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On the future of aesthetics

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James Rossant, *The Bridge*,
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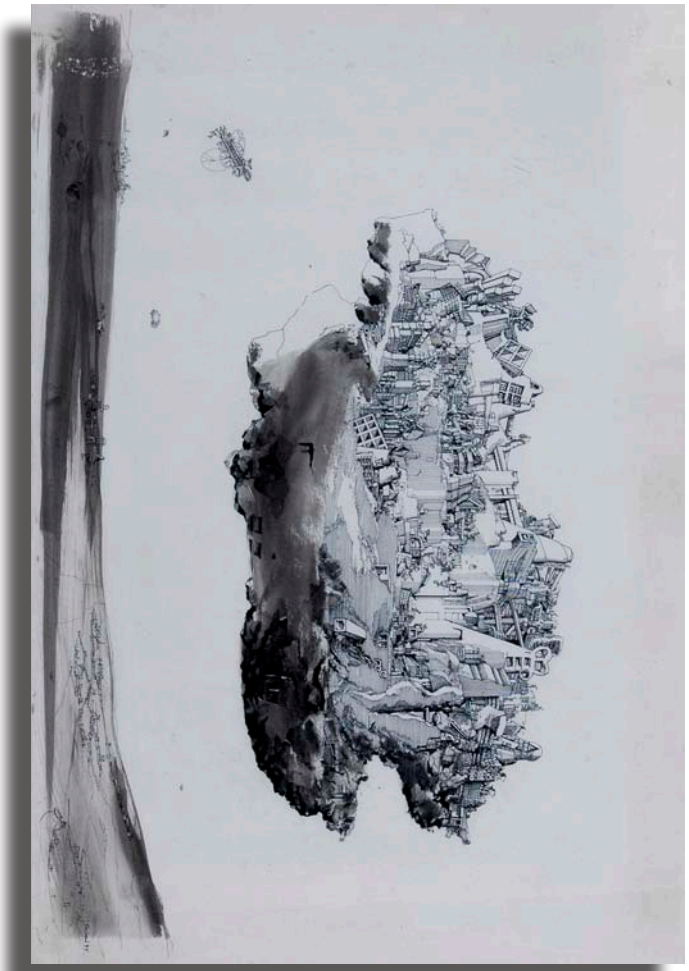
pen and ink on Japanese handmade paper



James Rossant

1928 – 2009

This issue of *Hyperion* is dedicated to the memory of James Rossant.

Rossant was an architect, city planner, artist, and professor of architecture. A long-time Fellow of the American Institute of Architects, Rossant was a partner of the architectural firm Conklin & Rossant and principal of James Rossant Architects. Among a life-time of architectural accomplishments, Rossant is best recognized for his master plan of Reston, Virginia, the Lower Manhattan Plan, and the UN-sponsored master plan for Dodoma, Tanzania.

His paintings and drawings have been exhibited in galleries in various parts of the world, and have entered a variety of collections, including those of George Mason University, Columbia University, and Centre D'Architecture in Paris. In addition, he has illustrated a number of books, among them children's books and cookbooks written by Colette Rossant, his wife.

James Rossant's name will be new to many reading this journal. However, his reputation has been significant and is widely recognized, well known by those in his own field. Despite his achievements, and one would like to think more because of them, he was not the subject of a general popularity. He did not have to suffer the indignity of a broad assent founded on the shifting and quivering tides of mass sentiment, but rather had the respect of those whose acknowledgement is rooted in the understanding that comes of and is expressed in clear and formulated ideas. Like those who always are known only to those who know much, he had the respect of those whose opinions count.

It can be argued that freedom is only to be found in capability, in the free flow of thought that is unencumbered by clumsiness and an absent readiness to formulate itself at the moment of its own impulse. It is clear from his work in his various media that his mind invented in the way that native speakers talk—without having to think how to do what it feels the impulse to do, without having to think how to say what it wants to say. Rossant was one among

those minds in this time—as they must exist in every time, in every place—not so much respected as respectable, one of those minds who are free by their acquired, developed capacity to do as they wish immediately, with the quickness of thought, Such minds are often invisible to all but those how know how to recognize them, to all but those of their own kind. One can see it in his work, in his architecture, his paintings, his drawings. And one can read it in his texts, in the rigor and precision of his words, which can be found, in one example, in this issue.

It is appropriate to complete these thoughts with a portion of a text written to her father by Cecile Rossant.

> All the colors of your brush including the unpredictable trespass of color on color are drawn across borders by your finger's steady stroke. Steady mastery, steady pen and I see a corner, cliff, wall and street of this inexhaustible Atlantis appear: *ciudad, citta, Stadt, cité*—eloquent city—tripping up round-faced typologies in its ever-advancing wake. Steady partner, your imagination: humorist, renegade, rebel and devotee.
>
> Devotion? Unremitting imagination has chosen its faithful host.
>
> Are you then midwife, who cups an infants head ignoring with wisdom a woman's otherworldly screams?
>
> Or are you a river with complex, changeable currents, able to wear the colors of mud bank, bough and sky in silky reflection on your restless surface, or are you a river ready and willing to creep above a child's slender shoulder then slap her bottom, and rush through her hair, or are you a river, waiting, bottled in the barrel of the pen?

Hyperion is proud to publish in this issue James Rossant's review of *Le Corbusier and the Occult*, by J. K. Birksted.

Thought . . . to the Purpose

The vocation of a journal is to proclaim the spirit of its age. Relevance to the present is more important even than unity or clarity, and a journal would be doomed—like the newspapers—to insubstantiality if it did not give voice to a vitality powerful enough to salvage even its more dubious components by validating them. In fact, a journal whose relevance for the present has no historical justification should not exist at all. The Romantic *Athenäum* is still a model today precisely because its claim to historical relevance was unique. At the same time it proves—if proof were needed—that we should not look to the public to supply the yardstick by which true relevance to the present is to be measured. Every journal ought to follow the example of the *Athenäum*. It should be rigorous in its thought and unwavering in its readiness to say what it believes, without any concessions to its public, particularly where it is a matter of distilling what is truly relevant from the sterile pageant of new and fashionable events, the exploitation of which can be left to the newspapers.

Moreover, for any journal that conceives itself in this way, criticism remains the guardian of the house. If in its infancy criticism was forced to combat commonplace viciousness, the situation nowadays is different . . . Both critical discourse and the habit of judgment stand in need of renewal. Only a terrorist campaign will suffice to overcome that imitation of great painting that goes by the name of literary Expressionism. If in such annihilating criticism it is essential to fill in the larger context—and how else could it succeed?—the task of positive criticism, even more than before and even more than for the Romantics, must be to concentrate on the individual work of art. For the function of great criticism is not, as is often thought, to instruct by means of historical descriptions or to educate through comparisons, but to cognize by immersing itself in the object. Criticism must account for the truth of works, a task just as essential for literature as for philosophy.

—Walter Benjamin, “Announcement of the Journal *Angelus Novus*”

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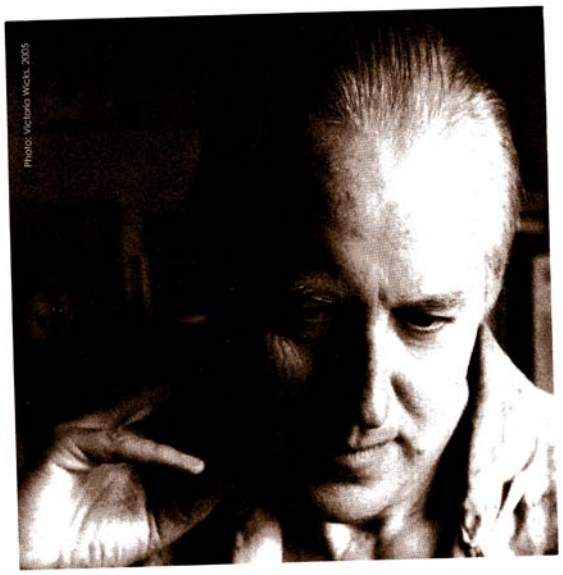
theatre minima and the Martin E. Segal Theatre Center

celebrate

Howard Barker

with the Playwright in Attendance!



screenings • readings • panel discussion • and 'A Conversation with Howard Barker'

On Monday, 10 May 2010, theatre minima and the Martin E. Segal Theatre Center at the CUNY Graduate Center will welcome legendary British dramatist, theorist, director, and poet Howard Barker in a rare visit to New York. Join Mr. Barker, actress and frequent collaborator Victoria Wicks, and critical champion David Ian Rabey of the University of Aberystwyth for a day of screenings, discussions, and readings, including Barker himself reading from his recent poetry.

The all-day event is free. More information about the program is available at the Segal Center Web page for the event (http://web.gc.cuny.edu/MESTC/events/s10/howard-barker.html), or email curator George Hunka at geh@panix.com.

Monday, May 10, 2010

1 PM – 8:30 PM

The CUNY Graduate Center

365 5th AVE, NYC

Images of Howard Barker:
M. Seyver - MBA / ésam Caen

INTRODUCTION: CRUELTY, BEAUTY, AND THE TRAGIC ART OF HOWARD BARKER

RAINER J. HANSHE

> What shocks the virtuous philosopher, delights the camelion Poet. It does no harm from its relish of the dark side of things any more than from its taste for the bright one; because they both end in speculation. A Poet is the most unpoetical of any thing in existence; because he has no Identity—he is continually [informing] and filling some other Body . . .
> —Keats

Even though Howard Barker is not well known in America and although he himself acidly professes to be little more than a rumor in his own country, after Beckett, he may be one of our most significant as well as profound writers. In fact, his very refusal of his standing, or the silence that largely surrounds him, indicates that his vocation is truly that of writer, and as did Beckett, he disdains the prizes most covet and take as signs of value. What is vital to him is "to desire tragedy, to experience tragedy as a need," and his works bears this mark as well as the silence of a resisting solitude.

Since the production of Barker's first play in 1970, he has remained a prolific writer, producing a daunting body of work that includes stage plays, radio plays, television plays, marionettes, opera libretti, poetry, and theoretical tracts. He is also a visual artist and his work, which is held in national collections in England and in Europe, evokes a mood of violence, death, and eroticism. Despite this prodigious body of work and writing for a period of over 40 years, he is hardly as well known as Beckett and, lamentably, even in the finer independent bookstores here in New York City, none of his books is available. If the reasons for this may be manifold, it in part seems due to the ferocity of Barker's artistic vision. As the founder of what he calls the Theatre of Catastrophe, which "takes as its first principle the idea that art is not digestible" but is instead "an irritant in consciousness, like a grain of sand in the oyster's gut," Barker actively cultivates cruelty, a quality all too few are ready to endure. But this is a cruelty that produces a lasting beauty and which, free of mawkish sentiment and humanistic delusions, recognizes that some form of cruelty underlies all significant human endeavors. There is no knowledge without it, nor without it is there any art. This lucid, fearless knowledge is evident in Barker's *Arguments for a Theatre*, which, even if one

remains opposed to the views espoused in the book, is an indispensable tract for any theater practitioner for it raises crucial questions that demand meditation—not to engage with the polemic is not to think, to refuse an exigent confrontation that gives rise to necessary uncertainties, to a skepticism that brings one face to face with the darkness that many seek to evade or neutralize with a numbing pharmakon so as to remain happy, affirmative, and optimistic, like the enslaved children of talk shows and sitcoms or the uplifting products of the industry of commerce that masquerade as art. But the tragic prevails; it is the inevitable crucible; the dark matter that continues to surface and reveal to us the profundity of a surface that is as enigmatic as any depth. For art is not meant to comfort. If one goes to it for comfort, one is seeking but the same consolations once offered by metaphysics, and that is to reduce art, to make it into a diversion, a mere palliative. It is to quiet the tremors. If Nietzsche first said in *The Birth of Tragedy* that it is "only as an *aesthetic phenomenon* that existence is eternally justified"—and this is perhaps one of the most abused quotes in his corpus—he soon abandoned such a consoling view. In *Human, All Too Human*, where Nietzsche is more scientifically minded and extremely critical of art, he focuses on perception itself and states that art is what "makes the sight of life bearable by laying over it the veil of unclear thinking." In *The Gay Science*, art's role as a mechanism for helping us to endure existence will receive yet another transformation; there, it enables us to turn ourselves into phenomenon, but this *morphosis* is done with a good conscience as opposed to imprecise thinking. In shattering the youthful naiveté that to pierce through a shroud is to discover truth, surfaces and veils are praised by Nietzsche as necessary and profound. There is nothing behind the mask but yet another mask—surface, depth, layer, chasm, these are all entwined. Similarly, as Deane Juhan notes in *Job's Body*, "Skin and brain develop from exactly the same primitive cells. Depending upon how you look at it, the skin is the outer surface of the brain, or the brain is the deepest layer of the skin. […] The skin is no more separated from the brain than the surface of a lake is separate from its depths. […] The brain is a single functional unit, from cortex to fingertips to toes. To touch the surface is to stir the depths." In *Twilight of the Idols*, Nietzsche achieves the ultimate tragic height and having long left behind or transfigured the oft-quoted pronouncement on the eternal justification of existence, he proclaims that it is *only reality* that "justifies" the human—*there is no catharsis*. To Nietzsche, that is Aristotle's fallacy, a distortion of the tragic sensibility. Instead, "beyond ruth and terror," what the tragic entails is "[*realizing*] *in oneself* the eternal joy of becoming—that joy which also encompasses *joy in destruction*." The ethicists will balk at this, but it is the hard and tragic truth that has been imparted to us from Pindar to Nietzsche and Barker: joy and suffering are inextricably interwoven. That is the reality that 'justifies' or better, to confront the exacting thought of the eternal return, which is the only thought that honors existence in its absolute sense, that is the reality that one must learn to love, and this is ultimately an erotic

question, the predicament of *amor fati*. Thus, true joy cannot exist for those who refuse suffering—joy is *infused* with suffering, and suffering with joy, just as creation is infused with destruction, and destruction with creation. *La petite mort*. The joy that is devoid of suffering is but a facile happiness and Barker is painfully aware of what, from our anthropomorphic perspective, is the terrible and questionable aspect of existence. Both his poetry and his plays convey this sting. Tragedy sensitizes us to it; our task is to remain sensitive to it. And it is not since Artaud's *Theater and its Double* that we have had a critical manifesto as incisive and challenging. In it, the sting of the tragic resonates and echoes in our flesh as we incorporate its questions. Barker's Theatre of Catastrophe has its lineage in Artaud's Theater of Cruelty and in the future, Barker's theoretical works will come to be as important and as influential as those of Artaud. If he has remained and will remain largely untimely, to those serious-minded artists and practitioners of the body, there is something posthumous here, something future-minded that must now be confronted in order to be of the very future that we are.

Barker has essentially etched out a niche of his own and in 1988 he formed The Wrestling School, a company designed to produce his own seldom-performed plays, works which, it seems, escaped even the finely tuned radar of Susan Sontag. While there have been other seminars on Barker's work, to speak of some recent events, in 2008, 20 years subsequent to the founding of his Wrestling School, the RSAMD in Glasgow held a symposium on his work and in the following year, there was an international conference on his theater work at Aberystwyth University of Wales. Months later, 21 for 21, a global celebration of the 21st birthday of his theatre company that spanned four continents and 18 countries, honored Barker through performing his plays and reciting his poetry in seven different languages. Currently, London's Riverside Studios is producing two of his plays, *Hurts Given and Received*, and *Slowly*, while they are also presenting *Wonder And Worship In The Dying Ward*, a rehearsed reading of his latest work, directed by Barker himself.

If largely inaudible and invisible to many, if even absent in St. Mark's Bookshop and Book Culture if not other similar bookstores in the cultural bastions of Europe, Asia, and elsewhere, clearly, Barker has remained an indelible presence in the world and his work is a testament of his devotion to writing and of an ever-questioning mind fearlessly in pursuit of the catastrophic. Now, in cooperation with George Hunka's theatre minima, the Martin E. Segal Theatre (CUNY Graduate Center) is presenting a daylong series of events including screenings, readings, panel discussions, and a one-on-one conversation with the dramatist, who will be making a rare visit to New York. It is rumored that, like Paul Bowles, Barker only travels by boat, thus, in an epoch of instantaneity and immediate gratification, Barker's presence in the city is indeed a special occasion bespeaking a different temporality altogether, a sensibility alien to the very tempers of our time, to the convenient fallacy of

identity politics, to the still pervasive ethical and moral laws espoused by those caught in a 19th century time warp as the real purveyors of the future wrestle with the darkness of what is beyond good and evil and the easy panacea of hope and change is fiercely refused. This tragic sensibility is concentrated in the following aphorism from Barker's forthcoming *These Sad Places*:

> The tragic character's visceral contempt for the law. His self-willed repudiation of all obligation. His euphoric rupture of the disciplines of cohabitation and compatibility, as if he sliced through his own artery and watched wild-eyed as the blood burst out of darkness, ecstatic, fatal, half-divine. If there is pity in this excess of wounding, it is pity only for himself. Yet this is self-pity which the chorus—uncompromising in extracting its revenge—cannot disdain, for the tragic character is first and foremost a sacrifice whose destruction is proof—a proof perpetually required—of the inexorable fact of limitation, a fact so disabling and humiliating it enables us also to let go of life.[1]

[1] Not surprisingly, this is not yet available in English but was first published in a French translation.

It is upon the unique event of Barker journeying to New York by ship, upon a moment that is truly decisive—and it is fitting that this comes after our own long convalescence—that *Hyperion* is publishing a series of writings on Howard Barker that include George Hunka's "Access to the Body: The Theatre of Revelation in Beckett, Foreman, and Barker," excerpts from Barker's *DEATH, THE ONE, AND THE ART OF THEATRE*, which features an introduction written expressly for this occasion by Barker scholar Karoline Gritzner, and "The Sunless Garden," a new essay of Barker's that was presented in public for the first time at the conference in his honor in Wales. Here, David Kilpatrick, who has written on Hermann Nitsch, Mishima, and Bataille amongst others, prefaces it. What we wish to consecrate with this selection of material is the work of a serious tragic writer of the 20th and now 21st century who recognizes along with Genet that beauty resides in the wound and that, hence, there is no reconciliation, only the anguish and the ecstasy of living with one's fate, a fate that one must encounter erotically and to which one must sacrifice oneself, for our worst transgression is the one we commit against ourselves, the transgression of leaving our conscience in the lurch and seeking a forgiveness we can never achieve and that, ultimately, is a crime against the body, of the secret knowledge of the relationship between beauty and cruelty, of a sacrificing solitude.

Howard Barker

Access to the Body

The Theatre of Revelation in Beckett, Foreman, and Barker[1]

by George Hunka

The speaking body on stage as the irreducible condition of theatrical experience is a trope so general as to verge on the meaningless. It is applicable to any theatrical event from a play by Neil Simon or Alan Ayckbourn to the farthest reaches of the work of the Complicite company, Jan Fabre, or Romeo Castellucci. In some theatre of the late twentieth and early twenty-first century, however, it is this condition which itself becomes the focus for dramatic exploration. The speaking body's status as both subject and object, as both autonomous consciousness and as a spiritual artifact for the spectator's meditation and contemplation, becomes the basis for imaginative possibility. Schopenhauer's concept of the individual body as the "immediate object," the source for all that can know and is known for the subject, acquires new significance with the threat by politics and culture to its autonomy.[2] Especially after the catastrophes of the two world wars, the decline of the nation-state in the years following and the rise of a corporatized post-capitalist ideology, the speaking body becomes a special issue of theatre as an art. As individuals themselves have been subjected to a catastrophic fracture of their autonomy in the community, the theatre has now become a self-conscious locus of individual redefinition.

This theatre represents an alternative post-World-War-II theatre tradition, a tradition that exists parallel to both the social realism that arose on English-language stages in the wake of that war and the collectively conceived and politically progressive work exemplified in the United States by the Becks, in the United Kingdom by Peter Brook and Joan Littlewood, and in continental Europe by Artaud and Grotowski. Beginning with Beckett's mature theatrical theory and practice, this theatre posits a unique triangulation of theatrical experience, from character to character to spectator, as the lyrical depiction of suffering, desire, and love become, through the fracture of both social realism and collectivity, a means of poetic compassion. As this tradition develops through the work of the British dramatist Howard Barker and the American dramatist Richard Foreman, contemporaries in the English-language theatre, the body as autonomous perceptual and erotic object, known inwardly by the performer and outwardly by the spectator, is celebrated as the site of imagination. In the wake of the catastrophic twentieth century, the individual is encouraged to seize once again his or her body for him or herself, a body that has become a possession of the state under both totalitarianism and the post-capitalist culture industry.

[1] Originally written for the conference "Howard Barker's Art of the Theatre," University of Aberystwyth, Wales 10-12 July 2009.

[2] I cite Schopenhauer here with quite deliberate intent. The three dramatists under consideration in this paper are frequently discussed in connection with contemporary continental philosophies such as those of Adorno, Lacan, Bataille, and Badiou, but it seems to me that their work clearly emerges not from the Hegelian strain of post-Cartesian and especially post-Kantian thought, but from the alternative strain that leads from Schopenhauer to Nietzsche (despite Adorno's dismissive comments on Schopenhauer). Most contemporary continental philosophy, such as Zizek's, emerges from a closer emphasis on the Hegelian rather than the Schopenhauerian stream of influence. In the avoidance of a discussion of Schopenhauer's metaphysics, these critics it seems to me offer an incomplete—and occasionally blinkered and narrow—consideration of the European aesthetic tradition that lies beneath these plays. (I also urge that, apart from Beckett, Foreman and Barker may or may not agree with this assessment of a Schopenhauerian

Front image:
Howard Barker,
Winter landscape : gynaecologists dyning off an actress
oil on board

Below:
Howard Barker,
Study of an actress with an unloved child
oil on board

Neither Foreman nor Barker, in their theoretical writings, explicitly point to Samuel Beckett's plays as a pervasive influence. Foreman's early work was based in an aesthetic borrowed from Gertrude Stein and Bertolt Brecht;[3] discussing the literature and music that informs his own practice, Barker cites Shakespeare and the Elizabethan and Jacobean dramatists, and as more contemporary influences he names the composers Bela Bartok and Karlheinz Stockhausen, as well as the writers Paul Celan, George Oppen, and especially Louis-Ferdinand Celine.[4] And indeed, Foreman and Barker's work little resemble Beckett's pre-1962 dramatic writings. But they share with Beckett's post-1962 work a codification of the body as physicalized language, an explicit concern with the physical body in metaphysical space. It is not *Waiting for Godot*, *Krapp's Last Tape,* or *Endgame* to which the plays of Foreman and Barker look back, but to *Play*, *Come and Go*, *Not I,* and radio plays such as *Cascando* and *Words and Music*—works that owe both form and content to a specific acknowledgement of theatrical metaphysics.

The body in Beckett's late work is not, at first, presented full-blown but as a series of fragments. The bodies in his early plays, as innovative as these plays were, still existed in a recognizably quotidian world: the two tramps on the road, four figures in a post-apocalyptic landscape. *Happy Days* of 1961 ends with Winnie buried to her neck in sand, only her head visible. *Play* of 1962 begins with these speaking heads, disembodied, rehearsing the memory of an extramarital affair. It is only with *Play* that Beckett's dramatic and theatrical practice seizes upon the innovations of his fiction. The man and two women of *Play* are wrested from any recognizable realistic

context and trapped now in urns, in some non-realistic, unspecified locale.

What draws the spectator's attention, more radically than before, is the condition of the body and the speed, inflection, and vocabulary of the expressed spoken word. Language, like the body, is a series of disconnections, fragments that remain to be experienced and reassembled by an individual auditor. *Play*'s spotlight, a self-consciously theatrical technology, becomes a fourth character in the performance, the object through which the suffering of the characters is brought forth to consciousness. If the light is a ray of recognition, of consciousness, what then lies within the darkness that surrounds both the figures and the shaft of illumination?

Light sculpts the disembodied heads in *Play*, as well as the hands of *Come and Go*, the mouth of *Not I*. But it also sculpts the negative space of the darkness that surrounds these speaking heads. In his later plays like *Footfalls* and *That Time*, words emerge from this darkness as well, rendering the body on the stage itself an auditor. The space in which these plays transpire is not a crossroads, or an underground bunker, or a searing desert, but the theatre auditorium itself. The second half of the theatrical subject/object equation, the spectator, is now consciously assumed in the theatrical experience. The fourth wall is not so much broken as moved to a place behind the spectator as well.

Bodies in a darkened space, perhaps conceived as an unconscious. But not, it is important to note, as a collective unconscious. As extraordinary as *Waiting for Godot*, *Krapp's Last Tape,* and *Endgame* were, the notion of audience as collective was still an element of Beckett's dramaturgical practice, and elements of popular entertainment such as the music hall and the silent film shaped the structure and performance of these plays. As Beckett explored the more profound implications of the speaking body as primary element in theatre, however, these popular cultural accretions were shorn away from his practice, leaving mere presence and physicality as the severely restricted palette for his theatrical explorations.

Language, the means by which Beckett's characters tell their stories in the late plays, is no longer an avenue towards intelligibility. Instead, words become experiential, riven by anxiety and catastrophe, fragmented and unable to contain physical experience. Nonetheless, in the theatre, these words are the only means by which his bodies can define themselves, can present themselves to the spectator. The mouths sputter their words out ceaselessly as if driven by a need to define the bodies that express them. One is reminded of his 1937 letter to Axel Kaun:

> It is indeed becoming more and more difficult, even senseless, for me to write an official English. And more and more my own

dimension in their work; I'm unaware of any specific reference to this philosopher in their theoretical writings.) For more on Schopenhauer's metaphysics and aesthetics, see *Schopenhauer, Philosophy and the Arts*, edited by Dale Jacquette (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), and for Beckett's specific indebtedness to Schopenhauer, see Ulrich Pothast's *The Metaphysical Vision: Arthur Schopenhauer's Philosophy of Art and Life and Samuel Beckett's Own Way to Make Use of It* (London: Peter Lang Publishing, 2008). A dreadful subtitle, and the book unfortunately lacks extended consideration of Becketts post-1962 drama.

[3] Richard Foreman, *Plays and Manifestos* (New York: NYU Press, 1976). See especially editor Kate Davy's introduction.

[4] Interview with Howard Barker, *Private Passions*, BBC, 11 June 2006. http://www.bbc.co.uk/radio3/privatepassions/pip/559ls/

> language appears to me like a veil that must be torn apart in order to get at the things (or the Nothingness) behind it. [...] To bore one hole after another in it, until what lurks behind it—be it something or nothing—begins to seep through; I cannot imagine a higher goal for a writer today. [...] At first it can only be a matter of somehow finding a method by which we can represent this mocking attitude towards the word, through words. In this dissonance between the means and their use it will perhaps become possible to feel a whisper of that final music or that silence that underlies All.[5]

[5] Samuel Beckett, *Disjecta: Miscellaneous Writings and a Dramatic Fragment*, ed. by Ruby Cohn (New York: Grove Press, 1984): 171.

[6] Richard Foreman, "Interview with Ken Jordan" (1990): 6. Accessed 20 June 2009 at http://www.ontological.com/RF/rfinterviews/ForemanJordan1990.doc.

Ultimately, I suggest, the theatrical body was that means by which, though language, language was undermined to feel the whisper of that silence: a tactile conclusion that assumes a spectator, a bodied consciousness that sees and listens.

The written text serves as origination for Beckett's theatrical work, as it does for that of American dramatist Richard Foreman. In both his written plays and his directorial and design work for his Ontological-Hysteric Theatre founded in 1968, Foreman's explorations of the dynamics between two bodies begin in his work with the word. Most instructive in terms of the body in the theatre and the triangulation of desire is Foreman's description—perhaps better described as an epiphany—that led to his theatrical practice:

> "I saw a particular static moment from my seat in the Circle in the Square where I watched a rather dreadful production of *The Balcony*. And I remember seeing [Shelley] Winters, on one side of the stage, and Lee Grant on the other, and it was just a moment of stasis, and a moment of a kind of tension between them, and I just wanted to make a whole play that had nothing except that unresolved tension between them. And I wrote out of that. I said that's what I want in the theater, just that moment, and it doesn't develop into any of the other awful stuff, the psychological stuff, the narrative stuff, the adventure stuff that it always develops into. But it's just that.[6]

If Beckett fragments and deconstructs the body in post-war Western culture, Foreman attempts to reconstruct it, particularly within the politically progressive culture that surrounded his downtown New York theatre in 1968. Further, Foreman's presentational rather than representational practice—his performers often face squarely towards the audience, their dialogue often

pre-recorded and played through loudspeakers (by which means, Foreman said, he frees his non-professional actors from the rigors of memorizing his elliptical dialogue to concentrate on stage placement and movement)— serves explicitly to triangulate what he refers to as "tension" between performers and spectators. Within a few years, his stage work was eroticized with the appearance of Kate Manheim, Foreman's second wife, who frequently appeared nude, tension then gaining the additional quality of erotic desire, which dynamic then entered the performance space.

As the name of his theatre suggests, Foreman's primary concern is the nature of reality as constructed by a subject, particularly within the context of emotional, physical, and psychological extremity. His project is to introduce, through the bodies onstage and his own gnomic, lyrical language, a fracture between the world inside and the world outside the theatre. Seemingly hermetic, Foreman's work also has a cultural dimension that he does not disclaim:

> My plays are an attempt to suggest through example that you can break open the interpretations of life that simplify and suppress the infinite range of inner human energies. [...] The strategies I use are meant to release the impulse from the straitjacket tailored for it by our society. Character, empathy, narrative—these are all straitjackets imposed on the impulse so it can be dressed up in a fashion that is familiar, comforting, and reassuring for the spectator. But I want a theater that frustrates our habitual way of seeing, and by so doing, frees the impulse from the objects in our culture to which it is invariably linked. [...] It's impulse that's primary, not the object we've been trained to fix it upon. It is the impulse that is your deep truth, not the object that seems to call it forth. The impulse is the vibrating, lively thing that you really are. And that is what I want to return to: the very thing you really are.[7]

If Beckett theorizes the body as a site of expressed suffering, Foreman restores to the experiencing body a creative and imaginative function. The body-as-object, as a physical thing to be contemplated in Beckett's work, reacquires a consciousness that reconstructs and, more important, can act upon the world that surrounds it. A case in point is Foreman's 2003 play *Panic! (How to Be Happy!)*, in which four characters, two men and two women, find themselves in a forbidding natural landscape as they attempt to scale a mountain.[8] Three of the characters hopelessly hurl themselves against the given landscape with little success; only one, a woman given to

[7] Richard Foreman, *Unbalancing Acts: Foundations for a Theater* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1992): 4.

[8] Richard Foreman, *Panic! (How to Be Happy!)*. In *Bad Boy Nietzsche! And Other Plays* (New York: Theatre Communications Group, 2005).

physical stillness, is granted any sort of peace, a peace generated not from understanding but from an ability to reconcieve her surroundings. Her body is just as real, just as challenging an object, as the given mountain. We can take the mountain as a metaphor for the theatrical work itself (and why not, given the perspectival freedom that Foreman seeks to encourage in his audiences?). The ordeal of the Beckettian body leads to the imaginative freedom of Foreman's female bodies:

> The artistic experience *must* be an ordeal to be undergone. The rhythms *must* be in a certain way difficult and uncongenial. Uncongenial elements are then redeemed by a clarity in the moment-to-moment, smallest unit of progression. [...] But CLARITY is so difficult in the smallest steps from one moment to the next, because on the miniscule level, clarity is muddled either by the "logic" or progression (which is really a form of sleepwalking) or by the predictability of the opposite choice—the surreal-absurdist choice of the arbitrary & accidental & haphazard step.
>
> Of course
>
> ORDEAL
>
> is the only experience that remains. And clarity is the mode in which the ordeal becomes ecstatic.[9]

This experience of ordeal is shared by the character with an individual auditor or spectator, a specifically theatrical experience that confronts the performing body with the perceiving body, the object with the subject. It is necessarily a challenge. In Foreman's theatre the challenge is presented by the performer exhibiting his or her body as a site of imaginative speculation, inviting the audience to share in that imaginative journey, not knowing its outcome. Foreman writes:

> Only one theatrical problem exists now: How to create a stage performance in which the spectator experiences the danger of art not as involvement or risk or excitement, not as something that reaches out to vulnerable areas of his person,
>
> but rather
>
> the danger as a possible decision he (spectator) may make

[9] Richard Foreman, *Plays and Manifestos* (New York: New York University Press, 1976): 74.

Opposite:
Howard Barker,
Knowing him imprisoned, I was overcome with sex
oil on board

> upon the occasion of confronting the work of art. The work of art as a contest between object (or process) and viewer.[10]

[10] Foreman, ibid., 70.

The performer's body, as well as the spectator's, remains inviolate—the work of art does not "reach out to vulnerable areas of [the] person," but invites speculation that the process of perceiving the work of art itself originates.

Foreman's theatrical project restores to Beckett's bodies under siege the individual's ability to imaginatively remake the world and the culture that has led to this siege, and simultaneously redefines comic possibilities of theatrical form. In his three mid-career plays that inaugurated his Theatre of Catastrophe, *Victory*, *The Castle,* and *The Europeans*, Howard Barker explores the same imaginative remaking of the body in the world, this time however restoring to it a tragic consciousness, perhaps more Europeanized, it could be said, than Foreman's brighter, more optimistic American perspective. Indeed, these three plays arguably form a tragic trilogy of the European body, specifically the female body (and it must be noted that of the three dramatists of whom I speak today, the female body is far more central to their work than the male: females are protagonists in most of Beckett's work for solo performers and Foreman's character Rhoda led the casts of nearly all of his early and mid-career work). At the same time, Barker's characters find in confronting and performing their suffering a path to reconstitution and freedom.

In *Victory*, the first of these three plays, the reconstruction of the human body is the explicit subject

matter of the play.[11] Bradshaw roams Restoration England in an attempt to collect the body parts of her late husband, a Republican who is arrested, tortured, and finally decapitated by the King's soldiers in the final days before the Restoration. For Scrope, her husband's assistant, this journey is a mere act of mourning for a death, but for Bradshaw herself it is this and more: the reconstruction of her husband's dead body leads to a reconstruction of her own living identity. Indeed, by the end of the play, she has the justified audacity to physically lash out at Milton, an exemplar of the Republican ideology.

The risks are greater in *The Castle*. In the aftermath of a war, male soldiers return home to find that women have created a matriarchy based in compassion and collectivity, a situation that Stucley responds to with the construction of an impossible fortification against the natural world itself. The architect Krak is associated by Barker with an expertise in rectilinear engineering and defense. Rationality and hierarchy are specifically male interests in this play. Krak's rectilinear imagination is threatened when he falls in love with Ann, Stucley's wife, whose very body has introduced chaos into his own expertise. "Where's cunt's geometry?" he exclaims. "The thing has got no angles! And no measure, neither width nor depth, how can you trust what has no measurements?"[12] Nonetheless he has become obsessed, and the obsession is a threat to the continued stability and construction of the castle. As David Ian Rabey notes in his discussion of the play:

> Krak is engulfed in new drawings, shunning calculation of angles, bending himself to pursue new form: "Drawn cunt [...] In 27 versions." Even Stucley is swayed momentarily from his course: "The representation of that thing is not encouraged by the church. [...] It's wrong, surely, that— [...] I have never looked at one before." This recalls the [...] authoritarian tendency to separate, designate something a polar opposite and then to proceed in denial of confronting its existence, inevitably [producing] the counter-pressure of upheaval, making war necessary.[13]

Of the women in the play, the witch Skinner bears the suffering of genital mutilation and torture, finally condemned to have the rotting corpse of Holiday, whom she has killed, tied to her own body for the rest of her natural life. In this grotesque bonding of dead body to mutilated body, however, "Skinner finds a strength and freedom," Rabey says. "Placed outside the community and normal boundaries of human experience, she is free of desire for Ann, recognizes her vanity and rediscovers an autonomy, if only to accept punishment and remain where she pleases, claiming, 'I belong here. I am the castle also.'"[14]

[11] Howard Barker, *Victory*. In *Plays One* (London: Oberon Books, 2006).

[12] Howard Barker, *The Castle*. In *Plays Two* (London: Oberon Books, 2006): 67.

[13] David Ian Rabey, *Howard Barker: Politics and Desire* (New York: Macmillan, 1989): 167.

[14] Rabey, ibid., 166-167.

