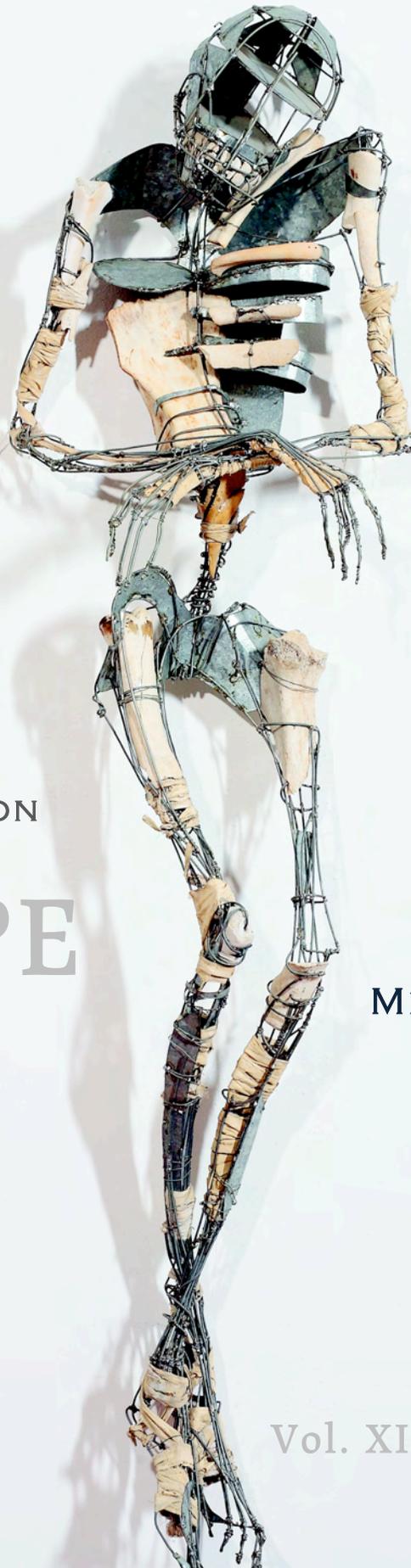


HYPERION

On the future of aesthetics



MARCELLO FALETRA ON

PHILIPPE
BERSON

FRITZ SENN
PÉTER GYÖRGY
JARED FAGEN

FLORIN BICAN
ÉLIANE RADIGUE
MEHDI BELHAJ KACEM

RENÉ CHAR
ROLAND BARTHES
SERGE DANÉY
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Vol. XI, No. 1 (summer 2018)

HYPERION

On the future of aesthetics



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Thoughts to the Purpose. . .

In certain epochs poetry has been able to coexist with society and its impulse has nourished the best undertakings of society. In primitive times poetry, religion, and society together formed a living and creative unity. The poet was magician and priest, and his word was divine. That unity was broken thousands of years ago — at that very moment when the division of labor created a clergy and the first theocracies were born — but the schism between poetry and society was never total. The great divorcement began in the 18th century and coincided with the downfall of the beliefs that were the foundations of our civilization. Nothing has replaced Christianity, and for two centuries we have lived in a kind of spiritual interregnum. In our epoch poetry cannot live within what capitalistic society calls its ideals: the lives of Shelley, Rimbaud, Baudelaire, and Bécquer are proofs that spare the necessity of argument. If, toward the end of the last century, Mallarmé was able to create his poetry outside of society, today all poetic activity, if it is truly poetic, must oppose that society. It is not strange that for certain sensitive souls the only possible vocation is solitude or suicide; neither is it strange that for others, beautiful and passionate, the only imaginable poetic activities are dynamite, political assassination, or the gratuitous crime. In certain cases, at least, one must have the courage to say that one sympathizes with those explosions, which are testimony of the desperation to which a social system based solely upon the conservation of the status quo, and especially economic gain, leads us. — Octavio Paz

Since art is dead, it has evidently become extremely easy to disguise police officers as artists. [...] We open empty pseudo museums, or pseudo-research centers on the complete work of a non-existent person, as quickly as we make the reputation of journalist-cops, or historian-cops, or novelist-cops. [...] The general conspiracy, having become so dense, is displayed almost openly so that [...] all these professional conspirators come to observe each other without knowing exactly why, or meet by chance, without being able to recognize themselves with certainty. Who wants to observe who? On whose behalf, apparently? But in reality? — Guy Debord

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ROLAND BARTHES

Dear Antonioni

Translated by Rainer J. Hanshe



Still from Antonioni's *Michelangelo Eye to Eye* (2004)

Dear Antonioni ...

In his typology, Nietzsche distinguishes two figures: the priest and the artist. Of priests, we have an abundance today: from every religion, and even outside of religion; but artists? I would like, dear Antonioni, to be allowed to borrow some traits from your work to permit me to delineate the three forces — or, if you like, the three virtues — which to my eyes constitute the artist. I shall name them at once: vigilance, wisdom, and, most paradoxical of all, fragility.

Contrarily to the priest, the artist is capable of astonishment and admiration; his gaze may be critical, but it is not accusatory: the artist does not know *ressentiment*. It is because you are an artist that your work is open to the Modern. Many take the Modern as a battle flag against the old world, its values compromised; but for you, the Modern is not a static term of facile opposition; contrarily, the Modern is an active difficulty in following the changes of Time, not only at the level of grand History, but within the little History of which the existence of each of us is the measure. Beginning with the aftermath of the last war, your work has thus proceeded, from moment to moment, according to a movement of double vigilance, toward the contemporary world and toward yourself; each of your films has been, at your personal level, a historic experience, that is, the abandonment of an old problem and the formulation of a new question — this means that you have lived through and treated the history of the last thirty years with subtlety, not as the material of an artistic reflection or an ideological commitment, but as a substance whose magnetism it was your task to capture, from work to work. For you, contents and forms are equally historical; dramas, you have said, are equally psychological and plastic. The social, the narrative, and the neurotic are just levels — pertinences, as they say in linguistics — of the world as a whole, which is the object of every artist: there is a succession, not a hierarchy of interests. Strictly speaking, contrarily to the thinker, an artist does not evolve; he surveys, like a very sensitive instrument, the successive Novelty which his own history presents to him: your work is not a fixed reflection, but a *moiré* over which passes, according to the inclination of your gaze and the demands of the time, figures of the Social or the Passional, and those formal innovations, from narrative modes to the use of Color. Your concern for the epoch is not that of a historian, a politician, or a moralist, but rather that of a utopian who seeks to perceive the new world on precise points, because he is eager for this world and he already wants to be part of it. The vigilance of the artist, which is yours, is an amorous vigilance, a vigilance of desire.

I call the wisdom of the artist not an ancient virtue, still less a mediocre discourse, but, on the contrary, a moral knowing, a discerning acuity that enables him to keep from confounding meaning and truth. What crimes has humanity not committed in the name of Truth! And yet that truth was nothing but a meaning. What wars, what repressions, what terrors, what genocides, for the triumph of a meaning! The artist himself knows that the meaning of a thing is not its truth; that knowledge is a wisdom — a mad wisdom, one might say, since it withdraws him from the community, from the herd of fanatics and the arrogant.

Not all artists, however, possess this wisdom: many make a hypostasis of meaning. This terrorist operation is generally called realism. So, when you declare (in an interview with Godard): “I feel the need to express reality, but in terms which are not entirely realist,” you show a true sense of meaning: you do not impose it, but you do not abolish it. This dialectic gives your films (I will use again the same word) a great subtlety: your art consists in always leaving the road of meaning open, and as if undecided, out of scrupulousness. It’s how you very precisely accomplish the task of the artist that our time has need of: neither dogmatic, nor devoid of meaning. Thus, in your first short films on the Rome street-cleaners or the manufacture of rayon at Torviscosa, the critical description of social alienation vacillates, without yielding, in favor of a more immediate, more pathos-laden sentiment of bodies at work. In *Il grido*, the strong meaning of the work is, one might say, the very uncertainty of meaning: the wandering of a man who cannot find his identity confirmed anywhere and the ambiguity of the conclusion (suicide or accident) lead the spectator to doubt the meaning of the message. This departure of meaning, which is not the same as its abolition, enables you to unhinge the psychological certitudes of realism: in *Red Desert* the crisis is no longer a crisis of feelings, as in *L’eclisse*, because feelings in it are secure (the heroine loves her husband): everything is bound and hurts in a second zone where the affects — the discomfiture of affects — escape to that armature of meaning that is the code of the passions. Finally — to proceed quickly — your last films carry this crisis of meaning at the heart of the identity of events (*Blow Up*) or

of people (*The Passenger*). Throughout your work, at bottom, there is a constant critique, at once painful and demanding, of that strong mark of meaning known as destiny.

This vacillation — or perhaps it would be more accurate to say: this syncope of meaning, follows technical, specifically filmic paths (decor, shots, montage), which it is not for me to analyze, because I don't have the competence; I am here, it seems to me, to say in what way your work, above and beyond its role as cinema, offers a challenge to all contemporary artists: you work at making subtle the meaning of what man says, recounts, sees or feels, and this subtlety of meaning, this conviction that meaning does not stop crudely at the thing being said, but always goes much further, fascinated by what lies beyond — it's that, I believe, that of all artists, whose object is not this or that technique, but that strange phenomenon, vibration. The represented object vibrates, to the detriment of dogma. I think of the words of the painter Braque: "The painting is finished when it has effaced the idea." I think of Matisse drawing an olive tree, from his bed, and beginning, after a while, to observe the spaces between the branches, and discovering that this new vision enabled him to escape the habitual image of the object being drawn — the cliché "olive tree." Matisse thus discovered the principle of oriental art, which always wants to paint the void, or rather, which seizes the object to be represented at the rare moment when the fullness of its identity suddenly falls into a new space, that of the Interstice. In a certain way, your art is also an art of the Interstice (the most striking example of this proposition would be *L'Avventura*) and then, in a certain way too, your art has some relationship to the Orient. It was your film on China that gave me the urge to travel there; and if this film was initially rejected by those who should have understood that its force of love was superior to all propaganda, that is because it was judged according to a reflex of power and not according to the demand of truth. The artist has no power, but he has some relationship with truth; his work — always allegorical if it is a great work — approaches truth at an angle; his world is the Indirect of truth.

Why is this subtlety of meaning itself so decisive? Precisely because meaning, from when it is fixed and imposed, from when it ceases to be subtle, becomes an instrument, a force of power. Making meaning subtle is therefore a second political activity, as is any attempt to break up, to disrupt, to dismantle the fanaticism of meaning. This is not without its danger. So the third virtue of the artist (I use the word "virtue" in its Latin sense) is his fragility: the artist is never confident of living, of working: a simple but serious proposition: his erasure is a possible thing.

The first fragility of the artist is this: he is part of a world which changes, but he himself changes too; this is banal, but for the artist, it is dizzying, because he never knows if the work he is offering is the result of changes in the world or changes in his subjectivity. You have always been conscious, it seems to me, of this relativity of Time, declaring, for example, in an interview: "If the things we talk about today are no longer those that we talked about just after the war, it's because the world around us has changed, but we too have changed. Our needs, our words, our themes have changed." This fragility is that of an existential doubt that seizes the artist as and when his life and work advance; this doubt is difficult, painful even, because the artist never knows if what he sets out to say is a truthful witnessing of the world as that which has changed, or the simple egotistical reflection of his nostalgia or his desire: an Einsteinian traveller, he never knows if it is the train or space-time that moves, if he is a witness or a man of desire.

Another aspect of fragility for the artist — it is paradoxical —, is the firmness and insistence of his gaze. Power, of any kind, because it is violence, never gazes: if it gazed one minute longer (one minute too much), it would lose its essence as power. The artist, he alone, stops and gazes lengthily, and I am imagining that you became a filmmaker because the camera is an eye, constrained, by its technical disposition, to gaze. What you add to this disposition, like all filmmakers, is to gaze at things radically, until their depletion. To one degree you gaze lengthily at what you were not expected to gaze at either due to political convention (the Chinese peasants) or due to narrative convention (the dead time of

an adventure). Alternatively, your preferred hero is someone who gazes (photographer or reporter). This is dangerous, because to look longer than is necessary (I insist on this supplementary intensity) disturbs every established order, of every kind, to the extent that, normally, the time of the gaze is controlled by society: hence, when the work escapes this control, the scandalous nature of certain photographs and films: not the most indecent or the most combative, but simply the most “staged.”

The artist is then threatened, not solely by established power — the martyrology of artists censored by the State, throughout all of History, would be of a despairing length —, but also by a collective feeling, always possible, that society can do without art: artistic activity is suspect because it disturbs the comfort, the security of established meanings, because it is at once expensive and free, and because the new society in search of itself, whatever every different regime it lives under, has not yet decided what it should think about luxury. Our fate is uncertain, and this incertitude does not have a simple relationship with the political solutions that we can envisage for the disquiet of the world: it depends on this monumental History, which decides, in a hardly suitable manner, not on our needs, but on our desires.

Dear Antonioni, I have tried to say in my intellectual language the reasons that make you, over and above the cinema, one of the artists of our time. This compliment is not simple, as you know; because being an artist today is being in a position no longer supported by the good conscience of a great sacred or social function; it is no longer being in the bourgeois Pantheon of the Lighthouses of Humanity; it is, at the moment of each work, confronting in oneself those spectra of modern subjectivity, which are (from the moment one is no longer a priest), ideological lassitude, bad social conscience, the attraction and disgust of facile art, the quivering of responsibility, the incessant scruple that quarters the artist between solitude and gregariousness. You must then today benefit from this peaceful, harmonious, reconciled moment, where a whole collectivity joins together to recognize,

admire, and love your work. Because tomorrow the hard work begins again.

Roland Barthes first presented this text as a speech at the ceremony granting the "Archiginnasio d'oro" to Antonioni by the City of Bologna in February of 1980. Originally published in Roland Barthes *'Caro Antonioni': con antologia degli scritti di Antonioni sul cinema*, ed. by Carlo di Carlo (Bologna: Cineteca Comunale, 1980), and subsequently in *Cahiers du Cinema*, No. 311 (May 1980) 90–111.

"Dear friend,

Thank you for *Camera Lucida*, which is a book both bright and very beautiful. It surprises me that you say in chapter three to be "a subject tossed between two languages, one expressive, the other critical," and you confirm this opinion in your extraordinary first lesson at the College de France.

But what is the artist if not a subject tossed between two languages also, one language that expresses, another that does not express? It is always thus. The inexorable and inexplicable dramas of artistic creation."

I was in the midst of writing this letter when the news of R.B.'s death reached me by phone. I did not know that he had an accident and I remained breathless, with a sharp pain in my head. The first thing I thought was this: there is a little less sweetness and intelligence in the world now. A little less love. All the love he put to live and write in his life and in his writing.

I believe that the more we advance in this world which brutally regresses, the more we will feel the lack of those "virtues" that were his.

Michelangelo Antonioni

HYPERION

On the future of aesthetics

**ÉLIANE RADIGUE :
FOR FREE EARS**



**INTERVIEW CONDUCTED & TRANSLATED
BY MARCO CACCIALUPI**

BIOGRAPHICAL INTRODUCTION

Éliane Radigue is a French composer. After years of solitary work in the field of electronic music, today she enjoys working with other musicians, composing solos, duos, trios, and so on up to orchestral works. In spite of a large variety of approaches to sound and music, her production is quite consistent in spirit.

From her first steps in *musique concrète*, through electronic music, to today's compositional works for flesh-and-bone musicians, the listener and reader of Radigue's work will find common points. A sense of fluidity, a series of organic movements that evolve slowly, very slowly, accompany the listener through the experience that is exposing oneself to her sound universe.

This continuity is a signature that characterizes not only Radigue's music, but first and foremost her very life.

Although her music can understandably be defined as meditative, yet it is not soporific, even less new age 'easy listening.' Just as in real life, tiny details appear, here and there, to shake the listener's attention and return him or her to a more conscious state, before music and before life.

As the readers of this interview will find through her own words, interestingly, Radigue's intention is always purely musical. She remains humble as she never intends to instruct anyone, leaving the listener free to live each experience in their own way.

Her interest in Buddhist philosophy began in the early 70's and further accentuates the aforementioned aspects.

A woman of sharp wit and sparkling humor, she turned this interview into a moment of further revelations regarding not only her approach to music, but her approach to life itself, for everyone interested in her work, and in music thinking in general.

While almost all of the titles mentioned in this interview are available on CD, her most recent acoustic compositional works have not yet been distributed, but concert performances of some of them can be found on YouTube, such as ONCEIM's rendition of *Occam Océan* at the Louis Vuitton Foundation.

Don't call her work "drone music"!

INTERVIEW PREFACE

When Éliane Radigue accepted to be interviewed on June 8, 2017, she asked me to surprise her with questions that she never thought about before. I decided that it would have been more interesting to note down simply words, ideas, and names which her music and answers to other interviewers would suggest to me, at random, on a piece of paper, to form a sort of constellation, without any specific hierarchy, and to pass them from one to another according to her answers and reactions.

We started the interview with the one that I put at the center of this constellation. — Marco Caccialupi

Marco Caccialupi: *Becoming aware. James Turrell. What is the experience? From which side: musician or listener?*

Éliane Radigue: I think the two are inseparable. It is absolutely impossible to be a musician if we don't develop a particularly acute gear to listen. And I would rather use the word "listener" than "hearer."¹ "Hearer" [*auditrice*] is a rather passive action; while listening [*écoute*] is a thoroughly active action. And music demands that active form of listening to be truly heard. Of course, you can have background music; there is muzak in every shop, but you cannot call that truly musical listening.

MC: *The expression: "becoming aware" came to me because of your interest in Tibetan Buddhism, and in every form of Buddhism reaching full awareness is the final goal of the eightfold path. Is there a desire or maybe even a need in you that the listener reaches full awareness through your work?*

ER: Listen, that belongs to the listener. I try to suggest sounds that are open and free enough for each listener [*auditeur*] to reveal his own music to himself. That is my sole aim — that the listener may leave [the concert hall] and have in himself his own little music that keeps on singing. And I impose nothing, I have no strict rule, I have no grand theory, nothing like that. This are just what re-

¹ In French there are two words indicating who listens, according to whether one simply hears or whether one listens attentively.

mains from when I started seriously in the 60's, what I used to call my little sound threads. Sound propositions. And I keep on making sound propositions, which one may call music & which, somehow, reach their goal precisely when the person can find in himself an awakening to his own musical conscience, more exactly.

"Conscience" is an extremely vast and rich word, opening up to many territories, and we would get lost. So, as we remain in the territory of sound, of listening and of music [I'd say that my aim is] the awakening of the listening person to his own inner music. Because each one of us has his inner music.

MC: *Is it therefore more of an invitation to a voyage?*

ER: For travellers such as you are why not; for someone on another quest, another pursuit, it could be something else. Each one of us has his or her own ruling forces. I repeat: I impose nothing, I ask for nothing. It is there, it is what I feel like doing; and then everything is in the answer that the listener finds. If he finds answers in himself, that's good. But again, if he finds nothing, if he gets bored and leaves, it's equally fine. For me, it's the same thing. It's a way to establish a link; the link is there or it is not; and the link is created also according to the personality that you have before you.

MC: *Talking about how to transmit the work. The first time you started working with instrumentalists, if I am correct, was in 2000 with Kasper Toeplitz for "Elemental"... So, transmitting the work: that is done with specific musicians, there is the relevance of the performance space, there is no partition, and I noted: Meredith Monk, because I know she too approaches the work with the musicians face-to-face, or in any case it is about meeting certain specific persons.*

ER: Yes. I made some solos. I always considered the instrumentalist and his instrument as an indissociable unity. And it seems obvious to me to create an almost osmotic bond. On the other hand, an essentially oral transmission is necessary. It is indispensable, due to my quest, which is shared by the musicians who ask to work with me. Because musicians ask to work with me, I don't

want to impose anything, but they know my work — [the reason for] this is essentially to make the music within the music to emerge, the music of partials, of overtones, the music of light beats, of pulses, of harmonics, of the very rare and wonderful sub-harmonics, which is of course a very special approach. You need a fundamental; but the fundamental is only there to bring forth this emergence. And writing on a piece of paper means nothing, if the musician does not do all this work, either on his bow, or with his breath. It is structured; it is not the work of improvisation; that is, we always have a structure, an approach that we share. And obviously the freedom of the musician is present when he grasps something particularly interesting, that he develops it as long as he wishes to. By contrast, if a difficulty appears [in an articulation, he should] gently move to the following articulation. But otherwise the work is structured. And only the musicians with whom I work can transmit it, since I never do the same work twice. Every musician has a unique piece. The one you heard by H el ene Bre-schand is very much different from the one for Rhodri Davis, be-cause they are both wonderful harpists, but they have very differ-ent personalities. Rhodri Davis was the first with whom I had started the “Occams”² series, but with H el ene it has been a totally different work, though just as exciting too. What is exciting is the sort of osmosis that is created with the musician. And then, when we work for duos, trios, or quartets, after the initial work has been done, [it becomes very easy,] the exchange happens immedi-ately, because we already had that intimate exchange, if I may say so, the three of us, the instrumentalist, me, and the instrument.

MC: *What intrigued me was to know if you think that, once the work is transmitted to the musician, that person can then transmit it.*

ER: But of course! And not only — it’s something that I tell them, but until now, they preferred keeping it for themselves. The only one who tried to transmit it, was Charles Curtis;³ but it is eventu-ally very exacting and very difficult. I always say that this is a

² “Occam XIV,” premiered at the Coll ege des Bernardins, in Paris, on April 26, 2017.

³ American cello player, who worked with Radigue on the first “Narjorlak” piece.

work of great virtuosity, which is not the virtuosity of the bow or the speed of execution, but an extraordinary control of the instrument. And Charles, who teaches at San Diego University, has not yet found any candidate to whom he can transmit the whole work. He is the first musician who asked me [to work together] and it was before the "Occams" series, it was "Narjorlak," he is therefore the first with whom I started collaborating. It was really, truly wonderful. And the "Narjorlak" series comprises at once that solo, a duo with Carol Robinson and Bruno Martinez and the trio,⁴ which recently played in Moscow. But this is a finished work, it is the three "Narjorlak." While the piece that you heard by Hélène Breschand is part of a body of work that I call unfinished, because "unfinishable" by nature. Already when there were fourteen solos, I asked the son of a friend of mine, Michèle Bokanowski,⁵ who is a doctor in mathematics, to calculate how many works are possible, with all the duos and trios and quartets, etc., etc. ... That was done and it already counted up to four thousands! Therefore, since we have twenty-two solos by now, it is obvious that "Occam Océan" will always remain open and may even be continued by musicians I often worked with, like Carol [Robinson]. She is absolutely suited, if she feels so, one day, to make an Occam and co-sign it. It actually happened already, by the way, in Perth, Australia. I could not go myself, but I had been asked, so we met through Skype! But then it is co-signed, obviously, because it was she who went, as I cannot travel any longer.

MC: *I have the impression that the Occam project... the creature Occam, it is really a living creature. Because since you said that other musicians...*

ER: Oh, no! It is like the ocean! The ocean is infinite, because it is the generic term for this ensemble of works: "Occam Ocean." Now, the ocean is infinite and has multiple variations. It is impossible to confine it to one single movement. Everything is there, then. It is not a creature. It is rather a flight, somehow. After all,

⁴ Robinson is a French clarinetist and Martinez is a French electro-acoustic composer.

⁵ French electro-acoustic composer.

the initial idea, the term ocean came as the most accessible to us to perceive it. But the initial idea came from an encounter in a museum of natural sciences with a long panel, showing the different known wave lengths of the sun, but it is obvious that beyond that wave length there are many more; it is much vaster and went until the mini, micro, nano, and where there is this very tiny area between 150 and 12.000 or 14.000, sometimes, for other creatures... The ear. As I was standing in front of this panel I felt a sort of giddiness. We know that our entire universe is a sort of ocean where we sail and that all those galaxies are maybe nothing but ripples, like when we toss a stone in a pond. Besides, I was reading that now we begin to think that our entire universe is not the only one, but that we begin to talk about multi-verses. So, the giddiness that we can feel before our universe is quite something already, but indeed in order to make it more perceptible, it was necessary to reduce it to something more accessible. And the [image of the] ocean seemed to me closer to this effect. I think, as it's recent, about Thomas Pesquet,⁶ who said that all this fragility that we can feel about our little planet Earth, for us it is somewhat intellectual, but to him, up there, he had that chance to feel it deeply. I think he is in the right place to say so. There are things like that which we can perceive. So, it is not a creature, no. It is the ocean.

MC: *By "creature" I was simply thinking about something alive...*

ER: Well, tell me of something that is not alive.

MC: *I agree entirely. Everything is alive and carries in itself this vibration that crosses the entire universe. So, indeed, I used an inappropriate word, but somewhere, we mean the same thing. But the question I had in mind was, actually, these scraps of universe that the "Occams" are, or these ripples in the ocean...⁷*

⁶ French astronaut.

⁷ The interviewer/translator made a mistake when using the French word "bribes," which translates "scraps," thinking that it was a synonym of "fragments." Obviously, Radigue reacted with vigor to that word. The twist that that misunderstanding gave to the interview made for an interesting response.

ER: There, again, I disagree with the word “scraps,” because there are billions of us on Earth, and each one of us is part of this humanity, and at the same time we have our own individuality and personality. Each drop of the ocean is not a scrap of the ocean, it is a “whole” that merges with another “whole” and the other “wholes” which are the drops around it. Just like when you look at an enormous crowd from afar, those are different drops, like the ones in the ocean, but we can’t talk about “scraps” — there is no place that is a scrap. A human being is not a scrap of humanity, it is a human being. But humanity is, on the other hand, its totality. So, neither “creature,” nor “scrap.”

MC: *To stay with this idea of vibration, of these frequencies that are in the universe, I noted: acoustic sound, vibration, does it have to speak (have the same sonic quality) like the electronic sounds, that is, the work you used to do before?*

ER: I need to make a detour here, because it is first of all very distant. If I had to carry all the luggage of my different lives now, I could not move any longer. So, I need to make a detour and return to that period and an interesting thing that happened when I first encountered electronic sounds, which was my encounter with those barbaric, wild sounds: feedback. And with feedback with a mike and a speaker, one must pay close attention to keeping the right distance, because when you are too far the sound disappears and when you are too close it explodes; it was about listening to what I may call the behavior of that sound, which is rather continuous, linear, fluctuating. By contrast, the electronic sounds produced by reinjection, between two or more tape recorders, had a tendency to behave by beats, pulses, that is, all those qualities of rhythm up to very, very, very light vibrations. And I thought, just like that, it was my very personal point of view, that such seemed to be the behavior of this sound world. The same way as the shepherds in Arcadia, when carving their bamboo sticks, realized that according to certain lengths, they would get sounds more or less harmonious and that all of western music was born out of that — thanks to [the western classical tradition], because it is wonderful music, which I still fondly love. That was my first great putting

into question, my great reassessment. You were talking about becoming aware before, and then, there, in true conscience... It occurred twice in my life, like that, putting aside everything that I learned, I respect, I love, that is classical music, its rules — I think it's a wonderful universe, really, in every sense of the word, it's just as much interesting to understand it, to analyze it, as to listen to it, even with or without temperament — but it seemed to me absurd trying to apply all that to that sound universe. Rocket through where we've arrived today, from the music born in ancient Greece until atonality and all the different modes. So, starting from there to work essentially on what that music wanted to say to me. If today I had to analyze the electronic music I made, especially the first pieces like "Cryptus," composed in New York, made of beats which, little by little, move toward a steady sound, or "*Vice Versa*," which was a way to tame with an instrument, a modular instrument, what I had already worked on at the feedback period... But how can I put it? Eventually, things evolved. As a start, I have never been a fan of dissonances, at least too great dissonances. By contrast, I always had a great passion for modulations, that is, when we are in a tonality and we move toward another one and there's a little alteration and for a while, ah! we are in an uncertain universe, undecided, a little alteration: "Look, we could go there, or there, or there..." — I love to keep this openness. And basically in all the music that I made there is always, somewhere, such a moment of uncertainty. What also interested me, with the approach given by synthesizers, was the possibility of taking this sound block, which I organized with my set of tools, with my wonderful ARP, the Stradivarius among the instruments of the day, and little by little as one would pull a string from a skein, bringing the state of this sound block to another, different one. This very often provokes the feeling that nothing is happening, in the beginning mostly, because when "Ah!" something happens, when one realizes that something happened, actually, that had been put in motion a long time before. It is like an organic growth: you don't see a tree growing when all of a sudden: "Look! It got bigger!" We don't see a newborn baby growing. We don't look at ourselves. Since we started, how many cells have we lost?

But then there is a moment when we realize it, that some things have changed in us. And I think that all my electronic music is permeated by this spirit, a spirit of openness, of listening, of respect for this sound universe, for what this brought to me, and it enriched my very own listening, because I had this respect for listening to this sound universe. Does it make any sense at all, or is it just completely delirious?

MC: *Absolutely. At the beginning of your answer, you said that there had been two moments in your life; so, the first one, if I understand it correctly, was when you decided to leave the European classical music baggage behind and you began working with electronics, which I presume also includes the musique concrète phase, feedback, then, maybe...*

ER: Yes, that was the apprenticeship...

MC: *That was when a first rupture occurred.*

ER: The *musique concrète* was the apprenticeship. That came before electronic music. *Musique concrète* was simply discovering what I was already, somehow, basically living day by day. Because I was living in Nice, back then, and close to the airport, which was far from being what it became, that is, there were possibly five or six flights per day and where you could hear planes with propellers, which had their very own music, they were definitely more musical than the huge modern day machines, they were much more interesting. Basically, you can find music in the water flowing, in a pipe, in many everyday things and my discovery of *musique concrète* through a radio show by Pierre Schaeffer⁸ was just that. Yes, of course, the “*Étude des chemins de fer*” [Studies on Railways], was my road to Damascus. But that was what prompted me to leave, trying to elaborate structures with a sound that was eventually rather boring. And eventually, that freed me from the constraints where we were, those wonderful music theories imagined by the ancient Greeks, because even by trying with the sound of the tetra chord, there was always a moment when nothing

⁸ French composer and founder of *musique concrète*.

worked any longer. But that was before, because electronic music, on the other hand... It was once more a time of trial and error, that is, a world was opening up, made of possible recordings, by the way one could treat [the sounds]. But then, well, it was completely wild. And the electronic phase started with this specific way of listening to a way of producing sounds with feedback. And that's when I thought and said to myself: "It's not worth it." That's why I left the keyboard which usually comes with the ARP synthesizer. I refused to take it. I had been told: "But it is included [with the machine. You get it] for the same price!" "It doesn't matter, I don't want it." Because I said to myself that from the moment I had taken it [the ARP], I had to tame that instrument. Or that we had to tame one another and that if we were having some serious problems, I would have been tempted by the keyboard, but not having it meant no temptation.

MC: *You would have not moved on from the ancient language.*

ER: No, I would have moved on, but with some old tics, some old habits. No, I would have moved on anyway, because I already had developed what I call the archaeology of my language during my feedback period, which were fragments of a language. Of course, I was finding them with the synthesizer, as they were obviously far more controllable than the mad and hard to control feedback sounds.

MC: *I have the impression that we could make a link with what you said before, about the fact that you always try to have moments of transition, where the balance is somewhat unstable, and in your life there has been something similar when you discovered musique concrète, which eventually led to your leaving, for a certain time, the academic language of conservatories to encounter another kind of language and this transition time has been a sort of bridge.*

ER: Yes, undoubtedly, we can say so.

MC: *And the second rupture?*

ER: That's directly related to the short dialogue that we had before you turned on the tape recorder, regarding Buddhism. When I encountered Buddhist philosophy, I soon realized that I needed, in order to really understand it, as much as possible, to leave behind me the way of thinking that I was educated within. After that, I could understand, when reading old books about Buddhism where the attempt was to make it graspable to the rational Western way of thinking, that there was a distortion [in those books]. As there is, after all, in every language. Language is always an approximation regarding what it is supposed to convey. And fortunately there's more that gets through than language anyway. But in that case it really was a caricature. And it's been, for me anyway, a great step to say: "Here! If I want to understand, I need to try to think as Asian people do," which really is another world. And I've been so lucky to meet extraordinary teachers for this. It was the time when I met wonderful teachers — most of them are gone now, except for his Holiness the Dalai Lama, and also the other one that became my Tibetan teacher, they really gave me a lot. I could not do that all by myself. There, I know that you work for Radio Libertaire,⁹ but my motto is not "Neither God, nor master,"¹⁰ because I know that without teachers, in any field whatsoever, we could not learn anything. Mathematics! All alone! Or astrophysics! And I consider that [trying to learn] any exact science or way of thinking that does not fit in ordinary life, without a teacher would be very pretentious.

MC: *This encounter with Buddhism, which happened at the beginning of the 70s if I remember well, I suppose also changed your way of listening. Is it a question of changing perspective?*

ER: No, because my music was already labeled meditative, before I encountered Buddhism. And it was through my music, at a concert I gave at Mills College, that I met some French people who attended the performance, Buddhists themselves, and thanks to them I

⁹ French anarchist radio.

¹⁰ The French word "*maitre*" translates both "master" and "teacher."

got some addresses in Paris, which I ran to immediately upon my return to France and then, voila, that's how the seed was sown that I try to continue cultivating.

MC: *Now we are going to jump to another thought I had: meditation. I noted down: listening equals abandonment — but not in a passive way — for the musician. The action before the non-action, listening before non-listening, presence before dissolving into the whole, that is the universe. I mean not abandonment in a passive way, but it's a work of acceptance, of becoming aware, once more, and I can't but use the word dissolving again, not as annihilation though: it's rather a fusion, becoming aware of being a drop in the ocean, with your own individuality, yet still being part of something greater. And the thought, indeed, brings on the work you do with the musician you meet: do you invite them, somehow, to discover another possible way of listening, in the work you do together? Or maybe the musicians themselves, coming to you, already have this predisposition for a deeper, meditative listening?*

ER: I think so, absolutely. After all, definitely, because, as I told you, it is the musicians themselves who ask me [to work together], therefore they know my work, they know very well what I am capable of suggesting to them. Because I ask nothing from them; I listen to them. Just like that, I come to think about our friend Hélène Breschand, it is obvious that the language I proposed to her is rather different [from the one that I proposed to Rhodri Davis]; she has a formidable character, you know her, so it was necessary that we find a way of communicating. It was extremely easy, as everything was in her too already; I think I contributed to revealing it, that aspect of her personality. After all, she's been so kind to tell me so. But if that had not already been in her, it wouldn't have been possible. And in everything you just said, I notice one thing: it's that I reject the dualistic way of thinking, which exists by "or," "it's this or that." — No, it can be this AND that. And many other things, thinking in multiple ways... It's like that image we mentioned before of the crowd, of a multiplicity: if you are in the middle of the crowd yourself, you are indeed with the few people around you, but each one of these people is, in turn, surrounded by others. And all that multiplies. I remember, when I

was a kid, I had fun staring at the two-colored tiles, because just by the way you looked at them you could have a white one surrounded by four black ones, a cross, an alignment, diagonals, you could see plenty of things. And yet they were always the same! So, thought is by its very essence much richer than what we can grasp. We grasp scraps of thoughts, like that and that's helpful, for I would never reject Cartesianism, that shapes us, it is an instrument among many instruments. And by the way, as soon as we want to make certain intuitions, certain elements real, on a material plane, we simply must connect to a rational way of thinking. But I think that spirituality is a human dimension, it is in every being, just like intelligence; it's just that, from the beginning, the Western European approach cultivated rational thought at the expense of spiritual thought, which simply became a matter for religions. And for philosophies too, but far more for religions. Now, I would say that it finds shelter in the arts. We don't build cathedrals any longer, but we build marvelous museums, which are the new cathedrals, and even in small towns, nowadays, we build a museum much more easily, and there we have places where people gather, where people pause freely and, why not, it's also a way of accessing and opening up this dimension, this awakening that you spoke of before, this dimension that is in each one of us, and to accept that we are not fixed beings. We are witnesses of that, since our birth until now, the age, more than certain, into which I am, given that I am more than 80. It is the same person but it is at the same time another person, there is undoubtedly a path, but there is not only one, there are multiple paths, there are crossroads of paths, all of this is multiplicity. I got to a point in my life where I prefer to practice this openness, even if... No, there is no losing oneself, after all, it's just about letting it flow; just like letting your gaze flow on the iridescences of water; that's why I return to the ocean. It may even be a swimming pool, where the surface reflects the light at the bottom and where there are different layers and yet they are always the same...

I remember, one day I walked to the banks of a river that swelled overnight and the sand carried the trace of the water that was the

same one could see at the surface, only that it was stuck. And we are always in that fluidity. So I think that we need to leave to that fluidity its own time, not always, but sometimes, not in the same way, that we can stop by the river's banks and simply stay there in contemplation, of the watercourse, the flow, the iridescences, just as we can contemplate a painting, or any artwork. As we can be absorbed by a particularly interesting sentence which awakens in us a thought that unravels and stretches out into a sound universe, of course. The sound universe is in that way like water, it is extremely free; water is free, sound too in the same way, it is ephemeral by nature. It constantly moves, by nature. You can have a glass of water, but you only need to move it ever so slightly and everything changes.

MC: *It seems to me that it is written in a Zen koan: "One can never swim twice in the same river."*¹¹

ER: No, of course.

MC: *And yet the river is always the same, we always call it by the same name and it is at once the same and not the same any longer.*

ER: Just like we are never thoroughly the same, even only a few minutes later. That is what I was telling you before, since you arrived, we have already become different. And that continues!

MC: *Something like two billion cells change every minute in a human body. It's dizzying.*

ER: Yes, of course. And thought has this fluidity, this capacity. So, it is sometimes necessary to direct it toward a specific goal to make something real; but why refuse this other means to knowledge, too, for it is another means to knowledge. The two are not incompatible. I am not going to throw mister Descartes and Auguste Comte out the window, after all. All that shaped us. But I am for acceptance, since the spiritual dimension has been somehow diverted, avoided, a bit thrown out the window like something slightly dubious, somewhat difficult in our societies, so I am

¹¹ Editor's Note: Actually, Heraclitus: one can never step into the same river twice.

in favor of giving back to it the place that it deserves. And I really mean the spirituality that is in every being.

MC: *Maybe in every work, too? For example, I think about your way of working with musicians, when you develop a work together, and, according to what I read and understood, you feel that there is — how to put it? — not a goal to achieve, but maybe a path to walk together, which is that one, and the only one that is right.*

ER: No, it's not a "path" — it's an experience, yes, a *total experience*. That is the term that comes to me. That is, there is no path; there is no development in what we do together. There is, if I dare say so, a frame anyway... It's not the right word, it's slightly reductive, but it is what we decide together; that is, what we decide is no small matter. There is a prior understanding, but an understanding that is extremely respectful of, for me, I say it again, the musician AND his instrument. The two are indissociable. The personality of the instrumentalist is for me just as important as his instrument and the virtuosity and mastery that the musician has of it. And it's that which I was listening to, first and foremost, with my microphone, putting myself at a distance between the speaker and where it [the sound] disappeared. That's very crude, as compared to what happens with an instrumentalist, because quite obviously the richness is infinitely greater. This unity that an instrumentalist forms with his instrument is something extraordinary. So, I don't work for an instrument, I work for an instrumentalist. And this exchange that we do is extremely rich — at least I think so. I would love if the instrumentalists I work with were asked more often about what we do, because I don't really know how they feel, but I would really love to know the way they feel, the way they work with me too.

