of a point, a literal, graphic dot. Having agreed to write a paper for a conference in Barcelona in 2005 that Derrida had hoped to attend, Cixous finds herself blocked by grief. She then stumbles upon a draft, handwritten manuscript Derrida had mailed to her from Argentina ten years earlier, for what would become their co-written book,

Veils. {FIGURE 13} It was in a sealed envelope that he had made her promise not to open until, or because of, some unspecified eventuality or “verdict” that is also a theme of his text. She keeps that promise until now, when she opens the envelope and reads Derrida’s manuscript. Here is her response to what she finds:

Look at it closely. It is to be seen, you see that: it is drawn at least as much as written, it is drawritten, a breathless [*haletant*] self-portrait. One *sees the breath*, one sees the wind push the sail, rush the fabric . . . I would write a book to de-pict or re-picture this painting with its quivering signs . . . *with living punctuations, of highly eloquent silences.*

Look at this portrait from left to right, from top to bottom, it can also be read vertically like a poem (98)

All of my themes are mentioned there: breath/breathlessness of expression, punctuation that lives and speaks as silence, the spatial appearance of poetry. But what also strikes Cixous is Derrida’s use of a point, precisely a •, to separate sections of the manuscript, for the encounter that takes place there comes explicitly to be concentrated in the play of presence and absence, life and after-life, represented by the dots. The encounter becomes more complicated once Derrida’s text not only speaks *to* her but at the same time speaks *of* her, which is the case in his contribution to *Veils* (“A Silkworm of One’s Own”) and in various other writings. Then it becomes a question of giving herself an existence, a position, and a situation both inside and outside what she is reading: “What kind of reading can one perform when one finds oneself to some degree invited, lodged within the text to be read?” (107). At least one of her answers to that question – how to respond to being lodged within the text – will involve her becoming inanimate, becoming one of those points, a black dot, and making it live: “I find suddenly that I resemble somewhat that •, the black dot that floats between your stanzas in the manuscript” (110). As such, she accepts to be a problematic node within the textual system – a *point noir* is everything from a black stitch to a “blackhead” and a “traffic snarl-up,” and could perhaps suggest a black hole. But, more radically still, she even submits to being no point, none at all, disappeared, for “this • goes and disappears in the book *Veils*” {FIGURE 14}:

This • would be altogether me: A point of (non-) view. I mean a point without sight, a pupil without light. • around which, from

which, you execute your fascinating dance of Veils. But this •
goes and disappears in the book *Veils*.

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Where to place myself, now? (110)

Where now? Where now or how now? How will she exist or what form of life will she have once the black point she sees herself as goes and disappears? How do we speak of that empty space produced by the absence of a mark, a disappeared mark representing an empty space; how do we speak of the trace of such an absence? What form of life would a “living punctuation” be, one that represents the voice of a departed Derrida, one that is there as “altogether me,” or one that disappears, as we say “without trace?” For these poetic encounters have never been about anything but life and survival, from Mallarmé’s shipwreck, from the tears, sobs and heaving chest of Cixous’s encounter with her lost book thirty years past, where the tipping of a teetering prose into poetry is a desire to “advance, by beginning at the end, death first, life next, next teetering life [*la vie chancelante*]” (*First Days* 9), a chancy, secret and *Celanating* life, to this continuing dialogue between a Derrida described as on the side of death and a Cixous on the side of life. Or, to put it differently, they will have always been about how the exhaled expressivism that gives rise to poetry relies on an inanimation that survives beyond any simple opposition between material manifestation and its disappearance, indeed a poetic survival that functions thanks precisely to what we shall now see as the originary interruption of the lifebreath.

And furthermore, this will not have been simply a formal aesthetic analysis or reflection but an interrogation that goes to the ethical and political heart of whether and how literature brings to life, how it *inanimates* the real; how it transforms bodies into marks on a page by means of something other than a simple move from living flesh to dead writing, how it deals with suffering bodies, even bodies that have been disappeared in the most intolerable or inhuman way; how it expresses the inexpressible, dealing with the challenge of what cannot but must be written.

* * *

Paul Celan’s 1960 Büchner-Prize address, *The Meridian*, weaves in and out of Georg Büchner’s “aesthetic conception,” expressed by his character Lenz in the work of the same name, which requires

that in art “what has been created ha[ve] life” rather than being “puppet-like . . . nothing but cardboard and watchsprings.”⁶ Celan attempts to develop a very different aesthetic principle from that of Büchner, one that seeks to avoid the pneumatic expressivity that is the traditional base of poetic creation, while still intimately remaining a question of breathing: “On breathroutes it comes, the poem, it is there, pneumatic” (108). For him, in order for a poem to constitute an encounter, there will have to take place a distancing of the idiosyncratic, egological breath at its source. It will have to move “with a self-forgotten I toward the uncanny and strange” (6). But the same distancing or uncanniness risks earning for poetry the reproach of “obscurity” (7). As a result, another operation is required, another form of distancing, but which will work as a parallel companion to “the darkness attributed to poetry for the sake of an encounter,” so as to produce “two strangenesses – close together, and in one and the same direction” (7). Paradoxically therefore, a doubling of distancing manages to keep poetry on a conciliatory path; what prevents the poem from getting lost in its own distant darkness or dark distancing is precisely the experience of uncannily doubling otherness, enabling the poem to speak “on behalf of . . . who knows, perhaps on behalf of a *totally other*. . . . The poem wants to head toward some other, it needs this other” (8-9).

Now it might seem that Celan has redeemed the distance he had inserted into the poetic process in a classical manner, transcending, indeed destroying the artificial contrivances of art in a manner that would satisfy Büchner’s Lenz, allowing for what is created to return to life and perform an organic communication with another. But apart from the doubling of otherness just referred to, two other somewhat enigmatic terms are introduced at this point in the Meridian address in order to describe how a potentially contrived art effectively becomes poetry: first the “breathturn [*Atemwende*]” – “Who knows, perhaps poetry travels this route – also the route of art – for the sake of such a breathturn? . . . Perhaps the poem is itself because of this” (7-8); and second, the date – “Perhaps one can say that each poem has its own “20th of January” inscribed in it? Perhaps what’s new in the poems written today . . . is the clearest attempt to remain mindful of such dates” (8). Time will permit me to speak here only of the first, the *Atemwende*, which is in any case closer to the question we have been considering so far. For if the puppets and automatons are rendered inactive by the breathturn it would be less because the

- 6 Paul Celan, *The Meridian: Final Version, Drafts, Materials*. Translated by Pierre Joris (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2011), 2. Further reference to this text will be included in text, preceded by the mention *Meridian*. Citations between pages 2 and 13 are from the published version of the address; those from 16-82 are from earlier drafts; and those from 84-213 from source materials and notes.

pneumatic exhalation has resumed as though without interruption than because there has again been a turn into what I am calling artificial or *inanimated* life.

As I have suggested, Celan's *pneumaticism* concentrates on a sense of rhythm that is as much about the interruption of breathing as it is about a traditional idea of poetic expressivity. Drafts and notes for the Meridian address repeat his mother's adage, "What's on the lung, put on the tongue," which makes the "breathroutes" that the poem takes pneumatic more in the physiological than the metaphysical sense, blown in the pulmonary rhythm of "breath-units" rather than as exhalation of the heart or soul (51, 108). Similarly, the poem's syntactic force derives from a "porous" system of "speechspaces" that emphasizes the interval and "stoppages of the breath" (109). "There is a "poem in the poem,"" he notes, "it is in . . . each interval" (103). Thus, whereas one also finds reference to the breath as "inspiration," to the poem as having "the liveliness of mortal soul creatures" (113), there is little doubt by the time it comes to the "breathturn" that priority is being given in that term to the sense of a falling-silent: "it faces you with silence . . . it takes your – false – breath away: you have come to the breathturn" (123). Indeed, the word *Atemwende* that gets repeated and underlined in the final version of the address would seem to have been carefully chosen to signify a radical deflection, a diverting or detouring of the breath into silence, rather than the *Atempause* to which he will also refer (8). It is as counterword, like Lucile Desmoulin's impertinent "Long Live the King" that Büchner reference's in his *Danton's Death*, an utterance that catches in the throat and stops the heart: "no longer a word, it is a terrifying falling silent, it takes away his – and our – breath and words" (7), or as another translation has it, "it robs him – and us – of breath and speech."⁷ Indeed, the German verb *verschlagen* that is used there necessarily conveys via its root *schlagen* a certain violence. It strikes us dumb, makes our heart leap, and suddenly takes our breath away; it "cuts" the breath (*couper le souffle*) as the French would say. We should understand that interruption of the breath, its violent othering, to function as the originary strangeness, the very caesura or cut that constitutes poetry, the *poetic* or *physical* uncanniness that is in operation at the pneumatic origin itself, well before there emerges any artistic, artefactual puppet or artificial automaton.

In that sense the poetry of a diverted breath would be both space and point, the complex negotiation of breath and absence of breath. For neither would that breathing and turning from

7 Paul Celan, "The Meridian." Translated by Jerry Glenn in Jacques Derrida, *Sovereignities in Question: The Poetics of Paul Celan*. Edited by Thomas Dutoit and Outi Pasanen (New York: Fordham University Press, 2005), 179.

breathing be a matter of a simple alternation between exhalation and inhalation; rather it would concern the tensions, extensions, gasps and protractions through which the regularity of the breath is called into question, threatened by something within it that is foreign, wholly other to it, but that must be embraced by it, articulated within it. That would be how poetry comes to life, not simply as communicated breath of the muse, not simply as speech given life by metric regimentations, however creative, derived from respiration, but as the punctual interruption that *inanimates* through that very turn out of the breath. For as I have tried to show, poetry not only reinforces but also disturbs the functioning of a punctuation derived from the pneumatic intonings and cadences of speech; it sets in train a wholly different functioning of what we might call negative versus positive materiality, a wholly different articulation of what constitutes the present and the visible when it comes to writing, a wholly non-natural conception of what makes itself present and visible as life form. If Celan's solution, via the breathturn, to the opposition between a contrived and a living art, is to be given a strong interpretation, we would have to read in it a sense of life that persists or survives in poetry because of, not in spite of – indeed, that is enabled by – *the very interruption of its naturality*, the fact of its being traversed by a radical otherness, an otherness whose structure cannot not include the non-natural, the prosthetic, the artificial, the inanimate.

As a token of that emphasis in *The Meridian* one can note the references in Celan's preparatory and posthumous materials to Freud's *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, and specifically to what Freud calls the primordial "desire of life to return to the inorganic." Like Freud, Celan seems to recognize there the operation of the inorganic, or what I prefer to call the *inanimating* drive, throughout life, from its origins to its most persistent and innovative forms. From inorganic to organic there is indeed a passage across an opposition, a point or tiny animated speck that emerges where previously there was nothing recognizable as such. A • where previously there was . But once there is such a passage across that opposition it can no longer be the same opposition; a very different relation develops between the blank and the •, between the • and its other side, between it and the wholly other of its same.

Such a non-oppositional relation between life and non-life, or between animate and inanimate life, is what lies along the path of the poem, in the space where the breath turns out of itself, not simply into a silence that signifies asphyxiation but rather into a

form of survival. It is also, however, a type of vulnerable, bare life. “Cello-Einsatz” proceeds toward the potential optimism of its final stanza, where everything is not only less but also more, through reference to a breath that is now haunted by clouds of fire: “two / smoke-clouds of breath / dig in the book / which the temple-din opened / something grows true / twelve times the / beyond hit by arrows lights up / the black- / blooded woman drinks / the black-blooded man’s semen / all things are less than / they are / all are more [alles ist weniger, als es ist, alles ist mehr]” (Michael Hamburger). Pierre Joris’s equally evocative translation has “blaze-clouds of death” for *Brandwolken Atem*.⁸ Poetry is, of course, no guarantee, and ultimately no protection against immolation, and as we know, the ash and cinders of the Shoah are a constant, perhaps necessary referent in all of Celan’s poems. In the same context, *The Meridian* is systematically referred to not just as Celan’s major statement on poetics but as a, or the major statement on poetics after Auschwitz. Yet the final draft of the speech, and indeed all the preliminary versions, avoid explicit references to it. Celan’s modifications of preparatory notes suggest that his sense of poetic abstraction accepts and even requires an elision of the Shoah, falling silent on it, pausing, even detouring from it. But such an elision is not for all that a disappearance, rather the basis for a transformation of it into what he calls “your word.” In that respect Celan would agree both with Adorno that “after Auschwitz . . . it became impossible . . . to write poems,” and with Peter Szondi, that “after Auschwitz no poem is any longer possible except on the basis of Auschwitz,” as well as with Werner Hamacher’s extrapolation that the Auschwitz basis for poetry is an abyss wherein “the poem can still speak only because it exposes itself to the impossibility of its speaking.”⁹

We might also read the elision of the name of Auschwitz by means of the breathturn as the “triumph” of its survival as artificial life. Not that the ashes of those murdered there will ever be resurrected, not that their memory will ever be anything other than a memory, a vigil and a labor of vigilant mourning. Nor am I suggesting by any means that poetry comes back into its own by trading on the holocaust or by profiting from its victims. I am referring to the paradox that Celan seems to allow, whereby that unutterable horror speaks through its silence as well as through its mention. And I am suggesting that if the memory of the victims of Auschwitz lives on thanks to the turn of the breath out of itself, it is because there exists a conception of artificial life – call

- 8 Paul Celan, *Poems of Paul Celan*. Translated by Michael Hamburger (New York: Persea Books, 1972), 237; Paul Celan, *Breathturn*. Translated by Pierre Joris (Berlin: Green Integer, 2006).
- 9 Werner Hamacher, *Premises*. Translated by Peter Fenves (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996), 368. Hamacher also quotes Theodor Adorno, “Cultural Criticism and Society” in *Prisms*. Translated by Samuel and Shierry Weber (Cambridge, Mass: The MIT Press, 1981), 34 and Peter Szondi “Durch die Enge geführt,” *Schriften 2* (Berlin: Suhrkamp, 1978), 384.

it memory, or the archive – that survives beyond natural life. Without it, there can be no commemoration of the victims of the Shoah, no more than there can be any commemoration of any living being at all. If there is to be a poetry after Auschwitz it will have to provide the capaciousness for that immeasurable prosthetic possibility; it will have to take that on as part of itself in the very place where it sings and breathes, to carry that iron lung on its tongue, to bear that imponderable load in the very place of its rhythmic transfer. Only then, will what has been poetically created survive.

**Producing (Inducing)
the Inscrutable**
Jed Rasula

My associations with Zagreb are strictly through an obscure figure named Dragan Aleksić, who in 1922 published a little journal here called *Dada Jazz*. In his short article on Dada, Aleksić concludes with a neologism: “Poetry is noendinsightness.”¹ This gesture towards imponderable immensity is what I want to address.

The figure of the inscrutable is instantly evident with a glimpse of a quintessentially modernist display like El Lissitzky’s “Proun Room” at the Große Berliner Kunstausstellung in 1923 or his “Kabinett der Abstrakten” in the Hanover Provincial Museum in 1928. In literary terms, it confronts us in a variety of sound, typographic, and placard poems from the wolf dens of Dada, Futurism, and De Stijl. To the casual observer, these artifacts are simply inscrutable. {FIGURES 15-17}

The initial point of connection between the inscrutable and the historical phenomenon of modernism is the metropolis. At some point, provoked thematically by the appearance of skyscrapers, the motif of *noendinsightness* shifted from geographical phenomena like the open plains of the American Midwest, or the Russian steppes, to human fabrication in the built environment.

One day early in 1920, Dutch painter Piet Mondrian was sitting at a sidewalk café in Paris, luxuriating in the sights and sounds of the buzzing thoroughfare, sketching an article on “The Grand Boulevards” in which he came to regard the city street as a “thought concentrator.”² “Everything on the boulevard moves,” he wrote. “To move: to create and to annihilate.” All this commotion decomposed the static unities, leaving as a result something like a live-action model of a collage: “Negro head, widow’s veil, Parisienne’s shoes, soldiers legs, cart wheel, Parisienne’s ankles, piece of pavement, part of a fat man, walking-stick nob, piece of a newspaper, lamp post base, red feather.” As these fragments swim into view, “they compose another reality that confounds our habitual conception of reality,” producing however not a chaotic throng but “a unity of broken images, automatically perceived.” The crucial term is *automatically*, because Mondrian was recognizing something later theorized by Walter Benjamin – namely, that modern life resists quiet contemplation; it can only be grasped in a state of distraction, bit by bit. “The particular carries me away,” Mondrian wrote, adding: “that is the boulevard.”³

Mondrian’s euphoric celebration of the perpetual present in this article captures much of the spirit of what Richard Huelsenbeck called the big X. “From the everyday events

- 1 Dragan Aleksić, “Dadaism.” *Zenit* 3 April 1921. Translated by Maja Starčević in *Between Worlds: A Sourcebook of Central European Avant-Gardes, 1910-1930*. Edited by Timothy O. Benson and Éva Forgács (Cambridge, Mass: The MIT Press/Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 2002), 279.
- 2 Hans Janssen and Michael White, *The Story of De Stijl: Mondrian to Van Doesburg* (New York: Abrams, 2011), 130.
- 3 Piet Mondrian, *The New Art – The New Life: The Collected Writings of Piet Mondrian*. Edited and Translated by Harry Holtzman and Martin S. James (Boston: G. K. Hall, 1986), 126, 128.

surrounding me,” he wrote, specifying “the big city, the Dada circus, crashing, steam whistles, house fronts, the smell of roast veal,” he discerned “an impulse which starts me toward direct action, becoming the big X.”⁴ The big X was not so much an equation as a force field. As Dragan Aleksić put it, “A naked man in the first year is a Dadaist.”⁵

The sensation of massed proximity was an increasingly recognizable condition of urban life by the early twentieth century, thematized in its dystopic aspect by Georg Simmel’s influential essay “The Metropolis and Mental Life.” Country cousins may have felt dismayed, but artists flocked to the city to experience the perceptual revelation of over-stimulation. Ezra Pound’s descent into the Paris subway to extract the two lines of “In a Station of the Metro” is one example. Russian filmmaker Sergei Eisenstein would have recognized Pound’s poem as an instance of what he called “vertical montage,” compressing the horizontal/temporal elements of a sequence into synaesthetic intensity: intensity as a portent of totality. Eisenstein’s example is the city on a rainy night, which he says “looks like the visual equivalent of jazz” – its rain slick streets and neon lights blended into a depthless pulsation in which far and near are obscured, and all objects are absorbed into a spectacle that he says “nullif[ies] all perception of real space.”⁶

This sounds like a premonition of postwar *film noir*. In fact, Eisenstein’s reference is keyed to an article by René Guilleré, in which the Frenchman advances the hypothesis that “In jazz, everything is brought into the foreground.” Therefore, “In jazz everything is mass.” Instead of Renaissance depth perspective, we now have the intensification of proximity. Parallel lines do not converge on the horizon, but remain strictly parallel until we’re tugged right into the object, and “we pull the picture towards us, at us, into ourselves” as “co-participants.” Consequently, Eisenstein says, speaking of his own art, “we are not afraid to use close-ups as in film: to depict the human figure out of its natural proportions, as it appears to us when it is fifty centimeters away from our eyes; we are not afraid of a metaphor that leaps out of a poem, not afraid of the sound of a trombone bursting out of the orchestra in an aggressive lunge.”⁷

This is among the more explicit modernist affirmations of an aesthetics of singularity – singularity constantly reabsorbed into the mass, in split seconds, like a jazz solo circa 1927. A trombone soaring out of the ensemble in Eisenstein’s model is not an exception to the aggregate, but something more like the

- 4 Richard Huelsenbeck, “En Avant Dada.” Translated by Ralph Manheim in *The Dada Painters and Poets*. Edited by Robert Motherwell (New York: Wittenborn, 1951), 36.
- 5 Mondrian, *The New Art – The New Life*, 126, 128.
- 6 S. M. Eisenstein, *Selected Works Volume II: Towards a Theory of Montage*. Edited by Michael Glenny and Richard Taylor. Translated by Michael Glenny (London: British Film Institute, 1991), 343.
- 7 René Guilleré in S. M. Eisenstein, *Selected Works Volume II*, 342, 343.

prow of a ship with the force of the whole vessel behind it – the annunciation of imminent mass, the foreground about to be filled to the brim. Co-participation is not a delicate invitation or even an urgent demand, but the gravitational condition of a state of affairs. This world of immediacies was perhaps the most compelling of modernist enticements. Eisenstein thought of it as a “healthy and carnivorous synaesthetic polyphony.”⁸

Eisenstein’s “synaesthetic polyphony” had been glimpsed in 1921 by Franco-Polish film theorist Jean Epstein, who maintained: “There are no stories. There have never been stories. There are only situations, without head or tail; without beginning, middle, or end; without a right or wrong side; they can be seen from every angle; right becomes left; unlimited by past or future, they’re the present.”⁹ Epstein was evoking the suitability of the medium of cinema to capture the *simultaneisme* proclaimed by his friend Blaise Cendrars. Cendrars said “the word ‘simultaneous’ is a term of professional jargon,” evoking its range with a list: “Sounds, colors, voices, dances, passions, mineral, vegetable, animal, textiles, butchery, chemistry, physics, civilization, offspring, father, mother, paintings, dresses, posters, books, poems, this lamp, this whistle, are the technique, the craft. Simultaneous contrast is the newest improvement in this craft, this technique.”¹⁰ It was a technique Cendrars had pioneered in 1913 with his six-foot tall poster-poem, *The Prose of the Transsiberian*, with “simultaneous” colors by Sonia Delaunay.

Ten years later, Cendrars was working in the film industry and writing about cinema, which he regarded as a resurgence of ideographic writing “from prehistoric man to the Egyptians, from the drawings that grace the walls of stone-age caves to hieroglyphics.” This revelation of the prehistoric in the latest technologies was a widespread theme I’ll address later. For Cendrars, it was the advent of a new magnitude. “At high speed the life of flowers is Shakespearean,” he wrote: “all of classicism is present in the slow-motion flexing of a biceps. On screen the slightest effort becomes painful, musical, and insects and microbes look like our most illustrious contemporaries. Eternity in the ephemeral.”¹¹

Eternity in the ephemeral – synaesthetic polyphony – the big X – noendinsightness: these are the terms applied by Cendrars, Eisenstein, Huelsenbeck and Aleksić to the swarming mass of sensory and intellectual provocations known as modernity. For them, it could be experienced almost by chance: sitting in a café

- 8 Sergei Eisenstein, *Nonindifferent Nature*. Translated by Herbert Marshall (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 297.
- 9 Jean Epstein, *Bonjour Cinéma* (Paris: Sirène, 1921), 32, my translation; Jean Epstein, “Homage a Canudo,” *Écrits sur le cinéma 1921-1953, Volume 1* (Paris: Seghers, 1973), 173, my translation.
- 10 Blaise Cendrars, *Modernities and Other Writings*. Edited by Monique Chefdor. Translated by Esther Allen (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1992), 102.
- 11 Cendrars, *Modernities and Other Writings*, 26, 25.

like Mondrian observing the boulevard, soaking up the daily profusion of images in a cinema, or hearing the latest jazz in a nightclub. It was an experience Gertrude Stein identified with reference to syncopation – that is, the discrepant rhythms of emotion and attention that concurrently occupy the same space.

The thing seen and the thing felt about the thing seen not going on at the same tempo is what makes the being at the theatre something that makes anybody nervous.

The jazz bands made of this thing, the thing that makes you nervous at the theatre, they made of this thing an end in itself. They made of this different tempo a something that was nothing but a difference in tempo between anybody and everybody including all those doing it and all those hearing and seeing it.¹²

Syncopation arises from these slight differences unique to each observer as their attentions converge on a single phenomenon. Long before encountering jazz, however, Stein had embarked on her colossal book *The Making of Americans* when “I began to get enormously interested in hearing how everybody said the same thing over and over again with infinite variations but over and over again.”¹³

The poet Mina Loy uses the expression “[an] intercepted cinema of suggestions” to evoke the way Stein dotes upon generative and regenerative increments of language measured out, as it were, frame by frame. Comparing Stein’s phrasal shifts with “the fractional tones in primitive music,” Loy imagined this was “a literature reduced to a basic significance that could be conveyed to a man on Mars.” “It is the variety of her mental processes that gives such fresh significance to her words, as if she had got them out of bed early in the morning and washed them in the sun.”¹⁴ In similar terms, William Carlos Williams welcomed Stein’s determination “to work smashing every connotation that words have ever had, in order to get them back clean.” Maverick American poet Laura Riding resorted to an image of pre-lapsarian purity: “None of the words Miss Stein uses have ever had any experience. They are no older than her use of them.” Riding accordingly inferred that “she uses language automatically to record pure, ultimate obviousness.”¹⁵ Loy and Riding discerned in Stein’s work something so thoroughly packed into the *surface* that a new world was convened.

- 12 Gertrude Stein, *Lectures in America* (New York: Random House, 1935), 95.
- 13 Gertrude Stein, *Lectures in America*, 138.
- 14 Mina Loy, “Gertrude Stein,” *Transatlantic Review* 2: 3 (1924), 306, 307.
- 15 Laura Riding, *Contemporaries and Snobs* (New York: Doubleday, 1928), 189; William Carlos Williams, *Selected Essays* (New York: New Directions, 1969), 163.

Stein's work was not hermetically coded, nor did it mimic childish prattle; it simply unfurled word upon word as if each use were unique to its occasion, and its occasion was the *present* in a sense that had gone unnoticed. Stein's works – Stein's words – bear up under the combined pressure of past, present and future “all together,” preserving that “flicker” of intersecting domains that leaves a reader with the oblique perception that something more is going on than meets the eye, even though what meets the eye can feel like more than enough. The emphasis on her words as newly washed, freshly pickled, or just born honors Stein even as it evades the common sensation as a reader of being overcome by them, confronted by words congealed into a wall. {FIGURE 18}

This unpunctuated passage from *Useful Knowledge* may be read as a shout out to Molly Bloom; but the act of *reading* is confronted here by a vocabulary so minimal yet so repetitious as to present a physical challenge to the act of *seeing*. The wall of words remains a wall – or, thanks to Mina Loy, “the plastic static of the ultimate presence of an entity.”¹⁶ This is veritably the *inscrutable*, induced in such a way that the reader becomes a stand-in for Melville's *Bartleby*, reduced to stunned silence before the wall of the Tombs, having reached that state with the simple remonstrance, “I prefer not.”

Bartleby's expression of demurrals was taken up most dramatically in the visual arts in the early twentieth century. The Dadaist Hans Arp reflected on its origins. “Between 1917 and 1920 or 1925, Sophie [Taeuber] and I fought for the precision of the indefinable. This may already contain a rudimentary interpretation of Rimbaud's famous utterance” – the exhortation to be modern which, for Arp, meant a “primordial deepness” whose roots went “deep in absolute modernism, in infinity.”¹⁷

For those alert to the occasion, modern art had ceased to be a succession of styles. Suddenly, it was the *advent* of a new world. Artists hunkered in their studios as if they had suddenly been outfitted with transistor tubes, cathode rays, building a time machine for immediate access to the future. *Reading the runes* – or “searching for a state of organized intensity” as the painter Fernand Léger saw it.¹⁸ Here and there, certain figures appeared to be doing more than reading the runes, they were *composing* them.

To encounter such a devotee in action was an indelible experience for Arp:

- 16 Mina Loy, *The Last Lunar Baedeker*. Edited by Roger L. Conover. (Highlands, N.C.: Jargon, 1982), 289.
- 17 Jean Arp, *Arp on Arp: Poems, Essays, Memories*. Edited by Marcel Jean. Translated by Joachim Neugroschel. (New York: Viking, 1972), 311.
- 18 Fernand Léger, *Functions of Painting*. Edited by Edward Fry. Translated by Alexandra Anderson (New York: Viking, 1973), 29.

In 1912 I visited Kandinsky in Munich. He gave me a very warm reception. It was the period when abstract art was beginning to turn into concrete art; that is to say, the avant-garde painters no longer stood before an apple, a guitar, a man, or a landscape to convert or dissolve them into colored circles, triangles, and rectangles; on the contrary, they created autonomous compositions directly out of their most intimate joy, their most personal suffering, out of lines, planes, forms, colors.¹⁹

Arp's fellow Dadaist Hans Richter recites the same terms.

When I first came in contact with the problems of abstract art, I felt a mysterious and special message in the fact that form and color had been liberated from guitars, madonnas, trees, harlequins, skirts, and apples. In Switzerland in those times – which historically are called Dada – we were involved in a manifold struggle to understand this message.²⁰

Suddenly, to see two or three primary colors on a canvas, unrestrained by any mimetic content, was to behold the rebirth of color itself – and, behind that, the reinvigorated human eye.

Arp notes the lexical convergence of relevant terms: “we, who lived through the years in which figurative art (*Abbildung*) changed into shaping, configurative art (*Bildung*), wanted to stress spirit rather than matter, and so we limited ourselves to horizontal and vertical planes. The vertical and the horizontal are the extreme signs available to man for touching the beyond and his inwardness.”²¹ Mondrian, through *De Stijl*, propagated the axis of these extreme signs with Theosophical deliberation. He cautioned, in 1922, “a new art is still necessary, but *the new cannot be built out of old material*.”²²

As if heeding Mondrian's point, the Constructivists in the Soviet Union endowed “faktura” or materiality with a comparably evangelical radiance. Favoring wood, metal, glass, and other concrete materials, “new objects – not pictures – are created, not imitative of reality, but built with a structural logic to be utilized eventually, just as steam was utilized long after its discovery.” Out of such efforts “constructivist art would mold the new social personality.”²³

Reviewing the “ $\zeta \times \zeta = 2\zeta$ ” exhibit in Moscow in September 1921, Nikolai Tarabukin found an eloquent demonstration that “painting as a figurative art – which it has always been – is

19 Arp, *Arp on Arp*, 282.

20 Hans Richter, “Beginnings of German Abstraction,” *The World of Abstract Art* [by] The American Abstract Artists (New York: Wittenborn, 1957), 37.

21 Arp, *Arp on Arp*, 292.

22 Mondrian, *The New Art – The New Life*, 169.

23 Louis Lozowick, *Modern Russian Art* (New York: Societé Anonyme, 1925), 30

outdated.” (Tarabukin would go on to write the book *From the Easel to the Machine* in 1923). Alexander Rodchenko – who had already adopted the slogan “Down with art as a means of escape from a senseless life!” – exhibited three monochromatic canvases (red, yellow, blue) as a simultaneous farewell to “art” and commitment to “production.” Tarabukin saw in Rodchenko’s gesture (the monochromatic canvas) either “a meaningless, dumb and blind wall” – suitable for a Bartleby’s fixed gaze – or else “a stage in evolution,” one that is “historically significant and ‘marks an epoch.’”²⁴

There is a tantalizing sense, in this disavowal of art by artists, of Prufrock’s quandary, pinioned between daring and doubt. Do I dare to eat a peach? Do we dare to call it something other than art? In the Soviet Union the self-consciousness this entailed could be assuaged by the political pledge, as the First Working Group of Constructivists did in March, 1921, in their declared aim of “realizing in practical terms the communistic expression of material structures” so as to transform labor from its pre-revolutionary status as “slave work” to its destiny as “exultant work” after the triumph of the proletariat.²⁵ This meant, naturally, working in the dark, experimenting within an emerging but inscrutable social order.

Louis Lozowick summarized the Constructivist outlook: “Art is not a matter of inspiration or intuition but of logic and craftsmanship. The function of art, before it disappears, is not to decorate or beautify life but to transform and organize it. The artist must change from one who represents existing objects into one who creates a world of new objects”²⁶; and these new objects were to be hatched out of what had formerly been art works, now reconceived as eggs.

In 1915 Kazimir Malevich had divested himself of academic rubbish, as he put it, declaring the “zero of form” in the black canvas he displayed in the traditional corner position of Russian icons in the 0.10 exhibition (“Last Exhibition of Futurist Pictures”).²⁷ {FIGURE 19}

Rodchenko’s monochromatic farewells to art in 1921 made a rainbow of the pledge. In the West, the architect Le Corbusier advocated Purism as “elimination of the equivocal” – intended as a challenge to the needs of the moment: “the tasks of our century, so strenuous, so full of danger, so violent, so victorious, seem to demand of us that we think against a background of white.”²⁸

- 24 Nikolai Tarabukin, “From the Easel to the Machine” in *Modern Art and Modernism*. Edited by Francis Frascina and Charles Harrison (New York: HarperCollins, 1983), 138; German Karginov, *Rodchenko*. Translated by Elisabeth Hoch (London: Thames and Hudson, 1979), 90.
- 25 The First Working Group of Constructivists in Christina Lodder, *Russian Constructivism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983), 94. The members of the group, at that point, were Alexei Gan, Varvara Stepanova, Alexander Rodchenko, the Stenberg brothers Vladimir and George, and Konstantin Medunetsky.
- 26 Lozowick, *Modern Russian Art*, 30.
- 27 Kazimir Malevich, “From Cubism and Futurism to Suprematism: The New Painterly Realism” in *Russian Art of the Avant-Garde: Theory and Criticism 1902-1934*. Edited and Translated by John Bowlit (New York: Viking, 1976), 118.
- 28 Le Corbusier, *The Decorative Art of Today*. Translated by James I. Dunnett. (Cambridge, Mass: The MIT Press, 1987) 192.

Whether black, white, or in primary colors, this inaugural declaration was not necessarily based on models of purity, even if purification was the incentive. In 1927 Giorgio de Chirico urged his fellow artists: “it is necessary to rid art of everything it contains known to us up to now, every subject every idea every thought every symbol must be put aside. Thought must necessarily detach itself from everything, from logic and sense; it must keep away from all human obstacles to such a degree that things appear under a new aspect as if they were illumined by a constellation appearing for the first time.”²⁹

Even if not programmatically undertaken, transformation in the arts generated such momentum that by 1934 William Butler Yeats struggled to account for it all. “Certain typical books,” he wrote – citing Pound’s *Cantos*, Joyce’s *Ulysses*, and *The Waves* by Virginia Woolf – “suggest a philosophy like that of the *Samkara* school of ancient India, mental and physical objects alike material, a deluge of experience breaking over us and within us, melting limits whether of line or tint; man no hard bright mirror dawdling by the dry sticks of a hedge, but a swimmer, or rather the waves themselves.”³⁰

Virginia Woolf’s novel *To the Lighthouse* obliquely addresses this transformation. It concludes with the painter Lily Briscoe adding a single stroke to the center of her canvas, completing the painting that’s been nagging her throughout the novel. “One line placed on the canvas committed her to innumerable risks, to frequent and irrevocable decisions.” This is a chastening premonition of the dangers to which abstract artists would face in Nazi Germany and the USSR. In context, though, Woolf assigns the skeptical eye to a character (Mr. Bankes) perplexed by Lily’s canvas. In a passage suggesting any number of strains in modern art, from Fauvism and Cubism to pure abstraction – he suddenly has an insight based on his presumption of pictorial content: “Mother and child then – objects of universal veneration, and in this case the mother was famous for her beauty – might be reduced, he pondered, to a purple shadow without irreverence.”³¹

What was ultimately at stake in this seemingly irreverent pursuit of a new basis of reverence was clarified by the American abstract artist Robert Wolff, who suggested that the old static image of art had been displaced by the kinetic image, “total, perpetual and self-transforming. Painting, since Cezanne, has destroyed the object to allow us this power of total perception.”³²

- 29 Giorgio de Chirico in Sidney Janis, *Abstract and Surrealist Art in America* (New York: Reynal & Hitchcock, 1944), 25.
- 30 William Butler Yeats, *Explorations* (New York: Macmillan, 1962), 373.
- 31 Virginia Woolf, *To the Lighthouse*. Edited by Margaret Drabble (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 213, 72.
- 32 Robert Wolff in Janis, *Abstract and Surrealist Art in America*, 57.

What's intriguing is the convergence at a particular moment in time of seemingly opposed artistic proclivities on a common goal, achieving "this power of total perception." Antithetical as they were in so many ways, Constructivism and Surrealism shared this aspiration. In Salvador Dalí's credo: "My whole ambition in the pictorial domain is to materialize the images of concrete irrationality with the most imperialist fury of precision."³³

The Constructivist object (a plexiglass mobile, a multi-media relief, a mechanical light modulator) and the Surrealist object – "object-beings" or "being-objects"? André Breton wondered, or maybe "*object-events*" – (a fur lined teacup with furry saucer and spoon, a table with a wolf's tail, a woman's shoe in which a glass of milk nestles into an excremental paste), despite dramatic differences, have something in common.³⁴ They are all objects that, placed in a display case, could be labeled "use unknown" – a common practice in exhibits of ethnographic artifacts. The proximity revealed under the label *use unknown* – a label endowing family resemblance on such diverse objects as a Haida carving, a Cornell box, and a Lissitzky proun – is itself a species of what James Clifford calls ethnographic Surrealism, "that moment in which the possibility of comparison exists in unmediated tension with sheer incongruity."³⁵

In fact, the *object as such* was being called upon to erase itself and regenerate itself in the same impulse; and the means available for this liminal adventure derived equally from abstraction and Surrealism. In either case, the objects of experience were being remobilized in the service of a new innocence, and vice versa. New innocence and new experience join to *produce* (from a Constructivist perspective) or to *induce* (in the Surrealist outlook) a new sentence.

33 Salvador Dalí in Janis, *Abstract and Surrealist Art in America*, 28.

34 André Breton, *Surrealism and Painting*. Translated by Simon Watson Taylor (Boston: MFA, 2002), 282; Marcel Jean, *The History of Surrealist Painting*. Translated by Simon Watson Taylor (New York: Grove Press, 1960), 19.

35 James Clifford, *The Predicament of Culture: Twentieth-Century Ethnography, Literature, and Art* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1988), 146.

The benighted image of T. S. Eliot has long been associated with a dour public persona that could have been extracted from his own J. Alfred Prufrock, so it's hard to imagine him growing up along the river associated with Huck Finn and Tom Sawyer. Yes, Tom Eliot was an American boy – at least once upon a time. To get a glimpse of that lad, there's a photograph taken in Sussex at the house of Virginia and Leonard Woolf. Tom is clearly relaxed, and wearing a conspicuous pair of Wellies (hiking boots). It's true that he measured out his life in the coffee spoons of office routine, first in a bank and then in the editorial offices of Faber in London; but he could lace up his boots for an outing. One such occasion – desperately needed after the long war years – came late in the summer of 1919 when he embarked on a walking tour in the south of France. "I have been walking the whole time since I arrived and so have had no address at all," Eliot wrote to a friend. "Through Dordogne and the Corrèze, sunburnt – melons, ceps, truffles, eggs, good wine and good cheese and cheerful people. It is a complete relief from London."³⁶ He grew a beard on the trip, presaging perhaps a kinship with those Paleolithic hunters whose bison he saw on cave walls. Soon after his return to London, Eliot completed "Tradition and the Individual Talent" for the final number of *The Egoist*. This canonical declaration includes a fleeting but crucial reference to Paleolithic cave art.

Eliot's attention to the "historical sense" as holistic tradition from Homer to the present is implicitly anchored in his encounter with the *pre-historic*. To apprehend a past revitalized by simultaneity "does not superannuate either Shakespeare, or Homer, or the rock drawing of the Magdalenian draughtsmen," Eliot insists.³⁷ Eliot was not alone in his conviction. "To me there is no past or future in art," Picasso said in an interview in 1923. Giacometti concurred: "all the art of the past rises up before me, the art of all ages and all civilizations, everything becomes simultaneous, as if space had replaced time."³⁸ In 1910 Ezra Pound had proclaimed, "All ages are contemporaneous." Siegfried Giedion used Pound's dictum as an epigraph for *The Eternal Present* (1962), his study of Paleolithic art. "A new attitude has become apparent in literature, painting, and music," wrote Giedion. "If one opens *Finnegans Wake*, listens to a quartet by Béla Bartók, or looks at a picture by Joan Miró, each of them tells us that present, past, and future are not chopped off from one another but merge into

- 36 *The Letters of T. S. Eliot, Volume I: 1898-1922*. Edited by Valerie Eliot (San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1988), 327.
- 37 T. S. Eliot, *Selected Essays*. 3rd Edition (London: Faber and Faber, 1951), 16.
- 38 Pablo Picasso, "Picasso Speaks" in *Art in Theory 1900-2000: An Anthology of Changing Ideas*. Edited by Charles Harrison and Paul Wood (Oxford: Blackwell, 2003), 216; Alberto Giacometti in Jed Perl, *New Art City: Manhattan at Mid-Century* (New York: Knopf, 2005), 233.

one uninterrupted fabric.”³⁹ This outlook suggests one of the immediate challenges felt by early encounters with modernism, in which individual works were not offered as discrete items on a cultural tasting menu, but tended to be inseparable from some larger phenomenon.

That phenomenon was understood by various names at the time: post-impressionist, cubist, futurist, ultra-modern, and so on. But what was generally overlooked was the sense of the archaic. In *The Geography of the Imagination* (1981), Guy Davenport wrote: “Art has not evolved. It has always been itself, and modern artists have notoriously learned more from the archaic discovered in our time than from the immediate centuries.” “[I]f we have had a renaissance in the twentieth century,” he suggests, “it has been a renaissance of the archaic.”⁴⁰

In the inaugural issue of *Blast* in 1914, sculptor Henri Gaudier-Brzeska enumerated the successive vortices contributing to Vorticism, calling attention to prehistory:

The PALEOLITHIC VORTEX resulted in the decoration of the Dordogne caverns.... Out of the minds primordially preoccupied with animals Font-de-Gaume gained its procession of horses carved in the rock. The driving power was life in the absolute – the plastic expression the fruitful sphere.

The sphere is thrown through space, it is the soul and object of the vortex.⁴¹

The sculptural initiative, in particular, gathered momentum from then on. If Rodin had seemed the incarnation of medieval doggedness combined with nineteenth century industry, modernist successors seemed to go farther back in time with every new initiative. The sleek industrial finish associated with Brancusi’s work paradoxically enhances the Paleolithic affinities of his forms; and his assiduous photographic documentation of his studio filled with sculptures in process makes it seem like the space itself is being carved into existence. Jacob Epstein’s *Rock-Drill* amalgamates the modern riveter to a Jurassic cranium with beak. {FIGURE 20}

Brancusi and Epstein were touchstones for Ezra Pound, and a later installment of his *Cantos* is titled *Rock-Drill*. His famous injunction to *Make It New* is also an exhortation to make the new archaic. Pound himself, in his treatise on machine art (circa 1927), insisted: “*Modern man can live and should live in his cities and machine shops with the same kind of swing and exuberance that*

39 Ezra Pound, *The Spirit of Romance* (New York: New Directions, 1968), 6; Siegfried Giedion, *The Eternal Present: The Beginnings of Art* (New York: Pantheon, 1962), xx.

40 Guy Davenport, *The Geography of the Imagination* (San Francisco: North Point, 1981), 67, 20.

41 Gaudier Brzeska, “Vortex,” *Blast* 1 (June 20, 1914), 155.

the savage is supposed to have in his forest."⁴² His friend, the painter Fernand Léger, recognized: "There is a modern primitivism in the intense life that surrounds us"; and Léger was proclaimed "the Primitive of the new life" by Carl Einstein.⁴³ For James Johnson Sweeney (curator at MoMA), modernism was predicated on the realization that "a new epoch could grow only out of a new archaism." "The twentieth century has been characterized by a gradual return to origins, to a new archaism – a pre-logical mode of expression – to art as something necessary and organic: a vital element in the world about us, not merely a reflection of it."⁴⁴

Another critic who used the term "new archaism" was Edward F. Rothschild, in *The Meaning of Unintelligibility* (1934): "We live in an age of unintelligibility, as every age must be that is so largely characterized by conflict, maladjustment, and heterogeneity. We can boast of science as the achievement of our age, but science has so completely revolutionized our world that it is a new and precarious world and *we are its primitives*. We have yet to reach the new archaism in life which we are having in art."⁴⁵ Declarations of renewal by submersion in the archaic had been steadily forthcoming from the artists themselves, from the Futurists in Italy ("We have called ourselves 'the primitives of a new and completely transformed sensitivity'") and Russia ("WE ARE THE PRIMITIVES OF THE TWENTIETH CENTURY") to the Constructivists and the Surrealists.⁴⁶

The concept of *prehistory* contributed something decisive to a debate otherwise tainted by the vocabulary of primitivism. It had been possible to routinely denigrate people "without a history" – those presumably mired in the vestigial trappings of a culture that "civilization" had outgrown – but what about people *before* history? Tribal artifacts of Native Americans, like those from Oceania and Africa, could be consigned to the marginal category of artisan crafts, conceding their exquisite execution while denying any corresponding awareness to its makers, who were presumed to work as instinctively as a cheetah devouring a gazelle. But the Paleolithic menagerie defied this logic; and, with nearly all traces of its cultural habitat erased by tens of thousands of years, prehistoric cave art hung tauntingly in the air, insinuating a shortcut into the source of artistic sapience – almost as if *those* caves were also Plato's cave.

So what did this "new archaism" consist of? One measure can be gleaned from an American artist, Howard Daum, who was associated with the journal *Iconograph* and its 1946 exhibit "Semeiology or 8 and a Totem Pole." {FIGURE 21}

42 Ezra Pound, *Machine Art and Other Writings: The Lost Thought of the Italian Years*. Edited by Maria Luisa Ardizzone (Durham: Duke University Press, 1996), 79.

43 Fernand Léger, *Functions of Painting*, 166; Carl [as Karl] Einstein, "Fernand Leger" in *Fernand Leger* (New York: Société Anonyme, 1925), 7.

44 James Johnson Sweeney, *Plastic Redirections in 20th Century Painting* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1934), 3, 35.

45 Edward F. Rothschild, *The Meaning of Unintelligibility in Modern Art* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1934), 99.

46 Umberto Boccioni, "Plastic Dynamism" in *Futurist Manifestos*. Edited by Umbro Apollonio. Translated by Robert Brain et al. (New York: Viking, 1973), 94; Ivan Klyun, "Primitives of the Twentieth Century" in *Russian Art of the Avant-Garde: Theory and Criticism 1902-1934*. Edited by Bowlit, 138.

He characterized the collapse of background and foreground into an undifferentiated plane as “Indian Space.”⁴⁷ For Steve Wheeler, another member of the group, the slightest mark, the laziest scrawl, could not help but summon “a fluid drama pushing the spectator into the substance of a world completely strange. The present is here in all its tenderness and brutality. We cannot go back. Today life is turning the soul of man inside out.”⁴⁸

The Viennese architect and designer Frederick Kiesler elaborated in similar terms:

Primitive man knew no separate worlds of vision and fact. He knew one world in which both were continually present within the pattern of every-day experience. And when he carved and painted the walls of his cave or the side of a cliff, no frames or borders cut off his works from space or life – the same space, the same life that flowed around his animals, his demons and himself.⁴⁹

In the assimilation of prehistory by modernist artists, who among them actually visited the Paleolithic sanctuaries? One of them was Amedée Ozenfant – co-editor of *L'Esprit nouveau* with Le Corbusier. He recounts how his car broke down near Les Eyzies, leading to a serendipitous visit to the cave. Encountering other tourists while waiting for the guide, “We began talking of Paris, composers, writers, painters in vogue: but when we came out, pensive, there was no more talking. What a clean sweep!” And this experience of prehistory’s *tabula rasa*, he claims, enabled him to write the book this anecdote prefaces (*Foundations of Modern Art*). “I had found the Ariadne’s thread,” he says, also calling it his “road to Damascus.”⁵⁰

The unimpeachable primacy of prehistoric art had a comparable impact on Roger Fry who, in 1920, reflected on how “in the last sixty years, knowledge and perception have poured upon us so fast that the whole well-ordered system has been blown away, and we stand bare to the blast, scarcely able to snatch a hasty generalization or two to cover our nakedness for a moment.”⁵¹ For Fry, as for so many others, artistic modernism and the recovery of the archaic were inseparable experiences – provoking the sense of precarious exposure, being bare to the blast – and his evocation of the modern connoisseur denuded of proprietary solace may echo memories of the 1910 Grafton Gallery exhibit of Post-Impressionism which he organized, taken by one critic as evidence

47 Howard Daum in W. Jackson Rushing, *Native American Art and the New York Avant-Garde: A History of Cultural Primitivism* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1995), 137.