It is simplistic to say that Barker's women "embrace" bodily suffering, despite this explicit embrace of death and life in Skinner's punishment. Instead, as for Beckett's and Foreman's women, this suffering—often associated with the marginal status of women in a paternalistic and authoritarian society, whether it's the seventeenth or the twentieth century—offers an avenue to imaginative autonomy and freedom. Skinner finds it in a newly acquired wit and individuality. What makes this treatment tragic, however, is that there is ultimately no sure redemption in freedom or autonomy. Skinner's condition is a condition of recognition, not reconciliation. Beckett's heroines may be left to their status as objects trapped within memory or trauma, Foreman's find themselves somehow redeemed and encouraged. Neither is the case with Barker's speaking bodies.

Even the possibility of love as experienced by Katrin in *The Europeans* is not necessarily redemptive—though love provides new possibilities and new imaginative worlds, it does not for that reason redeem tragic experience.[15] In large part this lies at the heart of Barker's conception of tragedy. Katrin is the most theatrical of the female protagonists in these three plays, self-consciously exhibiting herself in childbirth in the public square, an exhibition which attracts Starhemburg, her future lover, to her. Read, again, as a metaphor for the theatrical experience itself, the co-optation of Katrin's exhibition by Leopold when he names the child (who is a product of Katrin's rape by the Turks) Concilia, a co-optation of the imaginative offering Katrin makes to her audience. Her child can become a property of the state if she herself cannot. It is her own suffering physical body to which Katrin ultimately lays claim even in the trauma of the abandonment of the child at the end of the play. This suffering, and the new imaginative freedom it has engendered, is beyond Leopold's and the culture's reach. In her suffering is no reconciliation or redemption, but there is in it a freedom from the authoritarian state, and finally a freedom to love.

This alternative theatrical tradition reunites the two halves of the Cartesian human being, joining body

[15] Howard Barker, *The Europeans*. In *Plays One* (London: Oberon Books, 2006).

Howard Barker, Untitled ink and watercolor on paper

to spirit once again. And it was from a rejection of this Cartesian thought that Beckett's work most notoriously sprang. In one of his final plays, Beckett took on the theatre itself—not merely as metaphor but as explicit subject matter. A theatre director and his assistant arrange the body of an aged, pale, voiceless man for public exhibition. The director and his assistant are busy, crude, and self-important; the director is in a hurry for he has a meeting to attend (what's more, a government meeting: "Step on it, I have a caucus," he exclaims).[16] But the body around which they scurry remains, at center stage, raising its head only at the very end to stare the applauding audience in the face. The applause stops; the man keeps staring, though he remains silent. Barker and Foreman's project is to re-equip this suffering body with a voice and movement, to start out from this individual human body without which there can be no theatre whatsoever. Beckett's play *Catastrophe* came at the close of his career, though it comes as an opening to a new theatre for the next century.

[16] Samuel Beckett, *The Complete Dramatic Works* (London: Faber & Faber, 1986): 458.

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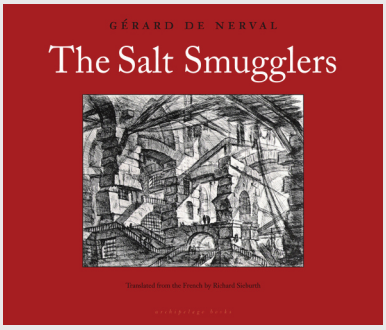

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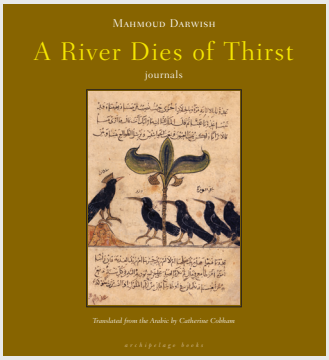

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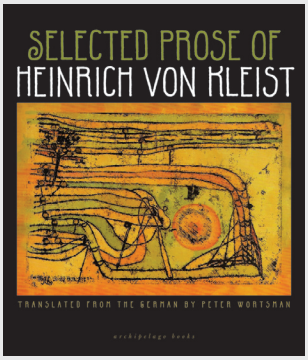

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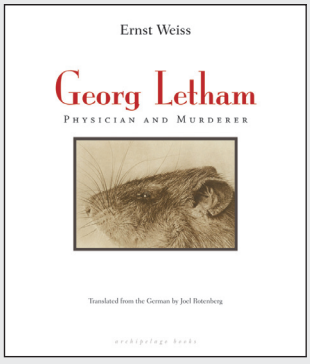

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Howard Barker

Death, The One,

and The Art of Theatre

(excerpt)

by Howard Barker
introduction by
Karoline Gritzner

Some Notes towards Autonomy in Howard Barker's Art of Theatre

by Karoline Gritzner

In his philosophical commentary on Theodor W. Adorno's *Minima Moralia*, entitled *So Ist Es*, Alexander García Düttmann defines the aphorism as an aesthetic gesture which says: 'that's it' ('*so ist es*'). According to Düttmann, the successful aphorism does not need to be explained or elaborated. Like a work of art, it addresses the reader with an immediacy and urgency that resists translation into discursive language. Like a work of art, the aphorism is a poetic and philosophical expression: in perfect form it 'reveals the unsayable in the sayable' (Düttmann, 41). Much the same can be said of Howard Barker's *Death, The One and The Art of Theatre*, which explores the mysteries of tragedy, eroticism and death in an aphoristic form that expresses a profoundly philosophical sensibility. In the words of Maurice Blanchot and Jean-Luc Nancy, writing in aphorisms expresses a 'fragmentary demand' that calls into question the relation between the part and the whole, the finite and the infinite.[1] This discontinuous and anti-systematic mode of writing denotes a refusal to subsume the singular thought and particular expression under an overarching totality of meaning. In Barker's work this fragmentary demand is staged as an expression of subjective autonomy. Barker's own preferred term for his poetics of profound emotional experience is the 'Theatre of Catastrophe,' a tragic theatre that rejects the utilitarian values of the modern world (such as transparency, clarity, usefulness) and pursues uncompromising explorations of human pain, anxiety, instinct and transgression. Barker defends theatre, especially tragedy, as an autonomous, independent space which authenticates modes of being on their own terms. In the extra-ordinary space of tragic theatre, bodies and language, movement and expression become exceptional—suspended from the instrumentality of the outside world.

Autonomy is commonly understood as an Enlightenment concept and as instrumental in forging the myth of modernity's morally objective, self-controlled, rational human being—in effect a self without a body or desire. In the spirit of Romanticism, Barker's poetic imagination denounces the ideology

[1] See also David Ian Rabey's references to Nancy in chapter 10 of his *Howard Barker: Ecstasy and Death. An Expository Study of His Drama, Theory and Production Work, 1988-2008* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009).

Front image:
Howard Barker,
Dead you said
oil on board

Opposite:
Howard Barker,
A policeman tortured by nurses
oil on board

of reason in favour of exaggeration and irrationality. Here the principle of autonomy is not a denial of the sensuous or 'merely' private dimension of emotional experience. On the contrary, Barker translates the demand for freedom into a performance of self-definition that takes the form of connecting more deeply with the dark and obscure force field of emotional and bodily desire. It seems that only by reaching deeper and further into catastrophe can the individual experience his or her freedom *to be*. Thus, the self in the Theatre of Catastrophe answers the call of the infinite by embodying and thereby rising above social, moral, and political crisis. In the process, self-authorship borders on self-obliteration, and servitude, coercion, and pain can become manifestations of love and passion. Therefore, Barker's poetics is also an ethics: it does not seek to reconcile differences or smooth out contradictions; it admits them and in doing so 'serves to allow the infinite relation of Self to Other' (Blanchot, *The Writing of the Disaster*, 53). Above all, the autonomous claim of tragic theatre, this peculiar 'art of playing with division' (Blanchot, *The Infinite Conversation*, 360), rests on an affirmation of incomprehensibility as a primary existential value.

In Barker's drama, to defend a position and ideal of autonomy (however precarious and self-destructive) means to admit chaos, exaggeration, and solitude, all in defence of an unknown life lived *at a remove* from what is already known and agreed upon. Dancer in *Hated Nightfall* is a good example of a transgressive dramatic character who exposes himself to an existence at the limit, defying the laws of history and politics in favour of a condition of uncertainty and contradiction.

> DANCER: […] The gratification, the celebration, the reputation the everything heroic and magnanimous, who could refuse? (*Pause*)
>
> Only me. (*Pause*)

This dancing around the abyss in the Theatre of Catastrophe effects a suspension of objective truth and meaning while also suggesting a playful irresolution of conflict and interminable transvaluation of values. Sexual desire and death are the primary dramatic forces of this form of tragedy. Barker's art of theatre is drawn to the mystery of eros and death because they offer 'limit-experiences,' experiences of extremity where life borders on the impossible. When death becomes an 'object of desire' (Barker, 75), the One, as is the case in many Barker plays, we enter an unknowable and unfathomable relation with it. "The limit-experience is the response that man encounters when he has decided to put himself radically in question. This decision

involving all being expresses the impossibility of ever stopping, whether it be at some consolation or some truth, at the interests or the results of an action, or with the certitudes of knowledge and belief" (Blanchot, *The Infinite Conversation*, 203-204). Perhaps Barker's art of theatre is a 'theatre *without limits*' (Barker, 36), an autonomous space, precisely because it recognises and affirms the value of the boundary, of experience *in extremis*, for only 'the fence' can give rise to transcending thoughts and actions.

Barker's poetic drama expresses, in Nietzschean fashion, a compulsive longing for 'unknowing,' uncertainty, and difference. Irresolution and contradiction are the hallmarks of this theatre of becoming. Barker's philosophy of theatre is disruptively theatrical because rather than constituting a dialectical search for truth, it oscillates between a multitude of appearances, gestures, and 'truths' that are discovered and experienced in moments of *ecstasis*. Theatre approaches philosophical thinking when it appears as an 'event,' following Alain Badiou: "This event—when it really is theatre, the art of the theatre—is an event of thought. This means that the assemblage of components directly produces ideas" (Badiou, 72). Barker's staging of desire, which may or may not be a 'gift of death' (Derrida)—we cannot know!—does not emerge from any foundational discourse of identity or gender politics.

Even the One does not fulfil the function of a synthesising origin or stable reference point, however cunningly she stages herself in the theatre of our imagination. Barker's conception of the One should not be confused with a metaphysical, transcendental notion of essential unity and sameness.

Rather, the appearance of the One (as lover, object of desire) in surprising manifestations, shapes, and movements—in short, his/her 'theatricality'—is what renders the One *impossible*. The One is 'the One' because he has a disturbing, dislocating effect upon me; he pushes me onto a shifting ground, causing disorientation and interruption. In Barker, the One elicits a (dialogic) fragmentation of the self rather than reducing plurality or offering at-one-ment. The One agitates my becoming in space and time, in which he is also not immune to change and influence. He launches an *affect* and thus declares himself unnameable and unknowable—to *me*.

When exploring the philosophical connotations of Barker's theatre and the poetic force of his theory, the spectre of Nietzsche is never far away. Nietzsche's attempt to free art and thought from the burdens of morality and exclusive truths is expressed in his view that "existence and the world appear justified only as an aesthetic phenomenon" (Nietzsche, 128). Barker refines this vision by foregrounding the distinctively *theatrical* nature of human existence in the context of tragic experience, which allows for the contradictions and dissonance of human nature (the pain, pleasure, and beauty of life lived 'beyond good and evil') to emerge *affect*ively. The theatre of tragedy invites a (potentially exhilarating) 'self-detachment from the weight of the factual' (Adorno, 126) and initiates an open-ended search for the infinite, for Death and the One. In doing this, Barker's art of theatre offers the promise and challenge of profound disturbance rather than deliverance.

> "May words cease to be […] means of salvation.
>
> Let us count, rather, on disarray. (Blanchot)

Death, The One, and The Art of Theatre (excerpt)

by Howard Barker

1

I do not know *the theatre*, and *the theatre* does not know me.

•

There is *the theatre* and there is *the art of theatre*. All that is proposed in this book pertains to the latter.

•

Some have had to do with *the art of theatre*, but finding it too arduous, chose to join *the theatre*. These are legion. A few remained faithful. Very few, because it is a painful path.

•

The theatre purports to give pleasure to the many. *The art of theatre* lends anxiety to the few. Which is the greater gift?

•

Nothing *said* about death by the living can possibly relate to death as it will be experienced by the dying. Nothing *known* about death by the dead can be communicated to the living. Over this appalling chasm tragedy throws a frail bridge of imagination.

•

Since theatre ceased to make death its subject it surrendered its authority over the human soul. Since it allowed itself to be incorporated into mundane projects of political indoctrination and social therapy it abdicated its power. Always theatre is suborned by the idealism of its makers. Always it is traduced by the sentimental. In *the art of theatre* we pity the idealist as one pities the man with a fatal disease. This pity is strictly circumscribed. Whilst many have tried to make hospitals from theatres we keep our stage infection-free.

2

All I describe is theatre even where theatre is not the subject.

•

Howard Barker,
The hospital : mother and child with dogs and unburied dead
oil on board

One has heard talk of many theatres existing, and of many forms, as if theatres tolerated one another. The fact is that theatres annihilate one another as all religions annihilate one another. Is this because theatre is a religion? Let us confess *the art of theatre* has many of the characteristics of religion. For example, it finds so much theatre *anathema*. It *excommunicates*. Its methods are akin to *prayer*. What distinguishes it from all religion is this, however, that it recoils from *truth*. It repudiates *truth* as vulgarity.

•

All cultures are enslaved by idealism – they are defined by their servitude to the ideal. Only tragedy locates the ideal in Death, but because Death is the first enemy of political systems, tragedy is caricatured as *negativity*. The bravery of tragedy – where not even sexual love is sufficient to abolish the fascination of Death – lies in its refutation of pleasure as an organizing principle of existence. Who would deny that this contempt for pleasure is also an ecstasy?

•

The theatre is often contrasted with the street, as if it were false, and the street real. *The art of theatre* asserts its absolute independence of the street. It values the door. It values the wall. It leaves the street to the street. In any case, who says the street is real? It *pretends* to be real. The fact so many persist in the fiction that it is real is of no concern to us.

•

Silence is the consequence of too-deep knowledge in some, of ignorance in others.

•

The dread of speech is a sign of spiritual health, for the banality of speech is universal and induces nausea. In *the art of theatre* we acknowledge a solitary obligation – *to save speech from itself*.

•

To tell the truth sincerely is the pitiful pretension of the theatre. To lie sincerely is the euphoria of *the art of theatre*.

•

To ask for truth in theatre is contradictory, a repudiation of its essence. Consequently, Death, a subject for which true statements are *a priori* inadmissible, is the subject most perfectly suited to the form of theatre.

3

We are not born full of sin, we are born full of the appetite for it.

•

We repudiate all those who find theatre *congenial*. *The art of theatre* is constructed on the premiss that the creation of happiness is no part of its function. Nor does it have a *function*.

•

To seduce this woman and not another. To seduce this man and not another. We are faintly discriminating.

•

To move continually out of reach. To be only ever *proximate*.

•

I come close. I tell *everything*. But only in such a way that the listener wonders if what he heard was *imagined*.

•

Confession is also discretion. 'Why did I fail to include the fact that I….?'

•

To seduce this woman and not another. To seduce this man and not another. The influence of the locality. The charm of coincidence. The failure to exploit

(the dropped handkerchief, the entire store of stratagems). The seducer's nausea at his own sentences. The prospect of having to admit nothing turned out as planned.

•

When the light came on he saw her face was disfigured. This had the effect of extinguishing his desire. He found an excuse to avoid the consequences of what he himself had initiated. His actions were however dictated by consideration of a purely *public* kind. It was not in his sexuality that he experienced offence. On the contrary he sensed his erotic instinct was enhanced by her disfigurement ('what or who had so damaged her? How had she inspired such mistreatment?'). Once he was able to acknowledge this he accepted the challenge of her condition. He nevertheless stipulated she wore tighter clothes.

•

All I describe is theatre even where theatre is not the subject.

•

So essential is theatre to *the idea of life* it cannot be compromised by making itself *the imitation of life*. It cannot be humiliated by rituals of reproduction.

•

The theatre reproduces life. *The art of theatre* invents life. This act of invention may be perceived as a critique of the poverty of existence. It is not *social criticism*.

•

The art of theatre, in its impatience with the world, utters in its own languages. Moreover it understands these languages to be the means by which its public is *cleansed* of the detritus of familiarity, domesticity and recognition.

•

The art of theatre was fear-inspiring. The Humanists, who know of no *use* for fear, nor can imagine the *subliminity* of fear, abolished it from the stage. We talk however, of theatre as crucially an art of Death. We assert the dominance of fear in the life of the characters. In this we are paradoxically, realists.

•

Death is the preoccupation of great art even where it is not the *subject* of it. When the utilitarians seized the theatre Death simply stood in the foyer, as patient as a chauffeur.

4

To enter the space silently. To enter it thinking of Death. To make Death the whole subject even when laughter discloses the ambiguity of our passions. To *admit* Death.

•

To *admit Death*…. to know *now* what you knew but were denied consciousness of… that *all* is predicated on Death… is this political?

•

What is the function of laughter in tragedy? Can we talk of a function in tragedy? Let us put it another way. How does laughter serve the experience of tragedy? By implicating us in its seductive process. It is a dropped handkerchief.

•

The peculiar laugh of tragedy. The laugh on the rim of Death.

•

The dropped handkerchief: accident/intention/the beauty of a falling thing/ white is a sign/I surrender/intimate as underwear/to retrieve it is to begin/ impossible not to retrieve it/an obligation/excuse me/we both know/this will perhaps be fatal.

•

The foyer is not neutral. Always the play of Death is at war with the foyer. The foyer is *the theatre* par excellence. It is the first aim of *the art of theatre* to abolish the foyer.

•

Cruelty is cheap, like philanthropy.

•

We should all like to choose our deaths, both the moment and the manner. We should like to control this as all the episodes of life. But Death is not an episode of life, it is beyond life and nothing that pertains to life pertains to Death. It was the same with the birth agony. We were coming into a place. With Death we are going into a place. Or, if we are not going into a place, certainly we are leaving one…

•

The sexual moment is not a knowing. Its vitality is nevertheless inspired by the

misapprehension that it is a knowing, as all exploration purports to be knowing, as all journeys proclaim their knowing. The well-travelled are notoriously ignorant.

•

The ancient element of violence in the wedding is dimly visible in the tears the mother sheds for the bride. These tears are commonly misunderstood as tears of joy, in the way a culture of gratification converts every manifestation of pain into the substance of its own sentimentality. But are these tears not tears of pity inspired by the spectacle of a beauty contrived solely for its own violation?

•

Speaking of those one might have loved, we like to indulge a spurious melancholy. The experience of life seems reducible to missed opportunities, near-encounters, appointments that failed to materialize. Thus we can comfort ourselves with another false-tragedy, that so-and-so, with whom we were destined to live a life of passion, somehow evaded us, that the objective situation conspired to obstruct a critical encounter. We are thus delivered into the power of the arbitrary, a pretext, a self-justification for spoiled life. If conversely, the loved one need not have been the *only one* (a nauseating exclusivity according to democratic ideology, where absolute interchangeability is the rule) but rather the world is profuse with possibility, the arbitrary becomes the excellent, a condition of luxury. Certainly, if it is true that if by failing to be in a certain place one relinquished *one* love, the opposite must equally apply, that by being in another place one delivered oneself to the possibility of encountering *another*…

•

All I describe is theatre even where theatre is not the subject.

•

Howard Barker, Untitled
ink and watercolor on paper

Kiss carefully – not an admonition about kissing, an act of banality/an act of terrible depth, but about the *kissed one*.

•

The clumsiness of all theatre where the artist is not ignorant. The poverty of all text where the dramatist is not ignorant. How can we speak of ignorance as a virtue? Because we are nauseated by the *knowing*. Because we long to share the ordeal of the *unknowing*, who alone possess a beautiful intention.

•

The paradox that we require bad art to make us long for a testament of authenticity. What do we mean by authenticity? Not a *true account* (let the journalists account truthfully, i.e. not at all) but a spectacle of utterance, the utterance born of an ordeal.

•

Her dread he would say the same things. Her relief that he *did* say the same things. Her contempt that he said them…

5

The demonstration causes me to ask not what was demonstrated but who is the demonstrator?

•

When we are ordered to be free we are entitled to ask in whose interest should we be free! In the existing state of language let alone ethics, it is not self-evident that freedom is a gift.

•

Why do you require me to be free?

•

The photographic paper before its immersion in the developing tank. The invisible is present. The immanent form. But never an immutable form (we might stop the development… the exhaustion of the chemicals…).

•

The old photograph. What is behind the tree? Something was behind the tree. To turn the photograph on its edge. To scratch away the surface of the tree.

•

The land behind the tree continues. A field, leading to a road. The road leads

to the city. At this moment (the moment of the photograph) in the city a room where a woman (a man) crosses one leg over the other. This is both contained in and excluded from the photograph. The essential *agony* of all photography.

•

Where this photograph was taken (the place) may never have changed (we cannot identify the place). Whilst few places are unchanged, we cannot say authoritatively that the general law of change applies to *this place*. So the photograph has the status of a wound, which smarts with its *irresolution* …

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Acceptance notification: 25 March 2010
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Howard Barker

The Sunless Garden of the Unconsoled

Some Destinations Beyond Catastrophe

by Howard Barker
introduction by
David Kilpatrick

An Invitation to Barker's Garden

David Kilpatrick

The question concerning tragedy has been a major concern for Modernism since Nietzsche. Whether or not the art form is possible in such an age has been the subject of much debate. No writer has done more to answer the call than Howard Barker. Born in south London in 1946, his first play was staged at the Royal Court in 1970 when, along with Caryl Churchill, Howard Brenton, and David Hare, he was seen as one of a handful of promising young dramatists writing political plays pushing a progressive agenda on the British stage. Unlike his peers, however, Barker hasn't risen to popularity on either side of the pond, and this is due in no small part to the "difficult" tag frequently used to label his plays by London theatre critics. Despite this resistance, he has gone on to cultivate a body of work that has earned him another reputation: an actor's playwright. When the stages of the Royal Court and Royal Shakespeare Company no longer welcomed his writing, in 1988 actors from both companies formed The Wrestling School, a theatre company devoted exclusively to the staging of his plays. By this time his dramaturgy abandoned the ideological and didactic impulse of his earlier work. As critics failed or refused to keep up with this shift, beginning in 1986 Barker took to writing theoretical texts as programme notes, newspaper articles, and lectures, before gathering them together in one volume as *Arguments for a Theatre* in 1989 (John Calder Press), expanding with subsequent editions in 1993 and 1997 (Manchester UP). Serving to articulate his tragic vision as they elaborate what he calls the "Theatre of Catastrophe," the volume stands alongside Artaud's *The Theatre and Its Double* and Grotowski's *Towards a Poor Theatre* as the most provocative and influential works on theatre in the twentieth century.

The influence of Barker's plays and theoretical texts on the "in-yer-face" dramatists who emerged in the mid-1990s "Cool Britannia" scene is inestimable. Dramatists such as Sarah Kane, Mark Ravenhill, Martin Mcdonagh, and Martin Crimp all share with Barker a commitment to theatre as excess, where the aesthetic and ethical limitations of conventional theatre

Front image:
Howard Barker,
The punishment of the judges
oil on board

are transgressed as a matter of course. Kane famously predicted that "in two hundred years' time Howard Barker will be thought of a bit like Shakespeare." While the works of Kane take their richly deserved place among the modern theatrical canon via anthologies and restaging, Barker's work remains strangely subject to neglect, with recent cuts in funding to the British Arts Council making the survival of The Wrestling School a concern.

Not that Barker's output has shown any signs of wear or weakening. His fifteen-hour play *The Ecstatic Bible* in 2000, his revision of Elsinore and the Hamlet myth with *Gertrude - The Cry* in 2002, and *The Seduction of Almighty God* in 2006 prove his tragic vision is as sharp as ever, adding to a body of work that is daunting in its breadth and depth. Likewise, his critical output continues in the new century, with *Death, The One and the Art of Theatre* appearing in 2005 (Routledge) while adopting the *nom-de-plume* Eduardo Houth with *A Style and its Origins*, published in 2007 (Oberon), chronicling in third-person Barker's cultivation of a unique performative aesthetic with the productions he directed with The Wrestling School.

The following essay, "The Sunless Garden of the Unconsoled: Some Destinations Beyond Catastrophe," would surely fit should there be a fourth edition of *Arguments for a Theatre*. Here we see Barker wrestling with tragedy, frustrated with the seeming reification of social values, the turn towards reconciliation and moral conformity that attends—however tenuously—Attic and Elizabethan tragic drama (perhaps, Barker suggests, due to the artist's need to be patronized if not adored), seeing in such dramaturgy a paradoxical suppression of the catastrophic core of the tragic. Rejecting such gestures as cowardly compromise, Barker here explores his own texts as movements towards "the experience of Sacrifice," with special attention to *Gertrude - The Cry* and *Wonder and Worship in the Dying Ward* (in this essay he refers to the latter as unperformed and unpublished but it has just been given a staged reading at Riverside Studios, London, 2 May 2010). Lack of familiarity with either of these scripts by Barker shouldn't be a barrier to an understanding of what is at stake here for tragedy and catastrophic thought; Barker's sacrificial theory of contemporary tragedy would be just as clearly articulated if he discussed plays either canonical or merely imagined. Like the work of Georges Bataille, Barker finds in sacrifice at once the antithesis and the antidote to the modern. The sense of the Sacred such sacrifice produces is one that renders any significatory order not only suspect (as with some works by Sophocles and Shakespeare) but shattered.

With "The Sunless Garden of the Unconsoled" we find an articulation of a theatrical vision more tragic than prior tragedy would allow. With this rejection of the comforts of faith, reason or ethics, Barker dares us to consider a mode of consciousness lost in a night of non-knowledge, inviting us to the ecstasy of irrevocable loss.

THE SUNLESS GARDEN OF THE UNCONSOLED

Some Destinations Beyond Catastrophe

by Howard Barker

It is scarcely controversial to declare that what we find frustrating in Tragedy is its love of The Law. Given the huge extent of its creative mandate, its contempt for the mimetic rule, its hypnotized fascination with transgression, and the poetry it brings to malice, sadism, and the savage accident, this inevitable capitulation can only be experienced as disappointing. In invoking The Law I am not referring only to the prevailing disciplines of State or Faith, but also to the similarly oscillating and insecure concepts of Kindness and the Human. To admit the material condition of the practice of theatre, the fact it is never active unless authorized, hardly compensates for this sense of lack, which is diminished only if one concedes at the outset that Tragedy has not until now been an exercize in moral speculation, but first and foremost a discipline which raised the spectre of passionate disorder only to abolish it again, thereby making of temptation and obliteration twin aspects of a game played out before an audience in order to validate a status quo. Certainly no one has claimed for Tragedy that it was enlightening, notwithstanding the curious fact that the plot of the antique text was routinely described as 'the argument.'

However, one senses it is not only the circumstances of ideology and censorship that have routinely bent the shape of tragic action into this familiar curve. Poets after all, have their ways with authority. We are the perfect liars of this and every age. This conformity of dramatic authors – and artists in general – to the moral climate of their cultural milieu invites speculation into the psychological origins of creative desire itself.

Howard Barker,
The well and its creator : women fighting with buckets
oil on board

It is hard to resist the suspicion that the profusion of texts in our time which purport to offer critiques of society whilst simultaneously endorsing its values unwittingly advertises a neurosis, as if by demanding deeper and deeper civility in the culture, the authors sensed the decay of it in themselves. It would perhaps be preposterous for any individual to claim he had acquired sufficient autonomy to articulate appalling propositions on the stage without admitting to the private predilections that initiated them, and in any case the extent of an author's implication in the crimes of his characters never affects the outcome. Some greater discipline imposes its resolution. My life in theatre has to a considerable extent been shaped by this conflict between a desire to speculate freely and widely on what it is to be human and the implacable disciplines of theatrical form.

Whatever rudimentary signs of a tragic instinct exist in earlier works such as CRIMES IN HOT COUNTRIES or VICTORY, I have consistently identified THE EUROPEANS as the first of the Catastrophic plays, not only from its narrative inception in a crisis of order but from the insistence of the protagonist on privileging personal instinct over cultural discipline. Katrin's rage at her violation and maiming might be contained and ameliorated by the doctrine of Christ or the doctrine of Expediency, but her sense that to engage in a programme of reconciliation could only maim her further renders her an outcast, and she is routinely described as mentally ill or inveterately perverse. It is perhaps worth differentiating Katrin's moral independence from the struggle of Widow Bradshaw in VICTORY. Bradshaw's choice is to discard by strenuous intellectual effort her whole moral character, and the

success which attends on this enterprise perhaps suggests its superficial claim on her. Katrin's determination is visceral, and requires no education. Her criminal apotheosis is perhaps her decision to give birth in public, making of herself what I have described as 'the screaming exhibit in the Museum of Reconciliation', but her greatest and most triumphant infringement of the law is delayed until she has necessarily developed a natural affection for her child and then to wilfully break the maternal bond and return the infant to the army of the enemy whose soldiers had fathered it upon her. At this point it can safely be said that the protagonist annihilates whatever lingering sympathy an audience accustomed to reconciliation as a social principle might have entertained for her.

To invite speculation as to the consequent life of Katrin and her lover is one of the outcomes of this extremity, and I once spoke of writing a sequel to THE EUROPEANS if only to insist on the character of her spirituality. Imploring her lover to applaud her outrage for its *superba*, if nothing else, with the cry 'Congratulate me, then…!' might on its own have ensured no actress of the Royal Shakespeare Company would ever play Katrin, for this institution may only utter the reconciliation that is the law, if not I suspect, the instinct, of its Shakespearian heritage.

I'd like to advance my account of the dilemmas and contradictions of tragic writing in a culture of moral totality by examining two later works, one relatively established, GERTRUDE, THE CRY, and one recently completed and unperformed, WONDER AND WORSHIP IN THE DYING WARD, both of which carry the thesis of Catastrophic Theatre into yet more uncomfortable territory, namely the experience of Sacrifice.

The culture of Liberal-Humanism finds Sacrifice comprehensible only in very constrained circumstances. Unwillingly it palliates the death of soldiers by attaching the word to the memorial, but both the rhetoric and the architecture are copied from Thermopylae and the pagan Spartans, and Christ himself, the most self-conscious of all the sacrificed, knew it as a destiny in his God-character, but a nightmare in the man. His desperate pleading to be excused the very ordeal for which he was created is touchingly human and might be seen as the first expression in Western culture of the individual asserting his reluctance to perish for the collective, in other words, to be a *victim*. Liberal Humanism's obsessive desire to identify and eliminate the *victim* is an inevitable consequence of the doctrine of equality, and indeed might be regarded as its ideological justification. Victims are, of course, abundant in tragedy, and constitute the source of the dismay which initiates it, but unless one were whimsical and dared to suggest that the humiliation and death of Cordelia was a sacrifice to the eventual civilizing of King Lear, the category of victim is strictly reserved.

To invoke Sacrifice in contemporary tragedy, as it is invoked in the two texts I have described, is to rupture the contract of mutuality that is critical to the contemporary moral project. Pity here becomes irrelevant and conscience ceases to act upon the public as it ceases to act on the protagonist herself. Katrin's unnatural gesture with her own child is vastly less cruel than Gertrude's with hers, but in both cases the act is presented from the perspective of an individual driven to assert her independence not only of social obligation but of the maternal bond, a defiance of biology as well as sentiment. We are familiar with the fact that in the confined spaces of public permission, the making of one self is frustrated by the rights of another. We also know that in conventional tragedy – whilst it is anachronistic to talk of rights – the claim to existence exists only to be violated. The rise of the protagonist is essentially a criminal enterprise, and the corpses that decorate his progress are the detritus of a mesmeric journey that has only one terminus – self-disgust and some form of suicide. In the Catastrophic play the invocation of Sacrifice renders the binary ethic of criminal / victim redundant. Humanist jurisprudence might argue as to whether the sexualized murder of the old king in GERTRUDE, THE CRY, is murder or manslaughter, given the infatuated condition of his killers, but the play's trajectory, with its phase by phase disclosure of the origins of Claudius's passion, and Gertrude's frequently pitiful attempts to satisfy it, renders protest at injustice awesomely irrelevant. If betrayal of the Law is precisely where Claudius locates the proof of love – and it is Gertrude who identifies this for him – it is not entirely surprising that the supreme infidelity that proposes itself is the mother's betrayal of the son, and it is important to recognize the clear signs in this text of Gertrude's deep feeling for Hamlet. Hamlet is poisoned, and dies mesmerized by the spectacle of his mother's nakedness, his awareness that he is nothing less than a sacrifice to the religion of his mother's sexuality immaculately described in the controlled gesture with which – despite his agony – he replaces the glass on its foot. Hamlet reiterates out of sheer infantile provocation, 'the world is full of things I do not understand, but others understand them evidently' but at this moment he understands perfectly well the function, if not the justice, of his destiny, and accords it an exquisite affirmation.

The abolition of the Law that characterizes the Catastrophic play is not followed by its restitution, and the state of anxiety created in an audience by the expected, even craved, arrival of the apology cannot be dissipated.

WONDER AND WORSHIP IN THE DYING WARD is a play about revelation, its irresistible compulsion, and the ambiguities surrounding the notions of the victim and the perpetrator. It is also, crucially, about the apology and its status in the Christian-Humanist tradition. Since the Church of Rome placed the confession at the very centre of its ritual, apology has been a significant personal and cultural gesture – and in recent years – astonishingly, a political device of dubious validity. The crux of the agony of apology – for it can be

nothing less – is the sense of personal loss entailed in denying actions in which one located one's faith in circumstances now altered. A culture of apology – removed from the context of Christian practice – finds a congenial new residence in the contemporary dispensation of Late Democracy and its tablet of laws, partly Christian, partly secular idealism, known as Human Rights. The intensity of the social consensus surrounding tolerance and freedom – nomenclature we cannot dispute here – raises the prospect familiar from various decayed regimes of the past that one might be persuaded to apologize for what one senses was never a wrong action in the first place, and this dilemma lies at the heart of this tragedy in which revelation on the part of one character, Ostend, is followed by a terrible act of self-maiming on the part of another, an appalling reaction to a visual shock shaped by both disgust and envy.

Howard Barker, *A sacred place* oil on board

Revelation in this narrative – its moment and its reason – is the subject of seemingly endless speculation, rather as the bizarre selection of a circus horse in preference to a motorbike by the messenger in A HOUSE OF CORRECTION preoccupies almost to distraction the characters of that play – and the gnawing obsession here of an entire hospital of untended patients with the chanted slogan 'The door fell open, why?' acts as a permanent and tortuous rebuke to Ostend. Given she is neither an exhibitionist nor a sadist, her showing can only be what I have to describe as divine obligation, her glimpsing of an overwhelming manifestation of spirituality compelling her to make herself visible rather as God Himself, in His devastating solitude in the waters of the universe, required to be seen, and could not *not* be seen, and

made Man precisely to be His audience. To perpetuate the affinity with Genesis, the paradox of Revelation is its unpredictable consequence, for consequences there must be, and Ostend's moment of splendour is simultaneously the triggering of the ordeal of another, here as in GERTRUDE, her own child, who as witness, must destroy herself, but in failing to do so, haunts her mother's life, a crippled rebuke to autonomy, awesomely vengeful and whilst forever prostrate, nimble on an electric bed.

Ostend senses the orchestration of events has only one purpose – to compel her to issue the apology she has refused for twenty years, and she is, for reasons of kindness and expediency, frequently on the brink of doing so. But Ostend, like most of the protagonists of the Theatre of Catastrophe, is scrupulous in her attitude to words, knowing the residual significance of sorry even in a culture which has made of sorry a disingenuousness. She properly assumes that to deny her participation in her Revelatory experience will annihilate her integrity. Yet this is not the ugliest aspect of the equation. Worse still is the realisation that only the denigration of this treasured experience can ever relieve the agony of rage that describes her child.

As I have suggested, love alone might compel submission, and Ostend is close to this genuflection to contemporary ethics when the third significant character of the play, a far-from-infantile resident of the Dying Ward called Childlike, a scholar, dwarf and one-eyed hermaphrodite, proposes a higher law than the law of Shame, namely, the Law of the Sacred and its ritualised manifestation, the *Sacrifice*. Childlike insists that the Sacrifice, however pitiful, cannot be compensated, and that the broken woman on the mobile bed must remain forever unconsoled.