MC: *I have the impression that the work you make is quite pragmatic. That is, you really work on the sound that emerges from this encounter.*

ER: But of course, that is very pragmatic. I do less solos, now. I am more interested in composing for duos, trios, quartets, etc., etc. ... So, I have to refuse solos, even by musicians I find greatly interest-

ing, but I cannot do everything and I always have projects. There are plenty of projects! But it's not really a path, a development, because there is actually very little difference between the very first piece for Rhodri Davis, that solo, and the orchestral piece made with the Oncem.¹² That is, the spirit remains the same, in its fluidity, and its mobility. And I believe all this work that is done is extremely consistent with the spirit that we want to put in it. That's an agreement: the only thing is that with certain soloists I did not previously know, who were coming to see me for the first time, I used to tell them that we had to try first, to see if we could work together and if that did not work there would be no conflict, that we would give up. That's all; whether it comes from one or the other. And the thing is that it always worked rather well. Now, there are some fifty musicians I work with and that is why it is difficult to go on for me. I can't do more than that!

MC: *Well, working with fifty musicians is already quite something!*

ER: Well, not all of them together. I have never had them all at once, yet!

MC: *That makes me think about another thing: your encountering the acoustic sounds, which made me think about another kind of dialogue, about exchanging words, sending back words. Maybe you already answered, somehow. But at first you were entirely alone, it was rather solitary work...*

ER: That changed my life. When I worked like an ascetic, here, in my corner, because before my studio was here, or way before it was in a friend's basement, in the basement of one of her offices, where I could only get in at night, and I always said that my only assistants were my cats, excellent at raising their heads when something was not right and staying calm when everything was right, but it was truly... I could not do that any longer, now, anyway, neither physically, nor... Because after discovering with Kasper Toeplitz,¹³ the very first one, the happiness of sharing

¹² Improvisers' orchestra based in Paris.

¹³ Performer of "Elemental II," Radigue's first work with another musician.

work in music... No, when you meet joy you don't want to go back to austerity. Unless it is necessary. And it's true that it is an immense joy to share. For me, yes, it is joy, it is happiness. It is always about sharing. And that has been missing basically all of my life, before. And that is why I definitely do not regret all that I left behind. Now, it's another chapter. Electronic music, it is electronic music. After all there is very little difference. I often say that I am the opposite of certain musicians, very gifted in our different domains, or even musicians that had extremely rich and varied careers. So, I lived with a painter¹⁴ who had a career of immense explorations. No, I am rather one of those stubborn donkeys; I had a career, well, toward certain music, and I needed to get deep into it, at least I hope I did, and it is the same music. I think that if we were to put everything I did end-to-end, we would realize that there are undoubtedly some light differences that occurred in the course of time, but that it is always the same music, eventually.

MC: The differences I perceive are in the sound sources, but actually, frankly speaking, if I were given a blind test, telling me: "Well, we are going to play some music and you have to tell us if it's acoustic, electronic..." there are cases where it would be hard for me to discern... I would always recognize your signature. What surprised me too about the work with feedback, when I read a review talking about certain compositions included in the album Vice Versa, mentioning raw sounds, when I had the chance to listen to it and yes, maybe it is possible to say so, that they are raw, but it was not my feeling. I stood in a sort of bliss, meeting your work the focused way I did, of the electronic phase, the feedback, and then the passage to acoustics. There is a consistency...

ER: Continuity, I would say. Thank you; it is very kind what you just said. But to return to the feedback, at the beginning they were used by several musicians whom I met: one had to stand in the middle of the speakers and have the microphone rotating in the middle of them. What you were describing, at the beginning, the sound firework came from that technique. It was the first technique I saw and that did not interest me. And in fact I tried, I

¹⁴ Arman, French painter, member of the informal art movement. Éliane Radigue and Arman have been together from 1950 until the late 60's.

made some attempts, I remember, but that hadn't appealed to me much, as I was returning to my old habits, with jars of water at different heights, by putting the microphone into one or the other and getting of course different pitches. Well, I did it once, but, well... I understood that one can play, with different jars, "Frère Jacques," or "Que vous dirais-je, maman," by pouring in the amount of water that was necessary with the feedback. That was not my goal, but it was part of the fields of exploration. Exploration also meant being able to make a choice, to make your choice; it is also exploring [different] directions... That was never interesting for me. It is not in my nature to take a microphone and rotate it. And the experience with the jars, I did it once. Nothing but a game. And that was it.

MC: *This may come as a surprise, but that commentary was about your very own work. That is why I found it all the more out of place. But anyway... We mentioned Kasper Toeplitz several times; he was the first who came to you, proposing to work together. Is it correct to say, to use the theme that we mentioned previously about the passage, the transition, because it's true that he uses a bass, but it is an electric bass, therefore amplified. There was a little bit of both, maybe.*

ER: Yes, absolutely; this is obvious. I think that if Charles Curtis had come to me before the experience I had with Kasper Toeplitz, I would have never dared to [work with him]. Because I knew Charles Curtis, his immense talent and I would have said: "No, it is impossible. What can I possibly give to him?!?" Because the sound matter that is Kasper's is relatively close to the sound universe I was swimming in at that time. It was a way of taking me out of a bath and putting me into another one, but whose water was almost the same temperature. And I found great pleasure in it, in fact. But then again, when I accepted, I said: "Well, let's see, let's give it a try." And I got caught in the game maybe even more than him. I found it exciting to work with him. And that was the opening. After all, there was a second version of this piece, "Elemental II," with the Lappetites, who worked with their computers. These two pieces, in fact this unique piece in its two versions by Kasper

Toeplitz and the Lappetites, really was the transition that led me to... It's very strange, because for me working with Charles Curtis felt like it was heaven-sent. And I was extremely intimidated about working with such a musician! At the beginning, and then, and then, things just unfolded very simply, very naturally, very nicely; it's a very beautiful memory that we both keep about this experience, because for him too... No, for him it was less... Because he already had that kind of experience, having worked with musicians such as LaMonte Young.

MC: *I am very curious to understand how you know when the duration of a work is right. This question comes to me, because, when listening to the reprint of some of your feedback works, I understood that some may last up to several hours, whereas they are edited down to some dozens of minutes on the LP or the CD. Is it always a matter of feeling, of an encounter with the musician and the instrument?*

ER: This is an interesting question. It is a question that requires... There, that's it — I need to take things from a different angle. I am a miserable improviser and I can't work any other way than when I already have in my mind the general idea, the structure and the story quite clearly. I always tell myself stories; there is always a story underlying everything I make.

MC: *Do you mean that there is a narrative?*

ER: No, it's not a narrative! If it's a narrative it is not interesting. There is nothing interesting in making a sound illustration. It's the feeling that can awaken a certain image, a certain memory. For example, to return to the time when I worked [with electronics], I think about the "Bardö-Thödol" for example, which respects the six intermediate states of consciousness, because "Bardö" means: in between, we are always — and it will always be in my spirit — in-between two tonalities, or two modalities and to have all the remaining doors open. It's obvious that this could be neither a narrative, nor a sound illustration, but simply put, the foundation was the six stanzas at the end of this book, each one recapitulating one of the six moments of the progress of con-

science. I give this example because it's obviously not a narrative. But on the other hand, there being a story behind it, this is the feeling that goes with it. Well, it's the feeling, or the emotion, or all the thoughts, everything that it awakens — I use your expression — in it. Now, with the musicians, there's an exchange. That is, when we start, I'm not going to explain the entire process of our work, but there is something determining the development of our work. It's not: "Come on! Go! Do what you want!" And it's not what I want either. It's something that was already verbally exchanged, it is a sort of guideline for us. And curiously, that, in itself, imposes the duration. It's obvious that a piece like the "Bardö-Thödol," which then has six stages to evoke and the tiniest evocation... Some ten to twelve minutes each are necessary. And fortunately, since I use a lot of the overlaps to get from one stage to another — and long overlaps! It is my specialty, my signature — when a stage has been evoked, the fade-out prepares for the following fade-in. The "Jetsun Mila" that evokes the ten stages of the life of Milarepa. There too, it's the same thing. And I say "Alas!" because the CD is too short, it was cut in two, when normally that was made to be listened to continuously, but it exceeds the duration of a CD. The duration is pretty much determined; I am rarely wrong. I am not talking about the feedback phase, when that was for me a time of explorations of technical aspects, I told you about what I left behind, like the jars with different levels of water, but I gave up, then, because... Among the many labels that have been put upon my music there is that of drone music. Well, a drone is a means among other ones. And if I wanted to make drones, in fact, when I had ten interesting minutes I might have made it an hour. But it was not what I was looking for. I was looking for what those ten minutes may have to tell me, the way I may have made them, to try, at least, to understand, from a technical point of view. There was also a technical apprenticeship with all this. But on the other hand it's true that I always knew, based on the themes that I mentally elaborated, what the approximate duration might be. Never within five to ten minutes, but I knew that that piece, at the beginning, when I started with my synthesizer, could not be shorter than twenty to twenty five minutes. It really

was the duration that I needed for a consistent development. Well, after all, I know nothing about it! It's the word that comes to my mind. But I won't go on discussing consistency! [Laughs] But I knew very well, like when I made the first long work, "PSI 847," that it was going to last an hour at least. And in fact it got to 80 minutes. Today, when I listen to it, I say to myself that some passages are too long, that I may have done.... But after all, it was the first piece of such a length that I made. And the duration is still determined by the work itself, or more exactly the spirit that is the thread upon which... How to put it? I would again use the term development, but it's the musical development that is approached... That goes around this.

Earlier, we were talking about taking the state of a sound material and bringing... Let's say, for example, if we were to take a musical cone, and we wanted to transform it by successive unravelings, into a cup we would need a certain time, that is for all the skeins to get to the base and for the base to be on the other side, above, so that it would be upside down, it would take a certain time. But this is a guiding idea, a directing idea, which, at a given time, comes to an inversion, somehow, because of what remains of the cone and what remains of the cup... The proportions are inversed. And so, it's the spirit that leads the matter, in every sense of the word. We are what we think. It's not the Cartesian "I think therefore I am," but it is "I am through what I think."

HYPERION

On the future of aesthetics

FRITZ SENN

The Joyce of Side Effects



James Joyce, circa 1922, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University

One convenient way of accounting for Joycean idiosyncrasies or departures from supposed norms would be to apply a mandatory warning from the pharmaceutical industry about “side effects.” According to dictionaries, a “side effect” is “a secondary and sometimes adverse effect,” or “an effect of a drug other than the one it was administered to evoke.” By definition it is something unwanted but almost inevitable, a collateral hazard. Joyce’s works go in the opposite direction — side effects are not a hazard or a danger, but a gain, often another dimension, and definitely part of

the design. Some such effects may well annoy readers (as in arguments against the dizzying confusion of *Finnegans Wake*) — possibly Joyce was overdoing it —, but on the whole the fringe resonances are experienced as invigorating and, in fact, can document what sets Joyce off from other writers in quality and in degree. The shortest and tritest formula is simply that there is always something more, and often something unforeseen, in Joyce.¹

Many Joycean peculiarities can therefore be subsumed under the comprehensive term of side effect — a new term, without new original insights, for familiar features. Joyce will be illustrated in terms of side effects, as a common denominator from a particular angle. The almost self-evident point could be made by a simple bow to symbols or Symbolism, with which Joyce has always been connected. For a while reading Joyce seemed to consist in indiscriminate symbol-hunting; interpretation was finding and explaining them. Unavoidably, Joyce is symbolic and, as usual, more so than other writers. He raised the issue and initiated the game in “The Dead” when Gabriel looks at his wife: “There was grace and mystery in her attitude as if she were a symbol of something,” and he asks himself: “what is a woman standing on the stairs in the shadow, listening to distant music, a symbol of?” (210). Everything can be a symbol of something else, a cracked looking glass “a symbol of Irish art” (U 1.146). What is X — the snow in “The Dead,” a shaving bowl or Macintosh in *Ulysses*, etc., *ad infinitum* — a symbol of? has been a constant question that led to insightful as well as singularly fatuous answers. A symbol is something thrown (“bol-”) together (“sin-”); it adds something else. *Finnegans Wake* is the book that throws most meanings together. Symbols or side effects are instances of something-else-ness thrown in for free, to take or leave.

The angle used here for partly familiar features can serve as a general introduction to Joyce, or as a repetition course; it is nothing but yet another parallax term considered useful.

¹ Not always. Some of the works seem relatively devoid of the features that will be paraded: *Chamber Music*, *Stephen Hero*, or *Exiles*.

Some *extravagancies*² are external and seem to be unique to Joyce, quite apart from the disproportionate attention his work attracts academically, in the number of studies, classes, dissertations, conferences, symposia, summer schools. Such lateral effects reach beyond the confines of Literature. Countless humans who may rarely touch a book have been exposed to rituals like the “Bloomsday” antics as they are engaged in all over the globe to celebrate a day that an author has invented, with events which never took place, and in one way they are nothing other than a combination of letters in words — a calendar side effect or a joco-serious carnival. Not every author, no matter how renowned, has increased the sale, perhaps also the price, of soap, as in Dublin’s artificially surviving chemist shop, “Sweny’s” in Lincoln Place, where souvenir lemon soaps are being sold on the tenuous basis that Leopold Bloom — an entirely fictitious person who never lived — bought some, and not even the self-same brand (the one in the novel is no longer available). These are side actions.

Titles and Schemas

Some of Joyce’s titles depart from conventions. One book — novel, epic? — is called “Ulysses”³ but does not contain anyone active of this name. The name of the Greek mythological hero — or rather, *one* of his several names — directs attention to classical antiquity; it is a marginal impact that may be felt as energizing, resonant, superfluous, overelaborated, or irritating. The optional guide-post potentially turns the book into a cultural translation. The title of a collection of poems, “Pomes Penyeach”, consists of two entities that are not, but come suggestively close to, English words and so deprive the title of stability. The oddity of the combination

² An “overload of your extravagance” is attributed to Shem as an implied co-author of *Ulysses* in *Finnegans Wake* (193.1).

³ Is the title name “Ulysses” simply the common English form for the mythological hero Odysseus, or is it perhaps already functioning as one stage of transformation in a transformative epic? The Greek name was Odys(s)eus, the Latin one Ulixes, and the hybrid form Ulysses is one of several transitional variants. W. H. Roscher, *Ausführliches Lexikon der griechischen und römischen Mythologie* (Leipzig: B. G. Teubner, 1897–1902) “Odysseus,” 646–51.

“Finnegans Wake” manifests itself in the frequent insertion of an officious apostrophe that is generally added by an almost mechanical reflex. Its lack offers an alternative syntactic structure, a noun or name followed by an inflected verb, quite apart from a gratuitous meaning of “wake” as water stirred. Side effects are stirring or blurring.

Then there are the spectral Homeric episode titles in *Ulysses* that are not and never were part the book itself. They now belong to its aura. Joyce used them privately in his conversation and correspondence and they have since accompanied the book as opportune signposts that highlight the striking individuality of the episodes. That famous “Schema” that Joyce supplied to a few select readers and that are included in the paraphernalia of various editions are also not part of the book. It consists of eighteen rows for each episode, and in its columns it lists those extraneous titles, the place and time of the actions, but also — and these are literally and spatially side by side effects — headings like “Organ,” “Art,” “Colour,” “Symbol,” and “Technic,” as well as Homeric correspondences. They are marginal enlightening expansions of unequal pertinence, optional extras.

Scholars have naturally proposed different categorizations, alongside the authoritative ones in the classical tradition. In his *Ulysses and Us*, Declan Kiberd supplies different thumbnail titles, live experiences, and emphatically non-academic headings in an effort to stress the humane aspects of the book: “Waking, Learning, Thinking, Walking, Praying, Dying, Reporting, Eating, Reading, Wandering, Singing, Drinking, Ogling, Birthing, Dreaming, Parenting, Teaching, Loving.”⁴

It is a strange oddity that the Homeric tags are transplanted into *Finnegans Wake*, where they take up a separate paragraph:

Ukalepe. Loathers’ leave. Had days. Nemo in Patria. The Luncher Out. Skilly and Carubdish. A Wondering Wreck. From the Mermaids’ Tavern. Bullyfamous. Naughtsycalves. Mother of Misery. Walpurgas Nackt.” (FW 228.12).

⁴ Declan Kiberd, *Ulysses and Us: The Art of Everyday Life in Joyce’s Masterpiece* (New York, London: Norton, 2009) vii.

It is worth considering that those are Wakean approximations of titles that are not to be found in *Ulysses* but are retrieved from its scholarly environs. The structure is a hybrid accumulation forced into a pattern. The links to the Homeric chapter titles vary — some are phonetic, others thematic, a few cunningly unite both: “Bullyfamous” combines the Greek name Polyphemos with a characteristic of the Kyklops who was a bully of some reputation; “Naughtsycalves” illustrates Nausikaa with her equivalent Gerty MacDowell naughtily revealing her calves. “Walpurgas Nackt” takes a far more circuitous route: Joyce’s Circe chapter was compared to Goethe’s equally fantastic “Walpurgisnacht” in his drama *Faust*, a kind of witches’ night in German folklore. Against such direct or refracted correspondences, some items are less obvious to accommodate. “Ukalepe” will not immediately be seen as a distortion of “Calypso,” but only in hindsight, and it still leaves a lot unaccounted for; “Nemo in Patria” might be more appropriate for Cyclops, but its relevance to Aeolus needs considerable elaboration. Some items are patently off center, with side effects that have not yet been revealed.

On many occasions, and increasingly so, *Ulysses* comments on itself and flaunts its own internal composition. Towards the end of the Ithaca section, it supplies parenthetical labels and notable side effects of its twelve central episodes, taken predominantly from the Old Testament (emphasized in bold for the sake of demonstration):

What past consecutive causes, before rising preapprehended, of accumulated fatigue did Bloom, before rising, silently recapitulate?

The preparation of breakfast (**burnt offering**): intestinal congestion and premeditative defecation (**holy of holies**): the bath (**rite of John**): the funeral (**rite of Samuel**): the advertisement of Alexander Keyes (**Urim and Thummim**): the unsubstantial lunch (**rite of Melchisedek**): the visit to museum and national library (**holy place**): the bookhunt along Bedford row, Merchants’ Arch, Wellington Quay (**Simchath Torah**): the music in the Ormond Hotel (**Shira**

Shirim): the altercation with a truculent troglodyte in Bernard Kiernan's premises (**holocaust**): a blank period of time including a car drive, a visit to a house of mourning, a leavetaking (**wilderness**): the eroticism produced by feminine exhibitionism (**rite of Onan**): the prolonged delivery of Mrs Mina Purefoy (**heave offering**): the visit to the disorderly house of Mrs. Bella Cohen, 82 Tyrone street, lower and subsequent brawl and chance medley in Beaver street (Armageddon): nocturnal perambulation to and from the cabman's shelter, Butt Bridge (**atonement**). (U 17.2041, emphasis added)

Joyce inserted the parentheses fairly late on the page proofs, on January 27, 1922, that is, one week before publication (JJA 27, 203), and so added an alternative schema, in terms of Biblical, not Homeric, resonance, as though to indicate other possible layers of coordination. The list even contains a meta-comment: "a blank period of time..." refers beyond the book's events to its structure — one major occurrence, Bloom's visit to the Dignam family, is not part of the narrative, resulting in a time gap between Cyclops, between 5 and 6 p.m., and Nausicaa setting off around 8 p.m.

Some side effects are visually present, as in chapter II.2 of *Finnegans Wake*, where the main central text is flanked by marginalia (side areas by definition) in respectively frivolous italics, on the left, and pompous capitals, on the right, with erratic footnotes at the bottom. How entirely spatial the arrangement is, becomes manifest at the moment when the text is being read aloud. What should be read first, the main text, but then which one of the marginalia? How do side effects fit into the main stream?⁵

⁵ It might make sense to treat the right hand marginal words — in capital letters and always at the beginning of a paragraph — as titles and read them first. But at what point exactly should the left-hand comments be voiced? Forward and sideways progressing has to be coordinated. The horizontal arrangement must be transformed into some sequence. The footnotes would logically come last.

Minute Tangents / Stumbling Blocks

At almost every step, Joyce invites and at times almost compels us to move sideways, away from the main direction. This happens illustratively at the very beginning of the first paragraph of the first story in *Dubliners*, “The Sisters,” where attention is turned away from things or acts toward the words that express them:

Every night as I gazed up at the window I said softly to myself the word paralysis. It had always sounded strangely in my ears, like the word *gnomon* in the Euclid and the word *simony* in the Catechism. (D 9)

Strange words move into focus, they are of foreign origin, not generally known, and marked by italics; they are paired with such odd collocations as “*the* Euclid.” The first name⁶ in the book is preceded by an article which can be explained as a school usage when classical books were referred to in this manner. What readers may be ignorant of becomes a matter for Annotations, which by definition takes care of extra features. Few readers would know, off hand, that Euclid’s *Elements of Geometry* defines a “gnomon” as “the part of a parallelogram which remains when a similar parallelogram is taken away from one of its corners” (Scholes 463). This description of a defect (something is missing) has been fruitful for characterizing the story (a brother priest has died, his two sisters are left behind), the whole collection, and Joyce in general, for his works expose variant deficiencies⁷ (*Finnegans Wake* is full of incomplete passages and spelling mistakes). According to the purposes or whims of an annotator, things can be carried even further sideways. The Greek “*gnomon*” is based on a root for knowing, “*gnô-*,” first meaning someone who knows or judges. Later, it acquired many subsidiary meanings, including the geometrical one. It may be significant — or the idle concern of a commentator — that a highlighted word right at the

⁶ The geometer’s Greek name “Eukleides” in itself would combine “good” (“*eu*”) with “*kleis, kleid-*” with potential ironic reverberations for an author who tends to withhold keys and leaves their inventions to critics.

⁷ It may be overlooked that a *gnomon* could equally be constructed by *adding* a smaller parallelogram to a bigger one and that Joyce could equally well be characterized by additions, augmentation, expansion (as genetic studies document *ad libitum*). In fact, the three foreign terms (paralysis, *gnomon*, *simony*) were added by Joyce in a revision.

outset suggests defective knowledge, a very human state of mind that is perpetually in focus and, beyond that, affects us as Joyce's readers.

More tangential meanings occur in the story when the boy narrator refers to Mr Cotter:

Tiresome old fool! When we knew him first he used to be rather interesting, talking of faints and worms; but I soon grew tired of him and his endless stories about the distillery.
(D 10)

Here the words in question are not outstandingly foreign but homely common ones in appearance, but they in turn require clarification since few readers will recognize them as technical distillery terms: "faints" are impure spirits which arise during distillation and "worms" long spiral tubes in which vapor is condensed. In this case, the side effects reside in the almost inevitable associations of those words in their everyday meanings, in a story about a death, overtones of worms are appropriate, as is the notion of fainting. Every ambiguity, play on words, or mistake supplements something to the main drift: the well-known example "rheumatic wheels" (D 17) contains its tacit correction. When one of the sisters remarks "And then his life was, you might say, crossed" (D 17), an implicit Christian shadow hovers hauntingly over the innocent statement.

Outgrowths

Some lateral extensions are visually prominent, like the titles in *Aeolus* that lend a semblance to newspaper headlines and are the first strident departure from the initial stylistic representation of the previous episodes. They protrude as separate entities and are set off from the rest of the text, generally in capital letters. Joyce inserted them in the course of revisions and they significantly change the range of the episode by transcending into new territory: they are outside the consciousness of the characters. Moreover, they undergo an evolution from relative straight information to increasing playfulness and autonomous frolicking.

Some are puzzling, true to the nature of headlines to arouse curiosity but not to give the story away, they become more perplexing in their relation to the text they introduce. What is a first-time reader to make of the so far longest headline?

SOPHIST WALLOPS HAUGHTY HELEN
SQUARE ON PROBOSCIS.
SPARTANS GNASH MOLARS.
ITHACANS VOW PEN IS CHAMP. (U 7.1035)

In this hybrid cluster there is a diversion into classical Greece and an incongruous mixture of registers; learned diction clashes with the zoological “proboscis” (which not a few readers have to look up: the mobile long nose of mammals like elephants or monkeys, not complimentary when applied to woman), a Biblical gnashing of teeth (Mat. 8:12, etc.) has shifted to dentistry; literary diction is interspersed with an abbreviation like “champ.” At a first go, “PEN” — following after “pen behind his ear” (7.34), “That was a pen” (7.63), and in particular “THE CROZIER AND THE PEN” (U 7.61) — is not automatically determinable.⁸

There are, at a basic level, plenty of additional disturbances. Clarification lags behind. The headline twists the remarks of the classical scholar MacHugh: “— You remind me of Antisthenes ... a disciple of Gorgias, the sophist. ... he wrote a book in which he took away the palm of beauty from Argive Helen and handed it to poor Penelope” (U 7.1035). Haughty Helen, the most beautiful woman in antiquity, receives a colloquial but figurative beating. In classical Greek, Penelope would never have been shortened to “Pen.” The rivalry is treated as a primeval beauty contest between Sparta (Helen’s home) and Ithaca, where aging Penelope waited patiently, with nationalist identifications. (Of course there was such a beauty contest in Greek myth, when Paris of Troy had to award the palm of beauty to Hera, Athene, or Aphrodite, and was bribed with Argive Helen, who thus became the “*prix de Paris*,” U 5.302, 3.483). All in all, an *omnium gatherum* of unruly deviousness.

⁸ Apart from readers on record who see significance in the closeness of “PEN” and “IS.”

That, as Robert Martin Adams has found out, there is no evidence that Antisthenes preferred Penelope to Helen in a book of which only the title is known (“Helena and Penelope”),⁹ is evidence of another extension. The most elaborate and ornate headline is based on nothing more than individual speculation. Stephen will later select this bit of misinformation in yet another distortion: “— Antisthenes, pupil of Gorgias, Stephen said, took the palm of beauty from Kyrios Menelaus’ brooddam, Argive Helen, the wooden mare of Troy in whom a score of heroes slept, and handed it to poor Penelope” (U 9.621). Animal side effects have proliferated, Helen, not famous for breeding, has become a “brooddam” as well as a mare — the Trojan horse is conflated with her implied promiscuity.

Interpolations

In contrast to the typographically distinct headlines in *Aeolus*, the spatial interpolations in *Wandering Rocks* do not visibly differ from their context and so may remain unnoticed. This particular feature consists of passages lifted from one location into another so as to signal simultaneous occurrences. They are geographical and spatial side effects; readers are taken elsewhere. Many such inserts are manifest. A remark by Haines on Stephen Dedalus, that “Shakespeare is the happy hunting ground of all minds that have lost their balance,” is juxtaposed, without any explicit mark, with

The onelegged sailor growled at area of 14 Nelson street:
— *England expects* (U 10.1061)

With only one leg and crutches, it is harder for the sailor to keep his balance. An additional connection is supplied by Buck Mulligan: “—You should see him [Stephen Dedalus] when his body loses its balance,” mental balance recalls physical balance. That the sailor’s song happens to be “The Death of Nelson” and is momentarily heard in Nelson Street is yet another, albeit minor, twist.

⁹ Robert Martin Adams, *Surface and Symbol: The Consistency of James Joyce* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1962) 37.

On the other hand, a reader unfamiliar with Dublin cannot tell whether the paragraph

Mr Denis J Maginni, professor of dancing &c, in silk hat, slate frockcoat with silk facings, white kerchief tie, tight lavender trousers, canary gloves and pointed patent boots, walking with grave deportment most respectfully took the curbstone as he passed lady Maxwell at the corner of Dignam's court. (U 10.55)

is within the range of Father Conmee's perception, as all encounters or observations so far have been. As any map can tell, Dignam's Court is in another place, some distance away, so that the paragraph suggests a scene elsewhere at the same time and is in fact an interpolation. But "H. E. L. Y'S filed before him [Boylan], tallwhitehatted, past Tangier lane ..." (U 10.310) is not because the lane can be seen from Thornton's fruit shop (10.299). Knowledge of Dublin is a side requirement.

Interpolations that indicate "elsewhereness" are carried into the next chapter, "Sirens," where a sad remark made in the Ormond hotel, " — It's them has the fine times," is followed by a sweep to the other side of the river, to Bloom, unseen by the barmaids in the Ormond hotel:

A man.

Bloowho went by Moulang's pipes bearing in his breast the sweets of sin, by Wine's antiques, in memory bearing sweet sinful words, by Carroll's dusky battered plate, for Raoul. (U 11.81)

The Sirens episode in its own way keeps track of what the various persons do, mainly within the relatively narrow range of locations within the hotel, the bar, the saloon, and the dining room, but also extending to the streets outside.

The interpolations in Cyclops, also referred to as "Asides," are less spatial or temporal than thematic. They interrupt the main personal narration and imaginatively distort scene or action into a travesty, with a complete change of tone and style, often in mock-elevation. Cyclopean interpolations vary in scope, mood, register,

and in their relation to the main text. Some are pure imaginative digressions, while others also carry the action forward, as when drinks are ordered and paid for (U 12.279). Some are brief asides:

Who comes through Michan's land, bedight in sable armor?

O'Bloom, the son of Rory: it is he. Impervious to fear is Rory: he of the prudent soul. (U 12.215)

At the first mention of Bloom he is described in an Irish transposition, he is Hibernicized patronymically to O'Bloom, his father's name Rudolph in turn becomes "Rory" (analogous to "Rory of the hill", 12.134). Bloom ("Ireland. I was born here," 12.1431) will later be maligned and threatened as an unwanted foreigner. There seems to be a slip from son to father as well: Rory, not Bloom, is said to be impervious to fear, but Bloom has just been called "the prudent member" (U 12.211). Incongruity prevails, and "prudent" is misapplied anyway: in his Cyclops adventure, Bloom deviates from his customary cautious and non-partisan attitude and is untypically provocative, in fact almost asking for trouble.¹⁰

Some Cyclopean interpolations seem to take casual words at face value and enlarge them into gigantic fabrications. A remark that someone who claims to have met the late Patrick Dignam must have seen a ghost results in a tangential evocation of an imagined séance where the ghost of the defunct is interrogated with appropriate occult paraphernalia (U 12.338–74). Purified spirits, already higher on a rising scale, are described as enjoying "every modern home comfort such as tâlâfânâ, âlâvâtâr, hâtâkâldâ, wâtâklâsât" (U 12.384). The spelling with long Sanskrit "â"s in the manner of the mainly Indian theosophical terminology adds another ironic twist. Sanskrit, the oldest recorded Indo-European language, is applied to the latest technical achievements, to "modern" home comfort (this is the first use of "modern" in an archetypal "Modernist" text).

¹⁰ This is in accordance with Odysseus who, against his self-control, blurts out his name to the blind Polyphemos, and thereby incites the potent wrath of Poseidon, father of the Kyklops (*Od.* 9.502ff).

Similarly, a remark that merely accompanies the arrival of some drinks (“God bless all here is my prayer”) is taken up in all seriousness and it initiates a ceremonial ecclesiastical Benediction involving a gigantic catalogue of saints and their accouterments, ending in Latin: “And at the sound of the sacring bell ... *per Christum Dominum nostrum*” — all in all 472 words, the second longest insertion in the episode, out of all realistic proportion (U 12.1673–1751). Some real saints, “... S. Martin of Todi and S. Martin of Tours and S. Alfred and S. Joseph and S. Denis S. Cornelius and S. Leopold and S. Bernard and S. Terence and S. Edward,” double with patrons of the pub; S. Martin of Tours — who shares his place of origin with Bloom, Szombathely in Hungary — then retrospectively includes Martin Cunningham. Even the fierce dog Garryowen is elevated to “S. Owen Caniculus.” In a multiplication of side effects some fictional characters bless themselves. In an episode where odd, wrong, or hidden names are thematically suggestive, the acts of naming are sanctified: “S. Anonymous and S. Eponymous* and S. Pseudonymous and S. Homonymous and S. Paronymous and S. Synonymous.” Lateral proliferation is carried to strange limits.

As it happens, the name of Odysseus itself is literally “eponymous.” His grandfather Autolykos advocates it: “*toi d’Odysseus onom’ estô epônymon*”: “therefore let the name by which the child is named [*epônymos*] be Odysseus” (Od 19:409). The term “*epônymos*” has been defined as “a name given on account of some particular circumstance.” The Cyclops episode is manifestly eponymous, as well as partly anonymous; it abounds in false names (“Pseudonymous”); it plays with homonyms (above all “I,” “eye,” and “aye”) and paronyms, literally “side-names.” The episode reflects on its own thematic concerns.

All in all, Cyclops in its own manner features variant departures from the main narrative direction.

Not Thrown Away

If ever a side effect was instituted, it is the well-known and potent “Throwaway” entanglement, based on the misconception of a horse racing fanatic who suspects a tip behind Bloom’s casual remark, that he was going to “throw away” a newspaper. The error will seriously affect Bloom and worsen his situation in a pub later on when he is imagined to have won a substantial sum by betting on a horse named Throwaway, whose existence he was as unaware of, and the readers along with him, until the misunderstanding is clarified only in retrospect — if at all. When Bloom later remembers how “... that half-baked Lyons ran off at a tangent in his impetuosity to get left” (U 16.1290) he cannot know that the whole Throwaway complex does in fact amount to a “tangent” — something diverging from a main line that takes on a separate significance. The issue is further complicated by a handbill put into Bloom’s hands that is also called a “throwaway”; it announces the advent of the prophet Elijah (U 8.6–15) and saddles Bloom with yet another figurative role.

That an actual horse named Throwaway (descended from “Rightaway-Thrale” (U 16.1278) won the Ascot Gold Cup of June 16, 1904, against a favorite named “Sceptre,” plays into the ecological concerns of *Ulysses* where nothing ever is thrown away for good. *Finnegans Wake* is even more based on the recycling of themes and cultural debris.

Like so much in Joyce, the “Throwaway” ramifications could be subsumed under the heading of “Parallax.” It demonstrates the divergent view of a racing fanatic who assimilates everything to his narrow perspective, along with the assumption of a biased Lenihan that Bloom is cagey and secretive. “Parallax,” an apparent dislocation, is literally an alteration (*allaxis*) alongside (*para-*). Most Greek composites based on “para-” stress side effects and could be enlisted in the present arguments: a “Parable” (like the Parable of the Plums, U 7.1057) invites interpretation in accordance with New Testament example, a “paradox” (“side-opinion”) indicates something contradictory, often to common sense (“Wilde and his paradoxes), “paraheliotropic” (U 17.14, 45), “paranymphs” (U

14.354), “the initial paraphenomena” of early morning are noises and sights (U 17.1264), etc., and especially “parody.”

Most of Joyce is somehow *para*.

Every parody, from Buck Mulligan’s irreverent playacting to whole sections or episodes, is based on something pre-existing that happens alongside the text at hand. A “parody” is literally a song (*ôidê*) sung beside (*para*) and so a side effect by definition; it adds a variation to an original. In this light, Oxen of the Sun becomes the most side-effectual part in *Ulysses*, it moves on two time scales and doubles as an anthology of literary styles and periods. The What of the story is at times nearly occluded by the How of its presentation. Much of the Oxen chapter demands back translations into contemporary English, “levin” into “lightning,” “welkin” into “sky,” or “rood” into “cross.” The actual events or dialogues have to be extricated from the prevalent period disguise.

The process is reversed in the so-called Coda, the final paragraphs that change from written imitations to an apparent record of spoken impromptu utterances of inspired speakers who meticulously abstain from direct statements in favor of jocular circumlocutions. In its own way, the Coda is based on secondary effects where understanding often amounts to guesswork. “Where the Henry Nevil’s sawbones and ole clo?” (U 14.1442) remains opaque until “sawbones” is glossed as a term for a doctor and readers remember — or commentators tell them — that Leopold Bloom once hawked old clothes. Irrespective of whether there ever was someone named Henry Nevil(le) or not, the main drift of “Where the Henry Nevil’s” has been recognized a rhyming slang for “where the devil.” Nothing is quite what it seems on the surface. Understanding amounts to transforming.

“All Intents and Purposes”

The prose of the Eumaeus episode — “sinewless and wobbly” (U 16.1724) — presents a special case of insidious effects almost in

the pharmacological sense: its persuasive unpremeditated gaucheness appears like the result of misguided ambitions, by aiming narratively too high and constantly missing some vague mark. It manifests itself in jarring discordant associations and the nicely calibrated wrongness of its minutiae.

Characteristic are lingering repetitions — “... observing that the point was the least conspicuous point about it” (U 16.819); “a levelheaded individual who could give points to not a few in point of shrewd observation” (U 16.219); “as it struck him, the two identical names, as a striking coincidence” (U 16.1775). It abounds in tautologies like “repeated again” (U 16.279) and uneasy clashes: “put a good face on the matter and foot it” (U 16.32); “... following in the footsteps of the head of state” (U 16.1200; “landed in deep water” (U 16.1191); “genuine forgeries” (U 16.781). Above all it concocts inappropriately extended metaphors: “the acme of first class music literally knocking everything into a cocked hat” (U 16.1739), where the inherent absurdity is underlined by a characteristic “literally.”

A phrase like “for/to all intents and purposes,” which occurs three times and only in Eumaeus (U 16.214, 931, 1721), looks particularly devoid of either semantic intent or purpose. The old joke — “open thy mouth and put thy foot in it” (U 16.1269) — is elevated to a stylistic code that leads to inadvertent unsettling vibrations. They add to the nervous capricious energy of the episode or, as Vike Plock puts it from a different perspective: “it is precisely this stylistic incompetence” (which has also neurological causes) “that creates a self-conscious script, which, in turn, establishes new synaptic connections between the text and the reader.”¹¹

Its stylistic anticipation in “Oxen of the Sun” is a side effect in the context of imitations of literary precedents. It is interposed between the manners of Landor (U 14.1110–73) and Macaulay (U

¹¹ Vike Martina Plock, “Nerves Overstrung: Neuroscience and Ergography in ‘Eumaeus.’” *Joyce, Medicine, and Modernity*. Florida James Joyce Series (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2010) 109. The article offers its own characterization of “the mosaic of lexical dissonances” (106–7).

14.1298–1222) and discordantly outside the sequence of the established English prose styles characteristic of the episode, and therefore a narrative disruption:

However, as a matter of fact though, the preposterous surmise about him being in some description of a doldrums or other or mesmerised which was entirely due to a misconception of the shallowest character, was not the case at all (U 14.1174–1222).

There is the same discomfiture, unbalanced clumsiness, and a sense of phrases not being downright wrong, but certainly not impeccably right.¹² The paragraph stands outside, or alongside, the main direction of the chapter.

Quotations

Every quotation is something external, plugged in as a tangential link. In the congested Library episode — which gives the impression of being all *déjà vu* — Buck Mulligan and Stephen walk down the stairs: “The curving balustrade: smoothsliding Mincius” (U 9.1124) is probably Stephen’s association. The library’s curving balustrades were presumably used by students for smooth sliding down, and those steeped in the literary tradition might well have jokingly paraded Milton’s reference to “smooth-sliding Mincius,” an ancient river, from “Lycidas” (line 86), a poem surfacing already in Nestor and elsewhere. Behind a Buck Mulligan type of student joke a concatenation of echoes leads to Milton and ultimately to Virgil, who describes the river Mincius in his *Eclogues* (VII, 12). Apart from that, the quote is also a comment on the semantic reach of the verb “slide.” Some quotations are distorted. Stephen Dedalus in his conjectures on Shakespeare in the Library is ostentatiously allusive:

— A deathsman of the soul Robert Greene called him,
Stephen said. Not for nothing was he a butcher’s son,

¹² One may wonder for example if “a surmise” may be “not the case at all,” and what exactly is “in some description of a doldrums.” Statistically, it is only in this passage and in “Eumaeus” that sentences begin with “However,” etc., etc.

wielding the sledded poleaxe and spitting in his palms. (U 9.131)

On scanty evidence, he makes Shakespeare a butcher's son, "wielding" a tool of the trade that Bloom has been thinking of in sympathy for the "[w]retched brutes there at the cattle market waiting for the poleaxe to split their skulls open" (U 8.723). But Stephen has cleverly alienated the word from a line describing the dead King Hamlet's ghost, as it is recognized by Horatio who observes:

So frowned he once when in an angry parle
He smote the sledded Polacks on the ice. (Ham. I.i, 62)

The Polacks were attacking on sleds, and one variant in the spelling of the nationality is "poleaxe" (an orthographical side effect). Stephen cunningly deflects the textual variant — in seeming disregard of whether his small audience would pick up the hidden echo and irrespective of whether "the sledded poleaxe" makes autonomous sense. The sleight of voice is resumed when the Polish representative of a foreign delegation in one of the Cyclopean interpolations is named "Pan Poleaxe Paddyrisky"¹³ of hybrid descent (U 12. 565).