48 Steve Wheeler, *Hello Steve*. (New York: Press Eight, 1947), no pagination.

49 Frederick Kiesler, *Selected Writings*. Edited by Siegfried Gohr and Gunda Luyken (Ostfildern bei Stuttgart: Gerd Hatje, 1996), 42.

50 Amedée Ozenfant, *Foundations of Modern Art*. Translated by John Rodker (New York: Brewer, Warren and Putnam, 1931), x.

51 Roger Fry, *Vision and Design*. Revised Edition (London: Chatto and Windus, 1925), 99. As early as 1910 Fry had acknowledged the skill of Paleolithic art, which he thought “surpassed anything that not only our own primitive peoples, but even the most accomplished animal draughtsmen have ever achieved” (93).

of “a widespread plot to destroy the whole fabric of European painting.”

This sort of alarmist response reflects a fundamental misrecognition, construing modernism broadly as futuristic, and criminally intent on murdering the moonshine (to cite a typically provocative attitude from the Italian Futurists). What was missing was any sense of the creative adventure by artists for whom taunting the public or ridiculing the bourgeoisie was simply not of interest.

In an issue of *Minotaure* in 1938, the Chilean Surrealist Matta insisted, “We need walls like wet sheets that mutate and wed our psychological fears,” conceiving these walls as “plastic psychoanalytic mirrors.”⁵² Whether or not he had in mind the walls of Paleolithic caves, they have in fact served as plastic mirrors revealing, in a phrase from *Finnegans Wake*, “the handwriting on his facewall.”⁵³ This could be the caption of a photomontage published in *Life* magazine in 1945, in which the faces of painters William Baziotes and Robert Motherwell peer out from the seemingly prehistoric swirl of a canvas by Jackson Pollock. {FIGURE 22}

The swirl of lines in Pollock’s drip paintings has affinities with Paleolithic art, in which the tangle of lines can at times be so thick as to make a perceptual nest, out of which recognizable images occasionally float. The lines themselves are called core meanders. {FIGURE 23}

Core meanders are, in effect, a species of doodling – dramatized by Abbé Breuil’s legendary line drawings – bringing to mind not only the Doodles family in *Finnegans Wake* but Stanley Hayter’s comments, in the journal *trans/formations*, on the Surrealist contention that “the doodle is not merely of importance but testifies to the vital preoccupations of the subject, it is interesting that in all languages it has been found necessary to refer to such works by a contemptuous diminutive. This may be an example of the mechanism by which people seek to isolate themselves from disturbing ideas.”⁵⁴

James Joyce referred to the cast of characters in his “Work in Progress” as the Doodles Family, using these primordial and incompletely humanized figures as a *character disorder*, rendering them simultaneously persons and calligraphic squiggles. To personify the recurrent letter triad HCE as a human named Humphrey Chimpden Earwicker – to presume him a character in a novel and promote him to heroic status – is an unwarranted anthropomorphism of alphabetic events, leading to the neglect

52 Matta Echaurren, “Mathématique sensible – Architecture du temps,” *Minotaure* 11 (1938), 43. Matta recommends searching by way of every umbilical cord that can put us in touch with other suns: “Trouver pour chacun ces cordons ombilicaux qui nous mettent en communication avec d’autres soleils, des objets à liberté totale qui seraient comme des miroirs plastiques psychanalytiques.”

53 James Joyce, *Finnegans Wake* (New York: Viking, 1958), 135.

54 Stanley Hayter, “The Art of This Time,” *Trans/formation: Arts, Communication, Environment* I: 2 (1951), 106.

of those true proletarians of the text, “Mister Typus, Mistress Tope and all the little typtopies.” “So you need hardly speel me how every word will be bound over to carry three score and ten toptypsical readings throughout the book of Doublends Jined.”⁵⁵ In this passage the spelling of the word “spell” is itself subverted by a homonym of the German “Spiel” or *play*. The text is not a collection of words to be read but is rather a score of letters or notes to be played. “Spell” in English also means charm or bewitchment.

Spelling words a certain way, as the *Wake* exhaustively demonstrates, bewitches the senses and disarms the mind – to say nothing of what it does to the words. A Wakean etymology might extend beyond the text to recoup parallel elucidations. To “spell” someone, for instance, means to relieve them of an assigned task, like a guard on watch; and this evokes Jacques Derrida’s felicitous translation of Hegel’s enigmatic term *Aufhebung* (cancel and/or preserve) as *relever* or relieve. Spelling in *Finnegans Wake* can be all too burdensome for the reader, who’s compelled to seek relief elsewhere (annotation, glossary, plot summary, gazeteer and census), but for those who stick with it, the *spiel* of Joycean spelling animates many more letters than other texts do, and thus *lends character* to the grammatological landscape, as on a relief map.

Letters are in fact the initial point of immersion in the *Wake*. They constitute the stuff by which the reader’s consciousness is stung *prior* to any awareness of the cover story. In fact, narrative is simply the *bait* that lures the reader into the carnival of letters. Amidst his deluge of doodles, Joyce did not restrict psychic activity to the personality traits of human figures, but instead saturated language with an animism distributed across the level of the word, the phoneme, the lexeme, and especially the letter or written *character*. The narratological actors, as “characters,” then, would manifest as a continuum from the morpheme to the somnolent snoozer of the whole, in one big love letter to language.

In the ballet of its momentum, the *Wake* is a radiant field of characters in motion, characters in the sense of letters, alphabetic doodles, as fluidly archaic as Picasso’s bison sketched with a lit cigarette on the emulsion of a roll of film. After the happy tryst at the close of Part III (the predawn waking arousal of the “goatfathers and groanmothers...firefinders [and] waterworkers”) the doodles coo to each other in an “Echo, choree chorecho! O I you O you me!... How me O my youhou my I youtou to I O?”⁵⁶ Are these felicitous vowel sounds to be mistaken for people? Yes, but

⁵⁵ James Joyce, *Finnegans Wake*, 20.

⁵⁶ James Joyce, *Finnegans Wake*, 585.

only if we recognize the narcissism of the reader gazing down into the pool of the text, acknowledge ourselves by these same acoustic properties – you and me, she, we, they, him, I and it – and account for the ripples created by our own voluntary immersion in this laughably Liffey flow, “At the site of salvocean. And watch would the letter you’re wanting be coming may be.”⁵⁷ Joyce’s amalgamated language in the *Wake* is actually the linguistic magma of infants, for whom a finite number of components has the potential to be baptized into any language at all. But to call it infantile is to denigrate the very foundation of human sapience.

Reading *Finnegans Wake* resembles a visit to a Paleolithic cave, in which the rump of one bison may be playfully superimposed on the snout of another; and the longer you gaze, the more congested the throng. To demand transparency of the signifier in the *Wake* is to ignore the flagrantly protuberant texture of the work itself, in which the morphological dominant is neither plot nor character but the spelling “disorder” that legislates every apparition of character traits and actions. Put simply the *Wake* is not a novel made blurry by unconventional orthography.

The ludic continuum of Joyce’s insubordinate polyglossia unsays everything it says. In doing so, it subjects the eternal dream of a transcendental signifier – a super-sign – to equivocation, partaking of the perpetual motion of creative vagrancy, or “naturalism in zigzag” as Hans Arp put it.⁵⁸ In the drama, and trauma, of starting from scratch with every letter, *Finnegans Wake* launches the reader on those “moist word expeditions” Carola Giedion-Welcker admired Joyce for undertaking; and in the process we’re bound (obliged, and destined) to hear “l’être” (being) as “lettre” (letter), opening up the manic prospect of all possible wor(l)ds compacted into a single (sacredly secular) text, thereby undermining any distinction of inside from outside, essential from peripheral, literature from language, abstract versus concrete, or any similar pairing predicated on content/form distinctions.⁵⁹

Elliot Paul – who, with Jolas, had solicited “Work in Progress” for *Transition* – likened the *Wake* to “the abstractions of modern painting and music” – and concerning the challenge of abstraction, wrote Hugh Gordon Porteus in 1936, “there is always more, for the spectator...to unlearn than to learn.”⁶⁰ English composer and occultist Cyril Scott thought, “when a thing is sufficiently old, its effect, on being resuscitated, is new again.” He looked to “Mr Smith, Unlearner” (via fourth dimension theorist C. H. Hinton) for an aesthetic compass. “I contend that unlearning

57 James Joyce, *Finnegans Wake*, 623.

58 Jean Arp, *On My Way: Poetry and Essays 1912-1947* (New York: Wittenborn, 1948), 45.

59 Carola Giedion-Welcker, “Meetings with Joyce” in *Portraits of the Artist in Exile: Recollections of James Joyce by Europeans*. Edited by Willard Potts (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1979), 265. My paragraphs on the *Wake* are adapted from a fuller account: see Jed Rasula, “*Finnegans Wake* and the Character of the Letter,” *James Joyce Quarterly* 34: 4 (Summer 1997): 517-530.

60 Elliot Paul, in *James Joyce, The Critical Heritage*. Edited by Robert H. Deming (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1970), 573; Hugh Gordon Porteus, “Ulterior Motives,” *Axis* 5 (1936), 23.

is one of the most important and difficult faculties for every creator to acquire, because, although it is tolerably easy to learn, yet to unlearn, it requires almost a genius: and certainly it requires an unlearner to create a genius.”⁶¹ This goes to the heart of the phenomena I’ve been addressing here, from Gertrude Stein’s wall of words to Alexander Rodchenko’s monochromatic canvases, to *Finnegans Wake*: all require as much *unlearning* as learning, in order to stand more adequately “bare to the blast.”

Soon after its publication in 1939, the *Wake* would encourage “all over” tendencies in Abstract Expressionism, a phenomenon remarked by Clement Greenberg after the war. The Doodles family of *Finnegans Wake*, with its caravan of disturbing preoccupations, was an exemplary incitement to the artists emerging in New York in the 1940s. Jackson Pollock was smitten by the recording Joyce made of “Anna Livia Plurabelle,” to which he may have been exposed by Howard Putzel. Putzel’s role in propagating Surrealism and promoting the Abstract Expressionists is well documented, as is his penchant for quoting passages of *Finnegans Wake* from memory. Willem de Kooning’s dealer, Charlie Egan, was also given to spontaneously reciting Joyce. Barnett Newmann reportedly attempted to write a novel under the influence of Joyce during the period of his biomorphic myth quests.

David Smith, sculptural doyen of Terminal Iron Works, was another Joyce aficionado. He named his dog Finnegan, and rashly told Robert Motherwell, who raved about Rimbaud and Mallarmé and Breton, “I don’t read French, but I don’t need them. I’ve read James Joyce!” His enthusiasm was evident to critics at the time, one of whom noted Smith’s dedication to “Work in Progress” during its serialization in *Transition*, and compared his “sculptural use of metamorphising objects” to Joyce’s portmanteau words and puns.⁶² The lessons of Joyce varied from artist to artist, but collectively his impact can be traced to the power to *unlearn* as precondition for the creative act. To immerse idea in material consequence was the way Joyce made legible the lessons of his own master, Vico, who said “the whole art of Poetry reduces itself to this, that anyone who wishes to excel as a poet must unlearn all his native language, and return to the pristine beggary of words.”⁶³

What *Finnegans Wake* offered visual artists was an affirmation of abstraction as a naming ritual. It boosted confidence that, for a new order to emerge, art required the boldness of its own creative impetus: “if the disintegration of natural forms had gone thus far,” suggested Sweeney, “what reason for not

61 Cyril Scott, *The Philosophy of Modernism – Its Connection with Music*. London: Waverley, n.d. [probably 1917], 69, 25.

62 Robert Motherwell, “A Major American Sculptor: David Smith” in *Abstract Expressionism: Creators and Critics*. Edited by Clifford Ross (New York: Abrams, 1990), 191; Clement Greenberg in Evan Firestone, “James Joyce and the First Generation New York School,” *Arts Magazine* 56:10 (June 1982), 118.

63 Giambattista Vico, in Herbert Read, *Surrealism* (New York: Praeger, 1971), 76 footnote.

going farther?”⁶⁴ By the time *Finnegans Wake* was published, the “commodius vicus of recirculation” demonstrated by its cyclical structure suggested that *going farther* meant going backwards and forwards at once. By that point, atavistic forms of nationalist nostalgia vividly demonstrated the political danger of antimodernist regression. So the affirmation of the remote past – prehistory, not primitivism – served as rallying cry for the most progressive tendencies in art.

Joyce’s “Work in Progress” came to embody the fruits of this research. Hailed by some for its affinities with abstract art, valued by Herbert Read for its development in language of the “plastic forms” pioneered by Picasso, or singled out by René Lalou for its treatment of language as “plastic matter,” *Finnegans Wake* answered for many to Eugene Jolas’s clarion call for new words and new myths.⁶⁵ Its radical formal innovations epitomized the ultra modern, yet it also presented an unmistakable symbiosis with the “new archaism.”

The *new archaism* and the *new realism* had incited dreams of a *new independent organism*, a *new mythology* and even the New Image announced by German Surrealist Wolfgang Paalen in *Dyn*, his journal of Meso-American antiquity and modern art. A new political world had been an incentive to the constructive commitment to the *new object*, though it was hardly confined to the inner sanctum of Constructivists in Russia. From El Lissitzky’s *prouns* as switching stations directing traffic to the new form, James Johnson Sweeney’s “new organisms,” and Barnett Newman’s assimilation of the archaic and the modern into “mental plasma,” the apparition of modernist singularity was unabated.⁶⁶ It combined Walter Gropius’ vision of the Bauhaus as a laboratory researching “the new structure of the future” with Hans Arp’s pledge to “the precision of the indefinable.”⁶⁷

When *Ulysses* was published in 1922, Giedion-Welcker recognized an anachronistic fixation on proportionality had impeded a proper recognition of its accomplishment. “Rounded-off existence, harmony, synthesis are just bluster, which we’re still today filching from the past, for ornaments,” she complained. The criteria had changed; mimesis was not an automatic standard: “the approximation of nature cannot be accepted as a requirement when the artistic aspiration is directed towards making visible a new independent organism,” she wrote.⁶⁸

Giedion-Welcker was responsive not only to Joyce but to modern visual art, and she wrote the first book on modern

- 64 James Johnson Sweeney, [Statement], in *These, Antithese, Synthese* (Lucerne: Kunstmuseum Luzern, 1935), 17.
- 65 Herbert Read, *Art Now* 126; René Lalou in *James Joyce, The Critical Heritage*. Edited by Robert H. Deming, 345.
- 66 Sweeney, *Plastic Redirections in 20th Century Painting*, 23; Barnett Newman, *Selected Writings and Interviews*. Edited by John P. O’Neill (New York: Knopf, 1990), 141.
- 67 Walter Gropius in Hans Wingler, *The Bauhaus: Weimar, Dessau, Berlin, Chicago*. Translated by Wolfgang Jabs and Basil Gilbert (Cambridge, Mass: The MIT Press, 1969), 31.
- 68 Carola Giedion-Welcker, “Zum Ulysses,” *Schriften 1926-1971: Stationen zu einem Zeitbild*. Edited by Reinhold Hohl (Cologne: DuMont, 1973), 36, my translation; Carola Giedion-Welcker, “Prehistoric Stones.” Translated by Eugene Jolas, *Transition* 27 (1938), 342.

sculpture (1937). “Modern plastic art wants to reconstitute the primal qualities.” “If ‘subject’ tends to disappear, content does not. Modern plastic art provides the cultural transmutations that our new way of living instinctively demands.” Unlike so many of her contemporaries, she was not threatened by the fact that “the human scale, the human angle, has ceased to be the universal norm,” and she readily understood the avant-gardes as being dedicated to the collective possibility of renewal, by the attainment of this broader perspective. Like Eugene Jolas, Giedion-Welcker had no difficulty seeing in Joyce’s “Work in Progress” a spirit similar to the Dadaist “rehabilitation of simple and quotidian qualities.”⁶⁹

Right from the beginning, however, these apparently simple qualities – as manifested in the work of Hans Arp – were met with perplexity or, more often, indignation and outrage. The customary grounds for disavowal – taste and blasphemy – suggest why modernism was an unsavory term in the early to mid-twentieth century. They reveal how thoroughly unprepared the public was to recognize what was at stake. The tacit assumption was that art, literature, and music exist as a service industry, providing solace and inspiration in familiar (pre-packaged) aesthetic doses. There was no sense that aesthetics was intrinsically bound up with the organism, nor that the organism itself was undergoing a technologically induced sea change. It was taken on faith that the arts did not change, and the service they provided should be trans-historical.

But to return in conclusion to T. S. Eliot: in “Tradition and the Individual Talent” he suggested that the artist “must be quite aware of the fact that art never improves, but that the material of art is never quite the same.”⁷⁰ Any presumption of uninterrupted continuity between past and present would epitomize that which Eliot sought to overcome: “if the only form of tradition, of handing down,” he proposed, “consisted in following the ways of the immediate generation before us in a blind or timid adherence to its successes, ‘tradition’ should positively be discouraged.”

This renaissance of the archaic burned like a slow fuse for several decades following Eliot’s walk in the Dordogne. Its compelling luminosity became a beacon for an avant-garde inspired by the prospect of starting from scratch, working from some baseline of creative rudiments. As the Soviet Union abandoned its initial utopianism and succumbed to the darker precincts of social engineering, the Paleolithic emerged as a parable and placeholder of primal values.

69 Carola Giedion-Welcker, *Modern Plastic Art: Elements of Reality, Volume and Disintegration*. Translated by P. Morton Shand (Zurich: Girsberger 1937), 7, 15; “New Roads in Modern Sculpture.” Translated by Eugene Jolas, *Transition* 23 (1935), 199.

70 Eliot, *Selected Essays*, 16.

In the catalogue for the “Prehistoric Rock Pictures” exhibit at the Museum of Modern Art in 1937, Alfred Barr acknowledged the paradox that “an institution devoted to the most recent in art should concern itself with the most ancient,” but he argued that the “formal elegance of the Altamira bison” had been admired by modern artists, not least because “they evoke an atmosphere of antediluvian first things, a strenuous Eden where Adam drew the animals before he named them.”⁷¹ Beholding those primeval images – residues of a time before history – was to come face to face with nothing less than the inscrutable, where *noendinsightness* is where one begins.

⁷¹ Alfred H. Barr, Jr., Preface, Leo Frobenius and Douglas C. Fox, *Prehistoric Rock Pictures in Europe and Africa, from Material in the Archives of the Research Institute for the Morphology of Civilization, Frankfurt-on-Main* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1937), 9, 10.



**Immanence in Poiesis or
“Life as a Text”**

Marie Gil

Poiesis is the art of narrative production, and the art of constructing – mainly through a text. I will deal here with *mimesis* in a very particular sense: not the conversion of life into text, but life as already being a text. In this respect I will concentrate on one narrative genre with regard to this question of immanence, and on one reading of that genre: the biography. Biography is the most terrible of the genres, if we consider the lie of all narrative: it pretends to convert life into text. I will try to show that if we can reverse this proposition, and see in the biographical genre not a false conversion, but something genuine, that only makes a translation from one reality (factual) to another (textual), and if I can affirm that there is an immanentist tradition of the biographical genre, then my demonstration will be true for all Western narratives and novels, because a priori, biography is the most “transcendental” and Aristotelian genre.

And this is true since the structuralist period in France. I will not have the opportunity to address here immanentist foundations prior to structuralism; I can only say that this tradition has its roots in the American novel, as Deleuze recognized. This immanentist tradition in Western poiesis seems to me close to elements of Chinese poetry.¹ Among the Structuralists, I will focus on Barthes, because he raised the possibility of reading a life ‘as a text,’² and therefore, of *writing* it. For the practice of life-writing cannot be taken for granted, and is in principle an impossible enterprise: after all, how can these two heterogeneous materials, the factual and textual, be reconciled? That is the very question of poiesis. Surely all writing involves a kind of death, the creation of a fixed form.

My genre, however, professes this ambition in its very name: bio-graphy. Quite unexpectedly, biography is as free and open as a genre can be, if one considers that it has no established form. To my mind, Barthes offers the possibility, through his life and his writing, of a genuine biography – quite literally, an exercise in life-writing – since his life can be read as a text.

Biography occupies a particular place among the factual genres: situated somewhere between philosophy, history and literature, practised by writers, philosophers and historians (Sartre, Zweig, Gide, and of course Barthes), discredited in turn by the doxa of French theory, rehabilitated once again in recent years since we have got out of the “tout texte” and, in the literary domain, since critics called into question Genette’s proposition in *Fiction and Diction* that only fiction can be an object of study for narratology.

- 1 This is the topic of my forthcoming book *La Chambre d'à côté* (Paris: Minuit, 2016), and of an interview with François Jullien (http://www.roland-barthes.org/audio_seminaire_barthes1.html).
- 2 Roland Barthes, from unpublished fragments for Roland Barthes in *Le Lexique de l'auteur: séminaire à l'École pratique des hautes études 1973–1974: suivi de Fragments inédits du "Roland Barthes" par Roland Barthes.* Edited by Anne Herschberg Pierrot (Paris: Seuil, 2010), 324.

Biographical writing therefore poses serious questions, both complex and fundamental because they question poesis itself in its essence: what does it mean to write a life, or life, to transform life into a text? Does the word “biography” denote the process of writing life, or life in the process of writing? Biography forces us to address this fascinating mixture of two different substances, that of reality (concrete world, life, death), and that of the text. It is precisely the question of poesis, and of the *Poetics* – the question that obsessed Aristotle, that of *mimesis*. Does the biographical object consist only of a *subject*, or is it an individual? How can we respect the openness and movement of a life, when narration forecloses meaning and signifies from the perspective of death? Writing a biography raises the fundamental problem of ‘writing the Other’ evoked by Levinas³ and central to the discussions of those philosophers who have been drawn to the biographical question: Blanchot, Barthes, Derrida, Deleuze and even, reorientated towards the more political dimension of life narratives, Foucault. It is most surprising that these structuralists, supposedly responsible for the anti-biographical doxa that followed after their work, were in fact the very philosophers and writers who truly and most deeply considered the genre. It is significant that Jean-Pierre Martin, in his recent essay criticising the ‘anti-biographical’ doxa, draws on both Barthes and Lacan for his defence of biography.⁴ Besides, the practice of biography is closely linked to certain anthropological questions, in particular in its gesture of renunciation – we do not reach the man, we merely construct a narrative; even biographemes, fragments of biography, are themselves the construction of a narrative. This is the very basis of Lacan’s defence of the genre. Biography brings to the fore, as Blanchot writes, “a relation in which the unknown would be affirmed, made manifest, even exhibited: disclosed – and under what aspect? – precisely in that which it keeps unknown.”⁵

My idea, or the idea is Barthes’s own, is very simple: it postulates that life is a text. In doing so, it inverts the biographical doxa: life does not become a text, life is constituted as a text, it is a text in the process of becoming – we should say more precisely that its very substance is *the textual*.

- 3 Emmanuel Levinas, *Humanism of the Other*. Translated by Nidra Poller (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2003).
- 4 Martin arrives at this defence after having attacked the ‘structuralists’, paradoxically, by assimilating them rapidly (and rather too polemically) with the doxa to which their work gave rise. But presumably it is the ‘writers’ who redeem the others, who are mere ‘philosophers’. Jean-Pierre Martin, *Les Écrivains face à la doxa, ou, Du génie hérétique de la littérature* (Paris: Corti, 2011), 152, 159.
- 5 Maurice Blanchot, *The Infinite Conversation*. Translated by Susan Hanson (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press), 1993.

As a writer, Barthes was obsessed by the biographical question, especially in the final ‘period’ of his life, the ‘novelistic period;’ the ‘biographical turn’ therefore takes hold around the beginning of the ‘novelistic period,’ with the reflection on the signifier in *Empire of Signs* and especially in the preface to *Sade, Fourier, Loyola* in 1971.

At first, Barthes’s passion for biography is centred on pleasure, it produces ‘the pleasure of the text’, and is dependent on the notion of the biographeme: “For me [...], the sudden about-face occurred at the time of *The Pleasure of the Text*: weakening of the theoretical superego, return of the much-loved texts [...]. I also thought I could detect, here and there, a fondness among some of my peers for what could be called [...] *biographical nebulae* [...]. That biographical ‘curiosity’ then developed freely in me.”⁶ Biography, in Barthesian language, resembles *erotography*, as he claims with regard to the life of Roger Laporte:

And if it should happen that for a given subject, as is the case for Roger Laporte himself, life, his life, is absorbed entirely, fundamentally, and – I would say – structurally, in the desire to write, then we can see that whatever happens to this desire, the adventures of this desire, gradually form the genuine *biography* of this subject, and the supposedly critical articles actually become variations on a biographical theme, and I would even say on an erotographic theme.⁷

What, then, is the concept of erotography that Barthes discovers in the early 1970s?

In 1971 Barthes publishes *Sade, Fourier, Loyola*, which reopens a field previously addressed in *Michelet par lui-même*, that of the biographical question. This issue does not come to displace Barthes’s passion for language: what fascinates Barthes in the biographical question is still in fact concerned with language – it is, notably, the creation of the “biographeme.” Furthermore, as he makes clear in his preface, the objects of his biographical writing are all “logothetes”: founders of languages. I would like to develop two points here: the meaning of the emergence of the question of “life,” and the relation of this question to language (which remains omnipresent in Barthes’s seminars and articles).

When Barthes addresses the biographical question, both in theory and in practice, he dispenses with the traditional

6 Roland Barthes, *The Preparation of the Novel*. Translated by Kate Briggs. Edited by Nathalie Léger (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011), 208.

7 Roland Barthes, ‘Rapports entre fiction et critique selon Roger Laporte’, *OC* 5: 758–59 (p. 759).

biographical *topoi*, instead creating a space in his writing, in which life appears as a succession of moments, that incessantly outplays any unity. Just as for Sartre, the subject is first and foremost unknowable: “For if, through a twisted dialectic, the Text, destroyer of all subject, contains a subject to love, that subject is dispersed, somewhat like the ashes we strew into the wind after death.”

Barthes refuses the prerogative, taken for granted in biographical writing, of imposing a retrospective unity on a life, effectively that of the novel, of a coherent narrative. He refuses the reduction of poesis to mimesis. When he defines “life as a text” in the unpublished fragments for *Roland Barthes par Roland Barthes* (cited above), he has no intention of assimilating life with the unity of the *œuvre*, of assimilating the object with its transformation into writing. Rather, he considers that the object is already textual in nature and that biography is in reality a hermeneutic, a reading, a rewriting: “For example, this year (1972–73), he [Barthes speaks of himself] has produced a unique text by juxtaposing different sorts of social engagements; here and there subjects emerge unexpectedly from disparate, incompatible contexts; this breaks the monotonous law of biographical discourse, it produces a sort of textual cacophony.” The diary is proposed as the immediate form of writing that would allow the writer to ‘mak[e] his life into an *œuvre*, his *Ceuvre*’, but this solution is ‘unsatisfactory’, and will be adopted only in passing.⁸ Furthermore, Barthes’s novelistic theory is founded on the individual “detail,” the “author” who is (in three different forms) the object of *Sade, Fourier, Loyola* is not the object of a *biography*, but a “novelistic” object, “the author who leaves his text and comes into our life has no unity, he is a mere plural of ‘charms,’ the site of a few tenuous details, yet the source of vivid novelistic glimmerings.”⁹ The paradoxically “simple” plural here becomes a unity, and all the more strongly in this case since it involves three biographies in one. The realities of the “novelistic” and of the individual detail penetrate one another, the “novelistic” and life are consubstantial, of one substance – and in this respect the novelistic as poesis is distinct from the “novel”: “The ‘novelistic’ is [...] a mode of notation, of investment, interest in the reality of everyday life, in people, in everything that happens in life,”¹⁰ a way of “writing life.” The novelistic is therefore “a way of dividing up reality.” This was the moment of the well-known shift in Barthes’s work from science to “pleasure” which would lead to *The Pleasure of the Text* in 1973.

8 Barthes, *The Preparation of the Novel*, 207.

9 Barthes, *Sade, Fourier, Loyola*, 8.

10 Roland Barthes, ‘Vingt mots-clés pour Roland Barthes,’ interview with Jean-Jacques Brochier (first published in 1975), OC 4: 851–75 (p. 866).

There is a fundamental connection between fiction and the biographeme, as he writes later with regard to anamnesis: “I call *anamnesis* the action – a mixture of pleasure and effort – performed by the subject in order to recover, *without magnifying or sentimentalising it*, a tenuity of memory: it is the haiku itself. The *biographeme* [...] is nothing but a factitious anamnesis: the one I lend to the author I love.”¹¹ Anamnesis, like the biographeme, is exempted from meaning. It is an immanentist state, and it proceeds *poien*. The fictional is therefore central to Barthes’s conception, even as it is rejected by Foucault (for example) in “La Vie des hommes infâmes”: the symbolic is crushed by an imaginary that relegates the real, since childhood, to the domain of uncertainty. For Barthes, biographemes must therefore remain on the surface, and on no account should they be signs of *meaning*, as he explains in order to justify the absence of a life of Loyola.¹² Only the body is the object of the biographeme, whereas biography is a story diffracted from the body, without the consistency of the novel but nonetheless closer to Proust than to Lacan, for whom there are clusters of biographical signs that produce meaning. It is a story in movement, and specifically the movement of writing, of *life-writing*. Biographemes must be arbitrary signifiers, which then lead us to the metaphor of life as a text.

The 1973 seminar is entirely devoted to this biographical approach, and it contains the explicit statement of the principles that emerged gradually from the linguistic conception of life as writing, and from biographemes:

Life as a text

Life as a text: this will become banal (perhaps it already is), if we do not specify: it is a text to be *produced*, not *deciphered*. (to be produced: *poien*)– Already stated at least twice before: in 1942: “It is not that the *Journal d’Édouard* resembles Gide’s *Journal*; on the contrary, many passages in the *Journal* already have the autonomy of the *Journal d’Édouard*”; and in 1966: “Proust’s œuvre does not reflect his life; it is his life that is the text of his œuvre.”¹³

The idea is stated again in *The Preparation of the Novel*:

- 11 Roland Barthes, *Roland Barthes by Roland Barthes*. Translated by Richard Howard (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 109. Translation modified.
- 12 Barthes, *Sade, Fourier, Loyola*, n.5, 11-12.
- 13 Barthes, *Le Lexique de l’auteur*, 324.

[...] it involves the writer *making his life into a work, his Work* (Poïen); obviously, the immediate form (without mediation) of this solution is the *diary* (I'll say at the end of this [development] why that solution is unsatisfactory).¹⁴

Elsewhere he replaces the *text* with the *sentence*. However, what matters for me here is the proposition itself and the task of defining a *life-text*.

I will now leave Barthes's theory and try to define my own conception of the immanentist poiesis of a *life-text*. And for that I will take Barthes's life and texts as an exemple: because it is, absolutely, a text.

I.II From 'life-writing' (the text written by his life) to the writing of the text (my biography)

I will take Barthes's proposition quite literally, and push it to its logical extreme. This approach is revolutionary, it reverses the Aristotelian poiesis, and it is also consistent with all of the Structuralists thought regarding the signifier: what interests them, as Barthes states in *Empire Of Signs*, "is the possibility of a difference, of a revolution in the propriety of symbolic systems."¹⁵ Yet the confrontation with the Other, in the form of a text (but not reduced to his *œuvre!*), is for the biographer the essential experience of a difference in symbolic systems, which here represents perhaps one of the few critical methods of approaching Barthes's thought, one possible way of avoiding mere paraphrase.

As Benveniste and Saussure have shown, we can never grasp the framework of thought itself, only the categories of language that govern the format of "reality" (what we refer to as reality): just as for thought, the person and the life that we seek to grasp are a language, which is not to be decrypted, but is rather the very condition of thinking that life. As Barthes says, life is a text in motion, "a text to be *produced*, not *deciphered*." And Sollers writes, in *Logiques* in 1968, "one can dream of something that would be... a genuine *graphy* or *writing*, conforming to Baudelaire's wish: 'Biography and fiction will serve to explain and to *verify*, so to speak, the mysterious adventures of the mind;' bio-graphy, *writing* that is *alive* and multiple, following a logic of fiction."¹⁶ Movement and fiction, are both the characteristics of poetics and life.

¹⁴ Barthes, *The Preparation of the Novel*, 207.

¹⁵ Roland Barthes, *Empire of Signs*. Translated by Richard Howard (New York: Hill and Wang, 1989), 3-4.

¹⁶ Philippe Sollers, *Logiques* (Paris: Seuil, 1968), 31.

Just as Barthes created the “fictive nation” of Japan in writing *Empire of Signs*, so I must pursue a fiction in order to create a formal system, a *life-text*.

Writing is not primarily narrating, or citing, or providing commentary, it is not a matter of being inscribed in a genre, but rather it is an active process of inscribing, of establishing a certain path. In Derrida’s terms, one might speak of the “*itinerant work of the trace*, producing and not following a route, the trace that traces, the trace that forges its own path.”¹⁷ We are concerned here with movement and with the body, it is a question of “writing the bodily life of thought,” as Derrida says. The writer engages his life in his writing, and the “biography of the mind,” contemporary with the writing itself, is itself in constant motion. We must also take account of the mind’s “residue of reading” and the imprint of this residue on the life in general, as Marielle Macé discussed in a recent essay.¹⁸

How can we reconcile this dynamic quality and the idea that life is a text? How can we contemplate this text in motion? I shall not proceed, as Barthes does in *Sade, Fourier, Loyola*, by reducing the movement of writing to a reading of the *œuvre* and by limiting the “life” to the biographeme. I have to define what a text is, at first. I choose a structuralist definition, the one of Levi-Strauss and Jakobson: a text is characterised by a closure, brought about by an eventual movement of return, and an invariant.

All the parts of the text conform to the same, repeated structure or invariant, which forms a “closure” while remaining open (the very nature of a text), which forms textual unities in the midst of the book of the life, and the same structure is operational over the whole ensemble: by an essentially rhizomal mode of functioning, textual unities are generated by the text itself. I have described this invariant, with regard to Barthes’s life, as a “generative void.” It is based on the principle that both events and writing are structured in such a way as to fill an initial void. The photographic metaphor – of a negative followed by the process of development – therefore functions as the major metaphor of the *life*, the major metaphor of the *life-text*. At least, this is true of the first part of this text, which comes to a close in 1977 with the death of the mother and the beginning of a *Vita Nova*, inaugurating a second structure characterised by the failure of any compensation and by the attainment of another way of writing, another way of reflecting on the sign, which Éric Marty has baptised (following Blanchot) as “the right to death.”

17 Jacques Derrida, *Writing and Difference*. Translated by Alan Bass (London: Routledge, 1978), 269. Translation modified.

18 Marielle Macé, *Façons de lire, manières d’écrire* (Paris: Gallimard, 2011).

The neutral, as he summarises in an unpublished fragment for *Roland Barthes by Roland Barthes*, is the refusal to choose between the two poles, it is a synonym for dualism, but it is also the path of plurality, and therefore it provides the perfect harmony between the dualism and the eclecticism that constitute Barthes as a text, Barthes's poetics.

II Reading the life-text

II.1 The generative void

This is the major invariant of Barthes's life structured as a text. In the beginning, there is a void: on 12 November 1915, at nine in the morning, at 107 rue de la Bucaille in Cherbourg, Roland Gérard Barthes was born: "I was born, as I am told, 12 November at nine in the morning, at Cherbourg, a simple garrison stopping point for my father, an officer in the merchant navy mobilised as a midshipman."¹⁹

This birth is a blind spot ("as I am told"), a void. The fact is, in itself, banal: the act of being born rarely has any significance, except in the realm of myth. But, in this case, the in-significance is significant. Barthes's birth is a void of meaning *par excellence*: both symbolically and even geographically. For example, if the birth had occurred several weeks later it would have fitted neatly into the family mythology: if Barthes had been born in 1916, he would have taken his place in the series that was recounted by his grandfather: "My grandfather was born in 1776 under Louis XVI, my father was born in 1816, and I was born in 1876."²⁰ The place, too, held no particular significance; the two branches of Barthes's ancestry are diametrically opposed, in the North-East on the maternal side, and in the South-West on the paternal side. Cherbourg and the North are fundamentally excluded from any symbolic attachment: 'city which I do not know, since I, quite literally, never set foot there, being only two months old when I left it.'²¹ However, this same un-symbolic North was to be the location of a crucial and essential event: the death of the father. Yet once again, this would take the form of a void, albeit a void transformed into a determining and foundational element.

The lack becomes a "generative absence," and throughout Barthes's life it serves systematically as the foundation for all construction: the absence of social status as a ward of the state, the total absence of money until 1953, the absence of the opportunity to

¹⁹ Barthes, *Lexique de l'auteur*, 250.

²⁰ Louis-Gustave Binger, *Une vie d'explorateur: souvenirs extraits des Carnets de route*. Edited by Jacques Binger, René Bouvier, and Pierre Deloncle (Paris: Fernand Sorlot, 1938), 35.

²¹ Barthes, interview with Jean Thibaudeau, 1023.

study due to the onset of tuberculosis, the absence of an official post, the absence of the necessary qualifications, all of these lead him to the writing of a masterful *œuvre*, constantly renewed and innovative, to unparalleled fame, and to the Collège de France in 1977.

In Barthes's long engagement in structuralism, I find a particular dualism associated with the generative void, or rather with its failure, to which I shall return: in the opposition between science and literature, Barthes chooses the neutral. The significance of the 'choice' of structuralism, and of its practice, is that writing itself becomes the empty centre. Barthes discovers, in the infinite search of writing, the same principle of a generative void that structures his life – but it is a search which never reaches its goal because it is, precisely, caught between two poles, it is an empty centre, a black hole.

At two points, the failure to compensate for a void or absence leads to serious ruptures in Barthes's life, both of which relate to writing. The first case concerns May 1968 when, suddenly deprived of his identity as an outsider, he turns towards a different form of writing, centred on the first person, on writing "I." In this life text, May '68 therefore represents a turning point. By dismissing structuralism as a whole, but especially the avant-garde espoused by Barthes himself, May '68 deprives Barthes of his own structure. In fact, May '68 deprives him of his very state of exclusion. For the first time, the complete filling of the generative void creates a new void, the process of compensation is defeated by its own success. The paradoxical situation of structuralism in the movement of May '68 plays out, in Barthes's case, in the life of an individual. This paradox, which undermines the imaginary construction of Barthes's relation to work and to creation, can be stated in literary terms: May '68 does not recognise his signature. In poetic terms, regarding the life-text, May '68 is effectively a plagiarism of Barthes, which is confirmed by the false attribution of the famous phrase "structures do not take to the streets," which Barthes could very well have spoken but, as it happens, did not, and which turns against him ("...nor does Barthes"). In this war, vicious in its own way, where the power of speech was dominant – speech and rhetorics rather than writing and poetics, "the terrorism of speech," which is also the opposite of the "absence of speech" in Japan,²² that Barthes loved – speech takes on the very form of plagiarism, the pastiche of his own writing. The phrase "nor does Barthes," bitterly signs the rejection of one who is defined by

22 Barthes theorised the opposition between speech and writing. Personal testimonies support this idea: "In fact, Roland did not like May '68 at all, and he disliked it precisely because it was a move to seize the power of speech [...]. Because it was speech and not writing that came to the fore, for example in the lecture theatres of the Sorbonne, and that seemed to him an impoverished form of language, inferior to the text, and in this sense a failure." (France Culture, 14 May 1986).

exclusion, it excludes the rejected. The author's first response is simple: to recentre his writing on the self, the "I." But in reality, this revelation – and it is a revelation since this is the moment when finds his own writing – is more complex. Barthes's search for the secret of writing over the previous ten years of structuralist work was not in vain. He finds the response to the "biographical mystery" in a line of continuity from structuralism, a labour to discover the relation between the sign and life, and to break free of psychological reflexes. But he also makes a change in direction. He adopts a critical distance which allows him to hold up an ironic mirror to the modernity that excludes him – whether it is structuralism or the Sartrean discourse of a return to humanism, whose followers unanimously criticise Barthes at this time. His reorientation towards the self will lead him to writing *S/Z* and *Empire of Signs*, works in which continuity from structuralism is manifest, but a version of structuralism caught in a deforming, ironic mirror and which rehabilitates, in a way, poesis.

Finally, with regard to the turning point of May '68, I have maintained, discreetly, a somewhat controversial idea: paradoxically, the very thing that Barthes sought in structuralism was the writing of life, biographical writing. After all, he was not the only one, as others, in the structuralist fold, showed the same tendency over the course of the 1970s, to reconcile the sign and life. Nonetheless, in 1968 he produced the well-known article "The Death of the Author," the crowning work of the ideology of the structuralist period, which was read for a long time afterwards as a rejection of "biography."

In his article, he establishes the role of writing as destruction of all origin: not a voice but the opening of voices, converging in the reader. The loss of identity of the writing subject is the very condition of the birth of writing: the death of the author for the birth of the text. Around the same time Barthes discovers his own writing, born through the death of the author, with the "[loss] of the writing body."²³ At the same time, to discuss this loss, he uses the very terms that constitute his own "biography": the neutral and the photographic metaphor of black-and-white:

writing is the destruction of every voice, every origin. Writing is that neutral, that composite, that obliquity into which our subject flees, the black-and-white where all identity is lost, beginning with the very identity of the body that writes.²⁴

²³ Barthes, 'The Death of the Author' in *The Rustle of Language*, Translated by Richard Howard. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989, 49–55 (p. 49).

²⁴ Barthes, 'The Death of the Author,' 49.

Barthes finds writing in conjunction with the neutral, the dualism that is *the abolition of the voice*, “death of the author”: the death of the author is not merely a polemical and theoretical notion concerning the critical manner of *reading* a text, it is above all a lesson in how to write: “once a fact is *recounted* [...] exclusive of any function except that exercise of the symbol itself – this gap appears, the voice loses its origin, the author enters into his own death, writing begins.”²⁵ This death of the author therefore signs a birth certificate, that of writing in general, and Barthes’s in particular.

There is a second turning point in the functioning of the generative void, but this time more fundamental, and leading to a complete reversal in Barthes’s life. This second failure of the generative void takes place with the death of the mother.

II.II The photographic metaphor

The structure of Barthes’s life-text for instance, but it is true of all texts, shifts through a transformation of inversion, which can be viewed using a metaphor from photography (we can use photography as both an analogy and a complement for writing): As Barthes writes:

Photography [...] allows me to accede to an infra-knowledge; it supplies me with a collection of partial objects and can flatter a certain fetishism of mine: for this “me” which likes knowledge, which nourishes a kind of amorous preference for it. In the same way, I like certain biographical features which, in a writer’s life, delight me as much as certain photographs; I have called these features “biographemes;” Photography has the same relation to History that the biographeme has to biography.²⁶

This break in the structure acts like the photographic process of development: we pass from a negative to a positive, a sort of process of clarification (enlightening).

The photographic metaphor has interesting implications when applied to poetics, because it relates to the *development* of something that is *entirely present from the beginning*, and even once it is developed, or written, it does not allow for a ‘development’ of the imagination, it remains closed. It is a sort of dualism, an oxymoron of mobility and immobility:

²⁵ Barthes, ‘The Death of the Author,’ 49.

²⁶ Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*. Translated by Richard Howard (London: Vintage, 1993), 30.

For the notation of a haiku too, is undevelopable: everything is given, without provoking the desire for or even the possibility of a rhetorical expansion. In both cases we might (we must) speak of an *intense immobility*: linked to a detail (a detonator), an explosion makes a little star on the pane of the text or of the photograph: neither the Haiku nor the Photograph makes us “dream.”²⁷

27 Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, 49.

28 Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, 88.

29 Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, 96.

It is precisely the text on photography that brings closure to the *œuvre*, shifting the object of writing from life to death, and the question of posterity from the self to the mother. There is in biography an element of resurrection which justifies the photographic metaphor: the passage from negative to positive is simultaneously a passage from death to the life of the text (“biography” = “life-writing”):

The realists, of whom I am one and of whom I was already one when I asserted that the Photograph was an image without code – even if, obviously, certain codes do inflect our reading of it – the realists do not take the photograph for a “copy” of reality (mimesis), but for an emanation of *past reality*: a *magic*, not an art.²⁸

That is the immanent poesis. And again: “the chemical nature of photography involves a *resurrectional* dimension,” since there is a resurrection in the process of development. At the same time, photography is also a development of death in life: death is the essence of photography, and so “the photograph tells me death in the future.”²⁹

III. The textual investigation

Or: how can we identify life in a text underneath the *oeuvre*, a cryptogrammatic text, in a lacanian reading, which is the bio-graphy, the *bios-poien*?

This perspective functions on the principle of *The Figure in the Carpet* by Henry James, and of the anamorphic skull in the painting *The Ambassadors* by Hans Holbein the Younger: these are the models for a biography. The anamorphic skull in this painting, emblematic of every literary text, here represents the void of the death of the father, but it is not a static figure, it functions

as a gap in the structure, it alters the adjacent figures through a structure of complementarity: money, studies, etc. One could also say that my reading of Barthes's life-text is Saussurian and anagrammatic. It could be considered as a generalisation of the principle that Barthes suggests implicitly by writing a text such as *S/Z*, with its cryptogrammatic character, as defined in a related text (or "mythographic," as Éric Marty writes).³⁰ Besides, as Marty mentions, Barthes was fascinated by anagrams, or rather by the very existence of the idea of anagrams as an object of fascination for Saussure: "We know how much this search obsessed Saussure, who seems to have spent his life between the anguish of the lost signified and the terrifying return of the pure signifier."³¹ And again, in *Roland Barthes by Roland Barthes*, "He [Barthes] liked the scientists in whom he could discern a disturbance, a vacillation, a mania, a delirium, an inflection; he had learned a great deal from Saussure's *Cours*, but Saussure had come to mean infinitely more to him since he discovered the man's desperate pursuit of the Anagrams."³²

As stated earlier, my approach abolishes the heterogeneity between text – in the sense of written language – and the factual, between past and present. As for the construction of a narrative, a immanent poesis, chronology is respected only with regard to the facts, and not for the texts: the underlying notion is that the cryptogrammatic writing which creates a secondary narrative, of a psychological and structural nature, is present in every part of the life, both written and lived, and just as present in the paratexts and drafts as in the main body of the *œuvre*. Lacan, writing on Jean Delay's biography of Gide, proposes that the totality of elements making up a writer's life, and particularly the fragmentary traces known as 'intimate writings' (which in the present case have remained out of reach, to my great regret), form a parallel body constituted in relation to the *œuvre*: "The [intimate papers] are, from the outset and still more when they are tied together in bundles with string, planned with an eye to the body they must constitute, if not in the work itself, at least in relation to it."³³

But my perspective is Lacanian above all in its premise that the language of the texts conceals, as Barthes suggests, this secondary narrative which explains, in cryptogrammatic form, the functioning of the structure of the life-text: the generative void, compensation for the mother, etc. A first example of this, discussed below, is my reading of *S/Z*, placed in relation to the circumstances of Barthes's life in 1927.

- 30 Éric Marty, 'Roland Barthes et le discours clinique: lecture de *S/Z*, *Essaim* 2 (2005), 100.
- 31 Roland Barthes, 'Saussure, le signe, la démocratie,' *OC* 4: 329–333 (p. 333).
- 32 Bathes, *Roland Barthes by Roland Barthes*, 160.
- 33 Jacques Lacan, 'The Youth of Gide, or the Letter and Desire', in *Écrits*, trans. by Bruce Fink (New York: Norton, 2006), pp. 623–644 (p. 626).

My search begins in Chapter 27 of *S/Z*, on account of the birth of Michel Salzedo ß: this connection is made possible by the polyvalence of relations, the levelling of all relations in the life-text (once I have assumed a Freudian or Lacanian perspective). The reading of this chapter exposes the “figure in the carpet” (of the text), the figure of the unwanted child.