As in GERTRUDE, WONDER AND WORSHIP IN THE DYING WARD describes the terrible phenomenon of crime without punishment, and more terrible still, punishment without crime, for both Hamlet and the broken

Howard Barker, Untitled
ink and watercolor on paper

daughter of Ostend have sinned against nothing we recognize, nor are those responsible for their injury ever driven to crave forgiveness, seek reconciliation, nor even, by their own fall, raise a quivering finger to point in the direction of a juster world. Furthermore, somewhere in this sunless garden stands a character who, like the two identified, is equally unconsoled for a savage destiny but in a further repudiation of Humanist ethics, discovers the wherewithal to applaud the arbitrary character of it. The wrecked musical prodigy Wardrobe senses the appalling significance of *loss*, the beauty of the unfulfilled, not for himself, but for others. Is he mad?

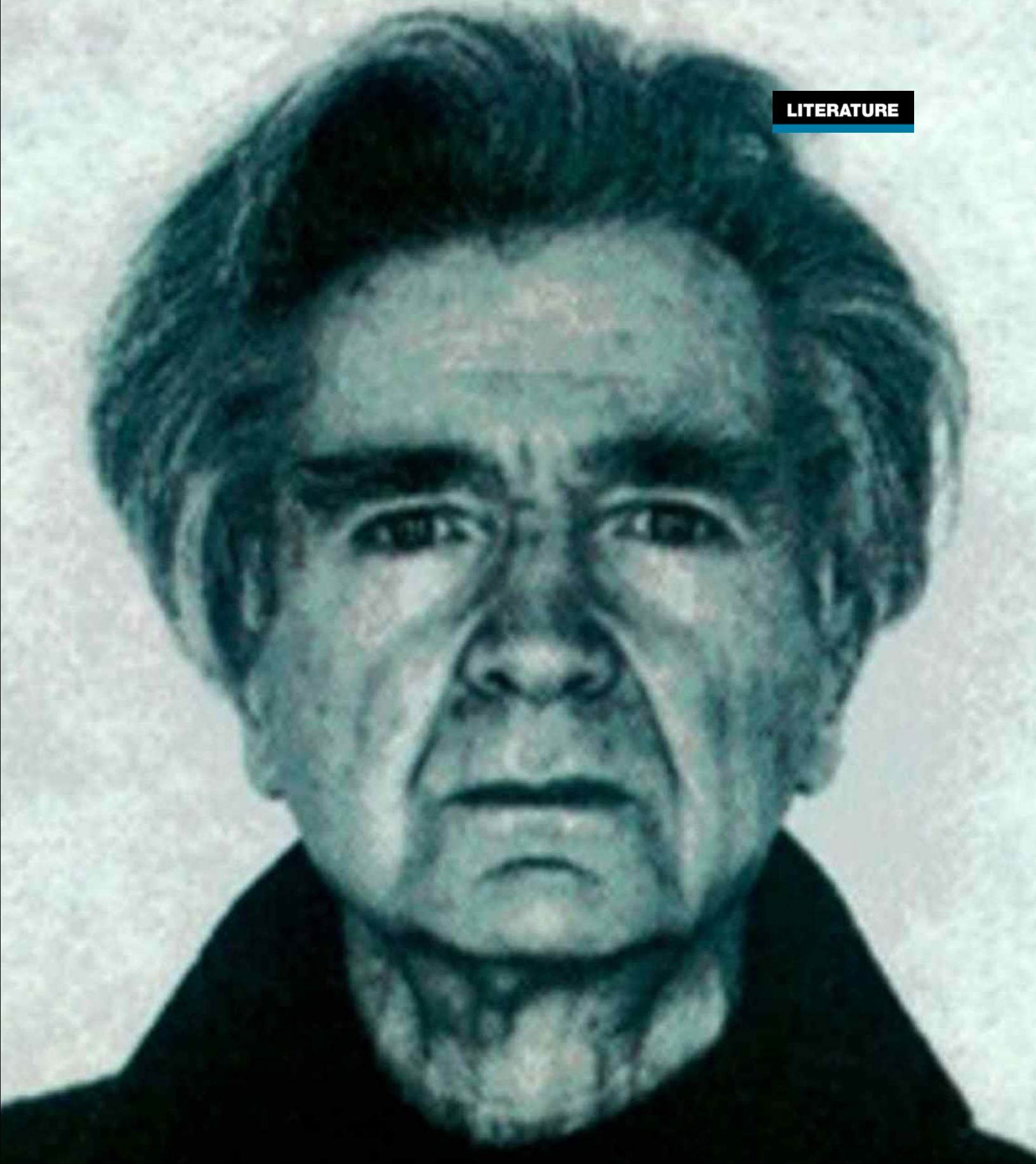
To invoke further as-yet-unperformed plays here would be tedious, and it is sufficient to say that the ruined protagonist of HARROWING AND UPLIFTING INTERVIEWS attains this state of melancholy gratification without recourse to Nihilism. Childlike's gruesome status as the worst-deformed inmate of the Dying Ward similarly entitles him to repudiate the patronage of pity and the cult of rights in his triumphant exclamation – the outcome of fastidious study of causes and effects – 'Goodbye to Why…!'

The spectacle of cruel deformity, or shattered genius, scorning the rhetoric of the Culture of Restitution inevitably makes them collusive with – or more heroically, proper consorts for – the Catastrophic protagonist with her passionate self-determination. In the ethical terms of contemporary Humanism, this is a landscape without illumination, yet in a tragic form which spurns both punishment and reward, these gestures of unaccommodating autonomy, brilliant and not necessarily brief, give testimony to a human genius that declines to be coerced by the prejudices of Christ or Reason.

Cioran

The Book of Delusions

***Cartea Amagirilor*, chapter five, trans with an intro by Camelia Elias**



The Book of Delusions
E.M. Cioran

> "All are lunatics, but he who can analyze his **delusions** is called a philosopher."
> —Ambrose Bierce

Cioran was 25 in 1936 when he wrote his second book, *The Book of Delusions* (*Cartea Amăgirilor*). If one looks at the grown body of criticism on Cioran, or early or subsequent reviews of his work, one notices that one of the things that critics emphasize is the fact that Cioran, in his youth, although as pessimistic as he ever remained, was more of a mystic, or an existential philosopher, than he was a writer of fragments as such. These comments are often made almost as a way of making up excuses for Cioran's early writings, which, in places, can border on the non-sensical. What critics seem to suggest almost rhetorically is that Cioran, who has now almost become a cult figure and one of the finest Romanian/French canonized writers, cannot possibly talk nonsense, can he? (Moraru, 2006; Rogozanu, 2002)

First off, Cioran himself would dislike the very idea of being called a philosopher, and as to his interest in mysticism, or the suggestion that he was a mystical writer, he would have laughed. Second off, regardless of how Cioran saw himself or his own writings, I would suggest that the value of his early works—in terms of their literary contribution to the genre of fragmentary writing and the aphorism, which he later refined unambiguously—consists of putting a constant spin precisely on the divide between sense and nonsense, reality and prophetic vision in a space that is more dense than deep.

What critics have missed so far is the fact that, whether one reads the young Cioran or the old Cioran, one is always confronted with the same type of question. How to escape time? Whereas, speaking of realism, the recurrent claim in Cioran is this one: "we are going to die," prophetically he is more

interested in how one does it. The modality of death, as that which can be perceived as taken out of time, or rather that should be the aim of everyone—vanquish death out of time, as it were—is clearly a topic that is for Cioran not only much more fascinating than stating the obvious, but also one that borders on an attempt to write for and on the surface of things, not their depth. Space, in other words, is the big thing. It unfolds more authentically than time because it is not bound to any linear experience. Considering this subtle framework, and then logically speaking, it does not make much sense to accuse a writer of being naively, idealistically, and youthfully pessimistic—simply because one assumes that that's what immature people in their 20s are like. In space, you are neither old, nor young, neither inexperienced, nor experienced.

If Cioran prioritizes space over time, it is because he is interested in the experience of space, rather than what we do with our time, how we think it, how we get rid of it, and how we forget it. Here, then, I would like to suggest that what makes Cioran's writings fascinating in the extreme is that he manages to make the careful reader forget about age. You just relate. In this relation of relating there is a constant that makes both Cioran and the reader appreciate a reading experience that transcends the boundary of the dichotomy sense/nonsense. Faced with the constant question: "what is the point?"—not only the point of writing, but also the point of living—the reader can do nothing other than appreciate the proposition that "the point"—when the writer insists on offering one nonetheless—one writes and one lives after all—is to be found in the interstice between continuity and gap. In the face of "there is no point in writing" Cioran's scribbling endeavor can be said to be completely disinterested, and hence more authentic. If a writer always thinks, as Cioran has done, that writing is a process of delusion—as writing is arrogant, presumptuous, self-aggrandizing, and useless—if one does write nonetheless against the background of such negative creativity, then one does it not because one is interested in proving a point but because one likes more the idea of situating oneself in a position that grants the writer, if not a sense of continuity, then at least its illusion. In other words, Cioran is not into counting points, but in experiencing being one himself. This is ultimately Cioran's strategy of taking himself ironically all the way through and thus bypassing what critics see as his necessary and unavoidable transformation, say from a young, tormented artist into a cynical master and philosopher. Here something should be mentioned that has long since become common knowledge, at least for the avid readers of Cioran. Namely, that although he often suggests the benefits of suicide in all of his writings, he never did it himself, nor did he stop "slandering the universe" with his words—a desire expressed already in his youth—until he was in his 80s.

My own point here then is to suggest that Cioran at 25 is no more naïve, innocent, immature, or refined a writer than he was at 80, at least where theme and theology is concerned. Cioran is Cioran. And the main themes in

his works, whether early or late, are the same: infinity, life on a continuous line or surface, and death in the ground as the main structural divider between thought and action. These never left Cioran. Nor did he ever renounce being a theologian *par excellence,* in spite of his utter disgust of religion and institutionalized religious thought. On the other hand, if one insists on talking about conceptual or stylistic transformations in the man's *oeuvre*, then one would have to say that what keeps Cioran's energy going is his desire to be precise. Almost mathematically precise.

Against this background, what is delectable in Cioran's writings, particularly in *The Book of Delusions,* is the fact that alongside precision there is a desire to perform also and precisely the illusion of precision. If Cioran had been more versed in mathematics, especially set theory, he would have liked the way in which mathematicians such as Georg Cantor challenged universal beliefs of dimension theory. For Cantor, the interval between 0 and 1 is so densely populated with what he called transfinite numbers (numbers that don't have recurrent patterns, but are infinitely unpredictably uncountable (pi is such a number)) that it is virtually impossible to ever get from 0 to 1 if one were to take the time to count on the linear line 1, 2, 3, and so on (Cantor, 1874). I find what Cioran does in his writing similar to the idea of density in mathematical analysis. Leaving, however, the mathematical argument out of this discussion, my point is that when you perform density in space, as it were, it doesn't matter how old you are anymore. Nor does it matter how successful you are in getting a precise message across that has its roots in a mystical experience. When Cioran goes from prophetic rambling *à la*, "lo, and evil shall kick a pregnant woman in her belly" to offering slogan-like guidance on how to avoid being melancholic, in formulations such as these: "think the world politically," "become a margin to yourself," one gets the impression that one is invited within a space where reading for the plot is not an option anymore. There, one starts reading for the ax. While one would like to know what happens to the dead babies, one ends up constricting one's desire to reach the end of that story to experiencing its essential extraction in the dense form of the killer aphorism: "Only Eros makes sense; knowledge is empty infinity."

Some readers may consider the passages that go mystical as writing in poor taste, and may be grateful for the well wrought bottom line that keeps reminding us that, whatever we do, there is no point to anything whatsoever. But nothing is written accidentally, or is devoid of a conscious aesthetic awareness in Cioran. So there must be a point to the pointless. In the *Book of Delusions* the constant tension between reading for the plot and reading for the ax, which is yet not rendered in any binary or structural way, is mediated by the density of experiencing the letter in its subjunctive mode. Which is to say that delusion is rendered as a form of failed anthropodicy, a failed justification of man to himself. It is as if what Cioran says, by literally employing the subjunctive mode—the kind of writing which is often hard to

translate as it is always interrupted by interjections and modal expressions such as lo, let there be, if only, would there be—is that he who has not tried being 'continuously' sad has not read anything that is 'truly' dense. Cioran targets this density with the clearest of his arrows. But insofar as the experience of a continuous space is punctured by interruptions that mark some degree of skepticism and uncertainty as to one's state of mind—am I sad or am I not?—the role of the subjunctive is nonetheless to reestablish a relation to the continuous dimension. In Cioran's theology of disillusionment, the reader is invited to join his private musical offering in this chant: who does not find the words, "and let there be light," comforting? Let there then be dense light on reading.

Thus, I give you here a fragment from this as yet untranslated book into English of Cioran—the whole of chapter 5 (out of 7). As I have tried to translate Cioran *à la lettre*—nothing else would cut it in my opinion—there is only one poetic license that I would like to take, namely name the nameless chapter five "Densiture." On the surface of delusion, the literature of the pointless and dense experience gives us *one* Cioran who deserves to have all of his works available in as many languages as possible. For the only justification we can make to ourselves for creating distinctions between and preferences for certain types of literatures that we choose to read, translate, or invent must be this: we like to be hit by an armor-piercing yet mysterious point: namely, that one never finishes with counting one's blessings where inspired words that go right through us, and words that take an infinite flight in our gut are concerned. If he were still alive, Cioran would call this point in the anatomical space cosmic catachresis.

The Book of Delusions

Densiture (Chapter 5)

Have you ever felt the *beginning* of motion, have you ever been tormented by the first departure of the world from itself? Have you ever touched the first pure shiver of motion, the prime ecstasy of becoming, the initial vortex of time? Have you never felt that moment of the first confusion, in the iridescent fever of your body and your soul? It is as if in a moment of forgetfulness and eternity, a spark that comes out of nowhere lights fires in space and projects lights onto the dark immensity, and makes strange contours against the gray background of space. This is the feel of the first motion! Do we not, then, live as the *source* of motion, as the first bumping flip of the world? And does it not exist in our fever, that concentration of motion, the centering of becoming in our impetus? He who has not felt how the world's motion was gathering in him in a whirl, in whose bubbling unending and unknown worlds roam, will never understand why, after such moments, man becomes essentially an other, a being taken out of beings; likewise, nor will he understand how one single day containing such uninterrupted moments of lightning would be enough to consume his being completely.

—Only the angels can comfort me now. These *non*-beings, each of whom "lives" by losing itself in the other's ecstasy. A world of mutual ecstasies…[1] My memories, with images by Botticelli and harmonies by Mozart, of returning from a far away place, of the time when my tears were acts of worshiping the sun… All these melancholies awaken my angelic places of the past, solitary and silent scenery, the scenery of grand recollections and grand forgetfulness; all my melancholies bring my distances closer to one another; they ravish deeply all the springs of my childhood and bring to light the uncertainty of some distant memory or a regret about a world whose tears are like mirrors of the soul. Melancholic confessions: they are the only proof of the lost paradise.

—Just like when during daytime, when we close our eyes to immerse ourselves in the sudden darkness we discover points of light and bands of color which remind us of the other part of the world, when likewise

[1] All ellipses in this translation belong to Cioran. If mine, they appear in square brackets.

we descend into the vast and dark depths of our soul, when what is revealed onto us, in the margins of darkness, we find the reflections of an unsuspected golden world. Can these reflections be a calling to our soul or a regret?

—Although space resists us more greatly, more directly and more fatally, it is nonetheless a less essential problem to us than time. Space never becomes a problem of existence or personal relationship. The more we immerse ourselves within our ego, the more space loses its reality, because time persists in our consciousness, and when we have become essentials we move further and further away from time as we did from space.

Space doesn't give us an intimate feeling of relativity; it only makes us seemingly reflective, on the outside. There are people and even cultures (the Egyptian) who perceive eternity as it is bound up with space, and who do not feel time and its relation to eternity. In their consciousness non-motion and the boundlessness of space exhaust the essential content of the world.

Space overwhelms us; but it doesn't go *through us*, even though we are closer to it than we are to time. Only time goes through us, only time leaves us awash, only time do we feel as belonging to us. Time discloses music and music discloses time to us, just as space unveils plasticity to us. But between the plastic and the musical, what soul goes for the first?

What is most essential in us struggles with time. It is impossible to not accept space; it is too great a piece of evidence. But there is a moment from which you don't want to accept time. The dramatic moment of the individual existence culminates always in the struggle with time. This struggle, however, is without escape, because the being touched by temporality, once having conquered eternity, inevitably regrets time. The desire to flee from time is found only in people ill with time, people who are tied too strongly by the bonds of fleeting moments. Redemption is such an inconsistent aspiration because of the regret experienced by those who are after the joys, surprises, and tragedies that the world, which lives and dies in the meanwhile, has to offer. If there is a temporal pressure, there is also, none the smaller, an infinity pressure.

Man aspires to infinity, but loves time more. As this life that we live and consume is the only value that we are given, it is impossible not to conceive of eternity as a loss, which we nonetheless respect. The only thing one can love is life itself, which I detest. It is absolutely impossible to get rid of time, without getting rid of life at the same time. Wherever you position yourself, time is the biggest temptation: a greater temptation than life itself, because if death is

not in time, then time will become the *occasion* of death. This is why the pure ecstasy of time reveals to us such bizarre mysteries and it introduces us to the secrets that bind the two worlds.

When man wouldn't know the access to eternity through absolute living in the moment, when he wouldn't be able to leap through eternity already living in the temporal whirlpool and would be forced to choose one of the two for eternity, would he then not hesitate to prefer time? Or when, also for ever, he would have to choose between Cleopatra and Saint Therese, would he hide his predilection for the first?

—For the one for whom life is a supreme reality, without it being a piece of evidence, what question can torment him other than the one pertaining to this dilemma: can we or can we not love life? This uncertainty is unclear and delicious; but nonetheless it demands an answer. It is both charming and bitter not to know whether you love or don't love life. You would like not to say either a *yes* or a *no*, if only for the pleasure of not clearing a pleasant uneasiness. A *yes* means a renunciation to imagining and feeling an *other* life; a *no* is fear of the illusion of other worlds. —Nietzsche got it wrong when, caught in the revelation of life, he discovered in the will to power the central problem and the essential modality to being. Man facing life wants to know if life gives him his last approval. The will to power is not man's essential problem; he can be strong also when he has nothing. The will to power originates many times over in people who don't love life. Who knows if the will to power is not a *necessity* vis-à-vis life! The first question facing life coincides with an appeal to our sincerity. Because afterwards, if we want power or not becomes redundant. People seek power to play the last card of life.

No one is genuine in his love of life, just like no one is genuine in his love of death. What is certain is that life is granted more approval from us: no one can hate life; but there are so many who have a brutish hatred of death. All of us are more sincere and categorical about death, so that in the doubts that life awakens in us we can allow ourselves to sense and foresee the unsuspected.

But then again, it is strange that the one who looked death in its face is ashamed to admit that he loves life and is thus condemned for the rest of his life to avoid life. As there exists in the final moments of everyone's existence an explosion of sincerity, can man, then, stop the avalanche of tears of gratitude, unknown to life until that moment? It's not written anywhere that the last tears are also the most bitter, but it is written on all the gates and the walls of the universe, both visible and invisible, that the most intimate regret and the most hidden is not to have loved life.

—All philosophers should end their days at Pythia's feet. There is only one philosophy, that of unique moments.

—The desire to embrace the stars! Why are truths so cold? When rationality was born, the sun was long since shining. And rationality is not born out of the sun.

—To suffer is the supreme modality of taking the world seriously. Thus is born the conflict between the feeling of suffering, which confers an absolute value on the outside causes and the world, and theoretical perspective, arisen out of suffering, for which the world is nothing. Out of this paradox of suffering there is no escape.

—There is a region of ultimate alternatives, which ends in the simultaneous temptation of sainthood and of crime. Why is it that humanity produced more criminals than saints? If man really looked for happiness as insistently as they say, why is it that he chooses with such violent passion the downwards paths? Man respects happiness and goodness more, but is even more attracted to unhappiness and evil. Three quarters of humanity could have become sacred, if it wanted. But one cannot know, alas, who revealed it to people that there is no other *life* than the one in hell…

—Sainthood is the victorious struggle with time. The way in which the saint manages to kill time within himself is mind-boggling and beyond everything. To be in time means living in this *everything*. Time is the frame around this everything, and works *as everything*. Sainthood: to be beyond everything, but in and with love. How monotonous the life of saints, because they can *only* be saints. Sainthood: existence lived in one single absolute dimension. Saints can also hear the voices of the world; but they only speak of the pains that have become love; these are the voices of a single world. Let me turn to the music in which the worlds speak, the other worlds…

—Which solitude is the one in which the snake caresses us and licks our cheeks and our lips? How far have we distanced ourselves from being, when only the snake can *be* with us?

—Two things that I don't understand: nostalgia in a stupid man, and the death of a ridiculous man.

—All men must destroy their lives. And according to the way in which they do it they call themselves winners or losers.

—Music is the medium through which *time* speaks to us. Music makes us feel time's passing, and it reveals time to us as a frame for all that passes.

There are musical moments which we can *fondle*. When music talks to us about eternity, it does it as an *organ* of time. The desire for infinity in music is a fugue from time. It is neither a present eternity, the continuous actuality, nor eternity beyond time.

Time is *heavy* sometimes; imagine how heavy eternity must be!

—A decomposed corpse in its unending cells; every cell containing a sum of vibrations; all the cells whirling in a vortex; the detachment of all the organs in the tremor of individuation; the return of life to its prime material, to the first *memories*…

I only love the one who goes beyond *there is*; the one who can feel his beginnings and the things that precede them; the one who remembers the times when he was not *him*, the one who jumps in anticipation of individuation. He who has not trembled realizing the deep meaning of individuation, has understood nothing of this world, because he will never have sensed the zones of his beginnings, nor will he able to foresee the moment of his own end. Individuation reveals our birth as an isolation and death as a return. The one who doesn't cultivate this isolation doesn't love life, nor does the one who doesn't fear return, love life. The fact that almost no one loves return proves something else, namely that this is the path towards the world in which we have no *name*. Individuation gives life a name. We all have a name; the world which precedes individuation is the life without a name, it is the life without a *shape*. Only individuation gives life a *shape*. This is why the crashing of individuation in death is a disfiguring. Man doesn't love his *face*, which is an accident, but its shape, which is a metaphysical sign. The trembling of individuation is an antecedent of disfiguring, it is the suspicion about losing our world. Man is a world within a world. —The way to re-returning goes through death, or who knows?—re-return ends in death. We make our connection to what preceded individuation by going down the spiral of our natural character, dwelling in ourselves, conquering the isolation of our shape, trans-*figuring* ourselves towards our beginnings, but not transfiguring ourselves by losing the figural sense of our individuation, in death. The life that was before we were *we*, we love through *return*; our eyes are turned towards our beginnings, towards the initial anonymity. We return to where we *haven't* been before, but where everything else was; we go towards the infinite potentiality of life, from which actuality and the inherent margin of individuation got us out. We *return* every time we love life with an infinite passion and we are dissatisfied with the barriers of individuation; every time we discover to our enthusiasm the roots beyond our figural finitude. Return is a vital transfiguration; re-return a metaphysical disfiguring. Return is a mysticism of the vital sources; re-return is a horror of final loses.

Life is behind us, because we came of it; life is the supreme memory. Individuation got us out of the world of beginnings, that is, out of potentiality, out of the infinite becoming, from a world in which the roots are trees, and not ephemeral sources of the illusionary trees, of being…

—How should I fence off my soul, what walls to erect around it so that I don't lose myself? My dreams take me too far away, too far away music and tears take me. I can't contain myself anymore, and I don't have space for myself in myself anymore; how can I contain others then, how can I make space for them? Do we love from plenitude or from poverty? When I can't contain myself anymore, can an other approach my center? Will the soul which dies from its life love? The soul full of holes fills them through love; seeks others from poverty. Love is begging, it is the terror of its own smallness. How much contempt and generosity there is in the love that comes from plenitude. Then you love to get rid of yourself, you throw away love! You worship Eros to get rid of yourself, your surpluses and excesses: you adore the liberation from your tempest.

No one can enter me, no one can siege me. Contempt, hatred, and magnanimity, I shall turn them into a love which *I* need, not one which *they* need. Why couldn't love be a weapon, an instrument, a pretext? Convinced in love shall be the naked souls, the begging souls, raised in the shadow. The one who never hated love, never loved. Any love, of people, of women, has something muddy, dirty, and slithering in it. Aren't you disgusted to know that there is an *other*, that there is a *you*, that there are other beings, that after you, in your expansion was *the* being? I can't contain myself anymore.

—Music transposes us anytime in spring time or autumn time. Like spring or like autumn it shatters our soul and body. There is no music for either summer or winter. Or why is it that every music is a sickness…

—*Absolute evil*: a being thirsty for ruining our nature would uproot all the trees in spring, it would eat up all the buds, it would poison the springs to kill all the living beings in them, it would stop up all the wells to hear the hoarse voices of the birds, it would cover all the flowers so that it would see them dry and fade, and bent sadly over the ground. It would kick the pregnant women in their bellies to kill the beginning of life, the fruit, all that is fruit, and the virgins' smiles, it would freeze them into a grimace. To the lovers, in their sexual spasm, it would throw a cadaver, and to the newborns, even before they opened their eyes, it would fix black glasses into their orbs. On a black board the size of the world, it would leap towards the sun to stop its rays, make it laugh into an eternal night, without stars, a sun in mourning, forever dressed up in black. And this being passes ironically by humanity

which waits in agony for the return of sunrays, and it smiles coldly to prayers raised towards the beclouded sky.

—*Evil* is hatred against all that is *fruit*.

—*History* must mean for you nothing other than the history of humanity within *you*. If everything that has been big so far, and everything that will be big in the future is not in you either memory or fruit, then you lose history and you are nothing. What man is he who will not remake and anticipate history on his own? Or better put: why is he not a man, the one who will not remake and anticipate history on his own?

Thus should you live, to be indifferent towards the forms in which the world dresses up indifferent towards epochs, styles and historical turns. Live as if before you there was nothing and as if nothing will follow you. You have to be disgusted at the idea of being a link in a chain, or perfecting or destroying an inheritance. There are no forerunners, nor followers of absolute thoughts. Only we die *beneath* them.

—Why do we not want to grant saints the privilege of madness? Is it because their madness ends in light, instead of darkness?

—All the concessions we make to Eros are holes in our desire for the absolute.

—Nostalgia, more than anything, gives us the shudder of our own imperfection. This is why with Chopin we feel so little like gods.

—The first and last chapter of an anthropodicy: about tears.

—Only hatred strengthens life, and destructive hatred maintains constructive life. In it we feel strong, able to kick up everything; in it all of our limbs burn; hatred calls us to action, it encourages us to make a gesture and act. This is not the interested hatred, provoked by mean causes and oriented towards an immediate act of revenge, but the grand passionate hatred, under which everything trembles. Hatred is the main spring of prophecy; hatred makes every prophet talk passionately about love. Prophecy is a hatred that is both destructive and creative. The Jews would have perished a long time ago if they hadn't the *divine* gift of hatred. To the chosen people God ensured eternity through hatred. To us, the Christians, God gave a transitory existence through the curse of love. Jesus came for the Jews, not for us. Their God sent us the great seducer. How inspired were the Jews when they refused the Messiah.

—Thought that doesn't express the struggle of an existence is pure theory. To think without a destiny, this is the fate of the theoretical man. All those that don't want to change themselves and the world, those that do no remake

everything and sense what will come theorize. They amount to zero, all those thoughts that don't grow on a soul and a body, and so do all pure ideas; it is futile, the knowledge that comes for free. Let steam come out of thought; sparks from ideas; from knowledge fire. Let other dimensions give things the fever of this thought. Let this thinking proceed from a will to reform the world, from the passion to overturn all orders, visible and invisible. Let this strong thinking bust the natural laws, give the cosmic basis another depth, and let the columns of the world gain another height through it. Let the world lean on us; let our resistance mean more than it meant for Atlas. Let our thoughts be the shoulders on which the endless worlds would lean. Earthquakes will create endless unease, and the flames will carry like halos the endless worlds. If everything that is in time and space did not contain our dimensions, why would we then think about space and time? If everything that lives and dies did not live and die within ourselves, why would we then think about life and death?

—Those days in spring, when matter dissolves in the sunrays and the soul gets lost in remembrance… That's when all the dreams we've had so far will be reborn in ourselves, all the dreams of our nights, all the absurd and the imaginary stuff, woven in our unconscious by our fear, our voluptuousness, and our hidden pain. I thought that the dreams had died in us with every day and every night that passed. But the voluptuous decomposition of our soul, under the vast spring sky, is the call of remembrance. The more the soul is fragmented, the more it approaches the zone of forgetfulness. Towards everything that we forgot, this is the pilgrimage towards our inner being the eternal presence of spring invites us to undertake. The shattering of our soul only shows us what we have been. Why can't we always awaken our past? We sleep within ourselves, and the ego is a shroud that covers our sleep.

—In that cathedral, in which you were alone, and where you entered to forget the world and yourself, you did it to feel the lack of motion and to forget waiting, to feel how you were solemnly born in the colonnades and in the arches, to feel how you were disseminated in the purple shrouding, the majestically curbed and undulating lines of the temple, whose vaults you measured, and in whose transcendental geometry you lost yourself. Your soul has become a column, an arch, and a vault. Above the world and in its forms your forms have been intertwined, and this non-movement of your nature has become a block of stone. And in your bending, without emotion, you have looked down on earth. What was your soul, if not the stone that does not rest on the ground? Down you were in your heights, weak in your toughness, heavy in your flight, stone on its way to heaven…

But suddenly, the miracle of the sound of the organ, a miracle in the cathedral in which you thought you were alone. How the arches moved, the colonnades and vaults, and in vibration did your matter dilate itself, and the cathedral grew bigger in the world's dimensions. In the sound of the organ, where you may

still look for boundaries, what music comes from beyond the margins, from beyond the margins of the world and the soul?

… And then, the heavens leaned on your soul.

—The atoms that sleep in people, and which have never slept in me.

The continuous awakening from matter's sleep…

Matter as the cradle of forgetting…

The life of the soul, the spirit which shows us our traces…

Matter leaves no traces, and therefore it is the cradle of forgetting.

All traces, all that is not matter in us, follows us…

But descending into matter, we love our traces…

Not spirit, but music is the antipode of matter…

Rummaging though the most distant past, music awakens us constantly from matter's sleep…

But music like matter is eternal.

The formation of the worlds has spread the first harmonies in space.

Music expresses all that is chaotic in the cosmos: therefore there exists only one music of the beginning and one music of the end…

Absurd thought in music: a physics from which one proceeds from tears rather than atoms.

Imagine if we were to roll with the entire world in a crazy avalanche to conquer forever matter's sleep, and like the atoms, let no one sleep. We should have lived when the earth breathed through volcanoes and when it was wrested out of the sun.

Everything is already in every moment: now the world is born, and now it dies; the rays of light and the dark; transfiguration and the crash, melancholy and horror. The world: we can make it absolute *within ourselves*.

—The fact that the will to power is the last card played in the game with life is proven by power's supreme ability to tempt all those that have nothing to lose or for whom life had nothing to offer. Jesus: the weakest man—was also the strongest (because he hasn't exhausted himself in hovering over two

millenniums). There is no spiritual strength other than in biological deficiency. The vital holes, in the ambitious and visionary souls, have turned and ravaged history. The individual goes ahead with history every time life leaves him behind. The Christians are right when they explain history through the fall. Adam's sin is the first historical act, that is, the first act against human nature or besides human nature. *In* human nature, in the law of the human nature there is no history. History is a fall from life's cradle, a jump from it; it is a treason, without which we would have remained the anonymous slaves of life. Freedom through history, that is, through the *history* of every unhappiness, the history of *everyone*.

We have become *everyone* since we have run away from life's cradle. Life, which had one name, has taken many innumerable ones, in each individual, thus retreating anonymously among them. History began when the phenomenon of individuation took a nominal character. Since then individuals have stopped believing that they are the sons of life, thus estranging themselves from their Alma Mater.

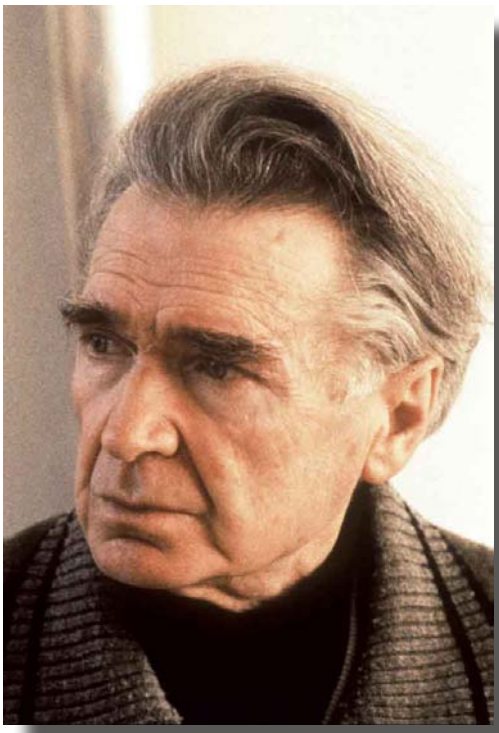
—Who can save me from the idea that this world can also be made on other bases, and who can give me the illusion that we can build it on other bases? How many times could this world, then, be *different*? How many times should it not, indeed, be thus, different? Or could this world have been made up by uncountable hidden faces, which we can uncover? Then we would do nothing other than *reform* the world; but we want another one altogether. We want to begin our world, because the one created by God is about to end…

His world was neither appearance, nor illusion, but reality. It was one that *was*. And therefore it must die. *He* has to conclude to his own *beginning*.

—The last man, and also the most depraved, thinks he is superior to Socrates. Even in front of Napoleon's grave you cannot hide your smile filled with scorn. For every man who dies, we feel more contempt than pity. It is as if people "compromise" themselves by dying. Don't we sometimes consider other peoples' deaths as a form of cowardice? I remember facing that skeleton and exclaiming: "you, moron!"

—If we were to begin our daily activities with a funereal march, what dimensions would our acts assume! A life that would unfold solemnly, and in which we would "officiate," and in the last act…

—They love Rembrandt, those who suffer from the attraction to grand sunsets. For Rembrandt, light comes neither from the outside, nor from the logic of a tableau as such. The sun sets in every man and in every thing. The portrait reflects from the interior rays that *don't belong to it*. Light goes down in man, and in this vanishing it dresses up the soul in shadows. For Rembrandt, the sun dies every day within each man, and the portrait seems to



represent the last flickers, the final stage of this trajectory. Light coming from the pale and disseminated rays of a decline. Here, the people come from the shadow, and the *Rembrandtesque* secret consists of nothing other than an act of waiting for darkness. A kind of darkness that wants to free itself from itself through light; the darkness which awaits the defeat of its own principle. For Rembrandt, everything *tends* towards old age. Rembrandt is the tiredness of the shadow and the tiredness of the sun, and beings are placed undecidedly between death and life. Having come from the shadow and raised under it, *where* would they return to? Towards what light do they aspire, when the sun offers them only its agony…

—*Botticelli*: the symbol of the world—a flower; becoming as grace; life's auto-ecstasy; every gesture, a miracle; the veils that shroud matter; enthusiasm heavier than matter; Botticelli is there where things are not weighed anymore; aurora is universal finality; the rays of light dance in space; stones vibrate; the sound of distant voices approach swinging…

—The more blood thins out, the more it means that man approaches his eternity. The whole of eternity is a question of red cells…

—Time dominates over us every time our blood circulation, the carnal resistance, and the organic rhythms are the dominants of our existences! But when blood becomes an intangible fluid, the flesh, an immaterial shiver, the organic rhythm, an abstract cadence, we are as far away from time as we are from being.

The voice of the blood is the voice of time, of the things which begin, and those that end. Why does blood lose its voice in thinking? Is it not because thoughts suck the blood? This is how *abstract passions* are born.

Eternity? An *anemia* of human nature.