Eutrapelia

The substitution of words in familiar dicta is an old device. It can happen inadvertently and by failing memory, as when Bloom misquotes "*Hamlet, I am thy father's spirit / Doomed for a certain time to walk the earth*" for "a certain *term* to walk the *night*" (U 8.63, *Hamlet* I.5, 9–10). In *Finnegans Wake*, there is the trace of an Irish actor who botched Shakespeare's famous line from *Othello* (3.3.165) to read: "O! beware of jealousy, my lord, it is the green-eyed *lobster*" (in place of "monster").¹⁴ This may have survived in Dublin memory for Joyce to conjure up: "he'd be the greeneyed

¹³ This faintly reverberates in *Finnegans Wake* where "**Puddyrick**" and "it would **poleaxe** your sonson's grandson utterly" appear in proximity (FW 53.30–33).

¹⁴ Samuel A. Ossory Fitzpatrick, *Dublin: A Historical and Topographical Account of the City* (London: Methuen, 1907) 249.

lobster,” with a further echo in “the greeneyed mister” (FW 249.2, 88.15).

But most comic or deflating effects are intentional witticisms. The device is as old as tradition, and even goes back to how Homer’s epics were already treated irreverently. There is nothing new under the literary sun:

In antiquity already the famous first line of the *Odyssey*:

Andra moi ennepe, Mousa, polytropon, ... (Od. 1.1)

[The] man tell me, Muse, [who is] “much-turned”

was given a culinary twist by a change of two words:

Deipna moi ennepe, Mousa, polytrophā, ...

“Man” is turned into “*deipna* = meals,” “much-turned” into “*polytrophā*,” “of much food.” As it happens, Liddell & Scott render the meaning of the adjective as also “plump and well-fed,” which Joyce may never have known of when he supplied “plump” Buck Mulligan with a “wellfed voice” (U 1. 107). Some side effects are naturally due to coincidences.

In *Ulysses*, Buck Mulligan introduces such humorous twists (and so does, almost compulsively, the ubiquitous Lenehan): many of them have the air of previous recirculation. A man of many turns, he readapts a Biblical quotation by declaiming, “wellnigh with sorrow”: “And going forth he met Butterly” (U 1.527), when no person of such name is within sight. The phrase, as readers of long ago would have identified at once, is patterned on the Biblical quote when Peter, having denied Jesus three times, is caught out: “Going forth, he wept bitterly” (Mat. 26:75). Through a few adjustments, an act is replaced by a wholly different one (alongside) and an adverb changed into a person; a serious event is mockingly trivialized. The twist adds pertinent vibrations since Peter was the apostle to become the successor of Jesus, as Joyce is reported to have said, based on “a pun” — Thou art Peter (*Petrus*) and upon this rock (*petram*) will I build my church ... And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven” (Mat. 16:19). Mulligan follows his (probably not original) witticism immediately

with a question about the key of the tower, which Stephen will soon reluctantly hand over, so that key of the tower acquires Biblical overtones.

The familiarity of the Bible or of Shakespeare, once taken for granted, allows for ample scope for sly twists: "Greater love than this ... no man hath that a man lay down his *wife* for his friend" (U 14.360). The more familiar a quotation is the more it lends itself to adroit, or heavy-handed, elaboration. Proverbial wisdom is often given a different meaning: "Never put on you tomorrow what you can wear today" (U 15.2333).

Classical Greek had a term for such tweaks, "*eutrapelia*,"¹⁵ literally a good or fortunate (*eu-*) turn (*trap-*); it was applied to lively wit, especially in repartee, or pleasantry, and considered a positive quality, as such it was praised by Aristotle as a skill of especially young men (Aristotle, *Rhetorics*, 1389b, Loeb 250–1). Buck Mulligan and other eloquent characters in *Ulysses* can be seen in this tradition. Religions, however, have a low tolerance for meddling with matters holy; Saint Paul lists such irreverent joking amid related transgressions: "But fornication, and all uncleanness, or covetousness, let it not be once named among you, as becometh saints. Neither filthiness, nor foolish talking, nor jesting (*eutrapelia*), which are not convenient ..." (Eph. 5:3–4). In the eyes of the Church, such verbal deviations would count as disturbing or abominable side effects. The term, borrowed from Aristotle and Saint Paul, conveniently and characteristically describes a pervasive device.¹⁶

It is above all one of the motive forces of *Finnegans Wake*. In its second paragraph, the Biblical "*Tu es Petrus / Thou art Peter*" is converted to a richly layered "thuartpeatricks" of considerable radiation. The Lord's Prayer is a particularly rich quarry: "That they shall not gomeet madhowlatrees," or "Lust, thou shalt not commix idolatry" (259.5, 433.23) are easily detected.

¹⁵ Fritz Senn, "From Efficacious Words to Eutrapelia." *Ulysses Close-ups*. Piccola Biblioteca Joyciana 2 (Roma: Bulzoni Editore, 2007) 47–80.

¹⁶ Even a tepid joke like "Frailty thy name is Sceptre" (U 12.1227) sends out some vibrations.

Among other devices, a network of *eutrapelian* variants lends coherence to the eminently dispersive chaos of *Finnegans Wake*; it offers moments of partial recognition and counteracts prevalent disorientation.¹⁷ A line in Percy French's song "Phil the Fluter's Ball," about a tumultuous party, "And they all joined in with the utmost joviality", is deflected with latitude into different areas. The emphasis may be on shouting and congestion: "And the all gianed in with the shoutmost shoviality" (6.18); on noise and food: "And of course all chimed din width the eatmost boiviality"¹⁸ (58.14). Elsewhere it is put into a context of radio and news: "And we all tuned in to hear the topmast noviality" (351.14).

Trans-Context

But for the sake of aberrant significance, quotations need not be verbally tampered with. Unaltered, they can be transplanted into a different situation. Knowingly or not, Bloom transfers the Biblical question, "And who is my neighbour?" (Luke 10:29) to his present surroundings in a church: "Nice discreet place to be next some girl. Who is my neighbour?" (U 5.40). The effect hinges on a modified context. Some examples need not express great originality, as when Cunningham, who is trying to raise a collection on behalf of the Dignam family, refers to one possible but unlikely contributor: "Touch me not" (U 10.967); the words of Jesus, "Touch me not; for I am not yet ascended to my father" (John 20:17), are overlaid with a common idiom for borrowing.

Misappropriation of familiar quotes, by re-framing them, is a long-standing praxis and continued by Bloom, who misapplies the

¹⁷ It frequently happens that a sequence that is not adequately understood reminds its readers of a similar occurrence elsewhere that was also not quite understood there, but the sense of having heard it before affords some partial comfort, the elementary joy of recognition. Clive Hart has put together a long, and of necessity incomplete recurrent phrases ("Index of Motifs"), like "all roads lead to Rome," in different approximations. They are bracketing supports in an essentially dispersive verbal artifact: Clive Hart, *Structure and Motif in Finnegans Wake* (London: Faber & Faber, 1962) 212–47.

¹⁸ The variant that substitutes "boiviality" for the original "joviality" might call up the Latin saying "*Quod licet Iovi non licet bovi*" ("what is permitted to Jupiter is not permitted to an ox").

words of a guard in *Hamlet* to his onanistic response to exhibitionism: "Did me good all the same ... For this relief much thanks. From *Hamlet* that is" (U 13.939). It is re-contexted in a scene conjured up in *Oxen*, where a Gothic avatar of the Englishman Haines who "drank drugs to obliterate. For this relief much thanks" (U 14.1034).

One consequence for Joyce readers is that classical passages may lose some of their innocence ever after.

Minuscule Effects

Interpretation hovers precariously between finding and inventing, and in Joyce, as usual, even more so. We are prone to project our favorite readings into a text beyond the author's intention or even knowledge and ferret out complexities where none may be. One such debatable feature is a phrase in the musings of Gerty MacDowell:

Over and over had she told herself that as she mused by the dying embers in a brown study without the lamp because she hated two lights or oftentimes gazing out of the window dreamily by the hour at the rain falling on the rusty bucket, thinking. (U 13.292)

Not every erudite reader of today is conversant with the obsolete expression "in a brown study" in the sense of deep thought, in a somber mood, or reverie; and Gerty MacDowell herself is unlikely to ever use it, and yet it occurs in her indirectly presented thoughts. So it is just possible that she — in so far as it is her own wording — would take it to be the description of a homely interior in its context: "... dying embers in a brown study without the lamp ...". Some translators have in fact understood it in this sense and, as an enquiry has shown, so do present day sophisticated readers.

It is one of Joyce's achievements to demonstrate to what contortions minds are capable of. Bloom reads "Gathering figs" into the name Figather (U 8.150). Molly Bloom remembers the case of a Mrs Maybrick, who had murdered her husband and was recently released from prison: "... white Arsenic she put in his tea

off flypaper wasn't it I wonder why they call it that if I asked him he'd say its from the Greek leave us as wise as we were before" (U 18.240). Why would she wonder about the Greek name of a poison? As it happens, she would do it only in English, where the first part of "arsenic" happens to contain one of the four cardinal points of the episode that Joyce explained out to Frank Budgen, "... being the female breasts, arse, womb and [cunt]" (16 August 1921, LI 170). Apart from such a lexical coincidence, Molly's interest would be seen as untypically philological. If Bloom were to say "its from the Greek" he would be right, for "arsenic" does in fact derive from a word meaning "manly" (which would fit Penelope as well). Molly Bloom of course recalls her question of the morning as to the meaning of "Metempsychosis," which she has turned into a phonetic and vernacular likeness: "Met him [pike hoses]" (U 4.339, 8.112). In this case, Bloom rose to the occasion, and after some brief stalling — "It's Greek: from the Greek — accurately explained that "it means the transmigration of souls." She dismisses the explanation with a demand for "plain words" (not of Latin origin, presumably). Undeterred, Bloom persistently offers an alternative, "reincarnation," but she shows little interest in his persistent efforts and turns her attention to the smell of burning kidneys (U 4.380). Her initial enquiry about a foreign word may be less due to philological curiosity but seems to be a trick to turn her husband's questions away from the impending visit in the afternoon. As it happens, when the incident reoccurs in her monologue, she turns the unfamiliar theosophical term "reincarnation" into a term she knows from her Catholic upbringing: "he came out with some jawbreakers about *the* incarnation ..." (U 18.566). All in all, a concatenation of side effects that take us far afield.

Verbal near misses are intriguing side effects. A conversation in the cabman's shelter turns around England as in the words of its proprietor:

The Boers were the beginning of the end. Brummagem England was toppling already and her downfall would be Ireland, her Achilles heel, which he explained to them about the vulnerable point of Achilles, the Greek hero, a

point his auditors at once seized as he completely gripped their attention by showing the tendon referred to on his boot. (U 16.1002)

Since the “Achilles heel” may be out of everybody’s range, the “tendon” is explicitly supplied for linguistic and anatomical clarification.¹⁹ Ironically then, it is just this explicative gloss that leads to a misunderstanding, or perhaps merely a distortion, when Bloom takes up the metaphor: “The most vulnerable point too of tender Achilles,” and the slip is repeated when Bloom’s “right side” is described “in classical idiom, his tender Achilles” (U 16.1638, 1716). A “tendon” has morphed sideways into “tender,” not perhaps the ideal epithet for the relentlessly savage hero of the *Iliad* whose wrath is one of the motives of the epic.²⁰

A letter missing, substituted, or added by mistake or intentionally can have an impact. It can turn a telegram saying “Nother dying come home father” into a “curiosity to show” with unwanted but intriguing overtones (U 3.199). A vagrant letter “l” can expand an intended “word” into a whole “world,” as in Martha Clifford’s letter (U 5.245). The erroneous intrusion letter is potent and plays into the hands of an author who creates imaginary worlds out of words. That same letter is missing from Bloom’s name in the *Evening Telegraph* as a defective “L. Boom” (U 16.1262) — it adds another blow to his ego, and possibly another role.

As every dictionary demonstrates, words by nature are ambiguous, often with a wide semantic reach, or else by homonymous coincidence, as in “race,” so that Joyce can somewhat

¹⁹ The act is paralleled by Bloom, who also provides anatomical instruction when he points out why “Aztecs ... couldn’t straighten their legs ... by indicating on his companion the brief outline of sinews or whatever you like to call them behind the right knee” (U 16.851). The characterization “sinewless and wobbly,” referring to Bloom’s “strange kind of flesh” and following close upon “tender Achilles” (U 16.1716, 1724), has already been taken to include the chapter’s slack style. In his Schema, Joyce attributed “Nerves” as “Organ” to the episode; the word “nerve” derived from Latin *nervus*, where it also meant sinew or tendon, analogous to Greek *neuron*. See again Vike Martina Plock, “Nerves Overstrung: Neuroscience and Ergography in ‘Eumaeus,’” above, 88–110.

²⁰ Achilles does have his tender moments, notably at the end in his touching encounter with Priamos in Book 24, and there may be more than mere friendship in his relations to his friend Patroklos — which might interest readers who pursue homoerotic undercurrents in “Eumaeus.”

inaccurately have Bloom “bearing in his arms the secret of the race” (U 17.340). It recalls his offer to “throw away” a newspaper that carried news about a horse race, which was mistaken to convey a secret tip on a horse named Throwaway, while the wording is also reminiscent of a speech describing Moses coming down from the mountaintop, “bearing in his arms the tables of the law,” and thereby leading his race, the Jewish one, into freedom (U 7.868). Translators have to decide which meaning is considered dominant.

In “Lestrygonians,” the alimentary episode, Bloom remembers Tom Kernan’s skill: “A nice salad, cool as a cucumber, Tom Kernan can dress” (U 8.759). At this point readers may not yet be aware of Kernan’s sartorial vanity:²¹

Mr Kernan halted and preened himself before the sloping mirror of Peter Kennedy, hairdresser. Stylish coat, beyond a doubt. Scott of Dawson street. Well worth the half sovereign I gave Neary for it. Never built under three guineas. Fits me down to the ground. ... Must dress the character for those fellows. Knight of the road. Gentleman. (U 10.142)

Later on, Kernan just misses a close sight of the viceroy and his cavalcade: “At Bloody Bridge Mr Thomas Kernan greeted him vainly from afar” (U 10.1183). Kernan’s greeting is in vain, but “vainly” is double-edged.

Given the probable absence of suitable verbal or cultural coincidences, translators grapple above all with side effects no matter of what category. Technically there is not much difference between the various side benefits of a clever turn (eutrapelia) as implemented above, an error (“rheumatic wheels”, D 17), a slip of the tongue (“the wife’s admirers” U 12.767), a *bona fide* pun (“lecturer on French letters,” U 9.1101), or a thematic overtone (“if you don’t conduct yourself” in Sirens (U 11.104), or all of the other

²¹ It is foreshadowed in “Grace” where Mr. Kernan “... believed in the dignity of its calling. He had never been seen in the city without a silk hat of some decency and a pair of gaiters. By grace of these two articles of clothing, he said, a man could always pass muster” (D 154).

analogous gratuities which have become one of Joyce's trademarks. They are all shorthand devices, semantic overloads, and depend on superimposition. What they have in common is their economy: a supplementary meaning is thrown in gratuitously, supplied by an attentive reader.

Joyce diverts us increasingly to the language *as* language and away from what it is explicitly pointing to. WHAT happens may disappear behind HOW it is rendered (in *Finnegans Wake* the verbal How gets in the way of spelling out the narrative What, Who, When or Where, which tend to get entirely obscured). That is true of the Ithaca chapter with its scientific mode, which favors accuracy and is characterized by its mainly Latinate vocabulary. One of its aims is to counteract the preceding loose, jocular, and largely figurative style ("it's a horse of quite another color to say you believe in the existence of supernatural god," U 16.770); Ithaca is manifestly, even compulsively, devoid of distractive metaphorical horses in theological contexts. At the risk of turgidity, it tries to be immune from emotions or misleading overtones and to keep an objective distance. For practical purposes, much of its verbiage is in need of translation into common English: "repristination of juvenile agility" (U 17.518) could be expressed in simpler terms, and so could "alterations effected in the disposition of the articles of furniture" (U 17.1279).

Even so Ithaca includes, against its manifest grain, its own inadvertent distractions. We may well be entirely caught up in following the meaning of

Which example did [Bloom] adduce to induce Stephen to deduce that originality, though producing its own reward, does not invariably conduce to success? (U 17.606)

Readers of the essay at hand are of course already alerted to lateral ripples and are less likely to overlook that the sentence is also a tongue-in-cheek listing of Latin-derived composite verbs ending in "-duce", Latin *ducere*, to lead. Secondarily the sentence is an example of being lead astray.

Certain passages that might be considered innocuous are susceptible to a double reading, they might — but do not overtly —

refer to something ordinary. Bloom is reading a story in a weekly magazine: "It did not move or touch him but it was something quick and easy" takes on a secondary meaning when we know he is sitting in a primitive outhouse, a "jakes" (U 4.511, 494). The climax of the visual encounter in *Nausicaa* ("And Jackey Caffrey shouted to look ... O, so lovely, O, soft, sweet, soft", U 13.71–40) could on its surface be read as an almost harmless description, but readers know what is going on, unstated by the phrasing itself. That particular side effect was so potent that in reality it set the Law in motion as it disrupted the publication of the book's serialization in the *Little Review*.

Immarginality

What is a side as against a presumed main effect? The distinction has so far been taken for granted, but there is something arbitrary about it; marginality is in the eye of the reader. Many cases are obvious. When old Cotter in "The Sisters" in "his endless stories about the distillery" was "talking of faints and worms" (D 10), the distilling terms are primary and the physical fainting and the mortal implication of "worms" are essentially overtones, atmospheric and perhaps thematic, but they can easily be disregarded. But some uncertainties remain, as possible alternative readings of "in a brown study" will have shown. When Bloom imagines a cannibal chief who "consumes the parts of honour" of a missionary, and speculates: "His wives in a row to watch the effect" (U 8.746, the wives could be watching in an orderly lineup or else in less peaceful fashion contend in a row (rhyming with "how"). Behavior is determined by the sound of a vowel. As it happens, most translators, perhaps unsuspecting, prefer good manners to rowdiness.

Is an expression literal or figurative? "Tongue in cheek" suggests irony, or a humorous knowing wink, but Simon Dedalus in "Wandering Rocks" counters his daughter's guess that he has more money: " — How do you know that? Mr Dedalus asked, his tongue in his cheek" (U 10.672), where there is little cause for irony, and Dedalus seems really to show his tongue in his cheek,

the overtone may still be hovering [nearby]. In “Wandering Rocks” surface meanings often prevail, or a word may revert to its semantic origins. Heavyweights in a boxing poster “proposed gently each to other his bulbous fists” (U 10.833) — they are not making abstract propositions, but literally put (pose) their fists forward (*pro-*). John Howard Parnell “translated ...,” and we all know what translation is, but the continuation is: “... a white bishop quietly” (U 10.1050), and we easily take it to be a move in game of chess — “translate” is used in the original sense of “transferring.” Translation in the common sense is a momentary disturbing side effect, yet another is the terminological usage that an ecclesiastical bishop can be “translated,” that is moved to another see. We might then associate that John Howards’ much more famous brother had some scrapes with the Church, and that Bloom thought, also in terms of chess, that he “used men as pawns” (U 8.511).

Finnegans Wake may well have given up a notion of main and subsidiary meanings, beyond the need of any further demonstration. The dichotomy of “either/or” is replaced by “both/and,” by approximate semantic accumulation. In continually merged meanings and semantic overloads, distinctions become futile.²² The book is based on many-sided effects, even though some of them may be more aside than others. The *Wake* proceeds “in the broadest way immarginable” (FW 4.19), and perhaps one glance at any of its pages would have said more than the thousands of words that have been paraded here. The simple upshot is that Joyce offers dynamically more immarginabilities than most writers. Which may justify the expedience to label the new bottles for old and familiar wine and to bundle them under the heading of “side effects.”

²² What is the prevailing meaning of a phrase like “Warum night!” (FW 479.36), which is not identical with, but equidistant from, English “warm night” and German “Warum nicht” (“Why not”)?

HYPERION

On the future of aesthetics

ION BARBU



Dora Maar, *Père Ubu* (1936)

Crypto Rex and Lapland Lady Enigelle
Translated from the Romanian by Florin Bican

INTRODUCTION

Ion Barbu (1895–1961) is the pen name of the reputed Romanian mathematician Dan Barbilian. His poetry, though duly celebrated in Romania, is largely unknown abroad. His math, however, seems to have won him international recognition. The term “Barbilian spaces” (Barbilian himself preferred calling them “Apollonian metric spaces”) is still very much in use among explorers of non-Euclidean geometries. With Barbu, poetry and mathematics coalesce into a unique vision of life, the universe, and everything, whereas those of us who are not versed in both arts may well have to infer one from the other. But be that as it may, in what appears like a random act of poetic justice, the November 2006, issue of *The American Mathematical Monthly* featured Ion Barbu’s poem “Ut Algebra Poesis” (“as algebra so poetry,” an obvious reference to Horace’s *Ut pictura poesis*). This seems highly appropriate, since Barbu/Barbilian himself confesses that by mathematics and poetry alike he understands “the symbolic representation of some possible forms of existence” (*italics mine*).

Originally published in 1924 (and included in the 1930 volume *Joc secund*), the cryptic “ballad” *Crypto Rex and Lapland Lady Enigelle* (*Riga Crypto și lapona Enigel*) seems to justify the author’s claim that love is the underlying topic of his poetry, inasmuch as, to him, love is first and foremost an abstract term. It consists primarily in a passion-fraught yearning towards an ideal. It is a fully acknowledged cosmic aspiration akin to Nietzsche’s love for the faraway. The whole ballad seems to be echoing with snippets of Nietzsche’s *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*: “I fear you close by, I love you far away,” or “Where one can no longer love, there one should pass by.”

Though critics attempted to dub him a “modernist poet,” Barbu himself rejected any such categorization. Modernism was, he insisted, an improper term and “downright offensive when applied to poetry.” He was at odds with “the new poetic currents” whose only recognizable merit was, in his view, “the return to imagination and romanticism, since poetry is the very opposite of

a permanent state of revolution.” One wonders, nonetheless, how he would have reacted to Ioana Em. Petrescu’s more recent attempt at ranking him with the postmodernists, since she construes postmodernism as a cultural mutation favoring the coexistence of contraries. And paradox is very much at work throughout Ion Barbu’s poetry. — Florin Bican

Oh, moody minstrel, hazier still
Than the old wine wedding guests toast,
Ribbons and gold reward thy skill,
Lavishly gifted by the host.

Come, self-willed minstrel, cast thy spell,
Gather thy ample voice and sing
About Laplander Enigelle
And ancient Crypto, mushroom-king.

“Best wedding guest,
Thy feast so rich my tongue has nipped, Oh...
And yet, before I take my rest,
I’ll sing of Enigelle and Crypto.”

“Sing, minstrel, sing...
Your song burned hot one summertime ago;
Now, pray, sing softly, whispering,
In this here chamber, ere I go...”

By woodlanders fervently sought
In riverbed and miry clay,
Rex Crypto of the Fungi Court,
Obscure at heart, was holding sway,

Enthroned on everlasting dew...
His fungus-folk believed, forsooth,
There lived a toadstool-witch who knew
The fountain of eternal youth,

While evil snowdrops, violets blue
Popped out of holes, their language vile,
And called him barren, vicious, too,
For he would not become fertile.

In distant lands of ill-starred ice
There used to dwell a Lapland belle,
Petite and exquisitely nice
And garbed in furs, named Enigelle.

From wintering to luscious spring
Borne by reindeer through the young year
All southward bound, moist air around,
She paused upon moss-covered ground
Within chaste Crypto's green frontier.

In Crypto's glade, on rugs of shade
She went to sleep, purring away;
The little king of glabrous skin
And his old eunuch came to bring
Her strawberries upon a tray:

"Enigelle, Enigelle,
Have some strawberries, pray, here...
They are sweet, good to eat,
Take a few in your pannier."

"I bow down to the ground
For the offer you carry,
Yet can't stay — on my way
I'll pick fruit... Now I can't tarry."

"Enigelle, Enigelle,
Night is waning, light draws near,
If you must move on fast,
Pick me first, I pray thee, here..."

"Wish I could, O, gentle King...
See the dawn's advancing stripe?
You're a sappy, tender thing,
You can't take what light might bring —
You must wait until you're ripe."

"Can't get ripe, Enigelle,
I can't face the wild sun's glare —
It's a nightmare straight from hell,
Red and burning, I can't bear,
Spotted with an evil spell...
Pray, forsake it, Enigelle,
In sweet slumber and cool air."

“Alas, what have you done, King Crypto?
The poison that your words have spread
Has hit me, and my heart is gripped, oh,
For shade is what I mostly dread.

I may be hatched in winter’s womb,
The polar bear may be my kin,
Yet I have parted with the gloom
And now I hail the sun as king.

By lamps of ice, beneath the snows,
My pole is dreaming the same dream —
A precious gong of gold that glows,
All streaked with green around the rim.

I worship Sun with utter zest
From deep within my fountain-soul,
The white wheel spinning in my chest
Pervades me with its aureole.

While sunshine makes my wheel increase,
Flesh clings unto its shady shore,
And slumber does curtail its lease,
Which wind and shade again restore.”

Thus spake, her voice a tiny bell,
The righteous damsel, Enigelle...
Time, nonetheless, would run its course —
The sun erupted in full force
And from above, its fierce fire fell...

“Weep, thou, sagacious Enigelle!
How can poor Crypto, fungus king,
Withstand the sun’s relentless sting?”
Said he, as helplessly he fell
Away from Lady Enigelle,
To seek relief ‘neath shadow’s wing.

The sun, a burning globe of fire,
Was mirrored in the king entire,
Was mirrored ten times, deep inside
Rex Crypto’s shiny, glabrous hide.

And sour went his sweet, sweet sap,
His heart obscure broke with a snap,
Accurséd venom, dark red oil
Beneath his skin began to boil,
Burst the ten life-seals with their toil.

For too much sun is hard to stand
By fungus bred on forest land;
The soul's deep waters are released
In man alone, the ancient beast,
Whereas in creatures more fragile
Thought is a chalice full of bile,

As in the tale of mad King Crypto,
Whose heart obscure by fire was stripped, oh,
And afterwards he went astray
With mates of kinglier array —

The subtle, cold serpent of old,
To spread the world around with gold,
To squander it in rites obscene
With Lady Mandrake — bride and queen.

Disconcertingly Alien: Transplanting, not Translating

Interview with Florin Bican by Erika Mihálycsa

Erika Mihálycsa: At a recent presentation of your delightful trans-daptation, or trans-planting of T.S. Eliot's Old Possum's Book of Practical Cats into Romanian soil you related how you tried for years to render the feel and cadence of these poems, until you suddenly came upon the solution while you were sitting on a (Romanian) train. How did you come to change all Eliot's cultural references and realia to Romanian ones, the London topography to Bucharest?

Florin Bican: Romanian trains tend to be the venue of quite unusual occurrences indeed. One can encounter there all sorts of characters, from rehearsing actors to practicing alchemists. It was during one of these train rides that I had what, to me, amounted to a revelation: Romanian trains are not British trains. That might sound trite, but it does resonate with the insight T.S. Eliot reiterates in "The Ad-Dressing of Cats": So first, your memory I'll jog, / And say: A CAT IS NOT A DOG. And, Again I must remind you that / A Dog's a Dog — A CAT'S A CAT. By the same token, I ended up realizing that a Romanian train is not an English train, and a Romanian train station is not an English train station. Well, where does that leave one, when one is trying to translate Eliot's "Skimbleshanks: The Railway Cat" from English into Romanian?

My theory was, you see, that if I managed a decent translation of Skimbleshanks, I would crack the translation code of the whole collection and that would enable me to render it into convincing

Romanian. I used to listen to distraction to T. S. Eliot's recorded voice reading Skimbleshanks, alongside his other cat-poems, and I pretty well knew them by heart. So, for the umpteenth time, I started munching on Skimbleshanks' unyielding opening — There's a whisper down the line at 11:39... And suddenly I realized why, no matter how accurately translated, that line never felt at home in Romanian. T. S. Eliot obviously wrote it with an English train station in mind. And such notions as "whisper" as a means of communication in public and "11:39/11:42" suggesting an accurately-functioning timetable are, by and large, disconcertingly alien around here. Small wonder, then, that my translation didn't swing. No translation would, under the circumstances.

I therefore radically changed my approach, deciding to transplant, rather than translate, the Cats into Romanian. Having replaced the Night Mail and the Sleeping Car Express with a Romanian commuters' train travelling to a Romanian destination, I witnessed, spellbound, T. S. Eliot coming alive in Romanian. In the process, the original "whisper" had turned into "screams and shouts," while "11:39" gave way to "1 a.m. or thereabouts"... Of course, I wouldn't dream of trying a similar approach in translating, say, *The Waste Land* or the *Four Quartets*. Based on this *ceteris paribus* assumption, the rest of the translation, or transplant, unraveled smoothly, Romanian names and realia springing forth as if of their own accord to embody the original situations and messages I was trying to bring across. It was like planting the seeds of Eliot's cat poems into the Romanian language and watching them germinate and grow, altered, perhaps, yet true to their paternity. More often than not, I was myself surprised at the forms they chose to take.

EM: *In the Romanian Gus the Theatre Cat you even changed the rhyme on Queen Victoria to Ceaușescu — additionally, turning it into a playful stylistic bloomer. What were your considerations in choosing the Romanian "equivalents" to the original's references, and how did you find the right tone and vernacular for Growltiger, Mungojerry and Rumpelteazer — in slangy (outer) Bucharest lingo?*

FB: I have attempted to convert the wealth of references flickering throughout Eliot's text to references resonating with an — ideally — large Romanian readership. In order to accommodate the resulting changes, I had to adjust the register, so that the original Cats' Romanian opposite numbers have acquired a certain... let's call it "working-class flair," which helps them blend naturally into their new environment. It's only rarely that the source language and the target language actually share a referent — the connotations of identical objects tend to vary geographically and, alas, historically. James Holmes claims that the referent of the translated work is not the same as that of the original, but rather, the linguistic formulation it generated in the text to be translated. In other words, the "Queen Victoria" I'm translating when addressing Eliot's Theatre-Cat poem is not the denotational, or historical, Queen Victoria, but a verbal construct among whose connotations we stand a very good chance of identifying a Romanian hyponym. Come to think of it, Ceaușescu would have considered himself classes above Queen Victoria... So much for "equivalents," then.

There was, speaking of equivalents, no way I could make Growltiger even half-credible in a Romanian aquatic environment. There's no equivalent of the Thames in Bucharest, or anywhere else in Romania, for that matter. And I assumed people wouldn't read the translation for the topographic details, a travel guide being more appropriate for that purpose. So I moved Growltiger (with a Romanian name ironically evoking a dangerous mixture of fierceness and short temper) into the Bucharest metro system, where he fitted surprisingly well, particularly since the said system obliges by providing enough water for a cat's undignified demise.

As for the "(outer) Bucharest lingo," you make a very fine point there. To the Romanian reader from elsewhere, a lot of the words and turns of phrase in my translation might sound a bit alien. I've become greatly aware of that since I moved to Transylvania. As soon as I've steeped myself enough in the local language and lore, I have a mind to retranslate Cats into Transylvanian Romanian. After all, T.S. Eliot's English is, in places, quite far from standard, if not downright idiolectal — see Cat Morgan.

EM: Among other Romanian poets, you translate Gellu Naum, one-time adherent to Surrealism who, unlike his fellow poet and friend Gherasim Luca, chose to live in Romania after WWII, lingering on the margins of the literary scene. You translated his iconic children's book in verse, *The Travels of Apolodor* (fragments of which have appeared in *Hyperion*).¹ How can one translate Naum's jocosely "childish" language and rhymes, with words like *răcitor* for refrigerator (appr. "cooler," from a *răci*: to cool)? The book's at once touching and mischievous humour comes from its linguistic inventiveness, its many "fake-lame" rhymes. What can you work with, and from, when translating them? Do you start from compiling a list of rhymes and proceed by "filling in" the verses?

FB: I'd never dream of working backwards from a list of rhymes — I find that quite restrictive, in the way (I imagine) a straitjacket is restrictive. I therefore take a different approach. Having "sucked in" the original like an accordion taking in air, I then squeeze myself empty again, feeding the exhaled air through the reeds of the target language. In the process, new rhymes emerge, coherent both with the original and among themselves. Allow me to digress for a moment... Back in the '80's, I was fortunate enough to purchase on the Romanian market an export-reject bookcase. I'd bought it as a flat-pack, for self-assembly, and it soon transpired why more conventional markets had rejected it — the components would simply not fit... Not one projection on any given piece would interlock with the corresponding notches or recesses it was supposed to slide into. Not willingly, that is... But when I took a hammer (and the occasional nail) to it, the expected structure started to emerge and I ended up with a serviceable bookcase, not unlike the one featuring on the sketch provided with the flat-pack. When translating rhyming poetry, rhymes — in the source and, respectively, target language — are pretty much like the tenons and mortises in a self-assembly product. If they don't fit into each

¹ See Florin Bican's translations of poems and a fragment of *The Travels of Apolodor* by Gellu Naum, in *Hyperion*, Vol. IX, No. 1 (spring 2015), and the Centenary Gellu Naum Issue, Vol. IX, No. 2 (autumn 2015).

other naturally, we can either recalibrate them or resort to a hammer until they dovetail. That way, we can even “export” rhyming poetry from one language into another. As for the word I had to find for the ancestor of our modern-day fridge, I was lucky: “Frigidaire” sounds both lusciously obsolete and fits nicely into the rhyming pattern.

EM: Naum has become one of the most widely translated Romanian poets — Oskar Pastior dispatched the bulk of his poetry into German, collections have come out in many European languages; two volumes of poetry and his oneiric novel Zenobia are available in English. Do you see discrepancies between his reception in the various languages he has been translated into? What are the aspects of his work that tend to suffer in translation? What traditions, styles can one harness when dispatching Naum’s poems into English?

FB: Whether there are any language-related discrepancies in the reception of his poetry in different parts of the world I couldn’t say, since my knowledge of those languages varies from fair to nil. I was, nonetheless, fortunate enough to observe the reactions of foreign readers, whose knowledge of Romanian allowed them direct access to Naum’s original poetry — they all seemed equally wowed. So, I suppose, that’s how readers anywhere would also react to translations from Naum’s poetry, as long as they capture the original’s wowsomeness. But as long as any aspect of his work does suffer in translation, bang goes that wowsomeness... Come to think of it, there’s no overwhelming reason, however, why any such aspect should suffer in translation — Naum’s poetry unfolds in an area where poetic expression constantly overcomes the dictatorship of referents. That should allow the translator a fair amount of poetic leverage, a leverage more easily transferable to the reader.

EM: For years you have led the Romanian Cultural Institute’s workshops and program for training foreign translators of Romanian literature. In your experience, who are the writers who “travel well,” and what are the linguistic particularities, what are the literary styles specific to modern Romanian writing, for which only with some sleight of hand can one find equivalents in English?

FB: When linguistic particularities become a criterion for “travebility” it’s a bad sign. It means that the mannerism foretelling the demise of any artistic form has already set in. Exporting “particularities” could be a long-term business. Producing ready-made particularities for export purposes is, however, both counterproductive and bound to be a short-lived endeavor, for it is not the “particularities” that travel well, but the spontaneity that has generated them. Spontaneity always travels well and it is sure to generate unperishable particularities. We shouldn’t make the mistake of putting the circulation of a literary work down to the topics it addresses, nor ascribe it to any formal achievement — it’s the spontaneity behind them that fuels the readers’ interest and ultimately accounts for circulation. Let’s take a look at a few Romanian authors circulating in translation — I mean, circulating, not moving mountains — Max Blecher, Gellu Naum, Mircea Cărtărescu, and Dan Lungu. They don’t share any particularities, on the contrary — in whatever formula one’s trying to combine them, they’re as different as chalk and cheese. What brought them to the attention of publishers is the genuineness of their spontaneity which, though crystalized in a variety of forms, speaks with a credible voice. True, this artistically crystalized spontaneity still needs to be supported by huge logistic efforts in order to attain international circulation. And the translator, of course, has to replicate that spontaneity with the appropriate sleight of hand.

EM: *One of the key works of the so-called “postmodern turn” of Romanian fiction is Ștefan Bănuțescu’s novel Cartea de la Metopolis, also called Cartea Milionarului (“The Book of the Millionaire,” publ. 1977), a dark, baroque allegory of the Ceaușescu age, parts of which you translated together with Jean Harris. What were the major challenges in Englishing it, and how do you see the demands it puts on a foreign-language reader?*

FB: Apart from one excerpt Jean Harris and myself have translated from Bănuțescu’s novel, we’ve also translated several of his short stories. And I don’t think we had to do much in the way of “Englishing” them — we breathed in the Romanian original and exhaled the English translation. Admittedly, at an excruciatingly

slow pace. The “air” we were breathing was extremely concentrated, but highly breathable, all the same. Bănulescu’s words seem to overlap like the scales on a fish and are just as bright. In translation, one has to recreate this structure. Yet I think the reader yields to its lure... well, spontaneously. It doesn’t put any particular demands on the foreign-language reader. Or, more precisely, the demands it puts on the foreign-language reader are about the same it puts on the Romanian reader — as the Romanian reader is not greatly aided by being familiar with the country, neither is the foreign reader greatly hindered by being unfamiliar with it. Neither Jean nor I pursued the Ceaușescu allegory — the book stands without it.

EM: When it comes to Romanian literature in translation, the 20th century canon seems to look sensibly different from the home-grown one mirrored in school and academic curricula; the recently-published books of Mihail Sebastian, Max Blecher, Benjamin Fondane, among others, have been receiving glowing reviews in the British and American press, from the likes of John Banville. What happens when it comes to more mainstream Romanian modernists, or to the Romanian fiction from the 1970s onwards? Do you see a chance for recuperating the gaps in translation? Do certain authors “age” more than others in the cultural field?