The symmetry established between “S” and “Z,” whether a dual figure or an irreconcilable antithesis, is that of the feminine and the masculine, and the central “slash” patently represents castration. Sarrasine too is a name with feminine connotations, it asserts the feminine essence of the painter who insists all the while on his virility, faced with Zambinella’s castrated state, and his/her laughter.:

SarraSine: customary French onomastics would lead us to expect *SarraZine*: on its way to the subject’s patronymic, the Z has encountered some pitfall. Z is the letter of mutilation: phonetically, Z stings like a chastising lash, an avenging insect; graphically, cast slantwise by the hand across the blank regularity of the page, amid the curves of the alphabet, like an oblique and illicit blade, it cuts, slashes, or, as we say in French, *zebras*; from a Balzacian viewpoint, this Z (which appears in Balzac’s name) is the letter of deviation [...]; finally, here, Z is the first letter of *La Zambinella*, the initial of castration, so that by this orthographical error committed in the middle of his name, in the centre of his body, Sarrasine receives the Zambinellan Z in its true sense – the wound of deficiency.³⁴

But this name also represents the other couple, the adulterous couple of Henriette (Barthes’s mother) and André Salzedo. Evoked in the background in connection with this exchange of letters, it represents, rather an opposition: the image of the impossible couple. The name “Salzedo” also contains both “S” and “Z.” Another passage, governed by the same antithesis between letters, addresses this opposition:

XXVII. ANTITHESIS II: THE MARRIAGE

The antithesis is a wall without a doorway. Leaping this wall is a transgression. Subject to the antithesis of inside and outside,

³⁴ Roland Barthes, *S/Z*. Translated by Richard Miller (London: Blackwell, 2002), 106–07.

heat and cold, life and death, the old man and the young woman are in fact separated by the most inflexible of barriers: that of meaning. [...] The marriage of the woman and the castrato is doubly catastrophic [...]: symbolically, it affirms the non-viability of the dual body, the chimeric body, doomed to the dispersion of its parts: when a supplementary body is produced, added to the distribution of opposites already effected, this supplement [...] is damned: the *excess* explodes: gathering becomes scattering[.]³⁵

³⁵ Barthes, *S/Z*, 65–66. Translation modified.

³⁶ Barthes, *Roland Barthes by Roland Barthes*, 41.

The dualism of heat and cold to express the impossible amorous union is reflected in the choice of the poem by Heine (*the poet associated with Schumann*) at the end of the album of *Roland Barthes by Roland Barthes*.³⁶ Here the number of the chapter, 27, corresponds to the year of Michel Salzedo's birth. The title, "Antithesis II: The Marriage," which should be read in relation to "Antithesis I: The Supplement," the added element, evokes both the impossible union of the two lovers (in the antithesis of heat and cold) and the birth of their child, which is addressed again in the production of a "supplementary body [...], added to the distribution of opposites already effected," and which is "damned." This binary relation, which is also the intrusion of another binary relation in between Barthes and his mother, is intermediate, and in this respect it is good, neutral – the collection of Heine's poems from which the antithesis of heat and cold is drawn is entitled *Intermezzo*. This extract from *S/Z* is an anagram of the life-text and of the event of the birth of the brother. Barthes presents his text as a journey with the goal of resolving the different enigmas offered by *Sarrasine*. *S/Z* is essentially the text of the resolution of enigmas, whether they are Balzac's or those of Barthes's own life. We can see here the structure of the paragram, as Barthes describes it in reference to the "blows" of Schumann's music: "a second text is heard, but at the limit – like Saussure listening for his anagrammatic verses – *I alone hear them*." The text traces the impossibility of reconciling an opposition, the explosion of the oppositional couple, or the passage from dualism to eclecticism ("explodes," "gathering becomes scattering"), which takes on a great significance in relation to the biographical imaginary. Surely it is the binary relation of the young Roland to this mother that explodes? The movement of the life also traces a "Z," since the oscillation between two sides in a dualism always yields to a certain sideways shift, resulting in the tracing of a zig-zag.

EXAMPLE 2: Reading of the text on “The Nautilus and the Drunken Boat”

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The insertion of this reading in the biographical narrative creates an even greater temporal distortion than in the previous example, since this text from the 1950s reveals or makes apparent one of the meanings of an element from the life’s “prehistory,” which is also connected to Barthes’s childhood: the figure of his grandfather Binger. I have sought out the “forms” or “figures” which reveal the presence of the life-text in Verne, on the grounds that Barthes’s grandfather Binger was a manifestly Vernian figure: first an explorer then governor of Ivory Coast, adventurer, author of an adventure novel, *Le Serment de l’explorateur*, which served as a hypertext for Jules Verne’s last novel, completed by his son Michel. Barthes begins his text on the Nautilus with a paradox: for Verne, the voyage is a form of closure: “the manchild re-invents the world, fills it, closes it, shuts himself up in it.”³⁷ The closure of open space, or open/closed space, is a dual figure and an obsessively recurrent motif in Barthes’s work, originating in the original equivalence of the generative void and the maternal womb, which I shall discuss in relation to this particular text. These open/closed spaces proliferate in *Roland Barthes by Roland Barthes* – the episode of being left in the hole in Marrac, the three gardens,³⁸ but also in other texts, Valéry’s room as the creator’s cave looking out onto the endless sea, etc. But this is the text in which this important oxymoron from Barthes’s childhood finds its perfect expression: the text progresses clearly from enclosure in the submarine to enclosure in the mother. Verne’s “ceaseless action of secluding oneself,” which is presented here as an action constitutive of writing, is polymorphous and subject to metamorphoses – my mind turned first of all to the figure of the grandfather, who had in reality passed from his African adventure to a spatial enclosure in his retirement in L’Isle-Adam and his temporal enclosure in boredom and the long wait for mealtimes. Verne evokes the elements of the archaic in Barthes’s imaginary, as he is connected to the grandfather, who is himself mythically associated with enclosure in boredom.

But, like anything archaic, the image of the womb soon makes its presence felt, and the “childlike” passion for enclosure becomes the “bliss” of the foetus – we need merely cite the terms used, and their connotations: “the most desirable of all caves,” “the bliss of their closure,” the “paroxysm [of bliss],” “the bosom.”³⁹ To read this

37 Roland Barthes, ‘The Nautilus and the Drunken Boat’ in *Mythologies*. Translated by Annette Lavers (London: Cape, 1972), 65–67 (p. 65).

38 Barthes, Roland *Barthes by Roland Barthes*, 121–22, 8.

39 Barthes, ‘The Nautilus and the Drunken Boat,’ 66–67.

as a sexual metaphor becomes child's play. Let us also cite "this unbroken inwardness" and "the outside vagueness of the waters" for the image of the womb with its amniotic fluid, the model of maternal perfection, which is a leitmotif of the whole *œuvre*. The phantasy is subsequently expanded to include a political dimension, which allows a double-reading: "a whole nautical morality makes [the occupier of the ship] at once the god, the master and the owner (*sole master on board*, etc.)."³⁹ This reference to the "captain" of the ship relates as much to the new-born Barthes as it does to "Captain Binger" or to the father, who died at sea, the last aboard his ship, and then displaced in his role.

In this idealisation of the womb as a cave, Barthes also "define[s], in a single act, the inside by means of its opposite" and gives a new meaning to the dualism.⁴¹ The text foreshadows the episode of the hole in Marrac, but here we see its idealised aspect. The enclosure is, as in the three gardens, or the hole, or Valéry's room, open on one side: this is the window of the *Nautilus* onto the exterior, the opening of the womb into life; what remains from the *topos* of children's literature and from the account of the first traumatic social fear is the arrival of the mother, seen from below, filling all of the opening onto the exterior, all the void of the sky over the hole.

Towards the end of the text, continually repeating the motif of a "cherished seclusion," "the habitat of man, for man immediately to organize there the enjoyment of a round, smooth universe," he goes on to consider the "means to exorcize the possessive nature of the man on a ship." This gesture consists of removing the man from the cave, which is also an act of childbirth. Psychoanalysis is invoked explicitly, as a matter of necessity: "The object that is the true opposite of Verne's *Nautilus* is Rimbaud's *Drunken Boat*, the boat which says 'I' and, freed from its concavity, can make man proceed from a psycho-analysis of the cave to a genuine poetics of exploration."⁴² The birth is that of the lyrical subject, who says "I," the figure of the writer. The connection between the maternal womb and writing as compensation for the absence of the father is symbolised, and Barthes accomplishes this in a general, broad reference to the figure of the grandfather, who is defined as a link joining the absence of one and the omnipresence of the other. The grandfather, a sailor and Vernian figure, is placed firmly between the father and the mother, for whom he is the origin (and conversely, from the child's point of view, she is his origin, for our grandparents come from our parents, and not

40 Barthes, 'The *Nautilus* and the Drunken Boat,' 67.

41 Barthes, 'The *Nautilus* and the Drunken Boat,' 67.

42 Barthes, 'The *Nautilus* and the Drunken Boat,' 67.

the reverse). To leave childhood behind is to say “I,” to leave the pleasure of organising our enclosed spaces and open oneself to the world, to leave the womb: this is a repetition of the oedipal drama, but concluding in a euphoric movement towards writing. Barthes has only one reading of Verne, whatever the work in question, for this same relation is always present in the background.

The second text on Verne, related to *The Mysterious Island* and which takes up again the motif of the womb, shifts from the cave to the Garden of Eden. It should be understood that it is always necessary to begin again this construction of the womb, and whether it is manifested in the Nautilus or, in this case, the island, compensating for the lack is an endless process. The assimilation of the island to the mother is clear: perfection, fertility, “it always supplies the necessary substance *at the appointed site*,” “gratifying Nature.”⁴³ The phrase “*at the appointed site*” and the “omnipotent discourse” (84) recall once again the anecdote of falling in the hole in Marrat. The passage from Adam (the origin) to the maternal “Eden” (“Adam/Eden, a curious phonetic homology,” writes Barthes) implicitly presents the completeness of the couple father/mother, or “fatherland” and “motherland” – which Barthes develops further in his final text, on Stendhal. Yet we can also read here the assimilation of the two parents in a single figure: the mother has two roles, that of Adam before becoming Eden and, as ever, there remains the same reading of compensation for the void by recuperation. We might well ask whether the absence of the discourse of the grandfathers, and particularly that of Binger, was not simply connected to this all-powerful discourse; I then came to realise that “the island of Adam,” recuperated as an Eden, is l’Isle-Adam, the site of the grandfather’s *retirement* (a village in the Parisian suburbs), whose importance in Barthes’s early life is unequivocally confirmed. Binger is undoubtedly present as a palimpsest in the texts on Verne, but he also functions as a palimpsest in that he is a figure who has been expunged from Barthes’s life: expunged by the mother who has taken his place, just as she took the place of the father, he is a palimpsest both as an erased masculine entity and as a figure of closure.

⁴³ Roland Barthes, ‘Where to Begin?’ in *New Critical Essays*. Translated by Richard Howard (New York: Hill and Wang, 1980), 83-4.

The theory of life as a text, and its and application in writing, reverses the proposition of the *Poetics*. It affirms the existence of a Western tradition of immanentist Narrative.

I have also defined the properties of the life-text that is sketched out, but always in motion, by Barthes's life. It is not a text to be interpreted or read, but to be defined in its textual essence by its two constitutive elements: the invariant of the structure of void, whose functioning is dispersed throughout all parts of the text, and the final reversal, the *dénouement* of 1977, which is clearly manifested in the photographic metaphor. I next set out the method I followed in exploring the text: treating the textual and the factual as being essentially homogeneous elements of the life-text, and the Freudian (but undogmatic) reading of "cryptogrammatic texts" such as *S/Z*. I therefore sought to provide my own reading, one *possible* reading, not of the life of Barthes – which I have merely "presented" as a text – but of what a "life-*œuvre*" can be, a real poesis, when taken in a purely textual sense. And also to show what it means, or what it can mean, to take seriously the idea that the real and the textual consist of one and the same matter, that of language.

The Happy Melancholic

Alexi Kukuljevic

...there was something in this ruthless melancholy that incapacitated him, drugged him, defeated him, that tightened his throat, so that frankly, those first two or three hours of the hard-core gig at the Central club in Almásy Square simply offered him no refuge at all.¹

The books we need, to paraphrase Kafka,² remain those that bring us to a standstill, impregnating us with a mute obstacle whose immobility cannot be grasped nor evaded and whose apprehension comes at the cost of breaking the subject in two. Such broken subjects enter “the melancholy realm of eternal drizzle,” a parallel world divested of hope, neither above nor below, but at the absent center of the world in which we live. The light that is shed from this center is black; the gaze illuminated by this black sun is melancholic.

Gérard de Nerval – to whom we owe the image of a black sun – remarks almost humorously, “[Melancholic hypochondria] is a terrible affliction – it makes one see things as they are.”³ In the melancholic’s suffering, the cruelty of the real, to adopt Rosset’s formula, asserts itself irremediably. The real, without ornament, stripped of sense, indigestible (*crudus*).⁴ That which is laid bare in melancholia, this mute and oppressive obstacle, the *thing*, marks the separation of *objects* from their meaning. The melancholic inhabits an in-between state, where meaning as such is withdrawn. Signification becomes merely ornamental and language loses its grip on the real. Finding nothing in the world to activate its energies, the melancholic suffers from world-weariness, *taedium vitae*, or *ennui* – all of which Baudelaire, the prince of melancholics, will transform into Spleen.

The pathetic heroism of the melancholic lies in this subject’s attempt to assume the void, and melancholia is the pathos of the subject’s disjunction: the peculiar feeling of the *becoming object* of the subject. Absorbed by the void, the melancholic adopts the posture of the brooder whose contemplative gaze falls on *things* whose sheer indifference solicits no concern.⁵ Compelled by the negativity of its own affect, the melancholic enters a circuit that passes from absence to absence: from a world deprived of substance to a subject lacking integrity to the null void that would seem to be their neutral and impartial sovereign.

To sketch the theoretical portrait of the melancholic requires tracing the structural space of the void’s migration: from the object to the subject to the void in culture that marks their

1 László Krasznahorkai, *War & War*. Translated by George Szirtes (New York: New Directions, 2006).

2 “The books we need are of the kind that act upon us like a misfortune, that make us suffer like the death of someone we love more than ourselves, that make us feel as if we were on the verge of suicide or lost in a forest remote from all human adaptation. A book should serve as the axe for the frozen sea within us.” Franz Kafka, *Letters to Friends, Family, and Editors*. Translated by Clara Winston (New York: Schocken Books, 1977), 16.

3 Quoted in Clément Rosset, *Joyful Cruelty: Toward a Philosophy of the Real*. Edited and Translated by David F. Bell (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 76.

4 “*Cruor*, from which *crudelis* (cruel) as well *crudus* (not digested, indigestible) are derived, designates torn and bloody flesh, that is, the thing itself stripped of all its ornaments and ordinary external accoutrements, in this case skin, and thus reduced to its unique reality, as bloody as it is indigestible. Thus

vertiginous superimposition. One might expect the portrait to be gloomy. Morbidity has been one of the melancholic's most persistent features. Yet, the image I would like to here invoke is that of a happy melancholic. A strange breed modeled more on the laughing than the weeping philosopher. The physiognomy of the melancholic may indeed be redolent with doom, but it shoulders this burden with an elegant nonchalance, finding a fitting phantasm for the dereliction of things.

* * *

Melancholia is the affective registration of the dereliction of things. By the dereliction of things, I mean the generalized rupture between objects and their significations that is inscribed into the heart of things with the commodity form. Benjamin writes, "The devaluation of the world of things in allegory is surpassed within the world of things itself by the commodity."⁶ If Baroque culture situated the void in the world – devaluing the world through its separation of things from their significations – modernity is the devaluation of spirit, of subjectivity, configuring a world which offers its subjects "no refuge at all." The subject is offered no refuge since transcendence is inscribed into the world of things itself as the very operation that devalues them. Heaven becomes hell; one's salvation becomes bound to this world of things, whose transcendent promise is belied as perpetual damnation. The Baroque allegory of the world's mortal insignificance becomes crushingly literal since, through the social necessity of their exchange, things themselves seem to perform their own evacuation and the void that is left is offered to the subject as the sole means of its salvation. As commodities, this void is effectively inscribed into things themselves, since they internalize through the function of exchange a relation to that which they are not, and their value is the concealed expression of this negation. Incarnating the abstraction of their own value, commodities are constitutively outside of themselves. The thing can only proffer its own abstraction, its separation from itself, its own void, as the promise of a value that is structurally unattainable for a subject that is nonetheless socially committed to its reproduction. In this respect, melancholia registers affectively the thing's separation from itself, its abstraction, marking the subject with the void of its significance.

reality is cruel – and indigestible – as soon as one removes from it everything which is not reality in order to consider it in itself" (Rosset, *Joyful Cruelty*, 76).

- 5 See Walter Benjamin's suggestive reading of Dürer's *Melencolia I* offered in *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*. Translated by John Osborne (London: Verso, 1998), which draws upon and radicalizes the scholarly work of Saxl and Panofsky.
- 6 Walter Benjamin, "Central Park" in *The Writer of Modern Life: Essays on Charles Baudelaire*. Edited by Michael W. Jennings. Translated by Howard Eiland, Edmund Jephcott, Rodney Livingston, and Harry Zohn (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2006), 138.

Melancholia is the disposition due to exposure to the void: the event of this crushing abstraction. The danger of this disposition consists in the melancholic's peculiar response to this dereliction: to counter the void with the void, abstraction with abstraction.

Such a response seems to be profoundly empty, such that the melancholic would appear to succumb to that most Romantic of affects, despair, finding itself overwhelmed by its inability to make sense, which is to say, to differentiate, to hold apart, to parse, in short, the ability to maintain the difference between the sign and its signification. Suicide is the persistent danger that afflicts this disposition of the mind: the desire, heroically exemplified by Hölderlin's Empedocles, to merge with the abyss, to plunge into the volcano, to disappear without a trace.⁷ This is what links melancholia to depression. And for less heroic subjects, there is perhaps a fate worse than death, which Kristeva describes as a feeling of being dead without necessarily wanting to die. Suicide seems unnecessary, beside the point, since one feels already dead. This state of absolute apathy, of near total dissociation from things, the world, the self, places the melancholic into a null, empty, hollow space, which Kristeva describes, following the speech of her patient, Helen, as "an absolute, mineral, astral numbness, which was nevertheless accompanied by the impression, also an almost physical one, that this 'being dead,' physical and sensory as it might be, was also a thought nebula, an amorphous imagination, a muddled representation of some implacable helplessness. The reality and fiction of death's being. Cadaverization and artifice."⁸ Overwhelmed with the loss of its subjectivity, its inability to differentiate itself from the void whose function places the subject into meaningful relation with things, the depressed melancholic succumbs. It succumbs to its own failure, to its own inability, to allude to Deleuze, to make a difference that makes a difference. One void comes crashing into the next.

The melancholic suffers what Fitzgerald describes as a "blow from within." This is not necessarily a dramatic blow, "the big sudden blows that come, or seem to come, from outside – the ones you remember and blame things on and, in moments of weakness, tell your friends about." He continues, "There is another sort of blow that comes from within – that you don't feel till it's too late to do anything about it, until you realize with finality that in some regard you will never be as good a man again."⁹ The melancholic is

7 This fantasy is belied by the volcano spitting forth Empedocles' bronzed sandal.

8 Julia Kristeva, *Black Sun: Depression and Melancholia*. Translated by Leon S. Roudiez (New York, Columbia University Press, 1989), 72-73.

9 F. Scott Fitzgerald, "The Crack-Up" in *On Booze* (New York: New Directions, 1945), 11.

the one who cracks, or perhaps the appropriate metaphor is that of a puncture, a slow wheezing leak that saps the subject of its vitality: *every act of life from the morning tooth-brush to the friend at dinner becomes an effort.*¹⁰

In this case, worse than suicide is the hardening that takes place, the cynicism that Fitzgerald describes with a self-punishing lucidity. The cultivation of a voice calculated to “show no ring of conviction except the conviction of the person” one is talking to... “And a smile –

ah, I would get me a smile. I’m still working on that smile. It is to combine the best qualities of a hotel manager, an experienced old social weasel, a head-master on visitor’s day, a colored elevator man, a pansy pulling a profile, a producer getting stuff at half its market value, a trained nurse coming on a new job, a body-vender in her first rotogravure, a hopeful extra swept near the camera, a ballet dancer with an infected toe, and of course the great beam of loving kindness common to all those from Washington to Beverly Hills who must exist by virtue of the contorted pan.¹¹

Cynicism in the end is nothing more than a will to correctness. The concluding line of *The Crack-Up*, which devastates: “I will try to be a correct animal though, and if you throw me a bone with enough meat on it I may even lick your hand.”¹²

If these responses – suicide, dissociation, and cynicism – each mark a kind of terminal misery, what they share is the melancholic’s incapacity to differentiate void from void, *a becoming melancholic about melancholy*. The problem thus becomes: how to avoid not identifying with the object of one’s horror, the loss that threatens to engulf one’s whole being? How to be evacuated without feeling utterly vacuous? How to prevent the melancholic’s “self-immolation” from becoming “sodden-dark”? How to be open to the dereliction of things, to the demolition of their substance wrought by Capital, without being destroyed by it: a suicide or an empty shell of a person?

The formulation, doubtless, shares much with Deleuze’s formulation: “how are we to stay at the surface without staying on the shore?”¹³ Just as Deleuze speaks of the possibility of becoming a little schizophrenic, a little alcoholic, etc., knowing full well the ridiculousness of such propositions, can we speak of becoming a little melancholic, just enough to evacuate the world of its formal

¹⁰ Fitzgerald, “The Crack-Up,” 15.

¹¹ Fitzgerald, “The Crack-Up,” 29.

¹² Fitzgerald, “The Crack-Up,” 32.

¹³ Gilles Deleuze, *The Logic of Sense*. Edited by Constantin V. Boundas. Translated by Mark Lester (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990), 158.

stability without becoming vacuous? If melancholia is the affective registration of the void's event, the problem concerns how to maintain a relation to it without being pathologically crippled by it. How to differentiate the void as event from *the place of the void* that swallows it. This distinction between the event and its place is nothing else than the effort of thought to differentiate itself from the feeling that engenders it. Thus, the act of this separation is nothing less than the attempt to objectify the void, to gain the requisite distance so that the thinker is not crushed under its weight.

* * *

The act of separation is the indispensable function of the imagination. It is the phantasm that serves to separate the event of the void from its place. The melancholic's relation to the phantasm is the subject of Agamben's recondite analysis in one of his earliest books, *Stanzas: On Word and Phantasm in Western Culture*. The problem that lies at the heart of this book – inventively taking up a legacy indebted as much to Martin Heidegger as to Walter Benjamin – concerns the manner in which the melancholic, through its imagination, internalizes a relation to the void, joyously occupying the null center of a parallel world, closer to the real because phantasmatic, illuminating the present through its radiant darkness. This image of radiant darkness, of a black sun, cuts to the heart of the “immobile dialectic” that structures the melancholic's relation to the void. The phantasm provides the subject with an image of its own deformation, making an object, so to speak, of its own dis-junction. The phantasm is the disjunctive synthesis of two voids.

Agamben recasts the problem as it is posed by Freud in “Mourning and Melancholia” in terms informed by the Medieval and Renaissance conception of black bile (*melaina chole*), the melancholic humor. Situating Freud within the intellectual landscape of the Renaissance enables Agamben to draw out a latent theory of the imagination, and thus of the phantasm, implied, but for the most part undeveloped, within Freud's psychoanalytic thought. Although at times obscure, this allows Agamben to extract a dialectical theory of the melancholic subject's imaginary relation to the real. The image (the phantasm) that defines melancholic desire (and hence its relation to itself and its world)

does not play a mediating role, but marks, rather, the site of a violent disjunction between desire (*eros*) and its “object.” This gap between desire and itself defines the place (*topos*) of the image as the null space *between* the real and the unreal. Agamben thus defines culture as the space of this disjunction: “The topology of the unreal that melancholy designs in its immobile dialectic is, at the same time, a topology of culture.”¹⁴

The phantasm, then, carves out a hollow space that makes possible an appropriation of absence itself (the void) in the form of an object. Following intuitions of Hölderlin and Rilke, whose epigraphs serve to frame his discussion of melancholia,¹⁵ Agamben conceives of loss as the completion or affirmation of that which is possessed, since one possesses something only insofar as one loses it (whether the loss be actual or potential). Loss expresses a joy in having lost something, since loss is the condition of possibility for its possession. In this respect, melancholia has nothing to do with a nostalgic fixation on the past. On the contrary, the melancholic’s fixation on negativity is the condition for having done with possession, a condition for finding a certain joy inseparable from pain in dispossession.

The crux of Agamben’s reading can be most clearly discerned in his reading of Freud’s essay, “On Mourning and Melancholia.” Following the work of Karl Abraham, Freud begins by marking a similarity between mourning and melancholia – the fact that like the aggrieved, the melancholic suffers from “a profoundly painful dejection, abrogation of interest in the outside world, loss of the capacity to love, inhibition of all activity.”¹⁶ However, whereas mourning always concerns the loss of a determinate object, whether real (a loved one or object) or ideal (a notion), melancholia is *at a loss*, so to speak, as to *what* it is that has been lost. Since *what* is lost is not given in melancholia, but remains unconscious, the loss, Freud argues, is a relation to an object that has been *introjected* and thus appears as a lack in the subject. As Freud puts it, the “loss of the object” becomes “transformed into a loss in the ego.”¹⁷ And it is this emptying out of the subject – “an impoverishment of [the melancholic’s] ego on a grand scale”¹⁸ – that accounts for the self-loathing of the melancholic: the key symptom that does not appear in grief. “In grief the world becomes poor and empty; in melancholia it is the ego itself.”¹⁹

This lack in the ego, Agamben stresses, is a relation to a loss that is original and not derivative, as it is the case in mourning. In melancholia, the loss that precedes the loss of an object and

14 Giorgio Agamben, *Stanzas: Word and Phantasm in Western Culture*. Translated by Ronald L. Martinez. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), 26.

15 The epigraphs run as follows. Rilke: “Now loss, cruel as it may be, cannot do anything against possession: it completes it, if you wish, it affirms it. It is not, at bottom, but a second acquisition – this time wholly internal – and equally intense.” Hölderlin: “Many attempted in vain to say the most joyful things joyfully; here, finally, they are expressed in mourning” (Agamben, *Stanzas*, 1).

16 Sigmund Freud, “Mourning and Melancholia” in *General Psychological Theory: Papers on Metapsychology*. Edited by Philip Rieff (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1991), 163.

17 Freud, “Mourning and Melancholia,” 168.

18 Freud, “Mourning and Melancholia,” 164.

19 Freud, “Mourning and Melancholia,” 164.

thus the withdrawal of the libido itself is “the original datum.” Unlike mourning, which responds to the event of a lost object, melancholia responds to the event of loss as such: an absence that cannot be made present. What has been lost is some-thing that precedes the very constitution of the subject (as a relation to objects) and whose absence is irreparable. As such, “melancholia offers the paradox of an intention to mourn that precedes and anticipates the loss of the object.”²⁰ In Agamben’s interpretation, melancholia is the ontological ground of mourning. There is some-thing that obtrudes in melancholia – a symptom – that cannot be derived from the subject’s relation to objects. It is not the object, but the subject’s *relation to the object* that is exposed in melancholia. That which makes itself felt in melancholia is, rather, a relation to that which is non-objective *in the subject*: the feeling of absence as such.

The subject relates to this space through a lack, a difference, that is felt and precedes the difference between the subject and the object – what Heidegger would no doubt call the ontological difference. Strangely, melancholia makes possible mourning in a situation where there is nothing to be mourned, since there is no object that has been lost. Drawing on his reading of *acedia*, Agamben thus concludes, “that the withdrawal of melancholic libido has no other purpose than to make viable an appropriation in a situation in which none is really possible. From this point of view, melancholy would be not so much be the regressive reaction to the loss of the love object as the imaginative capacity to make an unobtainable object appear as if it were lost.”²¹ The imagination is that which makes the negative manifest *as if it were* an object.

By drawing out the latent ontological background of Agamben’s interpretation, we can see that the imagination is the faculty that places the subject into a relation with that which is not. Something new can come into being only if it appears as something already lost. Melancholia is the creative genius of making *nothing* appear. Melancholia is the appropriation of negativity. The object that melancholia bestows with funereal trappings is the *nothing* as such: the void. The void has to appear as if it were lost in order to be found, and the image is the site of this paradoxical reversal. This structure belies the perversity of the imagination, which relates nothing to something in order making something out of nothing. The nothing names a loss that cannot be lost because it is possessed as loss. Vice-versa, it cannot be possessed because as a possession of loss, it is dispossessed

²⁰ Agamben, *Stanzas*, 20.

²¹ Agamben, *Stanzas*, 20.

of possession. This demented and maniacal reversal, this turning within the void, which can be thought only at the risk of reducing thought to a kind of non-sense, secures for the nothing an *absolute* place.

The fact that the void can appear only as *that which it is not* entails that it can only lay claim to a simulated existence. The nothing, the void, is defined as the existence of the unreal, the very place where *that which is not* can come into being. The peculiar labor of the imagination, then, consists in inscribing negativity into reality: seizing the void. That which is lost and, at the same, found, through the very appropriation of loss, is the phantasm: “The imaginary loss that so obsessively occupies the melancholic tendency has no real object, because its funeral strategy is directed to the impossible capture of the phantasm.”²² The phantasm is not an image of something, but precisely the imprint of an absence which can only have a simulated presence. Conversely, the presence of the phantasm merely attests to an absence. By means of the phantasm, the “real loses its reality so that what is unreal may become real.”²³ This gap, this disjunction within the phantasm itself, is that which brings the melancholic to a standstill at the same time as it makes novelty real. Melancholia is the sickness born of creativity whose emblem is Dürer’s Melancholic angel.

The phantasm, as it is here conceived, does not play a mediating role. It is not a synthesis of presence and absence, unless one is to speak of a disjunctive synthesis. The phantasm provides a minimal consistency to the void (absence) necessary for sustaining the subject’s attachment to the reality of objects. Yet, at the same time, the grip that this reality has on the subject, its power to convict, is loosened. The subject is neither wholly withdrawn from reality (schizophrenia), nor convinced by its normative appeal. The phantasm’s fiction serves to divide the subject without necessitating its destruction. The subject is disjunctively synthesized through its phantasmatic objectification. Put differently, the phantasm is the objectification of the split in the subject. The melancholic “*identification* of the ego with the abandoned object,”²⁴ to quote Freud, is in fact an attachment to the phantasm that presents a (subjective) loss in objective form. The phantasm is the objectification of an absence, the void’s phantasmagorical presence. The reflexive nature of melancholia consists in the subject’s becoming object – a will toward self-objectification. It is this morose attachment to its own absence that becomes the melancholic’s dearest, most prized possession:

²² Agamben, *Stanzas*, 25.

²³ Agamben, *Stanzas*, 25.

²⁴ Freud, “Mourning and Melancholia,” 168.

the paradoxical possession, through its objectification, of its own dispossession. The melancholic is an absentee subject, the phantasm, the placeholder of its void.

The phantasm is neither a delusion nor an illusion. It neither suppresses nor conceals reality. Rather, it exhibits reality's deformation. It perverts reality in the Freudian sense that it neither negates (*Verneinung*) nor affirms the given. It is rather a disavowal (*Verleugnung*) of reality. The melancholic becomes a fetishist. Agamben, like Kristeva, links the structure of melancholia to fetishism. For Freud, the fetish relates to the child's encounter with its own lack, namely the anxiety of castration, and its revelation of insufficiency. Confronted with the revelation of the void, the fetishist disavows it. The disavowal of the void entails attaching it to something, an object, that neither fills it in, takes its place, nor reproduces it. Paradoxically, the fetish presents an absence. The fetish becomes a sign of the void *and* of its absence. The fetish binds the void to an object by localizing their disjunction, immobilizing it. The fetish, like the melancholic phantasm, is a disjunctive synthesis. Agamben can thus maintain: "Similarly, in melancholia the object is neither appropriated nor lost, but both possessed and lost at the same time. And as the fetish is at once the sign of something and its absence, and owes to this contradiction its own phantomatic status, so the object of the melancholic project is at once real and unreal, incorporated and lost, affirmed and denied."²⁵ Both the fetish and the phantasm mark an objectification of a splitting that is internalized by the sign that refers the subject to its own incompleteness (its not wholeness).

Kristeva develops this aspect of the melancholic fetish at length. "Everywhere denial [*Verleugnung*] effects splittings and devalorizes representations and behaviours as well."²⁶ The melancholic maintains the sign's division and evacuates its meaning. This evacuation becomes an image of the subject's own splitting that distances the subject from meaning by distancing the sign from its signification.²⁷ This what Benjamin had already identified as the "[m]ajesty of the allegorical intention: to destroy the organic and the living – to eradicate semblance [*Schein*]"²⁸ In the fetish, the phantasm is mobilized against *Schein*, for what appears is the relation to that which is not, as if the act of appearing served to evacuate the appearance itself. The melancholic phantasm immobilizes this act, as if the subject encountered a kink in reality that brought it to a standstill by shocking it with an image of itself. Culture is the place where the melancholic

25 Agamben, *Stanzas*, 21.

26 Kristeva, *Black Sun*, 47.

27 Kristeva writes, "depressed [or melancholic] persons do not forget how to use signs. They keep them, but the signs seem absurd, delayed, ready to be extinguished, because of the splitting that affects them. For instead of bonding the affect caused by loss [as is the case in mourning], the depressed sign disowns that affect as well as the signifier, thus admitting that the depressed subject has remained prisoner of the nonlost object (the Thing)." (*Black Sun*, 47).

28 Benjamin, "Central Park," 147.

encounters its own absence. This epiphany of the void, the no-man's-land staked out by the phantasm's objective seizure of the subject's absence.

* * *

The phantasmatic seizure of the void's event as objectification of the subject's dissolution becomes with Baudelaire a condition of artistic practice.

Spleen is the phantasmatic foundation of his poetic enterprise. Spleen functions as an intoxicant. By allowing himself to imbibe liberally, he establishes a certain stability to his practice, as if drinking himself sober. For spleen is a phantasm that brings focus to a sensibility that is otherwise woefully manic, lending to his rage the lucidity requisite "to break into the world, to lay waste its harmonious structures."²⁹ By making his melancholia a poetic constant, Baudelaire makes the objectification of the void the center of his reflexive labor.

Traversing the landscape of melancholia, Baudelaire consigns his subjectivity to the spleen, to that melancholic organ that sends "gross fumes into the brain, and so *per consequens* [consequently] disturbing the soul, and all the faculties of it."³⁰ The focal image of his enterprise, spleen is at once object and subject of Baudelaire's poetry: that which speaks in the subject and that about which the subject speaks. As speaking and spoken, spleen is an image that marks a space between the subject and object, the collision, so to speak, of their respective voids. Spleen as poetic utterance – posited as the object seized and laid bare by the word – is no longer simply an expressive lament (a confession of world weariness), but, *qua* spleen, it actively marks the distance of the subject from itself, creating that necessary hollow where the subject can announce its own absence.

This is perhaps what Benjamin means when he writes, "The decisively new ferment that enters the *taedium vitae* and turns it into spleen is self-estrangement. In Baudelaire's melancholy [*Trauen*], all that is left of the infinite regress of reflection – which in Romanticism playfully expanded the space of life into ever-wider circles and reduced it within ever narrower frames – is the 'somber and lucid *tête-à-tête*' of the subject with itself."³¹ In turning back on itself, the I encounters its own radical dissociation. Baudelaire strips or lays bare the Romantic reflexive operation,

²⁹ Benjamin's full statement runs as follows: "The Baudelairean allegory – unlike the Baroque allegory – bears traces of the rage needed to break into the world, to lay waste its harmonious structures" ("Central Park," 149).

³⁰ Robert Burton, *The Anatomy of Melancholy*. Edited by Holbrook Jackson (New York: New York Review of Books, 2001), 250.

³¹ Benjamin, "Central Park," 137.

shifting the accent from the identity to the non-identity of the I. Through the spleen's disjunctive synthesis, the I enters into a relation with itself, but it encounters its "self" as a non-identity, for its very identity consists in spleen. If spleen conditions the subject's objectification, then its separation from itself, from the life within, becomes that which is most native to it, that which is most its own; its very impropriety becomes that which is most proper to it. What speaks in the poem and what is spoken is alienation: a lyrical I estranged from itself.

Spleen provides Baudelaire with an image of the I that decomposes in its composition, a snapshot of the I's objectification. Through a poetic image, spleen, the I is placed into an ex-centric relation with itself by its identification with the object, the spleen (at once affect and organ), that tempers it. Spleen is the organ, the poetic machine within the body of the text, that produces the I as atra-bilious. Objectified in the spleen, the I is produced as estranged; rather than resolving, it dissolves the consistency of the I, making the moment of enunciation, the saying of I, the enunciation of a part, the spleen, that dissolves the whole. This contradiction serves to divide the I as if forcing it to coincide with its own disjunction. The I manages to stage itself through the poem only as dis-junct, dis-integrated. Through this process of identification with the spleen, the I becomes a place holder of its own absence:

I am a graveyard that the moon abhors
 where long worms like regrets come out to feed
 most ravenously on my dearest dead.
 I am an old boudoir where a rack of gowns,
 perfumed by withered roses, rots to dust...³²

As Baudelaire opens his last, unfinished, project for an autobiographical poem, *My Heart Laid Bare*, "Of the vaporization and centralization of the self. Everything is here." The withdrawal into the I is the condition of its vaporization. The construction of the poem enacts this dual operation: centralization and vaporization. The poem is the condition for the emergence of an I that is vapor, a sensible mist or the mist of a sensibility that engulfs the language of the poem, giving it atmosphere. Yet this ideality of vaporization is always placed into relation with a counter image that decomposes the ideal. Spleen and Ideal has to be read as an immobile dialectic in which the idealization of spleen is offset by the spleenification of the ideal.

³² Charles Baudelaire, "Spleen (II)" in *Flowers of Evil*. Translated by Richard Howard (Boston: David R. Godine, 1982), 75.

In the first poem of *Paris Spleen*, “The Stranger,” this “enigmatic man” without father, mother, brother or sister, without family or country, this figure without origin or place is the I that loves and hates: an I that could love beauty, hates gold, but above all loves the clouds, “the clouds that pass...up there...up there... the wonderful clouds.”³³ A formulation that drifts like the image it invokes. The clouds in their billowing drift are the very phantasm of elegant deformation. If this is the extremity of the idealization of spleen, (idealization of deformation), the logic of Baudelaire’s practice is to produce a kink in the ideal:

their nebulous shapes become
a splendid hearse for my dreams,
their red glow the reflection
of the Hell where my heart’s at home.”³⁴

The cloud become hearse is the vehicle that carries the corpse to its tomb. The corpse is the cloud’s violation (the spleenification of the ideal) – the rotting corpse as that eminently inelegant reminder of what awaits the substrate of all human ideals. And Baudelaire’s dandyism prescribes that he is to become an elegant corpse, a rotting ideal.³⁵

The corpse provides the I with the image of an identity that coincides with its most radical decomposition. The poetic image occasions the seizure of a subjective destitution as radical as irreparable:

My soul is cracked, and when in distress
it tries to sing the chilly nights away,
how often its enfeebled voice suggests
the gasping of a wounded soldier left
beside a lake of blood, who, pinned beneath
a pile of dead men, struggles, stares and dies.³⁶

And yet, it is precisely in this seizure that the happiness of the melancholic lies.

The fantasy of the melancholic is to be a happy corpse. As Baudelaire asserts in “The Happy Corpse,”³⁷ this most bleak and humorous of poems, for a corpse to be happy it is not sufficient for the body to be consigned to the grave, deprived of life and lying in wait for the officialdom of mourning. The happiness of the corpse does not lie in death, but in digestion. It is when

33 Charles Baudelaire, “The Stranger” in *Paris Spleen*. Translated by Louise Varèse. (New Directions, 1970), 1.

34 Baudelaire, “Sympathetic Horror” in *Flowers of Evil*, 79.

35 “The condition of success of this sacrificial task is that the artist should take to its extreme consequences the principle of loss and self-dispossession. Rimbaud’s programmatic exclamation “I is an other” (*je est un autre*) must be taken literally: the redemption of objects is impossible except by virtue of becoming an object. As the work of art must destroy and alienate itself to become an absolute commodity, so the dandy-artist must become a living corpse, constantly tending toward an *other*, a creature essentially nonhuman and antihuman” (Agamben, *Stanzas*, 50).

36 Baudelaire, “The Cracked Bell” in *Flowers of Evil*, 74.

37 Baudelaire, “The Happy Corpse” in *Flowers of Evil*, 72-73.

the corpse is ingested by those “scions of decay,” those “feasting philosophers,” the earth worm, that it is happy. Only when reduced to bone, picked clean by contracted crows, does it rest content. It is only when reduced to its skeletal architecture that it can sleep in peace, “like a shark in the cradling wave.” This would be the fantasy of a “soulless body deader than the dead.” A body deprived of soul longs to be restored to the inorganic, insensate matter. To be deader than the dead is to be extinct, a bone awaiting fossilization. In short, the melancholic desires to be an object whose psychic life has been effaced, subtracted irreparably from the very vicissitudes of sensate flesh that provide the conditions and thus torments of psychic life. “From the perspective of spleen,” it is not simply “the buried man,” as Benjamin suggests, that “is the “transcendental subject” of historical consciousness;” it is the corpse picked clean.³⁸ It is not in awaiting, but being deprived of a second life that melancholic locates its joy, and this is what binds the melancholic to evil.

To see the corpse from the inside³⁹ is to become the impersonator of bone, the mask of a fossilized presence. The subject is inserted into culture only through the maximization of its distance from the organic. Culture thus becomes a space that is beyond decay, since it marks that which cannot die. If the happiness of the melancholic lies in its phantasmatic identification with its own extinction this is because, at this hyperbolic extreme, that which is most heavy becomes bearably light and the void that crushes becomes the void whose phantasmatic seizure marks this thinking animal’s commitment to a culture that praises something other than stupefaction.

38 “From the perspective of spleen, the buried man is the ‘transcendental subject’ of historical consciousness” (Benjamin, “Central Park,” 138).

39 “Baroque allegory sees the corpse only from the outside. Baudelaire sees it from within” (Benjamin, “Central Park,” 163).

The Subject of Genius in Kant and Kristeva

Amanda Holmes

Poiesis, as the title of this collection recalls, means making. In this essay I am interested in a very specific kind of making. The act of making is always limited by the constraints of a given context, both material and conceptual but the kind of making I will discuss here is that which brings something new into the world within these very constraints. Since Immanuel Kant's formulation of it in the *Critique of Judgment*, this kind of making is characterized as the work of genius. The work of genius is marked by both originality and exemplarity. On the one hand, the work of genius defies instruction and resists recipe; it is creativity *par excellence*. On the other, since it does not arrive *ex nihilo*, the work of genius offers an example of a particular kind of thing; it comes from, and contributes to, a discipline or a tradition. Exemplarity entails a creative relation to the constraint of a form, a kind of play at the borders of a practice. This is the special power of the genius: on the one hand, she works within the constraints of a practice, placing her work squarely within the domain of a recognizable form or genre, and, on the other, her work pushes past the form, setting and resetting the dimensions and measurements of the practice or genre itself.

While the creative work of genius is always original, "there can also be original nonsense, [so the products of genius] must at the same time be models, i.e., exemplary, hence, while not themselves the result of imitation, they must yet serve others in that way, i.e., as a standard or a rule for judging."¹ The genius, we might say, is one who makes work within a practice which simultaneously abides by, and transforms, the standards, rules, and methods of the practice itself. More than random deviations or minor alterations, exemplarity is not just some happy accident. Rather, it seems to abide by the laws of another order. That is, it seems to *access the necessary excess* of a practice and to reconfigure the practice itself on the basis of this excess. As such, the genius's exemplarity is a practice of making and remaking practices, of inducing the subtle and poetic mutation of forms.

In her work on female genius, Julia Kristeva inherits much of this Kantian framework. In her trilogy *Feminine Genius: Life, Madness, Words*, she posits the possibility of a specifically feminine genius and offers readings of the work of three women: Hannah Arendt, Melanie Klein, and Colette. These three women stand as geniuses, as exemplars in relation to their respective fields (critical philosophy in the case of Arendt, psychoanalysis in the case of Klein, and literature in the case of Colette); each of

- 1 Immanuel Kant, *Critique of the Power of Judgment*. Edited by Paul Guyer. Translated by Eric Matthews. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 5:308.

these women worked within their fields in ways that transformed and radically altered the practices within them. This idea is very much in line with the Kantian account of the genius's exemplary originality.

According to Kant, the genius is able to strike this balance between exemplarity and originality through a peculiar relation to nature. The genius is able to 'access the excess,' as I have formulated it, on the basis of "the inborn predisposition of the mind (*ingenium*) through which nature gives the rule to art."² More specifically, for Kant, the work of genius schematizes the supersensible substrate of nature, rendering the infinite in terms of the finite and making possible a connection between the determinate concepts of the human mind and the supersensible substrate of the totality of nature. Such a task requires that the genius transcend the limits of his or her own particular subjectivity, that the genius reaches out beyond the determinate concepts of reason, towards the indeterminate realm of nature. For Kristeva, too, the genius is a figure of transcendence. As she puts it, genius is the ability to "go beyond oneself and one's situation."³ Both Kant and Kristeva articulate the abilities of the genius in terms of transcendence. Unlike Kant, however, Kristeva focuses on a specifically female genius, unfolding the notion of the genius's special transcendence within the domain of an ontologically constituted sexual difference. The genius of Arendt, Klein, and Colette entails what she calls a 'psychical bisexuality' and a 'mental hermaphroditism.' Kristeva's geniuses transcend themselves insofar as they transcend sexual difference.

Kant's articulation of the genius's special transcendent subjectivity provides a helpful analogy for understanding Kristeva's theory of genius as an account of a transcendent subjectivity in relation to sexual difference, in relation to transcending the distinction between the masculine and the feminine. In what follows, I will trace a line of thought from Kant to Kristeva in which 'genius' articulates a subject who is able to transcend a subjectivity that is limited by the determinate concepts of reason. Kristeva does not explicitly cite Kant in her reflections on genius so what I will offer is an interpretive leap that attempts to link the Kantian formulation of the genius' ability to schematize the supersensible – to traverse the realm of indeterminate concepts and aesthetic ideas – to the Kristevan formulation of female genius as the three-fold ability to relate the feminine to the masculine, the semiotic to the symbolic, and to go beyond one's self. By linking

2 Kant, *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, 5:307-5:308.

3 Julia Kristeva, "Female Genius, Freedom and Culture." *Irish Pages* 2.2 (2004): 220.

these two theories of genius, I will show that there is a provocative parallel between Kant's notion of the supersensible and the psychoanalytic concepts of the unconscious.

I. Kant on genius

I.1 The indeterminate source of the genius's creation

Neither entirely underivative, nor wholly imitative, the work of genius is characterized by what Kant calls an "exemplary originality." It is exemplary insofar as it takes up that which precedes it and offers a full and robust example of the kind of thing that it is. A work of genius is recognizable within the domain of some kind of tradition and it fulfills some form. And yet, it is also original insofar as it is never a mere imitation of the work within that tradition. An unimaginative, even if impeccable, copy of a work of art, might be very skilled but a work of genius must also do something new. The two qualities of originality and exemplarity work as checks on each other. If a work is too original, it may stray too far afield from the rules that govern a practice and it may no longer be recognizable within its own tradition or genre. It may appear as what Kant calls "original nonsense." If it is too exemplary, it may be overly academic and seem to be too closely following determinate rules. As Kant writes, a work of genius will

agree punctiliously but not painstakingly with rules in accordance with which alone the product can become what it ought to be, that is, without the academic form showing through, i.e., without any sign that the rule has hovered before the eyes of the artist and fettered his mental powers.⁴

On Kant's account, moments of artistic genius are those in which an artist clearly and intentionally breaks some rule, but in so doing, sets others. These rules then establish not only new paradigms and limitations but also new possibilities for the genius's successors. Works of genius serve as "examples for other good minds [and] give rise to a school, i.e., a methodical instruction in accordance with rules."⁵ It is with these rules that the work of genius begets new schools, genres, and traditions.