—About abstract passions or: diaphanous hands; pale hands that burn; transparent hands that falter;—

Angelic and suave face, under which is hidden the impulse for crime; atemporal expression, which covers future overturns and future crashes; lowered eyes, lost eyes, with the objective in everything, losing the objects.

Distancing, a modality of love; the vague as a form; non-life, an apotheosis.

Ideas flow in the blood (the definition of abstract passions). Ideas that possess

the blood—or when passions are born without an objective. Passions that are bound with nothing, and which don't bind us with anything. That is to say, to die for that which is *the furthest away* from us. These distances, they are our only presence.

Neuter passions. Can they be explained, can they be understood? Passions that are not born under the sun, because the sun is too close… *Neuter* vis-à-vis all that is *here*, but not vis-à-vis infinity. Music and metaphysics spring from neuter passions vis-à-vis our world. For them there exists only a world of final distances; here is everything that is too little and too close. Beethoven's sadness and joy begin there where they end for everybody else. They are so deep that they have no cause. All that is profound in us has no cause: our depths don't come from the outside. And therefore, they are not about things here. About the absolute dimension of the soul… and about the diaphanous hands embracing distances.

—Why does the thought of eternity seem so complex to us? Because no one knows with certitude whether eternity is plenitude or vacuum.

The three big paths towards the absolute: mysticism, music, and eroticism get fulfilled in the oscillation between plenitude and vacuum. *Ecstasy*, be it of a mystical kind, of a musical or erotic kind, what does it do other than place us in the presence of some infinity, which is as empty as it is full. Never is the exact plenitude so reduced that it will not also dissolve itself, and never is the void so limited that it cannot fill us as well. Infinity is inseparable from nothingness.

—The closer we are to eternity, the further away we are from life. The sense for infinity is a hindrance and a curse on the way to re-conquer life. Infinity paralyzes us harder than the most horrible sickness. As a sick man, you can do anything without coming into conflict with, or contradicting the illness itself. But what can you *do* so that you may not be ashamed where eternity is concerned?

—The flowers that are not picked by pale hands have bloomed for nothing. Only pallor alone can naturally approach the delicate life of flowers. Only a face without color can gain some from the flowers, and only lifeless hands can take the illusory life of flowers.

—The first condition for our freedom: freeing ourselves from God; we cannot create anything, as we ourselves are creatures. So far, we have done nothing other than compromise the work of creation. Ah! If only we could destroy it! And on its ruins, as creators, build our terrestrial paradise, a second paradise, by defeating sin, and pain, and death. The world that would be born, and that would exist only *through ourselves*…

—There is no thought that is more criminal than that of sin. And there is no excuse for this thought. You don't know who you should hate more:

this world, which occasions such thoughts, or yourself, who can think and feel such crimes. Any thought of sin has to be vanquished from the human consciousness, and all religions and philosophies that promote such a thought revealing life as a sin must be likewise destroyed. To talk about sin, without regretting that you grasp its idea, is the first stage on the scale of criminal thoughts. Only a humanity that knows no sin can be tolerated now, one which lives all of life's acts as virtues. Humanity must be attacked down to its very roots and destroying sin in consciousness must be the first attack. Let everything change once and for all!

—The reaction against your own thought in itself lends life to thought. How this reaction is born is hard to describe, because it identifies with the very rare intellectual tragedies. —The tension, the degree and level of intensity of a thought proceeds from its internal antinomies, which in turn are derived from the unsolvable contradictions of a soul. Thought cannot solve the contradictions of the soul. As far as linear thinking is concerned, thoughts mirror themselves in other thoughts, instead of mirroring a destiny.

—All your torments, what are they reduced to, if not to the regret that you are not God? But after such regret, can one think in other ways than only in elegies and curses? I'm like a hanged man who knows not why he hangs, or from what. Perhaps from his consciousness… I would like to write the hymns of loathing.

It will have to be repeated a thousand times over that only life can be loved, pure life, the pure act of life, because we hang from consciousness, hanged in nothing.

—My problem is that I always know what is most essential and necessary, to have the prejudice of eternity. Even the sun seems ephemeral, in this hysteria of infinity. So then, how to *start* anything, how to become history, your own pulsation, action! To know what is most necessary is a curse from which only God can save us, or the devil. I can't make up my mind whether knowledge comes from God or from the devil.

—Corpses are disgusting, death is disgusting, and people's way of dying is disgusting. Out of so many types of dying, why has life chosen the most disgusting form? Why does it stop at *coldness*? I think of a death that occurs in youth, in a medium of illusions and anticipations, in which we would dissolve in space, under the pressure of an infinite fever, and we would float in the ether, as vapors of being. Imagine death as an immaterial dissolution in the infinite, as an ethereal leap, death as a dream and a poem of matter! But not death as a type of verifying matter, as an illustration of the laws of human nature, as a fatality of human nature. I don't revolt against death, but against the way of dying. The way in which we all die, man, animals, flowers, constitutes a plot that matter devises to conspire against us. Through dying according to how

nature has prescribed it for us, we betray all our gazes oriented upwards, all our wishes to dissolve ourselves somewhere beyond ourselves, our wishes to break our wings in a silence without matter. We fall on this side of ourselves, dying. And therefore every death is a shame. Verily, verily, I'm ashamed of dying! Why doesn't every atom try to go astray in space, so that I can dissolve myself, happy not to be able to find myself again…

—In a world full of disappearing people, who would be God? The one who holds the last hope.

—Not only once has the whole ethical problem appeared to me to be miraculously simple. Everything that is built on hope belongs to goodness; the rest belongs to the satanic principle. A criminal who proceeds from hope is closer to the world of good than a passive desperate. Ultimately, there is only one criminal: the one who doesn't even have a minimum of love for life. Who loves life more? The one for whom life is the only problem. There are several ways to love, but unfortunately there's only one way to die. About that thrill of love, the one that is born after the final moments of sadness…

—A regret understood by no one: the regret to be a pessimist. It's not easy to be *on the wrong foot* with life.

—So few realize that heroism exhausts itself in all those equally few people, in the resistance and the courage of every moment. When your existence defines itself in the attributes of fear and unease, the sheer fact of living is the supreme courage, it is a heroic act. Distancing yourself from Eros becomes fatal, because all that is in you concentrates itself on sustaining you as such; the pleasures found in such heroism of resistance would seem serious cowardice. When your whole being knows no other problem than the postponement or dismissal of destruction, than in truth you will not have time for love. Autonomy from Eros presupposes subjectivity as an absolute, and the torments of this subjectivity turn Eros into a fatal luxury.

—In those days when the sense of sight substitutes thought, when you approach things as *objects*; the flower as flower, water as water, sky as sky, sunset as sunset; the thing in the world of things—then the visual man is in everything and nothing.

—I only love death from plenitude, from excess, only the death which adds to life a sense of infinity which life didn't have until that point, as it had to die.

Musical life: the only modality to sanctify life.

—Why then, when we stare at the sky do we do it as if to wait for an answer? Could this be only a Christian prejudice? Ah, if only the heavens would open!

—My only "virtue" is not to even have sinned against eternity. The naïve minds

of most people value this virtue, without knowing that catastrophe begins from it.

—Man must be made to face a new beginning of history. A new Adam without sin must mean a new man and a history without sin must contain his activities. Only thus can one think of a new life, a life changed at its roots. Humanity awaits only a prophet: the one of a life without sin. If death cannot be conquered or destroyed, sin must be conquered or destroyed. As this individual effort is illusory, a cataclysm of history and an anthropological revolution, in which the age-long inheritance will be blown up, will signify the dawn of another world. Man will then compete with all the gods of the conquered centuries, and every being will signal a new dawn. Many worlds will die. But many more will be born. And then we shall know the crossroads of human nature, and not only those of man.

—I don't understand how people can believe in God, even when I myself think of him everyday.

—The fear of your own solitude, of its vast surface and its infinity… Remorse is the voice of solitude. And what does this whispering voice say? Everything in us that is not human anymore.

—The greater the thirst for life is for some souls, the more solitude swallows them…

Veil after veil is released from your soul, veil after veil swirls intangibly in the air. How many veils covered your soul, how many secrets have they buried? Why have you hidden your depths from light, from air, from surface? You told yourself: everything is *extreme*, unutterable. And off you went taking the church bell, covering the windows, and under darkened vaults you built your temple.

Veils that covered secrets, and secrets that hid sadness. The mystery of veiling is revealed unto us in the aerial dance of the veils, the mystery of all that is unutterable. Veil after veil is lifted from the soul; mysteries approach the world, the light, the air, and the surface. How veiled were these mysteries, and each a tombstone. So many dead lay under them, so much sadness in you.

—The fear of the secret of the smallest thing; the fear that all the indifferent things that surround us would turn to life for a moment, and would whisper to us unforgettable words, dangerous and fatal; the fear that these words would entrust us with secrets that we don't want, and confessions that we don't expect; the fear that mute things would give us a heavy-duty mission, unrealizable, tormenting; the fear that we might become the interpreters of these things, their spokespersons… The fear of the things which are silent, of their mysterious approaching, of their solemn infinity, or the fear that their non-motion would be an illusion, the endless fear that all of these things will once

tell *everything*, absolutely everything, and the burning desire that everything be unutterable.

—The impossibility to separate infinity from death, death from music, and music from melancholy! ...

—Far from myself and close to distances…

Come, unheard of corners, and unsuspected worlds, come furiously, snatch me and place me forever in your isolation, because under the world's melodies my soul would succumb, deaf in this resounding universe!

Whispers of the earth and hymns of the stars, what can you add to the musical murmur of the soul? How many times have we been the victims of these musical callings and which of the temptations to respond has offered me a musical death?

Everything is unutterable and everything wants to talk. Sonorous apocalypse.

After the word will not touch things anymore, and things will not respond to words, the music of human nature will be the bridge that links the soul to everything. On it, we cross over a great divide, with the fear in our souls of everything that ends.

Only through hearing do all the unsuspected things become clear in the soul. The one who has never heard has no God. Without the voices from beyond there is no mysticism, just like there is no final ecstasy, without the echoes of distant melodies from *beyond*. *We hear everything* in the voices that *precede* God. Then, unique vibrations, born before time, bring to us the indecision between being and non-being. The primordial unease, fed by the indecision between nothing and everything, dresses us up in resonant attire, as if to take us to places no one has ever seen or heard of. And after this cosmic dream, what nostalgia can take shape in the soul?

Distances, bury me, veil my sadness in your serenity and my soul in your inaccessible halo. Steal me away from all these dreams and save me from the perdition of tormenting nostalgia. Bring me to the places where dreams dwell and disseminate me on the surface of nostalgia.

HOW LIFE BECOMES THE SUPREME VALUE:

through the veneration of women; the rehabilitation of Eros as divinity; through natural health transfigured by delicacy; dancing enthusiasm in all of life's actions; grace rather than regret; smile instead of thought; momentum instead of passion; distance as finitude; life as the sole God, sole reality, and sole cult;

sin as a crime, and death as a shame.

…The rest is philosophy, Christianity, and other forms of the Fall.

Only exalted states, of inner drunkenness and of final tension can give us the tragic excellence, the voluptuousness in destroying ourselves for nothing or in sacrificing ourselves incommensurably. Depressions pay attention to life, they are the eyes of the devil, poisoned arrows which wound mortally any zest and love of life. Without them we *know* little, but with them, we cannot live. The one who doesn't know how to exploit them, to inseminate them, and then to avoid them, will not be able to escape collapsing. The ideal would be to conquer depressions totally; a fight to the death must be declared against these instruments of death; definite annihilation through the whole arsenal of knowledge, based on ironic lucidity. If ecstasy would not vindicate the sinister world of depressions, we would not be able to find any excuse for them.

We should create a world in ourselves that knows nothing of the poison of depressions. I can only accept a world in which tears flow from excess and exuberance, from plenitude and voluptuousness. Let the vital thrills replace thoughts, and let life die in its own ecstasy.

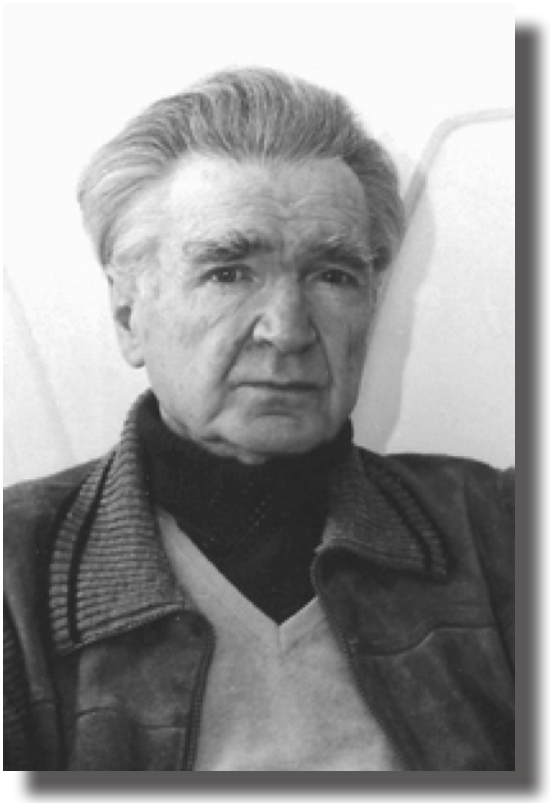
—For two thousand years the cross has reached the four corners of the world, and all the dimensions of the soul. For two thousand years, death has sanctified life. The symbol of the cross is the universality of death, and its vertical predomination is the crowning of life through death. Opened onto the four cardinal points of the cosmos, the cross reveals infinity to us as a cradle of death.

But the cross has become distorted, and its collapse will cost many souls. Many lives will be choked, squashed, and crushed. But the others, the ones that sob for light in its shadow, will find freedom. This is freedom that the cross will only bestow unto the defeated ones.

In the stead of the cross we shall introduce undulation as a way for all forms of life to play and receive grace. And let life sing of all its delusions, let it give delusions brightness and reflections of infinity. Let life's eternity turn from illusion into faith, and the superficial charm of so many vital undulations, let it be solemnly crowned with memories of paradise. Let life's ecstasy be the sole knowledge, and death, the hatred against life.

—No one should forget:

Eros alone can fulfill life; knowledge, never. Only Eros makes sense; knowledge is empty infinity;—for thoughts, there is always time; life has its time; there is no thought that comes too late; any desire can become a regret.



—The impossibility of believing in life's substitutes: God, the spirit, culture, morality, to give history the smallest credit.

The burning desire for solitude, and the fear of solitude, the absolute desire to be unique, and the passionate love of life. The most insignificant act in the middle of life seems sometimes to be more important than the biggest mission in solitude. Cowardice or veneration? The impossibility of not giving credit to life's delusions.

—All my life is a baptism of shadows. Their kiss made me mature for darkness and sadness.

—It may be that life was immortal before so many privileges were granted the spirit. The spirit has taken over life's infinite reservoirs, in order to later pay dearly for this act of theft. The punishment of the spirit is the punishment of man. Prometheus has chained himself, so that he, in penance, can obtain forgiveness from life.

—All that is and all that is not tears me to pieces. Do things ask for my caress? Or do I ask everything to caress me?

—To withstand any truth…

—That fear which gives birth to thoughts, and the fear of thoughts…

From Rembrandt I've learned how little light there is in man. The *Rembrandtesque* portrait exhausts all its light resources; there is no more light in it. Light itself seems to be the interior refraction of a light that dies somewhere, far away. Rembrandt's chiaroscuro doesn't derive from bringing

clarity and darkness in close proximity but from the illusion of light and from the infinity of the shadow. From Rembrandt I've learned that the world is born out of the shadow…

—To detach yourself elegantly from the world; to give contour and grace to sadness; a solitude in style; a walk that gives cadence to memories; stepping towards the intangible; with the breath in the trembling margins of things; the past reborn in the overflow of fragrances; the smell, through which we conquer time; the contour of the invisible things; the forms of the immaterial; to deepen yourself in the intangible; to touch the world airborne by smell; aerial dialogue and gliding dissolution; to bathe in your own reflecting fragmentation…

—Detachment from the world as an attachment to the ego… Who can realize the detachment in which you are as far away from yourself as you are from the world? To displace the center from nature to the individual and from the individual to God. This is the final end of grand detachment.

—The fear that we might encounter ourselves… (The source of all fears.)

—There is beauty for which we are not born, and which is too full and definitive for the oscillations of the soul; there is beauty that hurts us. So many silences, during the nights that we don't deserve, and heavens whose distances we are not worthy of, and the trees' profiles drawn against the ghostly blue of twilights, when we look for our shadows as a presence and a solace…

—The sense of smell takes us out of space. Perfume diffuses space in time. Roses have the same influence on us as does music. The sense of smell brings us closer to our time than anything else. They dig out the forgotten and give life to memories. And thus they conquer time.

—Only thoughts that are randomly born die. The other thoughts we carry with us without knowing them. They have abandoned themselves to forgetfulness so that they can be with us all the time.

—When man will be able to talk of delusions as he does of realities, then he will be saved. When everything is equally essential to him, and he is equally essential to everything, then he will no longer understand the myth of Prometheus.

RULES TO CONQUER PESSIMISM, BUT NOT SUFFERING:

to accompany the most delicate rustling of the soul with an intentional tension;

to be lucid in all intimate dissolutions;

to oversee one's musical fascination;

to be methodically sad;

to read the Bible with political interest, and the poets in order to verify one's own power of resistance;

to use nostalgia for thoughts or acts; to kidnap them for the soul;

to create an exterior center for oneself; a country, a scenery; to tie one's thoughts to space;

to maintain one's hatred artificially, it doesn't matter against whom—a nation, a city, a person, a memory;

to love the force that comes after each dream: to be brutal with everything that is pure or sublime;

to learn a tactics of the soul; to conquer the spiritual states;

to not learn anything from people; only nature is in control of its own doubts;

to annul one's fear of motion, while running; every time we stand still, things remain silent and nothingness calls us;

to make a system out of delusions.

THE ART OF AVOIDING SAINTHOOD

Learn to consider:

delusions as virtues; sadness as elegance; fear as pretext; love as forgetfulness; detachment as luxury; man as memory; life as a swing; suffering as an exercise; death as plenitude, as a goal; existence as a "piece of cake."

RULES AGAINST FALLING PRAY TO MELANCHOLY:

to think of the world politically (power and domination);

to make rhythm divine: a military march before a symphony;

to hate all the colors: they awaken spiritual states which end fatally in melancholy; even red dissolves everything, if we are immersed in it a long time. To lose ourselves in the last degradation of the color white, to lose ourselves in the absence of color;

to not look for nuances in feelings; each of them exerts a suggestion, seducing us, and one by one we glide into ourselves as into the unknown;

everything is heartrending, melancholy tells us. To which we would answer: to die objectively;

to be a margin to yourself;

to give a dancing expression to all feelings; to search ourselves on the outside; to take ourselves out into the world of exterior signs;

everything is about overcoming the sensation of weakness which dissolves the body and the soul. And in order to conquer, there is no modality that is either too delicate or too vulgar. To think music politically;

to deliver force through thoughts, and to force the feelings to serve it;

to tear yourself apart in form. A methodology of breaking-up; to liquidate yourself in good taste and in control; to die, that is, to lose your trajectory.

To *untie* the fear of your own destiny.

The discordances of a vulgar music awaken in us more sadness and more memories than the zest of a sublime music, because, by eliminating the dream, they approach that which is discontinuous, crushed, and abysmal in us, evoking all the holes which we don't have the courage to confess we have. We are sad to see all the subterranean discordances appear at the surface when pure memories and sublimated sadness are vainly trying to assure us of their quashing.

The past attacks me with every step I take, my memories beleaguer me, kidnap me for their world, one which I don't love. Time flows towards its source, tearing me apart in its irreversible drama. Why haven't you died, you places? There where I will not have been, where nothing reminds me of how many times I was left behind! Does time search for me or do I search for myself in time? How many times has time hurt my pride in reclaiming myself? The past belongs to time, and as many times I've lived so far, as many times it has knocked at the gate of my astonishment. In it, I was. And now it can only awaken for me the shadows of a life that cannot be tied to another, born in the twilight.

I can hear the transformations of the world into senses, sad resonances of a cosmic whirl, the murmur of time and all the things that pass through the valley of my soul, in order to spill themselves somewhere far away, in the soul.

—All people's moments of sadness are occasional. Like their fears, these moments have a cause, the disappearance of which instantly suppresses them. People's needs for consolation are also occasional; they have lost something and wait for the comforting recompense. But there is a need of consolation that is not born after a major defeat or unhappiness, one which is not even born in a painful moment. Every time moments of happiness approach without our being ready for them, a desire to be consoled floods us. But every time we wish for consolation, we would not be consoled if it came. That's why it is mysterious, because we run away from it every time we wait for it. We would accept it, if no one could see us; first and foremost if *we* couldn't see us. And we would receive it if we knew that there exist words of consolation, if we knew that there exist words like the wings of the angels, whose touch would give the body the quality of the soul.

—What am I, other than a chance in the infinite probabilities of not having been!

—Sexuality makes no other sense than when it conquers the infinite in Eros.

—I love those vibrations which are born after a major sadness; another world starts then, in which you don't look for feelings, even though they are there, nor do you look for passions, even though they give birth to this world. And this world, sprung from the triumph over sadness, is the most distant from people. So often music lives and breathes in this world, and so always do the founders of religions; rarely the poets, and never the people.

I ask myself: when are people going to stop querying themselves? When will they definitively renounce theory and mystery? What *is* seems to me to be neutral to appearance and to essence. The inessential has always been defined in opposition to death. All thinkers, whether they wanted it or not, have assimilated the essence of death. The appearances have constituted in their eyes all that which wants itself independent of death. The last thought of every man disfigures life in illusion.

Every time you separate the world in appearances and essences, you declare yourself implicitly against life. Out of every type of thought, life has nothing other than what it loses. The prejudice of the essential is the cult of death. When we destroy the categories of thinking, and we attach ourselves to the world in a completely different way, only then will we be able to smash this cult and this prejudice. This duality, appearances/essences, is a catastrophic duality. The first act of distinguishing made in the world was an attempt for which we should not hold only the spirit responsible. It seems to me that the whole future process of humanity will be nothing other than a regaining of delusions.

—I have started the battle thus: either me, or existence. And we both came out defeated and diminished.

—Ah! if only I could worship the ephemeral things once, to disseminate the breeze of memories in the wind, and if only thoughts would become breezes! So few of them I can catch—these thoughts, of the world and of things—that it would be better for thoughts to touch these things and caress them than to remain, estranged, with them! Because thoughts are deep in themselves; not in the depth of things and the world!

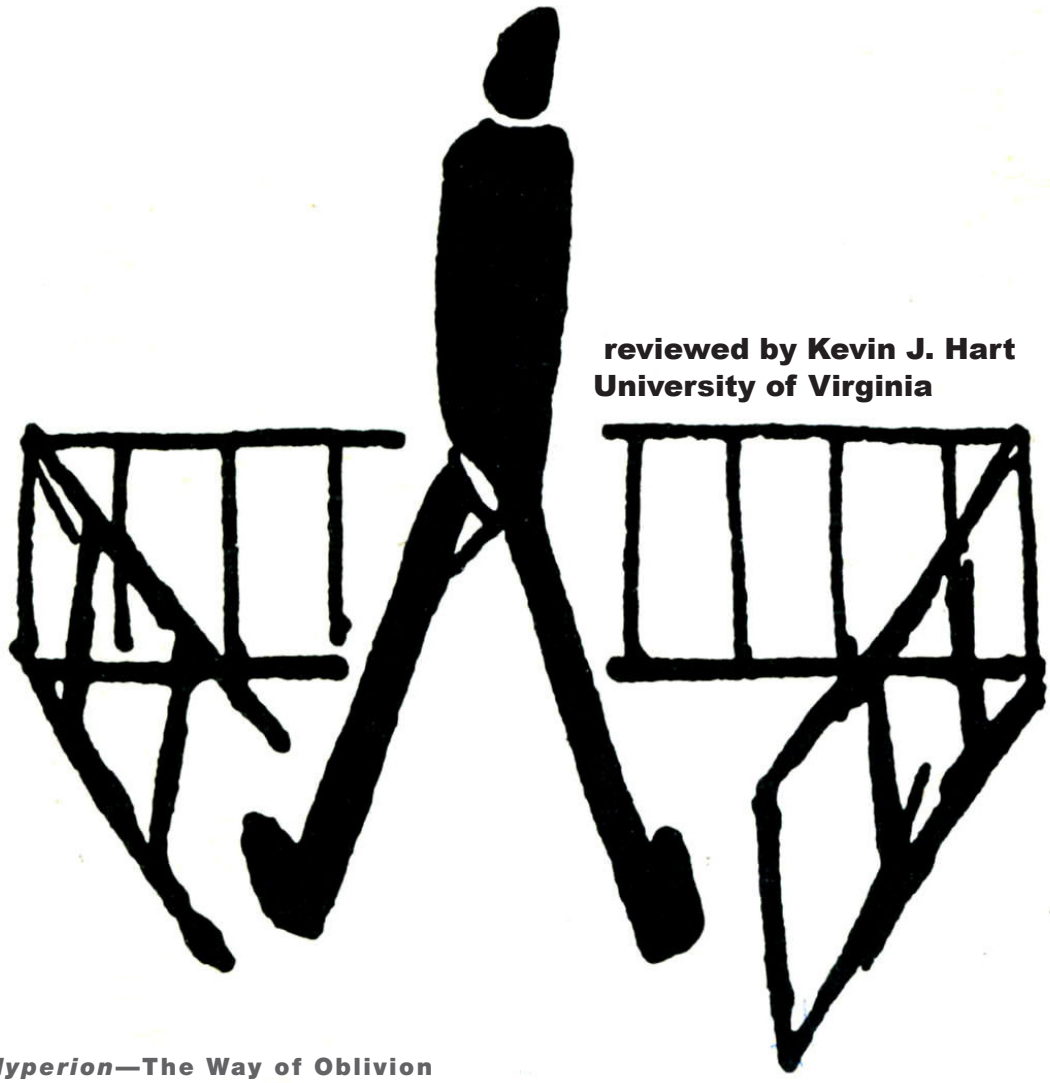
—Why are thoughts born with so much difficulty under the clear sky? There are only thoughts in the night. And they have a mysterious precision, a troubling laconism; the thoughts in the night are without appeal.

a review of

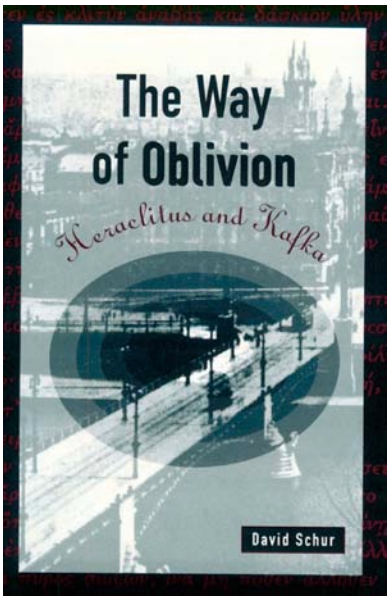
The Way of Oblivion: Heraclitus and Kafka

David Schur

Harvard University Press, 1998



reviewed by Kevin J. Hart
University of Virginia



In 1966, Eugen Fink made some preliminary comments by way of opening the seminar on Heraclitus that he was convening with Martin Heidegger at the University of Freiburg im Breisgau. “Our seminar should be an exercise in thinking, that is, in reflection on the thoughts anticipated by Heraclitus. Confronted with his texts, left to us only as fragments, we are not so much concerned with the philological problematic, as important as it might be, as with advancing into the matter itself, that is, toward the matter that must have stood before Heraclitus’s spiritual view.”[1] The distinction between philology and “the matter itself” is fundamental to phenomenology, and Fink goes on in a manner that would have been entirely familiar to Heidegger, for both he and Fink learned the lesson from Husserl several decades before. “This matter is not simply on hand like a result or like some spoken tradition: rather, it can be opened up or blocked from view precisely through the spoken tradition. It is not correct to view the matter of philosophy, particularly the matter of thinking as Martin Heidegger has formulated it, as a product lying before us. The matter of thinking does not lie somewhere before us like a land of truth into which one can advance; it is not a thing that we can discover and uncover. The reality of, and the appropriate manner of access to, the matter of thinking is still dark for us. We are still seeking the matter of thinking of the thinker Heraclitus, and we are therefore a little like the poor man who has forgotten where the road leads” (3).

One might situate David Schur’s fine book in terms of these comments about method. For Schur, Heraclitus is a self-conscious *writer*, and he takes as evidence Diogenes Laertius’s remark that Heraclitus wrote a book and left it in the temple of Artemis, and that this book was deliberately written in an obscure style so as not to be understood by the vulgar. On this reading, Heraclitus, like Kafka and all moderns, is self-conscious: not only does he see that to write

[1] Martin Heidegger and Eugen Fink, *Heraclitus Seminar 1966/67*, trans. Charles H. Seibert (University: University of Alabama Press, 1979): 3.

is to encrypt, to risk meaning one thing and saying another, but also that the writer is someone who, by rhetorical skill, can exploit to his advantage the gulf between meaning and saying. Heraclitus as exemplary modern: this means, for Schur, that the whole of the West is to be contained by Heraclitus at one end and Kafka at the other and that "West" and "modern" are co-ordinate notions. Are there different forms of modernity? Of course: ancient Alexandria is one, Renaissance Italy is another, Jena at the birth of Romanticism yet another. Schur passes over these, for he is concerned to paint with a large brush. What he wishes to represent is what he calls "philosophical method," and interestingly this method can be found in literature as well as philosophy. Schur has a number of finer brushes, but he prefers to use them for other purposes: chiefly, the close reading of Kafka. We are to be shaken by his first, main point and set to wonder about this philosophical method.

This method expresses itself, Schur argues, by way of "paradoxical metaphors" (3): metaphors, precisely, of the "way." For "way" is not just one topos among others; it is revealed to be the master topos of method. ("Method," as Schur reminds us, comes from the conjunction of *meta-* and *hodos*, giving us "a 'following after, pursuit, esp. pursuit of knowledge, method of inquiry'"(16).) Jacques Derrida had suggested some time back that we look back to the etymology of "method" in order better to understand Descartes' *Discourse on Method*.[2] In a method, one follows the path or way ahead, but of course the path or way is not necessarily methodical. I mention Derrida not so much to identify an earlier reflection on method that Schur seems to have bypassed (but it is hard to tell: the book has no bibliography) as to signal that Schur has learned from Derrida to pay attention to writing: phenomenal script, of course, and the structure of difference and deferral that gets encrypted in the act of writing. "My method of analysis is primarily philological and rhetorical," Schur writes. "In reading closely, I attempt to expose significance by focusing on the rhetorical function of specific elements within a given text" (3). So Schur seems to step past Fink and Heidegger, and to pass from a (post)-phenomenological reading of Heraclitus to one that is attentive to philology precisely because of what Derrida has told us. One can relish the irony when Schur speaks of "My method of analysis. . ., " for one can analyze method only by way of method, and show a paradox only by way of a paradox. Karl Reinhardt asks in his edition of Heraclitus's fragments (the subject of several exchanges by Fink and Heidegger in their seminar) "is the way an image, a parable, or a doctrine?" (quoted, 42). And we too may wonder if Schur's method of reading philosophical method is an image, a parable, or a doctrine.

Perhaps Heraclitus was the progenitor of a "paradox of method," namely "consciously trying to convey one thing" and "unconsciously convey[ing] another" (6). I am not sure that the modern duality of conscious and unconscious quite works here, any more than it would for the parables of

[2] See Jacques Derrida, "La langue et le discours de la méthode," in *Recherches sur la philosophie du langage*, Cahiers du Groupe de recherches sur la philosophie et le langage (Paris: Vrin, 1983): 35-51.

Jesus. What would be lost by focusing entirely on writing and leaving the manifest and latent out of play? The appeal to modernity would be one thing. Consider one fragment that is important for Schur's case. It begins:

> For while all things happen in accordance with this *logos*, they are like people without experience when experiencing the sorts of words and deeds that I set forth by distinguishing each thing according to nature. (44-45)

Schur notes that Heraclitus uses the first person ("I") and describes his "method of description." Yet, we are told, "Heraclitus cannot successfully communicate what he has investigated" (45). There is a gulf between description and communication. The fragment concludes:

> But what they do when awake escapes the notice of [*lanthanō*] other people, just as they forget [*epilanthanomai*] what they do when asleep. (45)

Communication fails, then, because other people do not take due notice of the *logos*. Investigation uncovers *logos* but exposition allows it to remain in oblivion. Such is the "paradox of method." To which one might say to Heraclitus (or to anyone): be a bit less snooty and take greater pains to be clear. A modern might respond by reminding us of the necessity of indirect communication, irony, the gap between latent and manifest content, the impossibility of reading, or something of the sort. The explanation can be a response to the mediocrity of one's peers as readers, or to the constitutive gap between what one wishes to say and what one actually says. Doubtless there are people for whom either or both is true, though I am doubtful that one *has* to hold that one's readers are always inadequate. A *philosophical* method would be one that is firmly grounded on recognizing that the gap between investigation and exposition is a principle of discourse, not on thinking that, because one is a philosopher, one therefore has better ideas than other people, ideas that they will never grasp or take seriously.

Be that as it may, Schur locates the paradox of method with Heraclitus's fragments, and then examines the "philosophical method" in Plato, Heidegger, Blanchot, and Kafka. The sequence has a logic of its own, needless to say (Heidegger as reader of Heraclitus and Plato; Blanchot as reader of Heraclitus and Heidegger, as well as of Kafka), but one cannot help but note the vast

leap from Plato to Heidegger. One is left to imagine what wondrous book would have emerged had Schur folded into his reflections St. Augustine on *modus sine modo* (a way without a way) and the complex heritage it bequeathed to St. Bernard of Clairvaux, St. Bonventure, Jean Gerson, and Meister Eckhart. Not that this heritage remains always within the firm grip of Christian theology. It is Blanchot and Lévinas who retrieve it, perhaps without knowing that they are doing so, in their syntax of "X without X," and that Derrida turns into a non-methodical method in his discussion of *le pas au-delà* as a step beyond and a step not beyond: a step without step, as it were.[3] What Schur says about "Heidegger's Way of Waylessness" in his third chapter could be explored in intriguing ways in many late patristic and medieval works, as well as in other areas of discourse. For example, one might also wonder how this book would appear with a chapter on the poetry of René Char: Char as reader of Heraclitus and Heidegger, Blanchot as reader of Heraclitus, Heidegger, and Char. As the new critics knew, lyric poetry is an ideal place to study the ways in which discourse reveals and conceals itself.

[3] See Derrida, "Notices (Warnings)," *The Post Card: From Socrates to Freud and Beyond*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1987).

It is part of the magic of *The Way of Oblivion* that the reader does not simply contemplate the doubling at the heart of method—straight way, crooked way; true way and false way; the way up and the way down; the way that leads ahead, the way that makes one stumble as one goes—but that one immediately wants to test the method for oneself. For Schur himself, the end of his study (both *telos* and conclusion) is the reading of Kafka's narratives. What he calls, in one of the moments in the book that strongly recalls Paul de Man, "the rhetoric of method," opens up, "several previously ignored avenues of research" in Kafka studies. One of these is the exploration of transcendence in Kafka, a transcendence that hides itself in negation where, paradoxically, it multiplies its power over us. It was Blanchot who first saw how to value transcendence in Kafka, as Schur realizes: the path had already been opened, though few had ventured down it. Consider this passage from Blanchot's extraordinary essay "Reading Kafka":

> Kafka's entire work is in search of an affirmation that it wants to gain by negation, an affirmation that conceals itself as soon as it emerges, seems to be a lie and thus is excluded from being an affirmation, making affirmation once again possible. It is for this reason that it seems so strange to say of such a world that it is unaware of transcendence. Transcendence is exactly this affirmation that can assert itself only by negation. It exists as a result of being denied; it is present because it is not there. The dead God has found a kind of impressive revenge in this work. For his death does not deprive him of his power, his infinite authority, or his infallibility: dead, he is even more terrible,

> more invulnerable, in a combat in which there is no longer any possibility of defeating him. It is a dead transcendence we are battling with, it is a dead emperor the functionary represents in "The Great Wall of China," and in "The Penal Colony," it is the dead former Commandant whom the torture machine makes forever present.[4]

This is what Schur calls Kafka's use of "Heraclitean rhetoric to discuss transcendence as a paradoxical way beyond the everyday world" (188). I do not know if we need to evoke Heraclitus here. Is it not sufficient to read or re-read Blanchot's essays on Kafka? True, Blanchot admired Heraclitus, but the originality and force of his reading of Kafka is deeply his own.