FB: I’m glad you’ve pointed that out... As if canons could be translated! Still, I’m aware that many a Romanian patriot wants our literary canon translated wholesale and, ideally, shoved down the throats of foreign readers and squeezed into their children’s primers. Mercifully, it doesn’t work that way... The glowing reviews you mention just prove that literature filters in mysterious ways from one country to another. When it comes to Romanian literature, there are, doubtlessly, gaps in translation that need to be covered. But I wouldn’t militate for a wholesale recovery of, say, the ’70s. It might be personal, of course — that’s when I lost faith in our contemporary domestic literature (and it took me some time to recover that faith). The authors I cherish from that period are still talked about with interest today, so I assume I was not the only one to lose interest in the others. But I’d certainly give a wide berth to those who clamor for recognition abroad on account of having

been hot stuff back in the '70s. I don't think authors age, but some were dated to begin with... And it isn't only authors that age, but readerships, too. Readerships, unlike authors, can also regress in time and become infantile — which does not necessarily help authors, though it might stimulate them to fine-tune their discourse... Still, I can only speak for myself — I'd recover for "external use" writers from all periods, regardless of the recognition they enjoyed in their heyday, from the 18th century — here it's Ioan Budai-Deleanu I have in mind (with his *Gypsiliad*, or *The Gypsy Camp*, the first Romanian epic and a riotously funny account of a Gypsy tribe striving to create a state and, in the process, taking the piss out of all known forms of political organization) — to the obscurest names in the second half of the 20th century — Alexandru Monciu-Sudinski, among others. I believe in random recovery and translation forays, hoping that, at a given moment, a given author, having resonated with a given translator, may happen to resonate with a given publisher that will chance to supply it to a readership that will resonate with it. If these random occurrences attain critical mass, they'll focus into coherence, making possible a systematic process of publishing Romanian literature in translation abroad. It might take some time, though.

EM: *One of the Romanian modernists you translate is hermeticist poet Ion Barbu, considered one of the most untranslatable Romanian poets alongside Tudor Arghezi and Nichita Stănescu. What poetic traditions can you resort to, in English, in translating his poetry? At what angle does Barbu stand to Romanian, and English-language, poetic modernism?*

FB: I've only translated one of Ion Barbu's poems — a lengthy ballad-like account of the descent into the murkier depths of the human spirit. Untranslatable he is not, nor are any of the other poets you mention. But I wouldn't resort to a poetic tradition — be it English or Romanian — in order to re-enact the poem in translation. Traditions might have been relevant at the point of inception, but not necessarily so at the point of... perception. I don't claim to attempt an academic translation — just a translation reflecting the poem's grip on me at the point of impact.

I translated Barbu's *Riga Crypto* because I'd become obsessed with/possessed by it — in that case, translation was an act of exorcism. I didn't put Barbu in any relation to poetic modernism — English or Romanian. I'm afraid I'm not that kind of translator, pace Vladimir Nabokov.

EM: *In general, poetry is grievously underrepresented in translation in comparison with prose and even with theatre. Yet arguably the most vibrant and innovative aspect of contemporary Romanian literature is found in poetry, rather than prose. You have translated the major voices of contemporary Romanian poetry. How do you see the generational divides, and what aesthetic does the Romanian poetry of the 1980s and '90s react against — and how can they be placed inside a broader framework of contemporary Weltliteratur?*

FB: I do agree with you that the most vibrant and innovative aspect of contemporary Romanian literature tends to be found in poetry, rather than prose. However, I'm far from having translated the major voices in contemporary Romanian poetry, not to mention the minor ones, just as significant. The grievous underrepresentation you are talking about is also due to the sheer number of poets that ought to be represented in translation. Oh, there are so many of them and most are quite remarkable. I'm afraid I've given up trying to keep track of all their voices. I've resigned myself to random discovery and random translation, so I can't place them in any broader framework; wouldn't dream of attempting such a task. Nah, let poets like Radu Vancu, whose critical awareness is commensurate with his poetic gift, do the cataloguing.

EM: *As an active literary translator who trains literary translators, what are the dangers and pitfalls you try to warn against? You must have seen scores of textbook examples of translation gone awry — but also, of unexpected creativity and even extra "textual activity" yielded by translation. When it comes to rendering culture-specific references, what is the degree of explication that you find acceptable?*

FB: I've always preached approaching the text to be translated with reverent humility and patience. Take the text for granted, and you're lost. Pore over the text humbly and expectantly until it

starts talking back to you, and, before you know it, the text will morph into its own translation... That's, basically, what I encourage the translators I work with to do. When translating literature, it's important to find one's own way, even if that means reading massively in both the source and the target languages, as well as keeping one's ear tuned to what other translators have to say. Translation studies are fortunately developing spectacularly and, if nothing else, they provide the means for mapping the territory of literary translation and the vocabulary for naming the pitfalls — such as culture-specific references, among others. In this particular case, I tend to resort to explanations discreetly inserted into the translated text. No explanation at all is, any time, preferable to a footnote, I believe...

PÉTER GYÖRGY



Frank Auerbach, *Summer Building Site*

Persons without Identity¹

(*Frank Auerbach, Lucian Freud*)

Translated from the Hungarian by Chris Sullivan

The Grafton [Post-Impressionist Exhibition], thank God, is over, artists are an abominable race. The furious excitement of these people all the winter over their pieces of coloured green and blue, is odious. Roger [Fry] is now turning them upon chairs and table: there's to be a shop and a warehouse next month. — Yr. V.W.²

... To me Art's subject is the human clay,
And landscape but a background to a torso...
— W. H. Auden, "Letter to Lord Byron," 1937³

¹ The essay published here in translation is part of György's forthcoming volume, *Faustus Afrikában* [*Faustus in Africa*], to be published by Magvető in 2018.

² Virginia Woolf to Violet Dickinson, Ashelam, Lewes (Sussex), December 24, 1912. *The Letters of Virginia Woolf*, II: 1912–1922, ed. by Nigel Nicholson & Joanne Trautmann (New York; London: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1976) 15.

³ "Letter to Lord Byron," III. *Collected Poems by W.H. Auden* (London: Faber and Faber, 1994) 61.

1. Empire and Provincia

Those who have been following events in the world of culture since 1976, when the School of London was formed,⁴ or at the latest since 1988, when the Young British Artists (yBa) group was established, may see London as a megalopolis exerting serious influence on the unknowable fashions of the contemporary global artistic sphere.⁵ Looking back today, it is indeed hard to imagine that in the decades immediately preceding and following WWI, seen from the Continent and the United Kingdom alike, modern British painting and sculpture seemed marginal and provincial. In other words, the English Channel separating the British Isles from the Continent represented a very significant cultural distance in social reality — unlike the distance it signified geographically — and to an extent continues to do so today. At the same time, geographical proximity and cultural distance regarding painting first and foremost represent a rare dichotomy. Undoubtedly evident for many centuries,

⁴ In 1976, at the request of the Arts Council, R. B. Kitaj organized an exhibition of primarily figurative painting. “I was looking mostly for pictures of the single human form as if they could be breathed on...” Quoting Auden, Kitaj gave the show the title *The Human Clay*, and began his introduction in the catalogue on a personal note with a part entitled “School of London”: “There are ten or more people in this town, or not far away, of world class [...] In fact, I think there is a substantial School of London [...] a School of London might become even more real than the one I have construed in my head.” *The Human Clay. An Exhibition Selected by R.B. Kitaj* (Arts Council of Great Britain, 1976) 3. Featured at the exhibition were — among others — Michael Andrews, Frank Auerbach, Francis Bacon, Lucian Freud, and Leon Kossoff. They knew each other well and later took part in many School of London shows, also featuring in numerous studies and newspaper articles as members of it. In 1989, Alistair Hicks, in the preface to his book *The School of London: The Resurgence of Contemporary Painting* (Oxford: Phaidon, 1989) 9–11, wrote: “British painting has never been so strong. [...] The last thirty years have witnessed a renaissance in British art.” At the same time, the meaning of the School of London was not self-evident. Cf. Michael Peppiatt, “A School or Not a School?” *Modern Painters*, Vol. 8, No. 2 (1995) 64–66; most recently: Elena Crippa & Catherine Lampert: *The London Calling, Bacon, Freud, Kossoff, Andrews, Auerbach, Kitaj* (The J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles, in Association with Tate, London, 2016).

⁵ See the exhibitions *Freeze* (1988) and *Sensation* (1997), which included works in different mediums by Damien Hirst, Gavin Turk, Jenny Saville, Chris Ofili, Marcus Harvey, Jake and Dinos Chapman, Sarah Lucas, and Glenn Brown. Cf. Julian Stallabrass: *High Art Lite, The Rise and Fall of Young British Art, Revised and Expanded Edition* (London: Verso, 1999); Norman Rosenthal & Brooks Adam: *Sensation: Young British Artists from the Saatchi Collection* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1998); Olav Velthuis, “Globalization of Markets for Contemporary Art. Why Local Ties Remain Dominant in Amsterdam and Berlin,” *European Societies*, Vol. 15, No. 2 (2013) 290–308.

the inseparability of British history from the notion of world history created by the European Enlightenment and the global dominance of the English language together bid one to handle reports of the alleged provincialism of British art with due caution, even if British critics and art historians should have rephrased it over the decades as occasion served.⁶ Moreover, this self-criticism, also understandable as a peculiar kind of self-hatred, to put it mildly, is well alive and kicking. In 2015, Jonathan Jones of *The Guardian* asserted in connection with Frank Auerbach: “The best British art of the 20th century is Jewish. It was the contribution of Jewish artists, many of whom were born in central Europe, that raised modern British art out of mediocrity and made it original.” He substantiated these claims by referring to the work of Leon Kossoff, Lucian Freud, Gustav Metzger, and Ernst Gombrich, stating that, with the exception of Kossoff, all were émigrés from Germany. He then sagely and rather sharply added: “So why have Jewish artists made such a brilliant contribution to modern British culture? Because they gave it a much-needed dose of German genius.”⁷

⁶ British provincialism was a commonplace that recurred in reflections on art history until the emergence of the School of London, and especially the yBa. The title of Charles Harrison’s book providing a critical survey of the duality of universal (modern) and provincial (national) art makes reference to this: *English Art and Modernism, 1900–1939, with a new introduction* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1994). Down our way, the title of a Lajos Németh summary monograph fulfilling an approximately similar role is *Modern magyar művészet* (“Modern Hungarian Art”). It was published in Budapest by Corvina in 1968, and the difference between the two works points to worthwhile arguments for a horizontal, i.e. a geographical, and non-narrative, art historical approach. On the continent, modern art represented hopes for joining the westernness in national cultures. British figurative painting, or realism, and the maintenance of distance from the “isms,” i.e. provincialism, did not mean that its representatives doubted for a moment that they comprised part of the imagined West.

⁷ Jonathan Jones, “How Jewish Émigrés Brought the Best of German Art in Britain,” *The Guardian* (July 16, 2015). At the same time, William Cook, a critic writing in *The Spectator*, put it even more bluntly: “The British cultural style has always been discreet and understated — ironic, self-effacing, instinctively wary of radical innovations or big ideas. This gulf between British and continental attitudes to all things intellectual was summed up by the Hungarian émigré George Mikes, in his wise and witty book about the immigrant experience called *How to be an Alien: ‘In England it is bad manners to be clever,’* he observed. ‘It may be your own personal view that two and two make four, but you must not state it in a self-assured way, because this is a democratic country, and others may be of a different opinion.’ Driven by the Hitler émigrés, Britain now has a very clever arts scene, but it’s an arts scene that feels alien to most Britons. German Refugees transformed British cultural life — but at a price.” *The Spectator* (October 3, 2015).

Unlike in Europe, where modernism was dominated by the avant-garde from the *fin de siècle* onwards, in Britain a serious role was played by figurative painting right up to the very end of the 20th century — what afterwards, on the basis of texts amassed from critics and art historians, consolidated to form a legacy of realism. All this was in no small measure due to the response given by a country situated on the margins of the European continent to the challenge of modern art. In other words, due to its distance from the self-evidence of European artistic norms, that is, due to axiomatic British cultural autonomy, that can also be framed as provincialism. And, of course, this applied not only, and not even primarily, to painting, but in equal measure to literature, too: “It appears that while writers fleeing political persecution go to Britain, the tedium of philistine pettiness drives others out of it, to continents that are exotic, exciting, or that provide opportunities for high art. In this context, the myth of Britain’s much-mentioned ‘innocence’ becomes intelligible... An often-mentioned reason for this retained innocence is that Britain has never experienced national traumas of the kind countries on the Continent have...”⁸

Another question is that while — as Tamás Bényei rightly points out — eminent representatives of English literature *fled* from innocence, for fugitives from death living in obscurity and remorse Britain’s provincialism represented more than simply the Promised Land in comparison to Germany. Thus, for Freud and Auerbach alike, this very same innocence represented — in different ways — freedom for artists from the institutions that determined the practicing of art in continental Europe, a microcosm free of the pressures exerted by changing fashions in art. This mi-

⁸ See Tamás Bényei: *Az ártatlan ország. Az angol regény 1945 után* [“The Innocent Country. The British Novel after 1945”] (Debrecen: Debrecen University Press, 2009) 145–146. See Bernard Bergonzi: “Compared with other nations, the English are a remarkably innocent people.” Ibid: “The Ideology of Being British,” in *The Situation of the Novel* (London: Macmillan, 1979) 63. Another issue, on which I touch later on in connection with the work of William Kentridge, is this: naturally, British innocence was relative, and compared to postwar Europe living in the shadows of the Holocaust and the Gulag, it was real. Of course, the colonial past reinterpreted in line with post-1989 postcolonial perceptions casts a dark shadow on the British Empire with its racial discrimination. Similar shadows were cast on Holland, contending with its Indonesian legacy and Belgium trying to come to terms with its Belgian Congo past.

crocosm lasted from the years following WWII all the way up to the dominance of yBa, easily long enough for a provincial freedom in which the School of London artists could work as they wished.

In a London art world that scarcely registered in the international context,⁹ there were many different concepts of realism that give rise to heated debates. They differed from one another not just in the field of stylistic criticism or formal criteria, but also in their social role.

In January 1952, John Berger, a communist, albeit one expressing strong reservations regarding contemporary “Victorian” Soviet socialist realism¹⁰ that has lost its revolutionary verve and its truth content, wrote a critique of the exhibition *Young Contemporaries* organized by the Royal Society of British Artists (RBA) in which 600 paintings were displayed. In his article, entitled “For the Future,” he reported on a new realism, a new spirit in the postwar period: “This attitude is based on a deliberate acceptance of the importance of the everyday and the ordinary. [...] [It] implies a fresh intention: an intention to discover and express the reality, the sharper meaning...”¹¹ Berger was writing about a sense of reality, not about style. In the summer of 1952, in an account of the Venice Biennale, he saw new Italian painting as exemplary, for similar reasons. “Realism is not a manner but an approach and an aim.”¹² In other words, Berger regarded realism not as a private matter, but as an issue of occupying a position in objective reality; the ideological or political “benefit” of art, of “constructive realism,” interested him more than its style: in any event, he paid a high price for all this when to all intents and purposes he blindly bypassed Henry Moore’s work. Berger was the organizer of the Art Council’s 1953 show *Looking Forward: An Exhibition for Realist Paintings and Drawings by Contemporary British Artists*. One of the

⁹ Cf. Margaret Garlake, *New Art New World: British Art in Postwar Society* (Paul Mellon Centre, Yale University Press, 1998); James Hyman, *The Battle for Realism, Figurative Art in Britain during the Cold War 1945–1960* (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 2001); *Artists and Patrons in Post-War Britain*, ed. by Margaret Garlake Courtauld Research Papers 2 (London: Ashgate, 2001).

¹⁰ John Berger, *Soviet Aesthetics*, *New Statesman and Nation* (February 6, 1954) 158.

¹¹ John Berger, “For the Future,” *New Statesman and Nation* (December 19, 1952) 64–66.

¹² John Berger, “The Biennale,” *New Statesman and Nation* (July 5, 1952) 12.

most important events of the decade, it gave many British “social realism” artists an opportunity to exhibit.

In 1954, David Sylvester analyzed the situation similarly, and against a neutral space free of meaning, i.e. the absolutism of the studio, told of the new, post-war generation that had already returned to the world. “The post-war generation takes us back from the studio to the kitchen. Dead ducks, rabbits, and fish — especially skate — can be found there, as in the expressionist slaughterhouse, but only as part of an inventory which includes every kind of food and drink, every kind of utensil and implement, the usual plain furniture, and the baby’s nappies on the line. Everything but the kitchen sink? The kitchen sink too. The point is that it is a very ordinary kitchen, lived in by a very ordinary family.”¹³ Sylvester’s starting point was the *Painting for the Kitchen* show staged at the Walker Gallery in 1953. All along, he was ambivalent about the matter of British “social realism” in the narrow sense. On the other hand, his 1954 piece represented an important step for the “kitchen sink realism” painters — John Bratby, Jack Smith, Derrick Grave, and Edward Middleditch — and Helen Lessore’s gallery, the Beaux Arts Gallery, alike. For the most part long forgotten by the late 1970s, the debates and currents in the 1950s realism were again in the spotlight when the significance of the School of London was recognized.

However marginal at the time, Bacon, Kossoff, Freud, and Auerbach were already present, with painting that was a good deal more dramatic and radical than “social realism.” It lacked any kind of reference to politics, but in their paintings [?] the relationship between reality and painting was indisputably rewritten. In his article “Some Thoughts on Painting” published in *Encounter* in 1954, Lucian Freud argued against the various currents and trends of abstraction and in support of realism and its unquestionable power: “My object in painting pictures is to try and move the senses by giving an intensification of reality. Whether this can be achieved depends on how intensely the painter understands and feels for the person or object of his choice. Because of this, paint-

¹³ David Sylvester, “The Kitchen Sink,” *Encounter* (December 1954) 61–64.

ing is the only art in which the intuitive qualities of the artist may be more valuable to him than actual knowledge or intelligence."¹⁴ And for many decades Freud progressed toward intensity of scenes, toward portraits, and toward a methodology of depicting images of bodies that went beyond conventions.

Painting, then, is partly a question of the representation of reality and partly one of the continuous challenges posed by it, and the visualization of somebody else is constantly at the center of the work of Freud, Kossoff, and Auerbach; the relationship between the painter and his model is more the experiencing of intuition or empathy with the person than it is an abstract social problem. Figurative painting, and the different registers of which we see in their works, did not need direct guidelines or ideological encouragement. The fundamental issue in such painting was the manner of the inexorable exteriorization of the relationship between two people, together with its consequences — i.e., the essence of a work is the uncovering and capturing of the individuality enclosed in ephemeral, always evanescent corporeal entities, and as such, figurative depiction represents radically differing aesthetic worlds.

The postwar years brought the decline of traditional British painting, and were accompanied by the nullification of the painterly world of meritocratic self-evidence and unquestioning identification with social roles believed to be beyond critique.¹⁵ The School of London no longer saw the representation — whether affirmative or critical — of relations regulated by social roles as a subject for figurative painting, but rather the problem of self-knowledge, the uncertainty inherited from 1910, which in turn conditioned their own lives to different degrees, and what we see in their complete indifference to their roles in society, i.e. in their detachment. All this fits in closely with problems of the "difficulties of narration," a dual problem also present in the work of Beckett: no writer of the text, no subject of it, and no boundary between the two is self-evident anymore. In other words, sentences are not brushstrokes exactly fitting a portrait with a contour outline, but

¹⁴ *The Encounter* (July 3, 1954) 23–24.

¹⁵ Andrew Brighton, "Where are the Boys of the Old Brigade?: The Post-War Decline of British Traditionalist Painting," *Oxford Art Journal*, Vol. 4, No. 1 (1981) 35–43.

are endeavors, fragments seeking and creating their place, just like the brush marks that can be seen on the works of the School of London painters.

Auerbach on the Borders of Realisms & Artistic Worlds

“Auerbach is always at work, locked in routine, solving problems with new stimulus and new ideas from the same subjects. There is no alternative. ‘I did feel when I was young that this was going to be a do-or-die enterprise, and the only respectable alternative to not going on is to be found dead in one’s studio.’ Auerbach simply follows a path described by Samuel Beckett in *The Unnameable*: ‘Where I am, I don’t know, I’ll never know, you must go on, I can’t go on. I’ll go on.’ It is what the artist has always done.”¹⁶

There is an easily discernible fundamental sameness in the work of Auerbach and Beckett: a grim radicalism of the comprehension and reconstruction of the entirety of reality, and its communication in writing/painting, *without disturbance or influence* from political, religious, or cultural abstractions. A rejection of political interpretation — hence the sameness of the self-evident nature of rebellion and its bleakness, i.e. the certainty that works cannot be pre-planned, and that early decisions about them are impossible. In other words, infinitely cautious progress¹⁷ sentence by sentence is like personal brush marks one on top of another, becoming thick layers covering one another, a tectonic crust, an impasto abstract

¹⁶ Geordie Greig, *Paint or Die, Meeting Frank Auerbach, Modern Painters* (Autumn 1998) 77.

¹⁷ “Beckett does not rebel against words, meaning, or sense — for this, endlessly precise, careful selection of words would not have been necessary, nor would the poetic drift and unexpected termination of the sentences, the nervous rhythm of the text, its visible and invisible magical mystery, everything which we wonder at in Beckett’s late works — but rather against seemingly self-evident, accepted turns, against big words, because he thought that if habitual speech and modes of thinking do not bring us nearer the truth, but only take us away from it, then the rejection of success stories concealed in speech or thinking — namely the embracing of the “wrong” word and the “ill said” phrase — offers a real chance for reality and truth. In his short prose and in his late prose poetry we can observe how from language broken into pieces, from words discarded, defective, and ill-suited to expression, from the very same words, the very same language a separate world could be built by means of unconditional “loyalty” to ignorance, incompetence, and being wrong.” Ákos Cseke, *Szóval élek. On Beckett’s late short prose. Kortárs* (July–August 2009) <http://www.kortaronline.hu/archivum/2009/07/szoval-elek.html> (last accessed November 3, 2017).

relief.¹⁸ Eventually consolidating into an immutable art work, its closed unequivocalness is reality indifferent to well-structured formal perfection. Comparison with sentences from Beckett's work have come up again and again in interviews and also in Auerbach's replies, which have touched on concerns connected with when a picture can be regarded as finished.¹⁹

For both of them, what seemed relevant was moving beyond the givenness of a reality determined by politics and ideology, i.e. in its preformed exiguity; a syntax as complex as the method of painting became an issue of access to reality and to truth, and a good deal more than either of them could have achieved using narratorial structures of narrative self-identity encapsulated in a story, or the Ego-orientatedness of order created by the clearly articulated picture surfaces and contours of abstract expressionism.²⁰

Since the legendary summer of 1952, mentioned as the time of the "breakthrough"²¹ when Auerbach's works *in hindsight* really did become expressly the same as those he still paints today, he did not hit upon this, but got to it as it were, eventually reaching the reality of the thickness of superimposed layers, a reality which was not simply a manner of painting, not a style, but a compulsion. Created over many weeks and months, the pictures made impossible the self-evidency of "due distance" to be used in museum spaces, or at least its reassuring employment. The receiver was sometimes

¹⁸ The source value of reproductions, i.e. the manner of their use, differs in the case of different painters and genres: Kossoff's and Auerbach's works, linked to the inevitable autonomous interpretation of the non-photographable nature of impasto, more precisely to the interpretation of the lighting of the reproductions do, I fear, present an impossible task without getting to know the originals. Not to speak of the fact that, to borrow György Petri's twist, as a result of the total lack of consideration of the perspectival order it is no longer clear that an angle is needed at all to see the picture in one/as one whole: "This is / the distance necessary. From here / look!" ("So rare," György Petri, *Körülírt zuhanás*, 1974).

¹⁹ Tim Adams, "Frank Auerbach: Constable, Turner, and Me," *The Guardian* (September 21, 2014).

²⁰ Auerbach and Beckett featured together in *X Quarterly*, Vol. 1, No. 1 (November 1959): "Auerbach in Conversation with Elizabeth Smart — Fragments from a Conversation. Here he said that he found only painting to be an escape: "Sometimes I think it weakness, madness, a disease, but it's [i.e. painting's] the only creative thing to do." Beckett featured in the issue with his text *L'Image*, an early version of *Comment c'est*.

²¹ "A Breakthrough. Summer, 1952," in Catherine Lampert, *Frank Auerbach. Speaking and Painting* (London: Thames and Hudson, 2015) 38.

too near the pictures, and sometimes too far away from them, the brushstrokes of which — pressing against one another — make transparent interpretation impossible, just as much as Beckett's prose texts and plays demand that we read them over and over again as verses, i.e. without self-evidency, and without any hope of it.

It was at that time that Auerbach's painting method for his two great and only unobtrusively connected themes, London buildings and portraits painted predominantly in neutral space, i.e. in the studio, became unmistakable, a procedure from which mannerisms and the autonomism of personal marks were absent. Apart from the sketches, the eleven oil paintings depicting London buildings and building sites that Auerbach made between 1952 and 1962 capture the coming into being of a new world. Only with difficulty can we recognize in them the signs of the era: there is in the pictures, which depict brutalist-type buildings constructed at around this time, no trace of veduta perspectives, and nothing of the neo-romantic photographs and paintings made during and after the war capturing the poetry of ruins. In 2009, he returned to a picture he had painted in 1952, *Summer Building Site*, which he himself understood and saw as a breakthrough. "I felt it was the beginning of my life as a painter," he told Barnaby Wright, curator of the exhibition *London Building Sites 1952–1962* staged at the Courtauld Gallery in 2010. The picture shows a building in the Earls Court Road not far from Kensington Police Station. Auerbach went that way on a daily basis, on his way to see Estelle West, one of his first great loves who modeled for him and who was one of the most important protagonists in his long life. "In *Summer Building Site* Auerbach achieves a sense of the struggle between raw earth and architectural order which he found so compelling in the construction site of post-war London."²² Already in 1961 David Sylvester drew attention to the duality of Auerbach's paintings of London buildings, to the differing "natures" of the impasto's thick material reality and the transparency of the structures, writing in his critique of Auerbach's exhibition at the Beaux Arts Gallery: "The image that

²² *Frank Auerbach: London Building Sites, 1952–62*, text: Barnaby Wright (London: The Courtauld Gallery, 2010) 74.

emerges is an image of structure, of firmly articulated masses of great density in a space that is equally taut and architectural. It has the degree of architectural resolution, that we normally associate with kinds of art that are concerned with constructing ideal forms..."²³

In the very same years when Auerbach was creating a radically new relationship between impasto and painting depicting architectural structures, i.e. filling out every part of the space, in other words, in making perspective views invisible, he was effecting a similar breakthrough in his portraits, too. In his review of contemporary young British painting, David Sylvester mentioned Auerbach's first exhibition at the Beaux Arts Gallery as the first significant event since Bacon's exhibition in 1949. "His conception of painting is so extreme as to be almost too absurd. In realisation the portraits tend to be sentimental, the landscape to be unintelligible. But these paintings reveal the qualities that make for greatness in a painter — fearlessness, a profound originality, a total absorption in what obsesses him, and above all, a certain authority and gravity in his forms and colours... Here at last is a young painter who has extended the power of paint to re-make reality."²⁴

Auerbach's materialism, the heavy pictures, the archaeology of the impasto layers, his way of ingraining brush marks atop one another, and the unavoidability of the existence of the picture as an object were, of course, nothing new — nor did the masters of abstract expressionism (Rothko, De Kooning, and Pollock) do less in the long run to warn the receiver on all occasions that not for a minute should he or she forget that they were standing before a picture, before an object-free world that has nothing to do with the great or critical, but nevertheless existent tradition of visual narrative. Save that Auerbach — who, along with Bomberg and Sickert, clearly learnt much from Chaim Soutine — stepped so forcefully beyond the world of the ego determined by social norms to seem unprecedented. Taking shape over many months, the nudes and portraits showed no trace of any kind of theatricality or prear-

²³ David Sylvester, "Nameless Structures," *New Statesman* (April 21, 1961) 637.

²⁴ David Sylvester, "Young English Painting," *The Listener*, issue 1402 (January 12, 1956) 64.

anged quality, i.e. the degree of distance between Auerbach's pictures and Freud's performative painting and provocative narratives was as great as the degree of personal closeness between the two men. The disappearance of contours and the loss of importance of anatomical representation of body and face are connected with Auerbach's closeness to his models: with the repudiation of the oneness of spirit and forms, of the *dualism of mind and body*. Be it about friendship or love, this painting seeks possibilities of solidarity, sympathy, and community instead of an agenda for the "perpetuance" of the other.

Auerbach's nudes, depictions of the painter's loves, have nothing to do with the great achievement of modernity — the radical sexualization of the body abandoned to its own means, and regarded as a whole in itself: that is, with contemporary culture's building on the duality of the heritage of sin on the one hand, and liberation from it on the other hand, what appears with such shattering power in Lucian Freud's paintings for instance. Neither hypocrisy, the norm for the Victorians, nor an avant-garde confronting of it, is present in the context of the pictures. Unlike Freud's pictures, Auerbach's models are never defenseless. On the contrary, they lie or sit next to Auerbach in the assurance that is a gift, a prerogative of *allies* who have, with reason, entrusted their bodies to one another. Trust, everyday lack of suspicion — this rare prerogative is the basis of the fabric of these pictures. They are not performatives, but documents of the possibility for community. Auerbach's *E. O. W. Nude* (1954) and *E. O. W., Nude on the Bed* (1959) are especially important pictures — both refer back to Sickert's method of painting defenseless, anonymous nudes, i.e. to the tradition of Auerbach's virtual school, while those two paintings have nothing to do with the power relations of earlier pictures showing prostitutes: they show the issue of the search for self-identity.²⁵ Auerbach's

²⁵ Sickert's 1906 nudes — *La Hollandaise*, *Nuit d'Été*, *Le Lit de cuivre* — were not simply nudes but rather, prostitutes painted at their work, whom the painter regarded and depicted as sex workers, as contemporary parlance has it, without the slightest romantic aura or middle-class patronizing. This is one of the reasons for the presence of this manner of depicting the nude, of pictures of naked women devoid of any erotic overtones, in the work of Bacon and Freud. As Sickert wrote in 1910 in the leftist magazine *New Age* in his article "The Naked and the Nude": "An inconsistent and prurient puritanism

companion for many years in love, in friendship, etc., Estelle Olive West, is someone whose authentic reality is captured by these paintings. Rejection of showiness as the basis for painting: this really can be seen as unique radicalism. In spite of all love, loyalty, and crisis, Auerbach's uncertainty shows the joint presence of the passageway and the chasm between reality and realism. The issue of the *closed directness* of a work of art is in the final analysis inseparable from the issue of truth; we can even see it as the essence of realism. Not knowing modesty or immodesty, the nudes in Auerbach's pictures have nothing to do with the normative roles of bourgeois intimacy, with the veneer of innocence, i.e. with contemporary culture's body representations struggling between psychoanalysis and pornography. The portraits and rare nudes of the Czech photographer Josef Sudek appear similarly.

The issue here is not the adherence of this unmistakable, more than sixty-years-old, self-identity to a style, to a painterly or ideological program, or even to a procedure or theme. Nor is it even about the creation of a conspicuously emphasized "personal signature" and its preservation for posterity despite its growing emptiness. But, what is even more baffling, it is not even the shaping — promising continuity in a way — of a well-constructed role modeled many times over. Auerbach does not use the role formation device much deployed by modern and postmodern artists, strategies constructing links between oeuvre and personality and capitalizing on myths of unknowability, which many eminent artists have fashioned and used so successfully, from Duchamp right on up to Pi-

has succeeded in evolving an ideal which it seeks to dignify by calling the Nude, with a capital 'n,' and placing it in opposition to the naked. An interdiction to representations of the naked figure, such as was in force in certain Catholic countries in the Middle Ages is worthy of respect, and is consistent. The modern flood of representations of the vacuous images dignified by the name of the Nude, represents an intellectual and artistic bankruptcy that cannot but be considered degrading, even by those who do not believe the treatment of the naked human figure reprehensible on moral or religious grounds." See Rebecca Daniels, Francis Bacon, and Walter Sickert, "Images Which Unlock Other Images," *The Burlington Magazine*, Vol. 151, No. 1273 (Apr. 2009) 224–230; David Hammer, "After Camden Town: Sickert's Legacy since 1930," [Tate](#) (last accessed August 22, 2017); Martin Hammer, "'Mainly Nourishment': Echoes of Sickert in the Works of Francis Bacon and Lucian Freud," *Visual Culture in Britain*, Vol. 14, No. 1 (2013) 87–100.

casso, and not last, in close proximity to Frank Auerbach, from Francis Bacon to Lucian Freud. And, of course, there are even more, from Andy Warhol down to Joseph Beuys, and eventually Gerhard Richter, who fashioned themselves magnificently, behaving like popstars of counter-culture and high culture.

As regards Auerbach's relationship to his role, to himself, and to his increasing fame, despite his indifference to it, i.e. to his role connected to his existence in society, all those who have undertaken to interpret the artist over the last decades have had, and have, an easier task. Auerbach belongs among those artists who cleave to their *invisibility* just as much as do Leon Kossoff or Gustav Metzger, to mention just two from his own milieu. He is to be mentioned among those artists in whose work there is not merely a complete absence of vanity or self-satisfaction, but also no sign whatsoever of accommodation to the pressures of the artistic world that weigh on the modern artist. It is another issue that Auerbach could not have quit anywhere and at any time the social norms of the biographical pact, for in that, beyond his own habits, the London artistic world of the 1950s and 1960s in its isolation and its provincialism, also had a role. In other words, as Michael Peppiatt sharply but accurately asserted in the catalogue for the School of London exhibition staged in Vienna in 1999: "Michael Andrews, Frank Auerbach, R. B. Kitaj, and Leon Kossoff are almost unknown outside specialized circles. If, very rarely, they have made appearances in Europe, these have been confined for the most part to thematic exhibitions presenting the School of London."²⁶ In other words, in the last decades up to the emergence of yBa, in a London which played a secondary role in the global art world, it was not especially difficult to live the type of closed and provincial life to which he paid homage. When possible, Auerbach never left London, nor even his own world within it, namely a few streets in Camden Town; he didn't give many interviews (true, not many were requested); and until contemporary art in London achieved a leading role in the contemporary art world, he was in fact a fairly old, ex-

²⁶ Michael Peppiatt – Jill Lloyd, "Die School of London / The School of London," in *Die School of London / The School of London*, exhibition catalogue, KunstHaus Wien, 11 May – 29 August 1999, 13.

perienced, and rooted outsider with indisputable success, who did not need to change his ways or his habits, since he was already being talked about and written about as Britain's most famous living painter, and not merely beyond the borders of the country, but beyond those of its language, too. And, of course, his reception in Germany was made still more confused on account of all this.

The question *answered* in the year 1952 may be reconstructed as follows: how was the genuinely sensual depiction of human beings possible *without agendas that were based on ideology and that followed roles*? In Auerbach's portraits and nudes, there is proximity without express or suggested intimacy; at the same time, a radical absence of distances stemming from social roles was, and remained, his starting point. For this reason, and for this reason only, throughout his entire life Auerbach has painted those known to, and loved by, him; those with whom he was living; and those to whom he was indebted, as anyone in any kind of human relationship is indebted to the other, since he did not utilize his role as a painter, and did not record his models' abstract egos. That is to say, rarely if ever had a portrait painter so little to do with the art historical and social historical tradition of portraiture. Instead, he was occupied with the *question of making distance-free community real, and of shaping it*. He painted one-off beings, mortals imprisoned in their bodies: in other words, those to whom he was indebted. He gave neither himself nor his models opportunities for evidence of love and solidarity, faithfulness and honor, to make his task easier. And although he never thought that depiction would have anything to do with physiognomical faithfulness, with the primary spectacle of physical reality, and although the pictures made over the course of many months came together from the capturing and uncovering of fantasy, vision, and impulse, of love and sympathy, of the unknowability of relationships between people and of the impossibility of connecting with the other, nevertheless, his paintings are the same in that all mortals are enclosed in their bodies in them, and in that this issue is an unavoidable one for painters. This is the reality for which we can thank him.

A charcoal drawing of Leon Kossoff made in 1950 — the text *December 28th 1950*, written in red chalk, a fairly unusual means,

can be read in the upper left-hand corner — accords exactly with the expectations for an expressive work that does not explore and make visible the connections between the model's social role and his or her physiognomy, but which confronts the issue of the representation of individuality left to itself, deprived of its norms or coming apart from them: what remains of us when our portrait is not identical to the biographical pact with which our behavior accords, i.e. if our portrait is not a mask? Moreover, in Auerbach's picture we don't even find Kossoff's gaze — the eye sockets are empty; accounting for the gaze can be seen as a recurring issue. It should be mentioned that on the charcoal drawing, which measures 762×559 mm, Auerbach made no attempt to hide the transitions between the sketch and the ready picture: the picture's archaeology and its layers (drawn one on top of another) can be followed exceptionally well. Auerbach simply does not know contours, as he cannot acknowledge them; in his oil paintings, the weight and cumbrousness of the impasto, the relentlessness of the pictures' material reality, make clear and perceptible how indifferent the artist is toward the issue of illusion and the perfection of carnal reality. And for the same reason one picture after another will be full of, so to say, zigzagging brush, charcoal, or pencil marks that appear unsure or discontinued — as may be seen in pictures depicting the London "landscape." Contours depicting and representing certainty, i.e. instead of false finality, layers on top of one another, hence the struggle for depiction believed to be true (with which he battled quite literally during the making of pictures), at the same time correspond to the continuous decay, metamorphosing, and relentless alteration that we ourselves are. He made a portrait of Kossoff in 1954 — and moreover photographed himself in his studio with the picture in his lap — which is nothing other than the documenting of what the 1952 breakthrough had meant. Measuring 41.3×31.7 cm, hence a good deal larger than life-size, the portrait, which, as it were, begins a series of pictures that seem wild and relentlessly impulsive and which pervade Auerbach's oeuvre, signifies the freedom that comes from the discovery and fun of discarding anatomical endowments, and at the same time the philosophical-issues-made-painterly-ones of the portrait's

faithfulness, and of the identity and capturing of the other. Before Auerbach, contemporaneously with him, and after him, many painters of significance are known who likewise were not interested in capturing direct experience of carnal reality. Bacon's bodies made into fragments, monsters, or just as bare pieces of meat, appear in the realm of that artist's unmistakable style and manner. And, of course, it was likewise in the case of Freud, who possessed the truly genius-like qualities necessary for great painting, as of course the stubborn, relentless realism of Bernard Buffet, a contemporary who perhaps already appears quite baffling today, is lost behind a manner that he made into the trademark of his work.

Auerbach's works are just as unmistakable as they are lacking in the help rendered by certainty of technique and in the emptiness of visual rhetoric used as technology. And, I am afraid, this is exactly what Auerbach wanted and what he painted, too, with the not-insignificant difference that he regarded truth not as objective, but as personal, as knowledge shut inside a relationship with a mortal being. A body depicted as if laid aside, a face covered by a red shadow, leaning forward, looking towards itself — all this lays before us the question of capturing directness, immediacy. What can we capture of the reality and truth of someone whom we make dead or immortal in a picture?

As far as the present author is aware, Beckett and Auerbach never met personally, although they did encounter one another in the columns of *X Quarterly* in 1959. Their relationship was clearly an unequal one: Auerbach knew of Beckett but it is doubtful whether Beckett knew of Auerbach. Even so, there were years when they were contemporaries, in that they travelled the same unknown territories of art. Radical finitude was a common denominator. Beckett's descriptions of the human body and of unknowability are parallels of exactness and inexactness, of error and unknowability, and we seldom see in a particular period the very same known and unknown ground being travelled by two artists of such differing histories. In contrast to the inverse proportion between knowledge and self-assurance, the securing of knowledge and the fact that it cannot be amassed, loss of self-assurance has quite a lot to do with truth. Beckett's last work, "Comment dire" /

“What is the Word” was published in the author’s lifetime in French only, with the English translation appearing in the *Irish Times* in 1989:

What is the Word

folly —
folly for to —
for to —
what is the word —
folly from this —
all this —
folly from all this —
given —
folly given all this —
seeing —
folly seeing all this —
this —
what is the word —
this this —
this this here —
all this this here —
folly given all this — ...