The rules that a genius establishes seem to be derived from an original act of breaking some other set of rules. And yet, we

4 Kant, *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, §:307.

5 Kant, *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, §:318.

cannot fully account for the phenomenon of genius with this description, as it would reduce the notion of genius to something like novelty. As Paul Guyer has pointed out:

since Kant treats art as a species of intentional and rational human production, there must be some sense in which the whole of an artist's productive activity is guided by a conception of its desired outcome and the steps to be taken in order to achieve that outcome; a model on which part of the artist's work was guided by rules, but if part, indeed the most important part, was left to anything like mere chance, it would not be a model of rational activity.⁶

If there must be some kind of rules that govern the genius's artistic creation – even when the genius is actively engaged in breaking other rules – what are they? On Kant's account, they seem to be rules of some indeterminate order that still abide by a logic of purposiveness. This is the logic of nature's purposiveness. While I do not have the space here to offer a robust account of what Kant means by "the purposiveness of nature," the following quotation should offer some help:

The flowers, the blossoms, indeed the shapes of whole plants; the delicacy of animal formations of all sorts of species, which is unnecessary for their own use but as if selected for our own taste; above all the manifold and harmonious composition of colors (in the pheasant, in crustaceans, insects, right down to the commonest flowers), which are so pleasant and charming to our eyes, which seem to have been aimed entirely at outer contemplation, since they concern merely the surface, and even in this do not concern the figure of the creature, which could still be requisite for its inner ends: all of these give great weight to the kind of explanation that involves the assumption for real ends of nature for our power of aesthetic judgment.⁷

The purposiveness of nature, the sense in which the beauty of nature seems to abide by some logic which exceeds our determinate categories and yet makes possible aesthetic judgments: this sense is also present in the work of the genius. Something like nature's purposiveness seem to provide the rules that govern the genius' artistic creation. And yet, as Kant claims, the genius herself cannot identify these rules. They seem to be fundamentally indeterminate.

- 6 Paul Guyer, "Exemplary Originality: Genius, Universality, and Individuality" in *Values of Beauty: Historical Essays in Aesthetics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 251-252.
- 7 Kant, *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, §347.

The rules that govern the genius's own production are alien to her. This is why genius cannot be taught: the genius does not know the source of her own ideas. As Kant writes:

...one cannot learn to write inspired poetry, however exhaustive all the rules for the art of poetry and however excellent the models for it may be [...] no Homer or Wieland can indicate how his ideas, which are fantastic and yet at the same time rich in thought, arise and come together in his head, because he himself does not know it and thus cannot teach it to anyone else either.⁸

Teaching necessitates the use of determinate and communicable concepts. But because genius somehow accesses concepts that exceed the determinate ground of language and abide by the logic of the totality of nature's purposiveness, it is not a teachable quality. The genius is unconscious of the source of her own ideas on Kant's account. This unconscious element of the genius's creativity renders her capacity as a teacher only partial. While a student can, and indeed must, imitate the work of the genius in order to learn, and while, as Kant says, every genius will have these imitators as students, not just any student can imitate the actual genius of genius. There remains an important element of a genius's work which can be neither taught nor learned. Kant writes:

... genius really consists in the happy relation, which no science can teach and no diligence learn, of finding ideas for a given concept on the one hand and on the other hitting upon the expression for these, through which the subjective disposition of the mind that is thereby produced, as an accompaniment of a concept, can be communicated to others.⁹

There are then two moments of genius: first in finding the idea and second in expressing it. Though it is not fully pronounced in this passage, Kant here suggests that the work of genius traverses the realm of indeterminate and pre-communicable concepts and ends up in that of those which are communicable, even if still indeterminate. That is, the genius first hits upon an idea for which there has not yet been a determinate expression and then, through her chosen medium, expresses it.

In this first moment, genius accesses something that lies outside of the determinate realm of language, something that can be represented in the imagination but that exceeds the

8 Kant, *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, §:310.

9 Kant, *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, §:316.

capacity of the understanding. The genius deals in the realm of aesthetic ideas, in the realm of the purposiveness of nature which transcends the ground of language. Kant writes, “by an aesthetic idea I mean that representation of the imagination that occasions much thinking though without it being possible for any determinate thought, i.e., concept, to be adequate to it, which, consequently, no language fully attains or can make intelligible.”¹⁰ Engaging in the transformation of what is outside of the bounds of communicability in its determinate form, the genius, with the second moment, renders ideas communicable in some fashion. This act of expression is contained in the second moment of genius, in the expression of an aesthetic idea.

The element of genius that cannot be taught seems to be contained in this first moment, which stands outside of language and yet still seems to abide by a certain logic of purposiveness. This phenomenon is often discussed in terms of genius’s intuition, but here Kant says explicitly that it is a relation to nature. The genius “cannot itself describe or indicate scientifically how it brings its product into being, but rather that it gives the rule as nature.”¹¹ Kant’s theory of genius thus rests on an account of the genius’s enigmatic relationship to the totality of nature and on the ability to access the ideas of the imagination which cannot be contained in the understanding, which exceed the determinate ground of language.

I.II Giving the rule as nature: a theory of immanence or transcendence?

So far, I have explained Kant’s position that the special power of genius seems to be derived from a peculiar relation to nature.¹² There are at least two possible ways of understanding what Kant means here by ‘nature.’ The first is in the sense of the genius’s own particular nature. If this is the case, Kant is suggesting that it is in the genius’s own nature, the make up of the subject’s mind, to give the rule to art. I will call this ‘the immanent reading’ of the relation between genius and nature. The second possibility is that ‘nature’ here signifies a totality of existence outside of the subject. If this is the case, Kant is suggesting that the genius acts as a kind of conduit through which nature expresses itself in culture, in the products of art. In this latter account, the genius transcends her own particular subjectivity and accesses the indeterminate truth

¹⁰ Kant, *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, 5:314.

¹¹ Kant, *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, 5:308.

¹² The genius’s relation to nature is an important qualification for Kant, who was committed not just to the superiority of nature’s beauty over that of art, but to designating the latter as merely one extension or an aspect of the former. “Beautiful art,” Kant says, “is an art to the extent that it seems at the same time to be nature,” and “Beautiful art must be regarded as nature.” The beauty of art is judged according to its proximity and resemblance to that of nature. Nature presents beautiful things; art represents them and is judged according to this representation. Nature is here on both sides of the process. It is at play in the production of beautiful art, through the conduit of genius, and it is at play in the presentation, though the faculty of judgment.

of the totality of nature. Through her expression, she renders part of that truth capable of being comprehended by the human mind. I will call this ‘the transcendent reading’ of the relation between genius and nature. The question is whether nature is within the genius in an immanent modality or in a transcendent one. I will now take up each possible reading separately and in order.

I.II.A The immanent reading of nature in genius

According to the immanent reading of the relation between nature and genius, when Kant says that ‘nature gives the rule to art,’ he means that it is in the genius’s nature to be able to create work that establishes rules that then come to define art practices. Here, ‘nature’ gives the rule to art insofar as the genius is a natural being with a particular arrangement of cognitive faculties. The explanation of the origin of genius, on this reading, is that there exists within the subject a natural arrangement of the faculties (the imagination and the understanding) that enables the genius’ creative work. This explanation rests on the genius’s subjective mental functioning. The genius’s imagination is somehow in the state of free harmony with the understanding. This free harmony between the imagination and the understanding in the mind of the genius enables her to create work that produces a free harmony between the imagination and the understanding in the viewer of that work. So, through the art object, the genius communicates a certain relation among her own mental faculties and produces that very same relation in the mind of the viewer.

This immanent reading provides a helpful way to think about Kant’s account of genius because it frames his treatment within the larger context of the *Critique of Judgment*. At this point within the text, Kant is giving an account of aesthetic judgments and aesthetic ideas. He writes:

In a word, the aesthetic idea is a representation of the imagination, associated with a given concept, which is combined with such a manifold of partial representations in the free use of the imagination that no expression designating a determinate concept can be found for it, which therefore allows the addition to a concept of much that is unnameable, the feeling of which animates the cognitive faculties and combines spirit with the mere letter of language.¹³

¹³ Kant, *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, 5:316. Kant also writes: “Just as in the case of an idea of reason the imagination, with its intuitions, never attains to the given concept, so in the case of an aesthetic idea the understanding, by means of its concepts, never attains to the complete inner intuition of the imagination which it combines with a given representation.”

The domain of the aesthetic idea exceeds that of our determinate concepts within language. It lies within the realm of the unnameable. It is the indeterminacy of the concept with which the genius deals that allows for the free play between the faculties. Kant writes, “though genius subsumes particulars under a given principle, this principle is indeterminate and allows for the freedom of the genius’ individual imagination” (89).

These remarks on genius offer an account of the creation of the beautiful as a kind of supplement to his theory of the judgment of it. The discussion of genius allows Kant to illustrate the creative counterpart of aesthetic judgment in aesthetic creation. In this sense, ‘nature gives the rule to art through genius insofar as ‘nature’ means:

The mental powers, whose union (in a certain relation) constitutes genius, are imagination and understanding. Only in the use of the imagination for cognition, the imagination is under the constraint of the understanding and is subject to the limitation of being adequate to its concept; in an aesthetic respect, however, the imagination is free to provide, beyond that concord with the concept, unsought extensive undeveloped material for the understanding.¹⁴

Kant’s account of the genius’s relation to nature on this reading is that it is the natural relation between the imagination and the understanding within the genius’s mind which allows for the creation of works of genius, enabling others to experience a similar relation of the mind’s capacities in the free play of the imagination and the understanding in their confrontation with the genius’ work. Just as in aesthetic judgment, in which beauty is not a property of an object but is rather the relation between the form of the object and our cognitive faculties in judging the object, genius is this same cognitive relation that is present in the creation of beautiful art. Genius’s creation is something like aesthetic judgment in reverse: in the act of creating, one begins with a state of free play in the imagination and then relates that cognitive state to an object of art; whereas in the act of judging, one is first confronted with an object of a work of art and the form of this object ignites a corresponding relation of free play of the imagination and the understanding in the mind of the viewer.¹⁵

¹⁴ Kant, *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, 5:317.

¹⁵ Kant’s pre-critical writings offer some insight regarding the genius’s immanent capacities as well. In his *Reflexionen* from 1776-1778, he deals extensively with the concept of genius, defining it as “a principle of enlivening of all other powers by means of Ideas of objects that one desires.” Using the language of ‘principle’ Kant sets up genius as a rule that governs the relation among the faculties. Further, it is important to note that in naming genius as a principle, Kant is not providing some reductive physical account. He states specifically: “I do not search for physical causes of genius, e.g. imagination – memory. These causes are not in our powers. Instead, I search for the leading powers that give direction to that which is natural, that is, the formal principle.” C.f. Kant’s *Reflexionen* 949, 15:421, Dated c.1776–8. I am grateful to the work of Lara Oštarić for drawing my attention to these pre-critical writings on genius.

The second way of reading the claim that nature gives the rule to art through genius is one in which nature signifies a totality that transcends the individual subject. Lara Oštarić has defended the most comprehensive view of this reading of the genius's relation to nature. She argues that genius's creation consists of a special unity of free human activity and nature, whereby 'nature' signifies something that transcends the genius's individual and creative subjectivity. On Oštarić's reading, the work of genius "presupposes something that goes beyond a genius's creative subjectivity through the notion of an order that is purposive for human faculties in general."¹⁶ That is, the genius is able to 'access the excess,' as I have formulated it above, whereby 'the excess' is understood as the purposiveness of nature, the "lawfulness of the contingent as such."¹⁷ The genius then represents this purposiveness of nature in a way that reflects the capacities of the human mind through the production of a work of art. Oštarić draws on Kant's discussion of nature's purposiveness and offers the following:

the genius's spirit can rightly be identified with the principle of nature's purposiveness. Because works of genius are produced in accordance with the principle of nature's purposiveness, they, unlike other products of art, do not embody the conscious intent of an artist and, hence, do not exhibit purposiveness with respect to the concept of an object. Instead, works of genius, like beauties of nature, exhibit purposiveness without a purpose, or free purposiveness.¹⁸

This free purposiveness provides the rules that guide the genius's creative work; it offers an alternative kind of ordering of the work. This kind of ordering is not like other artist's conscious intent. The work of genius is ordered without determinate rules, as those that would come from the categories of reason, but with a kind of ordering that comes from nature's supersensible substrate.

Just as the immanent reading of nature within genius offers insight into the context of Kant's discussion of genius within the larger project of the *Critique of Judgment*, this reading of the genius' transcendent relation to nature illuminates another important aspect of Kant's theory of judgment: it illuminates the principle of universal validity in aesthetic judgment. Insofar as aesthetic judgments require a dimension of subjective universality

- 16 Lara Oštarić, "Kant on the Normativity of Creative Production." *Kantian Review* 17.1 (2012), 76.
- 17 Kant, *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, 5:404.
- 18 Oštarić, "Kant on the Normativity of Creative Production," 79.

– if something is beautiful, according to Kant, it is not merely beautiful for me, the judging subject, but also for every other rational being – every subject who makes an aesthetic judgment of beauty enacts a transcendence of his or her own particular subjectivity. The principle of universal validity in aesthetic judgment entails another kind of transcendence that provides the obverse of the genius' transcendence. The subject transcends her own particular subjectivity in creating beautiful art because the same thing must happen when another subject judges it.

If my account so far is correct, and if Kant's account of genius offers a the creative counterpart to his theory of aesthetic judgment, the transcendence of the genius's work entails a transcendence of her own limited subjectivity because she creates something that is beautiful, something that causes others to enact a similar kind of transcendence of their own limited subjectivity within the act of reflective judgment. As Oštarić puts it, "a genius's imagination is receptive to something more than her individual finite being and is also instrumental for conforming this transcendent content to the laws of human understanding."¹⁹ The genius somehow surpasses herself, not merely in some idiosyncratic way – her creation is not just for herself, let's say – but rather it is for others too. This transcendent content is associated with the way in which a reflective judgment can lay claim to universal validity. And the transcendent reading of the genius's relation to nature provides the explanation for how this transcendence within the act of judgment is reflected in the act of creating beautiful works of art. To say that nature gives the rule to art through genius is to say that genius acts as a kind of conduit through which nature establishes itself in human activity. However, this is only possible because the genius's inner state reflects the harmony of the whole of nature in its quality of purposiveness. Kant writes:

in products of genius nature (that of the subject), not a deliberate end, gives the rule to art (the production of the beautiful). For since the beautiful must not be judged in accordance with concepts, but rather in accordance with the purposive disposition of the imagination for its correspondence with the faculty of concepts in general, it is not a rule or precept but only that which is merely nature in the subject, i.e., the supersensible substratum of all our faculties (to which no concept of the understanding attains)....²⁰

¹⁹ Oštarić, "Kant on the Normativity of Creative Production," 80.

²⁰ Kant *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, §344.

The work of genius, we see from this passage, offers a schema for the supersensible. As Oštarić puts it, “nature gives the rule to art insofar as ‘nature’ signifies “the Idea of nature’s supersensible substrate.”²¹ Through the work of genius, the supersensible substrate of nature is rendered into a schema through which it may be comprehended with the faculties of the human mind.

There is sufficient evidence from Kant’s corpus to defend each of these possibilities. I suggest that both of these accounts are operative in the relation between genius and nature and that they can really only be understood in relation to one another. That is, nature gives the rule to art both as an immanent principle within the subjectivity of the genius and as a transcendent totality exceeding the subjectivity of the genius. The immanent reading and the transcendent reading are co-constitutive. Genius, in other words, is a particular relation between the imagination and the understanding that enables access to the truth of nature, whereby nature also signifies that transcendent totality, the excess beyond the genius *qua* subject within the set bounds of the genius’s practice and the determinate concepts which guide it.

II. Kristeva on genius

II.1 Genius as transcendence in three ways

Julia Kristeva poses the notion of female genius as less an assertion than a series of questions: *does female genius exist?* Or rather, is the relation to the feminine aspect of an individual precisely the relation that is at play in the making of genius?²² “Do we owe these uncommon forms of genius and these unforgettable innovations to these women’s femininity, so unusual in itself?”²³ Just as Freud explains that “psychoanalysis does not try to describe what a woman is – that would be a task it could scarcely perform – but sets about enquiring how she comes into being,”²⁴ Kristeva relies on her three case studies to show how the female genius comes into being, offering the concept of female genius neither positive definition nor axiomatic form. A theory of genius nevertheless emerges from this series.

Kristeva’s trilogy on female genius resuscitates many of the concerns from Kant’s inquiry. For Kristeva as for Kant, genius is characterized by a form of transcendence that is yet still an immanence. She discusses the genius as a figure of transcendence

21 Oštarić, “Kant on the Normativity of Creative Production,” 76.

22 There is no space in this paper to develop a robust defense (or critique) of Kristeva’s essentialist ontology. For the purpose of this paper, I want to urge a nominalist reading of the categories ‘masculine’ and ‘feminine’ in order to focus on their relation to the semiotic and the symbolic. For more on this, see: Kelly Oliver, *Reading Kristeva Unraveling the Double-Bind* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993).

23 Julia Kristeva, *Hannah Arendt*. Translated by Ross Guberman (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001), xx.

24 Sigmund Freud. “Femininity” (1933) in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*. Translated and Edited by James Strachey. Vol. XXII (London: Hogarth, 1968), 116.

in at least three ways: the genius transcends herself, her situation, and, most provocatively, the female genius transcends sexual difference. She says that genius is the peculiar ability to “surpass oneself and one’s situation.”²⁵ Transcending the limits of her own particular subjectivity, the genius goes beyond herself in her life and work. Yet Kristeva accounts for this ability to transcend the particular subjectivity through biographically informed readings. Emphasizing the relation between life and work, the subject and her situation, Kristeva’s biographies of Arendt, Klein, and Colette provide the groundwork for a theory of genius as a figure whose transcendence lies in her very singularity as a human being whose relation to the feminine and the masculine aspects of herself enable her special powers of creation and conception.

For Kristeva, this question of surpassing oneself and one’s situation has been at the heart of the project of feminism since its inception. She dedicates her genius series to the work of Simone de Beauvoir, who, as she says, articulated the feminist project of ‘going beyond oneself’ as a particularly feminine transcendence. In her reading of de Beauvoir, Kristeva posits that, ‘one is not born a woman but becomes one’ by transcending the masculine mode of the individual. Woman, in the senses developed out of Kristeva’s reading of de Beauvoir, is a being who transcends the divide between masculinity and femininity through her uniqueness (*haecceitas*). She transcends the sense of an individual being cut off from others. Kristeva writes that it was “the ‘individual’ in [de Beauvoir] which ‘felt an undefined need to transcend itself.’”²⁶ On Kristeva’s reading, de Beauvoir’s work moves away from, “the essential question of individual projects, [... she] consigns to the shadows the issue of the indeterminable possibilities arising from the *haecceitas*²⁷ (fundamental uniqueness) of each individual.”²⁸ Kristeva’s work retains de Beauvoir’s critique of the individual but offers a theory of uniqueness and singularity to replace it. Through the notion of *haecceitas*, Kristeva upholds

the Scotist ideal that we are now, at this moment in history, in a position to achieve: which is a particular attention paid to the *haecceitas*, to the flourishing of the individual in his uniqueness, to what makes an individual who he is and raises him above ordinariness – genius being the most complex, the most appealing and the most fruitful form of this uniqueness at a particular moment in history, and, given that it is so, the form which is lasting and universal.²⁹

²⁵ Kristeva, *Female Genius*, 220.

²⁶ Kristeva, *Female Genius*, 219.

²⁷ Turning to the work of Duns Scotus, Kristeva draws on the concept of *haecceitas*, of the individual’s own uniqueness, in order to account for the transcendent quality of the genius.

²⁸ Kristeva, *Female Genius*, 220.

²⁹ Kristeva, *Female Genius*, 218.

The notion of individual subjectivity that emerges from Kristeva's reading of de Beauvoir provides a certain feminist reclamation of the notion of the individual in the wake of de Beauvoir's critique of it. It is no longer a picture of the individual as a truncated unit, autonomous and independent. Rather, Kristeva accentuates the uniqueness of the individual, a singularity that is able to surpass even itself. The form of genius is subjectivity that surpasses its own subjectivity precisely through its reflective relation to it; a self that goes beyond itself through itself.

The work of Kristeva's geniuses and indeed the work of de Beauvoir, represent what the presence of the feminine has done to radically restructure human thought in the West in the 20th century. They represent the insertion of the feminine into the domain of the masculine and the ensuing transformation of the masculine order on this basis. Just as Kant's genius was characterized by both exemplarity and originality, Kristeva's geniuses provide examples of critical philosophy, psychoanalysis, and literature, all while introducing into those domains a radical originality derived from the order of the feminine. Each of these women were able to surpass both themselves and their respective fields. Kristeva writes, "Arendt, Klein, Colette – and many others – did not wait for the 'feminine condition' to be ripe in order to exercise their freedom: is not 'genius' precisely the breakthrough which consists in going beyond the 'situation'?"³⁰ The genius of these three women is found in their respective capacities to play with the boundaries and constraints of the form of their respective fields by insisting on delimiting with respect to their singularity (*haecceitas*) as individuals, as women, the inadequacy of the forms of their practices in accessing the truth of them. Whether formulated as an exemplary originality or as the infusion of the feminine into the masculine, the genius transforms the practices of her discipline by simultaneously defying and complying with the rules that govern it. For Kant, as we saw, the genius *accessed the excess* of a discipline through a particular relation to the supersensible order of nature, displaying a free purposiveness in her work. For Kristeva, it seems that the genius is able to *access the excess* because of her relation to her own fundamental uniqueness, through an openness to her own *haecceitas* which is bound up with the way in which she transcends the relation between the masculine and the feminine.

Kristeva posits somewhat tentatively that this *haecceitas* might be understood as a particular relation between the masculine and the feminine aspects of the individual; that genius entails

a “psychical bisexuality,” and a “mental hermaphroditism.” She writes,

in the course of my study of Arendt, Klein and Colette, we have seen the extent to which their achievements are a result of their “mental hermaphroditism” to use Colette’s expression, and how it would have been impossible for them, without a sort of phallic affirmation, to express their uniqueness.³¹

This is a strange claim, and the resources for understanding what Kristeva means by it are largely within the concrete examples from these three biographies. However, Kristeva’s earlier work, specifically the theory of the subject that she develops in *Revolution in Poetic Language*,³² offers important resources for understanding the theoretical underpinnings of this claim. By turning to Kristeva’s earlier work, we can see how genius entails a transcendence of sexual difference and how the uniqueness of these individual women can be understood in terms of the relation between the feminine and the masculine.

II.II Genius, *Revolution in Poetic Language*, and the New

The genius project brings Kristeva back to her beginnings: to the intersection of politics, poetry, and psychoanalysis. What these two projects have in common is that they emphasize something akin to Hannah Arendt’s notion of natality: they both aim at the articulation of the human capacity to begin something new. The moments of genius in which a few individuals are able to ‘surpass themselves’ and to ‘go beyond the situation,’ are very similar to the moments that Kristeva set out to identify some twenty years before the genius trilogy in *Revolution in Poetic Language*, those moments in which the subject is radically transformed within the context of a political revolution, moments that crystallize around the co-constitution of language and history. For Kristeva, the subject’s transformation in poetry and political transformation in revolution are chronologically and materially linked. One is not fully what it is without the other’s simultaneous fulfillment. She writes, “the one brings about in the subject what the other introduces into society. The history and political experience of the twentieth century have demonstrated that one cannot be transformed without the other.”³³ Searching for the link between the subject’s transformation in

31 Kristeva, *Female Genius*, 227.

32 Julia Kristeva, *Revolution in Poetic Language*. Translated by Margaret Waller (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984).

33 Kristeva, *Revolution in Poetic Language*, 17.

poetic language and the political transformation in revolution, Kristeva posited a specific theory of the subject that was “obviously inseparable from a theory of the subject that takes into account the Freudian positing of the unconscious”³⁴ as it depended on the articulation of that which is external to language.

By bringing together linguistic analysis with psychoanalytic theory, Kristeva developed a theory of the subject as constituted as much outside of language as within it. She writes, “We view the subject in language as decentering the transcendental ego, cutting through it, and opening it up to a dialectic in which its syntactic and categorial understanding is merely the liminary moment of the process.”³⁵ Linguistic thought assumes that the sign is a substitute for the extra-linguistic, that there is an excess beyond the bounds of language. One way to cope with this excess is to distinguish the symbolic realm of language from the semiotic realm of that which exceeds it. On the one hand, the semiotic addresses the so-called arbitrary relation between the signifier and the signified as one that is motivated through the notion of the unconscious “insofar as the theories of drives (*pulsions*) and primary processes (displacement and condensation) can connect “empty signifiers” to psychosomatic functionings.”³⁶ On the other hand, the symbolic addresses the problem of externality through the process of substitution. Positing a “subject of enunciation” which “introduces, through categorial intuition, both semantic fields and logical [...] relations, which prove to be both intra- and trans- linguistic.”³⁷ The symbolic gives an account of the signifying process through the determinate rules of language.

The picture of subjectivity that emerges with this distinction between the semiotic and the symbolic is one in which the subject transcends the limitations of linguistic concepts. Kristeva writes, “The semiotic precedes the establishment of the sign; it is not, therefore, cognitive in the sense of being assumed by a knowing already constituted subject.”³⁸ Kristeva’s account draws on the formation of the subject in pre-linguistic, infantile, bodily experience:

According to a number of psycholinguists, “concrete operations” precede the acquisition of language, and organize preverbal semiotic space according to logical categories, which are thereby shown to precede or transcend language. From their research we shall retain not the principle of an operational state but that of a preverbal functional state that governs the connections between the body, objects, and the protagonist of a family structure.³⁹

³⁴ Kristeva, *Revolution in Poetic Language*, 30.

³⁵ Kristeva, *Revolution in Poetic Language*, 30.

³⁶ Kristeva, *Revolution in Poetic Language*, 22.

³⁷ Kristeva, *Revolution in Poetic Language*, 23.

³⁸ Kristeva, *Revolution in Poetic Language*, 27.

³⁹ Kristeva, *Revolution in Poetic Language*, 27.

The preverbal functional state that can be identified in the pre-linguistic experience offers the ground for the picture of subject formation that transcends language insofar as it precedes it and is retained even after the subject's entrance into the symbolic order of language. As Elaine Miller has put it,

In *Revolution in Poetic Language*, Kristeva had described language as originating in the body of the not yet constituted subject, the subject still fused with the mother: [Miller quotes Kristeva] "Discrete quantities of energy move through the body of the subject who is not yet constituted as such and, in the course of his development, they are arranged according to the various constraints imposed upon this body – always already involved in the semiotic process – by family and social structures."⁴⁰

In order to articulate what this preverbal functional state is, this language outside of language, Kristeva's posits what she calls a 'semiotic *chora*.' This identifies the excessive totality that lies beyond language. Miller, quoting Kristeva again:

"The drives, which are 'energy' charges as well as 'psychical' marks, articulate what we call a *chora*: a nonexpressive totality formed by the drives and their stases in a motility that is as full of movement as it is regulated." With the entrance into language, the semiotic underbelly of language is covered over, but it does not disappear. In poetic language, and in particular in the nonsignifying linguistic modes of rhythm, alliteration, assonance, and timbre, these energy charges reappear in the form of a 'second-degree thetic,' that is, always only indirectly, through the very medium of symbolic language that obscured it in the first place.⁴¹

The semiotic *chora* provides the space from which the subject enters the symbolic order, and the space remains even after the subject is constituted in the symbolic order of language. The subject is always operative at both levels: "Because the subject is always *both* semiotic *and* symbolic, no signifying system he produces can be either 'exclusively' semiotic or 'exclusively' symbolic, and it is instead necessarily marked by an indebtedness to both."⁴²

⁴⁰ Elaine P. Miller, *Head Cases: Julia Kristeva on Philosophy and Art in Depressed Times* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014), 24. Cf. Kristeva, *Revolution in Poetic Language*, 25.

⁴¹ Miller, *Head Cases*, 25.

⁴² Kristeva, *Revolution in Poetic Language*, 24.

Kristeva's formulation of the semiotic *chora* is developed from her reading of Plato's *Timaeus*. She writes,

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Neither model nor copy, the *chora* precedes and underlies figuration and thus specularization, and is analogous only to vocal or kinetic rhythm [...] The theory of the subject proposed by the theory of the unconscious will allow us to read in this rhythmic space [...] the process by which signifi-ance is constituted. Plato himself leads us to such a process when he calls this receptacle or *chora* nourishing and maternal.⁴³

43 Kristeva, *Revolution in Poetic Language*, 26.

44 Kristeva, *Revolution in Poetic Language*, 240. C.f. Plato, *Plato's Cosmology: The Timaeus of Plato*. Translated by Francis M. Cornford. (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1997), 50d.

Even in the beginning of her formulation of the semiotic *chora*, the semiotic is linked to the feminine. In a material sense, the *chora* is linked to the maternal body. Kristeva's association of the *chora* with the feminine is explicit: "The Platonic space or receptacle is a mother and wet nurse: [quoting Plato] 'Indeed we may fittingly compare the Recipient to a mother, the model to a father, and the nature that arises between them to their offspring.'"⁴⁴

My suggestion here is that Kristeva's account of female genius parallels her early theory of the subject. Both play with a movement between the semiotic and the symbolic, and this is what she has in mind when she says that the genius is constituted by a relation between the masculine and the feminine aspects of the individual. These categories correspond to the way in which the genius is constituted by a play between the semiotic and the symbolic. Perhaps we can posit that the genius is able to move more fluidly between these, and it is in this ability where her special power of creation and innovation lies.

Conclusion

In this paper, I have suggested that the notion of genius provides insight to the respective accounts of Kant and of Kristeva in relation to their articulations of a form of subjectivity that can transcend itself. For both Kant and Kristeva, the genius is a figure who transcends a given order that is articulated by the very boundaries of her being. In Kant's thinking, the genius transcends the determinate concepts of reason and accesses the totality of nature's supersensible substrate enabling the development of an aesthetic idea, and in Kristeva's thinking the genius transcends herself, her situation and the limitations of the masculine order,

playing with the border between the masculine and the feminine, the semiotic and symbolic motilities of being.

As we think through the fundamental distinction of the semiotic and the symbolic, we might recall Kant's formulation of the distinction between the determinate nature of the ideas of reason and the indeterminate nature of aesthetic ideas in which, as Kant says, "the imagination [is set] free and present[s] within the limits of given concepts and among the unbounded manifold of forms possibly agreeing with it, the one that connects its presentation with a fullness of thought to which no linguistic expression is fully adequate."⁴⁵ Both Kant and Kristeva articulate the movement of ideas beyond the determinate realm of language which we might link with the system of the symbolic. Their respective accounts of the new are bound up with indices to the indeterminate realm of aesthetic ideas which we might link with the system of the semiotic. While Kant argues that the genius makes intelligible, "the supersensible substratum of all our faculties (to which no concept of the understanding attains)," Kristeva holds that genius – in particular female genius – is responsible for bringing the unconscious, semiotic motilities to bear on the practices of the symbolic order.

In this paper I have tried to identify structural similarities in these two accounts of genius because they take up the central question of *poiesis*. Genius addresses the problem of what it is to make something, it addresses the problem of the new. Both Kant and Kristeva link this problem to an unknowable order that exceeds linguistic concepts and that yet remains accessible to thought. Whether conceived within the order of nature's supersensible substrate or within the Freudian unconscious, accessing the excess is the special power of the imagination, a torsion that renders possible the creation of the new.

⁴⁵ Kant, *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, 5:326.



Production into Presence

Goran Sergej Pristaš

Reflections on the transformation of the theatrical dispositif have evolved for centuries on the boundary between the viewer and the stage, by exploring the possibility of its breach, transfer, dislocation, or position exchange. The basic premise of this logic has been the mirroring, reflective logic of theatre; thus, even Artaud's radical intervention has merely been an inversion of the dual relation, since it posited theatre as a generator and the world as its reflection. Thus understood, theatre is an art that shows itself to the viewer, and all attempts at changing this image of theatre have aimed at changing the viewer's function, whereby the viewer has always been understood as someone external to theatre. However, the very manifestation of theatre has rarely been discussed: namely, that theatre always and already includes the viewers and their viewing, even during the rehearsals, when the viewing is merely supposed and theatre happens before the unborn viewer. The event of theatre, unlike its exhibition, has a character that is refractive rather than reflective. And that refraction occurs precisely on the membrane that separates its two different local manifestations, whereby the style of existence of its participants changes as well: it is theatre as the institutional relationship between the audience (public) and the artists (producers), and theatre as a poetic set or conjuncture of viewers and actors in performance (living and non-living). However, I am not referring to refraction as an effect of one idea passing through two different media or two ideologies. It is more adequate to think of it as a deflection in the style of existence of theatre's agents (viewers and artists), resulting from an encounter on the membrane between the institution and poetics. In this duality, theatre realizes its power of refraction: it is now materially factual and thus the world does not see itself only in theatre, but also through theatre, which makes theatre a polygon par excellence for reflecting on social objects and its parallel involvement in social processes, as well as the way of separating from them. Theatre always resembles other social processes and differs from them at the same time; nevertheless, it is becoming increasingly difficult to maintain this dual status, owing to transformations in the modes of production.

Understanding theatre as a medium *per se* has always been an uncanny thought, primarily because theatre is a place in which the basic disturbances in communication – such as noise, retardation, and redundancy – play a creative role. Today it may even be of

importance to reemphasize the difference between creation and communication. Thereby I do not mean to say that there is no mediation or communication in theatre, on the contrary. If theatre is a place of potential encounters, then the process of theatre is a performance of translation between the contacting problematics, coordinative systems, referential frameworks, contexts, discursive universes, regimes of tension, and modes of existence. Forever immersed in the media environment, theatre is a mediator in the sense in which Latour has differentiated between mediators and intermediaries.¹

Understanding theatre as a mediator instead of a mere intermediary implies that it is not a mechanism transferring the interpretation of an external author or authority. Its mode of functioning is interpretation, if interpretation is understood as translation as well as agency (*interpretes* - agent, translator), as refraction rather than mere reflection. Such translation implies the creation of a composite (in Diderot's theatre it is *tableaux*, in Brecht's *gestus*, in Artaud's hieroglyph, and in Beckett's breath) and its capacity exceeds, above all, the pure function of translating a clear message or meaning. In Barthes' words, these composites are "erecting a *meaning* but *manifesting* the *production* of that *meaning*."²

Observation 2

Instituting theatre implies a constant process of articulation, differentiating according to that which is external to it. However, as theatre is never entirely enclosed in itself, it never acquires complete stability as a manifestation and is never radically differentiated, tending instead towards de-localization. Paradoxically, in order to establish the situations through which it becomes instituted, it necessarily becomes re-localization itself. Theatre exposes its images to viewing (if Image is a "a set of what appears"³), yet these images and reactions to them are inseparable from each other. "Every thing, that is to say every image is indistinguishable from its actions and reactions,"⁴ and thus theatre is always part of some immanent appearing. Even though an image is de-localized by being exposed to viewing, "severed" from one network of relations and entering another, the articulation of this new set of relations objectifies and homogenizes it. What happens here is "sedimentation," quoting Laclau. Borrowing the term from

1 "An *intermediary*, in my vocabulary, is what transports meaning or force without transformation: defining its inputs is enough to define its outputs. (...) *Mediators*, on the other hand, cannot be counted as just one; they might count for one, for nothing, for several, or for infinity. Their input is never a good predictor of their output; their specificity has to be taken into account every time. *Mediators* transform, translate, distort, and modify the meaning or the elements they are supposed to carry." Bruno Latour, *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network-Theory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 39.

2 Roland Barthes, *Image, Music, Text*. Translated by Stephen Heath (New York: Hill and Wang, 1977), 71.

3 Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 1: The Movement-Image*. Translated by Hugh Tomlinson and Barbara Habberjam (London: Continuum, 2005), 58.

4 Deleuze, *Cinema 1*, 58.

Husserl, Laclau has used it to describe stable topographies, spaces created by means of routinized and hegemonic practices. “Insofar as an act of institution has been successful, a ‘forgetting of the origins’ tends to occur; the system of possible alternatives tends to vanish and the traces of the original contingency to fade. In this way, the instituted tends to assume the form of a mere objective presence. This is the moment of sedimentation.”⁵

5 Ernesto Laclau, *New Reflections on the Revolution of Our Time* (London: Verso 1990), 40.

The Aesthetic Turn

I would like to illustrate the dynamics of production and instituting here through three parallel dispositifs – theatre, cinema, and factory – through four manifestations of choreography in four different records of the camera, in which choreography and movement enter into equally different relationships with the production of relations, the practice of instituting, and the institutionalization of practice. These are: a photograph of Marta Paulin Brina’s dance before the partisans of the Rab Brigade in 1943; the “Liberation of Zagreb,” a film by Branko Marjanović and a group of cameramen from 1945; “The Flag,” a film made by the same author in 1949; and “The Mystery of I.B.’s Castle”, a brief propaganda film by Milan Katić from 1951. Besides wishing to juxtapose the dispositifs of cinema, theatre, and factory, I am using examples linked to the camera, be it photographic or cinematic, because they record and document the act of viewing in theatre in a very intriguing way, transforming it into a social object.

1st EXAMPLE: Marta Paulin Brina was a Slovenian dancer trained by a student of Mary Wigman. Before she joined the partisan movement in 1943, she had several significant choreographic acts, which have been described as the “new trend” in Slovenian dance. The photograph of Jože Petek shows Brina dancing in her partisan uniform in front of the thrilled members of a partisan brigade {FIGURE 24}, mostly former Jewish inmates of an Italian concentration camp on the island of Rab, dissolved in 1943. On her dance in nature, before the partisans, Marta Paulin said the following:

Standing by myself before a crowd of fighters and realising that I could express, with my gift of dancing and my feeble body, that which connected us, that I could master even that boundless natural space, I felt power in my feet, whilst treading the hard

earth. My arms could feel the breadth of the woods and climb over the trees. There was no imitation in my dancing, which would stem from formalist moves. I rejected almost all that I had 'learnt' in my dance studio years, I was looking for genuine, fresh dance expression, which stems from the vital human need to move.⁶

The photograph of Brina's performance shows dance as a creative act in a revolutionary moment, in a moment of social transformation, which was bringing a new society into existence. Her performing a modern dance before the partisans, at least in a photo that shows her pose as a revelation of truth, a *Haltung*, was indeed *poiesis* in the true sense of the word, in the Aristotelian sense, in which *poiesis* is not purely an act of will (*praxis*), but a "pro-duction into presence."⁷

For Brina, that dance was an experience of revealing the truth, which is evident from her memories of the prison days in 1943, preceding her flight to join the partisans: "Besides the deeds imposed by my sense of duty, I was still thinking of my artistic career, of improving my skill and the act that I was rehearsing at the time... Dance was fulfilling me, it comforted and also protected me. Each time when they interrogated me, I defended myself by saying that I was a dancer."⁸

2nd EXAMPLE: Zagreb, early May 1945. German and Ustasha troops are retreating from the city. Several filmmakers participate in the action of saving the filming equipment and material, which the occupation forces intend to take with them. A part of the equipment has been transported from the former building of state production into private homes, but it is impossible to hide everything. Therefore, the cameramen have taken the cameras and come out into the streets, filming the retreat of German and Ustasha convoy from Zagreb. In order to avoid suspicion, they camouflage some of the cameras behind the windowpanes or behave as if they were fleeing themselves. Sometimes they even ask the retreating soldiers to help them transport the equipment to a filming location. The whole action is coordinated by film director Branko Marjanović, who is based in the city centre and plans the locations. On May 8, the partisan forces enter the city, but the filming goes on. Mistrustful partisans occasionally stop civilians carrying cameras, but the cameramen tell them the predefined password: "Florijan knows everything!" Even though Florijan does not exist and the

6 Marta Paulin, qtd by Aldo Milohnić, "Koreografije otpora" [Choreographies of resistance], *TkH* 21 (Beograd: TkH, 2014), 18.

7 Giorgio Agamben, *The Man without Content*. Translated by Giorgio Albert (Stanford, Calif: Stanford University Press, 1999), 64.

8 Marta Paulin in Alenka Šelih, Milica G. Antić, Alenka Puhar, Tanja Rener, Rapa Šuklje, Marta Verginella, and Lidija Tavčar, *Pozabljena polovica: portreti žensk 19. in 20. stoletja na Slovenskem*. (Ljubljana: Tuma, 2007), 483.

cameramen have invented the password, a name behind the action helps regulate the situation. The cameramen are left alone. In this way, a historical document is created that is known in present-day literature as the “Liberation of Zagreb.” {FIGURES 25-28}

Everything has been filmed, documented; the object of cameraman’s attention is permanently available, evidencing the fact of a rupture, a revolution, an “event” of truth,⁹ a breakthrough with regard to the situation, the way things are. The film, like the false password naming someone called Florijan, resituates and names the event, de-constituting the community in decline and establishing another on the rise. Still, the story narrated above is indispensable for the “truthfulness” of the filmed material.

The film is apparently neutral, void of all cinematographer’s action. The main difference between the shots made before May 8, 1945 and the later ones is the fact that the documents about the retreat of troops from Zagreb are voyeur-like, filmed from behind the windowpanes, clandestinely or with great caution: they have been made by cameramen with a mission. The shots of partisans entering the city indicate uncertainty, but also show the enthusiasm of the cameramen, their camera running with the momentum, the filming operation having become an action. The shots were published in the first issue of *Filmske novosti*, a cinema journal created by our filmmakers. Prior to May 8, 1945 they were employed in the production sector of Hrvatski slikopis, an institute producing propaganda film journals for the puppet regime of Croatia. The day of the liberation of Zagreb also brought changes for the production staff. The idea behind the documentary operation became the “thought of a founding fiction, or a foundation by fiction.”¹⁰ In this way, our story has been transformed into a myth, since that fiction is the operation as such. To say it more clearly: the operation is not fiction, but its fiction (the way our story goes, the notes on the making of the first post-war film material in Croatia, the history of Croatian film that includes it, or the narrative in the margins of the film) is an operation. The story about the operation accompanying the documentary has transformed its own fiction into the “foundation or into the inauguration of *meaning* itself.”¹¹

Paradoxically, the film does not document the story about the operation, but the very way the story has been embedded in the film, that is, before it has become a narrative, presents the “*living heart of the logos*.”¹² The myth of an operation being the operation is lived and living because it was created on the very spot of the

9 Alain Badiou, *Being and Event*. Translated by Oliver Feltham (London: Continuum, 2007), xiii.

10 Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Inoperative Community*. Edited by Peter Connor. Translated by Peter Connor, Lisa Garbus, Michael Holland, and Simona Sawhney (University of Minnesota, 1990), 53.

11 Nancy, *Inoperative Community*, 53.

12 Nancy, *Inoperative Community*, 49.

event, at the site of its originating. It was created at the site where one cinematography was declining and another emerging, at the site of birth, of innovation – both social and aesthetic.

However, what ideologically rehabilitates the cameramen is their professionalization, their attitude towards work, and the director's orders that they should act as if they were reporters, professional workers, as he has stated in his memoirs. Identification of the cameraman with the reporter frees him from being identified with the object of filming, as well as from the political connotations of ideological work, both previous and new.

3rd EXAMPLE: “The Flag” (1949) was among the first feature films in the new state of Yugoslavia. It opens with a conversation between the ballerinas before their performance on Republic Day, a holiday celebrating the establishment of the state. The ballerinas talk of their stage fright and of performance as an act expressing the fullness of life. Ballerina Marija, the main protagonist of the film, tells her colleagues at the theatre how she joined the partisan movement: “You think that we should not live with all that happens around us? ... The true artist draws inspiration for his art from life. Only that way can we create something durable and valuable. You see, I was not on stage for three years. Does that mean that I did not live at the time? On the contrary...” The film continues with a retrospection of her life as a ballerina dancing on the national stage during the occupation, of being courted by a Nazi, and of her final loss of all illusions, resulting in her flight “into the woods,” as she then told to her partisan comrades: “All that was false and worthless. I know that. But what should I dance here?” {FIGURES 29-30}

Soon afterwards, we see her dancing a traditional folk dance with the partisans and the film ends with another ballet choreography, with elements of pantomime symbolizing resistance and heroism, from which the new state flag is born.

Unlike Brina in 1943, this heroine does not know what to dance among the partisans in 1949, four years after the revolution, but then opts for that which would come to incorporate the spirit of brotherhood and unity in the years after the war: folk dance and rally-ballet, the first linked to the logic of popular identity and the second to the institution of the new order and the new state. For Marija, dance is no longer a question of bringing a new expression into existence, but a representation of life, while performance is an act of will, an act of the living and willing being rather than

a revolutionary one. It is a moment in which art is brought back from the woods to the apparatus, from production to practice, from movement to statehood.

4th EXAMPLE: The last example is somewhat obscure, yet extraordinarily interesting. It is a rather unknown satirical film called “The Mystery of I.B.’s Castle,” {FIGURES 31-32} made after a one-act theatre ballet in which the entire dancing elite of Zagreb performed, the elite represented by the film’s heroine Marija. In its first part, the film uses the procedures of German expressionism and pantomime in order to depict a complot of Sovinformburo men gathered in a castle in order to devise a secret weapon against Yugoslavia after Tito said his historic “No!” to Stalin in 1949 and thus separated from the Comintern. The secret weapon coming out of the cauldron in which various poisons are concocted is called Resolution: it is a scantily dressed dancer, who seduces the workers with something like free ballet-dance movements, first at the construction site, then at the factory, and eventually on the train. What is particularly intriguing here is that dance appears as the opposite of work, which is how the third degree of transformation of the political context becomes visible – the one in which work, productivity, and economy play a crucial role. Work as a process directly linked to purely biological existence, as well as the material progress and welfare of the state, is diametrically opposed to *poiesis*, as bringing into existence is presented as a dominant and reactionary regime of representation.

- 13 Caroline Levine, *Forms: Whole, Rhythm, Hierarchy, Network* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015), 56.

Observation 3

Even if institutions are stable topographies, sedimentation is not primarily spatial and its connection to the infrastructure is of a secondary order. The institutionalization of theatrical routines and their homogenization must be viewed from the chrono-logics of theatre. In her book on *Forms*,¹³ Caroline Levine has argued that the term *instituire* combines two different meanings: 1) to cause to stand or stand up; 2) the introduction of something new, a break with the past.

The processes of instituting are thus primarily beginnings that imply long duration, while institutions are newly established ways of organizing heterogeneous materials and time, sedimented patterns of duration and repetition through time. Institutions

are the endurance of particular forms composed in rhythms, compilations of various temporal dynamics, patterns, and periods. Each theatre is a conglomerate of chronological patterns that have acquired a formal organization – elements of institutions often link material and immaterial forms of architecture, administration, repertoire calendars and timetables, working hours, modes of presentation, technology, organization of viewing, design, stylistic periods, and so on, sedimented over several epistemologically and productively different historical periods. Thus, institutions repeat the chronological patterns that render them recognizable, yet also juxtapose incommensurable rhythms in the society as a whole, which is the cause of their problematic relationship with the present, as their iterability resides in the performance of routines and norms through the practices of work, communication, movement, and appearance that are rarely or not necessarily synchronous with the rhythms of more mobile economic, social, and cultural agents.¹⁴ However, it is for this reason that institutions make it possible to view the status of work in artistic production from different angles in relation to the dominant modes of production in the society. In order to speak of differentiation in the artistic form of work as free work, one must presumably differentiate between the idea of production in art on the one side, and social reproduction, or what I will describe as anti-production, on the other. A separate question that arises is how artistic work is to be correlated with other forms of work, including practices that it comes to resemble owing to the institutions. The evolution of cultural institutions is undoubtedly linked to both the industrialization process and the post-industrial forms of organization and work. The distribution of labour in institutions has brought artistic work into a situation of synchronization and rationalization with other forms of work, those that constitute the organizational, technical, and service segments of institutions. Cultural institutions have thus been gradually synchronized with the factory model, including all of its forms of regulation, organization, and even protection of work and workers. For, as Marx wrote: “Every kind of capitalist production (...) has this in common (...) that it is not the workman that employs the instruments of labor, but the instruments of labor that employ the workman. But it is only in the factory system that this inversion for the first time acquires technical and palpable reality.”¹⁵

The factory model of institutions transfers artistic work from the model of free work into the fictional model of work as

¹⁴ Levine, *Forms*, 57-65.