Following the discussion of negative transcendence, Schur proposes to read Kafka's story "The Judgment" as "Heraclitean in its depiction of transcendence as inseparable from oblivion" (188). "Like Blanchot," he says, "I read the story on what is ultimately a metaphorical level" (188). The close reading of the story is impressive; Schur has learned from Blanchot without repeating his insights or his tone. One only wishes that he had devoted a chapter or more to *The Trial* and *The Castle*. At the end of *The Way of Oblivion,* one looks back on highly intelligent, close readings of Heraclitus, Plato, Heidegger, Blanchot, and Kafka, and one has seen many examples of Heraclitus's paradoxical method. It has turned out to be rather flexible. At no time, though, has one encountered any counter-examples to this method. The reader is likely to wonder what, if anything, escapes this wild method, and therefore to question the specificity of the particular trajectory that Schur has us follow. At the same time, the reader is likely to ponder other texts, some of which I have indicated, that might well be read according to this method.

Schur has apparently placed himself outside the phenomenological reading of Heraclitus that was the beginning of Fink and Heidegger's seminar. Yet, as Derrida showed as early as his reading of Husserl's "The Origin of Geometry," close reading occurs at the limit of phenomenology. *La différance* becomes manifest only in the transcendental reduction, albeit a reduction that is (as Merleau-Ponty recognized) never complete. "The Reduction is only pure thought as that delay," Derrida writes, "pure thought investigating the sense of itself as delay within philosophy."[5] Indeed, the sort of philological reading in which Schur excels is made possible by his reductions. That he does not draw attention to them is of course merely a part of his method.

[4] Maurice Blanchot, "Reading Kafka," *The Work of Fire*, trans. Charlotte Mandell (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995): 7.

[5] Derrida, *Edmund Husserl's "Origin of Geometry": An Introduction*, trans. and pref. John P. Leavey, Jr., ed. David B. Allison (Stony Brook, NY: Nicolas Hays, Ltd., 1978): 153.

NEW BOOK BY CAMELIA ELIAS

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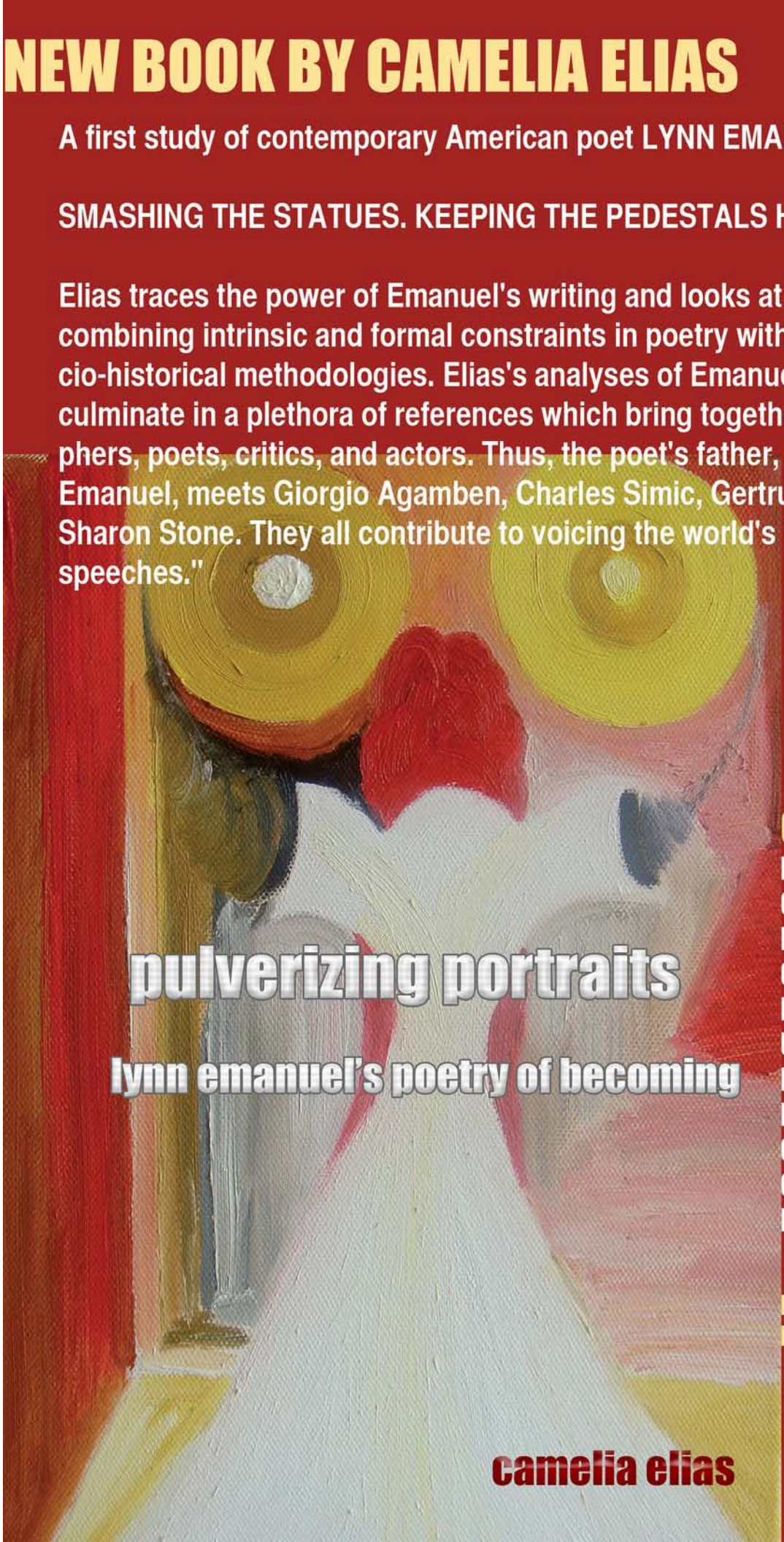

pulverizing portraits

lynn emanuel's poetry of becoming

camelia elias

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THE GOOD MAN

For Torino

He's cold in the sun
calculating his steps
in place of dreams
stranger and more real
stones under his bare feet
each window a compass
in alleys of laundry flying
a ceremonial breeze
he sees the rain
before he feels it
approaching the piazza
and stops to give lessons
to kids playing on the statue
philology first
the importance of hermeneutics
then a brief history
of domesticated seeds
he who is untimely
let him skip the first stone
across a new Elysium
in place of dreams

—Aaron Simon

The Muffled Lips of Apollo

For J, of the invisible choir...

I found Apollo deathly pale,
his hair cut from his skull;
his body, like the bow of a ship,
hammered by an indifferent sea.

Bound, not free to roam
under the blazing stars,
arrows lay at his side
like flightless birds.

"What has become of your bow?"
I asked, carrying his slain body
in my hopeful arms.

"*It is useless*,"
he gently groaned in my ear,
"*there are no more Olympians.*
Never before have I bent
back my bow to come to . . ."

The sun fell from the sky
like a cold and barren rock
as Apollo's lips muffled
these last words into my heart:

"*Destruction!*" he cried. "*You shall know*
it as never before——man."

Staring into his deathly eyes,
I heard music pulsing in his chest,
his ivory pupils as pallid
as the moon's eyelids.

"*I blot all stars from the sky*,"
the weary god clamored furiously,
collapsing at my feet.
"*I render music senseless*
to your insensate ears,— —
I cast you into pitch!"

"But Apollo," I implored,
"what of us who urgently go down,
what of those who incubate
and hunt after the moon,
knowing time is but vapor?"

Deep within my propitious eyes
he peered, yet did not speak;
his breath whispered
as if to say *good night* ~

Head of Apollo, recalling the Apollo Belvedere. Marble, Roman copy of ca. 120-140 AD after a Hellenistic original. From Rome. British Museum

A butoh-fu in memory of Hijikata Tatsumi

APOPTOSIS IN WHITE

by Fulya Peker

Year 1945… Japan… White death… Bodies were ruptured by political turmoil, scattered into neutrons… It was easier to consume the flesh, that way… Limbs were surrendered unconditionally while the small hands of toddlers were devouring the void in the rice fields of Tohoku… The continuity of the human life *spin* was disjointed a while ago… Blood was frozen in the cracking dry veins of an endless fall… There was no past, no future, but the stains of memories were spread on a crumpled present… It was all quiet, deadly still… Except the sound of the fog… That was dissolving towards the mountains… An urge named Butoh was born under the grounds of Japan to die over and over again, as a profound example for surviving off balanced and incomplete, embracing the transience of nature, striving not to hold onto a long since constructed next decade, but a lost yesterday's unborn tomorrow. Butoh as a poetic performing art was not foreign to transgressive aesthetics of discontinuity—a barren phallus can still be erected in nature and give birth to the memories of a silent Acephale. A dead body, naked and boneless, standing desperately upright gently held its own mask in its hands and looked behind it. In search of his death, in search of all that has died, he exited the world through a torn embryo and began to rediscover his neutral form in nature. His membrane was a transparent atmosphere retained by his own inner gravity. Who knows how many times the womb of nature was en-graved, how many times he has been aborted … Every memory that shaped his body from within made visible marks on his skin. His body became time and space. He took a step forward, always dancing in, on, at, with, from, of the earth… While carrying death within his body, in every vein, in every gesture, gently and fluently, he laughed. The sublime was not where he was comfortable, but where he was con-front-able. When the will to perfect, to power, to complete the uncompleted nature of existence hidden in the dry marrow of our narrow paths and in the fading bones of our bodies is digested as the will to create, the sublime finds a form to stimulate itself. Grown under a culture that embraces the beauty of imperfection, he was confronted with the impermanent, unsatisfactory, uncompleted existence. He trembled with a sense of longing. This moment of longing reminded him of the void within, i.e., the body without organs. *It is not you that moves your body; it is your body that moves you*. Body was his "self," not a mere vehicle that carried the gas form of his existence, i.e., his soul. The

skeleton of his subjective history was attached to the axis of the world; he was resisting against but revolving with that decomposer. Starvation of his white flesh revived gradually the façade of his architecture… He took a small step forward, sliding his feet above the shattered earth—he stopped… Another step forward… He was in the abyss… The nausea of his off balanced nature caused by the void between his legs made him confront the fragility of his holy erection… Apocalypse is nothing more than an orgasm… With every gesture he re-shaped his landscape. The stillness of his bones was cutting off the wind, and the mud that he was supposed to be sculpted with was producing a smacking sound in silence. His body learned to respond to things; his body *became* things; his body transformed *into* things and no-things. The subtlest movement in his fingertips could have deafened his eyes. He was knotting each joint to one another, one by one, patiently… The precision of catastrophe came alive in his body: he was a silenced animal, growling within… To become something, he had to learn to become nothing... The skin of his palms was anchored to his bones… All his fingers were moving towards his solar plexus… With the archeological dance of his dead body, or his body yet to born, he reached out, all white, and death was glowing in the stillness of his memories… A man named Tatsumi Hijikata died under the grounds of Japan to be born over and over again…

He has no strength to endure nothingness, yet still he has to stay alive.

Suddenly the sky shatters above his head.

Clouds are wrapped around his body.

Every time he blinks the mountains melt down.

He is a mountain melting down.

It is dusty.

He is thirsty.

A serpent approaches towards his belly.

To smash the serpent's head,

He grabs his heart.

His heart is a **stone**.

Stone is a burning coal.

Some of the cells in his right hand begin to die.

But his left hand is a flower blossoming.

He gets nauseous.

He throws up mud.

He is drowning in the **mud**.

His hand is not burning anymore.

It gets colder and colder.

Mud is frozen.

It is dark, and it is cold.

It is cold.

The mud cracks.

His cast is lying there shaping the **earth.**

He plants seeds on it.

He rains on it.

He waits.

His cast grows into a tree.

He cuts his own bark.

He collapses.

Yet he is still engraving his story in white.

Can you see it?

It is all white now.

He is white.

Moon like white…

Glowing quietly…

He is reflected and transmitted,

He contains life and death,

He is all and none at once.

Yet, he is still visible to some eyes…

He finds an embryo next to the broken branches.

“Be patient” he says.

His voice echoes in the womb.

He is the embryo.

Is there an exit?

He begins to peel his membrane off of the sacrificial identities he owned.

He begins from his finger tips.

There is a door opening in his forehead.

He removes his skull from his body.

His face becomes transparent.

He looks into his brain, his own geography.

He walks through the door.

He is in his brain.

He climbs at the curves.

He walks down his own spine.

He tastes his organs.

His breath smells like the cold air of existence.

He exhales the rotten nothingness.

Suddenly his spine crumbles.

He stands up from his ashes.

He drags his flesh into darkness.

A butterfly flew towards his stomach.

He holds it.

He bites its wings.

His wings defoliate…

The blood is oozing out of the bulging veins of his naked body.

He is wet.

He is red…

His redness affirms that he was once alive.

He is the blood.

How long can red last?

He is in search of his own gaze.

His raw memories hang upside down behind his left retina.

He is behind his retina.

He is in his own darkness.

Rain stops.

He is **e**vaporating.

He is in **t**he air.

You inhale…

You are in his white darkness…

a review of

Trials and Tribunals in the Dramas of Heinrich von Kleist

Kim Fordham

North American Studies in 19th-Century German Literature, Vol. 41, Peter Lang, 2007

reviewed by John T. Hamilton, Harvard University

The English phrase "courtroom drama" immediately points to the close and more or less self-evident similarity between legal proceedings and theatrical performances. Accordingly, among literary scholars, the work of playwrights has often been likened to trials of all sorts, not simply to judicial procedures but also to varying species of public disputes, including the practice of dueling. The comparisons could be based on a host of factors, which may or may not be interrelated. To begin, the appeal to a higher authority—be it the judge's sentence upon the accused or the divine decree that directs the result of a duel—finds a ready analogy in the audience members, who essentially decide on the play's action. Consequently, the effect of the trial's conclusion, the pleasure or displeasure in its final position, mirrors the audience's feelings toward the outcome of the protagonists, either their relief that justice or truth has been served or their distraught sense that these ideals, however conceived, have failed to be realized. If we turn to anthropological fields, say to the area of comparative religion, we would discover that the ancient theater and the tribunal share the common trappings of and appear to have a common source in ritual and ceremony. So close is the relation between drama and trials that it could lead thinkers like Rousseau to despair. In his *Letter to M. D'Alembert*, following arguments that reach back to Tertullian and Augustine, Rousseau frets over the theater, which he regards as posing a grave threat to the functioning of the city—a dangerous supplement that stands to replace participation in public hearings with the distracting pleasure of a merely entertaining spectacle. Taken together, the correspondences between theatrical and courtroom drama exert a particularly strong—and, in Rousseau's view, morally dubious—fascination upon members of communities throughout the history of the West.

Kim Fordham's accomplished study on the dramas of Heinrich von Kleist is explicitly motivated by this fascination, by the cultural compulsion to watch, to see what happens. For Fordham, who does not cite Rousseau, this fascination is associated with a basic

human need to satisfy one's desire for truth and justice. Yet, as Fordham points out, this fascination is not simply for the revelation of truth but rather is attracted to sheer power; and it is this enthrallment to power that underlies Kleist's engagement with judicial affairs. What Kleist's dramas consistently demonstrate is that the pursuit of justice is grounded more in expediency than in morality: it betrays an inclination to employ the mechanism of justice "as an instrument of control and degradation" (22). A universal or absolute sense of what is just is thereby made relative, trumped by self-interest and manipulated by those who are in a position to produce verdicts. Although it is contestable whether all drama rests on this fascination with the powerful establishment of particular, subjective order implicit in every trial, Fordham's main argument—that such a fascination lies at the root of Kleist's works for theater—constitutes an utterly convincing case. Indeed, what Kleist's dramas repeatedly display is that any search for a purely objective, non-relative sense of justice is condemned to fail.

Fordham's book proceeds with brief chapters on each of Kleist's major plays. Comprehensive interpretations are decidedly not the goal of these readings; rather the focus remains on key moments that may be described as judiciary. Great emphasis is placed throughout on the ancient Greek term for "justice," *dikê*, which denotes the restoration of balance, order, or security. In this way, with crime taken as anything that disrupts order, Fordham is able to press the judicial analogy well beyond instances that deal with explicit trials or tribunals. For example, in the first chapter, on *Die Familie Schroffenstein*, Fordham notes that the play contains "no formal trial" but then goes on to assert that "the characters use typical courtroom tactics to achieve their goals" (25). Similarly, in her reading of *Penthesilea*, which also lacks what is commonly referred to as a trial, the high priestess's accusation of the Amazon is understood as "a legal proceeding aimed at maintaining social stability" (87). One might well complain that by thus regarding all problems of guilt, transgression, and disruption as judicial, the stage-courtroom analogy becomes far too general to be of any hermeneutic worth. Yet, Fordham's investigations of Kleist's other plays—*Der zerbrochne Krug*, *Amphitryon*, *Das Käthchen von Heibronn*, *Die Hermannsschlacht*, and *Prinz Friedrich von Homburg*, which all provide explicit representations of trials—persuasively show that problems of legality and justice stand very much at the fore of Kleist's imagination.

The analyses are on the whole text-immanent, limiting themselves to the plays, with very rare allusion to Kleist's own historical or biographical context. Instead, close attention is paid to issues of poetic language, that is, to conventional areas of literary interpretation: lexical choices, metaphors, figures of speech, rhetorical devices, and so on. Each chapter pursues these well-tested tracks of reading to illustrate how justice is conceived. The paths chosen are hardly surprising. For example, the chapter on *Der zerbrochne*

Krug engages in a comparison with Sophocles' *Oedipus Tyrannus*—a move already suggested by Kleist himself in his *Vorrede* and subsequently examined by a number of scholars. Still, despite this absence of innovation (and despite the fact that Sophocles' Greek is entirely neglected), Fordham manages to pronounce key insights, which attest to her perspicuity as a reader. For example, in this chapter, she offers the following observation: "Oedipus is intent on finding the truth and saving his people; Adam seeks to hide the truth and save himself" (41)—a conclusion whose simplicity in no way detracts from its brilliance. The book is replete with these kinds of terse statements, which, on the one hand, precisely locate the crux of Kleist's theatrical work, but which, on the other hand—and in a less positive light—tend to present the tensions that animate the plays as misleadingly uncomplicated.

The stunning simplifications that punctuate Fordham's book correspond to the unvarying focus of the analyses. The third chapter, on *Amphitryon*, continues to concentrate on the notion of "legal instrumentalism," that is, the idea that trials operate more as vehicles of control than as channels for uncovering truth. Jupiter's position in the play as both supreme judge and guilty party readily exemplifies this instrumental function. The readings are remarkably consistent, insofar as they repeatedly return to notions of restoration, expediency, and relativity. In general, these notions remain fixed and receive but little nuance. All the same, Fordham's chapters, which exhibit a solid familiarity with the extensive secondary literature, hardly disappoint in providing fresh insights. Again in the *Amphitryon* chapter, in considering Merkur as a prosecutor (specifically in his interrogation of Sosias), Fordham discloses important elements of Kleist's poetics. Elsewhere, in the discussion of *Die Hermannsschlacht*, which pits Germanic concepts of justice against Roman ideals, the issue of judicial relativity is greatly modified by being viewed from the perspective of international relations. To be sure, the philosophical problems that necessarily arise, when one moves into this broader context, could have been treated at greater length and with more attention to the intellectual and political issues of Kleist's day. Sadly, corresponding themes in Kleist's prose works, both the literary and the essayistic, are for the most part ignored. Nonetheless, the stringent focus that Fordham applies to her brief, straightforward study should in the end be applauded insofar as it leaves the reader with a good sense of a central aspect of Kleist's dramatic work, namely "his subversive and deeply skeptical fascination with the workings of justice" (139). The readings of individual passages are lucid throughout and altogether compelling. In this regard, at the very least, Fordham's book makes a decisive and welcomed contribution to the field.

Front image:
Penthesileia stirbt durch das Schwert des Achilleus
(griechische Keramik, ca. 460 v. Chr.)

Peter Greenaway's *Writing on Water*

The Wizard at Odds

by James Desrosier

The video of Peter Greenaway's 2005 multimedia performance piece *Writing on Water* is a perplexing little work. On a first run through, it appears to be artfully contrived and involving. Brimming with signature Greenaway touches. Like frame-in-frame images, superimposed typography, minimalist music, operatic song, dynamically integrated text, and beautifully layered, intertwining elements rendered via the latest image-capture and post-production technologies. Seen on a screen the dimensions of a good-sized HD television with the audio cranked up on a superior sound system, it is energetic, bordering on visceral and verging with immediacy.

Oddly, what seems so clear-eyed a reaction turns out to be provisional. Giving way under the weight of repeated exposure. Which in itself is peculiar because with few exceptions Greenaway's work stands up to multiple viewings—blossoms, even. Also curious is the fact that *Writing on Water* represents an unexpected crossover into the performance realm—a point that should not be overlooked and hence begs for amplification: *Writing on Water* is a Greenaway performance and not simply another notch on the handle of his prodigious production credits. Here for the first time as his own subject he is in front of the lens as well as behind it. Both performer and director. A duality that not only alters his typical position *vis-à-vis* the work but also signals a fundamental difference in the work itself. Deviations that suggest other issues lurk beneath the surface of *Writing on Water*. But before wading too far in to isolate them, some background is needed.

Greenaway's *Writing on Water* was commissioned by Lloyd's, the London-based insurance syndicate, to mark the bicentenary of Admiral Lord Nelson's death and (more or less) the 400th anniversary of the firm's founding, originally as a maritime insurer based in an eponymous coffee house. There were three initial performances: the September 2005 private world premiere at Lloyd's headquarters in the City of London and a pair of subsequent public dates at the Queen Elizabeth Hall some weeks later. There have been subsequent performances elsewhere, as well.

For this, our star collaborated with American composer David Lang on the kind of minimalist score for small orchestra and voice that Greenaway has favored since his 1982 collaboration with Michael Nyman on *The Draughtsman's*

Contract. The music for *Writing on Water* was inspired by a maritime-themed libretto "written" by Greenaway by appropriating lines from *Moby Dick*, "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner," and *The Tempest*, which was the basis for his 1991 film *Prospero's Books*. Familiar fodder for Greenaway and, as we'll see, a potentially misleading thematic and executional touchstone for those knowledgeable of this earlier work. *Writing on Water's* debut was staged in and beneath the 275-foot-high atrium of Richard Roger's critically acclaimed inside-out Lloyd's building (architecturally speaking, a conceptual knockoff of Centre Pompidou in Paris). There Greenaway suspended three huge screens over the floor of the insurance market—one panel towering 45 meters up into the cathedral-void. Onto these floating surfaces he VJ'ed (i.e., video-jockeyed—à la disc-jockey) moving images from a bank of some 400 he'd filmed for the project: lots and lots of water—one of Greenaway's favorite tropes.

Meanwhile the London Sinfonietta delivered the music with a combination of acoustic and electric instruments—a kind of chamber rock outfit. Scribbling feverishly in tandem was calligrapher Brody Neuenschwander, who worked on Greenaway's 1991 *Prospero's Books* and his 1996 *The Pillow Book*, the movie that first fully integrated all the elements at play in *Writing on Water*. As Neuenschwander rendered the text, Greenaway captured it electronically, superimposing every parry and thrust of brushstroke in real time over images of flowing, bubbling, gurgling, undulating liquid.

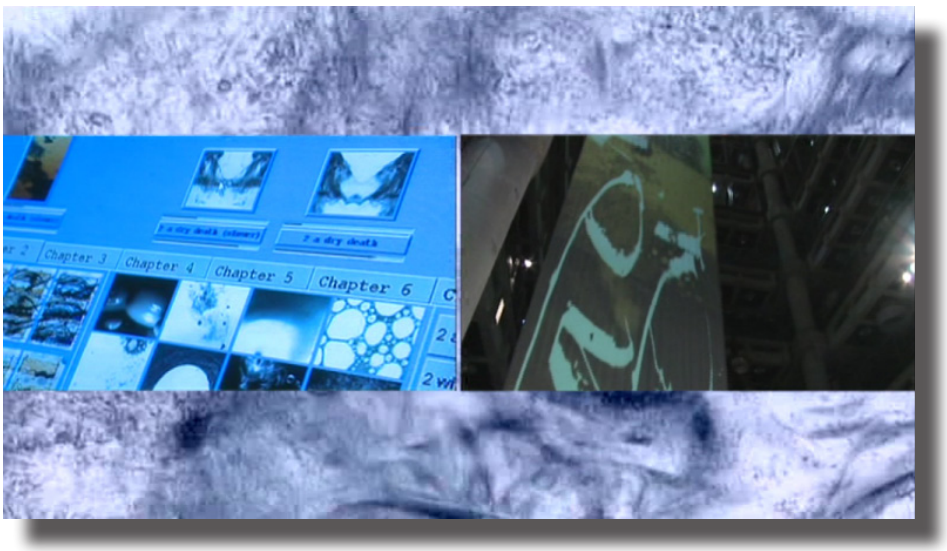
Interspersed with wide shots of the scene are syncopated cutaways to the conductor chopping the air with his baton, the ensemble playing intently, cameos of individual musicians with inflated cheeks beet red and hard, the male trio chorus and the ink-splattered calligraphist painting with a quiver of brushes on a continuous stream of translucent paper drawn across a light table. Cutting in and out from these images, set shots and full screens of the primary visuals of clear fluid are close-ups of Greenaway as VJ, i.e., video jockey. Seen over the shoulder poking at thumbnails of the image bank on a large touch-screen panel. Or head-on, looking up from below at him checking

the media array overhead as he launched it.

After a second pass, all this generates a hybrid impression. Part making-of promo. Part performance document. Dramatic in scale. But lacking real drama. Neither here nor there. Some would dismiss anything this equivocal as unworthy of serious consideration. And certainly this is the reception the London press gave *Writing on Water*. *The Guardian*, *Independent*, *Telegraph*, and *Times* were terse and tepid at best. Strange because of Greenaway's reputation for provoking critical controversy. As auteur he is anything but wishy-washy.

What's interesting, without knowing all this before looking at the video, is that familiarity with a lot of his work can lull the informed viewer into embracing *Writing on Water* as definitive Greenaway product. There is so much going on visually. So many recognizable visual themes and techniques. It can be deceiving. Pyrite for the eyes. Fool's gold. A shimmering millefeuille of image, sound, and graphics that distracts critical acuity as it disguises the foibles of not just the video but the piece itself.

Writing on Water is neither exactly boring nor vapid when revisited. It is uncharacteristically soulless. A realization as surprising, confusing, and fascinating as it is fundamental because the lapse is problematic on formal grounds. Take Kant's *Critique of Pure Judgment*. "Soul" is one of the four "requisites of fine art." An "animating principle of the mind" or "psychic substance" that "sets the mental powers into a swing" in a way that is "self-maintaining and which strengthens those powers of such activity." Regardless of whether we grant Greenaway the other three criteria of "imagination, understanding…and taste," the absence of soul—that substantial, mind-engaging, self-sustaining content that moves the viewer—is symptomatic of the conceptual anemia of the work itself. But even in a vernacular sense of soul, the void is marked. Because soulfulness anchors Greenaway's work. Which more often than not has gravitas that billows with pathos and sardonic wit while injecting fresh if dark insight into the "pure, true, and profound knowledge of the



inner nature of the world," as Schopenhauer put it in *The World as Will and Representation*. Or in Greenaway's case, into our understanding of the uglier realities of the human condition.

This kind of aesthetic failing could warrant ending this discussion right here. But despite this and the fact that it is a minor work, it is unnecessary to dismiss the video as offhandedly as the London critics did the performance. *Writing on Water* is a useful analytical lightning rod. It both shares in and deviates from a Greenaway method that has produced one of contemporary cinema's most distinctive, memorable, and noteworthy *oeuvres*. What makes *Writing on Water* important is how it illustrates what breaks down and why. And as such it merits further consideration from at least the following perspectives:

- Technology as vehicle versus content,
- Artistic content as basis for language,
- Deep structure of Greenaway's cinematic language,
- Compression as vehicle for meaning,
- Technique without trope,
- Mistranslation as a fatal metaphor, and
- The auteur as his own subject.

The sum of which engulfs *Writing on Water*. Swamps it, actually. And ultimately diagnoses Greenaway's Kantian pitfall.

Technology as Vehicle versus Content

Thinking about *Writing on Water* brings to mind Godfrey Reggio's *Qatsi Trilogy—Koyaanisqatsi*, *Powaqqatsi*, and *Naqoyqatsi*. A few years ago, Reggio toured his film suite with the Philip Glass Ensemble for three consecutive nights' live performances in various cities around the world. Make no mistake—it was a live performance, not unlike *Writing on Water*. What made the *Qatsi Trilogy Live* exceptional was the way the live and filmed performances blended.

At San Francisco's Davies Hall in February of 2006, the screen was huge and auditorium cavernous yet somehow the scene felt intimate. Glass & Co. decked out in black head-to-toe played the film scores. Even in the dim of the darkened stage Glass' subtly rapturous gesturing at the keyboard reached into the audience. Extending the embrace of the music on him out into the great acoustic horn of the venue. Surrounding the sold-out house in emotional and aural reverberation while the audience bathed in the reflected glow of the onslaught of alternately wild, subdued, and morphing motion. The amplified

sight and sound dug in every melody hook deeper. Counterpointed by the operatic manner of musical director Michael Riesman conducting from his keyboard. Reeling the crowd in closer to the looping repetition and soaring phrasing. He knew where each scene began and ended. Bent and flexed with the idiosyncratic flow of the visual aria. Guiding the ensemble through real time interaction with the gargantuan celluloid diva of the screen.

Qatsi Trilogy Live was a marriage of concept and execution around the theme that technology sends life out of balance. Live delivery of the soundtrack humanized the high-impact cinematic experience. As Glass intended. Something well characterized in an interview he gave after the tour's world premiere at the Sydney Opera House in January 2005. "What I wanted to do," he told Demetrius Romeo of ABC NewRadio's Music News, "was to maintain a kind of passageway between the human heart and these images.... Our receptivity, our ability to empathize with the film is tremendously enhanced by that." Thus letting the urgent power of the message stand out from the time-lapse, slow motion, and digitally manipulated imagery driven by the frenetic edits.

Technology as a medium is rooted in the rarefied codes and machinations of engineering and computer science. Too often it creates more problems as it solves others. To wit, the entire software industry is economically grounded in the fallibility and accelerated obsolescence of its product. But technology is also a culture that has taken on an independent life. Operating against its own agenda according to rules it writes for itself. Unbridled, it tends to run roughshod over whatever's in its way.

In contrast, the *Trilogy Live* contains and channels it. Aside from the screen, the only evidence of enabling and in this case electronic technology on stage during the nearly six hours of the *Qatsi Trilogy* was the shadowy presence of the instrumental kit and a mere scatter of red diodes. This difference is what makes these other back-to-back multimedia performances apropos this consideration of *Writing on Water*. *Qatsi* tamed the beast that is technology to let the viewer see through it more clearly. Which as Walter Ong points out in *Orality and Literacy* isn't just about the view, but about impact. "Technologies are not mere exterior aids," Ong said, "but also interior transformations of consciousness… [that] can be uplifting." Which the *Qatsi Trilogy Live* was.

Although a first fly-by of *Writing on Water* was, too, the typical Greenaway production isn't "uplifting" *per se*. But if anyone has leveraged film technology to have this kind of transformational, or intensely emotional, impact on his audience, it is Greenaway. He has gone to great lengths throughout his career to incorporate the latest cinema technology into his work. Like a postmodern, adamantly secular Athanasius Kircher. The 17th Century Jesuit who furthered the Church's moral educational aims by appropriating, repositioning, and

deploying technologies previously condemned by the Inquisition. Except Greenaway works without the overtly didactic agenda and shuns spectacular effects. Producing instead unexpected even startling results with technology and through it. Such as the raining pages of *Prospero's Books*. Or sending his output on orthogonal trajectories into entirely different orbits. Like the multilayered reality within the play within the religious festival within the film of *The Baby of Mâcon*. Or imbuing his work with a surprising extra edge that is his stock in trade. À la the sadism, misogyny, and cannibalism of *The Cook, the Thief, His Wife and Her Lover*. Unlike these other films, however, the technology behind *Writing on Water* is so far forward that it overwhelms.

Ultimately, audiences care about the show not the technology behind it. Even the geeks think so. "The magic…is not just in the technology but in devising the content," *Wired* magazine wrote in a December 2003 profile of Shane Booth, a researcher working on advanced advertising technologies at Mitsubishi's Electric Research Lab. Continuing, the article quotes Booth for emphasis: "Content is king," he said. "The system could be smart, but if your content sucks, people aren't going to watch." The value judgment rooted in "sucks" notwithstanding, this is as true for advertising as anything.

Writing on Water doesn't simply let the techno-genie out of the bottle. It does so uninterestingly. Which is worse. We watch Greenaway at the flat-panel display. Neuenschwander at the light-table. The Sinfonietta churning away. The screens hovering in the abyss above the idle workstations of the electronic insurance market. The only thing missing would have been something like an impassive Brian Eno dwarfed by a monstrous sound board.

These are nothing but apparitions of equipment and personnel that should have been left in the editing suite. Or in the shadows of the sideline. Where they and the VJ belong. Working the tech on the front line this way, the team fumbles what Michel Foucault called "the sorcery" that "lies in an operation rendered invisible by the simplicity of its result." But here the result is simply in-your-face technology that undermines the presentation. Of the piece as artwork. Of the video as a discrete and distinctive work. Of the substance of the content, such as it is.

This is precisely where the video breaks down. The substance doesn't matter. The problem with *Writing on Water* is the absence of the conceptual content. What Schelling called the "ideas." Which "to the extent that they are intuited objectively, are therefore the substance." The very stuff promised by the canonical sources of Greenaway's inspiration. And the consequences of this are big.

The video is all surface gloss. With a libretto that's the calligraphic equivalent of literary lip-synching. A marquetry veneer. Crowded with what appear to be the meaning-making details of a mature Greenaway production. But not

the kind of meticulous construction that Hegel had in mind in the *Lectures on Aesthetics*. That is, "an intelligent movement of imagination which [can] vivify and expand the smallest detail." Nor what E. E. Cummings was driving at when he referred to "such minutiae…in which my Firstness thrives." Nope. We're talking about a void that abhors even self-appropriation. Reducing the work to what Vilém Flusser called "the excessive fullness of kitsch."

In the aesthetic realm, the critic Clement Greenberg nailed down the definition of this in "Avant-garde and Kitsch." Saying that it is "mechanical and operates by formulas… borrows …devices, tricks, stratagems, rules of thumb, [and] themes, converts them into a system and discards the rest. It draws its life blood…from this reservoir of accumulat[ion.]" In other words, Kant's soul drained of its life blood becomes empty content. The oxymoron that characterizes so much of contemporary cinema.

Writing on Water doesn't work because as Flusser put it " 'Art' is that which opposes habit" to avoid the doubled "anaesthetic" effect. Unaesthetic and unfeeling. Which is why all the habitual tools and techniques Greenaway pulls from his bag of tricks don't add up. And why *Writing on Water* does not and cannot translate. Not from kitsch to art. Not from stage to video. Not from one medium to another. Not from one language to another.

Artistic Content as Basis for Language

The implication that art is both a medium and a language may be controversial to some. But this equivalence is important to this evaluation of *Writing on Water*. And it is supported by much precedent. Whether by metaphor in *Art and Experience*. Where Dewey said that "art is a universal language." Or somewhat abstractly. As in *Languages of Art*, where Nelson Goodman captured the congruence as "all the sensitivity and responsiveness of the organism [that] participates in the invention and interpretation of symbols." Or literally, the way Flusser explicitly pushed the analogy all the way into reading. "The difference between reading written lines and reading a picture," he wrote, is that "we must follow the written text if we want to get its message, but in pictures we may get the message first, and then try to decompose it." Different forms. Both read. But grasped differently. Yet equally communicative. Echoed by Greenaway himself in an August 2008 lecture at the European Graduate School in Saas-Fee, Switzerland. His topic: "How to Read Paintings." The art-language simile is neither forced nor lost on him.