Auerbach’s activity has in the course of many decades undergone numerous easily traceable changes: the city is pictured in the same way as the portraits, whose raggedness and uncertainty have become ever denser, i.e. the domain of the pictures is creating connections that are increasingly unknowable. Partly independently of a debate with György Lukács, remarks on reality made by Ernst Bloch in 1938 may be brought into connection with Auerbach’s painting, independently of the time that has elapsed since those remarks and independently of the radically different context. Defending expressionism, Bloch maintains a certain distance from Lukács’ critique, at the center of which stands “unfragmented objective realism.” “Lukács’s thought takes for granted a closed and integrated reality that does indeed exclude the subjectivity of idealism, but not [...] seamless ‘totality’ [...]. Whether such a totality in fact constitutes reality, is open to question. If it does, then Expres-

sionist experiments with disruptive and interpolative techniques are but an empty *jeu d'esprit*, as are the more recent experiments with montage and other devices of discontinuity. But what if Lukács's reality — a coherent, infinitely mediated totality — is not so objective after all?"²⁷ The basis of Auerbach's realism consists in unhitching close links to carnal reality, in interpellations: since the disappearance of contours, the fragility of lines, the disintegration of the composition, the parallelism of differing scales, and images taking shape on top of one another are all founded on a single, continuous, and complete self-evidency of reality including and representing sensual and social life. At the same time, it is as though Auerbach had not been aware of the world around him in one era and in one city, at different points in one world of art: about the methodology of institutional and conceptual critiques which, albeit on another path, likewise means and requires the critiquing of consensual reality and artistic practices.

In the contemporary understanding of Auerbach, a special role is played by Glenn Brown, a well-known persona in γBa who, through the eyes of an outsider, looks back from the norms of spectacle to the traditions of high culture, to the art historical canon, and to painting techniques, and who, using his undoubted manual skills cleverly and well, created a homogeneous medium in which parody and contemporary popular culture are in the same kind of unbreakable and single frame as reality, which Lukács regarded as unitary and objective, i.e. as existing separately from our will. Save that Brown sees parody as the continuous, self-evident use to which painting should be put. As David Freedberg writes: "Painting as an art form has long been declared dead, its possibilities often thought to be exhausted. But in this exhibition (980 Madison Avenue, New York, 25 February — 10 April 2004) of his latest work, his finest and most mature to date, Glenn Brown raises the stakes. Irony and paradox abound. Consistency and elegance and quickly subverted in favor of more complex qualities [...]. This fun-

²⁷ Ernst Bloch, "Discussing Expressionism," tr. by Rodney Livingstone, in *Aesthetics and Politics*, by Ernst Bloch, Georg Lukács, Bertolt Brecht, Walter Benjamin, Theodor Adorno; afterword by Fredric Jameson; translation editor: Ronald Taylor (London: NLB, 1977) 16–27. See 22. Originally first published in *Das Wort* (1938).

damental irony emerges nowhere more clearly, I think, than in the difficult painting called *Dirty* (2003). It is the one painting in the show wherein the reference to the savage and massively complex brushwork of the British painter Frank Auerbach is overt."²⁸

Extending to many great painters in the field of high culture, Brown's irony is partly thematic and partly montage consisting of painterly solutions. It finds expression as pictures that are naive and, for those viewers unfamiliar with the sources, unitary also. Anyway, in the technical sense of the term they are so. Way off not only on the Auerbach paraphrases, Brown imitates the spectacle of the impasto, and the brushwork, which appears wild and radical, which creates a certain distance between his meaningless pastiches rampaging in the vacuity of bad art, copies, and painterly concepts. He reuses Auerbach's portraits, which did not worry him too much: "bad painting," i.e. paintings of paintings, well accorded with popular cynicism regarding γBa. "Brown's painting is at bottom of a conceptual, not a technical, kind: he, after all, takes pains to make painterly technique invisible as such. As Stubbs, too, emphasizes, 'this acts against the Greenbergian aesthetic. Brown calls forth the deceptive likeness, as though we are seeing a picture that according to the Greenberg term is false, a kitsch.' Furthermore, he himself does not kick against kitsch: bouquets of flowers, little dogs, and angelic little children appear in his pictures; his stock of colors, too, recalls the aspect of rococo porcelain figurines. But it is as though Brown is referring to the original meaning of kitsch: 'kitschen' in the everyday sense of the word means 'raked together,' and as the great theoretician of kitsch Abraham A. Moles remarks, behind it lies an idea that is ethically base, the negation of truthfulness and authenticity. The surrealist way of seeing had made up with kitsch, and this is already an absurdity of the post-Greenberg era."²⁹ But these complicated copies may also be seen as entertaining. The painting entitled *Kindertransport* oversteps, as it

²⁸ David Freedberg, "Against Cliché. Glenn Brown and the Possibilities of Painting," in *Glenn Brown. Three Exhibitions*, text: Rochelle Steiner, Michael Bracewell, David Freedberg (New York: Gagosian Gallery – Rizzoli, 2009) 105–107.

²⁹ Cf. Katalin Székely, "Glenn Brown — A mash-up kultúra festészete" [Glenn Brown — the painting of mash-up culture], in *Glenn Brown. Kiállítási katalógus* [Glenn Brown. Exhibition catalogue], Budapest: Műcsarnok, February — April 2010.

were, an ethical border, clearly not by accident, since “post-painterly painting” and “post-political worldview” come from the same place, namely from the post-total-crisis approach of modern society, from the meaningless and stakeless cold irony of standing outside. In this regard, Brown does not deviate from the illusionist hyperrealism of Damian Hirst or Ron Mueck. And it is not certain that this is beneficial, but not enough time has yet elapsed for a judgment of yBa to be made. The issue is actually, how should we judge painting that parodies realism, and how should we judge the renunciation of the discovery of originality and the new, and what kind of passageways can we see in them to contemporary motion pictures, in Brown’s case primarily to David Lynch’s works, which are at least as much of art historical as of film historical significance.

Lucian Freud



Lucian Freud, *Hotel Bedroom*

The prudent handling of realism, the plural uses of “policies” appears especially reasonable in light of the poignant differences between the work of Auerbach and that of Freud, independently of their decades-long friendship, and of the circumstance that both belonged to the School of London and thus participated in numerous exhibitions together.³⁰ These differences can be brought into connection with the above-mentioned differences in their biographies, but may possibly be connected to their social existences and attitudes. But the fundamentals of their work differ independently of certainty or uncertainty regarding the reasons, whatever they are. Auerbach’s relationships to his models build on the reconstruction of *joint* experience, on the irretrievable solidarity of the painter and the things “immortalized” by him, on mutual defenselessness, on interdependence — and all this is based on a radical maintenance of distance from concepts of “social existence” and representation, as much as from the political reality of such.

The issue here is again the chasm between view and spectacle. Effected with truly astonishing painterly power and expressiveness, Freud’s work, its periods utilizing different painterly means, and its years of changed roles, were permeated with performativity, in worst cases with a theatricality — eventually a contrived histrionics — that dominated an output of shocking power and indisputable significance and greatness. The models in his early pictures, those made between 1945 and 1955, were *protagonists* in scenes, each of which was precisely choreographed, and in all of them a decisive part was played by the mysteriousness of the minimalist compositions, by the poetry of the much-analyzed pictures. Consisting of faces defined by outsized, contoured eyes opened conspicuously wide and more drawn than painted, and by unfocused looks, the virtual series includes such early masterpieces as *Girl with Roses* (1947–1948, the work depicts Freud’s first wife, Kitty Garman). “Seated slightly off-center, told to sit up, shoulders squared with some degree of confidence, Kitty has head turned

³⁰ Alistair Hicks, *The School of London. The Resurgence of Contemporary Painting* (Oxford: Phaidon, 1989); most recently, *London Calling. Bacon, Freud, Kossoff, Andrews, Auerbach and Kitaj*, texts: Elena Crippa, Catherine Lampert, Getty Museum, Los Angeles, in Association with Tate, London, 2016.

extra full face above the dark of the stripy jumper and the swirl of the velvet skirt. 'I was arranged,' she said." Thus wrote William Feaver in the catalogue for the Tate Britain exhibition of Freud's oeuvre staged in 2002.³¹

In his book *Contemporary British Art* (1951), Herbert Read wrote a sentence that has become legendary, according to which Freud was "the Ingres of Existentialism."³² If by this we understand the dramatic scenes painted with an eccentric virtuosity and presented in a dispassionate manner that are taken from Freud's own life and made into artworks, then Read is right. In a manner recalling Ingres, with disarming knowledge, Freud followed his compositional schemes and his mode of painting severe, emotionless, statuesque bodies precisely delineated with contours. In other words, everything that Read — for the sake of simplicity and, of course, very early on — called existentialism, may also be called the rise of power relations increasingly permeating Freud's oeuvre, namely the discourse of defenselessness.

The life of Caroline Blackwood, Freud's second wife, who satisfied the snobbery for the lineage of a painter who accounted himself to be free of a past but who was prominent in society life as well as in the wild and hard bohemia that was Soho, can be well documented in certain pictures, e.g. *Girl in Bed* (1952) and *Hotel Bedroom* (1954), which recall Paris. While the former is a withdrawn nude resting on an elbow, the latter is a scene from a marriage, an episode from a serial comic book: all relations between the dressed woman lying in the bed and the man who is looking at her from a semi-shadow with hands in his pockets (the figure corresponds to the painter) are already at an end. The truth is that narratives which made possible and warranted descriptions similar to the above declare that very early on Freud was aware of the limits of oil painting and of the issue of its capacity for integration into contemporary culture, i.e. of its undeniable, and annually increasing, status as an anachronism, while, as he himself wrote in

³¹ William Feaver, "Lucian Freud: Life into Art," in *Lucian Freud* (Tate Publishing, 2002) 23.

³² Herbert Read, *Contemporary British Art* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1951) 35. Revised edition: 1964.

Encounter, he stuck by the world of realism — all that happened was that he made bigger, in all senses of the word, tradition. The last-mentioned picture featured at the 1954 Venice Biennale, where, along with Francis Bacon and Ben Nicholson, Freud represented Britain.

From the mid-1950s onwards, the sharp contours began to blur; many portraits were made that seemed to have been blown up and that were accompanied by a richness of detail hitherto unknown and with strong, emphatic brushstrokes. In contrast to the pictures called existentialist by Read, emphasis was now on the dramatic depiction of the material reality of faces and naked bodies. Of stirring dramatic power, Freud's painting is dominated not by virtuosity, but by the joint presence of a fascinating expressivity, precision, and liberality that are seldom seen together. Although Freud used self-evidently a technique that was accompanied by a constant increase in picture size, he never contented himself with painterliness itself, and showed not the slightest interest in satisfying art-historical norms.

Freud's painting was permeated by a much bleaker problem. The acknowledgement and presentation of the power relation between the painter and his model, of the defenselessness of human beings, is achievable through the theme of human beings made defenseless, and this raises both ethical and political questions about the rule over reality. In other words, what Freud did may be regarded as a kind of ethical *trompe l'oeil*, as a performance in which the physical presence of the defenseless model and the critical purposes of such are inseparable from one another. Freud increasingly abandoned the tradition of depiction from eye level, which can be equated with the coequality of painter and his model; the models — mostly but not invariably naked women — appear more and more often as seen from above, i.e. they are subjugated to the painter's gaze, to the dominion of picture creation. It is not only, and not even primarily, about the representation of the "male gaze"³³ made — with good reason — a subject of radical critique by feminism, of the objectified body necessary for sexual gratification

³³ Laura Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and the Narrative Cinema," *Screen*, Vol. 16, No. 3 (autumn 1975): 6–18.

in the other, about making the problems of alienness and proximity inconsequential, and about the representation of the taking of power and the forcing out of equality, but also about homage to the unknown body and about the dialogue between bodies obtained or rejected in accordance with Victorian norms. "What is difficult is not to liberate sexuality, according to a more or less libertarian project, but to release it from meaning, including from transgression as meaning of transgression. Consider the Arab countries. Here certain rules of 'good' sexuality are readily transgressed by an open practice of homosexuality ... but this transgression remains implacably subject to a regime in the strict sense: homosexuality, a transgressive practice, then immediately reproduces within itself ... the purest paradigm imaginable, that of active/passive, possessor/possessed, buggerer/buggere... [...]. Nonetheless, once the alternative is rejected (once the paradigm is blurred) Utopia begins: meaning and sex become the object of a free play, at the heart of which the (polysemant) forms and the (sensual) practices, liberated from the binary prison, will achieve a state of infinite expansion. Thus may be born a Gongorian text and a happy sexuality."³⁴ This was the limit beyond which Lucian Freud never stepped, and his work was more and more permeated by the dichotomic paradigm Roland Barthes so sharply rejected.³⁵

Independently of all the reports of Freud's ruthless sexual behavior, the very act of painting becomes a source of pleasure. The model is not merely the subject of the depiction: at the same time the human being is the subject of being turned into a body, the model's essence is the subject of being changed into anatomy, i.e. the subject of the annihilation of individuality. In other words, Freud continually recreated the duality of dominion / defenselessness, and the shocking force and unsettling poetry of his pictures stem from reception building on acknowledgement of this, and also from the realization and admission that this is known precisely by those who for many different reasons agreed that he should have painted them in the way in which he did, since the issue here

³⁴ *Roland Barthes by Roland Barthes*, tr. by Richard Howard (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994) 133.

³⁵ Cf. [...].

is not quickly-made photographs, but scenes many times repeated: the model did not perform her role just once. Especially worthy of attention is that in the last years this subversive painting, i.e. the presentation of dramatic body pictures, became the primary subject of increasingly large exhibitions, or at least the grounds for giving them publicity.

In this context, Freud's clearly challenging depiction of sexual organs is an unavoidable issue. These pictures have nothing to do with pornography. They are not technical means to gratification, and are at a significant distance from voyeurism; there is no secret, no violation of modesty, and no immodesty in them: it is merely experiencing the sight of raw power that partly enthralls the viewer and partly unsettles him/her. The spectacle of self-evident "naturalness" painted with unprecedented power appears to be an unsolvable task. Freud's manner of painting, and his unmistakable painterly power, is the capturing of the body beyond contours, of the body in a condition describable as reality, without being cautious, without so-to-say refined details. Freud paints his models' sexual organs in the same way that he paints any other part of their bodies, and the reverse is also true, whether for mostly heterosexual women or for clearly homosexual men. There is no sign of any exempted status for body parts that are concealed. At the same time, Freud's body images, which may even be called brutal, have nothing to do with Bacon's depictions, which always shift towards abstraction and which supersede personality. Nor do they have anything to do with the work of Schiele or Otto Dix, which build on exaggeration, or with the primness of the painters of the *Neue Sachlichkeit*, or with French neoclassicism; that is, they have nothing to do with the world of even one picture by Picasso. Freud's disdain for intimacy is as effective a strategy as it is a dubious one. *And the issue is precisely not the embarrassment of the bourgeois world, the triumph of realism, or a hitherto unseen sincerity of depiction, and a rejection of every kind of sentimentalism.* "Sex is not that part of the body which the bourgeoisie was forced to disqualify or nullify in order to put those whom it dominated to work. It is that aspect of itself which troubled and preoccupied it more than any other, begged and obtained its attention, and which it cultivated

with a mixture of fear, curiosity, delight, and excitement. The bourgeoisie made this element identical with its body, or at least subordinated the latter to the former by attributing to it a mysterious and undefined power; it staked its life and its death on sex [...] by making it responsible for its future welfare; it placed its hope for the future in sex by imagining it to have ineluctable effects on generations to come; it subordinated its soul to sex by conceiving of it as what constituted the soul's most secret and determinant part. Let us not picture the bourgeoisie symbolically castrating itself the better to refuse others the right to have a sex and make use of it as they please. This class must be seen rather as being occupied [...] with creating its own sexuality and forming a specific body based on it, a 'class' body with its health, hygiene, descent, and race: the auto-sexualization of its body, the incarnation of sex in its body, the endogamy of sex and the body."³⁶ It was this cultural, "body political" strategy that led to such pictures as Courbet's 1866 painting *L'Origine du monde*, which for many years was owned by Baron Ferenc Hatvany, hanging — so legend has it — on the wall of his bathroom. After the baron's emigration from Hungary, the picture was purchased at an auction by Jacques Lacan,³⁷ eventually (only in 1995) passing into the possession of the Musée d'Orsay. (It is an interesting fact that the picture's ownership history and its exhibition history are both noteworthy, especially the circumstance that it reached a museum much later than did pictures by Lucian Freud.) Belonging to the afterlife of Courbet's picture are, for example, Cindy Sherman's photographs of dummies.³⁸ There is among these the same reflection on "the endogamy of sex and the body," to quote Foucault once again.

Freud, on the other hand, worked as though nothing that he painted had any meaning or significance. At the center of a very incisive critique of Freud made by the prominent novelist and essayist Julian Barnes is a reflection on this: "There are many differences between people's genitalia, but these differences are not ex-

³⁶ Michel Foucault: *The History of Sexuality. Vol. I: An Introduction*, tr. by Robert Hurley (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978) 123–124.

³⁷ See [here](#) (accessed November 7, 2017).

³⁸ Also deserving of mention here are Robert Mapplethorpe's and Jenny Saville's nudes.

pressive, they lead nowhere. That is why portraitists usually give more attention to the face — ‘the heart’s great canvas’ in Lorrie Moore’s phrase — which is expressive, and does lead somewhere: to a sense of the person’s presence, and essence, even if it is a changeable essence.”³⁹ Barnes’s critique refers back to a likewise exacting critique of Freud by Caroline Blackwood, the artist’s second wife, in the *New York Review of Books* in 1993. Freud’s many nudes depicting Leigh Bowery were indeed a discernibly important episode in his oeuvre: “Leigh Bowery as he appears in Lucian Freud’s portrait is a naked Colossus. He has a limp, dangling penis that appears pathetically small in proportion to other vast proportions. He is made dramatic by the astonishing amount of beautifully painted, translucent fat which encases his muscularity. A giant, and a grotesque, his image lolls and slumps around in these very large paintings as if he is exhausted by the sheer bulk of all the flesh he has to carry...”⁴⁰

At the end of his long career, it was as though Freud really did walk into the era’s great, and difficult-to-avoid, cultural trap: a painter keen to protect his fame unexpectedly found himself among the celebrities. It is difficult to view his self-portrait *The Painter Surprised by a Naked Admirer* (2004–2005) as self-irony: in the picture, the painter stands barefoot but dressed in front of his canvas about to paint; he clearly would be working were it not for a naked admirer with downcast eyes who is clutching his leg. And, of course, to some degree, his reputation’s resistance to wear was also corroded by the circumstance that the making of the picture was accompanied by a photograph depicting the two of them: in this, one of his many lovers — Alexandra Williams-Wynn, a contemporary artist from Wales — is clutching his leg.⁴¹ And finally there was the nude painting of Kate Moss, the making of which was likewise accompanied by many photographs: the artist and his model — dressed — resting in bed.

³⁹ Julian Barnes, “Freud: the Episodicist,” in *Keeping an Eye Open. Essays on Art* (London: Jonathan Cape, 2015) 252.

⁴⁰ Caroline Blackwood, “Portraits by Freud,” *New York Review of Books* (December 16, 1993).

⁴¹ David Kamp, “Freud, Interrupted,” *Vanity Fair* (February 2012).

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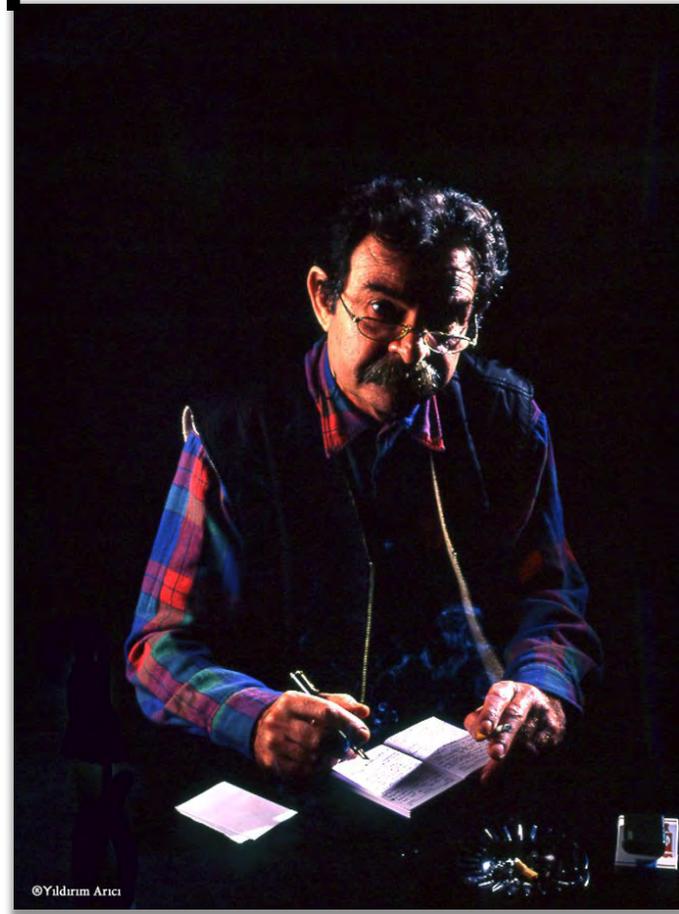
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HYPERION

On the future of aesthetics

ORUÇ ARUOBA



**IS NOT TO BE
IS
IS TO BE**

Translated by Fulya Peker

Translator's Note

I have to admit that I hate poetry translations, though I am glad that they exist. Translators frequently have to choose between the meaning and the sound of the original words, especially if the poet they are translating is a master in using those two elements, which are fundamental to constructing strong poems. Since a strong poem has the ability to penetrate the mind not only by its 'meaning' but also by its use of sound and form, it is possible to appreciate a poem not only as literature but also as a drawing or a sound notation. Hence, when such a 'scape' is translated into another language, it becomes more of an adaptation.

Aruoba's lingual dance and sonic evocation with words as a poet, his impressive work as a translator, and his background in philosophy made translating his work a considerable challenge. When I reached out to Aruoba about my worries on this sound-meaning dilemma, he kindly responded:

There are such translations where none of the words carry the exact meaning of the original, but the translation can still be successful. Hence, I would advise, don't try to be too *fidelle*, just try to capture the *belle*—if there is any—and try to make it speak for itself in that other language.

Thus, when *Hyperion* invited me to take on the challenge of translating Aruoba's poetry, I couldn't help but choose a section from his book *OL/AN* called "Olmayacak Olan Olacak." Translating it proved almost intractable, but I tried to emphasize the "belle" as clearly as possible. For me, this section, beginning with its title, is an impressive example of Aruoba's use of suffixes in revoking multiple meanings and his philosophically universal yet poetically intimate fluency.

Aruoba's work on Nietzsche in particular is apparent in this poetic exploration of being/becoming. The duration or time frame constructed by the word choices in this section is one which, rather, drifts; the past-future fuse into and close in upon one another. For the reader versed in Nietzsche, this inevitably triggers his concept of the eternal return.

When it comes to saying much with a single word and creating a soundscape with them, Turkish suffixes appear to be strong poetic tools. The title of the book, *OL/AN*, is a good example for elaborating on this. OL means “to be” and “-an” is a suffix that turns the verb into a noun, hence OLAN means “the thing that is.” However, AN also means “moment.” OL/AN can therefore also be read as “to be / moment.” This is almost impossible to render into English; it can only at times be suggested.

In this particular section, Aruoba creates a poetic landscape and by doing so invites the reader to move along geographical formations, but unlike nature poems strictly about nature itself, the movement is toward inner rather than outer nature, giving way to a number of complex metaphors.

I hope this translation succeeds in not only in introducing the “belle” in Aruoba’s poetry to the English speaking world, but also provokes the reader to reconsider poetry also as a drawing or a sound notation.

IS NOT TO BE
IS
IS TO BE

HERE

“Right now I am here
just now I was not”

not
a
thing
is

Afore, it came to be
wiggled
unapparent —
from a severe void
toward a mellow longing.

Unapparent.

Then, it became
moved
intermittent
impatient —
from a joyous sensation
toward a warm expectation.

Intermittent
impatient.

Just then, it welled up:
spread
strong
grand
regardless—
from a tense satiation
toward a serene twinge.

Strong
grand
regardless.

Now, it was born
burst
screaming
breathless
tearing
merciless—
from a mellow longing
toward a severe void.

Screaming
breathless
tearing
merciless.

Right now it is here
just
now
it was not.

IN THE AIR

Here
hung between
the wall and the pole,
I am dangling.

My edges, ragged
my fragments, sagged
my insides, burst.

Here
stretched between
the past and the future,
I am dangling.

My hours, crooked
my days, cracked
my years, lost.

Words, passing by through me
toward nonsense,
verbs, going away from my hands
toward despair.

Discharging I am
here
in between
nothing and none

IN THE STREET

I am here:
A century it has been.

The path before me
clogged
the gardens around me
narrowed
the people living in me
lessened:
I became lonely.

I am here:
a century ago I began
waiting.

It is time to pass by slowly:
Smoke
soot mist
rains
heat cold
winds
gnawed all around me.

My woods rotten one by one
my paints
came down piece by piece
my buttresses
one by one collapsed:
A century it has been.

A century ago:
Bright, green
my garden
white, clean
my walls
chirping, cheerful
my rooms
I was here.

I was living —
living were my people.

A century it has been:
Dark, color of mold
my milieu
Dark, ramshackle
my walls
desolate, all in dirt-rust
my rooms
I am here.

I am not living —
not living are my people.

I am here.
A century it has been.
I am waiting.

I am alone
here.

I am waiting —
since the first stone
the first child has thrown
I have been waiting.

When will they come —
with axes, sledgehammers, adzes —

I am alone
here
I am waiting.

When
will they come?

IN A SHELL

Here
slowly
I am moving ahead.

There
if only a while more I could have stayed
at heat, at moist—
a day, an hour or two, a few more minutes
maybe then I also would have come out
of my shell.

Now
while my siblings are being placed into their boxes
to be taken
to where they will be fed
I
am not even living yet.

Yet I am a being—
It is just my shell
separating me
from air
from life.

There
if only a while ago I was brought
to heat, to moist—
a day, an hour or two, a shift before
maybe then I also would have broken
my shell—
would have reached
to air
to life.

Now
while my siblings are being loaded into their trucks
to be taken
to where they will mature
I
slowly am moving ahead
to where I will be crushed.

There
I will die without living:
will be pulverized
will turn to feed
will return
to my mother—
while my siblings are being taken down from their
trucks
to be hanged from their feet
to where they will be butchered.

Here
slowly I am moving ahead
to where I will be destroyed—
I will return
to my mother.

IN THE SEA

Don't be deceived,
there
rain is waiting for you:
lightning, thunderbolt, storm
cold.

Here
warm sun, serene sea, cool wind
shouldn't deceive you:
Flood
is waiting there for you.

Don't deceive yourself:
the Ark of Noah will not be there
to save you —
pigeons to fly
leaves to bring,
it will not have.

Water will flow
will cascade, will rise
will fill all of you,
dragging
 will take you
 away.

Don't be deceived,
there
devastation is waiting for you:
noise, wreckage, subsidence
earthquake.

Here
calm voice, warm stone, strong wall
shouldn't deceive you:
Death
is waiting there for you

Don't deceive yourself:
the Ram of Abraham will not be there
to save you —
to have you bring down your knife
to have you purge your heart,
it will not be.

Pain will flow
will cascade, will rise
will fill all of you
dragging
 will take you
 away.

Don't be deceived
don't deceive yourself
it shouldn't deceive you
here
void —
none
is waiting there for you.

ON THE BRANCH

To Enis—from him/her...

I am here:
I may sleep one day.

One day I may complete
my cocoon full of holes
before all the mulberry leaves are shed
one day
finding strength within
with a final effort
drizzling my final secretions
over my holes my caterpillar
may fill in my cracks.

Then
I would pucker, fall into that sleep —
that is to destroy the old me
to create the new me:
all empty, all full
far away from noises, breezes
within which I have been going
becoming.

That sleep:
All white.
Was slept before me
will be slept after me.
All black.
It is to be scared of, to be longed for —
Having me let go of the old ones
Having me bring back the new ones
that sleep.

That sleep:
unfruitful, full of flowers.
far away from greys, from colors
within which I vanished
I became — I have been
that sleep.

Is there an awakening, will there be
uncertain:
Maybe rotting and drying
I will vanish within
maybe putting on wings
I will get out of
that sleep.

I will be able to leave everything, everyone behind —
only new me, his new sky
his new wings, colorful
large, stretched.

What, who have I left behind, moving forward —
what, who have I remembered, longed for
uncertain:
never have I been, never has it been
that sleep.

It never was, may never be
those colorful strong wings
that flight with light breeze
that regardless gaze —
never was:
will never be.

After all
neither my caterpillar nor my cocoon
has ever been mine—
my butterfly, never:

I after all
have never come to be.

I have always been however.

That sleep
a bridge
in between my being and not
an urge—
creating me from scratch
has never been.

I have always been however:
always looking for
a tone
coming out of serene sounds:
bringing me into being
being my wings
opening, spreading
being painful
joyful
a tone.

Has always been
will always be.

That tone:
having me become through my sleep
letting me be after
after waking up:

Was not
will not be.

In which I could not fall
from which I could not wake
that sleep:
has not been
was not
will not be.

Hier sitze ich und warte,
alte zerbrochene Tafeln um mich
und auch neue halb beschriebene
Tafeln. Wann kommt meine
Stunde?

Nietzsche
Zarathustra, III, 12 (1)

Here, sitting, I am waiting,
around me, old, shattered tablets,
and also new, half-engraved
tablets. When will it come,
my time?

ON THE BALCONY

Now I am full of pain —
I have no void left:
words are voided
no verb is left.

In my wrists a mild soreness,
in my back an old twinge,
in my shoulders a stiffness,
on my hand a bleeding wound,
my ears are clogged,
my eyes are bloody,
my words are cloudy,
I am writing
in here.

The flood of light flowing across the rock
Come take me away from here
Stones are creaking in my eye
I long for that desolate place.

The evening breeze blowing across the sea
Take me there
Waves are purling in my ear
I long for that silent place.

IN THE SPRING

I am here:
I am expanding.

My branches are reaching toward the clear air
green vibrant, serene, full.
My roots are diving into the dark earth
deep mystic, cool, strong.

I am here:
I am ascending.

But I was here—
I was getting dry.

The winds that rustle my leaves
were taking my moistness away
The storms that bend and twist my trunk
were shaking my roots.

I was here:
I was getting rotten.

Above me the never-ending rains of fall
below me the ever-amassing springs
My branches wet, my roots burst
my leaves yellow-red, the color of death.

I was here:
I was vanishing.

But I am here:
I withstood.

Until the cool spring breeze
its purifying downpour
the warm lights —
thus a bud amassed in me
broke on the very tip of my utmost branch
opened its leaves, reaching toward the sun
spread, filling the sky.

I was here:
I enliven.
I am here:
I am turning green.

Now the one I long for
through the curls of
a fresh bud
the one I long for
a colorful flower
will bloom, will scatter my fullness to the air
calling all the bees
will ripen.

I am here:
I am blossoming.

Now the one I long for
through the vigor of
a very green fruit
the one I long for
a full seed
will fall down, will take my ripeness to the earth
calling all the memories
will get plump.

I am here:
I am becoming

I was here:
I was coming to be not
I am here:
I am coming to be

I was here:
I was not.
I am here:
I am—
am being.

IN THE DARK

Here
I am to be.

In here
in this darkness
leaning against the window, bracing the stone, tied to the rope
amongst this ivy's
drying branches
while setting free
the shakiness of my wings
I know at last:
It is —
is to be.

The cool breeze that left me here
is to come
the hoarseness of my voice
is to go.
It is to take me away
that coolness
have me rest.

The serene sadness that threw me in here
is to come
the brokenness of my voice
is to go.
It is to take me away
that serenity
have me heal.

That tone is:
It is to come.

Then I also will come back,
as I have never been for years.
With my deep voice resounding
full of meaning
filling the air
willing it to being.

Then I also will go forward,
as I have never been able to for years.
with my blessed voice resonating
full of meaning
having the air mature
willing it to become.

Then I also will find you,
the one I couldn't reach for years.
With my joyous voice rushing out
full of meaning
drilling through the air
willing it to be.

You:

The one my hoarse voice longs for
the cool tone.

The one my broken voice wants
the serene tone.

The one my weary voice awaits
the tense tone.

You are

You are to come.

While I was, I was to die
I am, am to be:

It is—
is to be.

Such brightness it is to be
being
will fracture
Such darkness it is to be
being not
will shatter
Such fullness it is to be
becoming
will puncture.

Then
the new me will take off
through the cracks
of life
with new wings
colorful, vast
as is becoming.

It is to be:
It is, is to come.

It is to come, is to bring.
It is to be, is to will it to be.

It is—
is to be.

NEAR ME

Here
a half of me
bright
a half of me
dark
I am walking.

All day long
from behind the light
I watched the lowlands:
Exhausted winds
were blowing their moistness away
before they could form clouds.
Withered forests
were shaking their branches
before they could shed their leaves.

I was walking
slowly.

The circle that enlightens me
was standing still, serene —
the circle that I could not enlighten
was turning around, weary:
Before me the light
below me the dark —
before me the twinkle that enlightens me
below me the twilight that I could not enlighten,
I was walking.

Seeing, without being seen —
enlightened, without being able to enlighten
I was walking.

Just then
while I was reaching my peak
without being seen
I turned around, retreated behind the winds
behind the forests
that twinkle
leaving its light to me —
seeing
stood still, waited behind the moistness
behind the leaves
that twilight,
leaving
itself to me.

Right then
I also twinkled
enlightened
as I have never been before:
My light diffused toward
dark
waters —
appeased the moistness
brought a cool breeze.

May the clouds be formed now.
May the leaves be shed now.

I am walking.
a side of me
dark
a side of me
bright
in here.

IN THE SKY

Here
when it dithers
the wind that opens me up,
my clouds when for a moment
dither
noises would come and reach me
from under.

Rattles
ripples
rustles —

Rustles
ripples
rattles.

From under
noises could not come and reach me,
once they walk again
my clouds
the wind beyond me
once walks
again
here.

All black
the shadows of my clouds
roaming around the green hills —
roaming around the blue waters
the twinkle of my light
all white.

ON THE HILL

To Hüseyin

I have been here
for thousands of years —
by me a rock full of holes
by my feet daphne, thyme
azalea
for thousands of years
here.

What have I seen
for thousands of years
since coming here:
what storms
wars
what summers
winters.
By me the rock got exhausted
turned green, dried the daphne
the thyme
by me
here.

Thousands of years ago
they brought me
here —
they buried me
so that I would fall asleep
they covered
me
with this carved stone

I have not slept.

What have I seen
for thousands of years
since being buried here:
what lovings
sadnesses
what springs
falls.
By me the rock got worn out
bloomed and withered the azalea
by me
here.

I got even stronger.

On and on
lightning struck me
skies thundered above me
rains poured over me.

I have not collapsed.
Upright, strong
I am standing
here.

People
went, came
came, went
loved, died —
the rock got smaller
turned green, dried
the daphne, the thyme
bloomed, withered
the azalea
by me
here.

I have not slept.
I have been here
for thousands of years.

I got even more elevated.

On and on
earth erupted below me
sea ran over below me
rocks tumbled down below me.

I have not collapsed.
Upright, strong
I am standing
here.

Whatever there is left shall come
storm, war, summer, winter
love, grief, spring, fall —
what have I seen
for thousands of years
here.

Even though the rock by me dissolves,
the daphne, the thyme would turn green
the azalea would bloom
by me
here.

It shall come, whatever there is
whatever is not —
I have not slept
I have not collapsed
I have been standing
for thousands of years
here.

ON THE GROUND

Here
along humming, noise
My insides are all empty
rigid,
along shouts, cries
I am all green within
all yellow
I am becoming full.

There
I am to be.

I am to be all white
along the blues
I am to be all bright
along the cliffs —
My insides are to be all full
breezy
cool.

I am to be
there —
I am to become full.

Where is my place —
I am to know:
where goes my path —
I am to find.

I am to expand like the sky
over the things that were, that are to be —
I am to strike like the lightning
pour like the rain
shine like the sun
over the things that were, that are to be
like the sky.

I am to walk like the earth
over the things that couldn't be, that wouldn't be —
I am to flow like a shadow
fall like a light
resonate like a sound
over becoming, being
like the earth.

Where goes my path —
I am to know:
where is my place —
I am to find.

HYPERION

On the future of aesthetics

SERGE DANEY

A MORAL OF PERCEPTION

(Straub-Huillet's *From the Clouds to the Resistance*)



Translated by Rainer J. Hanshe

The last *Straub*-film is composed of two distinct parts, one mythological, the other modern, both without apparent relation. *Nube* side: six dialogues out of the twenty-seven *Dialogues with Leuco* written by Cesare Pavese in 1947. *Resistenza* side: excerpts from another book by Pavese, *The Moon and the Fires*, published in 1950, a few months before his suicide. This last side will not be surprising: each *Straub*-film is a survey — archaeological, geological, ethnographic, and military — of a situation where *some* men had resisted. Where Nietzsche said that “the only being we

know is the being who represents," Straub could answer: the only being who exists for certain is the one who resists. Nature, language, time, texts, gods, God, bosses, Nazis. The mother and the father. That is how the *shot*, the basic atom of Straubian cinema, is the product, the rest, the *restance* rather, a triple resistance: texts to bodies, places to texts, and bodies to places. A fourth should be added: that of the public to a shot then "cut," the stubborn resistance of the cinema public to something intractable which denies it as public.

I will not return to that. First of all, because a lot has been written on that in *Cahiers* for fifteen years. Next, because what is striking in this "Italian *Nicht Versohnt*" that is *Dalla nuba* is another thing: the sensuality, the taste of the narrative, the happiness of the language and the will to elucidate this "anyway, you have to go" which would almost make me say that this film carries the elements of a psychoanalysis of the Straubs by themselves. As if, at the end of their Jewish triptych (composed of *Little Schonberg*, *Moses and Aaron*, and *Fortini Cani*, after brandishing the signifier "resistance" as an absolute (because, no doubt, being Jewish, it is to resist and, in the first place, to resist the Book), they undertook the *genealogy*. The resistance is the end point of a story that begins elsewhere, earlier, with the cloud. What is this story that spans two millennia, embracing men and gods, then men to the most frightening of divinities, History? Starting from what moment did they resist? And what exactly are they resisting?

AGAINST THE SPECTACLE. BUT WHAT SPECTACLE?

The six dialogues that make up the first part of the film take note of a unique event: the gods have been separated from men. All fellowship between them is rendered obsolete, and as is the alliance, the promiscuity, the mingling. That is the new law in the foreground of the film, the nymph Nephelie, the cloud, sitting in its tree, announces to Ixion. "*There are monsters,*" she says. Henceforth those who, like the Centaurs, participated in a double nature know that they are monsters and hide themselves. Each dialogue marks a deepening of the separation. I summarize: the gods dissociate themselves from men, abandon them (second

dialogue: *The Chimera*), separate them from things by giving them a name (third dialogue: *The Blind*), separate them from themselves, and transform them into beasts (fourth dialogue: *The Wolf Man*), separate them from one another through sacrifices (fifth dialogue: *The Guest*), and the separation is total when they are content, idle, to gaze at such sacrifices (sixth dialogue: *The Fires*).