¹⁵ Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*. Vol. 1. Translated by Ernest Untermann (New York: Cosimo, 2007), 462.

a commodity, and the pinnacle of that transformation occurs in projects as the forms of work in which the price of each particular segment or form of artistic work is calculable and representable in the systems of financial support, as I have argued elsewhere.¹⁶ The institution is turned into a place where “credit invades art.”¹⁷ The institution is a place of promise, not of production, and everything is possible just like in the world of capital. “When execution is replaced by credit, by a blank check, Art finds itself reduced to derisory size and, at the extreme, disappears. It disappears by becoming almost the opposite idea.”¹⁸ The art institution can be an anticipation of politics, society, or life, and finally, it can be an anticipation of art. In such an institution, the artist is indebted and he/she known his/her debt. However, his/her debt no longer belongs to the sphere of creativity, but needs to be verified in something that is its “opposite idea.” Instead of artworks, the artists’ labour has to be presented and “art has to be produced from art and artists in a manner amenable to capital. For what matters is to touch the mass of human beings (otherwise there would be no realization of art) who still haven’t internalized capital’s lifestyle, who are still more or less bound to certain rhythms, practices, superstitions, etc., and who (even if they have taken up the vertigo of capital’s rhythm of life) don’t necessarily utilize its image, and therefore live a contradiction or jarring, and are constantly exposed to ‘future shock.’”¹⁹ In project logic, the institution must become a factory, but not a factory of works of art or of interruptions; it has to be a factory of continuity, labour, and production, or rather anti-production. Production incorporating dislocation, distribution, and consummation is nothing new in the world of capitalism; this symptom was defined as early as in Marx’s *Grundrisse*,²⁰ and Deleuze and Guattari named it anti-production in their *Anti-Oedipus*.²¹ Interpreted by Stephen Zepke:

Anti-production works through all the mechanisms that prevent or recoup creative excess, whether by refusing funding or support, or by rewards that integrate it into the flows of capital. In this sense anti-production is not the opposite of production, but rather supports and develops it. As a result, the greater visibility, prosperity and integration enjoyed by the arts today does not mean they have more creative freedom. Just the opposite. (...) contemporary artistic practice marks a particular low-point in creativity and insurrectionary spirit, not least because ‘resistance’ is now aggressively marketed as one of art’s selling points.²²

- 16 Goran Sergej Pristaš, “Anti-production of Art.” *TkH, Journal for Performing Arts Theory* 23 (Belgrade, April 2016): 29-32.
- 17 Jacques Camatte, “Beaubourg et le cancer du futur” (1977); “Beaubourg: Future Cancer?” *Anarchy: A Journal of Desire Armed* (Fall/Winter 1997–1998): 52–55.
- 18 Caillois qtd in Camatte, “Beaubourg et le cancer du future.”
- 19 Caillois qtd in Camatte, “Beaubourg et le cancer du future.”
- 20 Karl Marx, *Grundrisse*. Translated by David McLellan (London: Macmillan, 1980).
- 21 Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. Translated by Robert Hurley, Mark Seem, Helen R. Lane (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000).
- 22 Stephen Zepke, *Schizo-revolutionary Art; Deleuze, Guattari and Communitisation Theory*, forthcoming.

The classical difference between the two fundamental forms of human activity – *poiesis* and *praxis* – has been progressively blurred by bringing in a third notion, namely work. Work was the lowest form in the classical Greek hierarchy, yet today it occupies the central position of value, becoming a common denominator for all sorts of human activities, as Giorgio Agamben has indicated in his interpretation of Hannah Arendt:

This ascent begins at the moment when Locke discovers in work the origin of property, continues when Adam Smith elevates it to the source of all wealth, and reaches its peak with Marx, who makes of it the expression of man's very humanity. At this point, all human 'doing' is interpreted as *praxis*, as concrete productive activity (in opposition to theory, understood as a synonym of thought and abstract meditation), and *praxis* is conceived in turn as starting from work, that is, from the production of material life that corresponds to life's biological cycle.²³

The fact that the discourse on the modes of creation (*poiesis*) has been overshadowed by the one in which the borders between *praxis* as an act of free will and artistic work have been blurred indicates that poetic clarity has been substituted for economic rationalization. At the same time, another form of rationalization has been intensifying this obscuring tendency, as Jacques Rancière has argued, as the aesthetic revolution that rejects the poetic regime for the benefit of the aesthetic one tends to interpret *poiesis* normatively, as a regime of representation, "an ordered set of relations between what can be seen and what can be said, knowledge and action, activity and passivity."²⁴

However, the aesthetic regime is an ironical one, in which "art is art to the extent that it is something else than art."²⁵ Such an ironic fate, which rises beyond nihilism by negation, was called by Hegel "Nichtiges in seinem Sich Vernichten."²⁶

But *terra aesthetica* is a desert through which man wanders when he is separated from the origin of the artwork as such, as it is only in the poetic act that "artists and spectators recover their essential solidarity and their common ground."²⁷ The alienation that separates art from its poetic power abolishes the possibility of man's encounter with his capacity for acting and knowing. Man's poetic capacity to bring things to existence also gives him,

23 Agamben, *The Man without Content*, 70.

24 Jacques Rancière, *The Aesthetic Unconscious*. Translated by Debra Keates and James Swenson (Cambridge: Polity, 2009), 21.

25 Jacques Rancière, *Dis-sensus On Politics and Aesthetics*. Translated by Steve Corcoran (London: Continuum, 2010), 118.

26 Georgia Albert translates it as "a self-annihilating nothing" in Agamben, *The Man Without Content*, 52.

27 Agamben, *The Man Without Content*, 102.

according to Agamben, the capacity of *praxis*, of free and willing action. That power, “the most uncanny power,”²⁸ has been given to man by means of engaging in rhythm, since “in the work of art the continuum of linear time is broken, and man recovers, between past and future, his present space.”²⁹

In Agamben’s interpretation, rhythm causes a break in the linear flow of time, temporarily capturing the spectator in time and making him/her float in the suspension of continuity in an uninterrupted series of moments that have sailed in from the past and will be sunk in the future. An artwork puts us into a chronological interstice that is not timelessness, since it has a rhythmical character, the character of a musical beat, a period, or an epoch, ἐποχή. Coming back to the topologies of institutions, their polyrhythmic nature has a predisposition for “epochal” displacement. Their duration is marked by periods, while the new institutions, with their new attitude towards art production, potentially open up new periods, new displacements (ἔκστασις), and new reserves, which keep people together and at the same time offer the possibility of a breakthrough into the present. However, what is necessary is to change the attitude towards the work of art, as its purpose is no longer to accelerate the progress of thought, but rather to give it a turn, to posit it as a problem instead of searching for an result.³⁰ The way downwards (*kata-*), implying the notion of *katastrophe*, must be liberated from the trajectory defined by *katastasis* in order to bring the present and displacement (*ekstasis*) into the problem by means of a turn (*strophe*).

²⁸ Agamben, *The Man Without Content*, 101.

²⁹ Agamben, *The Man Without Content*, 102.

³⁰ Cf. Agamben’s letter in William Watkin, *The Literary Agamben: Adventures in Logopoiesis* (London: Continuum, 2010), 201.

**On Banishing Socrates' Wife:
The Interiority of the Ear in
*Phaedo***

Julie Beth Napolin

In William Faulkner's *As I Lay Dying*, the voice of Addie Bundren suddenly appears in the middle of the book to speak to us after her death. Her family had been tending to the steady transformation of her body into a corpse. They now must transport her in the midst of a torrential rain to a distant town for burial. In a novel composed of discrete interior monologues, we had been granted access to the characters' thoughts while also having been conspicuously barred from the outer and inner voices of "Addie," but only until a single section is finally interposed after her death. It is neither her last words nor an inner monologue on the threshold of death—the body that would claim to host such a voice has passed away. Faulkner will not describe the location from which she speaks. In this, her only monologue, she will comment on the voice's incommensurability, that words are "a shape to fill a lack" and "don't ever fit even what they are trying to say at."¹ Words are "just the gaps in people's lacks, coming down like the cries of the geese out of the wild darkness in the old terrible nights, fumbling at the deeds like orphans to whom are pointed out in a crowd two faces and told, That is your father, your mother."²

We know from Plato's *Phaedrus* that written words are "orphaned" and must call upon the support of (but cannot hope to locate) a missing "father." There is, in Plato's lexicon, no "mother" of the voice, only the anonymous mother of the world that hosts the space or airy background for words' appearance.

Has Addie survived her death to speak to us? To survive one's own death is to find the impossible pleasure of total revenge. Her final wish, that her corpse be brought to the distant town of Jefferson, Mississippi, is also revenge upon her family—they must carry the coffin over a river whose bridge has been washed away by a powerful flood. In introducing her voice, Faulkner introduces the possibility that she may survive her own death to enjoy the suffering of her survivors. They must cope with the brute burden of her corpse. This is the impasse of many fantasies of suicide: one would no longer be there to see the suffering of those who made one suffer. Thought cannot go beyond that desire for witnessing, a darker version of the proof of existence of the cogito: one cannot think unthinking.

Addie's enunciating instance thrusts before us the irrefutable reality of a corpse. There in the center of enunciative form its own contrary lies. On the other side of her monologue, the others go on talking, as if there is not some terrible stench. The novel's reality carries on perfectly unmarred. What death teaches in *As*

1 William Faulkner, *As I Lay Dying*, New York: Vintage International, 1990, 171.

2 *Ibid.*, 174.

I Lay Dying is the emergence of the speaking subject out of the displacement of the mother as the primary other. We might say that Addie's dead body is the condition of the novel's very claim to transparency and language.

I would like to show how this is the case in an ancient way. Plato's *Phaedo* documents the death and last argument of Socrates, one that confirms his theory of the soul's immortality and asserts that philosophy is the practice of dying. The dialogue is framed as Phaedo repeating the story of his friend's final hours and views concerning knowledge as recollection of what the soul gleaned before embodiment. Phaedo repeats the story to Echecrates who was not present for Socrates' death. The structure of the dialogue raises the dead and gives the words of Socrates out of the mouth of Phaedo. When Echecrates asks who else was present in those final hours, Phaedo somewhat astonishingly remarks that Plato, if he remembers correctly, was not there; he was "not strong enough to attend."³ Nicole Loraux remarks of this moment, "behind this narrator with the faulty memory stands Plato the writer."⁴ As Phaedo reports the story, gradually the frame disappears and one is able to forget Phaedo's mediating voice. It is Socrates himself, Loraux continues,

who does the most to persuade us of the truth of the *Phaedo*: the truth of the philosopher's last moments, which this dialogue stages so imaginatively that the reader feels he is actually present; also, the truth of the arguments in favor of the immortality of the soul, which rather depend on Socrates' presence to carry conviction. ... [T]he person and the *logos* of Socrates mutually reinforce one another.⁵

Indeed, conviction or *pistis* (in Christian traditions understood as "faith") is not a logical experience, but an emotional artifact produced and recognized by the body. Though it would seem to be prior to language, conviction was thought in ancient rhetoric to be generated by language and vocal delivery. For Plato, *pistis* is also a pre-philosophical state of belief, untested by argument; it is the brute fact or experience of belief one needs to survive.⁶ We might view conviction as the corpse or "dead object" one not only lives with, but embodies. It is to feel in the gut. From a rhetorical perspective, it is to be compelled to embodied belief. It is crucial that *pistis* is a fundamentally relational artifact when rhetorically defined. It is wrought in the body, not in the mind, by the tones of another. The other is with somatic impact.

- 3 Plato, *Phaedo*. Translated by Eva Brann et al., Newburyport: Focus Publishing, 1998. Cited hereafter in text.
- 4 Nicole Loraux, "Therefore, Socrates Is Immortal" in *Fragments for a History of the Human Body, Part Two*. Edited by Michel Feher. Brooklyn: Zone Books, 1989, 31.
- 5 *Ibid.*, 31-32.
- 6 I am grateful to Joseph Lemelin for his assistance with ancient Greek and for many discussions of ancient philosophy that took place while I was a Mellon Fellow in Civic Liberal Arts at Eugene Lang College in fall 2015.

Plato distinguishes between words related to *pistis* (belief, conviction) and those related to *didaskein* (instruction and learning). Here, we must turn to P. Christopher's Smith's grossly ignored recuperation of the hermeneutics of embodied argument and, with it, a material impulse prior to Aristotle's denigration of the acoustical.⁷ *Pistis* or conviction, Smith writes, "concerns things wholly incidental and ancillary to argument, whereas the second set [related to instruction and learning] concerns only that things that are essential to it."⁸ *Pistis* originates in the material basis of an oral argument: it is grounded in the tone of the voice that compels one to a state of pre-cognitive belief.

A sonorous materiality, which had been all important in Aristotle's *Rhetoric*, is incidental to the *Poetics*' fetishism of structure. To become itself—an idealized whole—structure must marginalize auditory experience and its ritualistic elements. As the sounds of words become less important, so too does the acoustical realm, particularly as it gives rise to questions of movement, space, and the somatic. Thus I suggested that words for Plato are with father, but no mother, as the incidental space (*chora*) through which the *logos* appears.⁹ Sounds, but also the space of sounding, are mere material hosts. To eliminate the acoustical is to eliminate the problem of a gap between or around realities. We might say, after Trinh T. Minh-ha, "death strolls between images."¹⁰

The essential movement of the *Poetics*, a work at odds with itself and with contrary tendencies, is to reconstruct the theory of tragedy on the premise of structure. Smith reminds us that, in a dual impulse, tragedy in Aristotle remains a "ritual reenactment for an audience (*akouontes*) [from *akouō*, to hear], themselves caught up in the rhythms and cadences of the voices that they hear."¹¹ This earlier understanding of tragedy still operates within the *Poetics*, but only in displaced form, along the margins of an "exposition of tragedy as representation for spectators (*theôretes*) looking on from a distance and surveying a logical 'whole.'"¹² The entire aim of Nietzsche's *The Birth of Tragedy* is to wrest tragedy away from the logicians and posit the chorus as the womb out of which phenomenal appearance is born. Nietzsche redeems a repressed "aesthetic listener."¹³ But, as I will return to, *chorus* is gendered masculine in Greek, and despite its movements and tones, we are thrown back into a listening without dimension as the feminine principle of support that appears only to disappear.

All sonorous transmission calls upon what Plutarch calls the "ambiguity of listening."¹⁴ This ancillary or brute material can

7 This shift in Aristotle has also been richly traced and critiqued by the work of Adriana Cavarero. She names Aristotle's separation of *logos* from its dependency on sound the "devocalization of *logos*." See *For More than One Voice*. Translated by Paul Kottman. Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 2005, 33-41.

8 Christopher P. Smith, *The Hermeneutics of Original Argument: Demonstration, Dialectic, Rhetoric*. Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1998, 235.

9 See Julia Kristeva, *Revolution in Poetic Language*. Translated by Margaret Waller. New York: Columbia University Press, 1984. Also see Jacques Derrida, "Khôra," in *On The Name*. Edited by Thomas Dutoit. Translated by David Wood, John P. Leavey, Jr., and Ian McLeod. Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 1995, 89-130.

10 Trinh T. Minh-ha, *When the Moon Waxes Red: Representation, Gender, and Cultural Politics*. New York: Routledge, 1991, 57.

11 Smith, *Hermeneutics*, 272.

12 *Ibid.*, 272.

never be shed fully. Listening is the most *pathetikos* and the most *logikos* of the senses. Only the ear can receive the *logos*, but it is the same medium of *pathos*. The ear must be trained, as Plutarch describes, to purge or not to admit what is *pathetikos* in the course of transmission. The ear is fundamentally split, a divided organ that both receives and shuns. We will find occasion to return to this split ear in a moment. Here we might simply say that the ear is trained in ancient thought to omit spatiality and to concentrate its attentive energy on the *logos*.

We have remarked on Socrates' willingness to die or his notion that philosophy is the practice of dying. In *Crito*, his friends meet him in jail to implore him to escape, an idea he rejects in his devotion to the law, which has also mandated his death. Socrates, the court maintains, is an atheist and sullies the minds of young men, but the court also maintains he is a follower of what his prosecutor calls "strange gods," or *kairon daimonen*. How can he be both an atheist and the follower of deities? In the *Apology*, Socrates states: "I...go around seeking and investigating in accordance with the god...I come to the god's aid...because of my devotion to the god...the god stationed me...ordering me to live philosophizing and examining myself and others..."¹⁵ Socrates' strange god, with him since childhood, comes to him in the form of an inner voice that others cannot hear: "...a sort of voice (*phônê*) comes, which, whenever it does come, always holds me back from what I am about to do but never urges me forward."¹⁶ We do not have here the *logos* as defined by Aristotle in the *Poetics* (as *phone semantike*) where his notion of the semantic, Adriana Cavarero describes, still requires the material vehicle of sonorousness before being abandoned for silent thought.¹⁷ The *daimon* is phonetic, but not semantic. It is closer to sound than to speech; one wonders if this voice "speaks" at all, or if it is not instead an activity suspended just before speech, a holding back. I am reminded of the *tacet* direction in a musical score indicating that an instrument should "keep quiet" (from *tacere* or verbal silence, not to be confused with *silere*, the absence of noise linked also to the silence of the dead).¹⁸ The *daimon*, as a "sort of voice," is silent; it cannot be heard as such. And yet it is somehow other from this order of keeping quiet and other from the order of conviction as untested or tacit belief.

We should remember that Socrates, in listening to his *daimon* that cannot be heard by others, engages in the crime of a "moral reformation" of the state's deities:

13 Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy: Out of the Spirit of Music*. Translated by Shaun Whiteside, New York: Penguin, 1993, 107. Smith argues that the radical conclusion to be derived from Nietzsche's early thought is the dependence of speech upon *phone*. "It is this primary acoustical experience that Nietzsche alone, not Heidegger, not Derrida, and not even Gadamer, recovers for us" (Smith, *Hermeneutics*, 306). I would suggest that even Nietzsche fails to help us recover a feminine principle.

14 See Michel Foucault's discussion of Plutarch's treatise "On Listening" in *The Hermeneutics of the Subject*. Translated by Graham Burchell, New York: Picador, 2005, 331-354.

15 Qtd. in Mark L. McPherran, "Introducing a New God: Socrates and His *Daimonion*" in *Socrates' Divine Sign: Religion, Practice, and Value in Socratic Philosophy*. Edited by Pierre Desirée and Nicolas D. Smith. Academic Printing and Publishing, 2005, 114.

16 *Ibid.*, 114.

17 See Cavarero, 33-41.

...his gods cannot be fully identified with those of popular tradition. For Greek popular thought assumed as a fundamental principle from Homer on that justice consists in reciprocation, in repayment in kind: a gift for a gift, an evil for an evil (the *lex talionis*).¹⁹

One displays these reciprocations before and with the gods. Socrates' true crime, we might say, is the interiorization of the deity's voice, and with it, the ear that receives it. One performs publically for the gods to ward off their wrath. The strange voice that drives Socrates to philosophize cannot be displayed in acts of sacrifice; it does not participate in the economy of retribution. I would suggest that, as an *activity*, it is beyond the scope of action. It is non-retributive, unritualistic, and without any sphere. I am thinking of the way in which, today, the listener of headphones has absolute sovereignty over the space between the headphone and the eardrum, a space so reduced, so minor, that it becomes an entire world. This is a daimonic space.

Socrates' daimon is the first truly autonomous voice and ear, the individual splitting off by way of "my voice" for me and no other. Therein lies the perceived strangeness of his god. Socrates is no atheist, but a religious man, and prayers often intercede in Plato's renderings of Socratic voice. How to reconcile the strange voice within this frame? It is a moment of splitting off, of historic separation.

For, even as he dissents, Socrates remains a loyal citizen. In *Phaedo*, he asserts not only that his death will be at the hands of the state, but also that suicide is unethical. He would rather be killed than kill himself; he will act in accordance with the laws of Athens. Critics have remarked upon this time and again. Socrates willingly dies, and philosophy is the non-retributive practice of learning to die, of preparing the soul to depart the prison of the body. But what of his particular unwillingness to die that arises in this moment amongst his disciples? This unwillingness is not owed to what Nietzsche calls Socrates' "decadence," a phrase related to his translation of Socrates' final words in *Twilight of the Idols*: "to live—that means to be sick a long time."²⁰ In telling the story, *Phaedo* explains to Echechrates that the executioner had advised Socrates to cease talking because talk warms the body, which slows the poison. Socrates will have to drink it several times as a consequence, the executioner had said.

18 Roland Barthes locates two movements of the silence of *tacere*, that of the discreet man and that of the skeptic who has a moral obligation to withhold or refrain from a position. The ecological claim to a right to silence or to be rid of noise, Barthes argues, fails to address the true pollutant, which is speech. See *The Neutral*. Translated by Rosalind Krauss and Denis Hollier. New York: Columbia University Press, 2005, 21-26.

19 Mark L. McPerran, "Socratic Religion" in *Cambridge Companion to Religion*. Edited by Donald R. Morrison. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011, 119.

20 Friedrich Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols and the Anti-Christ*. Translated by Michael Tanner, New York: Penguin, 1990, 40.

Socrates is unwilling to stop talking; he prefers a slow death. “Let him be! Just have him prepare his potion and be ready to give twice and, if he must, even three times” (Ph.63e4-6). Just before the guard’s note of instruction, Cebes had asked why Socrates says, “it isn’t lawful for [a man] to do violence to himself, but the philosopher should be willing to follow after somebody who’s dying” (Ph.61d3-5). In the midst of this conversation on the rightness of suicide, Socrates touches his feet to the ground and remains in that position of sitting for the remainder of the dialogue: he occupies the space of staying, of slow death. He takes the corpse pose, as it were, while also refusing to silence himself in a way that will defer the action of the poison. He separates his body from his voice, the body in the attitude of death and the voice in the attitude of living—it is his voice that the dialogue will position as living on after death.²¹

The voice and the image here become separated from each other, only to be virtually reintegrated by Descartes’ act of meditation, something we’ve always suspected to be a bit of a perverse suture. Characteristically, Socrates then asks Cebes, in response to the question of suicide, if he had ever heard Philolaus speak on this topic. Socrates has always found his words elsewhere, a lover of talk, a tissue of quotations. Cebes responds that he never much understood Philolaus. It is in this moment that the body of Socrates takes on the pose of death. “Now certainly I too speak of them only from hearsay. What I happen to have heard, however, I don’t begrudge telling” (Ph.61d9-10). Hearsay is a voice separated from a source. Does not Plato slowly extract the voice from the body of his master to assume it for himself? This is, of course, Plato’s project as enacted across the dialogues, but here the operation is performed as the condition of possibility for Platonic textuality. In *Phaedrus*, Socrates covers his head before he will allow himself to recite a divinely inspired speech in front of the young boy. We might recall how Pierre Schaeffer will later mythologize a blind listening practice of the Pythagoreans, the *akousmatikoi* who Schaeffer supposes listened to the master from behind a veil (both interlocutors, Cebes and Echecrates, are Pythagoreans).²²

The acousmatic voice brings with it void. This voice is dangerous, not in being “disembodied,” as is often described, but in *seeking* a body and floating about in space. The experience of what Michel Chion calls “the not-yet-seen”²³ voice brings with it fantasy. But from an ancient perspective, it is the activity of *Eros*,

21 If I have, in my own telling, moved from the past tense to the present sense, it is because that move is encouraged by the Platonic text itself.

22 See “Acousmatics” in *Audio Culture*. Edited by Christoph Cox and Daniel Warner. New York: Continuum, 2003, 76-81. Also see Brian Kane, “Myth and the Origin of the Pythagorean Veil,” in *Sound Unseen: Acousmatic Sound in Theory and Practice*, New York: Oxford, 2014, 45-72.

23 Michel Chion, *The Voice in Cinema*. Translated by Claudia Gorbman, New York: Columbia University Press, 1999, 23. Even Chion focuses on disembodiment, a limitation in his argument.

an originary and mediating force. This force is immortalized in the ambiguity of the Sirens who, though seen and heard by Odysseus, are not fully known or experienced. Full experience only leads to death; men's corpses, it is said, have piled up on the Sirens' island. If one cannot survive hearing the song, then the song cannot be transmitted as such. In transcribing the Sirens, Homer's text plays Faulkner's same trick. He translates what remains on the other side of visualization and the *episteme* (in Greek, simply a "frame" or "view"). Do the Sirens kill after luring men with the sweetness of their song? Do men forgo nourishment and bodily survival in the presence of their song? We are not able to say. We do learn in the *Phaedrus* that cicada song is issued by former men who perished for their love of song, a dying into song that was rewarded by the Muses in the gift of reincarnation and incessant sound. Homer does not answer the question of force, of what has drawn men to the Sirens and what has killed them. The sweetness of the Sirens' song—their sophistry—promises all time, for they promise to tell Odysseus the past, the present, and the future, to remove the void at the heart of experience. What is the heart of darkness from which their sound emanates? Odysseus' subjectivity is split by his desire to hear and then return. He returns from the experience from which no one is meant to return, that cannot be properly witnessed. Recast as myth, the otherness of desire is dispelled. Odysseus imagines himself able to keep the song for himself in his own autonomous ear.

Nonetheless, on the other side of their song persists the question of the corpse. It is the haunting remainder of the Sirens' unnarrateable discord. The corpse is the shape of hexameter's conceit. The discord of Siren song is the origin in death from which Odysseus historically separates. So too Aristotle claims that Chaos (*Χάος*) and Night could not have been at the beginning of things (in Greek, chaos or chasm is sonorous in its implications, literally a primal *discord*). It is in this context that Aristotle argues that potentiality is not prior to actuality, that in the beginning, there was substance and first motion. I will turn to this problem of origin in discord a moment. It pulses throughout the *Phaedo* in displaced form, the only possible position for the corpse.

The words and teachings of Socrates are immortalized as Plato's, the insemination and dissemination, as Jacques Derrida might say, that Plato will call dialectic. It founds the very motion of the Academy, of teaching living on, as disembodied voices of masters are re-embodied and reanimated. The corpse disappears

from view. Surrounding Socrates in his slow death are his disciples who will carry the voice on for him after death: it is the primal scene of academicization and institutionalized speech.

Recall that *Phaedo* is a framed tale, a missed encounter. Socrates has already died, and Phaedo has come to deliver the news. Echecrates had implored Phaedo to tell what happened as exactly as possible; he wants nothing from that scene that he missed, as if by accident, to be lost (Ph.58d2-4). What Echecrates wants is to have been there. That is what it means for Phaedo to claim to reanimate the voice of Socrates. Phaedo remarks, “to remember Socrates is ever the most pleasant of all things—at least for me—whether I myself do the speaking or listen to somebody else” (Ph.58d6-8). Again, Echecrates implores Phaedo to be as exact as he can. Exact replication. This is no mere recollection, but an incantation of the soul by way of the voice. This is a séance. But it is one that removes precarity from the scene and converts it from having been a scene of loss. If nothing was lost, nothing must be regained in new form.

Hannah Arendt notes in *The Human Condition* that no one survives her supreme act; the supreme act is a suicidal mission that necessarily hands the life-narrative over to others. If speech and action together form a fundamental unit for Arendt, then in the supreme act they become separate, the acting body no longer speaking on its behalf. It hands over its voice to others who become responsible for telling the story. One cannot guarantee that such a narrative will fit or encapsulate the agent. There is a precarity within the supreme act, for in the same moment one becomes an agent, one relinquishes that status totally. Agency cannot be permanent or else it is despotism. It is timely and temporal; it belongs to the realm of *kairos*, as the opportune moment or passing occasion.²⁴ In the corpse pose, Socrates plays a ghastly trick; he plays dead, as it were, ensuring that the final discourse belonging to the supreme act will be spoken in his own voice. He maintains control over the *logos* to master the dissemination of his supreme act. He does the unthinkable: he tells his own story after death. He becomes a ventriloquist.

It is said that Plato, so disgusted by the immorality of Socrates’ state-mandated death, disappeared for a time before returning to found the Academy of Athens. We can think about this dialogue as dramatizing a reappearing act, the beginnings of what we continue to call the academy. A primal scene or beginning.

²⁴ On the original meaning of *kairos*, see Detienne, 112, 116.

I want now to turn to a passing moment when Socrates' wife is asked to leave the space of dialogue, a dramatization of the disambiguation of listening, the separation of *logos* from *pathos*, the soul from somatic instance. Xanthippe often goes unnamed and forgotten in critical discourse, known simply "Socrates' wife:"

We hadn't waited for a long time when he came and told us to go in. So we went in and caught Socrates just freed from his bonds and Xanthippe—you know her—holding his little boy and seated beside him. Now when Xanthippe saw us, she cried out and then said just the sort of thing women usually say: "Socrates, now's the last your companions will talk to you and you to them!" And Socrates gave Crito a look and said: "Crito, have somebody take her home." (Ph.59e8-60a6).

They banish Xanthippe as the trace of the grief they cannot express if they are to occupy the realm of philosophy, constructed as it is by the space of talk or *muthos*. Women talk, but do not speak.²⁵ She was there, but not as a disciple in the space of dialogue—she remains embedded in the margins of fiction, described and then displaced. She is escorted off the stage. Where does Xanthippe go? In a final gesture before returning at the end of the dialogue, as if a shell to its kernel, she beats her breast, the gesture that seems to localize, figure, and contain all that Socrates will go on to discard from theory of the soul. She has a right to be angry. Sometimes there are no words, and one must beat one's breast and cry out.

The foundation of the city, as has been established in various accounts of the *Republic*, is also founded upon banishment, or what Ramona Naddaff calls "exiling the poets."²⁶ If the soul and city are in such perfect mutual figuration, one that will admit of no distance or relay—the acoustical spatiality of relay in resonance—then the soul is founded upon exile. This exile is dramatized nowhere more vividly than in banishing Socrates' wife from the scene of the last argument.

We know that we must attend to Plato's props, the dramaturgy of scenes as they are elaborated just before they disappear to become the site of dialogue, its host where words alone manifest. It is there that Derrida finds the *pharmakon* hiding in the off-hand remark about playing with the nymph Pharmacia or the winds of Boreas. It is there that we found the cicadas singing

25 Hélène Cixous writes, "...they do utter a little, but they don't speak. Always keep in mind the distinction between speaking and talking. It is said, in philosophical texts, that women's weapon is the word, because they talk, talk endlessly, chatter, overflow with sound, mouth-sound: but they don't actually *speak*, they have nothing to say. They always inhabit the place of silence, or at most, make it echo with their singing. And neither is to their benefit, for they remain outside knowledge." "Castration or Decapitation." *Signs* 7.1. (1981), 49. Also see Mary Beard, "The Public Voice of Women." *London Review of Books* 36.6. (2014), 11-14.

26 Ramona Naddaff, *Exiling the Poets: The Production of Censorship in Plato's Republic*. University of Chicago Press, 2002.

their droning song and spying on Socrates in the *Phaedrus*. What's more, such banishment is externally dramatized, taking the shape of scenography as such: embodied figures now stand in for the disembodied. The birth of the figure. It is in this process that the dialogue conducts its ultimate sleight of hand, transferring the dying master's discourse to Phaedo who stands in for the missing body of Plato. The insensible must be made sensible within the space of discourse. It is in the props, in the proscenium and scaffolding of dramatization that the figures functioning to support the argument are both constructed and discarded, but not without troubling remainders.

Banishment functions centrally in the theory of contraries as laid out in the *Phaedo* and elsewhere. One proof for the immortality of the soul is that it is contrary to death, that opposites will not admit their opposite. As Socrates explains through the figure of enumeration, "contraries would never be willing to receive a coming-to-be from one another" (Ph.103c2-3). He continues:

the three just now, though not contrary to the Even, does not for all that admit it, for the three always brings the contrary to bear against it, as does the two against the Odd and fire against the Cold, and as do a great many other things. Now see if this is how you'd mark it off: The contrary isn't alone in not admitting its contrary; there's also what brings some contrary to bear on that thing that comes at it; in other words, there's the thing itself that brings some contrary to bear, which thing never admits the contrariety of the thing it brings its contrary to bear on. Go back and recollect—it does no harm to hear it often. Five things won't admit the idea of Even, nor will ten (five doubled) admit the idea of the Odd. Now ten itself isn't contrary to anything, but nevertheless it won't admit the idea of the Odd. (Ph.104e10-105a11)

Just as the even cannot admit the odd, the soul cannot admit death; it is immortal. "Will not admit" is the common translation across many of Plato's texts for this form of demonstration that proves exact contraries. In the poetically inspired or divine truth before the secularization of speech, however, the conditions were otherwise. As Marcel Detienne writes, "there can be no *Alētheia* without a measure *Lēthē* [oblivion]."²⁷ "Negativity is not isolated from Being. It borders the truth and forms its inseparable shadow. The two antithetical powers are thus not contradictory but tend toward each

²⁷ Marcel Detienne, *The Masters of Truth in Archaic Greece*. Translated by Janet Lloyd. Brooklyn: Zone Books, 1996, 81.

other. The positive tends toward the negative, which, in a way, ‘denies’ it but cannot maintain itself in its absence.”²⁸

Yet, Socrates’ theory of admittance must be related to a physical border. To admit, or *dechomai* (δέχομαι), is to accept, but in the manner of receiving or giving warm welcome, as in a home. To welcome, but in middle voice, so highly related to the self that is acting upon itself. Indeed *auto* appears in Plato’s original phrasing: that which will not admit into itself. The force of keeping out is not outside of the Even, but within it and maintains itself without any other support. *Dechomai* includes both the active and passive states: to give and receive hospitality. Positioned on either side, it gives and receives.²⁹ If, as John Llewelyn notes, “*chōreō* means to make room for another by withdrawing,”³⁰ then we might say it shows something of the ethical and physical boundary that constitutes the act of listening. *Dechomai* is “to give ear to.”³¹

I am reminded of a different border in the *Republic*, one that establishes the *polis* as homologous with the soul. It is well known that in Book VII, Socrates imagines a man who could imitate anything, a charmer and musician, a player of the many-stringed instrument who could bend his voice in the most dazzling and deceptive of ways. What if he were to appear in the city? Socrates describes a scene of sanctification and sacrament. They would kneel down before and garland this man as a god just before saying that there is *no room* for such a man in the city. It is not that such a man does not *exist*, but rather that he *cannot be admitted*.³² The scene concerns turning the poet away, as if at the borders of the city. Admittance of the soul, then, turns out to be related in figurative and figuring ways to the presence of music and poetry, or sacred speech, in the city, the soul continually visualized as an accepting body.

In the same semantic field of *dechomai*, we find the masculine-gendered *chorus* and the feminine-gendered *chora*, originally the name of a district of Lower Egypt, a territory, remarkably enough, outside of the city walls. Its name was mobilized by Plato as the word for a maternal receptacle or nurse, the space that allows for but cannot retain Forms. This choric space is lent in Kristeva’s monumental reading of Plato’s *Timaeus* the feminine status of rhythm and pure semiosis.³³

The feminization of the space outside of dialogue turns upon these various forms of admittance and banishment.³⁴ Acceptance or admittance (in the English-language turn of phrase) has two meanings, and these meanings must be located in this principle of

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 82.

²⁹ See John Llewelyn, *Margins of Religion: Between Kierkegaard and Derrida*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2008, 278. Also see Barbara Cassin’s entry on *doxa* in *Dictionary of Untranslatable: A Philosophical Lexicon*. Edited by Barbara Cassin, Emily Apter, Jacques Lezra, and Michael Wood. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014, 228. Cassin notes that *doxa* is from *dokeō*, “to appear,” and is in the same family as *dechomai*. *Doxa* is “one of the most polysemic Greek words.”

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 278. “Choreography” is one derivative of *chōreō*. It recalls the importance of movement and dance in Nietzsche’s theory of the somatic dimension of hearing (Smith, *Hermeneutics*, 354, fn. 1). There are still more associations in Heidegger. I cannot account here for the importance of “making room” in his thought of space, which is a preoccupation in *Being and Time*, in his writings on Parmenides, and throughout his late work. In “Art and Space” (1969) he writes, “How does clearing-away [*Räumen*] happen? Is it not

dechomai, difference excised from logic. *Dechomai*, we might say, is the principle of ambiguity, because such admittance, or what we also call acceptance, is the state in which contraries abide. In acceptance, a contrary is allowed a place and warm welcome inside. It is not subsumed, but persists in its status as other. In isolating ambiguity as the sophistic principle, we thus turn on what it means to admit death. The space that claims to be a practice of dying turns out to be the one that secures eternal life. To admit, to accept.

It is just after Xanthippe is not admitted that Socrates invokes the recurring dream and intimation of his *daimon*, which demands that he “make music.” Nearing death and in “obedience to the dream,” he quickly composes a few lines of verse. It is, however, a composition made in obedience and without serious thought that he should have lived otherwise. Socrates, in order to continue his own project, must ignore the literal dimension of what the *daimon* demands. Nietzsche calls attention to this moment to suggest that indeed, the *daimon* might be saying, make music, you fool! Even in death, Socrates will not acknowledge the ambiguity of listening. The most beautiful music he could have made, he says, is philosophy. If there is a rhetorical act within this final moment, it is at the level of narrative: this is a man who can only listen in one direction at once, whose life’s work has been to purify the *logos* of the body. Even in his last moment he is deaf to the possibility that his own mode of listening has been falsely construed. He purges from the voice of the *daimon* what he cannot allow. He listens univocally, for in death, there can be no paranoia, only absolute repose that life has been correctly lived.

The *daimon* is ambiguous, both divine and mortal, and we have seen how it is both sound and silence. In the *Cratylus*, Socrates theorizes an etymology of the *daimon* that is consistent with this project of expurgation, noting there that the word *daimōn* (*δαίμων* or “deity”) is synonymous with *daēmōn* (*δαίμων* or “wise”). However, it is closer to *daiō* (*δαίω* or “learn” but also “divide”). Giorgio Agamben considers the *daimon* according to its root in the verb *daiomai*, “to divide, lacerate,”³⁵ but he locates a subsequent, rather than simultaneous, development in meaning as distribution and allotment.³⁶ The *daimon*, Walter Burkert also writes, is not so much “a specific class of divine beings, but a peculiar mode of activity.”³⁷ As an activity, the *daimon* is without image; there is no figure and no cult. It changes not in face, but in activity.

Does not divine rapport become with Socrates a purely inward and self-reflexive act? I suggested that Socrates’ true crime

making-room [Einräumen], and this again in a twofold manner as granting and arranging [Zulassens und das Einrichtens]? First, making-room admits something [Einmal gibt das Einräumen etwas zu]” (Martin Heidegger, “Art and Space.” Translated by Charles Siebert. Kluwer Academic Publishers, 6). It is important to note that in Heidegger’s discussion, there is no issue of exclusion, except in sculpture, which is constituted by making a border in space. My point will be that phenomenal opening is also a closing or marginalization.

31 Ibid., 278.

32 I mean to imply the oblique presence of *dechomai* in this act of receiving followed by refusing.

33 I cannot address fully the significance of Kristeva’s account, but I depart on at least one central point, that maternity and woman are bound. I draw attention to the sophistic ambiguity of *chora*, a placeless place of transformation. If it is pure semiosis, then it is without ontological determination.

34 In overhearing the talk of men, the cicadas are feminized. Odysseus

is to interiorize the ear. His *daimon* functions as the activity of interiorization.

We can see, for example, one origin of Augustine's "mouth of the heart" that speaks in advance of speech and is heard with this inward ear. A lie, for Augustine, is told with inner lips (I lie even when I accidentally speak the truth). Phaedo dramatizes the labor by which the "voice"—not as sonorous substance, but as union of inner mouth and ear—is interiorized, an object to which no one else can attest and which speaks in advance of speech.³⁸ Socrates refuses the occult division and distribution enacted by the *daimon*. If the *daimon* were to pronounce outwardly and make itself audible as a voice for others, it would be with and as the force of sophistic speech. As ambiguous speech, functioning outside of the dictates of being and nonbeing, the voice of the *daimon* would speak out loud only to deconstitute its claim to identity. That is the Sirenic discord Homeric meter belies. The *daimon*, as activity, finds its essence not in *saying*, but in a *sound* that is dividing and ambiguating. The *daimon* is not visible to oneself, but only audible; it thus occupies *the* realm and modality of ambiguity. The peculiar nature of the *daimon* is to be behind one's back, visible only to others.³⁹ In *Apology*, Plato notes that the voice of the *daimon* is never prescriptive, only prohibitive. Similarly in *Phaedrus*: "My friend, I was just about to cross the river, the familiar divine sign came to me which, whenever it occurs, holds me back from something I am about to do. I thought I have heard a voice coming from this very spot, forbidding me to leave until I made atonement for some offense against the gods" (Ph. 242b-c). The deathly sound of the cicadas droning in the background serves as a reminder against such offense; they report back to the Muses. They overhear speech to materialize in sound its discordant boundary. The activity of the *daimon* is to ward off action, to hold back. In *Phaedo*, however, the *daimon* will finally issue a single imperative or positive command: to make music.

What is it to make music and how does Socrates interpret that command? First, as I have already noted, he finds in it the description of his life as he has already lived it as a philosopher. For him, there is no trace of the future or imperative tense. Just in case, he haphazardly composes a few musical lines. This act returns us to the broader project of expunging sophistic ambiguity, which makes itself felt as admittance between contrary bodies. This admittance between contraries, the possibility that Socrates could have lived an opposite life, *appears under the sign of music*; it is absolute resonance between contraries.

does not overhear the Sirens, but forcefully steals their song without realizing he takes back with him a false artifact.

35 Giorgio Agamben, "History" in *Potentialities: Collected Essays in Philosophy*. Edited and translated by Daniel Heller-Roazen, Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 1999, 118.

36 "Only insofar as it is what divides can the *daimōn* be what assigns a fate and what destines (*daiomai* first means 'to divide,' then 'to assign'; the same semantic development can be found in a word that is derived from the same root: *dēmos*, 'people,' which originally means 'division of a territory,' 'assigned part.'" (Agamben, "History," 118).

37 Walter Burkert, *Greek Religion*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1985, 180. In this monumental work, Burkert writes, "For *daimon* and *theos* are never simply interchangeable either. This is seen most clearly in the apostrophe often addressed to a person in epic: *daimonie*: it is more reproach than praise, and therefore certainly does not mean divine; it is used when the speaker does

Music is left to the side... until it reappears in the middle of the dialogue as a figure. The section on harmony, occupying a long discussion, suddenly returns us to the question of music, but meant only to elaborate the theory of soul that cannot admit death. Socrates has just been rehearsing for Simmias his theory of knowledge as recollection and the immortality of the soul, opening his argument up to dispute. Simmias (also a Pythagorean) proposes to read the issue of harmony differently: “Somebody might also give the same account about a tuning and a lyre and its strings—that the tuning is something invisible and bodiless and something altogether beautiful and divine in the tuned lyre, but that the lyre itself and its strings are bodies and are body-like and composite, and earth-like and are akin to the deathbound” (Ph.85e3-86a4). We find here the composite, which is also banished from the Socrates’ account of poetry and music in the *Republic* in its defense of “pure narrative” (*diegesis* without *mimesis*). Simmias notes, “the lyre and the strings and the sounds come into being earlier, *while they’re still untuned*, and the tuning is the last of all to be composed [emphasis added]” (Ph.92c1-3). Stated differently, discord is that out of which harmony is made, as if sounds were a pure block of undifferentiated matter only later to be divided and organized. For Simmias, resonance is also of a material body. Without instrument, there can be no harmony; potential here stands as prior to actualization. Music, for Simmias, is principally defined as *resonance*, which needs a vibrating body to exist—wood, form, touch. Socrates ignores the verb or activity suggested by the daimonic command, to *make* music. Still more, Socrates posits harmony as prior to resonance, a continuation of Socrates’ larger rejection of the composite. In this spirit, Socrates retorts: “this thought of yours sticks around—that a tuning is a composite thing and soul a sort of tuning composed of bodily elements tensed like strings” (Ph.92a9-b2). For Socrates, harmony is more prior than sounds.

Is not resonance, the spatiality of sound, the remainder of Socratic dialectic, signaling its death knell by the force of a submerged ground in admittance? The scene of philosophic transmission is exposed to that which it had to forfeit to become itself, to the temporality of sounding and then decay, expectation and memory. What makes it a scene if not borders and banishment, the trappings of the dialogue in dramaturgy, its body?

We are more familiar with Socrates’ condemnation and ultimate exile of music in the *Republic*. That account of *mimesis* pertains less to the problem of resonance than it does to the

not understand what the addressee is doing and why he is doing it. *Daimon* is occult power, a force that drives man forward where no agent can be named. The individual feels as it were that the tide is with him, he acts with the daimon, *syn daimoni*, or else when everything turns against him, he stands against the daimon, *pros daimona*, especially when a god is favouring his adversary. Illness may be described as ‘a hated daimon’ that assails the sufferer; but then it is gods, *theoi*, who bring him release. Every god can act as a *daimon*; not every act of his reveals the god. *Daimon* is the veiled countenance of divine activity. There is no image of a *daimon*, and there is no cult. *Daimon* is thus the necessary complement to the Homeric view of the gods as individuals with personal characteristics; it covers that embarrassing remainder which eludes characterization and naming.” (180).

38 Also see Denise Riley, “‘A Voice Without A Mouth’: Inner Speech.” *Qui Parle* 14.2. (2004), 57-104. Riley’s essay remains the most extensive exploration of the ambiguous sonority of inner speech.

problem of the many voicedness of the bard in his capacity to pervert and distort what should be the single voicedness of the soul of the good listener (the guardians should be exposed only to simple music if they are to become simple in purpose). Ultimately, the problem with music in the *Republic* is that it reveals that the soul is not unto itself. If the young soul is all too malleable, is it because *it has been made*, lending to the soul a human duration, porousness, and proneness; it is, at the same time, eternal. Music reveals a contradiction within the eternal. There is a fault line in the figure of music as it stands in for the ideal. Music announces that the soul is like an ear into which adverse influence pours. Music is the primary and constitutive remainder of soul, undoing any claim to the eternal. Music, we might add, is the first sophisticated force. Just as the Siren song, it desubstantiates and converts identity into the warning that things might be otherwise on the other side of its unfolding. Socrates, in a final gesture, banishes music again; philosophy is the only music he has made. As Nietzsche recalls of this moment of the daimonic imperative, “Where art was concerned, the despotic logician has the sense of a lacuna, a void, something of a reproach, of a possibly neglected duty.”⁴⁰

I return, then, to the scene of Xanthippe’s banishment. She is the reminder; she intrudes upon the space of dialogue; she beats her breast. She is a critic. If the *daimon* exudes the force of ambiguity that is then nullified by myth, Xanthippe cries out in ways that cannot be redeemed by thought. She cries out in the face of the unthinkable, but also against the object of thought. Socrates does in language what he will not allow for in his body, an action that is tantamount to suicide: he kills the voice of the *daimon* so that he may be released from its potential. In a final act, Socrates asserts the agency of thought over the force of ambiguity. It is a voice that says that he might have been otherwise. The overarching rhetorical act of the *Phaedo* is to assert that there are no second acts in philosophy, only primary acts that are passed on. One cannot only disclaim until the very end, but one can instill in one’s receivers the charge of living on. His friends and listeners will live on, spreading the word of philosophy. It is a revisionist history posited in nearly the same breath that banishes woman from the scene of dying. She is banished from the charge of transmitting dying, of being the one who can receive and carry on the last words.⁴¹ These two expulsions are mutual. No one will be there to remember the alternative.