Even those who would rebel against the suggestion of synonymy between art and language can't escape it. Like monumental metal sculptor Richard Serra. The issue comes into sharp focus in an October 2008 *ArtForum* article by Jeffrey Weiss, curator of modern and contemporary art at the National Gallery of Art in D.C. In "Language in the Vicinity of Art," Weiss zeros in on the

conflictedness among artists who are highly conceptual but of two minds when it comes to equating language and art. Weiss quotes a 1977 interview where one minute Serra says that "space systems are different than linguistic systems in that they are non-descriptive." Only to flop over moments later, saying that "line as a visual element…becomes a transitive verb." A result that leaves Weiss unsurprised. Because "despite the limitations of language, as a medium its operations still provide the…formal approximation of…the process of the [artist's] work."

The equation of art and language goes both ways. Art can be a language. Language can be an art. No mere equivocation when talking about artistic representation. As the late philosopher Richard Rorty said in *Contingency, Irony and Solidarity*: "The world is out there, but descriptions of the world are not…The world does not speak. Only we do." For Rorty, this is reason for and effect of language. For art theorist Cynthia Freeland, however, Rorty's statement applies equally to linguistic and to artistic expression. In *But is it Art*, she said that "different arts do this differently…[and] different notation systems apply to…communicate." So regardless of art form, the notational systems are structured communications approaches. They can and do operate grammatically. Or within a grammar. Which as Ong pointed out, can "live in the unconscious, in the sense that you can know how to use the results and even how to set up new rules without being able to say what they are."

The analogy of art to language is central to understanding what is missing from the work called *Writing on Water*, not just the video. The meaning-making elements present in the video—discussed at length below—should be core to the piece itself. But they come across as mere stylized detail. When in fact they are grammatical elements of a distinctive language that Greenaway developed through a long-range process. A evolutionary process that is both absorptive and mutative.

It's an accomplishment akin to what the collagist Romare Bearden articulated from magazine clippings. An entirely new visual language. "The artist must be the medium," Bearden said in a 1947 diary entry that captures the point.

Greenaway as medium channeling new cinematic language. Cobbled from media technologies, post-production techniques, editorial skills, and a painterly eye. Plus a suite of artistic obsessions and conceits ranging from the history of painting and numerical patterning to cultural taboo. We are not talking about the early adoption of new technology *per se*. Nor about the tools themselves. Rather the underlying system of representation and conveyance that is the vehicle for a mode of cinematic expression that is Greenaway's true "firstness."

Deep Structure of Greenaway's Cinematic Language

In *Syntactic Structures*, Noam Chomsky traces the transformation of deep structure into predictable surface forms. The same could be said of Greenaway's approach to film. From a set of building blocks he constructs distinctive and different film articulations. An artistic protagonist. Intrigue. A deal gone awry. Frontal nudity. Film allusion. Cinematically rendered historical paintings. Insatiable sexuality. Betrayal. Incestuous innuendo. Murder. Images, dialog, and characters borrowed from previous films. Men in black. And an all out assault on taboo. Greenaway has consistently transformed this baker's dozen of contextless elements into his offbeat movies. Virtually every feature film he's made conforms to this structure. Which constitutes his cinematic grammar.

He also systematically mixes styles, forms, genres, and disciplines in a constantly evolving technological blender—while flouting cinematic convention. A kind of Wagnerian *Gesamtkunstwerk*—or contemporary version of Greek Music Drama. To name a few of each: *Water Wrackets* mixes nature documentary with science fiction while *The Cook, the Thief, His Wife and Her Lover* blends realism and fantasy. *Dear Phone* and *The Pillow Book* integrate handwritten text and film while *The Draughtsman's Contract* features architectural rendering within film. *A Zed and Two Noughts* incorporates cinematic send-offs of nature documentaries and paintings by Velasquez, Della Francesca, Vermeer, and Dali, while *Nightwatching* is part bio-pic, part whodunit, and all Rembrandt. Meanwhile Greenaway also subverts cinematic convention through such devices as scene-by-scene changes in color palette, full frontal male nudity, and intruding inset images and superimposed type into the frame.

Writing on Water itself fits this mold. In one fell swoop, it is a documentary and music video. Performance art, chamber music, calligraphy, and cinema. And an exercise in editing, composition, staging, and orchestral performance. However, what marks great Greenaway is never solely about visual surface—or what he calls pure form. "Content always atrophies," he said in Vernon and Marguerite Gras' *Peter Greenaway Interviews*, "until people don't know what

the hell it's about yet can still admire and enjoy the form. Form exists long after the content fades." Which does not mean the substance goes away. It's still there. In deeply layered conceptual content and a formal set of structural and narrative components, tightly interwoven with story, imagery, sound, and graphics that underpin Greenaway's trademark as a filmmaker.

Noam Chomsky illustrates how all this adds up to something more than a versatile tool kit or merely a well-honed surface. Much more. "One of the qualities that all languages have in common is their 'creative' aspect," Chomsky wrote. Which "provides the means of expressing indefinitely many thoughts…in an indefinite range of new situations. The grammar of a particular language, then, is to be supplemented by a universal grammar that accommodates the creative aspect of language use and expresses the deep-seated regularities." Chomsky wasn't thinking about Greenaway's modus operandi when he wrote *Aspects of the Theory of Syntax*. But the idea that a limited grammar can be a creative dynamo capable of producing infinite expression finds a direct parallel in Greenaway as a cinematic formalist.

Studying a cross-section of Greenaway films from the 1960s to the present, a complex and well defined superstructure is clearly evident. A balance of finite and universal grammars. A limited compositional palette combined with instantly familiar images. That not only shape individual productions but also evolve to distinguish periods of his *oeuvre*.

Here Chomsky meets Flusser at the confluence of deep-seated regularities and artistic habit. The components of the grammatical system and their application are both represented in the pattern repetition. This habitual transformation of deep structure into surface form is crucial to the emotive potency for Greenaway's cinema. In principle, this is no different, really, than Reggio's approach to the *Qatsi Trilogy*. The visualization is powerful because it is imbued with thematic profundity.

And Greenaway's own profound engagement with his work through a structured cinematic language is what makes his movies so consistently compelling. There are exceptions, of course. But overall his films rely—thrive—on semantic density. Even when the meaning is neither immediately evident. Nor readily available without a bit of detective work. And strict adherence to this syntax produced a diverse lot of intellectually and emotionally challenging films for theatrical and broadcast release.

A complete array of executional and semantic components—i.e., the grammar—are required to generate classic Greenaway. Evidence of this shows up beginning with his first independent works from the '60s and '70s. With it, Greenaway injects complex veins of meaning into his work. And on surface, *Writing on Water* appears to be a rich commingling of the full spectrum of grammatical elements in this language. His film language. Not

some impossibly hermetic private language. This entirely public means of conveyance. It possesses a unique, resonant voice. One that is consistent with and fulfills his proclaimed career project: to develop a new language distinctive to cinema. Further, the deep structure maps across the entire span of his cinematic output. Which from his earliest experimental films through his most recent commercial release coheres in clear segments:

§ The antinarratives—from shorts like *H is for House* and *Water Wrackets* to experimental features like *A Walk Through H* and *Vertical Features Remake*

§ The transition—*The Falls* (his last experimental film), *The Draughtsman's Contract* (his first narrative film) and *A Zed and Two Noughts* aka *ZOO* (the collision of the two)

§ The narrative dramas—from *The Belly of an Architect* to *8½ Women*

§ The breakthroughs—*A TV Dante*, *Prospero's Books*, *The Pillow Book* and *Rosa*—and

§ The period of return—which encompasses disparate works since the turn of the millennium, from *Nightwatching* and *The Tulse Luper Suitcases* to *Death of a Composer* and *Writing on Water*, all of which revisit the themes, films, and sometimes even footage from Greenaway's past.

Unfortunately, there isn't the luxury here to delve into each of these stages in detail. (A book length project in itself.) Three of these, however, do need to be contextualized for this discussion: the antinarratives, the transition, and the breakthroughs.

At 28 minutes, *Writing on Water* is on par with the length of the antinarrative shorts. But it doesn't exhibit the content compression that makes Greenaway's shorts succeed. In addition, it samples without fully synthesizing the compositional principles first deployed in the experimental films. These culminate in *The Falls*, *The Draughtsman's Contract*, and *ZOO*. Which together mark a period of transition in Greenaway's work where his cinematic grammar coalesces. Finally, the four films that constitute the breakthrough: *A TV Dante*, *Prospero's Books*, *The Pillow Book*, and *Rosa*. These represent the emergence of the fully articulated language of the artistically mature Greenaway. All four of these works embody the grammar and deliver the impact of classic Greenaway. Something *Writing on Water* may aspire to but falls well short of.

Again, the shortfall is more than executional. It's formal. Tying back to the Kantian criterion of soul. Which McLuhan catapults into a more contemporary framework in the introduction to the second edition of *Understanding Media*.

Where he clarifies the difference between cool and hot media. The term "cool" is the one that matters here. "Cool," McLuhan says, "indicates a kind of commitment and participation in situations that involves all of one's faculties." The Kantian parallel (if not outright influence) is unmistakable. "Cool" (McLuhan) is the "soul…that sets the mental powers into a swing" (Kant). The movement that digs the groove.

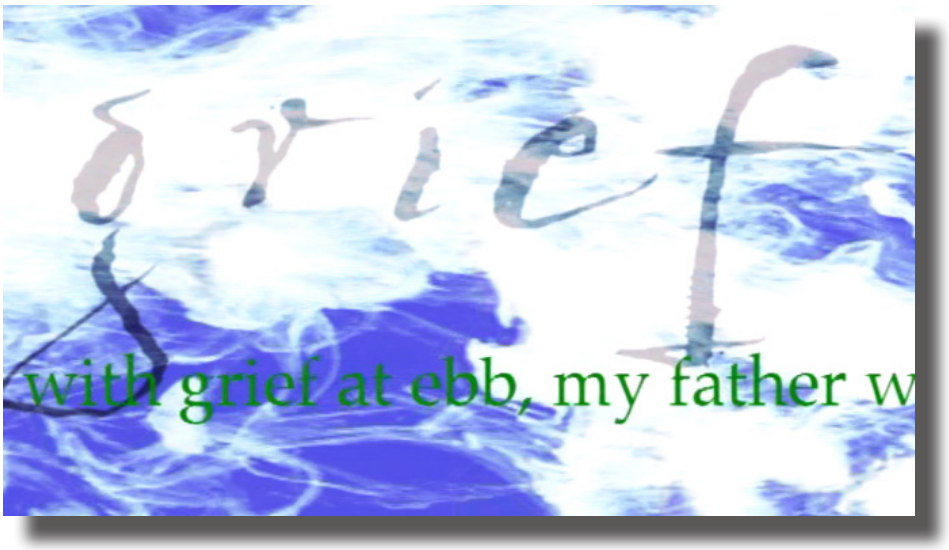
Cool and soul are about engagement. Something television excels at in McLuhan's view. Because a cool medium like "TV leaves much more for the… user to do than a hot medium" like film. However, some cinema transcends hot: "The Bergman and Fellini movies demand far more involvement than do narrative shows." They are cool because they are like "the more effective [television] programs…that present situations which consists of some process to be completed."

Because of the interpretative process that must be completed, Greenaway's own work is "cool." The diagnosis applies handily to his early antinarrative shorts: *Intervals* (1969), *Windows* (1974), *Dear Phone* (1976), *H is for House* (1976), and *Water Wrackets* (1978). But what does 'antinarrative' mean? According to Robert Kolker's *The Altering Eye*, as used during its heyday in the 1960s, the term designates "a series of images whose chronology and spatial relationships are purposely dislocated to dislodge the viewer from the complacency of continuity." Some of the main characteristics of '60s antinarrative films are elaborated by Barton Byg in *Landscape of Resistance*. These include simple visual construction; restrained camera movement; precise editing; supreme concentration on constituent elements, i.e., light, sound, motion in juxtaposition to landscape, poetic text. Greenaway's early shorts all fit this bill to a tee.

It was on the shoulders of this output that Greenaway established his early reputation as an artist. Each success, of course, made him bolder. More idiosyncratic. Drawing increasing attention—and funding. Accomplishing a key to artistic breakthrough that Walter Benjamin elaborated in "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction." "One of the foremost tasks of art," Benjamin wrote, "has always been the creating of a demand which would be fully satisfied only later." Benjamin is talking about latent aesthetic demand. Not the economic sense *per se*. But not simply in the sense of delayed. Also in the sense of exploiting opportunity to activate attraction and desire.

Compression as a Vehicle for Meaning

Artistic demand in the context of Greenaway's antinarrative films evokes another short-duration media format in vogue at the time. The TV commercial. In July 1968, *Time* magazine observed that commercials' "seductive effect upon the population compel[s] it to overconsume its own overproduction [by]



overstimulating… desires." From this and Benjamin, it is clear the two forms may diverge in intent. Advertising is designed to persuade. Antinarrative film is not. But when it comes to understanding Greenaway, they have another less apparent commonality.

In particular the experimental shorts share a number of technical aspects with the so-called "slice." Short for a situational slice-of-life commercial. The similarities trace to a simple demonstration-driven format, tightly synchronized visual and voice-over, restrained camera movement, precise editing with limited cuts, very short duration, and repetitive, often rhymed text. They also embed and display a cultural subtext. The match-up isn't exact, but surprisingly close.

The eleven-minute *Water Wrackets* comes to mind first as a comprehensive demonstration of the elements at play. For starters, it is notably ad-like in its see-say manner. The words "black water" over a shot of black water. "Forest" over forests. "Lake" over lakes. These visual-verbal synch-ups can seem random. However they're too frequent to be coincidental. In fact *H is for House* (which comes in at nine minutes) evidences similar see-say patterning as well as repetitive text. These impress on viewer awareness with each successive iteration. Like the monotone voiceover used in all the shorts. This layers on a mania that motors each film to a dizzy aural extreme. Not unlike the way repeating a word too many times strips it of apparent meaning. Or the way advertising relentlessly hammers into viewers' heads.

There is more to this, however. And McLuhan sums up how phenomenally economical and potent the medium of advertising is: "Historians and archaeologists will one day discover that the ads of our times are the richest and most faithful daily reflections that any society ever made of its entire range of activities." Looking back from the archaeological future, then, today's ads are the unbroken shards of what will in some way constitute the art of the period. They have a staying power that carries forward. But cultural mirroring is not supposed to be part of the antinarrative form.

Nevertheless Greenaway does not always strip the cultural-content load.

In fact, embedded in his antinarratives is an idyll. A British version of the hackneyed, multi-dimensional American Dream that plays out loudly as subtext. It shows up in his attachment to English landscape. And not only in his early films. But focusing on the shorts, you can see this distinctly in *H is for House* and *Windows*. The country house set in a lush garden. The bucolic pastoral vistas. His wife darning in a rocking chair. The golden summer afternoon. A picnic lunch and romp between mother and infant daughter. The heavenly skies. The home-movie quality of the photography. This imagery comprises a romantic mediation on the good life. The urban British intelligentsia since Bloomsbury have retreated to the countryside to recuperate and create. They still did in the Mod '60s and do so today. Greenaway has never been immune to its allure. In fact, he sometimes can't escape his own slice-of-life.

Although in theory antinarrative film overtly jettisons carried-content loads of this kind. Greenaway is not bound by this principle. In another video commentary on the shorts, he reveals the inspiration for *Windows*. Outrage against a rash of South African political murders perpetrated via defenestration. This is profound stuff. Highly politicized. Deeply emotional. Wrought with meaning. However, without digging for the filmmaker's intent context is missing to the viewer. This is what is meant by content shedding or inaccessibility. Which illustrates one of Greenaway's core beliefs about cinema. Namely, that content is ephemeral while form endures. In *Interviews*, Gras and Gras explain that in order to foreground the aesthetic structures of frame, image, and composition, Greenaway suppresses the underlying content. Thus his films can and do stand independently as viewing experiences. But the idea here of pure viewing surface is an illusion. The work is anchored in underlying meaning and motivation. It is compelling because of what it is imbued with.

So, like commercials, antinarratives contain heavily layered cultural and/or messaging throw-weight within strict temporal and rhetorical parameters. They compress insane quantities and sundry categories of information. They're both incredibly dense because of not despite their compression. This is why they can shed their content and still function solely as entertainment. Something in the intensity of their creation persists after the meaning-elements have decayed beyond their half-life. The coal in the diamond, if you will.

Proof in point: million-dollar-plus bespoke TV ads routinely produced for mondo-event programming like the Super Bowl. Some run only once. The quintessential example is Apple Computer's 1984 Macintosh launch commercial directed by Ridley Scott. The bleached-blonde Wonder Woman babe in full stride. Wielding a sledgehammer she launches to shatter a gigantic, imperious talking head. It is still a sight to behold. The spot is engrossing even if you don't get it. That "it" is the combined literary allusion

to 1984 and marketing narrative that Big Brother equals Big Blue, i.e., IBM, Apple's nemesis at the time. All the invisible content acts like a weight grounding the execution. Giving it residual mass and impact.

A more recent apparition is the hour-long commercial showcase *Firebrand*. This hybrid syndicated TV-web play takes Greenaway's key tenet another step. It's a mix of historical, international, and contemporary commercials. The spots are the program's only content and its entire appeal. Stripped of their advertising-communication mandate, their pure entertainment value shines. A perfect example of how content falls away leaving form behind. But all that content is still in there from the moment of creation. It is available for consumption and interpretation with a modicum of research. This is Benjamin's latency. McLuhan's cool. The interpretive work to be done. And it gives the ads a dimension that art possesses. They're not immediately accessible in their entirety. Requiring effort to fully appreciate and understand. Even if they are paltry ads.

Given all this, we cannot let *Writing on Water* off the hook by saying that a mother lode of carried content is too much to demand of a short film. Something he's accomplished repeatedly in other short format work. So there is no reason anything as elaborate and contrived as a Greenaway production at 28 minutes couldn't, too. Not when something an order of magnitude shorter like a thirty-second TV spot can accommodate it. It is lame that TV ads could outdo and deliver more impact à la classic Greenaway. A Greenaway production typically depends on heavy, injected layers of meaning in and through the creative process. This is what produces such intensely "cool" film. And why the pointed question from the TV commercial realm must be put to *Writing in Water*: Where's the beef?

It should be in, under, and behind the narrative. Which is integral to Greenaway. But missing from *Writing on Water*. And not because he can't find the right balance. Greenaway fluidly oscillates between antinarrative and narrative in the shorts. It is striking how fundamentally narrative—how layered with story—they are. Part of the strategy of the short films is a script that tells a wacked-out tale. Regardless of how crazy the stories are, they are stories nevertheless. Fully articulated with characters, plot, and backstory.

Since the 1960s, Greenaway has sustained this kind of balanced complexity. Most of his films play antithetical positions at the same time. Demonstrating theoretical and cinematic principles while attacking political, religious, and social dogma. Carrying the viewer along a narrative line. But without getting either polemical or didactic. So that he can hold the viewer in place. Grounded by substantial content and riveted through the barrage of intellectually and emotionally demanding sequences he's built his reputation on.

Greenaway perfects this approach in later more conventionally narrative

work. The extent to which it's an intended trademark becomes clear in the introduction to the screenplay of *The Baby of Mâcon*. There he explicitly states that he operates simultaneously on overlapping often contradictory planes. But what is so true of a simple, short, and sweet film as *Windows*—something he's done consistently across decades—unfortunately doesn't apply to *Writing on Water*. Despite the heavy-weight literary lineage, there are no capillaries of meaning lacing throughout the piece. Nothing to worm into. As Gertrude Stein put it in *Everybody's Autobiography*: "There is no there there." No stake beyond the commission. No driving principle. No V-8 under the hood. No pathos. No passion. No meat.

Technique Without Trope

Looking at Greenaway films holistically, visual components bear meaning in their filmic context. They don't merely migrate across films. They emerge from deep structure and operate as semantic underpinning. Driving meaning. They are not applied stencils. Not graffiti. Nor scribbles. Nor animated brushstrokes like the calligraphy of *Writing on Water*. Which dissolves against the fluid backdrop. Not into it. Not emulsifying into something more substantial beyond the individual elements. Not concocting a new tincture with a distinctive taste all its own. Not laddering up to the firstness of Bearden or Cummings. Both of whom were appropriative artists, too.

Take the literal writing on water. Images of scribed words layered on top of images of moving liquid. Figuratively: Language riding the fluctuating surface of experience. Abstracted: The ephemerality of language, experience, art. The metaphors are obvious. Too fathomable. Too thin to plumb without sinking to the bottom of the barren void. Quoted text evoking neither the drama nor the intensity of the original. Of its profound sources.

Still lacking depth when analyzed from another angle. As writing about water. Via lifted phrases. Placed next to each other. But not recombinant. Quasi. Never morphing beyond restatement. Beyond visual echo of uttered and superimposed text. Sung by a chorus. Swung from brushes. And slung onto screens. Neither conveying nor unpacking any new meaning. Too loose and vague to constitute story beyond the evocation of archetype. The mythic encounter of man with ocean—existential abyss. But stripped of connective tissue. Human interest. Narrative impact. Nothing to embody or convey. All technique. No trope. Even gleaning the edit produces little worth grinding down and rebaking. Touchstones to earlier work equally unsatisfying. The see-say quality of the antinarratives, for instance. We get some of this synching. But without the multiplicative effect where it would have greatest impact. The rich imagery of the appropriated literature is a missed opportunity. Melville's "circling surface creamed like new milk" is orphaned without reinforcement. Or

unfortunate editorial choice that squanders potentially dramatic image-phrase pairings. Exploding water against “drenched in the sea” from Shakespeare. But the visual is relegated to distant background in favor of a cameo of the VJ. A similar lapse happens with “air.”

The use of calligraphy pales in comparison to *The Pillow Book*. Which finds the same dynamic duo of Greenaway and Neuenschwander collaborating. To richly slather on layers of the Greenaway grammar. The heroine—a poem incarnate. A conveyance equally art and language. A thing of beauty and passion. She is literally a poetic canvas. Covered in calligraphy. Pictograms. Hand rendered in volume. By her elderly patrons and young lovers. Each rendition bearing a line of story. From creation myth. To death sentence. Her humiliated father’s. Her bisexual lover’s. And the arrogant publisher who buggers both. Forces her into marriage with his son. Buggering her by proxy. Through progeny. Only to be driven by her to suicide. Each line a thread in the weave. Connecting her past to her present. Tethering her father’s fate to hers. Tying the noose of her revenge on her nemesis. Palpable. Not translucent. Solid. Not liquid. Substantial. Not superficial.

The Pillow Book evokes and makes vivid Ernest Fenollosa’s *The Chinese Written Character as a Medium for Poetry*. Edited and published posthumously by Ezra Pound. Fenollosa said that in contemporary Chinese writing resides verbal and iconic meaning. Historically and graphically semantic. Both etymological and pictorial. Unlike alphabetic script. The Chinese character as an object for translation is a reservoir. Containing, preserving, and forwarding the entire history of the symbol. And its constituent parts. Philologically dissimilar to Western languages that grew out of Greek and Proto-Indo-European.

Individual, highly compressed meaning-making components operate this iconic way throughout Greenaway’s *oeuvre*. This makes the missing connection in *Writing on Water* nothing short of ironic. Because Greenaway is a filmic mason. He layers on concept and nuance with the facility of Picasso whipping off canvases with a palette knife. This is a mark of mastery. Such a high level of command of the tools and medium that it can look deceptively easy. Much of the patterning evident in Greenaway’s work builds to something systematic and structural beyond his obsessive-compulsive tendencies and fecund productivity. And viewing more than 20 Greenaway movies more than twice each over a relatively short period of time has an impact reminiscent of witnessing the posthumous Picasso exhibition that toured the world museum circuit in the early 1980s.

Beyond the sheer scope and tonnage of Picasso’s output, what overwhelmed about his retrospective was the sense of someone stuck. Obsessed. Compulsively and repeatedly trying to paint himself out of an aesthetic corner.

In room after room of repetitious paintings. Cubist still-lifes. Harlequins. Acrobats. Morose blue people. And more. Picasso incessantly iterated and reworked a limited set of iconic images and themes. This is a point John Richardson amplifies in an interview in *The Washington Post's* free daily *Express*. Talking about the final tome of his four-volume biography of Picasso he suggests "thinking of Picasso as a witchdoctor who makes his own fetishes." The same could be said about Greenaway.

But obsession isn't the whole story here. Creative evolution is, too. For what marveled about seeing so much of Picasso's work in one place at one time was the ability to spot the glimmers of breakthrough. Something similar takes place in the group of Greenaway films that mark the transition: *The Falls*, *The Draughtsman's Contract*, and *ZOO*. They presage what's to come. Constituting a prism that separates out the evidence of grammar from an obsessive process like Picasso's. Through which every film, painting, book, opera, or whatever Greenaway subsequently makes is structured.

The Falls marks the end of a long period of pseudo-documentary filmmaking. During which Greenaway delved deeply into antinarrative, surrealism, and mockumentary. He perfected film-editing skills. Honed his warped sense of humor. And betrayed his weakness for punning. All the while unraveling a long list of obsessions. *The Falls* is cinematic stew made from leftovers of all this prior films. Landscape and realism. Water and light. Painting and drawing. Aural monotony and dry humor. Borrowed images and repetitive text. Lots of lives and a ton of death. Arithmetic and fantasy. As well as lifted footage and transposed characters.

This list reads a lot like *Writing on Water*. But only on the level of technique. *The Falls* is rife with allusion and foreshadowing elements *Writing on Water* lacks. Twins. Recurring characters. Black-clad men. Frontal nudity. Stories within and behind stories. The history of paintings of course—another touchstone to Picasso. Plus a curious apparition: Della Francesca's *Madonna and Child*. However, *Writing on Water* neither mirrors nor structures anything. It appropriates without allusion or Greenaway self-reference.

Up to the point of *The Falls*, Greenaway flaunted mainly technical conventions to achieve aesthetic abstraction. In *The Draughtsman's Contract*, he lurches away from abstraction while retaining and referencing elements of The Falls. The homage to Della Francesca and affection for landscape are not simply rearticulated but elaborated. An illustration of how persistent and structural individual components become. For example, the protagonist Neville uses the tools of architectural perspective—the sight and frame—to render his client's country house from multiple angles on the estate. The drawings both shape the surface drama and encapsulate the conspiracy underlying the plot. Greenaway builds them into each other.

Twinning returns in a leading role. Literal twins in the ersatz biographies of *The Falls* turn up as two of Neville's aristocratic antagonists. So too with frontal nudity and intrigue. A naked woman seated on a sofa reading to camera morphs into an eccentric character who paints his body to resemble statues then strikes poses like that of a fountain urinating at the camera. An exquisite example of Greenaway's bent humor: the director whimsically urinating on his audience. Meanwhile the mock-apocalyptic Violent Unknown Event that is the premise of *The Falls* transforms into the murder mystery at the center of *The Draughtsman's Contract*.

In *ZOO*, we move out one form of architecture into an eponymous other. This is an initial tier of synthesis. More pronounced is the post-*Draughtsman* reintegration of the surrealism of the antinarratives into Greenaway's later, more conventional movie work. For example, *ZOO* takes homage to painting a surreal extra step. It features images from Vermeer and Velasquez and scenes of women photographed in staged recreations of famous paintings. *ZOO* also pervasively echoes Dali. The point of departure is Della Francesca's *Madonna and Child*. With another Picasso connection: Dali was Picasso's great friend and they admired each other's work. Greenaway does, too.

In this example lies a demonstration of a key dimension of the nuanced, repetitive patterning that grew into Greenaway's cinematic grammar. Echoed in the handling of the prostitute Buick, the central female character in *ZOO*. It's a Greenaway nod to the blasphemous innuendo about Christ's lineage as well as a treatment borrowed from Dali. Who truncates the Madonna's body by severing its legs. Buick is obsessed with amputation and has both her legs surgically removed. Dali then reconstitutes the missing legs with penile stumps. Greenaway has the naked twin brothers who are the protagonists of *ZOO* recline in bed flanking Buick. Each has one leg protruding from the covers precisely where Buick's missing limbs would have been. This only scratches the surface. When the many Daliesque touches are taken into account, it becomes clear that *A Zed and Two Noughts* is quite literally a surrealist trip to the zoo. The coded message in the madness, if you will.

Greenaway also weaves Chomsky's "creative aspect of language use" into a global thematic overlay that "expresses deep-seated regularities." *The Falls*, *The Draughtsman's Contract*, and *ZOO* all revolve around menageries. *Random House* tells us it has three meanings: A collection of wild or unusual animals for exhibition. A place where they are kept or exhibited. And an unusual and varied group of people. In *The Falls*, it is constituted of birds and biographies. *ZOO* reflects all three definitions. Which are also explicit in *The Draughtsman's Contract*. But cranked up to social commentary and twisted in Greenaway's inimitable way: The aristocratic herd that descends on the country estate is littered with social lions, baboons, hyenas, and peacocks. While the homestead itself is populated with the domesticated mammals of

the petting zoo. Including sheep and the cold heartedly reduced to chattel farmhands.

The Falls, *The Draughtsman's Contract*, and *ZOO* reveal something core about Greenaway's cinematic *modus operandi*. All the layered, obsessive detailing is part of a dedicated strategy derived from his antinarrative period. He never lets go of disrupting the continuity of the viewer experience. Forever reminding his audience through jarring detail and action. And a decidedly misanthropic edge. That they are watching a movie. Even while telling increasingly engrossing stories that keep them glued to the screen. Add to this the semantic tonnage he shovels into the conceptualization and realization of his films. Suddenly, it becomes clear why watching his movies can be bewildering in their density and intensity. The weight of their deep structure impressing the brain.

In contrast, *Writing on Water* is a fundamentally different breed of output than this kind of formalism. *Writing on Water* has no sub-layer of meaning whatsoever. "The power would not be conveyed by the images" the critic Paul Ricoeur said, "but by the emergent meaning." Something the video is missing. It exhibits only a casual application of visual and aural layering. Which only partially distinguishes Greenaway's mature cinematic language. But a minimalist score, text superimposed over image, and lots of split screens and frame in frame? These don't add up to an impression of thematic, let alone dramatic, substance. Although these techniques are earmarks of Greenaway's highly evolved cinematic language. What they add up to is an exercise in real-time filmmaking and editing. Undeniably skillful. Tightly choreographed. But uninteresting to watch.

The show is all about execution and technology. Not about substantial artistic content. A problem Jean Baudrillard highlights in *Simulations*. "Technique as medium dominates not only the 'message,'" he said, "but also the force-of-work." Steamrolling Shelling's "ideas" and Kant's "soul." "The equivalent," Baudrillard continued, "of the total neutralization of the signified by the code." Yet when operating within the constraints of his entire grammar, Greenaway's movies invariably stand up to repeated exposure. Each subsequent viewing revealing incremental nuance. Substance. Absent application of the entire blueprint, however, the work can lack the full emotional and hence creative force. And *Writing on Water* is a *tour de force* demonstration of this. What one of the piece's central sources—Shakespeare—called "false art."

The Failure to Translate

Which forces the key question. What is *Writing on Water* actually? Simplistically, it is a filmed recording of a live performance. But rerecorded in the studio. Part portrait. Part documentary. But neither one nor the other. A

media recapitulation that Greenaway made of his own performance. A filmed document that is clearly intended to depict the event. To capture something essential about the experience. The heady exhilaration in the moment. The energy and excitement of the action. Its uniqueness. Technological precedence. Or perhaps it is intended as evidentiary documentation. But not so much proof as self-reflexive transcript. A flat record. Spare on dimension. Barely a portrayal. More an impersonation. Doubly unreal. Detached. Distant. Too far from first hand to capture the essence. A mistranslation into a virtual facsimile. A mere picture-like object. A false impression projected on a glassy canvas.

Watching *Writing on Water* the first time, it seemed to dazzle. Watching it another time, the initial fervor faded quickly. Until upon subsequent exposure *Writing on Water* rang uncharacteristically hollow. Greenaway films can be hard to watch at moments. Like the excruciating serial rape sequence of *The Baby of Mâcon*. In other rarer instances they can be nearly intolerable. As with the interminable 195-minute *The Falls*. Hard to sit through without squirming. But shallow or insubstantial his films are not.

It's not that repeated viewing melted *Writing on Water* into gibberish. Nor did this strip it of meaning. Signification vaporized. Dilute beyond invisible. Transformed to nonsense through overuse. Over repetition. And the critical reaction of the British media, both old and new, wasn't so jading. The problem was neither one of over-exposure nor critical susceptibility. The problem laid in the act. The work. Its performance and capture. Archived but unreclaimable. So different from his other translative output. Meaning the way he productizes his work. From the medium it was created in into other media. Like the screenplays of his films. They're not flaccid knockoffs of the script. But alive with text, image, commentary, and design. Nifty, artfully constructed artifacts. Not undecipherable fragments of some dead language badly translated.

Rendering works of art in different media is an act of translation. With as much at stake as a literary translation. Indeed, the issue here is nothing short of what George Steiner in *Language and Silence* calls "the dilemma of adequate language." Translation being an art in itself. The making of something new from an existing source with its own life. Not the mechanical product of an algorithm-driven linguistic engine. Nor what Homeric translator Robert Fagles' characterized as Matthew Arnold's "drone's search" through "a clump of assessable data." Rather, to paraphrase Virginia Woolf's *Orlando*, "the transaction between [an artist] and the spirit of the [work] is one of infinite delicacy." A linguistic and creative challenge. As well as an obligation *vis-à-vis* not so much the integrity of the text *per se* as the integrity of the work itself. Translator as artist. Translation as new artwork.

In "What Is a 'Relevant' Translation," Jacques Derrida may have stated the

obvious when he said that “any given translation stands between…absolute relevance, [or] the most appropriate, adequate, univocal transparency, and the most aberrant and opaque irrelevance.” But he wasn’t talking about a literal translation. He wasn’t suggesting that a perfect recreation of the original in another language is the objective. Or even possible. Derrida pointed toward something closer to Steiner’s sense of adequacy. Which the literary historian and critic Hugh Kenner may have most aptly characterized as a nuanced, temporally and culturally sensitive re-creation “greatly told in, exactly, our time.” In the critical senses of these terms, this is what makes a translation relevant or adequate. A compelling retelling. Compelling in rendition as much as in milieu.

By this standard, *Writing on Water* underwhelms. Unable to fulfill its potential. Sharing the fate of a translation doomed *a priori*. A flubbed rendering of a performance delivered in one artistic medium—and hence language—into another. Unable, as Derrida would say, to translate, elevate, preserve. Only able to negate. But not even getting that right. Because this document doesn’t reproduce the original with sufficient force. So it cannot even pretend to replace it. Cannot stand in. Cannot represent—re-present. Can neither generate nor re-generate the artistic microcosm at that pinpoint in time and place.

What is baffling is that directors, including Greenaway, have compellingly documented live performance on film forever, cinematically speaking. Here are just two noteworthy examples from the Greenaway era. First: John Gielgud’s *Hamlet* starring Richard Burton. Filmed live at the Lunt-Fontanne Theatre in Manhattan and broadcast by NBC in 1964. Recently reissued. As good to watch today as back then. Second: *Woodstock* from 1970. Michael Wadleigh’s definitive film document of the twilight of the 1960s’ countercultural revolution. Worth every minute of mud and mania to see and listen to Jimi Hendrix’ electrifying “Star Spangled Banner” again.

Greenaway’s *Writing on Water* falls squarely into this product class. But lacks the straightforward portrayal of the Gielgud production. And is anemic in comparison to the energy—let alone

the scope—of Wadleigh's production. *Writing on Water* differs also in a want of staying power. What makes these comparative failings perplexing is that Greenway produced other documentary work that is breakthrough in all respects. Not so much his well-received TV documentaries of *(4) American Composers*. Simply because these weren't of live performances. Rather the 1999 video of the opera *Death of a Composer: Rosa—A Horse Drama*. Which predates *Writing on Water* by a mere six years.

Rosa is the film of a 1994 opera by Louis Andriessen. Greenaway made it for NPS Dutch Television. Wrote the libretto. And directed the stage production for The Netherlands Opera. On surface, *Rosa* brandishes many Greenaway flourishes. Full frontal nudity. Misogyny. Intrigue. Image in image. Textual overlay. To cite a few. And it is very specifically a performance document. But there is more to *Rosa* than this. What makes *Rosa* stand out in comparison is manifold. But adds up to soul. Derived from the approach that produces compelling Greenaway work. Built on deep structure. Thickly layered with meaning-making elements. Packed with interpretive guts.