This last dialogue marks, at the same time as the end of the first part, the beginning of the resistance, if not the revolt, and prefigures the second (“modern”) part through the theme of *fires*. It is worthwhile to stop here for a moment. To his father who explains that it is still necessary to light the fires, a young peasant replies: “*I do not want to, you understand, I do not want to. They do well, the bosses, to eat our marrow, if we have been so unjust among ourselves. They are good gods to watch us suffer.*” On purpose, the Straubs cut the end of Pavese’s dialogue (the son added: “*Siamo tutti cattivi*” — “We are all wicked” — and the father called him ignorant before renewing his offering to Zeus). Similarly, they had not kept the first two sentences of the dialogue (Pavese began by saying to the son: “*The whole mountain burns*”), starting with the observation by the son that, “*Our fires, no one sees them.*”

Much has been said about the Straubs’ meticulous respect for the texts so as not to note here in what sense they also know how to violate them. Because such cuts are not made at random, nor the fact that it is the theme of the *gaze* that is privileged. Resistance begins at the moment when, their separation from the gods completed, men imagine being the spectacle in which the gods take pleasure, from a distance: the beginning of resistance and the beginning of the pose, the theater. The Straubs have a taste for ancient theater, for the toga and drapery, which refers as much to Cecil B. De Mille as to the situations of Terror that they connote. Beginning with complacency, aesthetics, a “did you see me” reserved for the human body. Between the insouciance of Ixion who does not take very seriously what the nymph tells him (first dialogue) and the first *No!* (Sixth dialogue: the camera is then at the level of the boy’s hand, a hand that still hesitates to make a fist), the distance between the gods and men, by dint of widening, becomes the space of aesthetic contemplation. “The son: *And the gods? They are unfair to the gods.* The Father: *If it were not so, they*

would not be gods. They who do not work, how do you want them to spend their time? When there were not yet bosses and we lived with justice, we had to kill someone from time to time to give the gods joy. They are made that way. But in our time, they don't need it. So many of us go wrong that it is enough for them to look at us." It is therefore one and the same thing as the misery of men and their transformation into objects of aesthetic pleasure for idle gods. Of course, the gods are also the bosses, the *spectators* — all those who do not work. And to resist them is first to refuse to be watched. It is, for example, turning our backs on them.

Refusal of the spectacle, the shaming of the spectator-god, that spoiled child. To describe the gods to Ixion, Nephelie says: "*They feel everything from a distance, with eyes, nostrils, lips.*" The making of the Straubian shot is entirely from a practice of framing that breaks that distance, which learns to "look closely," which distorts the homogeneous space of the paranoid contemplation by which the god-spectators dispossess men (the actors) of their misfortune and by which men, to please them, are transformed into histrions of their fate, become a destiny. It is such a refusal of a back-world, of a *background*, that gives *Dalla nube* an immediate, pathic sensuality, where the memory of a world "where one would be at home," of intimacy with things, is to the senses best linked to the periphery of the body — hearing, tact — that must be confided. Not looking.

TRUE INSCRIPTION OR SUPERIMPOSITION?

There is no background, either. But is there a shot? Or, what is the *content* of what is called, for convenience, a shot? Content is to be taken here to the letter. In a short film called *Every Revolution is a Throw of the Dice*, Straub recites a Mallarmé poem in the Père-Lachaise cemetery: the "actors" (one per typographic character) are scattered — living writing — on the slope of a little hill; victims of the Commune were buried under this hill. But the film does not explain that. In *Fortini Cani*, the camera travels several times through an Italian countryside where, during the Second World War, civilian populations were massacred. The content of the shot, *stricto sensu*, is what lies behind it: the corpses under the ground. What to conclude from a kind of necrophiliac piety, directed by

Straub against the spectator, summoned to know or to be silent in the name of respect due to the dead — and especially to those dead. Impossible coalescence between the perceived and the known, the content of a perception and the perception of knowledge. In that sense, Straub's politics (and morality) is a politics (and a morality) of perception. In that sense, it is materialistic, but in the manner of Lucrece and Diderot. In *Dalla nube*, too, shots have content. It is, for example, the wheat field that the guest (Hercules) looks at and admires (fifth dialogue), but he knows that it is fertilized each year with the blood of the victim of a sacrifice and that he has been designated to be such a victim. This is the beautiful shot of "the grass and acacias" before which, at the very end of the film, Nuto reveals to the bastard that this is the place where Santa was killed, then burned by the partisans. It is in the end the shot of a wolf (fourth dialogue) whose hunters wonder what to do since, of their own confession, "*It is not the first time that we killed a beast / But it is the first time that we killed a man.*" These three examples, however, are enough to instill doubt. Doubt about *what* we see. For what happens in that "passage" from polytheism to monotheism — which interests Straub — if we can discern less and less what is put into *metamorphosis*? Blood into wheat, man into wolf, woman into fire, etc.

So there are two limits to the Straubian shot. One, internal, is what it contains — the shot as a tomb. The other, irrepresentable, undecidable, is that everything filmed, framed, may *also* be something else. Lycaon, the wolf-man who cries, would not be so overwhelming if, in the commentary, the hunters did not speak of him as a man ("*He defended himself like an old man, with his eyes*") and if their embarrassment did not come out of a deeper doubt, doubt as to their own identity ("*Are you yourself sure that you do not sometimes feel like Lycaon?*"). The sudden risk of being one and the other. In this sense, to return to the problematic of "true inscription," we can say that there is something that fits materially, indisputably, *hic et nunc*, on the film and the magnetic tape, *except that we do not know what it is, exactly*.

That's why that idea of resistance is so essential to Straub. It also has a conjuratory value: resistance is the only *clue* that does not deceive, that attests to any reality, to a knot of contradictions.

It is, in the Freudian sense, a symptom. Where it resists, you have to film. But you never know what you're filming, and the better you can describe it, the less you know. In the true inscription, there are only traces of the inscription about which one is sure. The rest is metamorphosis, avatar, double identity and double belonging, error, *betrayal*. It is this suspicion, or better: the desire to speak this suspicion, which I seem to perceive for the first time with such a frankness in *Dalla nube*.

A SHOT WITH NO IMAGE OR TWO IMAGES IN A SHOT?

There are some special effects that the Straubs never use — and which seem to be the very negation of their cinema — like superimpositions or fades. Whenever one image is superimposed over another (unless it contains it), it prefigures it (unless it is already remembered). The time of the superimposition is that of the active work of oblivion: a voice tells us: “You will forget, you have already forgotten.” These encroachments of one image over another are one of the two limits of the Straubian shot. The other is the black (or empty) screen. In *Moses and Aaron*, there was the glare of an empty shot, a non-image. In *Dalla nube*, it is another matter, it is a warning: whatever you look at, a cultivated field, a hill, a beast, *do not forget that it is always a human that you see*. If to see a film, in the Godard-Miéville version, is to assimilate daddy to a factory and mommy to a landscape, in the Straub-Huillet version, it is to assimilate the factory and — more and more — the countryside to the father and the mother. Humanism, therefore, in the sense of a prevalence, a *preponderance* of the human image in all things. It is in this sense that these films “look at us”: a man looks at the base of each image, in an impossible superimposition. Cinema would be what breaks the enchantment by which we think we see something other than the human being, whereas it is only cultivated fields, carved trees, ignored cemeteries, animals-who-are-perhaps men (hence the prohibition to kill them). Old-Marxist humanism too, in the sense that Brecht said that a photo of the Krupp factories did not tell us anything about the Krupp factories. What is missing? The work of men and men at work. And what is there to learn? Always the same thing: men create gods (or workers bosses, actors spectators) and in return those gods dispossess them

of their world, make them foreign, alienate them. For it is a matter of alienation and reappropriation, of experience and bad conscience, of an entire existentialist problem to which the Straubs cinema is attached. One can understand at once their horror of ready-made aesthetic categories: to find a landscape shot "beautiful" is, ultimately, blasphemous, because a shot, a landscape, at the end of the day, is someone. There is beauty only in morality. It is not an anthropomorphism. There is a primacy of the human figure in all things, but not the opposite. If we consider that a filmmaker is important only to the extent that he studies, from film to film, a certain *state* of the human body, the Straubs' films will remain like documentaries about two or three positions of the body: to sit, to bend down to read, to walk. It's already a lot.

HUMANISM OR MANKINDISM?

At the time of the release of *Fortini Cani*, Straub had declared that his film resembled that of Hawks'. This comparison convinced no one and even shocked. When I saw *Dalla nube*, I wondered if it should not be taken seriously. The two filmmakers have one thing in common; an almost total interest in everything that is not the human body: a talkative and moving body. A male body. So their humanism is based on a play on words: is it man (biological species), Man (human essence), or man (the human in its male form)? Much has been said about Hawksian misogyny but little has been said about *Straub*-films from the angle of the difference of the sexes. Yet it is clear that we are, at least since *Lessons of History*, in a heroic, warlike world, where women have become rarer to the point of disappearing almost entirely from *Dalla nube*. No woman in the Straub movies, I do not hear any figuration of the woman. No mother either. No doubt because, in the eyes of a mother, "humanism," that is to say, the pointless heroism that her offspring shares with his little comrades, will always be a little derisory, touching and without great significance. Humanism appears more and more to be an invention of men, or, as Lacan calls it, a "mankindism," the sympathetic and sublimated version of the alliance of men against women.

Dalla nube alla resistenza opens with a somewhat unreal image of a goddess (the admirable Olimpia Carlisi) and ends with the

story of the death of a woman, Santa, whom the partisans had to kill because she betrayed, too. At the beginning of the cloud and at the end of the resistance, there is therefore a double game, a double belonging that has, twice, a female figure. A figure that materializes what the *Straub*-films are about: treason. For beyond the stories of idle gods and rebellious men, it seems to me that Jean-Marie Straub and Danièle Huillet speak quietly of something that remains largely unknown (because this lack of knowledge depends upon the strength of the social link): *that there is a profound indifference of women for any belief in an ideal*. An indifference that sharply contrasts with the somewhat melodramatic piety of which the relationships between men are woven (see the pathos in the father-son saga of *Fortini Cani* or again, in *Dalla nube*, the friendship between the bastard and Cinto, the little boy with a knife). This is what resists humanism and what humanism, in turn, feeds: woman. Woman: what resists the one that resists, man. Woman, the rock. Because *the rock does not touch itself in words* (third dialogue). The rock: an indestructible element that Straub, not at all pantheistic, does not care to call nature. *The things of the world are rock*, says the blind Tiresias — who was a woman for seven years — to a blind future — that is called Oedipus.

HYPERION

On the future of aesthetics

SERGE DANNEY

THE STATE — SYBERBERG
(*“Hitler, a film from Germany”*)



Translated by Rainer J. Hanshe

1. It isn't very difficult to imagine the film that Syberberg would have made if he had wanted to reassure the critics. He would have justified himself in advance for his choice by highlighting the harsh necessity that we have — more than ever — to analyze and understand “the still fertile belly from which arose the foul beast.” He would have invited the spectator to a denunciation, a demystification, a de-something. The film would not have lasted seven hours, which is too long for a lesson, too long even for a show. He would have spoken of the “Nazi phenomenon” and would

not have taken Hitler for granted, not the individual Hitler but *Hitler, a film*.

That Syberberg did not seem too anxious to clear himself of his subject, that he did not multiply the declarations stating, thirty years later, his reprobation of Nazism, that he had sacrificed neither to what he himself calls the “concentration camp porn of the left” (a long tradition, with guaranteed success, from *Kapo* to *The Night Porter*), nor to an old catechistic Brechtism (like *Red Poster*) and that, despite this, the seven hours and the four parts of the film never cease to interest but without hysteria, to move without ever trapping, to stupefy but not to brutalize, it is there like a scandal.

2. By inscribing the signifier “Hitler” in his very title, Syberberg immediately indicates, for him, where the problem is. That there is mourning and that it is not finished. That certain words continue to be impossible to pronounce with simplicity. That the knowledge we have of the socio-economic conditions that produced Hitler and Nazism do not hold us back from what the enunciation of certain words continue to form: shame and horror, vague fascination, dark humor, disgust. In a very beautiful scene, toward the end of the film, one of Syberberg’s spokespersons (played by André Helier) gently reproaches the puppet-Hitler with this desolate intonation which runs through the film and which is more effective than every cry, to have impoverished the German language, to have made certain words unpronounceable, to have killed them, worse, to have condemned them to haunt the German language in an obsessive way. As if those words had become *puppet words*, to handle with care. What to do today with the delirious words of yesterday? Words like “Hitler,” “Jew,” “earth,” “irrational”? What to do in a film, in pictures, where there are no more quotation marks?

We can give up those words, no longer pronounce them, or pronounce them as little as possible, or with great care. It’s the politics of the ostrich. The boring thing is that the repressed always returns, step by step, in the drift of connotations. Is not the signifier “Wagner” suspicious, because Hitler’s propaganda used

the image of the Wagnerian opera? But when one learns (in Syberberg's film, correctly) that to Wagner — who was boring — Hitler preferred Franz Lehar and Franz von Suppé, should one bring suspicion to the waltzes of Vienna, to the waltz, to Vienna, to the name Franz? No: definitely, there is a work of mourning to be done, words to return to their banality, to their denotation. And seven hours will not be too much. Syberberg's project is neither pious nor well meaning; it is an *exorcism*, that is to say, another pair of sleeves.

3. What to do? How does Syberberg intend to win the trial that he is making of Hitler and to which he invites us (we are invited as a juror, the one who must hear everything, bear all the stories, trivial and terrifying, *remaining in the same place*)? How do you win against a dead person? By giving him a body, of course. But what body? The Nazi ideology, as we know, was nourished by a violent, phobic rejection of the body that could only make sublime the sporty, healthy, and asexual. This is why, by reaction, the anti-Nazi cinema has continued to adorn the Hitler character with a body of *his own*: banal, caricatural, a petit-bourgeois German body that serves as a target for the hatred of the public. This is true of the great heroic-historical frescoes of the Eastern countries where an actor with a mustache (true or false) *devotes himself* to embody Hitler in a naturalistic way. This solution has never been very convincing and it will be less and less so. Syberberg does not even consider it. Much more consequential is the beginning of Lubitsch (*To Be or Not to Be*) or of Chaplin (*The Dictator*), two contemporary filmmakers of Nazism and in the fight against it, because this step participates in the carnivalesque tradition. A tradition where we have always known that the body of the despot does not have to be played, imitated, since at the limit, it does not exist, that it is already, through and through, mountain, travesty, flight. Everyone can imitate it and laugh at it because it itself began by imitating everyone, by being "Mr. Everyone" (*qualunquisme*). In an admirable text, titled "Pastiche et Postiche," or "Nothingness for a Mustache," André Bazin spoke of the "ontological burglary" represented by Hitler-Hinkel's theft of Chaplin's mustache. By

making *The Dictator*, Chaplin would have only taken back his property. We are here in the heart of the carnival and that is the meaning of Syberberg's "Hitler in us." Especially not to take in the sense of "There is a beast in us, a Hitler perhaps, do we know what it is capable of, what anguish!" This metaphysics of Prismic, this fear of being afraid, has nothing to do with the cheerfulness of the Chaplinean operation: it is what we have given him and what he has turned against us that we must take back from him, as Chaplin takes back his mustache. Thus, for want of a *clean body*, he will really die.

The strength of Lubitsch and Chaplin came from the fact that their art (the comic) was popular. For many reasons, the Syberbergian exorcism, despite borrowings, citations, the hat trick of Chaplin and Karl Valentin, is not exactly carnivalesque. A matter of time. His point of view is rather that of an artist who, in the aftermath of a "peculiar peace," is *measured* by Hitler, by Hitler dead. And for Syberberg, to give a body to Hitler, it will be, through the heterogeneity of the depositions, witnesses of the incriminating evidence, recordings, evoke a *spoken body*, a puppet made of words.

4. This is where the system that Syberberg put in place in his previous films (*The Cook of Ludwig*, especially) works in full. A system that we have not finished going around, a system of a dissemination of the body. This spoken body is of course the puppet animated by Harry Baer, the ventriloquist; it is also the filmed image of the "real" Hitler of the *stock-shots* of the second part, a Hitler become a bit celluloid. It is especially that which is evoked in the indestructible babble of the servants of yesterday who have become the witnesses of today. To hear Ellerkamp tell the story of the rise of Hitler or deplore his lack of sartorial taste, we are suddenly put in a very particular position vis-à-vis the film: we meet the one for whom Hitler is only Hitler, the one for whom there is no confusion, no contamination between the public figure (whom he admires foolishly) and the private body (which he barely masters). Ellerkamp is the good mediator, the one through whom exorcism can be made since he radically disjoins (through stupidity

and not through critical distance — that's where irony and scandal are) the *name* of the *body*.

5. There is much more than one play here. Syberberg's vehement rejection of naturalism is inseparable from the idea that he has of his art, of himself as an artist, and of cinema as "the art of our time." An idea that is no longer relevant and perhaps embarrassing to critics, who have lost the habit of encountering such an exigency in a filmmaker. Because the pride implied by such a position is not irreverent, nor the gall: Syberberg's calm, paradoxical, even *adoxal* gall, finally declaring Hitler's trial open, as if nothing were being played (in the real world) nor tried (in the minds of people). A trial where the accused is given "a chance" and where the spectator (us) is given an unusual, aberrant place, that of witness to a unique duel, to a standoff at the summit, opposing nothing less than Syberberg to Hitler.

Because it is not a question of defeating Hitler (it would be a paranoid but still banal idea), it is a question of overcoming him *cinematographically*. I already said that Syberberg's approach was not exactly "carnavalesque": he does not instruct his trial from the point of view "from below," that of the people, victims, or martyrs. On the other hand, he is not, it is clear, a left-wing intellectual: he does not speak *in the place of* nobody. The scandal is rather that he instructed his trial from his point of view and his interests *for himself*, Syberberg, a German filmmaker born in 1935 in Pomerania, injured in his professional activity, in his job as a filmmaker. His point of view, in a sense, is corporatist. German, he found in R.D.A., then in R.F.A., a destroyed cinema, recycled in porno, a people unfit for mourning, a diminished language, expurgated, etc. A filmmaker closer to Benjamin than to Brecht, he will ask of Hitler, the other (bad) filmmaker, his accounts. And he defeats him, by turning his weapons against him, at the end of a titanic duel of seven hours: a film.

6. Delirious, of course. But also: moral. Delirium of morality. Where does morality reside for a filmmaker? In his personal convictions, his political choices, the petitions that he signs, the

countries that he boycotts? Perhaps. But if it was rather that, when he is committed, when he risks something, he does it *to the maximum of his power*? “Power” must be understood here in a double sense. At the same time the power of the one who knows that the cinema has *some* power, who works the specific impact, the forms, and who knows them responsible: the one for whom, for example, it is essential that the place of the spectator is not played no matter what. And also this other power, related to the social status of the artist and the value of exchange attached or not to his name. Both his profession and his brand image.

Morality *and* madness. When we listen to Syberberg, his film and what he says about it, we cannot help but hear, behind and despite the humility of the facade (he is an artisan of cinema, *too*), an enunciation, a tone that does not deceive: that of a State. And Syberberg’s fight against Hitler (and against that which, from Hitler, continues: Germany without Schmidt’s ideal, Hollywood, pornography) is nothing less than a state-to-state fight, a trench warfare where the legal is not the least weapon (we remember *Karl May* still on trial). The filmmaker claims a certain extraterritoriality from which, having become himself an army and its leader, he passes alliances, signs treaties, declares open hostilities and, like any State, lies. We are obviously very far from the traditional image of the committed intellectual-artist, caught between his personal tastes (his being and his class situation) and the morose mission of supporting a cause that is his only “objectively” (his class position).

7. That is why it is difficult to situate him in relation to *Hitler, ein Film aus Deutschland*, which is however, obviously, one of the most important films seen for a long time on screen. Difficult to occupy the place that Syberberg assigns us, this strange place where we are both *implicated* (who is not by such a subject?) and *surplus*. Because we are not only invited to judge Hitler (in general, it is done), but to verify that Syberberg vanquishes him cinematographically. We verify the weapons, we count the points. We have already happened to be before a film in this somewhat ridiculous situation — I think of Eisenstein’s *Ivan the Terrible* —

and not by chance, since the reference to Eisenstein is constant with Syberberg.

Because the cinema is old enough, has lived enough for us to be able to tell the story *also* as an episode of the dialogue that took place in the West, two centuries ago, between the intellectual-artist and the despot, enlightened or not. Abortive dialogue between Lang and Goebbels, a twisted and perverse dialogue between Eisenstein and Stalin. And especially, at a time when propaganda is the great temptation of cinema, its almost natural inclination, the counter-propaganda of Chaplin and the extraordinary reversal of alliances that constitute, a few years after *The Dictator*, *Monsieur Verdoux*: nothing less than a declaration of war from the Chaplin State to America, with the outcome that we know: it is the United States that came to apologize. It is clear today that if Lang, Eisenstein, and Chaplin saw their fate related to that of the great progressive ideas of their time, it is not possible to reduce them to such. Not because they would “somewhere” be right-wing men, but because they know how to function (and survive) as *war machines*.

8. Among the many questions raised by Syberberg’s film, I wanted to begin with that of the nature of the dialogue between the artist (the filmmaker) and the political leader, *today*, now forty years after Benjamin had brought to light that they had become rivals, since working the same matter: political representation. Faced with the cinema, an art less and less popular and increasingly subject to advertising rhetoric, some irredentists continue to think of cinema as counter-propaganda and to think of themselves as States at war. These troublemakers are obviously those who see the best continuation between the horrors of yesterday (Nazism is a borderline case) and those of tomorrow (soft fascination of the media, reign of the poll, desacralization). When Godard, speaking of television, said, to provoke: “France, directed by Marcellin and Pompidou,” he still evoked the specter of the bad-politician filmmaker to whom, as a filmmaker, he could oppose himself since there was a common ground: staging. When Pasolini, shortly before his death, sent an open letter to the Pope about an open letter, it was still necessary to demand a personal answer (but the

pope, as soon as the second letter came, had a cardinal answer). When Syberberg accuses Hitler of “kitsching” Germany, of having been above all a very bad filmmaker, given the scale of the means at his disposal, it is the same idea, serious and foolish at the same time, of a certain period in the history of political figuration in cinema, which must also be mourned.

HYPERION

On the future of aesthetics

SERGE DANÉY

NOTES ON SALÓ



Translated by Rainer J. Hanshe

It is not because *Salò* is the last film of Pasolini that you are forced to see it as a “testament” (or a letter bomb, to open only with precaution: “No one indeed, it seems, can recover,” said Roland Barthes about this film). It is much easier to see the reconstruction of what could be, in a comparable context (Italian fascism) and a similar setting (*Salò*), the final attempt of masters in perdition to *enjoy* their power.

It is not too difficult to recall that the Republic of *Salò* (September 1943–January 1944) is, in the history of Italian fascism, only the last grotesque act, the grand-guignol repetition of what had already failed as a farce, the frame of “a few small retarded

cowards." *Saló* is not triumphant fascism, the one that is supported by the devotion of the masses, a delirium of conquest and normativity. It is rather the closed place (in this way Sadean), under the protection of machine guns, of a ridiculous *excess* of legislation, of regulation, of a madness of staging. In this as in all his films, Pasolini is not really interested in the question of the devotion of the masses to anything (let alone to fascism).

The question that obsesses him is the opposite one. It is not that there can be a complicity between executioners and victims, masters and slaves, dominant and dominated, it is that, on the contrary, a *fundamental heterogeneity* can exist between those groups. If it is necessary to look for a line of demarcation between them, it is certainly not the "Stalinist" line that always situates perversion in the camp of the masters (for example, homosexuality, "social crime") and the innocent norm in that of the victims. This line passes rather between those (the masters) who are at worst ready to determine what by definition can only escape them: "knowledge of the enjoyment of the other," and those for whom this question does not arise, does not exist (and who can therefore ingeniously practice what bourgeois morality labels as perversion, homosexuality for example). This line of demarcation is otherwise far more serious than what presides over the usual games of sado-maso reversibility with its abject moralism (Kazan) or its schizoid aestheticism (Jancso), not to speak of the stupidity of "retro fashion."

For Pasolini — such was the postulate of his "optimistic" trilogy —, there is a *simple access of the people to pleasure* which nothing and nobody can undermine. Conversely, masters *desire desiring*. In vain. To support the fiction of their desire, to find a cause for it, they summon the popular body, in the most violent way, to interrogate (seduction, prostitution, torture, question) the secret, to presuppose it an enjoyment *in itself*, to regulate and to feed itself. We can say that in *Saló*, they give again the spectacle of their failure, but this time *in vitro*. To the degree that they advance, they come to destroy the very object of the experiment, the raw material of the film. The Sadean staging is quite incapable of giving them the key to this disarming secret: the access to pleasure.

Disarming. It can be said: pleasure isn't sufficient for resisting barbarism. The popular resistance, for Pasolini, is not only the refusal (the one who tries to escape and whom? a barrage slaughters, the one who cuts their throat), nor the claim of another politics (the boy with the raised fist). There is also a resistance that is commensurate with the failure of the masters to obtain the slightest desire, an amoral resistance that is reflected in the collection of small pleasures stolen from despotic regulation, against all odds. Little pleasures, pairings that are born in the hollows of the film, the moments of the relaxation of mastery, and which are located in the element of the *same*, of the *between-selves*. The youngest amongst them (by definition), boys (those who dance), girls (those who sleep), servants (the boy with the raised fist and the black maid). It is this between-self, this narcissism which, for Pasolini, is a resistance and a bulwark to the strategy of the masters whose logic is to demand the most violent heterogeneity: montages between the high and the low, the noble and the disgusting, young and old, etc.

In this staging, the (future) victims bend, some with disgust, others with resignation ("Do it for the Madonna," says one girl to another), some even with amused detachment. From what is required of them, they do not want to understand anything; the enjoyment of the masters comes to them like a series of whims and does not concern them (even if they die of it). The realistic aspect of which I spoke above, its exactitude, is in this reproduction of the prostitutional situation. Again, there is not much circulation between the "simple pleasures of the people" and the masters' "desire to desire."

This is confirmed by the film's own order, its "form." The atrocity is not only what is fixed in the plans (torture, coprophilia), it is the traumatic character of those plans, because nothing can predict them. They are like an outbidding horror where there has been no auction. This is because in *Saló* (all the cruelty of the film is there), all the functions of *coupling*, in which we usually recognize the filmmaker's desire to seduce and corrupt his viewer by putting before him the fact of his desire to achieve (that

something happens, that there is fiction), all such functions are doomed to an absolute *blunder*.

Take the female "historians." They are so terribly inefficient, nil, and stupid, only because they are a parody of what they are in Sade. In Sade, the use (exhaustion) of language in *all* its forms (describe, convince, excite, warn, educate, ejaculate, recount, etc.); in Pasolini, the failure of language to make any fictional coalescence take place: the weakness of the historians' narratives, the silliness of the masters' comments, the silence of the victims. And it is not only language that fails, but vision, too. There is nothing to voyeurism. When at the end of the film the masters observe the tortures through binoculars, they always have another master in their field of vision. Mastery only sees mastery.

That there is nothing in common between the executioners and the victims, between, for example, the great bourgeoisie and the people, is the central idea of Pasolini, his irresolute wish. It thus falls short of Wilhelm Reich's question ("Why did the masses want fascism?"). It is because there exists in him a populism "of principle" in which the people are completely indifferent to the enjoyment of the master. It is not a coincidence that Pasolini found this people (of whom he also dreamed) ever more in the past (the Middle Ages), culture (Boccaccio, Chaucer), and the East (*A Thousand and One Nights*). Because fascism is something else. It is when the very question of *ressentiment*, of an impossible knowledge about "the enjoyment of the other" (see the beautiful text by Daniel Sibony, "Remarks on Racial Affect"),¹ becomes a vital question for those whom Pasolini hates and ignores as much as he can: the *petit bourgeois*, the people who became "*petit-bourgeois*." Pasolini's final despair: "*There is nothing joyful about sex anymore. Young people are ugly and desperate, bad and defeated. Sex is today the satisfaction of a social obligation and not a pleasure against social obligations. And I cannot even hate the bourgeoisie anymore, because today, in the country where I live, everyone is bourgeois.*"

¹ In *Elements for an Analysis of Fascism*, Vol. II, 10/18, 141.

Pasolini is condemned to a kind of irremediable innocence. Master (of school, then famous artist), but master defamed, he is in a place incomprehensible to himself: two groups of bodies, entangled in History, forces of life and forces of death, make for him the crucifying ordeal of their bodies to an imaginary body.

HYPERION

On the future of aesthetics

RENÉ CHAR

Baudelaire Displeases Nietzsche



Caspar David Friedrich, *Seascape in the Moonlight* (ca. 1835)

Translated by Rainer J. Hanshe

It's
Baudelaire who postdates and sees only his boat of suffering, when he
designates us as we are.
Nietzsche, perpetually seismic, cadaster of all our agonistic territory.
My two water carriers.

Obligation, without taking breath, to rarefy, to hierarchize beings and
things encroaching upon us.

Understand who can.
The pollen no longer foments a multiple future crashing against
the rock face.

Whether we challenge order or chaos,
we obey laws that we have not instituted intellectually.
We approach it with the step of a mutilated giant.

From what do we suffer the most?
From worry.
We are born in the same torrent, but we row differently,
amongst the maddened stones.
Worry?
Guard instinct.

Sons of nothing and promised to nothing,
we would have only a few gestures to make
and a few words to give.
Refusal.
Let us forbid our surly door to the hurling mygales,
the usurers of the desert.
The non-vulgarizable work, with broken shutter, doesn't inspire
enforcement, only the feeling of its renewal.

What we hear during sleep, it is the beating of our heart,
not the lightning of our idle soul.

To die is to pass through the eye of the needle after multiple foliations.
We must go through death to emerge before life,
in the state of sovereign modesty.

Who still calls?
But the answer is not given.
Who still calls for unbridled waste?
The open treasure of the clouds that escorted our life.

HYPERION

On the future of aesthetics

MARCELLO FALETRA

Philippe Berson's Dance of Death: The Repressed of Beauty



Cappuccino mon amour (2017). Installation detail. Photo: Gaetano Costa

Translated by Francesco Caruso

The Baroque poet Francisco de Quevedo once wrote: “Those bones are the cast on which the flesh of man is modeled” (Obras Jocosas). These words may suffice to grasp the drama of death that for over thirty years Philippe Berson, an unclassifiable artist, has been staging in his installations. In some respect, his oeuvre follows a tradition that from Rimbaud to Cendrars and from Bataille to Jodorowsky focuses on the repressed of beauty: evil. Our society is obsessed with what it has always sold off to the highest bidder — beauty, that is. Today, having rhetorically retrieved that beauty as a “lost object,” that same society finds in Berson’s installations a clear and simple answer: the beauty of the body is a surface effect. “If men could see what is under the skin,” observed Odon of Cluny, “they would shudder... All that grace consists of mucus and blood, humors and bile.” Similarly, returning to an underground, heretical tradition, Berson shows what the myth of beauty in fact conceals: abjection, or the powers of horror (Kristeva).

On the other hand, beauty taken as surface effect of the body is a shape where goodness is purged from evil, beauty from ugliness, exactness from excess, and so on. Berson overthrows such a theater of horrors, that community where beauty and evil impersonate social and individual roles.

The incorruptibility of beauty is traced back to its spectral matrix: a pile of bones, which lives only in the theatricality of a *danse macabre*. From the body as a form to the body as an event of the end, Berson’s macabre drama finds its tragic and at the same time aesthetic side. The desocialization of death, which imposed itself with XIX century industrial society, made it the materialization of its living spectrum: the skeleton. It is from this assumption that all of Berson’s work moves. His dances of death tell of how our unleashed imagination looks at the body and its contingencies, a body whose alleged beauty, so cherished today, is its most apparent symptom.

Whereas beauty can be the object of narration and representation, and generates consensus, death is unspeakable and disorienting and creates loneliness. What remains of its symbolic dimension is the fetishistic capital we do not want to give up: bones and ashes. Indeed, today death is not a collective, but an individual matter.



Cappuccino mon amour (2017). Installation detail. Photo: Gaetano Costa.

How to Represent Death?

For a long time, graves and tombs as they were fashioned in the Middle Ages and in the Renaissance conveyed an idea of rest. As it was described in ancient sarcophagi and literature, from Petrarch to Suso to Gerson — authors whose treatises on death covered a span of two centuries (XIV–XV) — death was deprived of its horrors. In those writers the relationship with death has something of an alchemical nature, being mediated by a literature that has all the features of a craft: the art of dying well, *ars moriendi*. But the difference between the dance of death and the art of dying was clear. In the former death is never fully exhibited, while in the latter it appears in a direct and peculiar way. Still, in both cases, the dead, all dead, had something heroic and epic about them. Death was represented as a serene and anxiety-free event. The Council of Trent (1570) marked a radical change in the public display of death images. Skulls, skeletons, and bones invaded the collective imagination and began haunting the prayers of religious orders such as the Jesuits. Popes, kings, and princes asked to be portrayed next to skulls and skeletons. From that moment on, death became a recurring decorative element in painting.

From Zurbaran to De La Tour, from Van Dyck to De Pereda up to Ribera, the fetishes of death populated the scene of the Baroque stage. To entertain a dialogue with death became necessary, something that the Church conveniently exploited. It is at this time that death begins to be “obscene” in the modern sense of the word, displaying itself in all its theatricality and cruelty, sparing no one. It is the triumph of *vanitas*. In the span between the deferred eternity granted by the Church and Andy Warhol’s 15 minutes, we find the whole historical and aesthetic drama of death: from death as essence to death as appearance. From the theological management of death to its industrial organization, we can detect the signs of the world’s progressing “disenchantment” with death. The dead were expelled from the city and separated from communities to reappear as ghosts, nightmares, and obsessions. The medieval troubadours spoke of death as if it were a “someone,” as though its powers were embodied in a persona. That modern death which accompanies Baudelaire’s verses is instead anonymous and faceless. Eventually, anguish in the face of death will be straightforwardly violent, appear horrific, and bear the traits of a monstrous fact. From the sublimation of death (eternity) to the de-sublimation of death (as something ephemeral and individual), from salvation at the dawn of modernity to putrefaction in post-modernity, the annihilation of the body, once collectively displayed and shared, has now shifted to an individual dimension. Driven out of the circle of the living, death returns, as in movies, in the violence of disasters or in the ghostliness of zombies. It is in this historical scenario that Berson’s installations mark their presence, testifying to the end of the dead as a collective experience. In fact, the very determination with which his installations of skeleton are assembled — or symphonically orchestrated, even — is the most obvious symptom of this loss of collective function of death. The skeletons are there to tell us that they stand as the repressed of our separation from them.

And as in a dance of death, they look at us from their nothing made of bones reassembled into human form.



Inhale expel (2016). Performance created by Philippe Berson, with Marika Pugliatti
Photo: Gaetano Costa



Balancoire (2017). Performance. Photo by Libera Aiello.

What is *Vanitas*?

We alluded to Berson's installations as to a re-actualization of *vanitas*. But what is *vanitas*? It is a representation (especially pictorial, but also theatrical as in Kantor, or performative as in Berson) where the displayed objects — skulls & various symbols generally connected to



Kamikaze, ou la capitulation (2004). Installation. Photo: Gaetano Costa.



Kamikaze, ou la capitulation (2004). Performance. Photo: Gaetano Costa.

the contemplative, sensitive, political life — are arranged in such a way as to convey a moral lesson to the observer. *Vanitas* warns against the emptiness of an existence enslaved to objects, power, & an only seeming happiness. Bones & fetishes, above all, have become the mirror of the living. It is a macabre theater that harms reason: death has no explanations. Berson's entire corpus revolves around that wound which triggers a paradoxical rebirth of the allegory of *vanitas*, which, like all *vanitates* (evolution of medieval *danse macabres*), stages the "democratic" nature of death. Death performs a strictly egalitarian justice. But far more than death itself, it is the double or substitute object that disturbs & unsettles us in Berson's works. In his dances of death there is no ascent without reflection on the skeleton and the flesh, on the hardness of the former and the inane caducity of the latter. All his oeuvre centers on creatures petrified in the raw materiality of the remains of life. This necessity, implacably intrinsic to our being and co-essential to our gaze, can be seen as a very special kind of negative path to the experience of art in relation to death. For certain aspects, especially in some of Berson's works (mummies, totem-like figures), one can see the counterpart of what in ancient times were the *Kolosoi*, which were strictly connected to Psyché: *eidola*, doubles, in fact. Firmly grounded *Menhirs* pointing to the absent breath of life.

Here what is possible becomes what is unthinkable. The evidence of the depletion of the flesh, stripped of any quality of the living, subsists in the merely physical space of the remains, and opens up to the dismal sight of nothingness. Berson focuses on the nullity of all things &, not unlike the allegories of the Baroque *vanitas*, pursues the destruction of taboos. The recovery of the *vanitas* motif in his works reveals a kind of ontology of evil as understood by Georges Bataille, for whom eroticism was the complete acceptance of all aspects of life, including death. In this process, the corpse, or what remains of it, becomes an irreversible fusion of ornament and wreckage, and like a still life, reveals the invincibility of the catastrophe that inhabits it. There, the abandonment to death as final image & the ensuing hallucinated vision mark the wrinkled *phusis* against the putrefaction of the bones and enslaves life to a Triumph of Death.



Colosso (2006). Photo: Gaetano Costa.

Totems or statues?

Whatever we answer, the point is that of the relation between the *Kolosoi* and Psyché.

Now, the absolute independency of death constitutes a breach in the realm of experience, a deep cut in the blinding certainty of life. Berson sees death not as modification of forms, but as destruction of their becoming. For him, death is the advent of the informal or of deformation. If the alteration of a form into another is a metamorphosis, shifting from the fullness of life to the emptiness of death means embracing the completely other: it is a hyperbolic and ultimate mutation.

The double, as a fetish, is the home to the absent, like the Etruscan shadows of the night inspiring Giacometti: spindly, barely visible apparitions. An existence close to death. A threshold between the visible and the invisible. Not unlike the *eidolon*, which is indiscernible — the double has an existence, it actually lives, but only as long as it replaces something else, in the absence of others. It is the shiver left by the disappearance that death causes. In Berson the double does not capture the permanence of the identical in time, but rather its waning, its ghostly becoming, that is, its ultimate transformation.

In this shift, identity is implied in alterity and the double intersects reality. The insistence on the fact that the double affects reality points to the allegorical and disquieting vision of *vanitas*. Hence, for Berson, experiencing art means being aware that we sink down before reality; its ghostly quality lies in the unique features of nothingness, which the vision of the bones mercilessly displays.

But as they emerge from the absence, Berson's *menhir*-like sculptures provoke another reflection: they are the non-identical through which man perceives his feeble link with life. This fragility is the immediate evidence that time is irreversible and affects reality. On the contrary, it is possible to say that there is no real that is not subject to its own double. Only God has no double.

For the very fact that a certain reality is exposed to its duplication it ceases to be credible. The existence of the double and of the substitute-objects (*menhir*-sculptures) thus unmasks an ultimate deception of the real, displaying the lacerations that project it into the ephemeral. In this sense, each sculpture by Berson tells us that the

real is that which is mortal. And for this reason, all his oeuvre could be seen as an endless exercise aimed at providing us with the contemporary equivalent of a Danse Macabre, whose only ornament is the ordered and theatrical disposition of what remains of life: a pile of bones.