39 Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition: Second Edition*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013, 192. Mladen Dolar has found rich provocation in the fact that the *daimon* cannot be seen. See *A Voice and Nothing More*, Cambridge: MIT University Press, 2006.

40 Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, 170-171.

41 It is a structural demand of Platonic dialogue when Marlow cheats the Intended out of Kurtz’s last words in Joseph Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness*.

However, Plato builds the act of witnessing into the dramatic structure of the dialogue. It is we who receive Socrates' refusal of ambiguity, as Roland Barthes once remarked of tragic listeners. Plato continually begins with these excisions, the places that should have been cut, that wander away from the side or act as a remainder of discourse as its scene or setting (the cicadas drone there, and Xanthippe cries out there). Xanthippe says more about the space of dialogue in leaving it than those who stay there to continue to erect it.

Are we to commend Socrates' unwillingness to die, his refusal to stop talking while putting his body in the attitude of death? The question of suicide remains open: in self-destruction, does one transcend the outrage, as in the master/slave dialectic? Are we to mime Socrates' slow death, continuing to take the poison as many times as made necessary by the continuity of talk, or is there an ethical imperative towards suicide, and what would that suicide look like? We learn from the Sirens of the unrepresentable. In our moment, do we simply receive the administered death? How does one, with agency, kill a bureaucratically embodied ideal? I am reading the death of Socrates as the birth of an institution of disembodied and autonomous thought. Socrates teaches not just institutionalized thought, but he teaches the politics of slow death.

We might turn in contrast to Antigone's redoubled act of burial when she buries and then reburies the corpse that had been unburied by the state. Creon decrees that the corpse of her brother should remain exposed and rot above ground. Something in the space of politics is not being granted burial and, with it, forgetting. If the corpse cannot be buried, it cannot be forgotten—if it cannot be forgotten, it cannot be remembered. Ancient burial was a feminine act, women performing its rituals. "Between dying and being dead," Loraux writes, "rituals took place, and no one had the right to be called dead unless the funerary rites had been performed in his honor, authorizing his *psuche* to enter the misty kingdom of the underworld."⁴² In unburying Polynices and preventing his divine rites, Creon in fact divests Polynices of the right to be called dead. He is still dying, the process of dying slowed and repeated. I have suggested that Odysseus is this same kind of undead, returning from an experience of listening that should have annihilated him. There is between Xanthippe and Antigone, then, not only a politics of refusal—Antigone's claim being to "refuse to deny"⁴³—but also a politics of avowal in the face of disavowal. There is a rhetorical castration that announces the fetish concealing lack. To avow lack.

⁴² Loraux, "Therefore, Socrates is Immortal," 18.

⁴³ See Judith Butler, *Antigone's Claim: Kinship Between Life and Death*, New York: Columbia University Press, 2002.

Again, Socrates' sleight of hand. At the end of the dialogue, when Xanthippe and other women return, Socrates ushers them away. He denies women "their traditional intervention" of being the ones to prepare the body for death (Loraux 18). "[H]is companions in thought take the place of the women" (Loraux 19). The speaking subject emerges from the displacement of woman as a primary other. The disciples then begin to cry. Socrates replies, "What are you doing, you wonders! Surely this wasn't the least of my reasons for sending the women away—so they wouldn't strike such false notes!" (Ph.117d7-e1). There is a form of memory that Socrates' account will not and cannot allow for: discord is a sound that makes no mark on the eternal.⁴⁴ Xanthippe is the sounding out of the scene as scene by way of its margins. Women are taken away from the scene. Their fears must be stifled along with their cries and sounds while the practice of philosophical talk asserts itself towards institutionalization.

We are not to regard the argument concerning the soul as Socrates' last words. His last words are a brief request issued to Crito as his acting body: "Crito,' he said, 'we owe a cock to Asclepius. So pay the debt and don't be careless'" (Ph.118a4-6). This is a religious gesture and a gesture of friendship. Socrates ends with prayer and the divine, religion and philosophy being bound. But there is another submerged movement here that, as in the *Poetics*, disavows the ritualistic. This double movement or splitting off makes the *Phaedo* a divided text in need of recuperation. In the last words, mnemonics and patrimony are united in a single utterance; they are united as *logos* and the truth of speech. "Only that which never ceases to hurt stays in the memory," writes Nietzsche.⁴⁵ Socrates' last argument asserts the immortality of the soul in the theory of knowledge as recollection. This recollection, however, is a form of memory that takes the shape of debt and indebtedness. Debt is as foundational as the last argument. It is the primary gesture of the institution founded upon the practice of dialectical discourse, a debt to a prior claim upon time. So too disembodied harmony will always have its claim in advance of resonance. Crito takes on the debt while *Phaedo* takes on the voice. But the meaning of *telos* is not goal, but end as implied by the beginning. For *Phaedo* to embody the voice of the master, he must also embody his debt. Something of Socrates' material burden is preserved after death and passed on even as the corpse pose merges with its reality in death.

44 Also see Sean Alexander Gurd, *Dissonance: Auditory Aesthetics in Ancient Greece*, New York: Fordham University Press, 2016. This important work was published after the composition of my essay, and I regret not being able to engage it here.

45 Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals and Ecce Homo*. Translated by Walter Kaufmann and R.J. Hollingdale, New York: Penguin, 1989, 61.

It is unclear, however, if for Socrates it is a personal and unsayable debt or a collective debt, one that is simply a fundament of Greek religion. I am suggesting that the *Phaedo*, in its interiorization of the ear, stands as a split between the personal and the plural.⁴⁶ Socrates' final request is religious and ritualistic, to be sure, but as given to us in text, it signals a new and submerged movement that will only be embodied by the disciples after his death: it is the birth of the individual whose voice, above all, passes on debt to itself. "The debt shall be paid," answers Crito. But the debt is the remainder of Socrates' body after he consigns it to oblivion in the discourse on the soul: "I'm not persuading Crito, gentlemen, that I am this Socrates—the one who is now conversing and marshaling each of our arguments. Instead, he thinks I'm that one he'll see a little later as a corpse and so asks how he should bury me" (Ph.115c6-d4). But the real and foreboding question is, *how shall he bury me while also trying to repay me?* An originary split and double movement. If debt and indebtedness are integrated into the foundation of the Academy, the answer is that he cannot. The dead will remain unburied. To know is to remember a debt owed and payable upon (until) death. Socrates does not leave the scene without bequeathing a debt, the primacy of owing in advance of speech. Socratic harmony is eternally owed its due from resonance and discord.

We seem to hear Addie's laughing rebuke.

⁴⁶ Here we can recall the semantic relation between the *daimon* and *demos* as the division of territory.



Fasting and Method:
Kafka as Philosopher
Aaron Schuster

Franz Kafka's short story "Investigations of a Dog" might be retitled "Portrait of the Philosopher as a Young Dog." In any event, Kafka did not give the story a title, which he left unpublished; it was Max Brod who named it *Forschungen eines Hundes*, which would be better translated as "Researches of a Dog," the word *Forschungen* having the more academic ring of research as opposed to investigation, with its connotations of a detective story or police procedure. We are not in the milieu of the trial but the university. The story (along with "A Report to an Academy") presents a brilliant and sometime hilarious parody of what Jacques Lacan called "The University discourse," the bureaucratic organization of knowledge production that has flourished under its current administration, in ways that Kafka uncannily predicted.¹ And yet Kafka was not only a prescient diagnostician of our hyper-bureaucratic times, but also the theorist of an alternative science, another way of thinking, even, perhaps, of a way out. Against the Kafkaesque neoliberal management of the university, the revolutionary studies of Kafka's dog.

What would be the kind of academy, the New University or enlightened institute of the future, that could accept the investigations of a dog as a veritable research program? What if we were to take the animal's scholarly career, with its hallucinatory visions, paradoxical speculations, and extreme self-experimentation, seriously? The dog is a theoretical maverick, dissatisfied with the state of existing dog science, which he considers to be, in a word, too dogmatic, and so he strikes out on his own, and even endeavors to found a new science. Narrated by the dog himself (who is never named), the story's lengthy and convoluted plot is not easy to summarize. We learn of the philosopher dog's youth, of how his curiosity was first sparked by his shocking encounter with a troupe of musical dogs ("Investigations" is a tale of philosophy born from the spirit of music); of the bizarre and wondrous phenomena he encounters along the way, including the "soaring dogs," ne'er-do-wells who spend their days floating in the air; of his eccentric speculations and experiments, one of which leads him to the brink of death; and of his difficult and complicated relationship with the dog community, whose glorious renewal he dreams of, one that would break through its ancient customs and closed ways and usher in a new era of solidarity based on the union of theory and life. In the last pages of the story the dog summarizes the results of his researches, sketching the outlines of an ambitious philosophical

1 See Mark Fisher's application of Kafka's distinction between "definite acquittal" and "ostensible acquittal" to the evaluation schemes of contemporary university administrators, in *Capitalist Realism: Is There No Alternative?* (London: Zero Books, 2009), 22-23.

system which might be called, not without irony, Kafka's "System of Science." It is composed by four disciplines: the science of nurture (*Nahrungswissenschaft*), which could also be translated as the science of nourishment or more simply the science of food, and which deals with the sphere of vitality; the science of music (*Musikwissenschaft*), which stands more generally for the study of art and aesthetics (music, not literature, is the paradigmatic art in Kafka's universe); then there is a transitional or bridging science between these two, which investigates the link between the realms of necessity and art, or between physical nourishment and spiritual nourishment, what the dog calls the theory of incantation, or more precisely the "theory of incantation by which food is called down" (essentially the rituals and codified behaviors performed by dogs for the procurement of edibles; it is here that can be found an account of the genesis of institutions or the law). Finally, at the pinnacle of the system, there is an "ultimate science" (*einer allerletzten Wissenschaft*), the science of freedom, a prize "higher than everything else." This is how the story ends, with the dog ambivalently declaring that freedom "as is possible today is a wretched business," yet "nonetheless a possession."² Walter Benjamin once wrote that despite Kafka's proximity to theology and especially mysticism, he did not found a religion. But what about a philosophy? Why was Kafka a writer of parables and not a philosopher?³ Though critical judgment has been relatively reserved about this work – it has been called "one of the longest, most rambling, and least directed of Kafka's short stories"⁴ – I believe that, precisely as a flawed masterpiece, it can provide a unique insight into the construction of Kafka's fictional universe, as well as its theoretical stakes. In the guise of writing about a lone canine's attempts to come to grips with his peculiarities and those of his world – that is, in chronicling the thinker's dogged pursuit of his alienation, his incapacity to "live in harmony with my people and accept in silence whatever disturbs the harmony" (280) – Kafka comes closest to giving us his philosophical manifesto.

In this essay I will not address Kafka's System of Science as a whole, nor attempt to directly justify my claim that we should take the dog's work seriously as a philosophical system and as the expression of Kafka's own philosophy. Instead I shall limit myself to an analysis of just one of its essential aspects, its first and most fundamental level, the science of nurture. This is what the bulk of the dog's philosophical investigations are concerned with, the thing that is closest to dog nature: food. Unsurprisingly,

- 2 Franz Kafka, "Investigations of a Dog" in *The Complete Stories*. Edited by Nahum N. Glatzer. Translated by Willa and Edwin Muir (New York: Schocken, 1971), 316. Subsequent page references to this and other stories will be given in the text.
- 3 Benjamin himself highlighted, in a letter to Adorno, that "Investigations of a Dog" was the one story he never figured out while working on Kafka, and that he still needs to discover its meaning: "I have taken the fact that you refer with such particular emphasis to 'Investigations of a Dog' [Aufzeichnungen eines Hundes] (sic) as a hint. It is precisely this piece – probably the only one – that remained alien to me even while I was working on my 'Kafka' essay. I also know – and have even said as much to Felizitas – that I still needed to discover what it actually meant. Your comments square with this assumption." *The Correspondence of Walter Benjamin 1910-1940*. Edited by Gershom Scholem and Theodor Adorno. Translated by Manfred R. Jacobson and Evelyn M. Jacobson (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1994), 471.

nurture is a well-established field of canine inquiry. As the narrator notes, he is hardly the first to inquire to this topic; dogs have been studying the problems of nourishment since as long as anyone can remember. “[I]t has occupied us since the dawn of time, it is the chief object of all our meditation, countless observations and essays and views on this subject have been published, it has grown into a province of knowledge which in its prodigious compass is not only beyond the comprehension of any single scholar, but of all our scholars collectively...” (286-87). One would have to imagine – hilarious tableau – whole doggie libraries chock full of volumes dedicated to such topics as dietetical reason, nurture studies, and the people’s food, such that not even the whole community of scholars, let alone a single researcher, could ever hope to master the field. Yet this vast accumulation of knowledge does not satisfy the dog, who remains skeptical. “People often praise the universal progress made by the dog community throughout the ages, and probably mean by that more particularly the progress in knowledge. Certainly knowledge is progressing, its advance is irresistible, it actually progresses at an accelerating speed, always faster, but what is there to praise in that?” (299) This dog is no accelerationist. He doubts whether the growing pile of learned tomes and prestigious studies really amounts to anything. Like a canine Heidegger might have said, have we gotten any closer to grasping the essence of food? One must start by endeavoring to recover the origin and principle of the matter. For the dog, the question of first philosophy, of *prima philosophia*, is “Whence does the earth procure this food?” (288)

His fellow dogs don’t get it. When he asks about food, they think he’s hungry, and offer him morsels to eat. There is a subtle ruse in this, for dogs normally do not share their grub, they gobble up whatever they can get. The narrator suspects that behind their generosity what these dogs really wanted was “to stop my mouth with food” (289). That is the problem with eating, you cannot do it and ask questions at the same time. Food is the anti-philosophical object *par excellence* in the sense that the mouth can be used either for eating or for speaking but not both at once, a point that Gilles Deleuze develops at length in *Logic of Sense*. Alimentation and argumentation are mutually exclusive; the possession of food eliminates the desire for research. Such is one of the basic principles of food science: “If you have food in your jaws you have solved all questions for the time being” (303). But for the narrator food is not only a matter of physical necessity but more profoundly

- 4 Richard T. Gray, et. al., *A Franz Kafka Encyclopedia* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2005), 95.

a metaphysical conundrum. For all its sophistication and sweep, hitherto existing dog food science has focused almost exclusively on the problem of how to obtain food without inquiring into its origin. Where does the sustenance of the dog community come from? While many studies indicate that it appears on the ground following the execution of certain preparatory rituals, the narrator observes that it mostly falls from the sky, and that dogs even snatch it in midair before it ever touches the ground. (Like Thales, this dog is also an observer of the heavens). So again the question, “Whence does the earth procure this food?” The dog conducts a series of experiments meant to isolate and test the source of nourishment.⁵ Eventually, however, he gives up these tests and, in order to get to the bottom of the mystery of food, comes up with a truly radical, and properly philosophical, approach. His method is not that of universal doubt, but something which, for a dog, is maybe not so different. He fasts. Fasting, he says, is “the final and most potent means of my research” (309).

On the subject of fasting, “Investigations of a Dog” is in close dialogue with another of Kafka’s stories, “A Hunger Artist,” both of which were written in 1922. These two stories ought to be read together, for they tackle the same fundamental problem but from opposite sides. For a dog, fasting requires an enormous struggle, even a super-canine effort, since there is nothing more basic to dog nature than eating: “the highest effort among us is voluntary fasting” (309). The dog describes his time of fasting as an almost mystical journey, a dark night of the soul through which he passes with closed eyes, a “perpetual night” lasting “days or weeks,” punctuated only by little bouts of sleep. He knows his method is highly unorthodox; he feels himself an outsider to the scientific community, an intellectual outcast, although he still experiences “the proverbial serenity of the scientific worker” (308). He dreams of winning recognition from his fellow dogs, of receiving their accolades, and sharing in “the long-yearned-for warmth of assembled canine bodies” (308). But soon these consoling thoughts depart and the dog is left alone with nothing but his hunger burning inside him. The research is miserable, the dog grows weaker and weaker and is tormented by surreal visions and even menaced by death. The contrast with the hunger artist could not be greater. For him fasting is effortless, “the easiest thing in the world” (270). Fasting is a piece of cake (if someone were to write “The Kafka Diet,” this could well serve as its slogan). This is the secret behind his performance, that there is no secret to it: fasting

- 5 Although I will not deal with it in this essay, here I must mention the central joke running through the story: dogs have no awareness of human beings. For example, they cannot “see” that it is a human hand tossing a bone to them, and not mana falling from the heavens. Kafka deploys this joke to great effect, showing how the dogs’ blindness to human beings, their unshakable caninocentrism, produces all sorts of mysteries and surreal descriptions of everyday experience, mysteries that would seem to be easily solved by adding the human back into the equation.

entails no difficulty, no struggle, no challenge to overcome. As the artist explains, the reason why fasting comes so easily to him is because he does not like to eat; or, more precisely, he has nothing against eating per se, but cannot find any food to his liking. “I couldn’t find the food I liked. If I had found it, believe me, I should have made no fuss and stuffed myself like you or anyone else” (277). While the dog must overcome his natural instincts in order to fast – a near impossible feat for an animal – for the hunger artist fasting is already second nature, something that comes, as it were, automatically and without exertion. The real struggle of the artist is to *stop* fasting. For he does not want to stop. He dreams of going further and further, of breaking not only all records but exceeding the very bounds of the imagination. “Why should he be cheated of the fame he would get for fasting longer, for being not only the record hunger artist of all time, which presumably he was already, but for beating his own record by a performance beyond human imagination, since *he felt that there were no limits to his capacity for fasting?*” (271; emphasis added).⁶ Can hunger be sublime? If left to his own devices one has the impression that the hunger artist would go on fasting for all eternity, that the fast would even outlast the disappearance of his body, like the shame outliving K. after his assassination at the end of *The Trial*. It is only the impresario who puts an end to the show by imposing a limit of forty days. He does this for good reasons: beyond that time people will lose interest, a fixed end-date is essential to build excitement, and a break is necessary so as to regenerate the performer, who has meanwhile slimmed his body down to a Giacometti-like “skeleton thinness” (270); plus, forty days has a nice Biblical ring. Despite this sensible management, for the hunger artist the impresario’s limit is utterly arbitrary, a frustratingly artificial barrier. Of the infinite character of his performance the words of Paul Valéry, though intended for another art form, fit perfectly:

A formula for pure dance should include nothing to suggest that it has an end. It is terminated by outside events; its limits in time are not intrinsic to it; the duration of the dance is limited by the conventional length of the program, by fatigue or loss of interest. But the dance itself has nothing to make it end. It ceases as a dream ceases that might go on indefinitely: it stops, not because an undertaking has been completed, because there is no undertaking, but because something else, something outside it has been exhausted.⁷

- 6 Like the hunger artist who would perpetually fast, in “First Sorrow” Kafka tells the story of a trapeze artist who spends all his time in the air; he “arranged his life [so] that, as long as he kept working in the same building, he never came down from his trapeze by night or day” (494). His aerial existence is interrupted only by the occasional journey, yet even on the train the trapeze artist manages to stay aloft by cramming himself in the overhead luggage rack. We could also say something similar of the dog, that he cannot help but ask questions, following wherever they may take him, since research is the very core of his being.
- 7 Paul Valéry, “Philosophy of the Dance” in *What is Dance?* Edited by Roger Copeland and Marshall Cohen (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983), 62.

Hunger is an art like dance; it too is a self-contained activity that includes nothing to imply its coming to an end. One of the main jokes of the story is that its subject is not a starving artist, a common enough figure, but an artist who has elevated starvation to the level of art.⁸ Like Valéry's "pure dance," the "pure fast" of the hunger artist is only terminated by outside events. Moreover, to die is not his aim, and there is no indication that the hunger artist is suicidal; death by starvation is merely an unfortunate accident, collateral damage of the fast's ceaseless dream-like unfolding. When the hunger artist offers his enigmatic explanation for his passion, saying that he fasts because he could find no food to his liking, he appears as a veritable martyr of lack. His career is dedicated to that missing morsel which does not exist, and into whose void he himself shall eventually vanish. Yet while it is no doubt true that the hunger artist exemplifies the lack of desire, we could also view his performances in a different light. His insatiable hunger is not so much a quest for the eternally missing object as an astonishing and unheard-of power, the force of starvation that knows no bounds or limits, not even those of the human body. Lack and excess, non-being and extra-being, convert with one another.

Once upon a time, the hunger artist was a highly successful and revered figure. His fame was such that he needed no help with his career; only later, when his popularity was starting to wane, did he engage an impresario to drum up crowds and publicize his performances. When the impresario fails to halt his sliding fortunes with a last whirlwind tour through Europe, he eventually hires himself out to a circus, where he is relegated to a neglected spot outside the main ring, on the way to the menagerie (the artist's frustration is a study of disgruntled employee psychology: while he's terribly unhappy with the arrangement he dares not complain to the management in case his situation should become even worse). There he ends his days in a lonely cage, unrecognized and unloved. "A Hunger Artist" is a story of slow decline. From the very beginning, though, the artist was haunted by an "inner dissatisfaction" (270). This difficulty has to do not with some deficiency on the artist's part, a lack of discipline or talent – on the contrary, he is a fasting virtuoso – but rather a disconnect between the artist and his audience. Like any celebrity, he seeks the public's approval and admiration; but, even more, he wishes to be celebrated for the right reason. He wants his art to be understood. And yet he faces "a whole world of non-understanding" (273).

8 See Mladen Dolar, *A Voice and Nothing More* (Cambridge, Mass: The MIT Press, 2006), 183.

“Just try to explain to anyone the art of fasting!” (276). One of the things that really bothers him is people thinking that his weak and sickly appearance is caused by the fast – the impresario exploits the shock value of this by selling photos of him on the fortieth day – when in truth it is the effect of its premature ending. Fasting doesn’t weaken the artist, it strengthens his will to fast! The photographs show only his decrepit body; they cannot capture the sublimity of his hunger. Another problem is the widespread suspicion that he is cheating. He especially despises the fake complicity of those minders who, by intentionally casting a blind eye at certain moments, think they help him by facilitating his cheating. But here we see the hunger artist’s deep ambivalence with regard to the viewing public. The artist never cheats, though only he can know this for sure, since he cannot be constantly under surveillance (this was a less technologically invasive time). Thus the artist can never definitively prove his innocence. Yet to even suspect him of cheating is to miss the point of the performance. For the artist’s triumph does not lie in overcoming his craving for food – this would be the usual interpretation, in line with normal human psychology and physiology – as this craving has already been overcome. The artist is never tempted to cheat because fasting for him is second nature. Therefore to truly understand the artist means not to admire him, since his fasting is involuntary. “I always wanted you to admire my fasting,” said the hunger artist. “We do admire it,” said the overseer, affably. “But you shouldn’t admire it,” said the hunger artist. “Well then we don’t admire it,” said the overseer, “but why shouldn’t we admire it?” “Because I have to fast, I can’t help it,” said the hunger artist” (277). What does the artist want from the audience? Is he seeking recognition or not? Therein lies his nagging dissatisfaction: the ideal spectator would be the one who ignores him, and yet the artist wants to be adored.⁹

The hunger artist might have benefitted from the advice given by Jean Genet to his own circus performing lover, Abdallah Bentaga. In his remarkable text “The Tightrope Walker,” Genet counsels that the true artist must perform only for himself, or for his own image. Upon the high-wire it must be “Narcissus” who dances.¹⁰ This narcissism should be sharply distinguished from the everyday sort of self-love which is attentive to and dependent on the love of the other (or others: the adoring public). It rather designates the singular love affair between the artist and his art, a love which isolates him from other persons. A great artist is one who is so surrendered to and absorbed by his art that it is no

9 As we have seen, the philosopher dog too imagines being lauded by the dog community from which he is excluded. This dilemma will find its resolution in “Josephine the Singer, or the Mouse Folk,” where the public, much to the annoyance of the ever more diva-esque Josephine, ignores the artist while giving a central place in the community to her art.

10 Jean Genet, “The Tightrope Walker” in *Fragments of the Artwork*. Translated by Charlotte Mandell. (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003), 71.

longer he who is at the center of the action; rather, the performance flows from out of itself. "It is not you who dances, it is the wire."¹¹ What is at stake is not the gregarious narcissism of the ego but the radical self-enclosure of the drive. Art unfolds in a solitary space, withdrawn from and indifferent to the world outside it, and Genet's essay is intended to evoke the "deadly solitude of that desperate and brilliant region where the artist operates," in order to inspire and "inflamm" his partner (would that the hunger artist had such a manager).¹² And it is precisely this untouchable solitude that exerts such a powerful hold on the audience. For as Genet writes, "You are not there to amuse the public, but to fascinate it."¹³ If amusement or entertainment entails a reciprocal relationship with the audience – the entertainer is fundamentally "one of us," someone we can relate to – in fascination this bond is cut through: the audience is related to something that does not relate to it, and for that reason is all the more dazzled and enthralled. This is the secret of the artist's relation, or "non-relation," with the public: the artist needs the audience, but, paradoxically, only in order to be all the more alone. For the aim of the artist is not to amuse or please but to astonish the audience, as if they were witnessing something from another planet. The performer withdraws into an inviolable space, yet this solitude can only be achieved through the fascinated gaze of the other from which the artist turns away. That is why the show must culminate in the public's sacrifice and death: "The audience – which allows you to exist, without it you would never have the solitude I spoke about – the audience is the animal that you will finally stab. Your perfection, as well as your boldness, will, during the time you appear, annihilate it."¹⁴ The public is the sacrificial animal slayed on the altar of art. But for this to work, the exterminating artist must himself already be a dead man. On the one hand, it is essential that there is a risk of actual, physical death, and Genet notes that tightrope walking, along with poetry (!), war, and bullfighting, is one of the few remaining "cruel games."¹⁵ One could add fasting to this list, as it too comports a mortal danger: the hunger artist's show is equally a theater of cruelty. On the other, the true death is not a physical but artistic one: it is the death of the actor in favor of the show, the performer overtaken by the performance, the doer eclipsed by the deed. Art demands a depersonalization, an annihilation of the ego, so that a more daring and alien Narcissus can emerge. Concerning the hunger artist one might say – but he is too neurotic for this, too worried about being understood, about the desire of the Other –

11 Genet, "The Tightrope Walker," 71

12 Genet, "The Tightrope Walker," 73. In fact, things did not turn out well for Genet and Bentaga: Bentaga was injured during a performance and, despite his efforts at recovery, could no longer walk the tight-rope. Genet eventually left him, and Bentaga committed suicide some time after.

13 Genet, "The Tightrope Walker," 75.

14 Genet, "The Tightrope Walker," 82.

15 Genet, "The Tightrope Walker," 73.

that as soon as he begins fasting he has already died: for it is not he who fasts, but the hunger itself which hungers in and through him. To enrapture the public with this glorious artistic death is his true aim, not to perish from malnutrition. But Kafka is not Genet, and the hunger artist is not the blazing human “hard-on” Genet imagines the tightrope walker to be, but a melancholic flop. In a sad irony, the hunger artist will know his finest hour of the “pure fast” only when there is no longer any audience to witness it. He is the practitioner of a dying art, and he will die, dissatisfied, with and because of his art.

Soon after the hunger artist passes away, he is replaced in his cage by a fearsome panther. The story concludes as follows:

Even the most insensitive felt it refreshing to see this wild creature leaping around the cage that had so long been dreary. The panther was all right. The food he liked was brought him without hesitation by the attendants; he seemed not even to miss his freedom; his noble body, furnished almost to the bursting point with all that it needed, seemed to carry freedom around with it too; somewhere in his jaws it seemed to lurk; and the joy of life streamed with such ardent passion from his throat that for the onlookers it was not easy to stand the shock of it. But they braced themselves, crowded around the cage, and did not want ever to move away (277).

The key to “A Hunger Artist,” its whole mystery, lies here, in this arresting final image. It is impossible to understand the story without understanding the significance of the ending. How are we to grasp the relationship between the artist and the panther? At first one could hardly imagine a greater contrast. While the latter is a paragon of health and vitality, representing the awesome raw power of nature, the former is a frail and sickly figure, a martyr to the neurotic discontent in culture. The panther consumes his food without problem, whereas the hunger artist has grave difficulties with eating (although one could say that he *doesn't* eat his food without problem). The cat radiates a joy of life and irrepressible freedom; the hunger artist is trapped not only in a circus cage but more profoundly in the prison of his own creative failure. And finally, it is the cat who slays the audience, like a feline version of Genet's untouchable Narcissus: while the spectacle of the panther is utterly fascinating, so that the public can hardly bear it and yet doesn't dare to draw away, the hunger artist is increasingly

neglected to the point that he practically disappears into the straw at the bottom of the cage, lamenting, in his final moments, the public's lack of admiration. No wonder that after such a depressing sight the panther is a veritable breath of fresh air! What if, however, instead of a series of oppositions there were a strange sort of identity between the two figures? In fact there exists a secret kinship between the emaciated artist and the powerful feline, which is belied by their stark physical disparity, not to mention their belonging to different species. It is not so much that the hunger artist is replaced by a cat; rather, he is *survived* by him. What survives the death of the artist is his art: his implacable drive to break every fasting record, to go on starving even after the body has disappeared, to hunger as if for all eternity. It is no coincidence that the panther's freedom streams from his jaws and his throat. The panther effectively embodies the raw power and inward compulsive freedom that is the hunger artist's hunger, minus the personal failings and misery of the artist. He is the very image of that terrible joy of life, without limits and insensitive to the outside world, of which hunger may equally be an expression. This is what no one understands.

Let us now turn from the artist back to the philosopher: what is the result of the dog's fast? As he informs us, the fast marked a radical break in his life, a *caesura* in the Hölderlinian sense: "my whole life as an adult lies between me and that fast" (309). Recall that for the dog, unlike the hunger artist, fasting requires a tremendous, super-canine effort. For what the experiment in voluntary starvation produces is a rupture with dog nature. This is a true philosophical act: the dog manages to overcome the natural canine attitude towards food, namely to beg for it and gobble it up. The fast suspends not his spontaneous belief in the world but the spontaneous orientation of the instincts towards satisfaction and self-preservation, the dog's innate greed for life (292). And by doing so it allows for the emergence of a new kind of life. The dark night of the fast entails a violent refashioning of the body, a process of dismemberment and reembodiment, a decomposition of the bodily ego and the production of a new, uncanny drive. This is recounted in the crucial passage where the dog experiences his hunger as a kind of second body, a foreign entity taunting him that is nonetheless himself. "That is my hunger', I told myself countless times during this stage, as if I wanted to convince myself that my hunger and I were still two things and I could shake it off like a burdensome lover; but in reality we were very painfully one, and

when I explained to myself: ‘That is my hunger’, it was really my hunger that was speaking and having its joke at my expense” (308-309). This splitting is a textbook example of what psychoanalysis calls projective identification, a defense mechanism that works by isolating internal dangers and expelling them outside the psyche, thereby transforming them into more manageable external threats. In this case, the danger is the mounting hunger, which is derealized by projecting it away from the self so that it becomes a separated foreign object, like a “burdensome lover” that might be “shaken off,” in Kafka’s poignant analogy: if only one could break up with one’s own body. Yet the gambit quickly turns derisory, and the detached hunger mocks his miserable ploy. The dog, however, persists through this defeat, he perseveres in his split, and at a certain moment something finally clicks: arduous effort gives way to compulsive joy. “In the midst of my pain I felt a longing to go on fasting, and I followed it as greedily as if it were a strange dog” (*einem unbekanntem Hund*) (310). This last phrase is truly remarkable: fasting itself is another dog. A strange double of the dog, a second “unknown dog” (“unknown” would probably be a better and more literal translation of *unbekanntem* than “strange” here, as it corresponds with the dog’s theoretical cast of mind: what we are dealing with is the apprehension of hunger as a detached, autonomous phenomenon, something at the very limits of knowledge, beyond the ken of existing dog science). Fasting becomes the dog’s mysterious partner, a seductive double he cannot resist. Hunger now takes him by the hand. He follows this other dog’s lead, he becomes a fasting addict: “I could not stop” (310). Once led along this pathway the dog’s fast can only end, like Valéry says, as a dream ends that might go on indefinitely, it ceases only because something outside of it is exhausted. In this case what is exhausted is the dog himself, who is by now terribly weakened and on the brink of death.

My last hopes, my last dreams vanished; I would perish here miserably; of what use were my researches? – childish attempts undertaken in childish and far happier days; here and now was the hour of deadly earnest, here my inquiries should have shown their value, but where had they vanished? [...] It seemed to me as if I were separated from all my fellows, not by a quite short stretch, but by an infinite distance, and as if I would die less of hunger than of neglect. For it was clear that nobody troubled about me, nobody beneath the earth, on it, or above it; I was

dying of their indifference; they said indifferently. "He is dying," and it would actually come to pass. And did I not myself assent? Did I not say the same thing? Had I not wanted to be forsaken like this? (311-12)

The dog is dying, his powers are dissipating, he loses faith in his research, he gives in to hopelessness and despair; for all his effort and perseverance, the fast is for nothing. But this death is not so much a physical affair as a symbolic one, a cutting of ties with the world and the realm of dogdom. His fast makes him an outcast from the community of dogs, and he is dying above all from isolation and neglect. Death is a sentence imposed from the outside, a verdict of indifference to which he, in his despair, readily consents. He will perish in a shameful manner, abandoned and alone. But unlike the hunger artist, the dog does not die; he vomits blood, he passes out, and when he awakens it is as if into a second life or after-life, a new post-fast life. He is reborn: still a member of the dog community, and yet not. At the end of *The Trial*, Kafka writes of the murder of K. that he died in a most ignoble way: "Like a dog!", he said." If philosophy, since Socrates, is the art of learning how to die, "Investigations" shows how one might die philosophically like a dog.

"The way goes through fasting" (309). What truth is revealed to the dog in this "way"? Despite the fact that, or rather precisely because, he is driven to the extreme limit of losing faith in the fast altogether, something important is achieved. The real achievement of the fast is to break the natural cohesion of the body and the spontaneous rule of the bodily instincts. First the dog starves the old life out of him, he reduces his body to the point of nothingness; then this very starvation takes the form of a new body and a new greedy life: hunger becomes the dog's uncanny double, an unknown hound mixing deadly emptiness with compulsive joy. This is a precious discovery, a scientific accomplishment, which should not be quickly explained away as a consequence of delirium or as merely a suggestive metaphor. If the artist proposes a performative aesthetics of hunger, the dog treats the same matter but from an epistemological perspective. The fast is part of the dog's research, his *Forschung*, his quest for the truth; it is, as he tells us, "the final and most potent means of my research." In order to understand the dog's philosophical project, we must take fasting seriously as a theoretical tool. "Investigations of a Dog" should be read alongside *Meditations on First Philosophy*: Kafka has effectively

invented a canine Cartesianism that maintains the speculative rigor of the philosopher's method, while inverting its consequences. First, like Descartes' meditations, the dog's investigations necessitate an ascetic attitude. To philosophize, after Descartes, means to enter into an exceptional, even unnatural, state of mind, whose maintenance requires concentration and intellectual fortitude. In order to think philosophically, one must fight against one's usual habits and inclinations, one's sedimented opinions and beliefs; the thinker must have the capacity to submit even the most seemingly obvious perceptions to radical questioning. Philosophy contravenes the "pleasure principle," and the mind always risks slipping back to its more comfortable ways. This is how Descartes concludes the first of his *Meditations*: "But this is an arduous undertaking, and a kind of laziness brings me back to normal life. I am like a prisoner who is enjoying an imaginary freedom while asleep; as he begins to suspect that he is asleep, he dreads being woken up, and goes along with the pleasant illusion as long as he can. In the same way, I happily slide back into my old opinions and dread being shaken out of them."¹⁶ Now, the dog's struggle is even more extreme and strenuous than that of the meditator. For what is at stake is not only his beliefs and perceptions, his state of mind, but his whole physical constitution. If Descartes's philosophical procedure, in its hyperbolic extension, can only be carried out in proximity to madness, the dog's necessitates a tarrying with death. What the dog is struggling against is dog nature, the spontaneous thrust of his instincts, which demand first and foremost that he sustain his life, that is, to eat. The dog's fast is an alimentary *epoché* that suspends the instinct for self-preservation and reduces the natural claims and evidence of the body. This body, this nature, these instincts – what do they really demand? What is the real stuff out of which the body is made? The aim of starvation, stated in this Cartesian way, is to determine if there is some hard kernel of the body that cannot be starved away.

This brings us to the second point. The fast is a means of putting out of action the instincts of the organism in order to discover the irreducible core that remains of the body and the bodily appetites. In what does this final remainder consist? Starving brings the body to the brink of nothingness, so that all that is left, the last bit that cannot be starved, is starvation itself. Just as doubt is in the indubitable remnant of thought – one can doubt everything, except the very operation of doubt – so is hunger the unstarvable remnant of the body. And in the same

¹⁶ René Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy in The Philosophical Writings of Descartes. Vol. II.* Translated by John Cottingham, Robert Stoothoff, and Dugald Murdoch (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1984), 15. The most beautiful expression of the strained and arduous character of philosophical thought was made by David Hume: "I dine, I play a game of back-gammon, I converse, and am merry with my friends; and when after three or four hours' amusement, I would return to these speculations, they appear so cold, and strain'd, and ridiculous, that I cannot find in my heart to enter into them any farther." *A Treatise of Human Nature* (Oxford: Oxford University, 2000), 175.

way that the “I think” is produced as the outcome of the method of radical doubt, so is hunger qua partial object (the second “unknown dog”) produced as the remainder of the process of voluntary fasting. If the *cogito* is the irreducible subject of thought so is the partial object the real substance of the body. The originality of Kafka lies in his having invented a method for the purification of extended substance, and not only thinking substance, as Descartes held. And what better word is there for this purified substance of the body, if not *enjoyment*? The key moment of the fast, its turning point or point of no return – as Kafka writes elsewhere, “Beyond a certain point there is no return. This point has to be reached”¹⁷ – is when it is transformed from a struggle against nature into a passion and the expression of a new denaturalized nature, when fasting as voluntary deprivation becomes an involuntary fasting-drive. It is via this momentous reversal that the secret of nourishment is revealed to the dog. Why does the dog race feed? What is the purpose of eating? And why the obsessive accumulation of knowledge regarding every aspect and detail of nourishment? Contrary to natural evidence, the real reason for eating is not to satisfy hunger, but so as not to taste this other enjoyment. It is to ward off this greater danger that one stuffs one’s mouth with food and one’s head with knowledge about food. The cycle of need and satisfaction, the rhythm of lack and fulfillment, the ebb and flow of corruption and generation, is not the ineluctable way of things, but a barrier and a defense against the irruption of the infinite in the body. This is the secret truth of the science of nurture and the paradox behind nourishment. As Lacan succinctly put it, in a phrase that reads as if he were commenting on Kafka: “If the animal feeds regularly, it is clear that it is not to know the enjoyment of hunger.”¹⁸ For the dog, this joy of hunger (or hungering joy) spills over his own body to a riotous animation pervading the outside world, as if the real of enjoyment had invaded reality itself: “the world, which had been asleep during my life hitherto, seemed to have been awakened by my fasting... I must eat so as to reduce to silence this world rioting so noisily around me” (310-11). *In the dog’s fast we witness the birth of the hunger artist.*¹⁹ This is a different kind of “metamorphosis,” not a becoming-animal or becoming-insect but an equally fantastic becoming-human.

Is fasting a humanism? The dog’s prolonged hunger strike may be viewed as a process of hominization, involving an arduous and painful break with and transformation of animal nature. Here

17 Kafka, *The Blue Octavo Notebooks*. Edited by Max Brod. Translated by Ernst Kaiser and Eithne Wilkins (Cambridge, Mass: Exact Change, 1991), 16.

18 Jacques Lacan, *Seminar XIX: Ou pire*. Session of January 19, 1972 (unpublished).

19 Like the hunger artist, the dog too dreams of an ultimate fast, a fast of the future (that would break the history of dogdom in two?), for which the first fast would be merely the preparation. Yet this ever deferred ascetic triumph – the dog never has the force for a new fast, largely because of the damage wrought by the first – masks what the fast has already accomplished in terms of scientific research, the break it has instigated.

we have a properly Kafkaesque evolutionary psychology: One day an animal decides not to obey its instinctual programming, it defies its most basic urge, and through that defiant gesture it takes a giant leap to becoming another sort of animal, an animal that is divided from itself. With the perversion of the eating-function effected by the fast the dog becomes humanized, at least partially so, and he glimpses on the horizon his future career as a hunger artist (before he passes out, that is). Or perhaps it would be better to say that he is super-humanized or in-humanized, for if there is one lesson in Kafka it is that the human being is never as human as it thinks itself to be. If the hunger artist is the heir of the dog, he is so precisely as a split being, riven by an inner dissatisfaction, and, ironically, on his way back to the beasts. On the one hand, there is his hunger “beyond human imagination”: he is possessed by a superhuman or inhuman drive, a terrible joy not made to his measure; on the other, he is captivated by all-too-human narcissistic predilections and concerns, the desire for an audience, to show off his wonderful talents, to be loved and, especially, to be understood. In the end, that part of him that he would happily do without if only he could (“If I had found [the food I liked], believe me, I should have made no fuss and stuffed myself like you or anyone else”), can only be embodied by a non-human creature, an animal. And not just any animal, but that animal which forms the other half of the classic impossible couple of the animal kingdom, the dog’s very Other, its non-partner – a cat. This is perhaps the ultimate couple in Kafka, the formula of the successful sexual relation that he could not find in his real life romantic encounters: a hysterical dog together with a supremely solitary cat.²⁰

There is one more twist to the story of the dog’s fast. The transformation effected by this experiment in radical asceticism would not be complete without the mediation of culture, that is, the intervention of the law. This is represented by a parable within the story, the “well-known dialogue” of the two sages. The dialogue is quite brief. The first sage declares his intention to proclaim a prohibition on fasting. The second sage replies that no dog would ever think of fasting, since it contravenes dog nature. The end. But the big question that this little exchange leaves unresolved is, is fasting thereby forbidden or not? Against the “great majority of commentators” who hold that the lesson of the dialogue is that fasting is freely permitted yet impossible (rather like saying that human beings are freely permitted to flap their arms and fly), the dog comes to an entirely different conclusion: fasting is in fact

20 The problem of the cat-dog relation is an unfortunately neglected field of philosophical research. The one exception to this is Rainer Maria Rilke, who dedicated some interesting observations on the topic in his preface to a book of cat drawings by a very young Balthus. Rilke analyzes the two main species of domestic animals in terms of their contrasting relations to the human world. The dog has a tragic pathos: he is torn between his animal nature and the human milieu. He strives, impossibly yet ever faithfully, to overcome his own nature and join that other world which he worships and adores. Cats, on the other hand, are enigmatic creatures. They are withdrawn into their own universe which, in spite of their cuddliness and whatever warm contact they may have with human beings, is self-contained and impenetrable. Cats are wholly Other. One could conjecture that the differing appeal of these pet animals has to do with the way that they represent the two basic vectors of subjectivity: the dog stands for the process of subjectivation itself, the tragic entrance into culture, while the cat

represents what falls outside the dialectic of culture and can never be sublated there, the archaic, unfathomable Other.

Take dogs: the admiration and trust evidenced in their approaches to us often make some of them seem to have abandoned their most primal canine traditions and turned to worship of our ways, and even of our faults. That is precisely what makes them tragic and sublime. Their determination to acknowledge us forces them to live at the very limits of their nature, constantly – through the humanness of their gaze, their nostalgic muzzlings – on the verge of passing beyond them.

Cats are just that: cats. And their world is utterly, through and through, a cat's world. You think they look at us? Has anyone ever truly known whether or not they deign to register for one instant in the sunken surface of their retina our trifling forms? As they stare at us they might merely be eliminating us magically from their gaze, eternally replete. True, some of us indulge our susceptibility to their wheedling and electric caresses. But let such

persons remember the strange, brusque, and offhand way in which their favorite animal frequently cuts short the effusions they had fondly imagined to be reciprocal. They, too, even the privilege elected to enjoy the proximity of cats, have been rejected and denied time and time again, and even as they cherish some mysteriously apathetic creature in their arms they too have felt themselves brought up short at the threshold of a world that is a cat's world, a world inhabited exclusively by cats and in which they live in ways that no one else can fathom.

See *Mitsou: Forty Images by Balthus*. (1919) Translated by Richard Miller (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1984), 4.

triply forbidden. He reasons as follows: “[T]he first sage wished to forbid fasting; what a sage wishes is already done, so fasting was forbidden; as for the second sage, he not only agreed with the first, but actually considered fasting impossible, piled therefore on the first prohibition a second, that of dog nature itself; the first sage saw this and thereupon withdrew the explicit prohibition, that was to say, he imposed upon all dogs, the matter being now settled, the obligation to know themselves and to make their own prohibitions regarding fasting. So here was a threefold prohibition instead of merely one, and I had violated it” (310). Let us consider these steps in turn. First there is posed an external prohibition, or more precisely the intention to pose such a prohibition, which by its mere utterance takes on the force of law: *Dogs must not fast*. The second sage responds by shifting registers from the normative to the descriptive; he makes a statement of fact, which in a funny short circuit between is and ought becomes a prohibition that flows not the mouth of the authoritative sage but from dogdom’s inner nature: *Dogs must not fast because they cannot fast*. Finally, at the last stage there is the injunction for the dog to “Know thyself” and to formulate his own law on the basis of that knowledge: presumably this would read, *I must not fast because dogs cannot fast*. But are we so sure of this? With this last movement, the movement of subjectivation, things become more complicated. What we encounter at the third stage is neither an externally imposed order nor the sureness of inner instinct, but rather the metamorphosis of the dog into a reflexive agent responsible for formulating his own maxims. Instead of the “investigations of a dog” we have, in a Kantian turn, the “self-legislation of a dog.” Earlier in the story, during the young dog’s encounter with a group of virtuoso musicians, the perplexed puppy makes a bizarre sounding accusation: “Those dogs were violating the law.” In that case, it was the performers’ refusal to respond to the puppy’s questions that transgressed the canine code, and, as he stated at the time, even “magicians” are no exception to the law. But how can animals violate the law at all? Is not the rule of law superfluous to beasts since they are located either before or beyond it, struggling and enjoying in a lawless wilderness where nature provides the only rule?²¹ That is the position of the majority of commentators on the dialogue of the sages: animals are free to do what they want, but this freedom turns out to be nothing but the unfreedom of instinct, it lacks the properly normative dimension of law. Kafka’s animals are hardly beasts in this sense. They are rather border-

21 Oxana Timofeeva offers an insightful and very funny commentary on this problem of animals violating the law, starting from the recent true story of the St Petersburg Legislative Assembly seeking to ban the noise of, among other nuisances, the footsteps of cats. See “Trampling Cats,” *Eurozine* (2013). Available at <http://www.eurozine.com/articles/2013-05-10-timofeeva-en.html>

creatures, wandering across or along the divide between nature and culture, instincts and institutions, without finding a home in either. The philosopher dog's prolonged fast – his most powerful research method – both denatures the body and brings him to the point of entrance into culture, “before the law.” To think together the breakup of the body and the birth of normativity: this is the wider theoretical challenge of Kafka's dog, the difficulty that hounds us, and a crucial problem for a philosophy of the future. Is this border region not the real object of Kafka's new science?²² In the precarious interval between the natural body ruled by instinct and the subject governed by the law, strange creatures roam about, like the immortal spool-being Odradek, or the cat-lamb “crossbreed” in the story of the same name. “Sometimes I cannot help laughing when it sniffs around me and winds itself between my legs and simply will not be parted from me. Not content with being lamb and cat, it almost insists on being a dog as well” (427).

- 22 This would, of course, require further investigation. On the many borders and edges in Kafka's work, to which I add here the border between nature and culture, or instincts and institutions, see Mladen Dolar, “The Burrow of Sound.” *differences*. 22.2-3 (2011): 130-136.