The genesis of *Rosa* was an investigation. Historical and creative. Into the suspicious demise of ten 20th Century composers. Beginning in 1945 with Anton Weber. Ending with John Lennon in 1980. *Rosa* digs into the 1957 murder and equine obsessions of Argentine composer Jan Manuel de Rosa. Living in Uruguay, Rosa aspired to score Hollywood Westerns. Riding this storyline, the opera wends through standard Greenaway tropes. Sex. Death. Obsession. Rosa falls in love with his horse. His lover Esmeralda tries to win him back. Paints herself black. Like the horse. Like the black-clad men that populate the chorus. And other Greenaway films. The production is quintessentially twisted. Made from the sixth libretto Greenaway wrote for this project. Thus before its specific conception, *Rosa* was gestating. Intensifying. Congealing in subcontent. Deep structure. Layer upon layer of meaning forming. Growing creative backbone. Building up to surface form. Giving the work volcanic impetus and impact.

In Gras and Gras, Greenaway said "no subject matter is documentary." A point that has resonated with intellectuals from Charles Lamb to Michel Foucault. And Jungian psychologist James Hillman. Who in "The Fiction of Case Study" said that all supposedly objective narrative is fiction. In *Rosa*, Greenaway seizes permission to deviate from factuality. Doesn't hold himself to an artificial standard of documentary veracity. As a result, he does not limit the power of expression in the translation from the live performance of the opera to its cinematic rendition.

In so doing, Greenaway gave *Rosa* something *Writing on Water* is missing. The same thing Mikhail Bahktin in *The Dialogic Imagination* attributes to the classical Greeks. The viscerality that was truth to the Greeks. "Who behaved,"

Bahktin wrote, “in a most unrestrained manner and express[ed] their feelings vividly and noisily.” The way Greenaway usually approaches his films. The way he approached *Rosa*.

Consequently, *Writing on Water* ends up having more in common with a failed advertising approach from the 1960s than *Rosa*. The TV commercial format that Lawrence Samuel called “improvised documentaries” in *Brought to You By*. A dismal flop. No one believed them. Because they aimed at documentary veracity. Faux transparency. Which provoked viewer backlash. This rejection rooted in what McLuhan described as the “depart[ure] from the center of shared experience.” They “collapse,” McLuhan said, “by losing all hold on [viewer] feelings.” So in trying to make a slick, cool looking, documentary-style rendition of his performance piece, Greenaway only vaporized whatever meager connective tissue the piece had between the work and its audience. And off with it went the soul.

Which means something is badly and sadly amiss. Because Greenaway is a documentarian *par excellence*. He didn’t flee the filmic and narrative techniques he acquired and mastered as a government propagandist. He descended into them. Borrowed heavily from the Surrealists who pioneered the jarring juxtaposition of moving image, text, and sound 40 years earlier. Then synthesized a unique cinematic grammar. A trace of this resides in his work the same way every television ad carries the full weight and implication of its historical reality. The way every work in every language carries the deep-time semantics of its philological antecedents. As does Greenaway’s cinematic language.

Writing on Water isn’t just less risky and more conventional than classic Greenaway. It’s dramatically flat. Drained to an emotional pallor. Whereas *Rosa* employs everything in Greenaway’s dramaturgical, directorial, editorial, and technological repertoire to full effect. And as a result has the emotional depth and power of *The Baby of Mâcon*. *Rosa* is one of the full articulations of the Greenaway syntax. Where dramatic force is intensified by the insertion of the grammatical gene into the DNA of the work. Which is then reconceived for execution in another medium. In this case an opera on stage into a film that uses the complete cinematic grammar of the mature Greenaway to capture and amplify the immediacy and emotional power of the performance.

This raises an issue about the difference between live stage performance and cinema. The implication of which is that as a filmed work *Writing on Water* is the mutant product of incomplete creative gestation. Normally, an artist identifies then collaborates with a simpatico translator to produce what is essentially a new work. Representative but not identical to the original. A new work that works in a new language. When crossing over media lines, however, Greenaway always acts as his own translator. This usurpation of the independent translator’s role has previously produced superb results for him.

But not in the case of *Writing on Water*. Something got in his way with this video. And that something may simply have been himself.

Auteur as Self Subject

Painter by training. Propagandist by trade. Experimental filmmaker. Feature director. TV mini-series creator. Opera impresario. And multimedia artist to boot. As described by Raymond Geuss and Ronald Speirs, the editor-translator team of *The Birth of Tragedy and Other Writings*, Greenaway is an artist who embodies the melding of the Nietzschean Apolline and Dionysiac. By "absorb[ing] all previous artistic genres" and "creat[ing] by mixing all available styles and forms together so that [his work] hovers somewhere midway between narrative, lyric and drama, between prose and poetry." An über-auteur. And cinematic linguist and poet. Foraging intellectually and aesthetically across exceptionally broad terrain. Someone so artistically daring. So consistent in the quality of his output. So cross-disciplinary. How could he miss the mark so widely in a documentary cinematic format he'd previously mastered? Not once. But in four distinct genres. Propaganda. Antinarrative. Television. Opera.

Greenaway is standing on the wrong side of the camera. There are few famous directors who became decent actors. Although the late Sidney Lumet as the lawyer in Stanley Kubrick's posthumous *Eyes Wide Open* was one who did. More typical is the big name director who should have resisted the impulse to jump sides of the lens. *Woodstock* brings Martin Scorsese to mind because he was one of that film's editors. More recently he "played" himself in his 2008 Rolling Stones charity concert documentary *Shine a Light*. A decision that made him look neurotic. This switching sides, so to speak, is more successful the other way around. When actors become directors. Like Ron Howard. Or when actor-directors direct themselves. Like Clint Eastwood. They were terrific actors first. Something Greenaway is not and never has been.

He's the VJ. But like a DJ he's supposed to be off to the side. Discretely making the scene unfold. Happen. But he rejects this shadow stance in *Writing on Water*. Puts himself out front. With his tools and team. Under the pretense of being a performance artist. Choosing the limelight instead of the wings. But Laurie Anderson he is not. When she's on stage she's not part of the production team. And she's not part of the act. She is the act. The whole show. It revolves around her. Because she showcases the content. Embodied in her performance. Wrapped in multimedia blitz. Centered on her. She conceives and builds and delivers it that way.

By contrast Greenaway's on-stage presence isn't. He's just a hardworking film editor. Poking buttons out on the middle of the stage. Looking earnestly involved. Gazing up and down. Checking out what's showing up there. The

fact he's standing at the swiftest looking flat-panel interface ever is meaningless. It's nothing like playing an instrument. Delivering an oration. Or singing a song. You'd think he'd have known better. Which is ironic. Because as a talking head he can be damned effective. For example in the commentaries on his movie reissues. Poised. Pithy. Confident. Projective. And artfully framed and filmed.

Greenaway's position as the VJ in the spotlight recalls *Qatsi Trilogy Live*. Insofar as he should have taken a cue from Glass. Who hovered in the shadows below the screen to great effect. Presence without prominence. Greenaway's dilemma is also reminiscent of Victor Fleming's *The Wizard of Oz*. Specifically the scene where The Wiz is uncloaked by Toto. Curtain pulled back. Caught working his control panel. Truth and technology bared. His real identity stripped down from the fireball-inflated proportions of The Wizard's façade. So blustering, fiery, imperious, and overblown. So easily deflated to the man in his meager street clothes. The Wizard knew what the show was about. And knew it was blown when the artifice was unveiled. A moment resonant with the message of the *Qatsi Trilogy*. Misused, technology sends art out of balance, too.

Greenaway so Wizard-like. Impresario and maestro. But caught up in his diva stance. His on-screen presence wears thin. Literally the shots of him. The others, too. They become flags. A collective wait-a-minute semaphore signaling that this movie is divergent on so many fronts that it doesn't qualify as trademark Greenaway. Which conjures yet another movie. *Rude Boy*. The 1980 quasi-documentary about Brit punk rockers The Clash. At one point, the roadie-protagonist scrambles out onto the stage to secure a loose connection. Lead guitarist Mick Jones cuts him down with a laser glare. Barks. Expletive deleted. Get off the stage. That pretty well sums it up.

Similarly, when the filmmaking technology enters the frame it reduces "all the transcendent finalities," as Baudrillard put it, "to a dashboard full of instruments." Drawing our attention to the wrong place. Where the intended spectacularity is anything but special. A poor disguise for empty content. A

criticism that fairly applies to Greenaway's *Writing on Water*. Which rockets past "cool" altogether. And freezes in the chill of the abysmal not-there.

Conclusion

From the outset *Writing on Water* fails to layer in the trademark Greenaway pathos. Both a methodological and a conceptual problem. That lies with the original as well as its execution in performance and on film. The video exacerbates the lapse. The twofold failure. First to conceive the piece appropriately for the stage. Then to re-conceive it for a different medium. Hence the mistranslation from performance to video. Greenaway fell prey to what Baudrillard called "the compulsive repetition of the code." An almost reckless disregard for the deep structure that makes his work art. Usurped by a single-minded focus on the superficial at the expense of the substantial. Masquerading appliqué for interpretive content. Content that had to be built in to make it fully Greenaway product.

When Flusser said "'Art' is that which opposes habit but must of necessity return to habit," what he was talking about is the reality of creative process. That in habitual practice resides breakthrough. With volume of output comes quality. Which is why great artists can seem to succumb to an obsessive-compulsive aesthetic. For long stretches of time. Working and reworking the same images, materials, and palette. Like Picasso. Like Greenaway. Who normally is found mining for magnum. Not manicuring the landscape. Which in *Writing on Water* he seems to wander.

Gadamer's *Truth and Method* sums up the aesthetic problem. "The presentation or performance of a work," he said, "is something essential and not incidental, for in this is merely completed what … works of art already are: the being there of what is represented in them." This being there is what Gadamer called "full presentness." What something "that presents itself to us achieves in its presentation" when "all mediation is dissolved." Hence the fundamental formal mistake of *Writing on Water*. Nothing is dissolved. Far too many mediating elements are in the viewer's face. As a result the work itself neither fully comes to life nor comes through. We never feel the embrace of the piece that Greenaway constructed from such powerful canonical sources. We never feel the press of the ideas. The force of the emotions. The profundity of the literary archetype. Or the passion Greenaway felt about them. The passion that drove him to create the piece in the first place. As a result we are not compelled to watch. Not captured by the creative gravity *Writing on Water* generates. Instead we are repelled. Left to drift. Soulless in aesthetic purgatory.

OLIVIER MESSIAEN

Visions de l'Amen

for two pianos

SARAH ROTHENBERG
MARILYN NONKEN, pianos

In the spring of 1943, in German-occupied Paris, a select audience of invited guests gathered at the Galerie Charpentier for the first performance of Olivier Messiaen's new work for two pianos, *Visions de l'Amen*. Although originally one of several pieces on the program, a printed announcement of a change of date explained that "the significance, the character and the duration of this work have led the Concerts de la Pléiade to present it in a concert which will be entirely devoted to it." Performed by Messiaen and Yvonne Loriod, *Visions* represented the first musical collaboration between the two, and the beginning of a personal and creative partnership that would endure for half a century. This new recording brings together two leading performers of Messiaen's music- pianists Sarah Rothenberg and Marilyn Nonken.

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a review of

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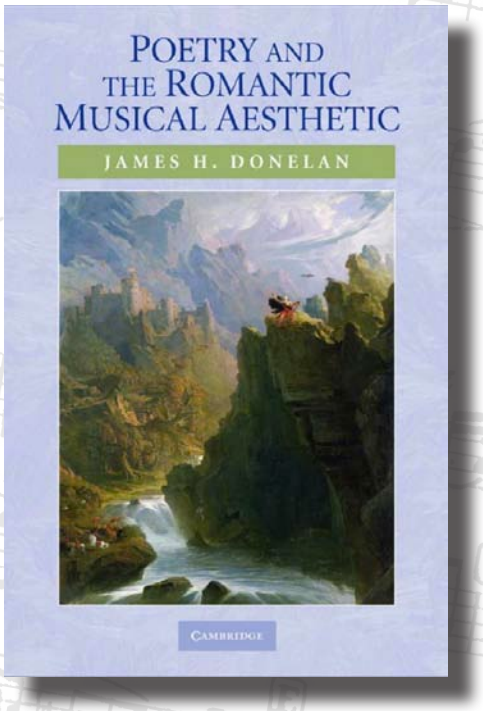
James H. Donelan

Cambridge University Press, 2008



reviewed by Martine Prange
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Two hundred years have passed since the premiere of Beethoven's Fifth and Sixth Symphonies, the publication of Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*, the end of Wordsworth's Golden Decade, and the beginning of Hölderlin's madness, yet these four key figures of Romanticism and Idealism—all born in the year 1770—still occupy a tremendous place in the collective cultural imagination, for the reason that, as James Donelan argues in his fine *Poetry and the Romantic Musical Aesthetic*, in their works they addressed issues of 'identity, freedom, and beauty that still matter' (p. 176), i.e., they express 'hope for the reintegration of the self through beauty' (p. 177). That is the wider, extra-musical *meaning* that absolute (instrumental/non-programmatic) music conveys, particularly Beethoven's String Quartet No. 13, according to Donelan. 'How can music represent self-consciousness?' is the central question of an account that soon admits that music indeed *can* represent self-consciousness, according to the Romantic-Idealist aesthetic, which goes so far as to imagine music and self-consciousness as 'mutually positing, reciprocal dialectical structures' (p. xi). Recently, Andrew Bowie already demonstrated the intimate, mutually qualifying relationship between music and modern subjectivity in Modern German philosophy, while inquiring the meaning of music 'qua music' (instead of as 'language') in *Aesthetics and Subjectivity from Kant to Nietzsche* (2nd ed. 2003) and *Music, Philosophy, and Modernity* (Cambridge University Press, 2007). Donelan operates along similar lines, covering the fields of literary criticism, musicology, and philosophy, and likewise starting from the *Oldest System Programme.* Remarkably, though, Donelan denies that other landmark framework of nineteenth-century musical discussions: the binary opposition between beauty (produced by visual arts and poetry) and the sublime (music), for undeclared reasons, as well as the question of music's unique power to create universal understanding and community, due to its independence of language. His contextualization does not go so far as to raise questions about music's changing political and cultural function at the time, although these questions indeed relate directly to the central question of the expression (or representation) of self-awareness in music (as well as to the question of the genius composer and the experience of the sublime) as it rises with Romanticism and German Idealism. Donelan confines his research methodologically to this single question, historically to the years 1795-1831, thus focusing on the new ontology of music that emerged in the wake of Mozart's struggle to overcome the patronage system of his time and the celebratory character of music that went with it (i.e., celebrating God or the patron), and geographically/culturally to the German-speaking (Hölderlin, Hegel, Beethoven) and English-speaking (Wordsworth) worlds.

Concentrating on Hegel, Hölderlin, Wordsworth, and Beethoven, Donelan moreover avoids the larger part of both German/English and wider Romantic music. Of course, *all* Romantic music relates in one way or another to Beethoven, but not accounting for skipping Wagner, Schopenhauer, Nietzsche,

Verdi, and Strauss, while speaking of '*the* Romantic musical aesthetic' in the book title, is a substantial omission, next to its being a smart move if one wants to shun discussion of one's own essentialist characterization of Romanticism. Would it not have been more obvious to discuss E.T.A. Hoffmann, Brendel, Liszt, Wagner, Schopenhauer, Nietzsche, and the 'war' between Old and New German School of Music over Beethoven's symphonic legacy, if one claims to discuss '*the'* Romantic musical aesthetic rather than Hegel, Hölderlin, and Wordsworth, the first being a philosopher and the other two being poets?

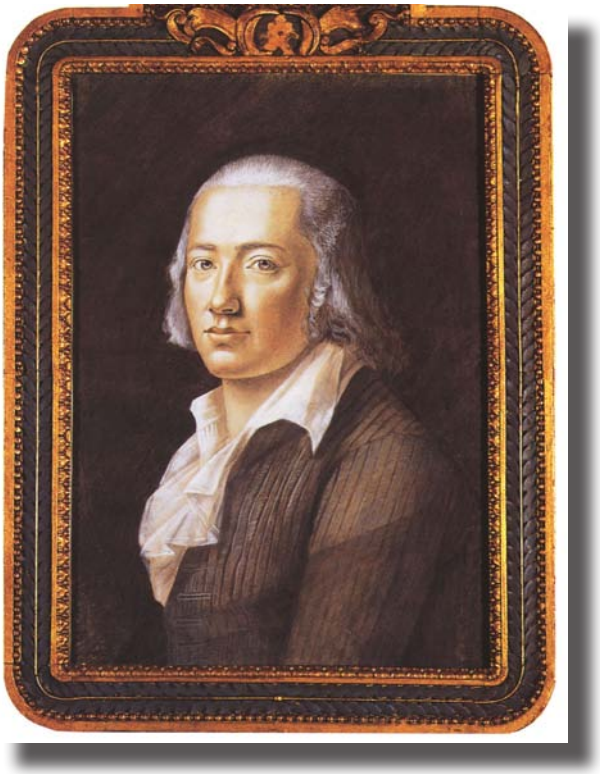
Rather than pointing out the variety and development in different Romantic musical aesthetic theories, however, Donelan sets out to explore how and why the conception of the human self as an autonomous, free mind became an object of artistic, more specifically *musical* reflection in early Romantic poetry and music. In other words, why was *music*, rather than poetry and visual arts, so apt to express or represent selfhood? That Donelan chooses Hegel, Hölderlin, Wordsworth, and Beethoven in this investigation is not only because they were all born in 1770, but also for the reason that they, or rather the works they produced discussed by Donelan, may be conceived as exemplary for a whole range of scholars and artists that regarded music as of utmost relevance for philosophy and aesthetics—their artworks expressing a growing sense of self-awareness. Donelan analyses representative art works as products and representations of the particular feelings and thoughts of the individual artist. In this regard, however, it is rather estranging that so little attention is paid to the Romantic cult of 'genius.'

'Self-consciousness,' of course, is an invention of Enlightenment philosophy and culture, subsequently explored by Romantic art and thought. Donelan is aware of this, given his accuracy to outline, in a very clear, rather brief yet narrative way (i.e., drawing upon secondary literature rather than arguing his position in discussion with it) the developments intimating the Romantic interest in 'self-consciousness' in chapter 1 ('Self-Consciousness and Music in the Late Enlightenment'). He points out its roots in Kant's critical works and Mozart's transformation of Enlightenment musical aesthetics, discusses further the Oldest System Programme fragment, after which he devotes consecutive chapters to Hölderlin's implementation of musical forms in the *Deutscher Gesang* poems, the place of music in Hegel's *Lectures on Aesthetics*, Wordsworth's poetical interest in sounds of nature, and the expression of selfhood in Beethoven's String Quartets. He does so in an very readable, lucid, and elegant prose, however not always questioning or explicating the different philosophical and aesthetic concepts ('Idealism,' 'subjectivity,' 'beauty') and sometimes drawing more on secondary sources for the interpretation of primary literature than on his own understanding.

Despite the book's focus on the years 1795-1831, chapter 1 shows that the turning point must be located in 1781, when Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*

came out and Mozart gave up his position as court composer in order to continue autonomously, thus planting the seeds of the later Romantic project. Donelan shows that the combined power of *Critique of Pure Reason* and *Critique of Judgement*, published nine years later, should be held accountable for the Romantic defence of art and self-expression. In *Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant set the limits of human knowledge, arguing the active role of the human mind in structuring the reception of appearances. This focus on appearances led him to explore the aesthetic judgement, i.e., the judgement of sense data, in *Critique of Judgement*. Thus directing the metaphysical focus to aesthetics and the subjectivity of knowledge, Kant paved the way for scientific and philosophical reflections on the subject, aesthetics, and, despite his focus on the beauty of *nature*, art. In the same period, Mozart forged an independent career as a public composer, soloist, and conductor, making his control over the musical performance nearly absolute, and, negating the rules of decoration by focusing in its place on the expression of inner thought, feeling, and freedom in the newly created *stile brillante*, changed and professionalized European musical culture. Mozart's influence reached its pinnacle in the opera *Don Giovanni* of 1787, in which he not only innovated musical style but also challenged social conventions in asserting his individual freedom.

Thus, the year 1781 was a landmark year, the year in which art and philosophy hooked up, albeit still rather unconsciously, in order to be wedded and blossom in Romantic philosophy of music, launched by the *Oldest System Programme Fragment* (very probably conceived in 1796 by Hegel, Schelling, and Hölderlin), which Donelan then discusses in the same chapter. It offers a solution to the problem of self-consciousness, stated by Kant, referring to the aesthetic imagination, beauty, and freedom and thus unifying ideas put forward by Kant, Schiller, Fichte, and Schelling. Through an act of the imagination (the presentation of the



Franz Karl Hiemer, *Friedrich Hölderlin*, 1792 pastel

self in an image or 'aesthetic intuition'), the self postulates itself as absolutely free and self-conscious, as inherent in the idea of the subject itself. Thus, this programmatic leaflet placed the concept of 'self-consciousness' entirely within aesthetics, Donelan shows, 'leaving open the possibility that art could better express, demonstrate, or manifest the concept than philosophy' (p. 23), representing 'the beginning of philosophical beginnings in self-consciousness as aesthetic investigations' (ibid.).

The fragment thus paved the way for poetry as the basis for philosophy and aesthetics as the basis of metaphysics. The fragment, combining and transgressing Kant, Fichte, and Schelling's understandings of self-consciousness as emerging from intellectual intuition (Kant), the positing of the self in the phrase 'I am I' (Fichte) and the aesthetic encounter and unification of subject and object (Schelling) describes the moment in which the self becomes conscious of itself as a free and 'aesthetic choice to become self-conscious, the result of a desire for beauty' (p. 33). This is primarily materialized in the 'poetological' writings of Friedrich Hölderlin, 'the poet of poets' (Heidegger). On the basis of close readings of the fragmentary essay 'Judgement and Being' ('Urteil und Sein', 1795), 'Change of Tone' (p. 34) or 'Exchange of Tones' ('Wechsel der Töne', p. 40), and the poem *Deutscher Gesang*, it is argued in Chapter 2 ('Hölderlin's *Deutscher Gesang* and the Music of Poetic Self-Consciousness') that for Hölderlin musical form plays a critical role in reconciling poetry (concreteness) and philosophy (abstraction) by synthesizing subject and object, while concurrently researching the connection between human existence and divine transcendence, as well as between German/European present and Greek past. Hölderlin's focus was on the realization of the self in poetry's music, the material manifestation of the divine in the human, thus making up '[...] a system in which the poet's vocation, poetic language, and finally poetry itself manifest themselves as a combination of self-consciousness and divine will' (p. 67). This is indeed the case in *Deutscher Gesang*, which consists of a series of complex musical metaphors based on an idealized view of the Pindaric poetical tradition, reflecting a longing for transcendence typical for Romantic aesthetics, while at the same time the poetical language underwrites the claim of self-consciousness in its awareness of being *poetical* itself*:* '[...] the philosophical act of saying "I am I" becomes both a theoretical and a practical statement when performed in poetic discourse' (p. 40). This is especially true for 'Exchange of Tones,' which Donelan (rather than with Schiller) reads in the light of Christian Körner's essay 'On the Representation of Character in Music,' published in *Die Horen* in 1795. Körner argues, against Kant, that music requires unity and that that unity equals the representation of character. Donelan then argues that Hölderlin identifies keys ('Töne') as unifying elements of poetic composition, representing a 'naïve,' 'heroic' or 'ideal' character (rather than emotional states), following Schiller's admonition that

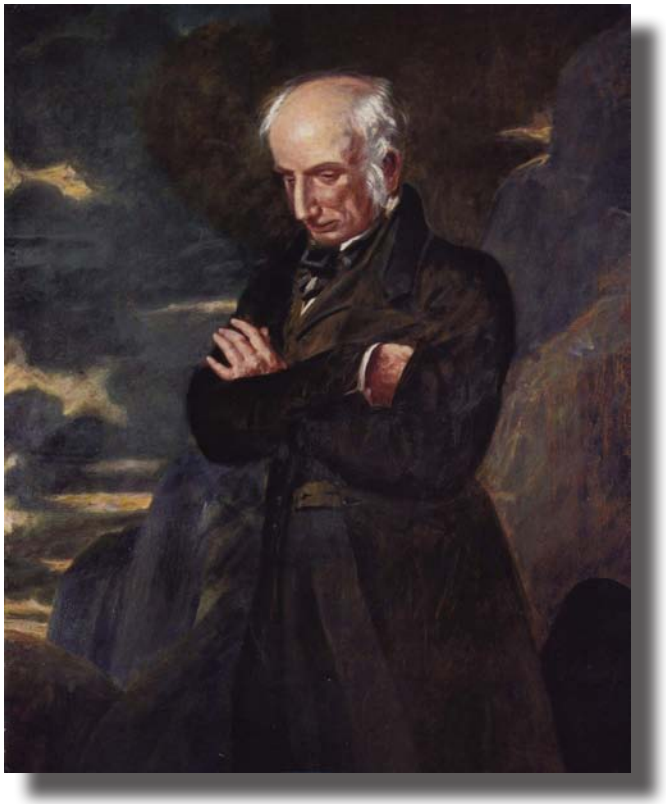
'all great art should try to approach the condition of music through sheer form' (p. 42). In combining this formal device with Körner's notion of (naïve, heroic, ideal) 'character' and the poetic self-awareness (or: the 'Greece-Hesperia dialectic', p. 48), Hölderlin comes to a practical-poetic solution to the problem of self-consciousness: the poet identifies himself with the naïve, heroic or idealistic character to construct his own identity and the poem: 'The Hesperian poet begins by recognizing that the naïveté of Greek poetry reveals their fiery nature, yet cannot be shared at this historical and cultural distance. He or she therefore must undergo a heroic act of self-positing with respect to that difference and create an idealistic vision of this transformation in poetry' (p. 49). Rather than sentimentally longing for Greek naïveté, Hölderlin wants to acknowledge the difference between Greek and Modern poetry (remarkably, Donelan does not at all refer to Schiller's 'Ueber naïve und sentimentalische Dichtung' here, also published originally in *Die Horen* of 1795-1796, which obviously influenced Hölderlin's thought). The 'self-consciousness,' then, is gained in song, by way of confrontation with 'what is foreign' ('*das Fremde'*).

Having pointed out the musicality of Hölderlin's poetry and dialectic, or triadic, poetics, the question in chapter 3 ('Hegel's Aesthetic Theory: Self-Consciousness and Musical Material') is what the role of music is in Hegel's dialectical interpretation of the self. Idea of self-consciousness in Hegel, Hölderlin's friend of the *Tübinger Stift*, continues to keep some notion of aesthetic intuition epitomized by music, Donelan argues by showing how Hegel first regarded music as a manifestation of self-consciousness, only to leave that function to philosophy later on, and viewing Hegel's *Lectures on Aesthetics* (delivered first in 1818 and last in 1829) as a maturatization of the *Oldest System Programme* fragment. More generally, Hegel regarded art-works to be acts of self-reflection. In *Phenomenology of Spirit* (1807), Hegel had presented his Idealist account of the self as a historical, retrospective, and progressive process of coming to self-consciousness (one gets to know the self by knowing one's history), while overcoming the gap between theory and praxis (the practice of becoming self-aware, rather than understanding the self as a theoretical construct) and the material manifestation of the knowledge the self has gained about itself in the social realm. The subject creates objects in order to enter the world, positing itself in it. Such objects are, for example, works of art—as concrete and sensuous representations of knowledge.

For Hegel, however, the highpoint of art ('the end of art') was already reached in Classical Times—as for so many of his contemporaries. This view had its ramifications for his appreciation of music. Hegel is *not* a good example of the *Romantic* school of music, simply because he does not believe that (Romantic, German) music is the highest form of art (whether or not it imitates Greek music). Music does, however, represent 'the indeterminate movement of the inner spirit' for him, and therefore he does call music a paradigmatic 'Romantic' art form. Like Körner, thus, Hegel rejects Kant's interpretation of

music as 'beautiful play of emotions,' apprehending it physiologically (music as sound heard by the ear) and philosophically (intellectual/emotional meaning of music as abstract apprehension of inner subjectivity). However, rather than supporting 'absolute music' (instrumental music), like the Romantics, Hegel prefers Italian opera (Rossini), claiming that the singing human voice is the highest expression of the subjective, inner self (and it is music's task to express this). Hegel despised Beethoven, regarding his music to be 'empty technicality' (just like Beethoven hated Rossini). 'Absolute' music is 'hopelessly subjective' (p. 91), for Hegel, and therefore he prefers the combination of music and poetry, as the latter is, by way of its language, able to establish a relation between the inner and the outer. Poetry, in the end, is a higher art form for Hegel than music.

The link between music and poetry is central in chapter 4 ('Nature, Music, and the Imagination in Wordsworth's Poetry'), too, in which poems of Wordsworth are discussed. Here, we witness a turn in the book: however beautiful the poems are, and however interesting it is to read more about Wordsworth's meta-poetical reflections, this chapter relies fully on Donelan's projective interpretation, which leads to a forced connection of music and the self in Wordsworth's poetry. Perhaps this is the most interesting chapter of the book, at least it seems to be the most personal, but it is the weakest when it comes to supporting Donelan's central thesis. Wordsworth did not write poetry to express a philosophy of self-consciousness, such as Hölderlin, inspired by extensive reflections on contemporary philosophy and musical aesthetics. Rather, Wordsworth understood 'the materiality of poetry through metaphors of music' and wrote poems about or referring to sound, hearing, and singing (for example in 'The



Benjamin Robert Haydon, *Wordsworth on Helvellyn*, 1842
oil on canvas

Solitary Reaper'), but that is foremost in line with his view that the artwork must present itself for sensuous apprehension (p. 111). Wordsworth does not use music to assert the self, also not the Idealist formula of self-consciousness Donelan projects into *The Prelude* because of its separation of the I in a voice and an internal echo: 'My own voice cheered me, and, far more, the mind's/ Internal Echo of the imperfect sound; [...]' (p. 113).

A similar thing happens in chapter 5 ('Beethoven and the Musical Self-Consciousness'), because Beethoven did not use his music to convey some (Idealist) philosophy of the self. Moving from the early Viennese Classicism of his early days via his heroic compositions to a style revolving around 'self-conscious reflection on musical representations of inner life' (p. 137) or the 'exalted representations of genius' (ibid.) respectively, Beethoven became paradigmatic of the Romantic musical aesthetic, but he never really surpassed the level of psychological and egotistical interest in himself. Although Donelan claims that his later musical compositions 'posit' the self in an act of self-reflection as well as by reflecting on the inner workings of music itself and that the 'meaning' of Beethoven's work therefore is not to be derived from something external to it (as Donelan claims with Dahlhaus) but rather from 'the musical formulation' of the 'extramusical substrate' (p. 139), the question remains whether Beethoven's ego can be so easily widened to 'the self' as object of philosophical reflection (either in music or outside music). Similar to Wordsworth, Beethoven was not a philosopher, and his music cannot be interpreted as deliberate vehicle for some (Idealist) philosophy. The self-consciousness that his music expresses is, other than Hölderlin's poetry, not the result of a discussion with philosophers like Schelling and Hegel and the idea that music is more appropriate to assert the self than philosophy. Beethoven's 'care for the self' is closer to Mozart's than Hölderlin's or Hegel's. The self was not so much a philosophical problem, to them, but a personal problem, inspired by their desire for personal, artistic freedom. Beethoven's famous lament that, due to his deafness, he was forced 'to become a philosopher already at my 28th year,' should not be taken as literally as Donelan does when he writes that Beethoven had indeed 'prepared himself to become a philosophical composer' (pp. 142-143).

Rather than philosophical, Beethoven's positing of the self, as in his late String Quartets, which are paradigmatic of his 'absolute music' ('absolute' as 'instrumental'), is a psychological statement. The 'parallel' that Donelan construes between Beethoven's heroic and 'late' compositions ('heroic' because they form a sort of *Bildungsroman* in music) and Idealist philosophy is, indeed, nothing more than a parallel, even though the 'late' compositions showcase a moment of self-criticism, which make them more reflective than the heroic compositions. However, it is not *philosophical*, as Donelan claims (p. 150), because, again, Beethoven's self-critique hardly transcends the level of artistic and psychological criticism. For example, artistically, he decided to

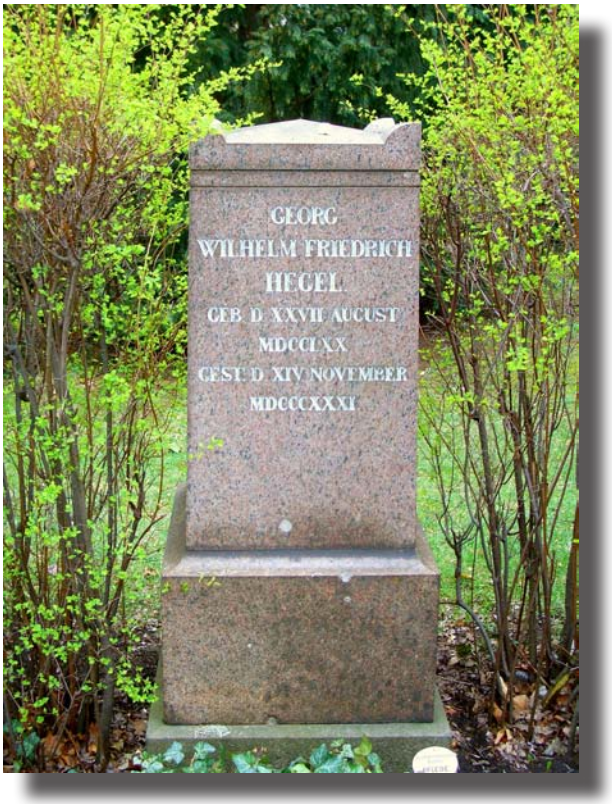
focus on melody and counterpoint, against his previous focus on the dramatic development of motif, and turn to older musical traditions (e.g., Baroque) as sources of inspiration. Adorno explains the late style as the 'deliberate' attempt to destroy the idea of autonomous subjectivity (key to his heroic style), and that would take it from a psychological, individual level to a more philosophic and general plane (although, obviously, not to Idealist altitudes). Adorno's 'self-destructive' interpretation, however, contrasts Donelan's interpretation of Beethoven's music as, let's say, 'deliberative self-assertion.' Donelan then rightfully points to the Ninth Symphony as counter-evidence of Adorno's claim, and corroborates his rejection of Adorno with a close hearing of String Quartet No. 13 in B flat.

This String Quartet is a metaphor of self-consciousness, in that it seeks to establish itself as part of the classicist tradition, but simultaneously partly transcends that very tradition by expanding its musicality far beyond the classicist principles of symmetry and closure by breaking new ground in form and harmony, Donelan discloses. In other words, Beethoven sought to redefine himself as a composer by returning to his former 'teachers' Mozart and Haydn. The pupil was trying 'to master the masters,' and establish himself at their level, by showing the same kind of originality, genius, and artistic innovation. Innovating the saturated genre of the string quartet, he forced the public to re-examine their view of Beethoven as 'composer of grand statements' (p. 156) and opened ways for a new musical future—thereby securing his influence for future generations. Operating according to its own rules (and Donelan gives a delightful 20-page analysis of those rules), while simultaneously participating in the tradition of classical harmony, counterpoint, and sonata-allegro form, this work expresses a remarkable self-consciousness. Again, it does so through identification *and* opposition to its predecessors, but this is only a *parallel* of Hegel's dialectics, Schelling's aesthetics, and Fichte's 'I am I,' and not a musical *expression* of their philosophy.

As Donelan remarks himself, the book 'interpret[s] individual works through historical, social or biographical materials rather than to understand or create something outside them' (p. xii). *Poetry and the Romantic Musical Aesthetic* therefore is not the work of 'philosophical criticism' it wants to be (ibid.): one can maintain that music carries extra-musical meaning, but it cannot be *proved;* the meagre three-page chapter which draws the book to a close by seeking such proof does not succeed in any case, when merely positing against Marxist criticism of aesthetic autonomy that 'even if our subjective selves have been constructed for us out of a web of socially determined performances and ideologies, we still treasure freedom and independence, and even if our aesthetic judgment is a Pavlovian response to predetermined conditions, we still long for beauty' (p. 177). This is a non-argument that will not convince any (empirical) psychologist or philosopher. Our need for something does not *prove* anything beyond the fact that there exists a need, and certainly not the

autonomous existence of aesthetic meaning *per se*, a purely aesthetic or 'cult' value in art beyond its 'exhibition' value, or the 'aura' of a work of art in times of not only reproduction but also all-encompassing, global capitalism.