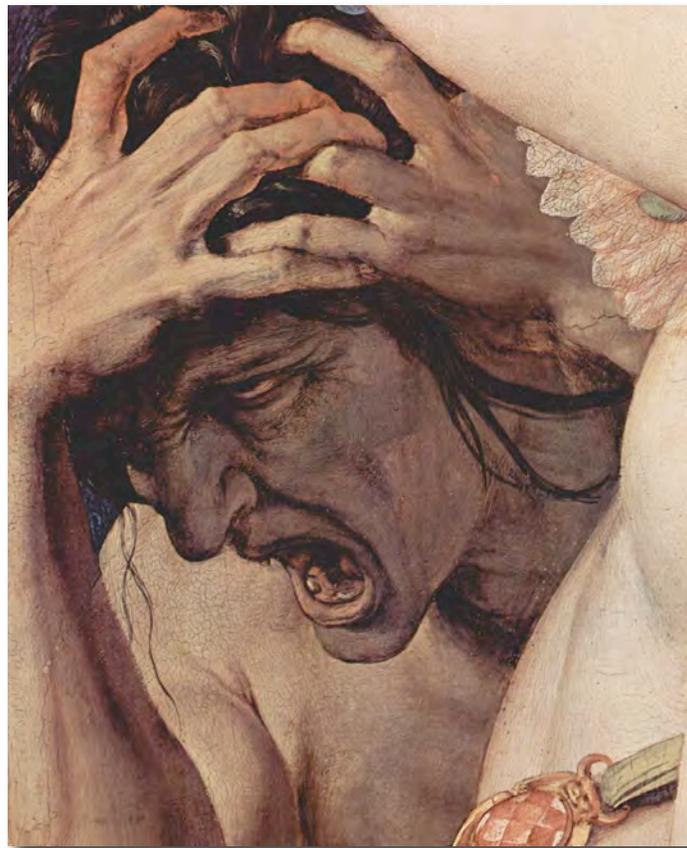
Cappuccino mon amour (2000).
Photos: Alessandro Di Giugno



Cappuccino mon amour (2000).

THE ALGEBRA OF TRAGEDY

Interview with Mehdi Belhaj Kacem by Jean-Clet Martin¹



Bronzino, detail from *Venus, Cupid, Folly, and Time* (1540–45)

Translated by Rainer J. Hanshe

¹ Originally published on October 27, 2014 on *Strass de la philosophie*, accessible here:
http://strassdelaphilosophie.blogspot.fr/2014/10/algebre-de-la-tragedie-entretien-avec_27.html

1. — Editions Léo Scheer just released “Algebra of Tragedy” in a very contemporary collection. It thus acts as a reprise of a section of *The Spirit of Nihilism*.² The text has progressed since that first draft, and because it received a supplement that precedes it — or comes after —, proofed by Tristan Garcia. How to read it anew when the author approached, commented, discovered himself as a reader, in the prism of a close or miniaturized vision as Tristan said from the first pages?

Mehdi Belhaj Kacem: “Algebra of Tragedy” is the last section of *The Spirit of Nihilism*, which was released to relative indifference at the time: the size and density of the book, the total absence of academic responses, and suddenly, the core of people who had read it almost all told me: why didn’t you publish “Algebra” alone? You would have been read far more. And indeed I was a bit sorry for not having done that. It is a pivotal text for me, in the sense that, until then, me, a perfect autodidact, had never considered myself a ‘philosopher,’ but rather a philosopher-essayist, a theorist practicing the concept for specific reasons (the phenomenology of the ‘collective’ post-avant-gardist, *Evidenz* or *Tiqqun*, for example),³ ideally à la Artaud, Bataille, Debord: as an “intellectual philosopher” (it’s a phrase, unfair to the rest, which uses Habermas to qualify Adorno, the ethico-philosophico-political figure who for me is absolutely tutelary). The other three sections of *The Spirit of Nihilism* are essays, research, and experiments on others’ concepts. There were, of course, bits of systematicity, but I wasn’t looking for the system-of-the-system.

And yet! “Algebra of Tragedy,” which came to me like a breath, written in a state of very great nervous intensity, proved to be the pure and simple birth of a system, which I have today fully perfected.

To answer part of your question, no, I did not correct or revise it, nor even read it before it came out. As Tristan points out, there are still historical ‘compromises’ with Badiou, and the last two

² *L’esprit du nihilisme: Une ontologique de l’Histoire* (Paris: Fayard, 2009).

³ *Evidenz* is a magazine Kacem founded with friends who were a kind of Bataillean community. *Tiqqun* is a French collective of authors and activists formed in 1999. They published two journals in 1999 & 2001, as well as the books *Théorie du Bloom* and *Théorie de la jeune fille*. — For one discussion of *Evidenz* & *Tiqqun*, see this interview with Kacem in *Purple Diary*: <http://purple.fr/magazine/ss-2011-issue-15/mehdi-belhaj-kacem-4/>

pages are totally obsolete, for example; but, as to the rest, everyone saw in reading it again that the break with Badiou was inevitably apparent. To paraphrase Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy: no book can escape the tests of time, but a text cannot be modified by revisionism; it must endure and face its own temporally situated singularity, as well as its own errors. On re-reading it, it appears very thin: with the exception of the mathematics=ontology thesis, I say nothing of Badiou's metaphysics that I would continue to maintain today; as to the rest, it's the birth of 'my' own system that one encounters.

So: philosophy by chance, system by chance, and yet philosophy in the most demanding sense of the term, system in the strongest sense: an organic interaction of all the produced concepts. At the same time, we can focus on a simple conceptual 'moment' of construction, without losing its little ones (and many of my 'regular' readers still read me like that!) I think of Stéphane Domeracki, who due to his personal background cannot even think of philosophy as a 'system'), but all the same, to fully understand the whole movement, we must understand the whole movement! A brilliant American academic spoke to me emphatically of things that I would never have even dared to think in a whisper (it's true that it's about an unpublished subject, which I will evoke later). On the 'ratio' between conceptual systematicity (in the really 'classical' sense, Spinozist-Hegelian, the term, all proportions of course kept) and 'autodidacticism.' I do not dare to repeat what he said to me, it's overwhelming. That's why I took my distance from it all for two years: "It's too big for me," as Deleuze summed up the "little health" (Spinoza, Hölderlin, Nietzsche — himself, Deleuze!); it's sort of like "falling on me": I found myself with a philosophical system on my hands when nothing prepared me for it. So that's what "Algebra" 'represents' in my journey: the thrilling 'live' birth of a system. It acted as a sort of metaphysical psychoanalysis: everything I had written before, including literature, which I thought was somewhat schizophrenic, scattered, fragmented, without any immediately readable cohesion from one book to another, 'concatenated' in a conceptual articulation for which modesty prevented me for years from daring to use the word 'system.' A system that I

recapitulated in an unpublished book in French, *La Transgression et l'Inexistant*, which is coming out soon from the Anglo-Saxon publisher Bloomsbury.⁴ Steve Light, an American scholar, said of the book: “We have never seen this: such a pure autodidact producing such a refined system!” And it’s overwhelming, because you don’t expect it at all.

So, on the one hand, I’ve often been criticized for not publishing that text in a way; alternatively, at the end of the conference devoted to my work, which was held at the ENS in Ulm in 2013, several people, impressed by the Tristan Garcia conference, suggested that I republish “Algebra,” for example in English, with a preface or afterword of the improved text from Tristan’s conference. At that time, as I said, I didn’t tend to it at all, I was caught up in a ‘Rimbaudian’ impulse to flee from everything related to culture (or, to quote Lacoue-Labarthe: “to destroy everything and not to hear of anything,” that was the only *Stimmung*); I did not respond. And then, ‘telepathically,’ Leo Scheer had the same idea (on reading the novel, hum hum, how to say? ‘the thesis,’ or ‘the key,’ of Tristan: “Faber the destroyer”).

My relation to Tristan? I read *Form and Object* before it was published⁵ — I hardly knew that Tristan read me (a novel from my twenties, he said to me simply) — and immediately praised it (it’s there all the same!) in places where I could (*La revue littéraire, Chronicart*), disinterestedly: I in no way imagined that Tristan had read my philosophical experiments. I don’t see any “tit for tat” in that: it’s just that, in the nihilism in which we bathe, it’s moving to discover a young man who undertakes such an ambitious philosophical work, and it’s for that reason that I have praised him.

Tristan has read “Algebra” in his own way: his afterword is no longer a kind of double hologram of my text, where he finally deploys ‘his’ own phenomenology of contemporary nihilism, a commentary on my text in the strict sense, some system of which he lays even less of a foundation (among all the participants of the col-

⁴ *Transgression & the Inexistent: A Philosophical Vocabulary*, tr. by P. Burcu Yalim (2014). The French edition was published in 2016 by META-Éditions.

⁵ Tristan Garcia, *Forme et objet. Un traité des choses* (2011). In English: *Form and Object: A Treatise on Things*, tr. by Mark Allan Ohm and Jon Cogburn (2014).

loquium, Tristan is the only one who has still not read *Transgression* because of a combination of personal circumstances. As a result, his text is the most 'personal': (almost) all of the others really dialogue with 'my system' with thoroughness, because they had read *Transgression*!). However, I must admit that the great emotion provoked in me by his reading at the time (all the more so, I repeat, since I hardly wrote or read anything at all: I was looking for "the simple stupidity" of which Rimbaud spoke, without finding the expected relief, unfortunately), was, all the same, the first time that a text of this force placed my work in a historical perspective. Including, it must be said, the mode of "the King is dead, long live the King." Of course the tribute, coming from someone of his talent, touched me (as with you, when you made that superb article so premonitory of my path: "Lacoue kills Badiou"!). Afterwards, there are two more parallel texts: a sort of editorial tennis. Two divergent speculative 'solutions' to the same problem: nihilism. He offers a kind of passive acceptance of the formal equality of the entire proliferation of objects that overwhelm us today (we do not know how, but I will return to that); I propose rather a deconstruction, and even an outright destruction, of the very concept (Nietzscheo-Heideggerian) of 'nihilism,' to get to the bottom of what was hidden in the question of evil, of supernumerary, atrocious suffering, which mankind has been inflicting upon itself ever since its appearance.

How do I relate then to his work? A big question. There are many answers, which will come in their own time. But I will summarize the key strategic point: for me, the history of ontologies in philosophy is over, for many reasons; moreover, I believe that we lose nothing in renouncing the great ontological ambition, but that we gain (I believe in a thought of being, a paradoxical logic of being, but no ontology, and about that I have no nostalgia: I believe, on the contrary, that it's profoundly liberating, whilst claiming the 'ontological' posture, — even if it is as 'democratic' as possible, Tristan dixit — we enclose ourselves in a whole bunch of constraints that could be dispensed with, to say it sharply: why seek to create an ontology that allows one to speak with 'equanimity' of the whole, when there is no whole?). So that, when Tristan alleges

to 'innovate' by claiming a 'flat' ontology, we hear: the least hegemonic, the most 'deflationary,' the least possibly burdened of the classic requisites (and always 'hierarchizing': the more one is to be, the better it is, whilst Tristan says the opposite: even the 'least possible being' has the right to 'ontological dignity'), for me, he delivers rather, without noticing, the very truth of the whole history of ontology. What is that? "The science of the most general and universal." So: by definition, ontology is flat, has always been flat. Its only problem is that ontology never knew it, until Tristan, who consciously/unconsciously embodies the necessary diagnosis. Without quite realizing it, Tristan says: ontology can no longer be anything but 'flat'; it can no longer pretend to ignore that it is condemned to that 'platitude.' Basically, he is resigned, through a very strong strategic intelligence to the thing, to a solution that is not only the most elegant, but basically the only possible solution: to a minimalist ontology, bringing everything back to its lowest common denominator — the thing. The exact reason for which I happily pass by any ontology whatsoever. The last thesis on ontology, and by far the strongest, is Badiou's, but it failed: I demonstrated in my work, very rigorously, why and how. After, you must read... I want to grant Tristan 'his' ontology: the flatter, the more 'cowardly' possible, the more welcoming and democratic (he even says: liberal). He speaks in his text about me of a "fatigue of the negative," of which I would be the phenomenologist (which is only partly true); I would gladly say that he, under the pretext of producing the most refined ontology of his time, expresses, on the contrary, and explicitly, a symptom at once flagrant and unconscious as such, of the fatigue of ontology itself. Of a certain historical exhaustion of ontology itself, and that is what 'nihilism' is: the fact that the hypostatized bodies, idealized by metaphysics as eternal and imperishable, proved to be as finite, perishable, and mortal as the physical bodies they wanted to overtake and belittle. Garcia is the ontologist of the moment, no more, no less.

2. — *In your "Algebra" there is a sketch of a relation with Hegel of which you probably know that I am not left out. And between Garcia and you, it opened a whole discussion about the relation of the univer-*

sal to the particular, even to the singular, the singular being that which in the wake of the dialectical machine would not be strictly recoverable — waste without relief —, which would be an undeconstructible inheritance whose philosophy of difference apparently has nothing to accomplish. Could you clarify the contours of these concepts: singularity, difference, negation.

MBK: That you are not outdone, I know all the better because the masterly reading that you made of Hegel in *A Criminal Plot of Philosophy* — to me as striking as those of Kojève and Marquet — is at the heart of this. What do I have to say about the relationship between negativity and difference? I pay homage to the profound influence that this book has had on my thought in *Transgression and the Inexistent*.

As I say provocatively, and yet not without a very solid foundation of truth, I deploy a kind of ‘Hegelianism of difference.’ Pure oxymoron! But indeed what I say about all of that could not be thought of either by Hegel or by the philosophers of difference.

Everything starts from the dazzling reading that Lacoue devotes to Rousseau in *Poetics of History*. What is he discovering? That Hegel’s *Aufhebung*, the famous engine of negativity, the anthropological agent of the surpassing of the given, is nothing other than an unconscious translation, via Rousseau precisely, of Aristotle’s *katharsis*. The Hegelian system — tardily erected from the rest, as you show well, under the influence of academic constraints, and certainly not in *The Phenomenology of the Spirit*, where we live so to speak ‘live,’ in the most complete anarchy, in the style of a historical bacchanal of human negativity, pleonasm —, that system, I say, after having read Lacoue, appears for what it is: an extension of the ‘kathartic’ operator, which Aristotle confided to art, to every sector of human activity. What to say? That the ‘kathartic’ effect is the result of the anthropological ‘weapon’ *par excellence*, which is the mimetic capacity: imitating phenomena that, experienced directly, are at a high degree of ‘pain’ as we say today, imitating horrible, atrocious, abominable events, etc., well, tragedy transforms, as is well known, so to speak alchemically, the affects that arouse these negative affects: terror & pity, says Aristotle. That is to say, such affects, unsustainable if lived ‘directly,’ in the

real presence of a real atrocity, become, in the tragic performance, positive, voluptuous affects. They are suppressed as negative affects, as extreme affects of human 'hardship,' & simultaneously they are preserved, since it is still terror and pity in attending King Oedipus, Electra — exceeding, suppressing, & at the same time preserving what is suppressed in a modified form, which is that exceeding itself. It is the Hegelian *Aufhebung*, entirely expelled. That is the brilliant discovery of Lacoue: the Hegelian system of 'positive' negativity is a staggering translation of Aristotle's *katharsis*.

In other words: production. Marx, Hegel's reader, will not lose a crumb. What is technology? Suppression-preservation-exceeding of 'given' materials. This table on which I write is made of wood. To build it, I had to suppress a tree, which I kept, however, as wood. The form of this exceeding is the table. Good news for us: just as Hegel was much more Heraclitic than Parmenidian, he proves himself to be much more Aristotelian than Platonist. And there is not a single area of human existence that bears any trace of that 'kathartic' phenomenality. And that is the 'Hegelianism of difference': to show how the 'kathartic' operator, present in the most infinitesimal detail of our flatter everyday life, produces innumerable and unforeseeable differences: they do not balance out in the initial Hegelian 'identity' horizon. For example, recently, I showed how it worked, that mimetico-kathartic machinery, that *Aufhebung* of a kind of differential-integral productivism, in the constellations of our sexual practices.

Without your discreet reinterpretation of the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, I would not have made all those connections. What is at the origin of this productivist *katharsis*? The mimetic distance. The animal eats the grass directly, as you say. Man breaks this cycle by appropriating the being of the grass. "Instead of devouring the grain, he plants it; he suspends his instinct of self-preservation and doesn't throw himself onto the produce of the earth," you say. The animal immediately devours what falls under the necessity of food; the techno-mimetic animal, by ourselves, by short-circuiting this instinct, produces at the same time a greater exponential consumer, production, and something else, which we shall speak of later.

As you say: the act of techno-mimetic appropriation, —hunting, agriculture, and therefore the birth of the first chiefdoms, therefore the famous master/slave dialectic: modern paleo-anthropology confirms Rousseau and Hegel — product of ‘new outlets’ — an expression of yours that I like very much, and often repeat myself.

Why mimicry, not just technology? Because the birth of the animal of technological virtuosity, ourselves, is closely dependent upon a superlative ability to imitate: what is agriculture, if not an imitation of the laws of efflorescence, which “produces new business opportunities”? What is hunting and breeding, if not imitations of the laws of predation? Suppression, exceeding, and at the same time, preservation. *Aufhebung*, that is, actually *katharsis* extended to all areas of human activity. And such are not ‘concepts’: it’s the whole of the anthropological facticity such as verifiable to the naked eye. It is from that wholeness that my work erects a panoramic phenomenology.

What does Hegel miss? The mimetic moment. From this point of view, I remain entirely faithful to the achievements of the philosophies of difference: metaphysics, for a very long time, has hidden difference under identity. The latter was the metaphysical illusion, the misinterpretation *par excellence* of being, which is, in fact, ‘only’ a difference. Hölderlin, against his little friends of the *Stift*, will see it first: being is not identity but disruption.⁶ What my work, here at the crossroads of Lacoue and Jean-Clet [Martin], demonstrates a bit innovatively is, I think, this: identification is the metaphysical weapon, that is to say, it is technological *par excellence*. For a long time humanity has deluded itself into the very being, the hyper-appropriating chance with which nature had provided it, the strength to identify — what Aristotle, always smarter than his Master, recognized purely and simply in mimesis — hypostatizing it in the eternal, the immortal, the imperishable, etc. Since we could identify without limits (ourselves, the techno-mimetic animals), then inevitably an ultimate Identity had to ‘remain’ behind everything.

⁶ A reference to Hölderlin’s time at the Tübinger Stift, where he was a fellow-student with Hegel and Schelling, and his 1795 piece “Judgment and Being” (*Urteil und Sein*). See Friedrich Hölderlin, *Essays and Letters on Theory*, tr. by Thomas Pfau (1987).

In other words: the capacity, mimetic virtuosity, is the force of identification itself: laws of vegetable efflorescence, of predation, and finally of the entirety of the 'same' being, with logic, mathematics, mathematical physics, astronomy, etc. Science is the power of identifying being, from a mimetic impulse that had emerged from a singular animal only a few tens of millennia ago. Metaphysics has long hypostatized that techno-mimetic super-power in a 'secret' lurking in being itself: the Identity of all things, the Grail of metaphysics from Parmenides to Hegel. On this point, the 'reversal' of the philosophies of difference (of which Garcia makes a very thin case all the same) is, for me, a definitive achievement: the determinance of being is under the sign of difference, not of a hitherto illusory identity, because initially, instrumentally prodigious.

Where is the dispute, the anxiety, about philosophies of difference, the point where I 'threaten' them? It is a kind of chiasmus: it is the identifying virtuosity, the techno-mimetic virtuosity itself, which produces difference, in inflation. The fund of being is difference; but the event is still an intensive exponent, an 'explosion' of that fund. And no event, in this respect, is more intensive than the emergence of a superlatively clever primate, genetically endowed with an exceptional capacity for language (it needed such virtuosity to coordinate the strategic efforts of mammoth hunters: to transmit sophisticated information). That's what you say about Hegel: an animal does not touch its being, it repeats itself in the mode of limited appropriation — feeding, but also, already, consciousness and simple perception — which is his: a herd of cows from 10 to 1,000 years ago can be mistaken for the flock I see through the window of my country house. The dinosaurs have dominated our planet for nearly 150 million years, without producing anything but morphogenetic events, which is obviously not bad, and attests already that life, that imprognostic miracle, is an event that superabundantly produces difference, which is called biodiversity. No more intensive differences on our tiny planet, under the only biological relation, than in all the cosmos so far known (by science! which means that science also creates a difference in this one mode: discovery, imprognostic description, not just production). Finally, in a few millennia of 'civilizations,' we get more

quantifiable, intensive differences than in hundreds of millions of years of pure biological 'self-production' (since technology, as we know it since Aristotle, is the production by another 'thing,' as Garcia would say).

This capacity, which is superior to the production of difference, the techno-mimetic event, the meta-physical virtuosity (let us say: the imitation of *phusis*, the appropriation of its laws by science), was paid for by a procession of horrors, of atrocities, which did not exist on earth before. "History is (no longer) the history of the good" of metaphysicians, as Adorno said, "but of horror": slavery, mutilation, poisoning, torture, epidemiological inflations, etc. And, today: a threat every day more immanent, every day more inevitable, sleepwalking, self-suppression of the animal spoiled by his virtuosity. In other words: the maximum capacity for the event, that is to say, for difference does indeed seem to end, contrary to all that metaphysics believed, with a sort of proportionate precariousness. (Moreover, the most sharpened anthropologists — I think of Jared Diamond — empirically reach the same conclusion: the appearance of *homo sapiens* on earth coincides with a capacity hitherto unheard of: that of incessant innovation, ever more accelerated and abundant, but also, from the beginning, of a devastation of 'biotopic' environments). Life is a hyper-productive event of differences compared to the so far discovered physical universe, but also more 'rapidly' precarious. And the techno-mimetic being, which intensifies, by identification and appropriation, that 'fertility' of being as an event — awakes today from its 'supremacist,' 'eternalist' illusion, paraphrased by metaphysicians and theologians, and it sees that it is mortal not only individually, but henceforth as a species.

Such is what 'concerns' me, in broad outline, about philosophies of difference; and here is the rather unprecedented knot that I propose between negativity and difference. 'Hegelianism of difference' means: the *Aufhebung* — which is none other than *tekhne* as the *katharsis* of *phusis* — the imitation of this one, meta-physical — cannot be closed either in absolute knowledge or in a state of universal law where the game of the Master and the slave becomes a zero-sum day. It is a divergent proliferation, and there-

fore through unequal definition, of differences. My 'Hegelianism' is a perversion (but, once again: it is the perversion of reality even before our eyes), that is, the *Aufhebung* as a diffraction of differences. And not only is negativity 'the agent' of this diffraction, it is also its immense result: the game is not zero-sum. The differences are not only more and more unequal (the wolves higher and lower, the 'dominant males' from the animal stage), but most often, at the techno-mimetic stage, sickly, martyrological (humans, animals). The amplification of the *phusic* by technology has also excessively magnified and sophisticated the purely necessary suffering (food, predators) of the animal kingdom, into supernumerary suffering, perfectly useless and free. And our leftist academic philosophers travel around the world speaking of 'equality'! Let's open our eyes: the opposite is happening, which characterizes the human. And I do not rejoice in any way; but this word 'equality,' sentimental at best (Rancière), meta-tyrannical at worst (Badiou), I do not support philosophically anymore. If what remains of the 'left' is dying of something, that's fine. It is therefore not a matter of rejoicing (nor of renouncing the legislative, regulatory idea of equality: I would like to one day write a book that completely renews the philosophy of law). But, all the same, to deconstruct the metaphysical illusions that led the Left to shipwreck, and which still remain today kinds of sacred semantic cows, like the word 'equality,' emptied of its meaning, but serving as an empty sign rallying around from the nostalgia of the era of emancipation struggles, the terrifying contemporary ebb and flow which is so inexplicably explained by the benefit of a no less terrifying imposition, everywhere, of far-right, fascist ideologies, xenophobia, identity, etc., etc. If the conceptual workers of what we do not dare call the left do not look at the roots of this situation, do not make the (self)-critical metaphysical illusions that led us to this international fiasco, then we truly deserve no better: we are only Hegelian 'beautiful souls,' basically very satisfied with our helplessness. I dedicate a book to the question, which is a reaction to the book Domeracki devoted to Heidegger's *Cahiers Noirs*.⁷ Know: Nietzsche and Heidegger as the first symp-

⁷ *Heidegger et sa solution finale: Essai sur la violence de « la » « pensée »* (Saint-Denis: Connaissances & Savoirs: 2016).

toms, genial and monstrous, of a problem that is now entirely on our hands: the collapse of the universally positive one (which Badiou, another monstrous and awesome symptom, also continues to promote as if nothing had happened). Universalism, the anthropological aptitude of the universal, no longer as a blessing and eudemonism, but as a curse (which is quite another thing, as I will also show, with one more “anti-universalism”).

It's the same capacity of the universal (of science, of the mimetic appropriation of the laws of nature and of being) which produces the insane amplification of inequality, and not, as the on-to-theological fairy's account has so long narrated, the universal that will guarantee us, in an always repulsed again future, the equality of all. Bill Gates alone has the total GDP of 20 of the world's poorest countries; if we all consume the same energy as California alone, there could not be more than a billion and a half humans on earth (!); etc., etc. This is also the 'game' of difference, sadly. It is not an 'egalitarian' game, either 'from above' (Badiou), or 'from below' (Garcia): that's why I give all ontology a discharge. To think of being as event and as difference rather accuses the inordinately inegalitarian play of the being subject to an event worthy of the name: in the biological fence first ('Darwinism'), in the technomimetic fence next, where this unequal game reaches literally insane proportions, and where pure animal suffering and mortality grow pathetically, literally monstrous, 'atrocifying.'

My work is therefore a systematization of the most incisive intuitions of the final Lacoue: it would be necessary to speak of the way in which I have distinguished myself from the 'Badiouienne' notion of the event thanks to Lacoue (to his readings of Hölderlin), which I call archi-transgression. All of this is linked. But, for example: why are there, in the only anthropological enclosure, more differences in sexual practices and singularizations than there are in any other animal species known in isolation? Such are the kinds of things that my work explains, demonstrates exhaustively, without any shadows. And, as I said in a recent seminar: of course eroticism is one of the areas of the creation of the greatest joy, the most voluptuous singularization. But it is stupid, and today ruinous, by virtue of a liberal-libertarian 'morality' that no longer con-

sumes a lot of lesser bread, to mask itself, since anthropological sexuality is also the place of some of the most intense suffering, the most inconceivable crimes and horrors (Sade and Goya, Freud and Lacan, Bataille and Guyotat, and so many others have ruthlessly edified us on this point). What I point out, giving a lot of examples and phenomenologies (it was the book *Being and Sexuation*, published last year by Stock editions, and to which I will provide a sequel),⁸ is that what can be seen everywhere else is in sexuality: there is a singular knot, hitherto unnoticed as such, between difference and negativity. The revolutionary revisiting (thanks to Lacoue, and also Jean-Clet) of the Hegelian *Aufhebung*, in other words: of the event as a repetition, mimesis, makes it possible to determine this knot.

3. — *You spoke of the relation to flat- or object-oriented ontologies in the vicinity of Tristan Garcia and Meillassoux. It seems to me that that is indeed a line of thought of the philosophy of the extreme contemporary with/against that it will be necessary to count. Contrarily, I don't know what you think in regard to another line that crosses us today, that of the pluralism that I revived since 1988 around Deleuze, my thesis then on the idea of multiplicities, but ones which punctuate singulars toward Jean-Luc Nancy, Aurélien Barrau, but probably also Isabelle Stengers, David Lapoujade. How do you relate to this line, say, which is not very ontologisante and is not the 'everything happens' of capitalism?*

MBK: In a word: Deleuzians and Derridae! (Laughter). What to say? I am surrounded, harassed by Deleuzians (laughs). You, one of my best readers, are a dizzying reader of Deleuze, one of my best friends finishes his art history thesis, which includes only Deleuze (and Nancy).

It seems to me that, without mentioning his name, I have partly answered: it doesn't seem very possible to me to ignore that, now that difference is 'liberated' (simply because, as Kierkegaard would have said, each generation is assigned its singular task, and that fifty years ago, it was indeed the joyous "liberation of difference,"

⁸ *Être et sexuation* (Paris: Stock, 2013). This has not yet been translated into English, but *Transgression and the Inexistent* contains an appendix (189–216) entitled "Proreptic to *Being and Sexuation*."

ours is perhaps a little less joyous), it could well be affected by a negativity that the philosophies of difference are a little too eager to evacuate. A negativity that is no longer quite, therefore, that of Hegel. To put it bluntly: if a philosophy does not speak of the fact that techno-mimetic virtuosity, hence the maximum aptitude for difference, also results in a blatant exponentiation of evil and suffering (one example among a thousand: 71% of women in the world today are victims of physical abuse); that humanity may well have only a few centuries left to live, perhaps less, because of this very intensive overpowering; I do not see what it can do.

But I spoke very clearly about the ontological question in Deleuze, in a text called "being = event in Deleuze" (which will emerge in a few months, prefaced by the Deleuzian emeritus Crevoisier). As with Badiou, so of course otherwise, I conclude at the ultimate impasse of the Deleuzian ontology, as ontology. The sciences have now become too numerous, and the worlds themselves too schizophrenic (what you call, if I understood correctly, "pluriverse"), for anyone today to be able to claim "the univocity of being" (or, of course, 'minimal' ontology, which for me exhausts the question rather than solves it). But that's not the most important to me. Deleuze's initial ontological intuition (the virtual, inherited from Bergson) fascinates me (what I reject is the One-All, the 'total memory,' all that: being once again 'unified'), and his singular local investigations remain for me the summits of 20th-C thought, models of conceptual writing. Next to Artaud's essay on Van Gogh, I hold Deleuze's book on Bacon to be the most beautiful book on painting written in the 20th C. I believe that no one has taken Deleuze's thought on masochism into account as I did in my work. But, to sum it up very simply: if the 'depth' of being is difference, then ontology is for us 'the bypassed thing.' By definition.

As an autodidact, I undoubtedly need, initially, my surprise invitation to the Banquet of Contemporary Philosophy on Derrida (fifteen years ago now), then on Deleuze. Thus on Nancy. With him, I have the feeling of a badly regulated debt. I also read him a lot; his whole way of 'asking' the question of presence — for example in his aesthetic comments — influences me, I think, considerably, but I still cannot say where and how. Less than with Derri-

da (there is in my current work the rudiments of a 'deconstruction of deconstruction'), and much less (that goes without saying) than with Lacoue. That will come. Most recently, there was talk of an interview where we would have confronted his "deconstruction of Christianity" and my concept of "archi-transgression." We'll see.

I would like to comment on the first part of your question. I absolutely don't think that Meillassoux can be dismissed on the 'philosophies of the object,' in other words on the 'speculative realism' that has claimed him. There is an immense misunderstanding here. What Meillassoux has demonstrated, and I believe he has made a decisive point in the history of philosophy, is a certain expiration of the 'thoughts of correlation' — namely, the philosophical underpinnings of constructivism. One must always (since Kant) have a thinker so that there is thought. Meillassoux broke that circle, demonstratively. Suddenly, the 'speculative realists,' so often the Anglo-Saxons (it is not trivial), who do not solve the analytical chore, rushed (and Garcia! who read far more of the analytics than the 'continentals') to say: from now on, we 'innocently' have the right to make 'direct' ontologies, to speak of 'very things'! The truth is that Meillassoux's philosophy is far removed from all that. In my debate with Tristan, if it is one (and not a dialogue between the deaf), I believe that the crucial point is that he 'reproaches' me for being a too 'intensive' philosopher, and I reproach him for being a far too ecumenical philosopher ("irenic," as he says, but I don't believe in irenism: I remain Nietzschean on this point — any position is interested, there is no 'Platonic' or 'Hegelian' point of Sirius, as Badiou will have proved to us with grandiloquence): far too 'extensive.' I think the difference between 'intensity' ↔ 'extensiveness' is the key point of what separates our two philosophical practices from an abyss: as I said above, Garcia has hardly read the philosophies of difference, while, as he says in his afterword, I passed the 'required passage' for so many young academics today, analytic philosophy. It may come, but to tell the truth, and judging by the results, I don't have the impression that we're getting more conceptual innovation by burning Quine or Lewis than by revisiting Lacan or Lacoue. When I finally read Mac Taggart, he will bring me more answers than Derrida.

Meillassoux is like an exclusive inclusion, an inclusive exclusion of 'speculative realism,' and he is in my eyes at odds with 'object-oriented philosophies': he generated this entire 'movement,' but he basically stands resolutely outside. Why? For a very simple reason: he is a very profound philosopher, too! It is not insignificant that he does not hold an excessive account of analytic philosophy in his work either — his 'fund' is very resolutely 'continental,' in the noblest sense of the term. He has 'sparked' all these 'flat ontologies,' but I absolutely and literally bet my life that he does not recognize it in any way! On the contrary, his ontology is 'deep' in the most continental sense of the word: it's Schelling or Deleuze that we think of when reading it, not Lewis or Meinong. His reading was absolutely decisive for me, just like Lacoue, Schurmann, your book on Hegel, recently Jared Diamond. I'm going to finish my book about him, which has been in a drawer for two years (I repeat, I have been on a spiritual 'hunger strike' for the last two years), where, among many other things, I balance his conception of the 'virtual' with that of Deleuze. You'll see, it's something. All that to say: do not leave Meillassoux, you faithful orphans of philosophies of difference, to the 'speculative realists. Or to Badiou. He is an intensive philosopher in the almost pure state, even more so than me, in reality (which escapes, it seems to me, to Garcia). He certainly did not say, "Let's return to the very things!" We were quick to deduce from him. He said something else, a landmark. And there are also very deep dead ends that my book, I believe for the first time, will renovate. Always deal, you will see, with *Aufhebung*. As Derrida said so well: if you forget Hegel, he does not forget you (laughs).

HYPERION

On the future of aesthetics

JARED DANIEL FAGEN

**Poetics, Possibility, and Beauty:
Beckett and the Vestiges of Language**



Louis le Brocquy, *Stirrings Still* (No. XII of XV HC copies)

It is always in spite of themselves that secret minds betray the depths of their nature. Beckett's is so impregnated with poetry that it is inseparable from it.

— Emil Cioran, *Anathemas & Admirations*

As early as 1937 — just a year before the release of *Murphy*, his third book of prose and first novel to see publication — Samuel Beckett had already encountered and articulated an artistic dilemma that would culminate in a despairing *dénouement* with the completion of *The Unnamable*, the last installment of his “siege-in-the-room” trilogy written in French between 1946 and 1950, and the *Texts for Nothing* (1950–1952), a corpus of short fictions identified by Beckett scholars S.E. Gontarski and C.J. Ackerley as “an attempt to move beyond the creative impasse”¹ that, according to the latter, was pursued without success.² In his letter to Axel Kaun, referred to, more recently, as the “German Letter of 1937,” Beckett described his desire to “drill one hole after another” into language, for a “literature of the unword” in which “word-storming in the name of beauty”³ meant that beauty was not preordained or universal, corresponding to preexisting realities as language and meaning prescribed them, but a definition that demanded constant disrepair: the impoverishment of beauty’s surface by taking apart the structures that lent them form. What was distressing for Beckett was obtaining language’s originary silence through the degradation of the prose form, to engineer or attain an authentic, uncontaminated voice that might liberate expression from the limitations of reason, utility, morality, knowledge, or communication inflicted on the self. The impasse that he struggled with was how to give voice to silence and return to language what he saw as its purity and its nothingness — its *approach* toward suggested possibilities rather than its function to signify and name objects for the achievement of desirable *ends* — and to recover what Giorgio Agamben called the gesture, “to

¹ S. E. Gontarski and C. J. Ackerley, “‘The Knowing Non-Exister’: Thirteen Ways of Reading *Texts for Nothing*,” in *A Companion to Samuel Beckett*, ed. by S.E. Gontarski (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010) 289.

² See C.J. Ackerley, “The Uncertainty of Self: Samuel Beckett and the Location of the Voice,” *Samuel Beckett Today / Aujourd’hui* Vol. 14, *After Beckett / D’après Beckett* (2004) 47.

³ Martha Dow Fehsenfeld, Lois More Overbeck, George Craig, Daniel Gunn (eds), *The Letters of Samuel Beckett Volume I: 1929–1940* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009) 518–520.

expose the word in its own mediality, in its own being a means, without any transcendence.”⁴

Language, however, both corrupts and oppresses silence by the meaning it builds. In other words, the creative dilemma experienced by Beckett was an inability to extract a genuine expression from the resources at his disposal: the artifice of language and the very substance of literary prose itself, the tension between form and content created by the performance of writing and the mechanisms of those *other* voices, or techniques of fiction, which govern the action and fasten to it a significance that may or may not be the intention of the speaker or its author. The “porous and agonizing ‘I’”⁵ in *The Unnamable*, for example, is repeatedly obstructed by “stories” or inventions of the “I” that don’t belong to it and, consequently, act as its proxy:

Decidedly Basil is becoming important, I’ll call him Mahood instead, I prefer that, I’m queer. It was he told me stories about me, lived in my stead, issued forth from me, came back to me, entered back into me, heaped stories in my head [. . .] It is his voice which has often, always, mingled with mine, and sometimes drowned it completely [. . .] his voice continued to testify for me, as though woven into mine, preventing me from saying who I was, what I was, so as to have done with saying, done with listening.⁶

Additionally, “all these Murphys, Molloys, and Malones” reappear — if only briefly — from previous works, traversing the space of the page and implying a narrative continuity that proves, on the one hand, a distraction from the “I” constantly seeking a voice to claim its own, and serves, on the other hand, to remind readers

⁴ Giorgio Agamben, “Notes on Gesture,” in *Means Without End: Notes on Politics*, tr. Vincenzo Binetti and Cesare Casarino (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000) 58.

⁵ Maurice Blanchot, “Where Now? Who Now?,” in *On Beckett: Essays and Criticism*, ed. S. E. Gontarski (New York: Grove Press, 1986) 144.

⁶ Samuel Beckett, *Three Novels: Molloy, Malone Dies, The Unnamable* (New York: Grove Press, 2009) 303.

that, despite abstract abandon, *The Unnamable* remains a “novel” in which “the spirit” of the novelistic method “prevents the miracle” of speaking of and for oneself.⁷ The simultaneous operation of the “I’s” linguistic parsimony and its process of distancing itself from its tormentors is realized but unresolved, taking form in a fever of words and aporetic utterances that perhaps reveal the source of the impasse: “Method or no method I shall have to banish them in the end, the beings, things, shapes, sounds and lights with which my haste to speak has encumbered this place. In the frenzy of utterance the concern with truth.”⁸ Like beauty, truth for Beckett is nominal rather than real (in the philosophical sense) and cannot be achieved reasonably through an ordered system of referentiality but, on the contrary, through the relinquishment of everything blemished by a name and a point of reference. In *Texts for Nothing*, Gontarski says we see “a leap from Modernism to Post-Modernism,”⁹ and the stylistic approach of *The Unnamable* is further exacerbated: the *Texts* are shorter in length but no less difficult in their attempt to salvage a self through the utterance of words toward nothing rather than being, which has a stake in the world (of narrative) and, thus, meaning. Though one of the voices in “Text IV” pronounces the mistake that it’s made at having “wanted to make a story” for itself,¹⁰ and characters have been reduced to mere names without a source, the fetters of fiction, while diminished to a “trace” in “Text XIII,”¹¹ nonetheless persist as the self sinks with the ship and disintegrates into the nothing behind language which it unveiled, momentarily, through the mechanizations of prose. Moreover, it can also be gathered that, for Beckett, the limitations of the novel themselves *are* the

⁷ Ibid., 297.

⁸ Ibid., 293.

⁹ S.E. Gontarski, “From Unabandoned Works: Samuel Beckett’s Short Prose,” the “Introduction” to Samuel Beckett, *The Complete Short Prose, 1929–1989*, ed. Gontarski (New York: Grove Press, 1995) xxv.

¹⁰ Beckett, *The Complete Short Prose*, 116.

¹¹ “A trace, it wants to leave a trace, yes, like air leaves among the leaves, among the grass, among the sand, it’s with that it would make a life...” Ibid., 152.

subjects of his novels, and this point, ordinary as it might seem, additionally forces Beckett into a corner.