**“Miraculous Constellations”:
Counter-Mapping &
the Avant-Garde**
Dee Morris & Stephen Voyce

The aesthetic, pedagogical, and political focus of this essay is a set of documents we call *counter-maps*. Like an avant-garde poem, a counter-map is both a critique and a creation: it appropriates maps and mapping forms in order to expose structures of power at work in these supposedly neutral or objective versions of the world. The term comes from critical cartographer Denis Wood, who provides a lineage that includes early twentieth-century map art, the traditions of Parish Mapping, the mental maps movement of the 1960s, and contemporary Indigenous and bioregional maps. For Wood, “[I]t is counter-mapping that shows us where mapping is heading.”¹

Imagine, for instance, an interactive map that transposes the landscape of war-torn Baghdad onto the streets of San Francisco; a map that plots incarceration rates city block by city block; a map the size of a basketball court constructed from junked computer parts; a map that plots the covert aerial routes of the CIA’s program of extraordinary rendition. {FIGURES 33-36}

The material practices that distinguish counter-maps from maps resemble the practices that differentiate experimental from mainstream, conventional from innovative compositions. Like an innovative poem, a counter-map is a differential document: it disturbs, distorts, or disintegrates familiar forms in order to challenge habitual modes of thought. This warping or torquing of form – counter-mapping’s practice of fragmentation, superposition, polyvalence, zooming in, zooming out, and/or jamming of codes and scales – is an agent of the drive Barrett Watten calls *negativity*: a critical alterity and interpretive openness that exposes the assumptions through which a culture claims, zones, occupies, and navigates space and proposes new structures through which it is possible to understand our positioning within local, national, international, and/or global totalities.

In addition to the “legend” that sets a map’s scale and indexes its icons, conventional maps rely on a myth fundamental enough to escape attention. Maps, the story goes, are unproblematic representations of an objective and persistent world: whether sketched, printed, or pixelated, they appear to reference something “out there,” something as real as rock. As critical cartographers have long insisted, however, this mimetic conception of mapping overlooks two key factors: whether it appears on a cliff, a skin, a page, or a screen, a map is a two-dimensional abstraction of multi-dimensional space; it is, therefore, by necessity, significantly less dense, deep, and detailed than the territory it purports to

- 1 Denis Wood with John Fels and John Krygier. *Rethinking the Power of Maps* (New York: The Guilford Press, 2010), 111.

represent. To properly interpret a map or counter-map, it is crucial to understand the technologies and codes by which it is produced, to see these codes as parts of larger ideological systems, and to ask what social spaces they promote, what forms of subjectivity they construct or thwart, what powers they serve, and, with accelerating urgency, how they position us within the postmodern complexities Fredric Jameson calls the global system of late capitalism.

Perhaps predictably, maps figure prominently in the work of almost every important twentieth-century avant-garde movement. Many of the most compelling compositions of Italian Futurism, Dada, Surrealism, Fluxus, Situationism, Concrete poetics, and Pop and Conceptual Art feature counter-maps in their media mix. Our task in this essay is to survey early- to mid-twentieth-century works in order to track points of convergence between aesthetic and political counter-mapping projects. Our larger points are these: (1) that counter-maps are semiological systems with verbal and visual logics that are as legible, flexible, and generative as conventions of innovative art and writing; (2) that the extensive use of maps in early and mid-twentieth-century avant-garde practices offers a rich set of models for ongoing anti-capitalist, anti-colonial, and social justice activism; (3) and, finally, that counter-maps, like other innovative art practices, can be employed not only to expose forms of exploitation but to propose alternative forms of thinking, feeling, and dwelling in the worlds we inhabit.

EXHIBIT 1: Dada Conquers!

In his “Zurich Chronicle,” penned in February 1916, Tristan Tzara reports magnificent goings on at the Cabaret Voltaire. Performances by Hugo Ball, Richard Huelsenbeck, Marcel Janco, Mme Hennings, and Tzara himself entertain the crowd; paintings by Pablo Picasso and Hans Arp adorn the walls; and Dadaist noise-music fills the air. Circulating in this carnival tumult, Tzara identifies “[c]oloured papers ... abstract art and geographic futurist map-poems,”² the latter most likely the compositions in disparate font sizes and exploded spacing that the Italian Futurist F. T. Marinetti described as *parole in libertà* (words-in-freedom). Although not cartographic per se, these map-poems were nonetheless, like the paintings of Picasso and Arp, multi-sensorial zones of dynamic force.

- 2 Tristan Tzara, “Zurich Chronicle, 1915–1919” in *Dada: Art and Anti-Art*. Edited by Hans Richter (London: Thames and Hudson, 1997).

On April 12, 1918, the German Dadaists gave a rousing performance at the Berlin Sezession, at which Hausmann delivered a speech calling for “new materials in painting” to capture the ethos of the city. “In Dada,” he proclaimed, “you will recognize our real situation: miraculous constellations in real material, wire, glass, cardboard, fabric ... your own utterly brittle fragility, your bagginess.”³

War-torn Berlin differed radically from neutral Zurich. After Germany’s military defeat in November 1918, a succession of crises – the Kaiser’s abdication, the West’s retributive postwar sanctions, soaring inflation, and the popular but largely ineffectual Spartacist revolution – led to the ascendancy of the precarious Weimar Republic in 1920. Like Zurich Dada, which aimed to rebuild language from the letter up, “Club Dada” allied itself with anti-State communists who wanted to remake the outlines of the map of Europe.

The German Dadaists Hannah Hoch, Raoul Hausmann, and Kurt Schwitters were among the earliest artists to make sustained use of cartographic materials. Maps featured prominently in four of the best known early examples of photomontage: Hoch’s *Cut with the Kitchen Knife* (1920) and Hausmann’s *Dada Siegt! / Dada Conquers!* (1920), *Tatlin lebt zu Hause / Tatlin at Home* (1920), and *ABCD* (1923-24). In a cut-and-paste mix of Cubist collage, Zurich Dada performance, Futurist typography, and a Constructivist machine aesthetic, these photomontages, assembled in a spirit Hausmann described as “perfectly kindhearted malice,” functioned as stingingly effective political satire.

Innovations in mass publishing were essential to the practice of photomontage. With the explosion of photojournalism, maps – like the photographs, graphs, posters, and advertisements littering the works of “Club Dada” – became a standard feature of newspapers, illustrated magazines, and other affordable reading materials.

Consider, for example, Hausmann’s *ABCD*: {FIGURE 37}

Much is rightly made of Hausmann’s visualization of sound as letters of the alphabet projecting loudly from between his teeth. In a term that subtends the border between page and canvas, looking and reading, art and poetry, the artist-poet called these productions “optophonetic” poster-poems. Language weaves in and out of all the materials in the composition: a photograph of outer space, a Czech banknote, an advertisement designed by El Lissitzky for a 1923 Merz evening in Hanover, and a map of Harrar,

- 3 Raoul Hausmann, “Synthetic Cinema of Painting” in *Dadas on Art: Tzara, Arp, Duchamp and Others*. Edited by Lucy Lippard (New York: Dover, 2007), 59-61.

Ethiopia, which the poet Arthur Rimbaud once called home. The maps Hausmann worked into his (self)-portraiture capture not the singular essence of an individual but the travels, associations, and actions of a politically motivated group.

Hausmann's photomontages saluted the development of an *international avant-garde*. By 1923, Dada had established centers in Zurich, New York, Berlin, Cologne, Hanover, Paris, and elsewhere. More militant than their Zurich counterparts, the members of Berlin Dada marked the First International Dada Fair (1920) by suspending an effigy of a German officer with the head of a pig and prominently displaying Hausmann's *Dada Siegt! / Dada Conquers!*, also known as *A Bourgeois Precision Brain Incites a World Movement*. In this photomontage, Hausmann stands center-right beside an easel bearing the image of the Wenzelplatz in Prague, a stop on the 1920 Dada Tour organized by Hausmann, Huelsenbeck, and Johannes Baader. The pictorial equivalent of a subtitle, the artist appears as a dandyish and monocled bourgeois sophisticate poised to lecture the room. The letters "D A D A" now pave the street anew, while the number 391 salutes the title of Francis Picabia's influential magazine. Above the easel, a map of the Northern hemisphere is stamped with the name of the movement, while below center foreground, an exposed cranium reveals a man with DADA on the brain. Art, Hausmann proclaims, permeates the mind, the city, and the world.

Intertextual references to the movement abound: in the lower third of the montage, a snippet from Huelsenbeck's manifesto (also entitled *Dada Siegt*) connects the mouth of the precision brain to the typewriter, while just above this text, a soccer ball alludes to a four-page satirical broadsheet, *Jedermann sein eigener Fussball (Everyone his own soccer ball)*, a pamphlet distributed in February 1920 by Wieland Herzfelde's Leftist publishing house Malik Verlag and censored the very same day.

The maps in Hausmann's photomontages anticipate the argument Wood was to make several decades later: cartography is not an innocent mimetic practice but a central player in the modern State's military conquests, a marker of its dependence upon colonial enslavement and resource extraction, and a carrier of ideologies of nationhood deployed to justify imperialist aims. The "miraculous constellations" of photomontage repurpose the "real materials" of everyday life. Active at some of the most important scenes in twentieth-century art history, the counter-map – like Byron the Bulb in Thomas Pynchon's *Gravity's Rainbow* – loiters in the background plotting revolution.

In the early 1920s, as many Dadaists moved on from their centers of activity in Zurich, Berlin, New York, and elsewhere, Paris once again became an artistic hotbed. *The Surrealist Map of the World* first appeared in a special issue of the Belgian periodical *Variétés* in 1929. Entitled “Le Surréalisme en 1929,” this issue featured works by René Crevel, Paul Éluard, Louis Aragon, Robert Desnos, and André Breton alongside Belgian writers and artists Paul Nougé, E. L. T. Mesens, and others. {FIGURE 39}

Denis Wood suggests that Éluard likely authored the map. In 1924, the French poet had toured Southeast Asia and parts of Indochina, encountering evidence of appalling colonial violence committed by Dutch and French powers. As Wood explains, “Éluard had recorded his route on a map, *Les Cinq Parties du Monde, Planisphère, Comprenant toutes les Possessions Coloniales*, a classic of the era that displayed, on a Mercator projection, English colonial possessions in yellow, French in pink, Dutch in orange, Italian in mauve, and so on.”⁴ If Wood is correct that “maps blossom in the springtime of the State,”⁵ the counter-map’s first appearance in the early 20th-century avant-gardes announces their unequivocally anti-colonial project.

“L’Humour,” a short essay by Sigmund Freud published in the Surrealist issue of *Variétés*, offers an especially fitting introduction to their hallucinatory redux of the Mercator projection. Humor, we are told, “is not resigned; it is rebellious. It signifies not only the triumph of the ego but also of the pleasure principle, which is able here to assert itself against the unkindness of the real circumstances.”⁶ This passage suggests why ruminations on humor launch the journal’s “petite contribution au dossier de certains intellectuels à tendances révolutionnaires” (*Variétés*, *Table of Contents*): as Freud and the Surrealists recognized, humor renders absurd what cultural documents like maps offer as unproblematic representations of the real.

If “Le Monde au Temps des Surrealistes” is a warped projection that anticipates maps like Jake Barton’s *City of Memory* (2008) and Tim Roeskens’s *Videomappings: Aida, Palestine* (2009), it is helpful to recall that all projections of a three-dimensional sphere onto a two-dimensional plane distort scale, shape, and other essential metric properties of maps. Many variants of the Mercator projection make Europe seem to be approximately the size of South America and Greenland the size of Africa, while, in

- 4 Wood, Fels, and Kyger, *Rethinking the Power of Maps*, 199.
- 5 Wood, Fels, and Kyger, *Rethinking the Power of Maps*, 15.
- 6 Sigmund Freud, *An Autobiographical Study, Inhibitions, Symptoms and Anxiety, The Question of Lay Analysis and Other Works in The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*. Edited by James Strachey. Vol. 20 (London: Hogarth Press), 177-258 (p. 163).

actuality, South America is twice the size of Europe and Africa more than ten times the size of Greenland. As Ramona Currie, a reporter for the geography periodical *Directions Magazine*, aptly notes, “Mercator projections present a *surrealistic* view of the world that makes them inappropriate choices for use in classrooms!”⁷

Three anomalies are likely to captivate the viewer of the Surrealists’ map of the world. In its schema, the equator deviates from a straight line; the Pacific rather than the Atlantic occupies the center of the drawing, banishing Europe (and its ethnocentrism) to the edge of the page and end of the earth; and North America has been swallowed whole by Alaska and Labrador. Among a host of other tendentious deformations, Easter Island looms large, Ireland towers over England, and Paris becomes the capital of Germany.

Like their Dadaist counterparts, Surrealist artists and writers employ maps in direct opposition to the cartographic deformances sanctioned by colonial enterprise, warfare, and the globalizing project of modernity. A world map – if it were accurate – would have to account for perpetually shifting border disputes and land grabs. The French and Belgian Surrealist contingents first charted their common cause in a 1925 manifesto, “The Revolution First and Always!” (The majority of those featured in *Variétés* were among its signatories.) “The world,” they declare, “is a crossroads of conflicts”:

Even more than patriotism – which is a quite commonplace sort of hysteria, though emptier and shorter-lived than most – we are disgusted by the idea of belonging to a country at all, which is the most bestial and least philosophic of the concepts to which we are all subjected.⁸

Breton and company, however, champion a more optimistic view of international struggle than, say, the Dadaists: civilization, Tzara insists with characteristic nihilistic wit, is “still shit, but from now on we want to shit in different colors so as to adorn the zoo of art with all the flags of all the consulates.”⁹ France had in 1924 joined Spain’s colonial repression of the Berber rebellion in Morocco’s Rif region, while the aftermath of World War I was still glaringly on display in Europe’s devastated cities. This incursion by the French state would prompt the Surrealists to consolidate ties with the French Communist Party (PCF). The manifesto’s authors proclaim their resolute opposition to nationalism and imperialism: “we vigorously and in every way reject the idea of this kind of

- 7 Currie, Ramona. “A More Realistic View of Our World,” *Directions Magazine* (Feb. 3, 1999).
- 8 Louis Aragon, Antonin Artaud, Andre Breton, Max Ernst, Robert Desnos, et al. “The Revolution First and Always” in *Surrealism*. Edited by Mary Ann Caws. Translated by Michael Richardson and Krzysztof Fijalkowski (London: Phaidon, 2004), 201.
- 9 Tristan Tzara, “Monsieur Antipyrine’s Manifesto” in *The Dada Painters and Poets: An Anthology*. Edited by Robert Motherwell (Cambridge, Mass: Wittenborn, Schultz Inc., 1951), 73-97.

subjugation ... for us France does not exist.”¹⁰ And, voila, it vanishes in *The Surrealist Map of the World*, now interchangeable with its former WWI enemy. In similar cartographic twists, Ireland is made to loom over a puny England and the post-1917 Russian Revolution spreads the Soviet Union across most of the rest of the continent.

If the map’s shrunken southern hemisphere is more difficult to explain, an excerpt from Freud’s *The Question of Lay Analysis* in a 1927 issue of *La Révolution Surréaliste* offers a clue: “If someone talks of subconsciousness,” Freud writes, “I cannot tell whether he means the term topographically – to indicate something lying in the mind beneath consciousness – or qualitatively – to indicate another consciousness, a subterranean one The only trustworthy antithesis is between conscious and unconscious.”¹¹ Freud’s rebuke of topological metaphors notwithstanding, the Surrealists relished the visual puns the cartographic imaginary sets up.

The preferred English translation of the title, *The Surrealist Map of the World*, lacks the original title’s insistence on temporality. Matthew Gale’s more literal translation – *World at the Time of the Surrealists* – rightly points to the Surrealist’s subjective and pliable stance: “we are not ‘utopians,’” they maintain, but in their work borders between nation states – like lines drawn on paper by generals and venture capitalists – shift, disappear, and reconstitute themselves otherwise.¹² This mischievous repurposing of traditional maps is an essential element in the Situationist counter-mapping of Guy Debord and Asger Jorn.

EXHIBIT 3: The Naked City

{FIGURE 40} Embedded in the coterie journals, performances, exhibits, and spectacles that provided their contexts, Dada and Surrealist counter-maps were exemplary aesthetic creations, but their bold lettering, torqued scales, and attentiveness to contemporary events made them, at the same time, political and pedagogical documents. In evoking the dynamics of nationalism, colonialism, and imperialism, avant-garde counter-mapping aimed to situate attentive viewers within a global, multinational network of power-driven political systems.

In a term made famous by Fredric Jameson, the aim of counter-mapping was “cognitive”: its intent was to draw the alert viewer into an act or process of knowing. As Jameson elaborates this idea,

10 Aragon et al., “The Revolution First and Always,” 201.

11 Freud, *The Question of Lay Analysis*, 198.

12 Aragon et al., “The Revolution First and Always,” 202.

An aesthetic of cognitive mapping – a pedagogical political culture which seeks to endow the individual subject with some new heightened sense of its place in the global system – will necessarily have to respect this now enormously complex representational dialectic and invent radically new forms in order to do it justice.¹³

In place of Freud, summoned to authorize Surrealist practices, Jameson draws on the work of two lesser-known American academics: one a cognitive psychologist, the other a city planner. The notion of a cognitive map is initially elaborated in two mid-twentieth-century documents: Edward C. Tolman's "Cognitive Maps in Rats and Men," published in *The Psychological Review* in 1948, and Kevin Lynch's *The Image of the City*, published by MIT Press in 1960. Tolman's experiments – his "ratiocinations," as he calls them¹⁴ – demonstrate the construction of rudimentary field maps in the brains of rats trained to run a maze; Lynch's study demonstrates the construction of abstracted city plans in the brains of citizens navigating the streets of Boston, Jersey City, and Los Angeles.

For rats and city-dwellers alike, the stakes of mental mapping are practical – access to food, for one; access to a wider array of urban rewards, for the other – but writing, respectively, at the close of World War II and the opening of the Cold War, Tolman and Lynch expand their arguments to include more general, and equally urgent, behavioral and sociological ruminations.

For Tolman, a rat with a limited cognitive map is a dangerous rat. "[I]t is going to be my contention," he writes, "that some, at least, of the so-called 'psychological mechanisms' which the clinical psychologists and the other students of personality have uncovered as the devils underlying many of our individual and social maladjustments can be interpreted as narrowings of our cognitive maps due to too strong motivations or to too intense frustration."¹⁵ For Tolman, insufficient cognitive mapping – "strip mapping," as he calls it – leads to "regression," "fixation," and systematic "displacement of aggression onto outgroups,"¹⁶ the dead end – the devil's work – of World War II.

Lynch, too, moves quickly from defective cognitive maps to social, political, and moral consequences. The mental images citizens of Boston used to navigate their respective urban mazes were, he found, flawed abstractions, mental representations marred by "floating points, weak boundaries, isolations, breaks

- 13 Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1991), 54.
- 14 Edward C. Tolman, "Cognitive Maps in Rats and Men." *The Psychological Review* 55.4 (1948), 207.
- 15 Tolman, "Cognitive Maps in Rats and Men," 207.
- 16 Tolman, "Cognitive Maps in Rats and Men," 207.

in continuity, ambiguities, branchings, [and] lacks of character or differentiation.”¹⁷

For Lynch as for Tolson, this failure of mapping is not just cognitive but moral and, in humans at least, aesthetic: it signals, that is, an inability to grasp “a complicated pattern, continuous and whole, yet intricate and mobile,” a reluctance to remain “open-ended to change of function and meaning,” and a refusal to be “receptive to the formation of new imagery.”¹⁸

Citing Lynch as his source of the term, Jameson ups the ante from the local to the global, from the navigational to the philosophical, from the moral to the formal or aesthetic. Like Tolson, Lynch was an empiricist who believed it was possible to create the conditions for a richly detailed, comprehensive, and above all accurate representation of the brick-and-mortar real, be it a maze or a city. Drawing on postmodern theories of representation, Jameson, by contrast, asks not for an *accurate* but for “a *situational* representation.”¹⁹ As Wood and his fellow critical cartographers would agree, no map is an accurate map: to a greater or lesser extent, for Jameson maps draw an ideological relationship between an individual subject and “that vaster and properly unrepresentable totality which is the ensemble of society’s structures as a whole.”²⁰

This turn puts Guy Debord and Asger Jorn’s Situationist maps at the heart of the lineage we trace in this essay. Like a cognitive map, a “counter-map” is not a representation of an actual, precise, or correct layout – the “real” maze, the “naked” city – but rather a representation of our imaginary relation to the complexities that surround us. Counter-mapping’s tendentious – sometimes utopian, sometimes dystopian – advocacy and invention of new cartographic protocols are possible because, as Jameson notes, the moment it becomes clear “there can be no *true* maps ... it also becomes clear that there can be ... a dialectical advance, in the various historical moments of mapmaking.”²¹

McKenzie Wark, one of the Situationists’ most discerning advocates, puts the counter-maps of Guy Debord and Asger Jorn at the leading edge of such an advance. “To abstract,” Wark explains, “is to construct a plane” – in this case, a spatial plane on a counter-map – “upon which otherwise different and unrelated matters may be brought into many possible relations. To abstract is to express the virtuality of nature, to make known some instance of its possibilities, to actualize a relation out of infinite relationality, to manifest the manifold.”²² Debord and Jorn’s “The Naked City”

17 Kevin Lynch, *The Image of the City* (Cambridge, Mass: The MIT Press, 1960), 25.

18 Lynch, *The Image of the City*, 119.

19 Jameson, *Postmodernism*, 51. Our italics.

20 Jameson, *Postmodernism*, 51.

21 Jameson, *Postmodernism*, 52. Our italics.

22 McKenzie Wark, “Abstraction” in *A Hacker Manifesto* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2004), [008].

(1957) is one of the most compelling of the “radically new forms” the mid-century avant-garde put forth as a passage out of the impasses of World War II and its Cold War aftershock. {FIGURE 42}

Situationist counter-maps are the product of drifts or *dérives* practiced by Debord and his companions in post-World War II Paris. Often collective rather than solitary, of no preset route or duration, and driven by intuition rather than planning, a *dérive* is a ritual exorcism of the instrumental, efficient, and ratiocinative life Le Corbusier and other urban planners envisioned for post-war cities of steel-framed, glass-enclosed housing blocks; pre-fabricated, mass-produced office and manufacturing complexes; and networks of ring roads, shuttle stops, and pedestrian circulation paths designed to bind these sites together.

The alternatives as Debord and his allies envisioned them are starkly evident in two Situationist creations. The first, a map of the 16th Arrondissement drawn by Debord’s friend Paul-Henri Chombart de Lauwe, traces the routes taken by a Parisian student over the course of a year as she circulates between the School of Political Sciences, her residence, and the residence of her piano teacher:

The result – an insectoid clot of heavily scored, angular lines on an otherwise vacant field – lacks any possibility for the swerves Debord’s “Theory of the *Dérive*” celebrated as marks of “significant deviations” (62): it is the Situationist version of the mental map of a maze-running rat.

Debord and Jorn’s “The Naked City,” by contrast, maps a stylish, capacious, and transgressive event-space. “From a *dérive* point of view,” Debord explains, “cities have psychogeographical contours, with constant currents, fixed points and vortexes that strongly discourage entry into or exit from certain zones.”²³ To map territories conducive to swerves, Situationist cartographers had to devise a form to capture the city’s psychological and social as well as spatial layout. To borrow a term from Hakim Bey, they needed to identify “temporary autonomous zones” without obliterating the grids from that surround them.²⁴

To make their map, Debord and Jorn used an x-acto knife to excise from two municipal tourist maps sections of Paris not yet ruined by capitalism and bureaucracy, set these sections into a swirl, and struck them through with arrows to mark junctions and transfer points – “slopes,” in Debord and Jorn’s terminology – into and out of zones conducive to the aleatory practice of the drift. As their noir title suggests, *The Naked City* is a forensic map: it

23 Guy Debord, “Theory of the *Dérive*” in *Situationist International Anthology*. Revised and expanded version. Edited and Translated by Ken Knabb (Berkeley: Bureau of Public Secrets, 2006), 62.

24 Hakim Bey, T.A.Z.: *The Temporary Autonomous Zone, Ontological Anarchy, Poetic Terrorism*. Second edition with new preface (Brooklyn, NY: Autonomia, 2003).

emerges from pavement-pounding atmospheric sweeps of the city during which the cartographers sniff out evidence, follow hunches, and adjust their routes on the fly. Like Laura Kurgan’s “Million Dollar Blocks” or Trevor Paglen and John Emerson’s “Selected CIA Aircraft Routes,” their counter-map is the result of hardboiled research and is meant to be activated in a public forum in the name of justice and liberation.

There is, however, a crucial difference between Situationist and forensic counter-maps. Rather than simply displaying information, Situationists invite citizens to generate it for themselves by maximizing their experience of a dense and fluctuant space-time. In this sense, their city plans are proleptic rather than descriptive. To create their zones of ontological anarchy, they excise the residue of capitalism and bureaucracy – the political, economic, and legal contexts of a *rationalized Paris* – in order to lure drifters, poets, and artists into the significant deviations and unforeseen combinations that might generate, in Jameson’s words, “a dialectical advance” and actualize, in Wark’s terms, “a relation out of infinite relationality.”²⁵

Debord and Jorn’s Situationist counter-map is made with urgency and gusto. Although its DIY, cut-and-paste techniques predate the technologies by which we now represent the world – most importantly, the digital affordances of GPS, GIS, and satellite photography – it brings into view elements of contemporary activist or maptivist cartography that set out, in a similar fashion, to overturn the administrated and now also heavily surveilled routines of everyday life.

EXHIBIT 4: Geography of a Revolution

In 1968, the year after Debord’s *Society of the Spectacle* first appeared in print, a geographer by the name of William Bunge co-founded with Gwendolyn Warren, an inner-city public sector administrator, The Detroit Geographical Expedition and Institute. Under this rubric, they mobilized and trained a group of young “ghetto residents”²⁶ to undertake a series of experiments in radical cartography. Just as Dadaist, Surrealist, and Situationist artists appropriated cartographic forms to make their art, Bunge, Warren, and their group of citizen cartographers used artistic methods to make a series of activist interventions in the life of their city.

²⁵ Wark, “Abstraction,” [008].

²⁶ Wood, Fels, and Krygi-er, *Rethinking the Power of Maps*, 166.

Radical cartography is the term increasing numbers of activist map-makers – among others, individuals and collectives such as Bill Rankin, Alexis Bhagat, Lize Mogel, Hackitectura, the Institute for Applied Autonomy, and the Counter Cartographies Collective – use to describe their aesthetic, political, and pedagogical commitments. In their incisive introduction to their *Atlas of Radical Cartography*, Bhagat and Mogel define this term as a “practice of mapmaking that subverts conventional notions in order to actively promote social change. The object of critique,” they continue, “... is not cartography *per se* (as is generally meant by the overlapping term *critical cartography*), but rather social relations.”²⁷ Craig Dalton and Liz Mason-Deese of the Counter Cartographies Collective similarly define their practice as “militant research” that “aims to foster cooperation among researchers and participants to practically intervene in real problems without attempting to marshal state or administrative power.”²⁸

The pioneering work of the Detroit Geographical Expedition and Institute set the standards for this tradition. Unlike earlier geographical societies, whose members mapped *outward* toward new frontiers of unexplored terrain and colonial expropriation, Bunge and his colleagues moved *inward* to explore pockets of place that were not un-discovered but rather overlooked or exploited.

Consider these two maps, one municipal, the other activist: the first, an official police report entitled *Citywide Pattern of Children’s Pedestrian Deaths and Injuries by Automobiles*; the second, DGEI’s version of the same statistics retitled *Where Commuters Run Over Black Children on the Pointes-Downtown Track*.

{FIGURES 45-46}

Redrawn, the protest map isolates and identifies the consequences of white flight. At its poles are “The Pointes,” an enclave of corporate executives, and “Downtown,” Detroit’s inner-city warren for automotive and industrial workers; the dynamics it makes clear are the day-to-day workings – the tell-tale traces, the “tracks” – of racial and class privilege. Bunge’s touchstones here were most likely the epidemiologist John Snow’s 1854 map locating the source of an outbreak of cholera in London, Charles Booth’s poverty maps of 1899, and the groundbreaking work of the Chicago School of Sociological Research, but DGEI’s title gives its counter-map the punch of a Dada trickster.

The surprising thing about the DGEI’s counter-map is not its aim, methods, or medium. Like their forerunners in the Royal Geographic Society (founded in London in 1830), the Royal

27 Alexis Bhagat and Lize Mogel, Editors, *An Atlas of Radical Cartography* (Los Angeles: Journal of Aesthetics and Protest Press, 2008), 6.

28 Craig Dalton and Liz Mason-Deese, “Counter (Mapping) Actions: Mapping as Militant Research.” *ACME: An International E-Journal for Critical Geographies* 11.3 (2012), 439.

Dutch Geographic Society (founded in the Netherlands in 1873), or the Royal Belgian Geographical Society (founded in Brussels in 1876), the DGEI sent teams into previously uncharted territory to measure and record what they encountered and disseminate their findings in maps, lectures, journals, and books for the enlightenment of a curious public. Authorized by the nations that lent them their names, dignified by ruling powers who endorsed their missions, and funded by merchant-capitalists invested in overseas acquisitions and expansions, the work of these geographical societies was to submit “unknown” territory to known laws, powers, and customs. What is distinctive about the counter-map produced by Bunge’s coalition of academics and inner-city residents is its out-front, urgent, angry indictment of the manifestation of capitalism sixties activists were just beginning to call “interior colonialism.”

As compact and powerful as a poem, the title *Where Commuters Run Over Black Children on the Pointes-Downtown Track* gives a name to an urban capital’s deep and enduring division between wealth and poverty, owners and laborers, suburbs and slums, and provides a map of a daily pageant that plays out its consequences. This movement from a spatial pattern to its social and economic origins characterizes all DGEI’s maps of Detroit’s inner-city triangle: among them, Bunge and his colleague Robert Bordessa’s “Region of Rat-Bitten Babies” and the DGEI’s “Direction of Money Transfers in Metropolitan Detroit”: what these activist maps make plain are the many ways in which capital travels the same tracks as the speeding cars that kill the city’s black children. {FIGURE 47}

Conclusion

“Poiesis,” Nathan Brown contends, “means, for one thing, that poetics is not only proper to the province of literature”:

If, when the first volume of *Das Kapital* descends into “the hidden abode of production,” we descend also into the realm of poiesis, that is because making is not only a private enterprise of the author. What gets made, and how, depends upon configurations of social and technical forces, and this puts every practice of artistic making – film, sculpture, painting, architecture, performance, poetry, etc. – on the common, uneven ground of historical determination....

Poiesis, making, production, is thus bound up with boundary work, exposing the givenness of language to its outside not only through the continual reconstitution of what language is, but also through the exposure of language to what it is not: to other media of formal articulation and to historical determinations by which it is conditioned.²⁹

- ²⁹ Nathan Brown, "Poiesis." Conference Introduction. *Poiesis*. Multimedia Institute. Zagreb, Croatia (June 11-16, 2015).

We contend that the practice of counter-mapping is exemplary of this tension between artistic forms and visual representations of knowledge are central to the expanded field of contemporary poetics. In counter-mapping as in classical and contemporary avant-garde production, art is not subsumed by forms of knowledge nor are forms of knowledge subordinated to art: the two are, in each case, constitutively and strategically, codetermined. Bringing disparate realms of knowledge into relation on a plane – a mapping plane, a picture plane, the plane of a page – is a tactic of militant research. Looking back at our mini-exhibition, whether the examples map imperial expansion, territorial dispossession, or the circulation of capital, the makers' investments are ultimately in the ways we might occupy, share, defend, or critique a common world. Like Hausmann's "miraculous constellations," counter-mapping, if it is to have value beyond a momentary provocation, must be a tool of sustained political antagonism: evidence, that is, of alternative forms of thinking, feeling, and dwelling in the worlds we inhabit.



More Beautiful, More Intense?
H.D's Poetics of Comparison
Nathan Brown

“I will not Reason & Compare,” writes William Blake; “my business is to Create.”¹ But poetry is a practice of comparison. That is what I want to suggest through a reading of H.D.’s first book, *Sea Garden*, which makes this practice manifest with exemplary clarity. Poetry is a practice of immanent measure; it is the creation of comparison. It constructs relations among relative intensities, it weighs these, and it manifests a decision between them. Indeed, this practice of construction, measure, and decision is the most intimate practice of our daily lives, of our sexuality, of our political engagements. We could call this practice “comparison.” Poetry distills it.

Blake’s *Newton* figures Enlightenment rationality as instrumental measure {FIGURE 48}. Euclidean geometry provides a standard of form which bends the mind and body to its rule. The devices with which one drafts the figures of these standard forms render reason an instrument of conformity. In a word: reason conforms to measure, rather than creating it. This standard of rationality, which we might call instrumental measure, is what Blake rejects in favor of imaginative creation.

In favor of. Already, the phrase registers the fact that Blake’s formulation is itself a comparison: “I will not Reason & Compare: my business is to Create.” Creation is measured against comparison; imagination is implicitly measured against reason, and the soul gravitates toward one pole of the relation. We could say that Blake’s artistic practice *tends toward* creation rather than comparison. We note that the articulation of Blake’s tendency, his inclination – which is no doubt *felt* as an immediate affect, the felt inclination of one’s whole being – is also a judgment. It is articulated as a decision between one of two alternatives. What I want to show is that this decision hinges upon the relation of creation and comparison, of affect and reason, to different modalities of measure.

We can see that Blake’s whole art is, in fact, involved in a practice of comparison, of measuring relative intensities. He drafts, engraves, and paints differential intensities through exemplary relations among figure, line, and color. Consider, for example, the relation between the figural and compositional energies of the two pieces known as “The Ancient of Days” {FIGURE 49} and “Glad Day” {FIGURE 50}. In the first, the Demiurge whom Blake names Urizen assumes the same posture as his Newton, bound within a sphere and hunched over looking down in an act of instrumental measure, subjecting the cosmos to the standardized

1 William Blake, *Jerusalem in The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake*. Edited by David V. Erdman (New York: Doubleday, 1988), 153. Though I do not emphasize the point here, one should bear in mind that Blake’s formula from *Jerusalem* is articulated in the voice of Los.

rule of mathematical reason. This is how Blake figures the creation of the material world by God the Father. For him, it is not really an act of creation at all, but rather of subjugation to the rule of reason, represented here as a patriarch. In “Glad Day,” on the other hand, the figure whom Blake calls Albion extends his limbs to their full extent as the light of creation streams out of his body rather than down from on high. Blake’s Christian humanism figures the *immanence* of creative energy – imagination – as the human body realizing its own capacities. The relation between these two plates implicitly posits this immanent realization against the subjection of the human to the measure of a higher authority.

The construction of such relations is a practice of comparison. It is a practice that subsumes the entirety of Blake’s art, wherein the illustration of his elaborate mythology involves the composition of differences between figures which are indeed types, though of Blake’s own invention. His art involves not only the weighing of relative intensities – registered as compositional energies of figure, line, and color – but also implicit acts of judgment and valuation. A relation of intensities is felt, the soul inclines toward one or the other, and imaginative creation is the construction of this differential inclination in the heat and the craft of composition. It is this practice of comparison not as instrumental measure, but as immanent measure, which Blake calls creation.

Such a practice is central to H.D.’s art in *Sea Garden*, as in the poem “Sea Violet,” for example:

The white violet
is scented on its stalk,
the sea-violet
fragile as agate,
lies fronting all the wind
among the torn shells
on the sand bank.

The greater blue violets
flutter on the hill,
but who would change for these
who would change for these
one root of the white sort?

Violet

your grasp is frail
on the edge of the sand-hill,
but you catch the light –
frost, a star edges with its fire.²

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- 2 H.D., *Collected Poems: 1912-1944*. Edited by Louis L. Martz (New York: New Directions, 1983), 25-26.

Description. Situation. Comparison. Decision. Invocation. The white violet is described as “scented on its stalk,” “fragile as agate.” It is situated on the sand bank, fronting all the wind among the torn shells. It is compared to the blue violets, which are “greater” and which flutter on the hill. But the relative greatness of these blue violets consists only in their size, a standardized metric. The blue violets are larger than the white violet, they are plural, and they are situated more conspicuously. But they are of an inferior intensity. An inclination and a decision upon this point is registered by the insistence of a rhetorical question:

but who would change for these
who would change for these
one root of the white sort?

The singularity of the white violet, of the sea violet, is then summoned into the poem through an invocation that erases its epithets, displaces all relation, and renders it absolute rather than relative. Decided upon, the white violet or sea violet is now addressed simply as “Violet,” its singular nomination claiming a line of its own to begin the last stanza. The grasp of the violet is frail – it is tenuous, fragile, at risk – but it catches the light. The work of relation in the poem now turns from comparison to synthesis as the terrestrial violet catches the celestial light of the sun, and the poem is consumed in the cold white heat of metaphor:

frost, a star edges with its fire.

The poem works through comparison toward a true relation figured as consummation. The poem weighs relative intensities, negates the very terms of this relation through decision, and explodes into the singularity of metaphorical making: poiesis. “I will not Reason & Compare: my business is to Create,” says Blake, and H.D.’s poem ultimately says the same thing. But it arrives at the business of creation through a practice of comparison.

My claim is that the making of poesis, through comparison, is at the core of lyric practice. Consider Wordsworth's famous demonstration:

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I wandered lonely as a cloud
That floats on high o'er vales and hills,
When all at once I saw a crowd,
A host, of golden daffodils;
Beside the lake, beneath the trees,
Fluttering and dancing in the breeze.

Continuous as the stars that shine
And twinkle on the milky way,
They stretched in never-ending line
Along the margin of a bay:
Ten thousand saw I at a glance,
Tossing their heads in sprightly dance.

The waves beside them danced; but they
Out-did the sparkling waves in glee:
A poet could not but be gay,
In such a jocund company:
I gazed – and gazed – but little thought
What wealth the show to me had brought:

For oft, when on my couch I lie
In vacant or in pensive mood,
They flash upon that inward eye
Which is the bliss of solitude;
And then my heart with pleasure fills,
And dances with the daffodils.

The lyric "I" comes into relation with a host of golden daffodils, and these, in turn, are situated in their environment and drawn into relation with its elements through the poetic construction of the lyric speaker. The daffodils are "beside the lake, beneath the trees;" they are "fluttering and dancing in the breeze." Prepositions – "beside," "beneath," "in" – establish relations of contiguity which situate the daffodils within the relational space of the poem.

The daffodils are "continuous as" the stars that shine; like these, they "stretched in never ending line." Again, terrestrial flowers are figured as the equal of celestial stars, in this case by

virtue of their sheer multiplicity (“ten thousand saw I at a glance”) which seems to exceed on all sides this determinate count. The waves dance “beside” the daffodils, but whereas the flowers equal the stars in continuity and number, they “outdid” the sparkling waves in glee. The glee of the daffodils exceeds that of the waves. The daffodils are *more intense* than the waves and they are *continuous* as the stars.

In the past tense, the speaker *relates* these relations. He relates a scene, configures it, and weighs relative intensities within it through a practice of comparison. In the present tense of the final stanza – the space of powerful emotion recollected in tranquillity – the scene is interiorized, and the pleasure of its incorporation into the bliss of solitude melds the affective life of the heart with the sensory experience of the daffodils through the figure of the dance. Again, the act or practice of lyric consists in a practice of comparison yielding the synthetic singularity of metaphor through the fusion of the outer and inward eye, of sensory experience and affective life. I am not really saying anything about this poem we do not already know. To put it concisely: Wordsworth’s lyric subject is the affective synthesis of a sensory singularity. I merely note the practice of comparison which, within the world of the poem, renders the daffodils the singularity that they are.

Each of H.D.’s flower poems in *Sea Garden* – constituting a series that punctuates the collection – expresses a preference. And in each case this preference, in turn, expresses an implicit inclination of affective life through relations among sensory intensities. For example, “Sea Poppies”:

Amber husk
fluted with gold,
fruit on the sand
marked with a rich grain,

treasure
spilled near the shrub-pines
to bleach on the boulders:

your stalk has caught root

among wet pebbles
and drift flung by the sea
and grated shells
and split conch-shells.

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3 H.D., *Collected Poems*,
21.

Beautiful, wide-spread,
fire upon leaf,
what meadow yields
so fragrant a leaf
as your bright leaf?³

4 H.D., *Collected Poems*,
5.

Here the difficulties endured by the sea poppy – its exposure to the hard, mineral sharpness of the shore – endow it with a rich grain, a fragrance, and a fiery brightness more intense than that of a meadow flower.

Or consider the first two stanzas of “Sea Rose”:

Rose, harsh rose,
marred and with stint of petals,
meager flower, thin,
sparse of leaf,

more precious
than a wet rose
single on a stem –
you are caught in the drift.⁴

Note the formal density of H.D.’s rendering of the harsh rose, particularly the important role played by vowel sounds here and throughout her work: “meager flower, thin.” I do not know another line of English poetry that concentrates its sense so intensely in a system of phonetic relations as this one. The long open “o” sound in “flower” typifies, if you will, the open softness that one might associate with flowers in general – with the poetic figure of the flower. But this figure and this phoneme are qualified by the pinched, tight vowel sound of “meager,” redoubling the sense of a relation between subject (“flower”) and predicate (“meager”) with a relation between phonemic moods. This relation, its affect, is then registered or expressed by a third term, “thin,” held between commas at the end of the line. It is as though the predicative qualification of “meager” has pinched the open sound of “flower” into a thin “i,” which instantiates the relation of “meager”

and “flower” not only at the level of the phoneme but also the grapheme, the open space of the “o” pressed together into the narrow line of the “i,” tenuous and abstract, as if having fallen out of the word “stint,” above. The practice of comparison operates not only at the level of meaning or content in H.D.’s poems, but more immediately at the level of sound or form, where their sense resides in its most concentrated state.

The language of such poems carries sexual implications: the fragrance of the wide-spread flower, or the relation of the harsh rose, stint of petals, to the wet rose. The erotic cartography of female anatomy in H.D.’s poems, and the exploration of differential drives and bisexual desires that it performs, has been widely noted. Yet we need to ask not only *how* sexuality is figured in these poems, but *what it is*. If we say that sexuality is a psychosomatic field of differential intensities, then we might begin to see how the lyric practice of comparison – the weighing of relative intensities as an act of immanent measure – bears upon the poetic exploration of desire. The field of sexual experience is at once intensely localized and amorphously diffuse. As Maurice Merleau-Ponty says, sexuality “has internal links with the whole active and cognitive being” such that “we commit our whole personal life to it.”⁶ “Sexuality is neither transcended in human life,” he writes, “nor shown up at its center by unconscious representations. It is at all times present there like an atmosphere.”⁷

The Oedipal Complex of Freudian theory, for example, is not really a relation of determinate desires. The phantasies it breeds constitute a field of affective impulses and inclinations which saturate the psychosomatic experience of childhood to a degree that is essentially without measure, blurring and eliding the consistency of figures, bodies, or psychological subjects. Or consider Freud’s famous case study of hysteria, in which he reports that “when Dora talked about Frau K., she used to praise her ‘adorable white body’ in accents more appropriate to a lover than to a defeated rival.”⁸ Freud deduces that within the complex field of her unconscious phantasies, Dora’s desire for Frau K is stronger, more deeply rooted, than her desire for Herr K or her father. But in what does this desire consist? Frau K speaks to Dora, as a child, about the secrets of her marriage. She introduces Dora to an illicit catalog of sexual perversions through the pages of a sex manual. When she visits, Dora sleeps in Frau K’s bed with her while Herr K sleeps elsewhere. These intimacies construct a cathexis, a bond and a preferential inclination within which the

- 5 Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*. Translated by Colin Smith (London: Routledge, 2002), 182.
- 6 Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, 198.
- 7 Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, 195.
- 8 Sigmund Freud, *A Case of Hysteria in The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*. Translated and Edited by James Strachey. Vol. VII (London: Hogarth, 1953), 61.

female voice, the female body, the experience of feminine secrecy and seduction becomes more desirable than the crude bodies and straightforward proposals of male specimens. The phantasy is an affective inclination that subsumes the whole of experience by virtue of its relation to other elements of that experience. There is no “no” in the unconscious, Freud teaches. This is why Melville’s *Bartleby* says, “I would prefer not to.” And we can say that Dora’s rejection of Herr K does not express a negation but an unconscious preference for his wife. Or not, rather, for his wife, but for the singularity of her adorable white body.

Thus, the stakes these inclinations, of the affective singularity of a preference, could not be higher. The field of sexual desire is unmeasured, ambivalent, amorphous, and yet relentlessly determinate. Within the unmeasured field of sexual desire, the poems in *Sea Garden* take the measure of its determinations. In “The Helmsman,” the variegated pleasures and sensual pains of earth – the lash of branches, the jagged edges of rocks, the moisture of “leaf-mold,” the “feel of the clefts in the bark” – are figured as a forgetful idyll or pastoral retreat, an escape inland from the abstract, repetitive rigors of the sea:

O be swift –
we have always known you wanted us.

We fled inland with our flocks,
we pastured them in hollows,
cut off from the wind
and the salt track of the marsh.

We worshipped inland –
we stepped past wood-flowers,
we forgot your tang,
we brushed wood-grass.

We wandered from pine-hills
through oak and scrub-oak tangles,
we broke hyssop and bramble,
we caught flower and new bramble-fruit
in our hair: we laughed
as each branch whipped back,
we tore our feet in half buried rocks
and knotted roots and acorn-cups.

We forgot – we worshipped,
 we parted green from green,
 we sought further thickets,
 we dipped our ankles
 through leaf-mould and earth,
 and wood and wood-bank enchanted us –

and the feel of the clefts in the bark,
 and the slope between tree and tree –
 and a slender path strung field to field
 and wood to wood
 and hill to hill
 and the forest after it.

We forgot – for a moment
 tree-resin, tree-bark,
 sweat of a torn branch
 were sweet to the taste.
 We were enchanted with the fields,
 the tufts of course grass
 in the shorter grass –
 we loved all this.

But now, our boat climbs – hesitates – drops –
 climbs – hesitates – crawls back –
 climbs – hesitates –
 O be swift –
 we have always known you wanted us.⁹

The inevitability of a return from the earthly pastoral escape to the tang and the determinate rhythms of the sea is registered by the simple consignment of the inland idyll to the past tense: “we fled,” “we worshipped,” “we wandered,” “we forgot,” “we were enchanted.” *But now* the circular structure of the poem returns us from the forgetfulness of “we” to the singular determination of “you,” which seems to be the determination of *being taken*. It is not that “we have always wanted you;” rather, “we have always known you wanted us.” Desire is the desire of the Other, and the poem knows this. “We have always known” this. That there is ultimately no escape from the determination of our desire as the desire of the Other is the poem’s concession to the Other of desire itself: to drive, to necessity, to fate, to what the Greeks called *ananke*. Here,

preference itself is ephemeral, fleeting, inessential. *For a moment* “tree-resin, tree-bark, / sweat of a torn branch / were sweet to the taste.” “We loved all this.” *But now*, what must be is. Inclination, in this poem – the eventual or tendential necessity of a return to sea – is not so much a matter of preference but of destiny. It is not so much the wood and the sea that are compared, let alone lesbian or heterosexual desire, but rather the sporadic contingency of pleasure and the tendential necessity of inclination. It is through the comparison of contingency and necessity themselves that the truth of one’s desire becomes manifest – whether one likes it or not.

Let me now try to unfold the consequences of this approach to H.D.’s art through a reading of what I consider her most profound and important poem – a poem which encounters, in the course of its complex articulation, the essential problems and possibilities of her lyric craft.

The longest poem in *Sea Garden*, “The Gift”¹⁰ opens and closes with two couplets, which state and restate the terms of an implicit comparison:

Instead of pearls – a wrought clasp –
a bracelet – will you accept this?

...

I send no string of pearls,
no bracelet – accept this.

First, a question, an offering: “will you accept this?” Later an imperative, perhaps an insistence: “accept this.” A gift is offered and given with either hope or resignation, with confidence or desperation – it is difficult to gauge, precisely, the modality of the tonal shift between the poem’s first gesture and its last. But at least we can say: *the poem is a gift*. It is offered as it begins; it is given as it ends. It is offered instead of pearls, instead of a necklace or bracelet, though perhaps it replaces or stands in for the scattered seed-pearls, spilt on a street on a hot day. In a typical modernist trope, the work of art is juxtaposed against the commodity. It has another sort of value. We can say: one sort of value is substituted for another, and the poem performs this substitution. *The poem is a substitution*. In being so, it implies a practice of comparison: *this* instead of *that*, the peculiar use value of art, over and against the

¹⁰ H.D., *Collected Poems*, 15-18. The text of the complete poem is included as an appendix to this essay.

determinate exchange values of the market. "I will not Reason & Compare: my business is to Create."

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The poem begins by substituting itself for pearls, but insofar as it begins at all it is, first and foremost, a substitute for silence. It makes this clear in the second stanza:

You know the script –
you will start, wonder:
what is left, what phrase
after last night? This:

"What phrase / after last night?": a dearth of language following a quarrel? Or the insufficiency of phrases relative to the tangible pleasures of bodies? Again, the scenario is ambiguous, but where language ends the poem begins. *The poem is a supplement*. Its speech emerges from speechlessness.

The poem narrates, recalls, characterizes. It describes, through indirections, a "you" for whom "the world is yet unspoiled" and an "I" who wants not to be perceived as the dupe of her own neuroses, as "defrauded of delight."

Do not dream that I speak
as one defrauded of delight,
sick, shaken by each heart-beat
or paralyzed, stretched at length,
who gasps:
these ripe pears
are bitter to the taste,
this spiced wine, poison, corrupt.
I cannot walk –
who would walk?
Life is a scavenger's pit – I escape –
I only, rejecting it,
lying here on this couch.

Insofar as the speaker knowingly rejects the world, she is not defrauded of delight. Her anxiety, however, seems to reside in the tenuousness of this escape and in the tension between her rejection of the world and the remainders of her relation to it. One such remainder is her description of that world, the poem through which she articulates her rejection of it, yet which thus draws her out of silence into speech. *The poem is a sacrifice*. It sacrifices the

repose of silence to speech, to communication between an “I” and a “you.” It surrenders the private retreat of “I only” to the act of describing the world that one rejects.

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The world the speaker rejects is spoiled by a cloying modality of beauty she both reviles and reiterates, precisely by being compelled to describe it, thus adding to its overfullness:

11 H.D., *Collected Poems*,
21.

Your garden sloped to the beach,
myrtle overran the paths,
honey and amber flecked each leaf,
the citron-lily head –
one among many –
weighed there, over-sweet.

...

The house, too, was like this,
over painted, over lovely –
the world is like this.

The over-sweet garden is a synecdoche for a world which is “over painted, over-lovely,” and this is a figure that runs throughout *Sea Garden*. We find its most direct presentation in “Sheltered Garden,” where this “beauty without strength / chokes out life,” and where its over-ripe sweetness gives way to a stringent, abrasive modality of beauty the speaker finds herself compelled to prefer.

O to blot out this garden
to forget, to find a new beauty
in some terrible
wind-tortured place.”

Here the logic of relation is negation. It is precisely the absence of negation, of the power to negate, that makes the sheltered garden unbearable (“I have had enough”) and that calls for the terrible stringency of a tortuous wind.

In “The Gift,” however, the stark contrast between the “wind-tortured place” of some terrible new beauty and the “beauty without strength” of the sheltered garden is complicated by the introduction of a third term: “a still place” neither enervated by stultifying prettiness nor dominated by the agitation of a tortuous wind. “I reason,” the speaker states (violating Blake’s criterion of poetic creation):

another life holds what this lacks
 a sea, unmoving, quiet –
 not forcing our strength
 to rise to it, beat upon beat –
 a stretch of sand,
 no garden beyond, strangling
 with its myrrh-lilies –
 a hill, not set with black violets
 but stones, stones, bare rocks,
 dwarf-trees, twisted, no beauty
 to distract – to crowd
 madness upon madness.

Only a still place
 and perhaps some outer horror
 some hideousness to stamp beauty,
 a mark – no changing it now –
 on our hearts.

These stanzas present a distilled summation of the affective, libidinal, and aesthetic cartography of *Sea Garden*, though the map has been redrawn to make space for a new topos. The “still place” evoked here does not force our strength to rise to it, beat upon beat, like the sea of “The Helmsman.” Rather, it is “a sea, unmoving, quiet.” Beyond it there is no over-sweet garden whose beauty “chokes out life,” as in “Sheltered Garden,” nor are there dark violets for whose multiplicity we would never trade “one root of the white sort,” as in “Sea Violet.” Instead, there are only “stones, stones, bare rocks, / dwarf-trees, twisted, no beauty / to distract.” Here it is not the negation of one modality of beauty (cloying, sweet, pretty) by another (harsh, astringent, stark) that is at issue; what is described is the *neutrality* of a still place without the distraction of either cloying or terrible beauty, immanence without relational intensity. Yet beauty and relation return to this scene of immanent neutrality by way of contrast with the exteriority it excludes: “and perhaps some outer horror / some hideousness to stamp beauty ... on our hearts.” Immanence includes exteriority by way of excluding it, includes relation through its absence, such that neutrality is marked as beautiful precisely through its lack of horror. The still place is not of itself beautiful, nor is a new beauty to be sought for elsewhere. Rather, beauty is marked by the retroactive relation of exteriority to interior stillness, of

hideousness to neutrality, and the impression of this mark is inevitable, is already there (“no changing it now”): not sought for, but accepted as an inescapable fact of affective life. Beauty is not a quality but a structure. It can be neither objectified in a scene nor subjectively evaded. It is an impression, in a technical sense: a stamp or mark or trace that is the remainder of a relation.

The “still place” evoked in the poem is implicitly associated with “the initiates” introduced in the preceding stanzas:

Sleepless nights,
 I remember the initiates,
 their gesture, their calm glance.
 I have heard how in rapt thought,
 in vision, they speak
 with another race,
 more beautiful, more intense than this.
 I could laugh –
 more beautiful, more intense?

Perhaps that other life
 is contrast always to this.
 I reason:
 I have lived as they
 in their inmost rites –
 they endure the tense nerves
 through the moment of ritual.
 I endure from moment to moment –
 days pass all alike,
 tortured, intense.

The “calm glance” of the initiates is compared with the neurotic intensity of the speaker who endures the tortured passage of days. The initiates converse with “another race” of superior beauty and intensity, and this “other life” is registered as utopian, in “contrast always to this.” The other race is reportedly *more* beautiful, *more* intense, and here the practice of comparison in which *Sea Garden* is engaged attains its most abstract and reflexive attunement. Poetry resides in neither ritual nor neurosis, neither the smooth gesture of the initiates nor the trembling hands of the hysteric, neither the calm glance nor the distracted gaze. Here, poetry is a practice of comparison whereby the intensities of “this” world are

drawn into contrast with “that,” and the scission produced by the relation between the actual and the utopian is marked as writing. In “The Gift,” lyric recognizes its vocation so precisely that its speaker *could* laugh, but instead she queries the curious simplicity of the practice she has stumbled upon in the act of speaking: “more beautiful, more intense?”

Hearing this question, and learning how to recognize it, we might go so far as to say that what it queries is essence of lyric itself. But if we make that claim then how are we to situate it and the lyric practice it specifies within the history of poetics and aesthetic theory? Given the content of H.D.’s poems in *Sea Garden*, the series of aesthetic encounters they trace with relations between natural objects and their affective correlates, I find it helpful to turn to the theory of aesthetic judgment found in Kant’s *Critique of Judgment*, which is precisely a theory of aesthetic judgment bearing upon subjective encounters with natural objects, first and foremost, rather than with art objects.

How can we situate the judgments of “beauty” and “intensity” at stake in H.D.’s poems, and the preferences these register, with regard to Kant’s aesthetics? First, we can say that the sort of judgments performed by H.D.’s speaker fall outside the purview of properly aesthetic judgment in Kant’s Third Critique. For Kant, the pleasure of the beautiful or the sublime clearly admits an affective dimension of aesthetic experience. But, as we know, for Kant the *satisfaction* experienced as the affective correlate of an aesthetic judgment must be disinterested, such that a judgment of beauty must be impartial and universal insofar as it is entirely without interest in the thing judged; it must be indifferent to the question of whether the thing should or should not exist, and indifferent to my subjective preference for one thing or the other.

The judgments of H.D.’s speaker are not disinterested in this sense. Rather, as I have been arguing, these judgments are made on the basis of *inclination*, a term we can now give a technical Kantian sense. Inclination, he argues, is determined by impressions of the senses which are *agreeable*, and the satisfaction of the agreeable always involves interest. The ground of the agreeable is what Kant terms “feeling,” an experience of pleasure or displeasure that is a purely subjective sensation, a sensation that must remain purely subjective and cannot constitute the representation of an object. Thus, Kant writes, “the green color of the meadows belongs to objective sensation, as perception of an object of sense; but its agreeableness belongs to subjective sensation, through which no

object is represented, i.e., to feeling, through which the object is considered as an object of satisfaction.”¹² When H.D.’s speaker says that “beauty without strength / chokes out life,” she judges on the basis of what is agreeable or not: on the basis of what either furthers or inhibits the speaker’s affective life. As Spinoza might say, she judges on the basis of what either increases or decreases her power of action. The agreeable is that which Kant terms “pathologically conditioned satisfaction”¹³ and this is precisely correct in the case of H.D.’s poems: her speaker prefers or finds agreeable that which corresponds to her drives and desires. Or, more stringently, that which meets her psychosexual needs.

This modality of non-aesthetic judgment in Kant’s theory – the agreeable as that which determines inclination through sensory satisfaction – thus allows us to specify the sort of judgments made by H.D.’s lyric speaker. But I want to take up this modality of judgment on its own terms, reconsidering its significance outside the merely negative determination it receives in the *Critique of Judgment*. In his reconstruction of the history of modern philosophy, *The Genealogy of Psychoanalysis*, Michel Henry has elaborated an argument which intervenes at the foundation of Kant’s critical system and allows us to resituate the significance of his brief account of “feeling” in the Third Critique.¹⁴ Henry takes up the concept of *sensation* in the *Critique of Pure Reason*, which Kant defines as “the effect of an object on the capacity for representation, insofar as we are affected by it.”¹⁵ Sensation is the interior correlate of empirical intuitions, of the *matter* of appearances. On this basis, Kant distinguishes between the matter and form of appearances. That in appearance which corresponds to sensation is its matter, but there is also a pure form of appearance which can be considered separately from all sensation. Space and time are pure or formal representations insofar as they are considered *a priori*, as formal conditions of possible experience prior to sensation. Kant also distinguishes between the form of outer sense, space, and the form of inner sense, time – the latter involving the intuition of our self and our inner state, which is structured by succession and sequence. Time is an *a priori* formal condition of all appearances in general, but as the form of inner sense it also determines our state of inner perception (or empirical apperception). As a pure form of appearance, or as the form of inner sense, time is evidently prior to sensation whether sensation is correlated to either inner or outer perception.

12 Immanuel Kant, *Critique of the Power of Judgement*. Edited by Paul Guyer. Translated by Paul Guyer and Eric Matthews (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 92 (§:206).

13 Kant, *Critique of the Power of Judgement*, 94 (§:209).

14 See Chapter 4 of Michel Henry, *The Genealogy of Psychoanalysis*. Translated by Douglas Brick (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1993), 103-130.

15 Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*. Edited and Translated by Paul Guyer and Allen W. Wood (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 172 (A20/B34).

Henry intervenes in this framework by pointing out that Kant's discussion of intensive magnitudes (degrees of sensation in the subjective experience of appearances) creates an aporia with regard to the priority of time as a transcendental condition of both appearances and inner sense. In his discussion of intensive magnitudes, Kant argues that since appearances, as objects of perception, are not pure intuitions (like space and time), they also contain, in addition to an intuition, the materials for "some object in general," which he calls "the real of the sensation, as merely subjective representation, by which one can only be conscious that the subject is affected, and which one relates to an object in general." Kant will refer here to "sensation in itself" which "is not an objective representation" and in which "neither the intuition of space nor that of time is to be encountered."¹⁶ This "sensation in itself," as the correlate of either appearances or of the inner sense, evades the forms of intuition as determining conditions of representation, insofar as sensation in itself is *not* a representation. What Kant calls "the real of sensation" is prior to representation, even as it accompanies it.

For Henry, what Kant calls the real of sensation is nothing other than affectivity *per se*, the pure *capacity* to be affected. Thus affectivity, the capacity to be affected, constitutes the transcendental condition of sensation – a transcendental condition which is also *immanent* to subjectivity insofar as it is prior to representation and insofar as it evades both the exteriority of outer sense (space) and the ekstastical structure of temporalization (time). It is according to this condition of immanent affectivity that Henry thinks the concept of "life." Life, for Henry, is immanent auto-affectivity, prior to representation, prior to temporal difference, and prior to any form of exteriority insofar as it is a transcendental element inherent to the real of sensation.

From this perspective, the status of inclination or the agreeable as "pathologically conditioned satisfaction" in the *Critique of Judgment* takes on ontological significance, insofar as Henry claims to have excavated an ontological ground (life as pure auto-affectation) of the transcendental subject. If agreeableness belongs to subjective sensation, or "feeling," through which no object is represented, it now emerges as falling under the transcendental condition of what Kant calls "sensation in general" or what Henry calls "life." Whereas aesthetic judgments are expressive of taste, the relation between differential intensive magnitudes registered by inclination is expressive not only of

¹⁶ Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, 290 (A166/B208).

sensation as the correlate of an appearance, but of the ground of sensation in pure affectivity. Indeed, we could say that *inclination measures the relation of a particular sensation to sensation in general*, or to “life.” This is the sort of measure that is expressed by H.D.’s speaker when she judges that “beauty without strength / chokes out life.”

On this basis, we can give an ontological sense to G.W.F. Hegel’s understanding of lyric poetry as “the language of the poetic inner life,” as the liberation of the spirit “not *from* but *in* feeling.”¹⁷ These propositions now take on a determinate and technical, rather than a merely colloquial significance. We could say that lyric is an intensive art – it has *concentration* as its principle, Hegel says – insofar as it grounds expression and measure in the affective immanence of inner life.

But we should also situate the ontological significance of this theory of lyric in relation to Theodor Adorno’s understanding of its social significance in “Lyric Poetry and Society.” Remarking that the modern lyric has lost nature and seeks to recreate it through a descent into subjective being, Adorno writes:

Even lyric works in which no trace of conventional and concrete existence, no crude materiality remains, the greatest lyric works in our language, owe their quality to the force with which the “I” creates the illusion of nature emerging from alienation. Their pure subjectivity, the aspect of them that appears seamless and harmonious, bears witness to its opposite, to suffering in an existence alien to the subject and to love for it as well – indeed, their harmoniousness is actually nothing but the mutual accord of this suffering and this love.¹⁸

As an implicit comparison of the interior to the exterior, lyric is also a comparison of subjective harmony and alienation, of suffering and love – their mutual accord, Adorno says. What else does H.D. mark, in “The Gift,” when her speaker cedes the inescapability of “some outer horror” as the correlate of a “still place,” an alienated exteriority that, by way of contradiction, stamps beauty on our hearts? Lyric implicitly *compares* the subjective immanence of pure sensation, of life, to the exteriority of objects and social conditions. Even if implicit, this comparison is ineliminable.

Let me return to the final lines of “The Gift,” and to their preference for the worth of the poem over that of the commodity –

17 G.W.F. Hegel, *Hegel’s Aesthetics: Lectures on Fine Art*. Translated by T.M. Knox. Vol. II (Oxford: Clarendon, 1975), 1111.

18 Theodor W. Adorno, “On Lyric Poetry and Society” in *Notes to Literature*. Vol. 1. Edited by Rolf Tiedeman. Translated by Shierry Weber Nicholson (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991), 41.

I send no string of pearls,
no bracelet – accept this.

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Listening to this final line, we might also hear: *except* this. The poem is *like* a string of pearls or a bracelet insofar as its return to these figures in the final stanza functions as a kind of clasp, binding the poem together in circular form. Figuratively, the poem is akin to a string of pearls or a bracelet; but it is not a string of pearls or a bracelet: it is a poem. In the world of the commodity, the value of the poem – whose worth is of another order than that of expensive jewelry – is exceptional. We could say, *the poem is an exception*. When it poses the question of the exception that it is (“I could laugh – / more beautiful, more intense?”), H.D.’s poem stumbles upon its own singularity in the process of its articulation, even as it also marks that singularity through its differential proximity to what it is not (a string of pearls, a commodity). The poem is thus a *relative singularity*, a singularity composed through comparison, and if this is not paradoxical it is because poetry attains its singular intensities through the relational differences that it constructs and measures.

Thus, lyric practice draws out into form and measure that which is most formless, most unmeasured, yet most immediately determinate of our subjective being. We gravitate. We incline. We prefer. We decide. But the minutia of these affective processes and determinations – their stamp upon the heart – is so diffuse and pervasive as to be almost unintelligible, nearly insensible. Preference is so proximate to being that it merely is, and is therefore nearly unsayable. Poetry distills, and what it distills are the reifications it has dissolved into relations. The dialectic of its formal making is to take that which has been named or measured, to reopen its qualitative composition, and then to take the measure of the relations thus released. It is through this practice of comparison, which is indeed Blake’s sense of creation, that H.D.’s lyric practice takes the measure of a life.

What H.D. shows is that creation is not opposed to reason and comparison – or if it is, that this opposition is true friendship. This apparent opposition is, dialectically, the contradiction of which poesis, making, is itself made. The poem is a contradiction. A gift. A substitution. A supplement. A sacrifice. An exception. A relative singularity. And at every moment of its unfolding in these modalities of relation, poetry is a practice of comparison.

Instead of pearls – a wrought clasp –
a bracelet – will you accept this?

You know the script –
you will start, wonder:
what is left, what phrase,
after last night? This:

The world is yet unspoiled for you,
you wait, expectant –
you are like the children
who haunt your own steps
for chance bits – a comb
that may have slipped,
a gold tassel, unravelled,
plucked from your scarf,
twirled by your slight fingers
into the street –
a flower dropped.

Do not think me unaware,
I who have snatched at you
as the street-child clutched
at the seed-pearls you spilt
that hot day
when your necklace snapped.

Do not dream that I speak
as one defrauded of delight,
sick, shaken by each heart-beat
or paralyzed, stretched at length,
who gasps:
these ripe pears
are bitter to the taste,
this spiced wine, poison, corrupt.
I cannot walk –
who would walk?
Life is a scavenger's pit – I escape –
I only, rejecting it,
lying here on this couch.

Your garden sloped to the beach,
myrtle overran the paths,
honey and amber flecked each leaf,
the citron-lily head –
one among many –
weighed there, over-sweet.

The myrrh-hyacinth
spread across low slopes,
violets streaked black ridges
through the grass.

The house, too, was like this,
over painted, over lovely –
the world is like this.

Sleepless nights,
I remember the initiates,
their gesture, their calm glance.
I have heard how in rapt thought,
in vision, they speak
with another race,
more beautiful, more intense than this.
I could laugh –
more beautiful, more intense?

Perhaps that other life
is contrast always to this.
I reason:
I have lived as they
in their inmost rites –
they endure the tense nerves
through the moment of ritual.
I endure from moment to moment –
days pass all alike,
tortured, intense.

This I forgot last night:
 you must not be blamed,
 it is not your fault;
 as a child, a flower – any flower
 tore my breast –
 meadow-chicory, a common grass-tip,
 a leaf shadow, a flower tint
 unexpected on a winter-branch.

I reason:
 another life holds what this lacks,
 a sea, unmoving, quiet –
 not forcing our strength
 to rise to it, beat on beat –
 a stretch of sand,
 no garden beyond, strangling
 with its myrrh-lilies –
 a hill, not set with black violets
 but stones, stones, bare rocks,
 dwarf-trees, twisted, no beauty
 to distract – to crowd
 madness upon madness.

Only a still place
 and perhaps some outer horror
 some hideousness to stamp beauty,
 a mark – no changing it now –
 on our hearts.

I send no string of pearls,
 no bracelet – accept this.

Illustrations

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 Look back
 On time,
 With kindly
 Eyes—
 He doubtless
 did his best—
 How softly
 sinks ^{his} ~~that~~
 trembling Sun
 In Human
Nature's Nest—

FIGURE 3
 Emily Dickinson,
 Manuscript A 278

450
 the way
 Hope Guides his
 House
 It is not with a Sill—
 nor Rafter— has that
 Edifice ^{man. knows}
 But only Pinnacle—
 Abode in as supreme
 this Superficies
 As if it were of
 Ledger, smit with the
 Or mortised with the
 And
 Laws—

FIGURE 4
 Emily Dickinson,
 Manuscript A 450

FIGURE 7
Emily Dickinson,
Manuscript A 499
(recto)







FIGURE 8
Marcel Broodthaers,
*Un Coup de dés jamais
n'abolira le hasard*
(1969), Royal Museum
of Fine Arts of
Belgium

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Belgium, Brussels

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FIGURE 9
Marcel Broodthaers,
*Un Coup de dés jamais
n'abolira le hasard*
(Antwerp, 1969)



C'ÉTAIT
issu stellaire

CE SERAIT
pire

non

davantage ni moins

indifféremment mais autant

LE NOMBRE

EXISTÂT-IL

autrement qu'hallucination éparse d'agonie

COMMENÇÂT-IL ET CESSÂT-IL

sourdant que nié et clos quand apparu

enfin

par quelque profusion répandue en rareté

SE CHIFFRÂT-IL

évidence de la somme pour peu qu'une

ILLUMINÂT-IL

FIGURE 10
Stéphane Mallarmé,
*Un Coup de dés jamais
n'abolira le hasard*
(1897)

LE HASARD

Choit

la plume

rythmique suspens du sinistre

s'ensevelir

aux écumes originelles

naguères d'où sursauta son délire jusqu'à une cime

flétrie

par la neutralité identique du gouffre

de chair qui aura réussi à échapper à la pelle de l'Apocalypse.

Je lisais : « Il n'y avait plus rien sur terre que rien », racontait Cello. Je lisais Celan. Il restait une larme (disait-il). Une larme et personne. Le reste de personne. Je voyais que la terre était devenue rien. Et il y avait une larme. Jamais il n'y a eu une semblable larme. Cette larme, pour moi, c'était la mer.

Avec une seule larme on peut pleurer le monde.

Pendant un certain temps.

Et elle avait pleuré pendant quelques années avec une larme de Celan. Un Dieu avait pourvu à son besoin de pleurer en inventant Celan, le poète au nom renversé, le poète qui avait commencé par être appelé Ancel, puis avait cessé d'être appelé Ancel, puis s'était appelé lui-même : Celan, et c'est ainsi qu'il était sorti de l'oubli dans lequel on l'avait glissé, *en s'appelant contrairement*, et le voilà debout sur le sol silencieux, la poitrine pleine de branches de violoncelle. C'est seulement ainsi que l'on peut s'avancer, en commençant par la fin, la mort la première, la vie ensuite, ensuite la vie chancelante, si chancelante, si chance, si celante,

Songeait-elle, l'auteur, tremblante

Sentant qu'il était inutile de nier l'événement.

laquelle j'obéis et je désobéis. Ce..., ce poème, donc.

(Elle avait cherché comment appeler ce livre qui n'avait pas été écrit. Cette chose retenue, – cette attente qui ne mûrissait pas – et faute de nom pour désigner une chose qui n'était pas de ce monde, le nôtre, le visible, s'était proposé le mot « poème ». Cela n'était pas entièrement

8

fait de notre vie. Quel fil elles auront légèrement tiré.)

Ce... « poème » donc. Ce livre latent, qui n'avait jamais esquissé un pas, un son clair, voilà qu'il aurait l'air d'espérer, de prétendre, de solliciter une reconnaissance de ce monde ? Une incarnation ?

Il y a toujours eu ce chant, abandonné, loin-

9

FIGURES 11, 12

Hélène Cixous, *Jours de l'an*, (Paris, 1990)

– Où me mettre ? Où suis-je ?

Je me trouve soudain quelque ressemblance avec ce •, point noir qui flotte entre tes strophes *dans le manuscrit* – que je vais désigner maintenant par le surtitre *Points de vue piqués sur l'autre voile* (ce sont là peut-être les premiers mots qui sont venus à cette méditation. Mais on ne saura jamais).

Ce • ce serait tout à fait moi : Un point de vue. Je veux dire un point sans vue, une pupille sans lumière. • autour duquel, de laquelle, tu exécutes ta fascinante danse du Voile. Mais voilà que ce • disparaît dans le livre *Voiles*.

Où me mettre, maintenant ?

Où me mettre ? ce n'est pas la même plainte que *ce où je suis* qui je suis que je t'ai entendu lu plus d'une fois proférer.

Où me mettre ? dit-on, on cherche des yeux une fente un trou de souris.

Où me mettre pour pouvoir jouir en paix donc sans « moi », franchement, de la beauté de ce texte sans m'accuser et me plaindre de trop et de trop tard ?

FIGURE 14

Hélène Cixous,
Insister. À Jacques Derrida (Paris, 2006)

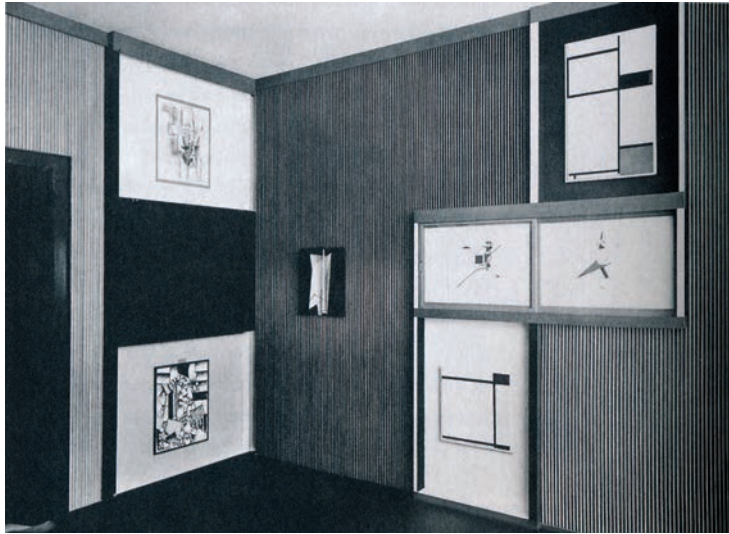


FIGURE 15
El Lissitzky, *The
Abstract Cabinet*
(Hanover, 1922-1936)



FIGURE 16
Theo van Doesburg &
Kurt Schwitters, *Kleine
Dada Soirée*, 1922



FIGURE 17
Kirill Zdanevič,
Sophie Georgievna
Melnikov: *La Taverne*
Fantastique (1919)

FIGURE 18
Gertrude Stein, *Useful
Knowledge* (New York,
1928)

This is one date.
Two cannot make room for two both seated.
Yes and yes and more and yes and why and yes and yes and
why and yes. A new better and best and yes and yes and
better and most and yes and yes and better and best and yes
and yes and more and best and better and most and yes and
yes. And yes and yes and better and yes and more and yes
and better and yes, and yes and yes and more and yes and
better and yes and more and yes and yes and yes and more
and best and yes and yes and better and most and yes and
yes and more and better and best and most and yes and yes
and most and better and yes and yes and most and more and
yes and yes, and more and yes and yes and better and yes
and yes and most and yes and yes and best and yes and yes
and better and yes and more and yes and best and yes and
better and yes and more and yes and most and yes and more
and yes and yes and better and yes and yes and most and
yes and yes and best and yes and yes and yes and yes and
better and most and yes and yes and better and most and yes
and yes and more and most and yes and yes and better and
most and yes and yes and more and better and yes and yes
and yes and yes and more and best and yes and yes and more
and best and yes and yes and more and yes and yes and
best and yes and yes and more and yes and yes and better
and yes and yes and best and yes and yes and more and yes
and yes and better and yes and yes. And yes and yes and
and more and better and yes and yes and better and yes
and yes and more and yes and yes and better and and yes
and yes and better and yes and yes and more and yes and
yes and best and better and yes and yes and most and more
and yes and yes and yes and yes and better and yes and best
and most and better and more and best and better and yes
and yes and yes and yes and yes and yes and more and yes

and yes and better and yes and yes and more and yes and
yes. And more and yes and yes. And more and better and
yes and yes and best and more and yes and yes and better
and yes and yes and most and yes and yes and best and more
and yes and yes and yes and yes and better and more and
better and yes and yes and most and better and more and
yes and yes and yes and yes. And better and yes and yes
and more and yes and yes and yes and yes and more and
best and better and most and best and better and most
and more and more and most and better and yes and yes.

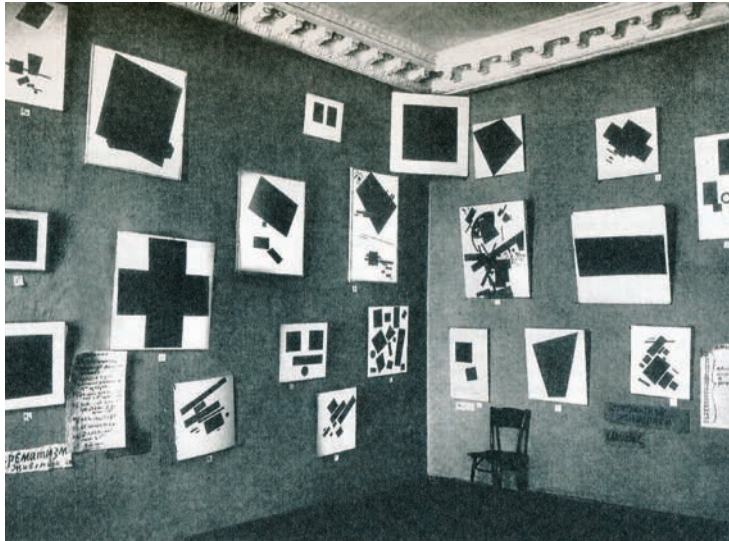


FIGURE 19
The Last Futurist
Exhibition (o.10)
(Petrograd,
19 December 1915
– 17 January 1916)



FIGURE 20
Jacob Epstein, *Rock
Drill*, 1913

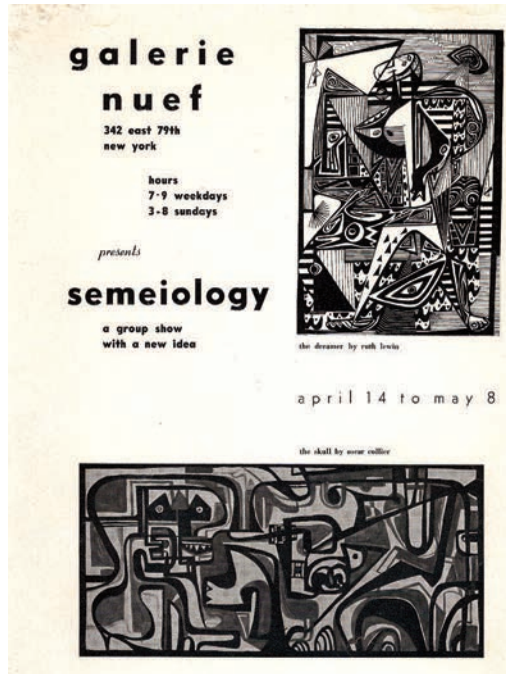


FIGURE 21
Semeiology, or 8 and
a Totem Pole, Gallery
Neuf (New York, 1946)



FIGURE 22
Life magazine cover
(1945)

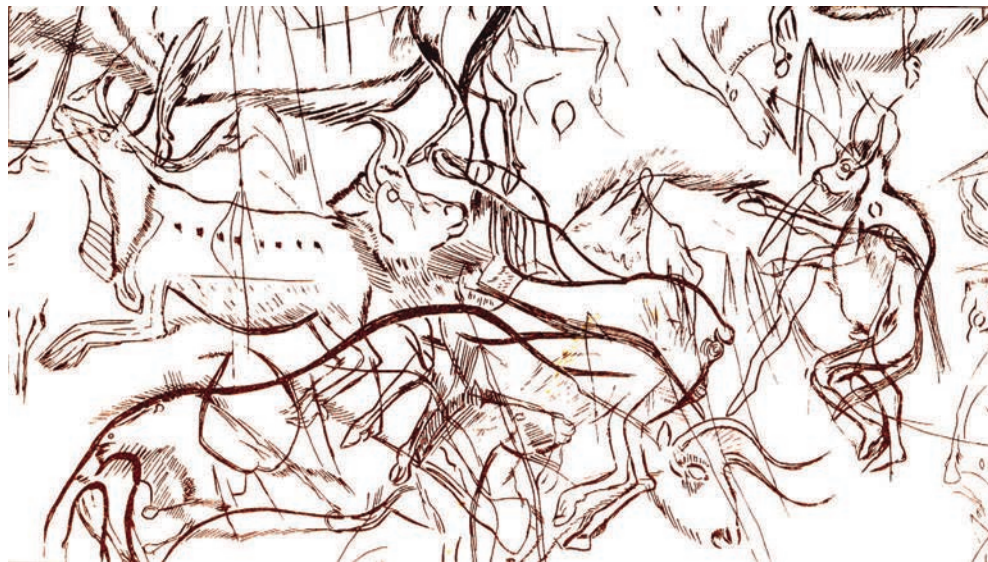


FIGURE 23
Detail from a mural
engraving at the
Cave of Trois-Frères,
France, by Abbé Henri
Breuil



FIGURE 24
Marta Paulin Brina
dancing for the
partisans at Mašun
(September 24, 1943),
photographer: Joža
Petek (the original
print is archived in
the National Museum
of Contemporary
History of Slovenia)



FIGURES 25, 26
Stills from Branko
Marjanović, *Liberation
of Zagreb* (1945)





FIGURES 27, 28
Stills from Branko
Marjanović, *Liberation
of Zagreb* (1945)





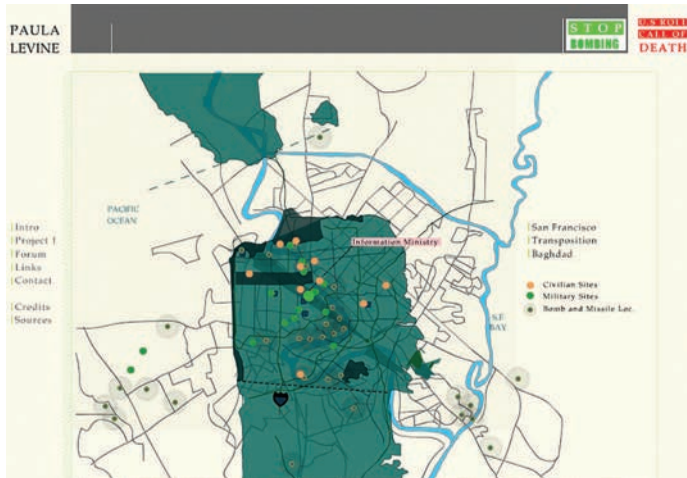
FIGURES 29, 30
Stills from Branko
Marjanović, *The Flag*
(1949)





FIGURES 31, 32
Stills from Milan
Katić, *The Mystery of
I.B.'s Castle* (1951)





FIGURES 33, 34
Paula Levine, *Shadows from Another Place: San Francisco < — > Baghdad*, 2004

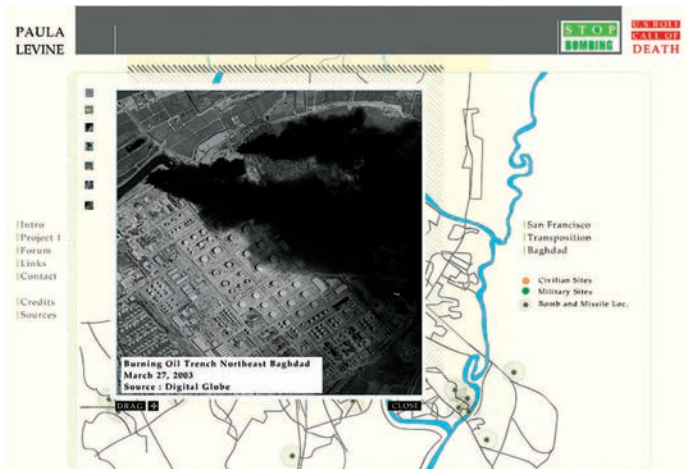


FIGURE 35
Vik Muniz, *WWW (World Map), Pictures of Junk*, 2008

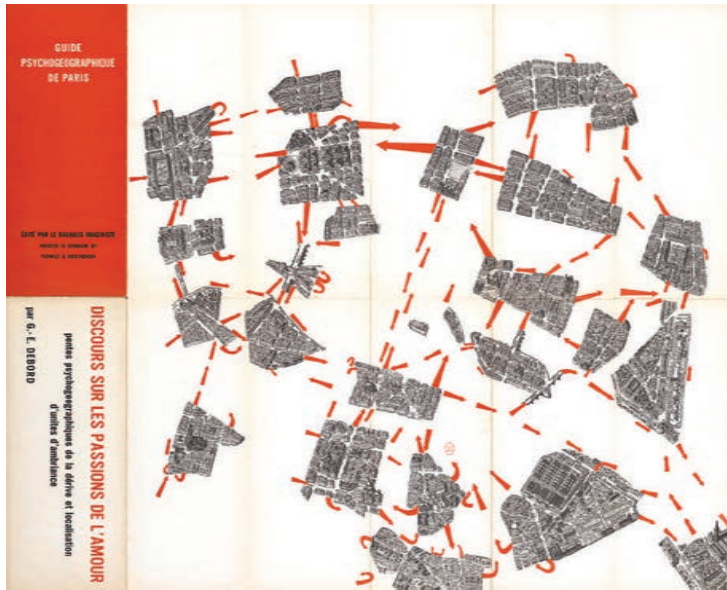


FIGURE 40
Guy Debord,
*Psychogeographic
Guide of Paris*, 1955

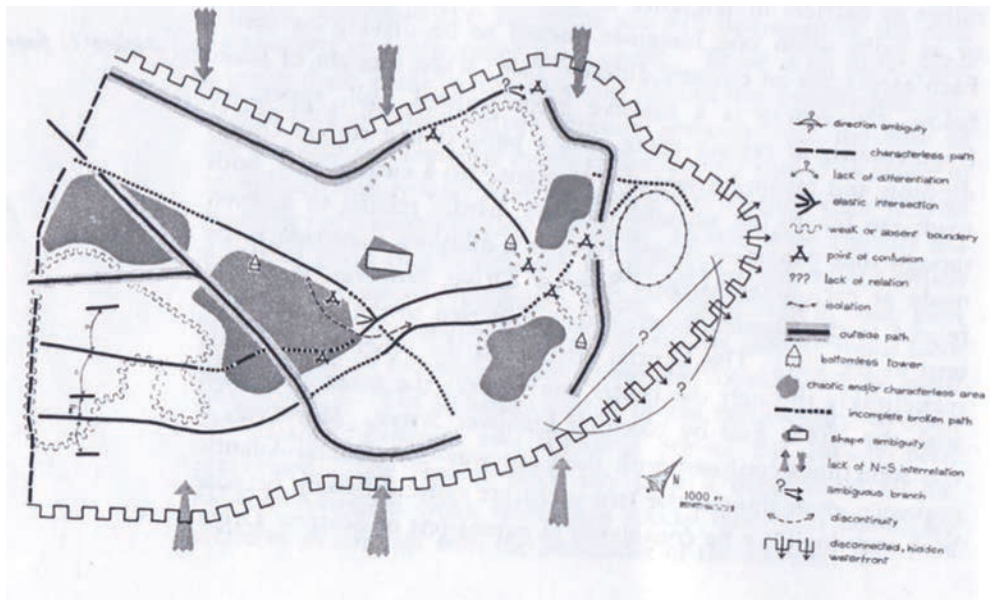


FIGURE 41
Kevin Lynch,
*Problems of the
Boston Image*, from
The Image of the City,
Cambridge, Mass:
The MIT Press, 1960

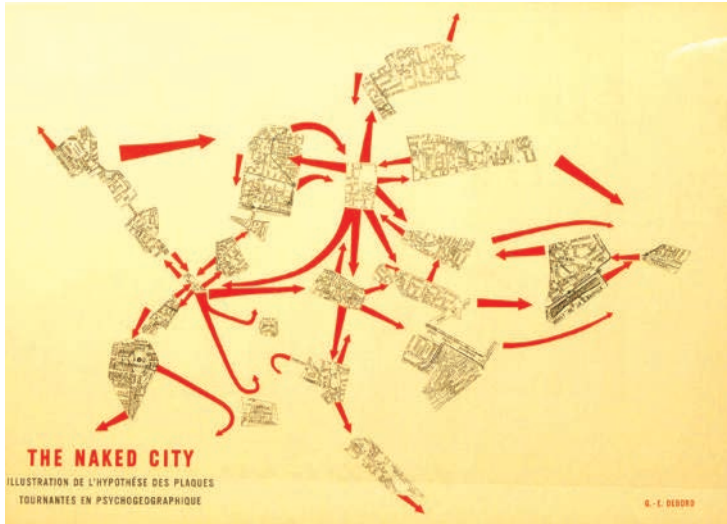


FIGURE 42
Guy Debord, *The Naked City*, 1957

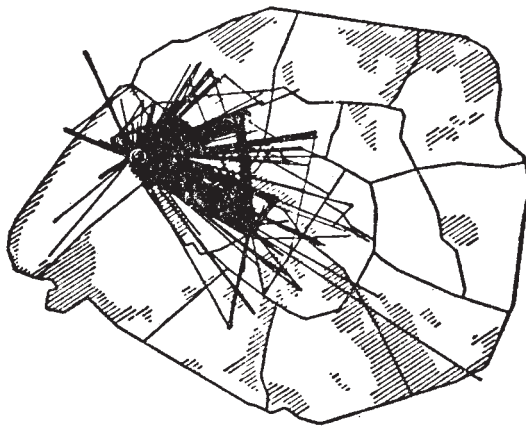


FIGURE 43
Paul-Henry Chombart
de Lauwe, *Trajets
pendant un an d'une
jeune fille du XVIIe
arrondissement*, 1957

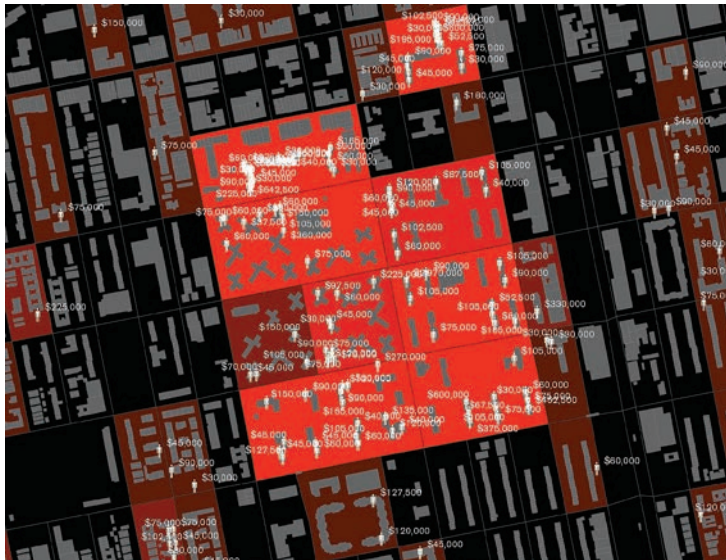


FIGURE 44
Laura Kurgan, *Million Dollar Blocks*, 2006

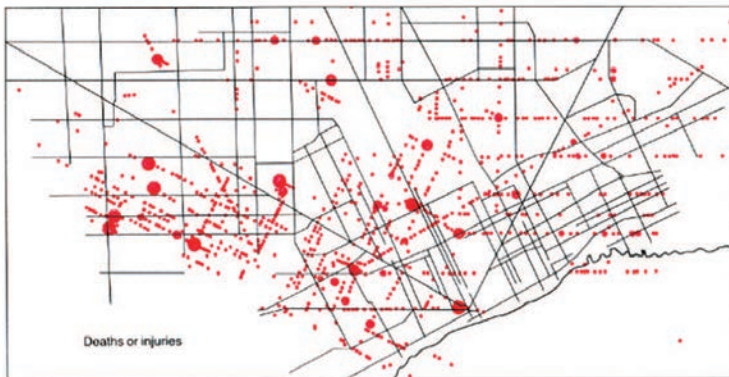


FIGURE 45
Citywide Pattern of Children's Pedestrian Deaths and Injuries by Automobiles, 1971, Reproduced in *Rethinking The Power of Maps* (New York: Guilford, 2010)

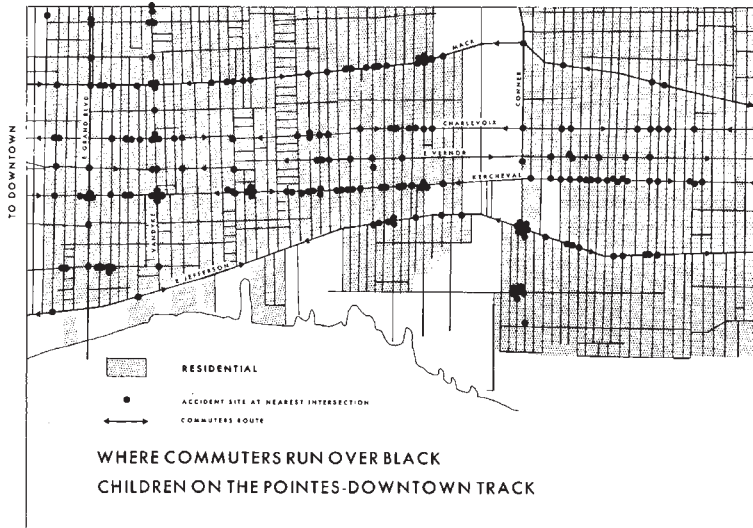


FIGURE 46
William Bunge,
*Where Commuters
Run Over Black
Children on the Pointes-
Downtown Track, from:
Fitzgerald: Geography
of a Revolution
(Cambridge, Mass:
Schenkman, 1971)*

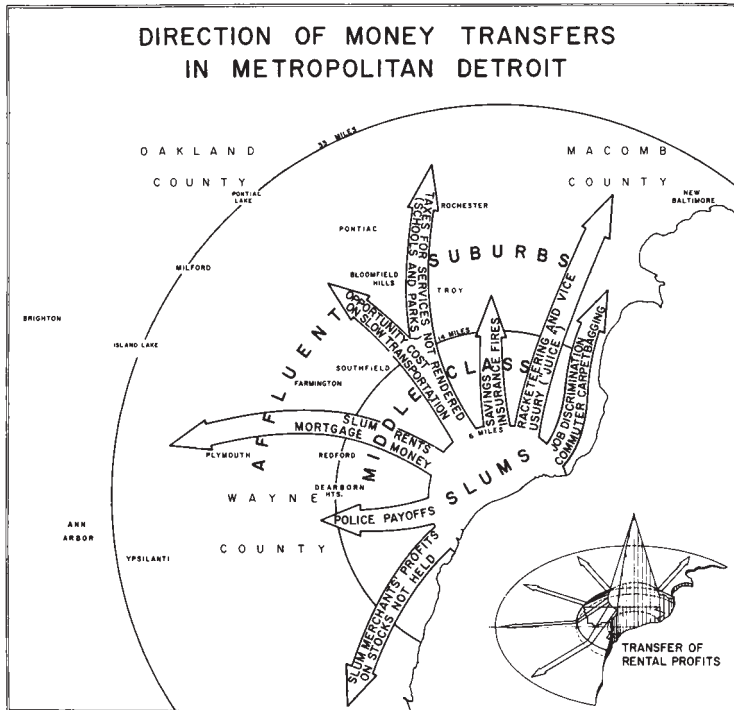


FIGURE 47
William Bunge,
*Direction of
Money Transfers
in Metropolitan
Detroit, from:
Fitzgerald: Geography
of a Revolution
(Cambridge, Mass:
Schenkman, 1971)*



FIGURE 48
William Blake,
Newton, 1795/1805



FIGURE 49
William Blake,
The Ancient of Days,
1794



FIGURE 50
William Blake,
The Dance of Albion,
1803/1810



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