One way to investigate the impasse Beckett confronted in the late 1940's and early 1950's is to look more closely at the relationship between the self and the world that envelops, defines, and informs it. Rather than viewing Beckett's work as a rejection of formal, widely accepted positions on literature and philosophy, some critics have argued that — underneath the nihilism, anguish, and nothingness his oeuvre insinuates — the trajectory of Beckett's works, at least those written before the self-proclaimed impasse, owes much to aspects of Western thought insofar as it illustrates their complications to better confront them.¹² While Beckett insisted that he was by no means a philosopher,¹³ two such intellectual viewpoints that largely influenced his early prose were Cartesian skepticism and Kant's transcendental idealism, in which doubt and uncertainty undermine presumed knowledge of the material world and thus force the self to seek asylum in the abyssal terrain of its inner consciousness (the unconscious), where, without verity or a site of departure, the nothing known becomes the dreadful reality of the nothing assured. The subjective conundrum that characterizes *Molloy*, for example, is metaphorically expressed by the physical deterioration of Molloy/Moran during the journey of each through an ambiguous, unsheltered world in which the self can find respite only in its removal. Eric Prieto's study of spatial dimensions, in "Samuel Beckett and the Postmodern Loss of Place," offers an interesting interpretation of the impasse when he divides Beckett's writing career into two phases:

The first phase is characterized by Beckett's narrators' progressive loss of contact with the outside world. It stretches from his very first novel,

¹² See, for example, Sylvie Debevec Henning, *Beckett's Critical Complicity: Carnival, Contestation, and Tradition* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 1988) 5–6.

¹³ See H. Porter Abbott, "I Am Not a Philosopher," in *Beckett at 100: Revolving it All*, ed. Linda Ben-Zvi and Angela Moorjani (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008) 81.

Dream of Fair to Middling Women (written in 1932 but published in 1992), through to *The Unnamable* (1953). The second phase depicts the struggle to find a way back out into the world, which is explicitly and consistently conceived in spatial terms. This theme is first voiced toward the end of *The Unnamable*, comes to the fore in the *Stories and Texts for Nothing* (1954), provides a central focus of Beckett's prose and the television dramas beginning in the 1960's, and continues to preoccupy Beckett until the end of his life in 1989.¹⁴

As the self of Beckett's characters (and narrators) becomes that much more withdrawn, the world — whose sense relies on the paradoxically predetermined but constantly evolving knowledge and meaning in which it functions — becomes increasingly more foreign. Therefore the self, searching for foundational belief from the debris of doubt within its own emptiness or inner space (which is enlarged by the still unbearable open space of what is meant by being), can no longer be located. The knowledge of the self, in the precarious situation of, to quote poet Audre Lorde, never being able to prosper, absolutely, in dismantling "the master's house" with "the master's tools," becomes as wretched and elusive as the knowledge of the material world.¹⁵ For Beckett, the open space in which his characters roam and from which his narrators shrink suggests a range of motion across a wilderness of their unknowing at odds with foreshadowing, omniscience, authoritative control, and the linear movement supposed of prose. The scope of the novel presumes an unlimited space in which to seize and experiment with those systems of the limit-experience¹⁶ that provoke the

¹⁴ Eric Prieto, *Literature, Geography, and the Postmodern Poetics of Place* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013) 38.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 39.

¹⁶ The limit-experience for Foucault, who borrows the concept from his readings of Nietzsche, Bataille, and Blanchot, "wrenches the subject from itself." The very systems that arouse the limit-experience are those that deal with the construction of knowledge, the "relation between a fixed subject and a domain of objects," or the histories of truth that constitute thought. See Michel Foucault, "An Interview with Michel Foucault by Charles Ruas," in *Death and the*

creative impulse to shatter the boundaries of Balzacian and Stendhalian realism. However, the periphery, the horizon of possibility — from the ontological and phenomenological circumstance in which Beckett found himself at an impasse — presupposes an immeasurable space impossible to bridge. The cries of birth (the pain of being born naïve to the world and the knowledge it contains) in “First Love” (1946) that are drowned by the sound of footsteps,¹⁷ and the voyage without a destination “so as not to drown” in “From an Abandoned Work”¹⁸ (1954–1955), are expeditions of unremitting peregrination, a frightening prospect for narrative expression. It is perhaps, then, no wonder that — in the case of the trilogy — we see the perpetual decreasing of space (and intensification of the self’s hopelessness): from the limited region of “Molloy country” to the room in *Malone Dies* and, finally, to the space of a jar in *The Unnamable*.

If Beckett’s earlier works expose a failure to exceed, by ways of some inward retreat, the limits of experience — the referential conditions of the world — and expression (or the limits of language and literature, respectively), Beckett, as demonstrated in his later texts of the 1960’s up till his death, takes refuge *within* those limits, reducing language to subtract the self rather than attempting to confront or conquer language to affirm or assert the self. The failure of expression was famously declared in his correspondence with Georges Duthuit, published in *transition* in 1949, in which Beckett — during a discussion about French artist Pierre Tal-Coat — spoke of “The expression that there is nothing to express, nothing with which to express, nothing from which to express, no power to express, no desire to express, together with

Labyrinth: The World of Raymond Roussel, tr. Ruas (London/New York: Continuum, 2004) 171–188.

¹⁷ “As long as I kept walking I didn’t hear them, because of the footsteps.” Beckett, *The Complete Short Prose*, 45.

¹⁸ “I have never in my life been on my way anywhere, but simply on my way. And in this way I have gone through great thickets, bleeding, and deep into bogs, water too, even the sea in some moods and been carried out of my course, or driven back, so as not to drown.” *Ibid.*, 156.

the obligation to express.”¹⁹ A similar sentiment is murmured in *The Unnamable*, when the “I” questions its ability to meet the burden of speaking when its relief is silence.²⁰ Implicit in this dilemma is how one can express without re-presenting the world that serves to stifle the gesture. The “obligation,” the creative impulse, the urge, or even what Hugh Kenner described as a “weary persistence,”²¹ might bear with it some truth, some beauty, but this authenticity cannot be expressed comprehensively without running the risk “of doing a little better the same old thing, of going a little further along a dreary road,”²² in other words, without hazarding the regurgitation of a story or meaning contingent on the harmonious relationship between a subject and an object. “All Strange Away” (1963–1964) straddles the divide between the closed space and open space, the dead end and obligation. It begins:

Imagination dead imagine. A place, that again.
Never another question. A place, then someone in it,
that again. Crawl out of the frowsy deathbed and
drag it to a place to die in. Out of the door and down
the road in the old hat and coat like after the war,
no, not that again. Five foot square, six high, no way
in, none out, try for him there.²³

Here, Beckett defies the open space — the story (“no, not that again”) — and sets up for his narrator a deficient, closed place (“Five foot square, six high”) in which, with “no way in, none out,”

¹⁹ Samuel Beckett, *Proust and Three Dialogues with Georges Duthuit* (London: Calder and Boyars, 1965) 103.

²⁰ “Strange notion in any case, and eminently open to suspicion, that of a task to be performed, before one can be at rest. Strange task, which consists in speaking of oneself. Strange hope, turned towards silence and peace. Possessed of nothing but my voice, the voice, it may seem natural, once the idea of obligation has been swallowed, that I should interpret it as an obligation to say something. But is it possible?” Beckett, *Three Novels*, 305.

²¹ Hugh Kenner, *A Reader’s Guide to Samuel Beckett* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1973) 113.

²² Beckett, *Proust and Three Dialogues with Georges Duthuit*, 103.

²³ Beckett, *The Complete Short Prose*, 169.

the narrator finds protection from the world which guided his conduct.

Obligation connotes a sense of being bound. Nevertheless, the “obligation to express” forces a way through the impasse. Beckett pursues a “literature of the unword,” this time, by *undoing* prose, by tightening fiction’s temporal and spatial dimensions and, thus, *poeticizing* it, by “word-storming in the name of beauty,” using “the frenzy of utterance” to approach “the concern with truth.” Here, we can see the last breath of the *Unnamable*’s “I can’t go on, I’ll go on” foreshadowed in the “Three Dialogues” when Beckett, in his appreciation of Dutch painter Bram van Velde, makes “of this submission, this admission, this fidelity to failure, a new occasion, a new term of relation, and of the act which, unable to act, obliged to act, he makes, an expressive act, even if only of itself, of its impossibility, of its obligation.”²⁴ The promise and potential of poetry was identified by Beckett in his first published work, “Dante... Bruno. Vico.. Joyce” (1929). For Vico, Beckett writes:

Poetry [...] was born of curiosity, daughter of ignorance [...]. The figurative character of the oldest poetry must be regarded, not as sophisticated confectionery, but as evidence of a poverty-stricken vocabulary and of a disability to achieve abstraction [...]. Vico asserts the spontaneity of language and denies the dualism of poetry and language. Similarly, poetry is the foundation of writing. When language consisted of gesture, the spoken and the written were identical.²⁵

Beckett’s poetic expression is less conventional in the formal sense than it is actual or conceptual, that is, preoccupied by the “breakdown of the object” or “breakdown of the subject,” as well as

²⁴ Beckett, *Proust and Three Dialogues with Georges Duthuit*, 125.

²⁵ Samuel Beckett, “Dante... Bruno. Vico.. Joyce,” in *Our Exagmination Round His Factification for Incamination of Work in Progress* (Paris: Shakespeare and Company, 1929) 9–11.

the “rupture of the lines of communication,”²⁶ which he was unable to fully accomplish in his prose. Indeed, Beckett began his creative writing career penning line poetry. *Whoroscope*, a heavily annotated poem revealing peculiarities about the personal life of Descartes, was published in 1930 after winning a contest held by Nancy Cunard (and was written the evening just before the submission deadline). According to James Knowlson, the title of Beckett’s first book of poetry was changed from *Poems* to *Echo’s Bones, and Other Precipitates* (1935), a decision made by the author in part due to his self-effacing estimation of the work as poems themselves and the collection’s departure from poetic surface,²⁷ despite Beckett’s recognition of the Provençal poetic forms of the *enueg* and *serena*, the latter being categorized as “an evening song in which the lover longs for the night which will bring him his beloved.”²⁸

In *What Is Literature?*, first published in 1948 by Gallimard, Jean-Paul Sartre marks a clear (though trivial) differentiation between prose and poetry. According to Sartre, the former comes from a speaker who exercises discourse to incite a particular moment of action. In contrast to the poet, the prose writer makes use of words and their capacity to signify, which “tears [him] away from himself and throws him out into the world.”²⁹ The writer of prose, therefore, is tasked with constructing a purposeful relationship with the world, which he hopes to change with his choice to use words in a certain way. Conversely, the poet (like the painter, sculptor, or musician) considers/creates objects or “word-things” and not signs, which represent rather than express

²⁶ Samuel Beckett, “Recent Irish Poetry,” in *Disjecta: Miscellaneous Writings and a Dramatic Fragment*, ed. Ruby Cohn (New York: Grove Press, 1984) 70–71.

²⁷ In a letter to his publisher, George Reavey, Beckett writes: “Not *Poems* after all, but *Echo’s Bones, and Other Precipitates*. C’est plus modeste.” See James Knowlson, *Damned to Fame: The Life of Samuel Beckett* (New York: Grove Press, 1996) 208.

²⁸ Marjorie Perloff, *The Poetics of Indeterminacy: Rimbaud to Cage* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1981) 226–227.

²⁹ Jean-Paul Sartre, *What Is Literature? and Other Essays* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988) 31–32.

meaning: the poet is outside language and thus uses words, which for him have a material quality, as a mirror of the external world that reflects his own image. The post-alexandrine poet, then, is removed from the human condition and therefore is not committed to it. Beckett was, as we have discussed, certainly opposed to the utilitarian opinion upon which Sartre confessed here lied. As Peter Fifiield suggests, “we can come to a proper understanding of Beckett’s characteristic ‘obligation to express’ only if we recognize that it is formulated in the immediate wake of Sartre’s attachment of literature and freedom.”³⁰ Sartre’s position on poetry after Baudelaire, Mallarmé, and Rimbaud, however, is not dissimilar from the operations of Beckett’s earlier fiction, in which the existential and epistemological density of the work narrows its appearance — an obscurity of classification that has not gone unnoticed by both novice and the most enthusiastic of Beckett readers, and which calls to mind the symbolist prose poets. Claude Mauriac, for example, maintained in *Le Figaro* that Beckett “est aussi un poète” (“is also a poet”) in a critique of his dramatic work *Krapp’s Last Tape*. Additionally, as Sarah Gendron points out, there has been “a general propensity on the part of Beckett scholars to read his prose as if it were poetry, concentrating primarily on its formal elements, and his poetry as if it were prose, focusing almost exclusively on its intended ‘meaning’.”³¹ In his December 31, 1961 article in *The Observer*, “Poet Waiting for Pegasus,” A. Alvarez lauded the “subtle artistic tautness” of Beckett’s prose, which “one usually associates with poetry,” while reproving his verse for what he considered to be merely an “imitation.” Similarly, Lawrence Harvey praised the “densely poetic” facets of Beckett’s prose which expand “beyond storytelling and communication,” producing what he called “the distance of aesthetic contemplation.”³²

³⁰ Peter Fifiield, *Late Modernist Style in Samuel Beckett and Emmanuel Levinas* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013) 17–18.

³¹ Sarah Gendron, *Repetition, Difference, and Knowledge in the Work of Samuel Beckett, Jacques Derrida, and Gilles Deleuze* (New York: Peter Lang, 2008) 49.

³² *Ibid.*

Ruby Cohn acknowledged Beckett's "lyrics of fiction" in works as early as the *Texts for Nothing* and *How It Is*, the latter marking a tremendous aesthetic shift from the pre-impasse phase. Published in French under the title *Comment c'est* in 1961 and translated by the author and published in English in 1964, *How It Is* signals Beckett's temptation to express more poetically through typographical (irregular verses rather than a cascade of print, as was found most prominently in *Molloy* and *The Unnamable*) and textual (no punctuation or capitalization) innovations seldom registered in fiction at the time (we shall look more closely at the fusion of prose and poetry, the "prose-verse ambiguity," shortly). In her analysis of *How It Is* — the last novel Beckett wrote until the late 1970's — Cohn detects properties of Beckett's poetics that will reach a pinnacle in his final return to longer, full-length prose, the *Nohow On* "trilogy" comprised of *Company*, *Ill Seen Ill Said*, and *Worstward Ho*, a "fourth dimension of prose, where a fusion of words sometimes borders on confusion, and where the meaning seems buried in the melody."³³ As previously mentioned, the absence of conventional sentence structure in *How It Is*, for example, is filled with a lyrical, oral quality, the "I say it as I hear it" repeated, in subtle variations, throughout the novel.

Repetition also comes to a climax, introducing a compulsive, hypnotic verbal melody that expresses the movements of the tormentor/tormented who — coupled with the frequent pace of repeated phrases like "I quote," "vast stretch / tracts of time," and others, which return almost as soon as they have ended — appears to not move at all. If the sound of his footsteps prevents the narrator of "First Love" from hearing the "cries" of birth as he leaves the prostitute Lulu/Anna's house, then the escalation of the repeated "when the panting stops" in part "3" of *How It Is* helps us "to listen to the interior voice"³⁴ before the panting resumes / repeats, as it inevitably will. The voice here is reminiscent of the open-space journeys of *Molloy* and the outcast narrators of the *Texts for Nothing*, and reintroduces the obstacle of authenticity

³³ Ruby Cohn, *Back to Beckett* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1973) 220.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 233.

encountered in *The Unnamable*. However, the problems of the old impasse are addressed in new ways, with a more poetic vision, and are, thus, eclipsed:

there he is then at last that not one of us there we
are then at last who listens to himself and who when
he lends his ear to our murmur does no more than
lend it to a story of his own devising ill-inspired ill-
told and so ancient so forgotten at each telling that
ours may seem faithful that we murmur to the mud
to him³⁵

And:

and this anonymous voice self-styled quaqu the
voice of us all that was without on all sides then in us
when the panting stops bits and scraps barely
audible certainly distorted there it is at last the voice
of him who before listening to us murmur what we
are tells us what we are as best he can³⁶

Finally, to come full circle:

formulation to be adjusted assuredly in the light of
our limits and possibilities but which will always
present this advantage that by eliminating all
journeys all abandons it eliminates at the same
stroke all occasion of sacks and voices quaqu then
in us when the panting stops³⁷

We see from these select passages the poetic device of repetition at work, the way it grounds or resituates the reader by harmonizing the words in an otherwise frenzied phrase-expression — the repetition provides repose from the abstract expression of poetry, allowing us to pause and take a breath, so to speak, in the midst of

³⁵ Samuel Beckett, *How It Is* (New York: Grove Press, 1964) 139.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 141.

meaning that, according to Cohn, is always present, no matter how hidden (or how much it involves unmeaning), in Beckett's work.³⁸

For Steven Connor, repetition has another important occupation. "Time and again," he writes, "Beckett's work, with its asymptotic approaches to zero, enacts this complex play between reduction and addition, in which to repeat oneself, and therefore to say progressively less, seems, uncannily, always to involve saying more."³⁹ While Beckett brings his texts that much closer to silence through the diminution of expression, repetition, the economy of repeated words or short phrases, however, accumulates; not with meaning that refers to anything from elsewhere, but to something internal. Using repetition, Beckett is filling, albeit meagerly, a space that comforts the void — which was made absent by his abandonment of the world — with language that has been emptied of communication and utility. For Beckett, it is better to hollow out than to bore holes; it is better to be somewhere, in a closed, limited space, than to be everywhere, in an open space, in which the self is more vulnerable to external intrusions.

Solace can be found, too, in poetic imagery, where language, as Deleuze puts it, no longer relates "to enumerable or combinable objects, nor to transmitting voices, but to immanent limits that are ceaselessly displaced."⁴⁰ The image, for Deleuze, "is not defined by the sublimity of its content but by its form, that is, by its 'internal tension,'" which is created by the words and voices that surround it.⁴¹ The withdrawal into image assemblage rather than narrative building rescues Beckett, albeit temporarily, from the affliction of prose-language and its inherent meaning: the vestiges of prose become a scaffold on which the image repairs

³⁸ "As always in Beckett's work, the verbal music is inseparable from the meaning, but never before has his music been so hypnotic. We have to interrupt the melody to probe to meaning, but there always is meaning." Cohn, *Back to Beckett*, 234.

³⁹ Steven Connor, *Samuel Beckett: Repetition, Theory and Text* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1988) 11.

⁴⁰ Gilles Deleuze, "The Exhausted," in *Essays Critical and Clinical*, tr. Daniel W. Smith and Michael A. Greco (London/New York: Verso, 1998) 158.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 159.

itself poetically. In *Worstward Ho*, the image of “an old man and child” holding hands,⁴² with sudden urgency, appears out of nowhere within a barrage of repeated one- and two-syllabled words. In *Company*, images of a boy being reproved by his mother, a father sitting in his car waiting for his son to be born, an old beggar woman “fumbling at a big garden gate,”⁴³ and a boy discovering the hedgehog he had saved “mushed,” all pierce passages of the “one on his back in the dark” who is “devising it all for company.” Here, characters are replaced by images. Like repetition, the random insertion and penetration of images in the “narrative” of *Company* and *Worstward Ho* alleviate, perhaps, the exhaustion of the text.

The poetic frenzy of repeated words and short phrases — in which meaning cannot grasp quickly or frequently enough — that Beckett employed more distinctly in the second half of his writing career can, to some extent, be clarified by Nietzsche. “If there is to be art,” he writes in *Twilight of the Idols*, “if there is to be any aesthetic doing and seeing, one physiological condition is indispensable: frenzy.”⁴⁴ For Nietzsche, frenzy is the urge to express a heightened state onto an external object in order to impose one’s will on that object and, thus, overtake it (or reduce its appearance). Although for Beckett the amplified state of frenzy is by no means a display of power or an effort to perfect or “idealize” art, his urge to reshape or engulf prose within the dimensions of poetics is, in many ways, the “tremendous drive to bring out the main features so that the others disappear in the process,”⁴⁵ as theorized by Nietzsche. This effort is perhaps best exemplified in Beckett’s *Ill Seen Ill Said*, the second novel of the *Nohow On* “trilogy.”

For Marjorie Perloff, *Ill Seen Ill Said* illustrates a “prose-verse ambiguity” that gives the impression of both prose — with

⁴² Samuel Beckett, *Nohow On: Company, Ill Seen Ill Said, Worstward Ho* (New York: Grove Press, 1996) 80.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 9.

⁴⁴ Walter Kaufman, tr., ed., *The Portable Nietzsche* (New York: Penguin Books, 1976) 518.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

its “arrangement of words [...] dominated by the syntactical relations of subject and predicate” — and verse, with its “arrangement of words dominated by,” following Northrop Frye, “some form of regular recurrence, whether meter, accent, vowel quality, rhyme, alliteration, parallelism, or any combination of these.”⁴⁶ While Beckett does not lineate *Ill Seen Ill Said*, arguably the largest indication of the lyric,⁴⁷ the “story” is delivered “in broken fragments as it presents itself to the impersonal voice whose fate is to ‘ill see ill say’ it.”⁴⁸ To “ill see” and “ill say” is, for Beckett, to refresh prose to an insufficiency, to see it as what it has become: a trace of its bygone form and syntactical unity in which its illness is its poetic possibility. Beckett, however, is content to fail at his task — or obligation — of removing all traces of what is left of fiction:

Absence supreme good and yet. Illumination then go
again and on return no more trace. On earth’s face.
Of what was never. And if by mishap some left then
go again. For good again. So on. Till no more trace.
On earth’s face. Instead of always the same place.
Slaving away forever in the same place. At this and
that trace. And what if the eye could not? No more
tear itself away from the remains of trace. Of what
was never. Quick say it suddenly can and farewell
say farewell. If only to the face. Of her tenacious
trace.⁴⁹

Like Cohn, Perloff pinpoints an oral essence in Beckett’s “lyrics of fiction” that gives the text a particular rhythm that the prose form

⁴⁶ Marjorie Perloff, “Between Verse and Prose: Beckett and the New Poetry,” *Critical Inquiry* Vol. 9, No. 2 (1982) 415–433.

⁴⁷ “Much of Beckett’s short prose inhabits the margins between prose and poetry, between narrative and drama, and finally between completion and incompleteness. The short work ‘neither’ [1976] has routinely been published with line breaks suggestive of poetry, but when British publisher John Calder was about to gather ‘neither’ in the *Collected Poems*, Beckett resisted because he considered it a prose work, a short story.” Gontarski, “From Unabandoned Works: Samuel Beckett’s Short Prose,” xii.

⁴⁸ Perloff, “Between Verse and Prose,” 420.

⁴⁹ Beckett, *Nohow On*, 73.

often overshadows on behalf of narrative clarity. Perloff calls this property an “associative monologue,” which she models after Frye’s definition of ordinary speech, “a unit of rhythm” that is “much more repetitive than prose, as it is in the process of working out an idea.”⁵⁰ Speech, like writing, involves the procedure of bringing a thought to life. Unlike writing, however, which may be revised clandestinely, speech must be worked out as words come to fruition, and may meander before being brought to a pause, or its conclusion in thought. The beauty of speech, like poetry, is therefore its flaws, its fits and starts, its fumbles, flux, and contradictions, its directionlessness and labyrinthine routes,⁵¹ which we are invited (and encouraged) to witness. Consider, for example, the fifth stanza of *Worstward Ho*:

First the body. No. First the place. No. First both.
Now either. Now the other. Sick of the either try the
other. Sick of it back sick of the either. So on.
Somehow on. Till sick of both. Throw up and go.
Where neither. Till sick of there. Throw up and
back. The body again. Where none. The place again.
Where none. Try again. Fail again. Better again. Or
better worse. Fail worse again. Still worse again. Till
sick for good. Throw up for good. Go for good.
Where neither for good. Good and all.⁵²

The strophe here operates on several levels. First, the uncertainty by which it is launched (“No”) and the oscillation between “the body” and “the place” provide an unstable and unwanted (“sick of”) resolution already doomed to repeatedly fail. Second, this uncertainty is immediately reconciled by trying a different course

⁵⁰ Perloff, “Between Verse and Prose,” 423. See, also, Northrop Frye, *The Well-Tempered Critic* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1963), and Frye, “Verse and Prose,” in *Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1974).

⁵¹ For Beckett, Hölderlin’s “only successes are the points where his poems go on, falter, stammer, and then admit failure, and are abandoned.” See Patrick Bowles, “How to Fail: Notes on Talks with Samuel Beckett,” *PN Review* 26, 20.4 (1994) 24–38.

⁵² Beckett, *Nohow On*, 77–78.

(“try the other,” “back,” and “throw up,” with vomiting conveying the feeling of beginning again, though as a deformation) in spite of there being “No future in this”⁵³ pendulum of “Sudden go. Sudden back.”⁵⁴ In “‘The Space of a Door’: Beckett and the Poetry of Absence,” Perloff substantiates Frye’s assertion. For her, it is the *process* and not the *product* that is key to Beckett’s prose poetry,⁵⁵ recalling Deleuze’s contention that the image “is not an object but a ‘process’.”⁵⁶ Additionally, Kenner’s examination of *The Unnamable* anticipates Beckett’s ostensibly maddening speech-method, meticulously refined in his late poetic prose, connecting the frantic activity of the mind (“a necessary adjunct of company”⁵⁷) and its formulation of expression via vocalization to the obligation undertaken by Beckett vis-à-vis the written word: “the writer’s impulse to write” and “the need of the mind to remain in action whether it has anything to engage it or not” establishes the urgency to have “thoughts of something” rather than *about* something, which Kenner calls “the thinking faculty.”⁵⁸ While Beckett has pointed out differences between his and Joyce’s work — the latter exuding excess and the former poverty — he does divulge, in his writing on *Work in Progress*, an intriguing similarity: “[Joyce’s] writing is not *about* something; *it is that something itself* [...] Mr. Joyce has desophisticated language.”⁵⁹

Like Frye, Perloff, and Kenner, Alain Badiou also reads Beckett as “an enterprise of meditative thought — half conquered by the poem.”⁶⁰ The process of thought for Badiou, however, is inextricably linked to beauty, which

tells us what it is that Beckett wishes to save. This is because the destiny of beauty, and in particular of

⁵³ Ibid., 79.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 81.

⁵⁵ Perloff, *The Poetics of Indeterminacy*, 208.

⁵⁶ Deleuze, “The Exhausted,” 159.

⁵⁷ Beckett, *Nohow On*, 5.

⁵⁸ Kenner, *A Reader’s Guide to Samuel Beckett*, 110.

⁵⁹ Beckett, “Dante... Bruno. Vico.. Joyce,” 14–15.

⁶⁰ Alain Badiou, *On Beckett*, tr., ed., Alberto Toscano and Nina Power (Manchester: Clinamen Press, 2003) 41.

the beauty that Beckett aims at, is to separate. To separate appearance, which it both restores and obliterates, from the universal core of experience. It is indispensable to take Beckett at his word: the word of beauty. In this separating function, the word declares what we must disregard in order to face up to what may be of worth.⁶¹

From Badiou's statement, we might imply that one such "separation" that Beckett obligated himself to in his later work was the removal of storytelling from prose. It can also be argued that without a story (or any other traditional literary tropes that once made fiction easily identifiable) to sustain a narrative, prose becomes an exercise in radical indeterminacy, an endless unfolding of words that refer to and are held together only by their unidentified speaker alone. What Badiou calls "the poetic incision of memory,"⁶² some *semblance* of an allusive identity (real and/or imagined), could be promising in the ways of prose cohesion, and indeed is one way that some Beckett scholars have looked at *Company*: as an autobiography of sorts.⁶³ Gontarski, on the other hand, complicates this viewpoint: "That memories are indistinguishable from imaginings in the process of mind, both ill seen and ill said, is as much the subject of the *Nohow On* novels as any autobiographical strain."⁶⁴ (The "relationship between storytelling and truth-seeking" is also a conflict of autobiography.⁶⁵) Nevertheless, we can agree with Badiou's claim that for Beckett, poetry is "the tireless desire to think,"⁶⁶ a field of unceasing

⁶¹ Ibid., 44.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ See, for example, Brian Finney, "Still to Worstward Ho: Beckett's Prose Fiction Since *The Lost Ones*," in *Beckett's Later Fiction and Drama: Texts for Company*, ed. James Acheson and Kateryna Arthur (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1987) 70.

⁶⁴ S. E. Gontarski, "The Conjuring of Something out of Nothing: Samuel Beckett's 'Closed Space' Novels," the "Introduction" to Beckett, *Nohow On*, xix.

⁶⁵ See James Hansford, "Seeing and saying in 'As the story was told,'" *Journal of Beckett Studies* No. 8 (1982) 75.

⁶⁶ Badiou, *On Beckett*, 77.

conjectures owed atop the remnants of prose where “Remains of mind then still. Enough still.”⁶⁷

These remains have been likened by L.A.J. Bell, Nico Israel, and others to a minimalist aesthetic (an artistic expression just as indebted to Beckett as it was to Merleau-Ponty), a “less is more” in which “a ‘new beauty’” arises from the wearisome “feeling of incommunicability” and “the residual, the decaying, the vanishing [...] affirms the almost nothing, the barely present, the something that resists annihilation.”⁶⁸ To be, in other words, as near to death without having to die. We can see how those traces, the remainder that prevents death, correspond to what Badiou optimistically sees as hope in Beckett’s work beginning with and after *How It Is* — a reading that veers considerably from Derrida’s poststructuralist point of view.⁶⁹ What Badiou sees as hope in Beckett may however be better explained as possibility, for Beckett’s nihilism never completely disappears after the impasse but, like his prose, transforms. The metamorphosis isn’t expressed through the trials and tribulations of his characters or their situations, which virtually vanish in the later texts, but through the anguish of the mind and its unwillingness to bring thought to a logical end.

For Beckett, writing is, as Bataille put it, the expression “of someone determined to expose a façade, signing the death warrant of a literature made of language, preferring a speech disheveled by the wind and pitted with holes, but with the kind of authority that a ruin cannot help but have.”⁷⁰ It is within the spare landscape of words, those vestiges, the faint traces of language and the self, that Beckett sought to survey — pacing back and forth among the ashes instead of raising the semblance of a structure to be repossessed by

⁶⁷ Beckett, *Nohow On*, 89.

⁶⁸ L.A.J. Bell, “Between Ethics and Aesthetics: The Residual in Samuel Beckett’s Minimalism,” *Journal of Beckett Studies* 20.1 (2011) 32–53.

⁶⁹ While we can gain much from Badiou’s reading, there are some scholars who would agree with my rejection of his positivity. See, for example, Anthony Uhlmann, “Worstward Ho, Parmenides, Badiou and the Limit,” *Journal of Beckett Studies* 20.1 (2011) 78–95, and Claire Joubert, “Badiou with Beckett: ‘Concept, Prose, and the Poetics ‘d’avenir’,” *Journal of Beckett Studies* 21.1 (2012) 33–55.

⁷⁰ Georges Bataille, “Molloy’s Silence,” in *On Beckett: Essays and Criticism*, 133.

meaning — the possibilities of a beauty that could be discerned not in the expression of something whole or intact, but in the experience of impairment; of abiding a dying flame never to be kindled, but kept at a pale luminescence, a cause rather than a result or consequence. The meaning of Beckett's poetic prose is not a meaning of the self's deception through language, but of its reflection *against* language; that is, the self as that which falsifies being. The impasse of the open space of fiction that Beckett first explored was forfeited for the closed space of poetics, in which he could perform — by a whisper — the project of unraveling thought itself, as Susan Sontag put it.⁷¹ To read Beckett's devastation of traditional prose is to not only consider more thoughtfully the paradigms of literature that dictate how the beautiful is interpreted, but to subscribe to the idea that beauty, rather than being, as Hegel romanticizes a divine, sensuous expression of spiritual freedom, is more accurately represented as the "conjuring of something out of nothing,"⁷² a cogitation which must always begin "from naught anew," and so on and on. "The definition of beauty is easy," writes Valéry: "it is what leads to desperation."⁷³

⁷¹ Susan Sontag, "The Aesthetics of Silence," in *Styles of Radical Will* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1976) 33.

⁷² Beckett, *Nohow On*, 33.

⁷³ Paul Valéry, *Selected Writings* (New York: New Directions, 1950) 213.



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HYPERION

On the future of aesthetics

“Long, Superabundant, Hypertrophic Narratives”:
Stefano Ercolino’s *Maximalist Novel*



A Review by Ágota Márton

Stefano Ercolino, *The Maximalist Novel: From Thomas Pynchon's Gravity's Rainbow to Roberto Bolano's 2666*, tr. by Albert Sbardia
(Bloomsbury, 2015)

The Maximalist Novel proposes to define a specific genre of contemporary fiction that develops in postmodern America and continues to be a marked tendency of twenty-first century literary sensibility. As such, the book aims to engage in debates on postmodernism and novel theory. Stefano Ercolino defines the maximalist novel through offering a systematic survey of the key characteristics of this genre, identified in seven novels ranging from the mid-twentieth to the twenty-first century. His corpus includes Thomas Pynchon's *Gravity's Rainbow* (1973), David Foster Wallace's *Infinite Jest* (1996), Don DeLillo's *Underworld* (1997), Zadie Smith's *White Teeth* (2000), Jonathan Franzen's *The Corrections* (2001), Roberto Bolaño's *2666* (2004), and *2005 dopo Cristo* (2005) by Babette Factory. The ten characteristics that are shared by these maximalist novels according to Ercolino are: length, encyclopaedic mode, dissonant chorality, diegetic exuberance, completeness, narratorial omniscience, paranoid imagination, intersemioticity, ethical commitment, and hybrid realism. What differentiates Ercolino's approach from other theoretical hypotheses of "long, superabundant, hypertrophic narratives" is admittedly his insistence on the permeability of genres and a holistic view of novel theories and contextual boundaries. When discussing Franco Moretti's world text, Ercolino opts for the "idea of a system of narrative genres constantly traversed by polyphonic and monologic tensions that cluster, in different historical moments, around either the epic or the novel, that is to say, a narrative system in which the epic and the novel continually interfere, defining each in relation to the other" (15).

Just as his description of the encyclopaedia as "an osmotic space of exchange" (36), Ercolino's book becomes a site for thought-provoking theoretical exchange. Herein lies Ercolino's critical strength: his skepticism of, and aim to surpass, binary perspectives. *The Maximalist Novel* considers larger contextual frameworks in its theoretical reasoning, arguing for more fluid demarcations of period and genre boundaries, as well as for the necessity to see literary forms "from a *longue durée* perspective since it is impossible to fully comprehend [their] significance if one does not take into consideration literary history as a whole" (70).

For example, he agrees that there is a strong line of continuity between postmodern maximalist practices, modernism, and the epic, and clarifies that maximalism was “not born in reaction to American literary minimalism” (69). The maximalist novel cannot be seen solely in a binary relation with minimalism: “it is not completely mistaken to think of a ‘maximalism’ in opposition to a ‘minimalism,’ but only if the two terms are regarded within a long-term perspective” (69); “the two phenomena [are] dialectically coexistent” (70). Ercolino situates the maximalist novel’s ethical commitment “within a seam of continuity with the best *engagée* literary tradition of the twentieth century, and not under the banner of a rupture with the postmodern literary system” (136). In line with the book’s commitment to a *longue durée* literary memory, Ercolino also mentions the persistent “encyclopaedic tension” and “symbolic proximity between the ancient epic and modernist and postmodern encyclopaedic forms” (31). This resonates with Paul Saint-Amour’s argument about modernist and postmodernist continuities. In his interpretation, Pynchon’s *Gravity’s Rainbow* becomes “a reading of encyclopedic modernism from across the nuclear divide.”¹ However, Saint-Amour’s conception of the epic differs from Ercolino’s. He says that “the long modernist narratives ... were built not on an epic armature to foreground the lost totality of the present, but on an encyclopedic armature to contest the resurgent totality of the present.”²

In the past few years there has been a significant renewal of interest in encyclopaedic fiction. Petrus van Ewijk argues that open-endedness makes encyclopaedic narratives relevant for thinking about current textual forms of hypertext and database.³ Other critics have problematized the possible “functions” of encyclopaedism in fiction, negotiating terminological

¹ Paul K. Saint-Amour, *Tense Future: Modernism, Total War, Encyclopaedic Form* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015) 204.

² Saint-Amour, *Tense Future*, 214–215.

³ See Petrus van Ewijk, “Encyclopedia, Network, Hypertext, Database: The Continuing Relevance of Encyclopedic Narrative and Encyclopedic Novel as Generic Designations,” *Genre* 44.2 (2011): 205–222; Luc Herman and Petrus van Ewijk, “Gravity’s Encyclopedia Revisited: The Illusion of a Totalizing System in *Gravity’s Rainbow*,” *English Studies*, 90.2 (April 2009) 167–179.

contradictions that arise from their different claims to referentiality,⁴ or have emphasized encyclopaedic fiction's relevance through its "bid for literary greatness." All these studies point to the contemporaneity, flexibility, and inherent ambivalence of encyclopaedic fiction. König and Woolf's *Encyclopaedism from Antiquity to the Renaissance* (2013) proves that encyclopaedism can accommodate an entire spectrum of works. In Ercolino's case, the encyclopaedic "mode" is only one characteristic of the maximalist novel, along with a strong emphasis on hybridity, polyphony, paranoid imagination, and ethical commitment. Ercolino states that "encyclopædism is not identifiable with an existing literary genre, nor is it conceptually assimilable to one" (39). His outline of the structural characteristics of the maximalist novel offers several compelling insights. The "chaos and cosmos-function" of maximalist characteristics and "the desire for re-enchantment and holistic ontology" as "constants of the maximalist paranoid imagination" (112) is particularly interesting, together with his discussion of the fragment as a meaning-making device. The fragment becomes "the privileged bearer of maximalist information" (50), "the principal organizational criterion of the *diegesis*" (55), the typographic blank space which enables the maximalist novel to play out conflicting perspectives and "disassemble and recombine" temporal and spatial shifts.

The Maximalist Novel also incorporates aspects of commodity culture, the ethical turn, and art history into its theoretical pattern. Though this attempt to consider comprehensive frameworks of literary history and bring in a varied scale of approaches ranging from media studies to narratology is meritable, the reader would expect further elaboration of some of these ideas; as it stands, several claims do not seem to have been sufficiently fleshed out in the book. The discussion of postmodernism, novel theory, and transnational perspective is a little less developed than the introduction suggested it would be. It is in these cases that the difficulty of analyzing the maximalist novel against the backdrop of

⁴ See David Letzler, "Encyclopaedic Novels and the Craft of Fiction: *Infinite Jest's* Endnotes," *Studies in the Novel*, 44:3 (2012) 304–324.

the continuity of genres, literary periods, and interconnectedness of several approaches to literature arises. Consequently, the transition from wider contextual frameworks to particular maximalist novelistic characteristics is not always fluid in the chapters. The brief but focused chapters clearly follow a systematic logic; however, this strong systematicity at times feels slightly enumerative. The reader would like to read more of Ercolino's insightful in-depth textual analyses. For example, in those cases where Ercolino enumerates certain topics the seven novels engage with, it might be useful to extend these specific and accurate examples into close-readings. That way the nuanced differences of those shared characteristics would have become clearer. However, the maximalist novel, a particularly successful term and conceptual category, opens up the path for further fascinating theoretical hypotheses of twenty-first-century literary sensibility.

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Marco Caccialupi: musician, music therapist, photographer, nomad. He got his name from the medieval traveller Marco Polo. Like his name-giver, he lived in different countries, encountering different languages and cultures and skills. And people. If asked why this curiosity, he'd quote another great traveller, Thor Heyerdal: "Borders? I have never seen any. But I heard they exist in the mind of some people."

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