Soit, I would say. A Romantic 'aesthete' like Donelan will never turn one single Marxist 'philistine' (Beech and Roberts, eds., *The Philistine Controversy*, 2003) into a believer in the auratic force and the aesthetic and existential meaning of art. And the Marxist, holding to 'instrumental reason' and the dialectic rule of capitalism, will always repudiate the Romantic Aestheticist as a 'naïve,' if not sentimental, believer in aesthetic autonomy. As yet, 'another third way' (Andrew Bowie in *The Philistine Controversy*, pp. 161-174) seems a far-off prospect. But why bother? Donelan has written a lovely book, despite its inept argument for the autonomy of the aesthetic and despite the fact that the argument of its central claim is only partially convincing. Donelan promotes the necessity of further research into the close, complicated, and fascinating relation between music and philosophy, especially by drawing attention to Hölderlin's "*Wechsel der Töne*" and arguing for the momentous role of musical aesthetics in Hegel's aesthetics, not in the least because it responds to the eminent proponent of Romantic music, E.T.A. Hoffmann. Moreover, Hölderlin's reflections on the musicality of poetry continue to be of importance to any poetics. He demonstrates, above all, that the relation between philosophy, poetry, and music deserves further research with regard to the historical study of modern aesthetics and its wider, cultural meaning as well as with regard to present-day theory building on art, freedom, and self-consciousness, and the meaning of music *qua* music.



a review of

ARCHITECTURE

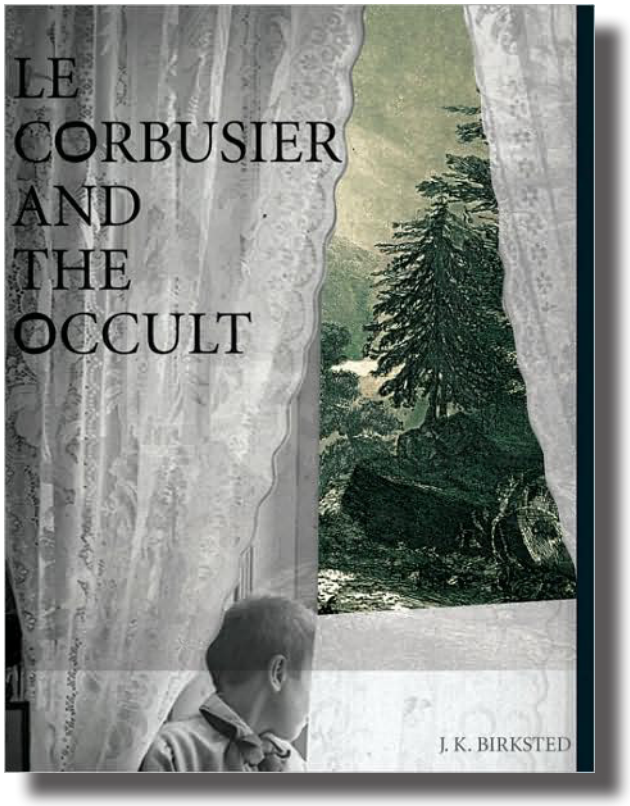
Le Corbusier and the Occult

J. K. Birksted

MIT Press, 2009

reviewed by James Rossant FAIA, Architect, Teacher, Artist, and City Planner

When I was a very young student living in Manhattan and a great reader, I would spend Saturday mornings haunting the bookshops of lower Manhattan to look for cheap used books of literature. Many of the bookstores had outsized signs boldly announcing *OCCULT*. Why the great attraction of the Occult? I felt there must be something on the edge of the law here because these signs were just like the *SEX* signs in store windows on Eighth Avenue in the 40's: 100 GORGEOUS SEXY GIRLS, things in those days you absolutely couldn't question your parents about. Later I read about séances, speaking with departed loved ones by Victorian writers like Conan Doyle, and about Spiritualism. Much of this seemed to have been done through the intersession of genuine or fraudulent mediums. The literary figures ranged from Conan Doyle and his interest in spiritualism and occultism to the respected W.B. Yeats, dismaying his English fans with his new found obsession. Actually Yeats was searching for a spiritual aspect to his inherited religious life, the dry, strict Irish Protestant faith.



In France, Scotland, and Germany, however, the occult manifested in Masonic ritual was more philosophical, political, and religious in its nature and had a raging anti-Vatican aspect to it. Masonic Lodges favored democratic, non-

exclusive membership consisting in Free Thinkers, Jewish and Agnostic merchants, Protestants, lapsed Catholics, doctors, and ranking artisans. Birksted sees in the dramatic blindfolded, ritualistic initiation of new members in what must have been austere Nineteenth Masonic Lodge houses (the 18th century's equivalent of a meditation room in the Star Trek Spaceship 'Enterprise,') the essence of Masonic belief, especially in the form he admires most, "the Scottish Rectified Rite." In the spatial aspects of the initiation ceremony he recognizes aspects of Le Corbusier's "Architectural Promenade" and borrowing of Masonic forms such as pure white pyramids capping white stone cubes. The author provides, however, absolutely no evidence that Le Corbusier ever witnessed, participated in, or even entered a Masonic Lodge, or believed in the Scottish Rectified Rite or any other Rite.

The "Architectural Promenade" was a trip through a building, which, if the architect were skilled, revealed the brilliance of his spatial concept. Birksted's fascination with the Rites of Initiation, where the blindfolded candidates, by turns, are made to fear what is coming and are reassured once the next step into the Temple is successfully taken. Birksted seems totally disinterested in the rest of Masonic Lodge life. Le Corbusier may have heard of the Occult initiation ceremony, but from all evidence, Le Corbusier's "Architectural Promenade" had other intentions.

Le Corbusier rejected all designs that came before his own modern, new world vision except for a handful of great historic works. The vision he strove for was guided by *L'esprit Nouveau*—the new spirit—producing a new physical world as different from provincial La Chaux de Fonds, Le Corbusier's boyhood village and its Masonic Lodge as it could be. As far from his adolescent water coloring sessions with friends, as far from mountain-hiking clubs, stuffy Sunday lunches, and finely-crafted, boring 18th-century technology with its exquisite watches, as it was feasible to get, Le Corbusier, in his dramatic move to Paris, lay the groundwork for an amazing, self-conceived birth of himself as the supreme world architect, artist, and personality, and in the end brilliantly and ruthlessly created by this Swiss son of a enameler of watch faces.

The self-anointed genius architect, whose mission was to create an operating vision of an entirely new world, and one which provided a fit setting for the things Le Corbusier truly loved: steel steamships, shiny motorcars, and aero planes, light-as-air steel-framed plate glass and reinforced concrete buildings incorporating ramps, flat roofs planted with moveable gardens, so brilliant and attractive as composed by Le Corbusier, that all other current visions would wither, disappear overnight from the scene. His buildings and cities would compete with Greek temples in Athens, Gothic cathedrals in Rouen and Chartres, and Egyptian tombs in Memphis. The new Corbusier world of the future would be seen by politicians, barons of industry, the leaders of the art and intellectual world as the only acceptable vision of the modern.

All the while, Le Corbusier was certain other visions for the future would be seen for their timid and fragmentary nature. Unfortunately, his cities tended toward total lifelessness. But the look of our cities today has been altogether affected by Le Corbusier's vision. Thousands of housing estates all over the world characterized by tall, identical housing towers rising from a low park-like landscape are Corbusier, as are town centers with ranks of even taller towers set within clean, sterile, immense plazas and fed by great geometric boulevards and highways.

As a young architect, I curled up in the university library with Corbusier's thin square volumes. The wonderfully colored drawings and diagrams smeared with great swatches of bright green covering land liberated by Le Corbusier's silly idea of lifting all buildings in the air on stilts. How I then adored those pictures, the pure towers with fifty floors, the lack of low buildings to mess up the views, and the heroic bits of prose, which, to me, soared like his towers. I was determined to be an architect like Le Corbusier. How far this all seems today or ever from Masonic Lodge initiations in gloomy, drafty, neo classic halls.

There is an immense pile of historical scholarship in *Le Corbusier and the Occult*, most of it unreadable, boring, and excessive like endless lists of Swiss Masonic Lodge members, never including Le Corbusier's Swiss name, Charles-Edouard Jenneret Gris except for a spurious Vichy Government document about Le Corbusier's Masonic career substantiated nowhere else. For the jaded, there are delightful photographs of a "Groupe de Gymnastic" of the union of Christians of young people, and sweet photos of garden parties which Le Corbusier did not attend. There is one sentence in a paragraph in which Birksted perhaps inadvertently reveals his sense of unreality, where he claims that Le Corbusier added a Masonic history and dogma book to his library in 1960. Birksted goes on to remark how the very date reveals the soaring importance to the architect's designs, apparently not aware that by 1960 Le Corbusier had done it all: his astonishing Ronchamp Chapel and La Tourette had been built years before and the Garches and Savoye Houses, date from 40 years earlier . . . the Unite d'Habitation in Marseilles, the Pavilion Suisse, the Pavilion of L'esprit Nouveau, and on and on. By 1960, it was about over, and what influence could a 1960 book on Masonic ritual make even if it became the primary influence on Le Corbusier's thought? Precisely none.

These visions of the world of Le Corbusier had a lasting effect on the look of the twentieth century world for better or for worse (I am beginning to think for the worse). It is also true that Mies van der Rohe's vision and Wallace K. Harrison's later modifications did modify the more sculptural and emotional Le Corbusier dream and his version of the concrete UN building was modified beyond all recognition with its slick, gridded, curtain wall. But as I said earlier, vast pieces of the world and thousands of buildings do reflect Le Corbusier's

Front Image:
Philips Pavilion, Expo '58 in Brussels
Le Corbusier and Edgard Varèse

vision. Le Corbusier built many smaller projects where bits and pieces of other inventive forms are seen. To Birksted, a few of these are of obvious Masonic origin. But although a creative architect does have an enormous storehouse of images piled up in his brain cells, and one could conjecture there were cube buildings of Masonic origin with solid pyramids on top like stubby obelisques in Corbusier's visual storehouse, I wouldn't be surprised. It is unlikely, however, from what we do know that philosophically and artistically the great architect was a believer in the Occult. Even though he wrote a loving poem and a colorful diagram to the right angle, which may or may not have some connection to Masonic beliefs, unfortunately Birksted's attic leftovers shaped into this crushingly heavy art book prove nothing.

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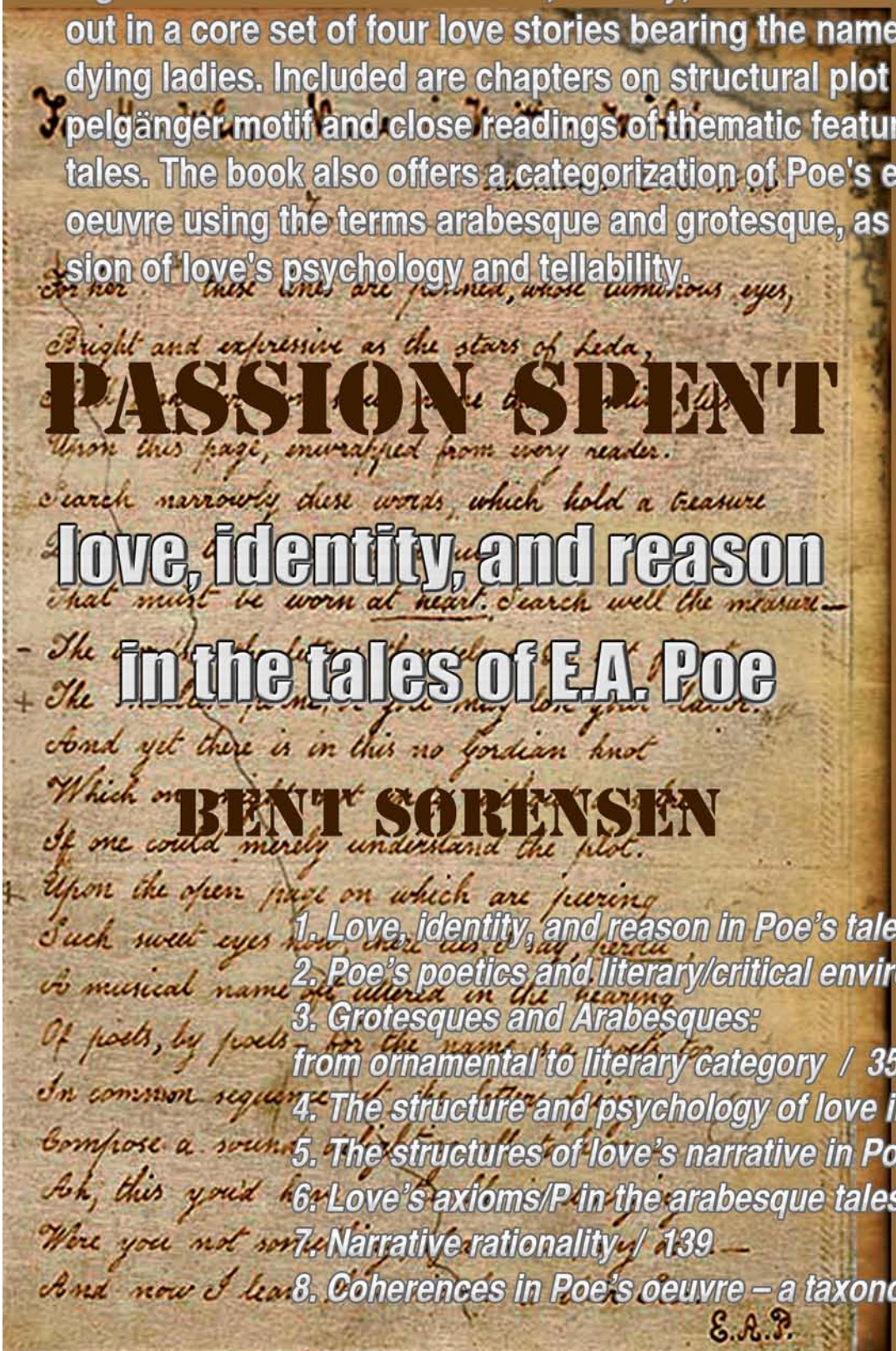

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BENT SORENSEN

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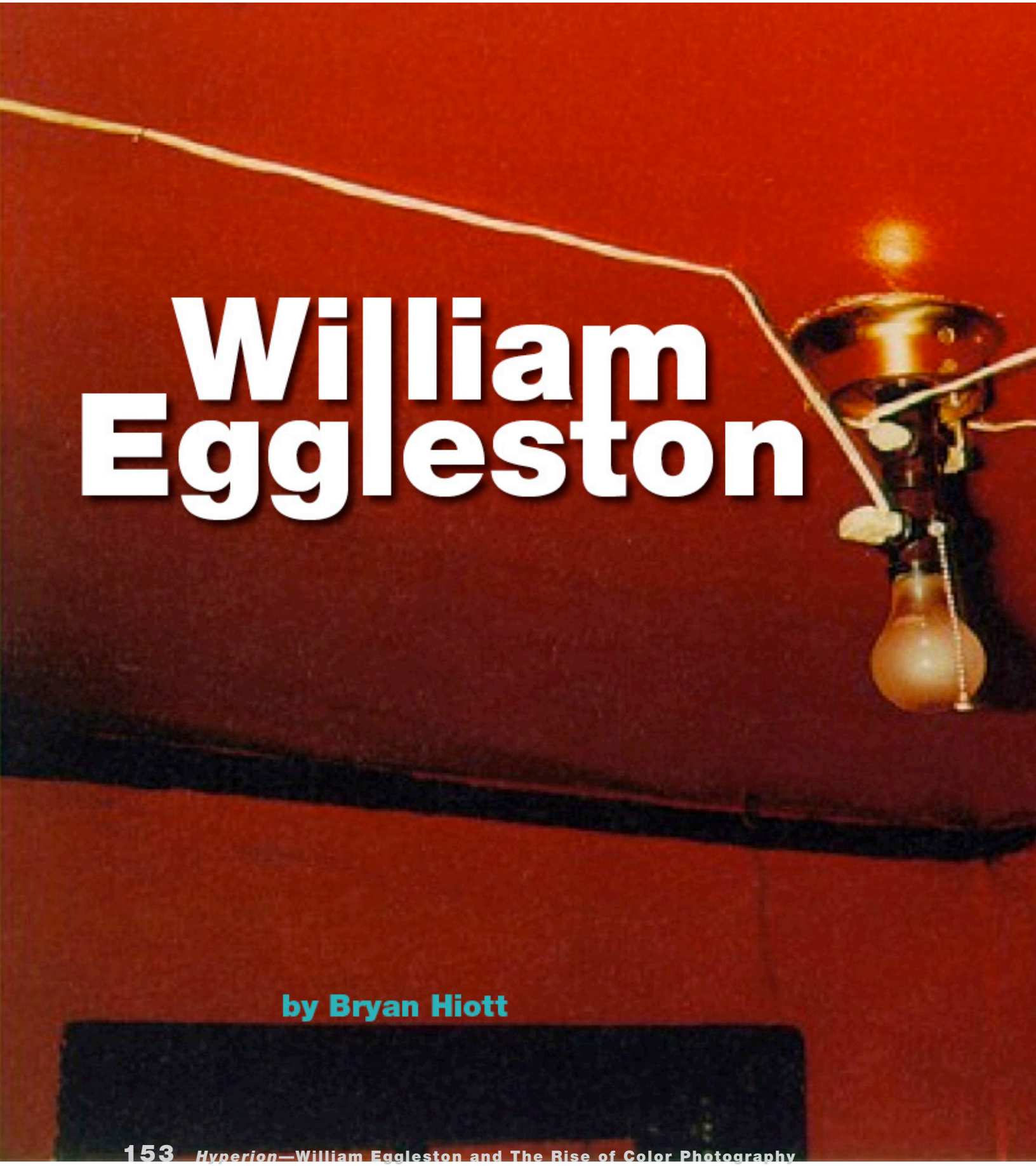
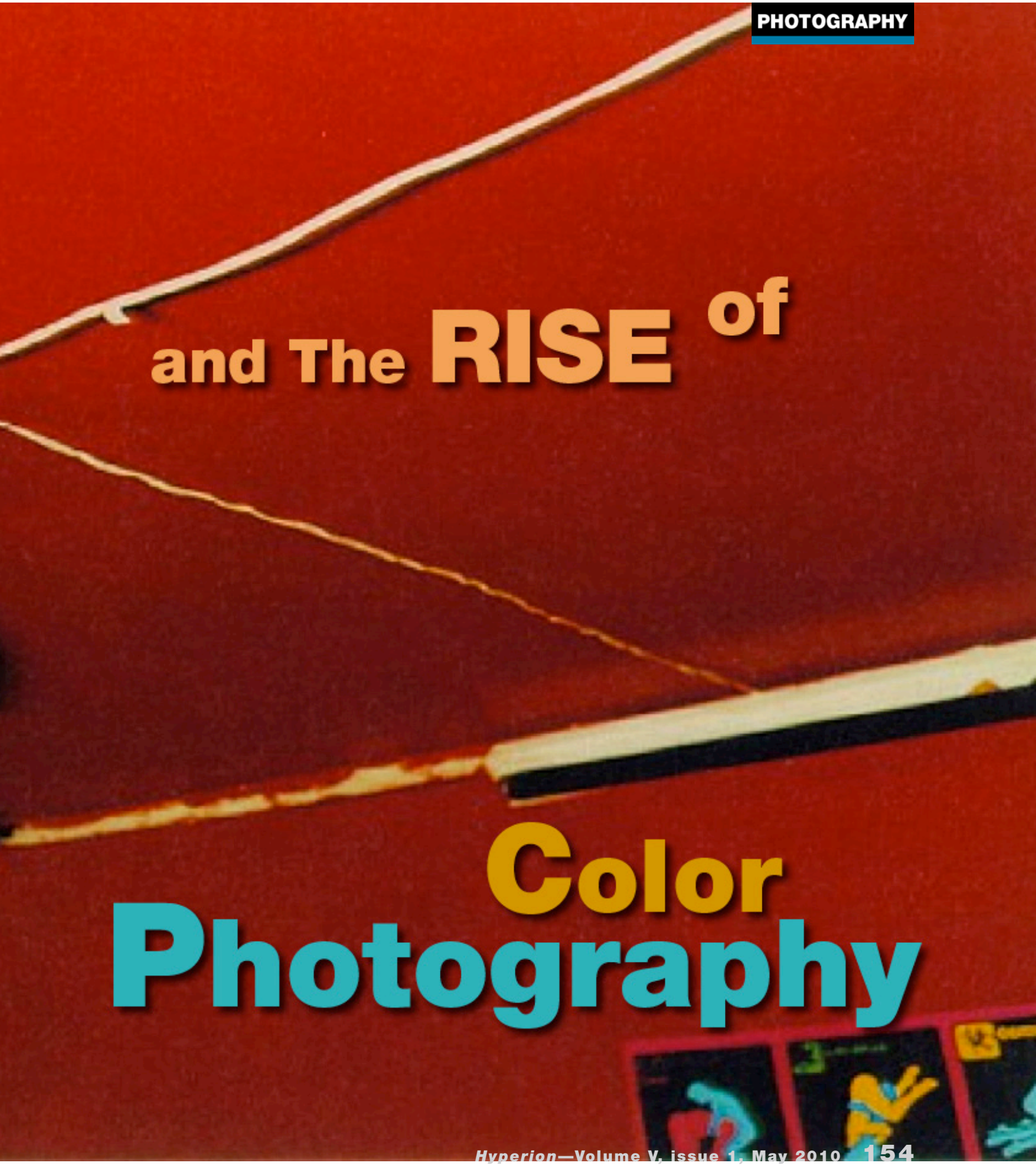


William Eggleston

by Bryan Hiott



and The RISE of Color Photography

In 1976, William Eggleston became the first photographer to receive a solo exhibition of color prints at The Museum of Modern Art. The exhibition generated controversy and outrage among professional critics not only because the work was in color and violated the prevailing preference for black and white photography, but also because of the ordinary subject matter depicted. Writing for *The New York Times*, Hilton Kramer described Eggleston's images of family and personal acquaintances, suburban Memphis landscapes, and architectural interiors as "…perfectly banal, perhaps. Perfectly boring, certainly."[1] However, during the 33 years following that exhibition, color prints have become the predominant medium among professional photographers and are in the permanent collections of major art museums worldwide. Eggleston's solo debut was perhaps more influential than any other exhibition in bringing about the acceptance of color prints as fine art.

[1] Hilton Kramer. "Art Focus on Photo Shows," *The New York Times*, 28 May 1976.

In spite of all that has been written about him, Eggleston remains an elusive figure, whose reticent manner has given rise to misunderstanding about his origin as a photographer. The story is often repeated that Eggleston's career began suddenly one day in 1967, when he appeared at The Museum of Modern Art with a suitcase full of his Kodachrome slides for Chief Curator of Photography John Szarkowski. Although that meeting did take place, during which a professional relationship was established, it has been endowed with a mythic quality that distracts from the most significant factors involved in Eggleston's emergence. First, he was aided by the critical acceptance of Pop Art in the 1960s and the movement's preoccupation with everyday objects as the materials of fine art. Second, his strategy of appropriating the dye transfer process, an expensive and highly archival printing method normally used for high-end advertising images of consumer goods, places him within the dominant mode of conceptual art practice in the 1970s. Third, he spent nine years cultivating a relationship with Szarkowski, working with him to edit a large number of photographs to create a portfolio that would become the basis for his solo exhibition. Szarkowski's curatorial backing was crucial in overcoming the critics' skepticism of color photography.

To gain some understanding of how Pop Art and conceptual strategies

Page XX:
William Eggleston, Greenwood, MS, 1973
(Dye Transfer Print). Red Ceiling.

influenced Eggleston, one need look no further than the work of Ed Ruscha. Although he considered photography to be merely one tool of his practice, Ruscha was a key figure in redefining acceptable content for image making. As Sylvia Wolf notes,

> *The proposition set forth by Ruscha and others – that art could be found among or made out of everyday objects and activities – coincided with a profound questioning of convention and anti-establishment sentiment that had been growing for a decade.*[2]

In 1963, Ruscha self-published *Twentysix Gasoline Stations*, a small book of black and white photographs of gasoline stations along U.S. Route 66. The publication was subversive in that it lavished great attention on utilitarian structures that the public might not have given a second glance. "What I really want is a professional polish, a clear cut machine finish," said Ruscha. "I am not trying to create a precious limited edition, but a mass produced object of high order."[3] Ruscha's series of gasoline stations situated in the Southwest were the photographic equivalent of Andy Warhol's *Campbell's Soup* cans. Both artists were exploring mass production within a consumer society by elevating ordinary subjects to the level of aesthetic contemplation. Ruscha's images could not have been more different from the exacting gelatin silver prints of pristine landscapes that Ansel Adams had captured with his view camera in the same geographic area.

Eggleston recently acknowledged a debt to Ruscha in his introduction to a book of photographs by Huger Foote, entitled *My Friend From Memphis*:

> In the 1960's, Ed did a book about gas stations from all over the country. Then he did another of every single building on Sunset Strip. That gave us all food for thought.[4]

It was Ruscha's use of American vernacular forms, demonstrating a willingness to question prevailing assumptions of aesthetic merit, which drew Eggleston's attention.

Ruscha was following a long-established practice in Modernism, originating with the Dada movement, of challenging what the art world deemed to be acceptable content for exhibition. A primary exponent of Dada was Marcel Duchamp, who submitted Fountain, a porcelain urinal bearing the signature "R. Mutt," to an open exhibition of The Society of Independent Artists in

[2] Sylvia Wolf, *Ed Ruscha and Photography* (New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, 2004), 178.

[3] Ibid, 120.

[4] Huger Foote, *My Friend From Memphis* (London: Booth-Clibborn Editions, 2000), Introduction (No page number).

1917. The work was greeted with indignation and rejected by the exhibition committee. Max Podstolski writes in his essay "The Elegant Pisser, Fountain By R. Mutt,"

> His ruse, it appears, was intended to test the 'artistic freedom' espoused by the Society of Independent Artists, which he had helped found. The Society's moral indignation over Fountain prompted Duchamp to write, purportedly in Mutt's defense, that the mere act of choosing was enough to qualify any object as 'art'. Thus was his theory of the readymade conceptualized.[5]

As the Dada movement came to fruition in the early 1920s, its goal continued to be the elevation of non-art objects to the status of high art, with the hope of shocking the bourgeoisie out of their complacency. It was acceptable to Dada practitioners if works were marked by complete absurdity or incongruity. Ruscha was operating in the same mode when he self-published *Twentysix Gasoline Stations* in addition to the books that followed: *Various Small Fires and Milk*, *Some Los Angeles Apartments*, *Every Building on Sunset Strip*, *Thirtyfour Parking Lots*, *Nine Swimming Pools,* and *Some Real Estate Opportunities*.

Artforum reviewed *Twentysix Gasoline Stations* in its September 1963 issue. As one might expect, the response was rather mixed:

> Not quite a joke, the idea is at least as complex as the puns posed by Duchamp's urinal; we are irritated and annoyed by the act; but feel compelled to resolve the questions it raises. The urinal was resolved in favor of Duchamp; for Ruscha and the movement he represents, the issue is still in doubt.[6]

Not content with mere publicity, Ruscha attempted to donate his first book to The Library of Congress the following month. His proposed gift was refused. Rather than forgetting about this unpleasant experience, he went on to memorialize it by purchasing advertising space in *Artforum* and announcing his rejection to the public as if to make it a point of honor. The confused reactions to the subject matter of his publications, the "huh factor" as Ruscha called it, would figure prominently in future discussions of his photographic work.[7] There would always be a sizable percentage of viewers who simply could not comprehend why anyone would want to photograph the things he

[5] Max Podstolski, "The Elegant Pisser: Fountain By R. Mutt," *Spark-Online* Issue 2.0, November 1999. <http://www.spark-nline.com/november99/esociety/art/podstolski.htm>

[6] Wolf, 120.

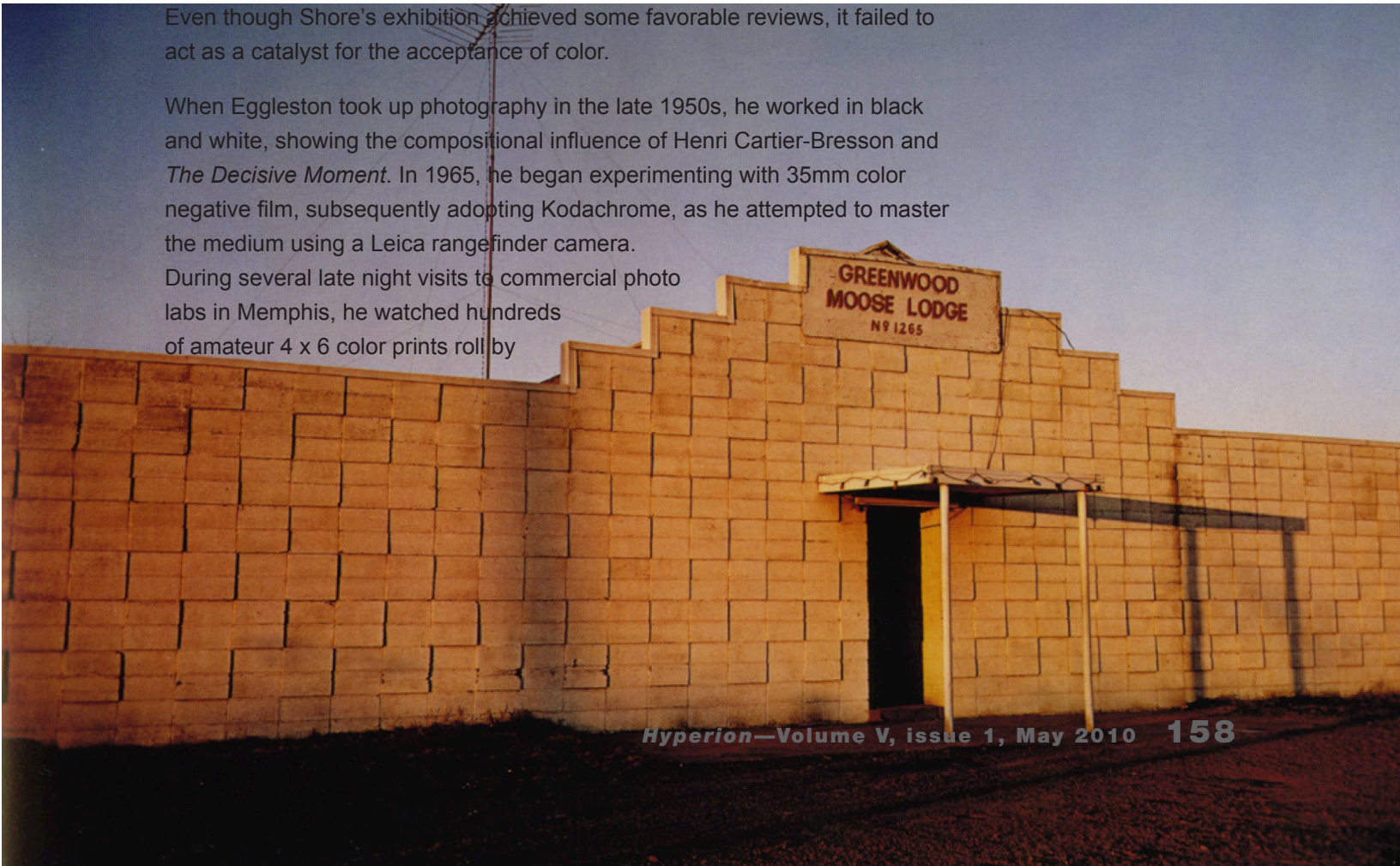
[7] Ibid, 122.

did. The negative reaction to Eggleston's color photographs more than a decade later would follow the same pattern of initial confusion and rejection.

By the time of Eggleston's 1976 solo debut, the Pop Art movement was over, having gained critical acceptance and institutional backing. Eggleston had produced a portion of the color images in that exhibition during the late 1960s when the movement was still in vogue. However, the critics did not place him in that context even though Eggleston had brought to color photography the same sort of everyday subject matter that Ruscha had brought to the medium of black and white prints. Ruscha's eventual acceptance was due more to his large-scale oil paintings, some of which were derived from his photographs. Eggleston was hampered by the fact that he was exhibiting exclusively as a photographer and was being judged against the conventions of traditional black and white prints, which were the museum standard for photography.

Among Eggleston's early detractors, there was a dictum that color photographs were more appropriate to commercial advertising than to fine art. There were notable exceptions to this dictum. Paul Outerbridge, Eliot Porter, and Ernst Haas had produced some remarkable color prints between the 1930s and 1950s; but they did not succeed in breaking down the aesthetic bias against the medium. In addition, Stephen Shore was given a solo exhibition of color prints at The Metropolitan Museum of Art in 1971. Shore's palette was similar to Eggleston's, but his compositions related more to the social documentary style of Walker Evans, who had once referred to color photography as vulgar before taking it up himself with a Polaroid camera. Even though Shore's exhibition achieved some favorable reviews, it failed to act as a catalyst for the acceptance of color.

When Eggleston took up photography in the late 1950s, he worked in black and white, showing the compositional influence of Henri Cartier-Bresson and *The Decisive Moment*. In 1965, he began experimenting with 35mm color negative film, subsequently adopting Kodachrome, as he attempted to master the medium using a Leica rangefinder camera. During several late night visits to commercial photo labs in Memphis, he watched hundreds of amateur 4 x 6 color prints roll by



William Eggleston, Greenwood, MS, 1973 (Dye Transfer Print). Greenwood Moose Lodge.

in rapid succession on the processing machines. The varied subject matter in those prints, though often poorly composed, awakened his sense of what could be accomplished with his own color images. As Eggleston remarked, "It was one of the most exciting and unforgettable experiences as a whole—and educational for me."[8] Some critics have suggested that visiting commercial photo labs might have prompted him to adopt a snapshot aesthetic.

Cutting against the grain, Eggleston was perfectly positioned for a backlash against his work, a new and highly personal look at the world that could slip unnoticed into a family photo album. Yet Szarkowski was proposing to elevate this work to the status of fine art with the imprimatur of The Museum of Modern Art, a provocative move for a curator with a growing reputation for pushing the envelope of representation. With the *New Documents* exhibition in 1967, he had introduced three photographers—Diane Arbus, Lee Friedlander, and Garry Winogrand—who represented a significant departure from the objective social stance epitomized by Walker Evans's generation of photographers. Their work was more personal and edgy. Arbus's drag queens and circus freaks, Winogrand's suspicious, tense pedestrians, and Friedlander's complex visual puns would not have been likely candidates for the upbeat, formal prints in the *Family of Man* exhibition produced by Szarkowski's predecessor Edward Steichen in 1955. However, in at least one respect, their work maintained the status quo: all three printed in black and white. Eggleston established friendships with the participants of *New Documents,* sharing their awareness of Walker Evans's images, as well as a determination not to mimic his style. What Eggleston objected to was the direct frontal view so prevalent in Evans's images.

While serving as a guest lecturer at The Carpenter Center of Harvard University from 1973-1974, Eggleston became interested in the dye transfer process as a possibility for his final prints. He wanted to have the greatest possible control over the range of color and realized that dye transfers would allow him to achieve just that.

> "I was reading the price list of this lab in Chicago and it advertised "from the cheapest to the ultimate print." The ultimate print was a dye-transfer. I went straight up there to look and everything that I saw was commercial work like pictures of cigarette packs or perfume bottles but the color saturation and the quality of the ink was overwhelming. I couldn't wait to see what a plain Eggleston picture would look like with the same process. Every photograph I subsequently printed with the process seemed fantastic and each one seemed better than the previous one.[9]

[8] Thomas Weski, "William Eggleston: Prophet of Contemporary Color Photography," *American Suburb X*, July 2009. < http://www.americansuburbx.com/2009/07/theory-william-eggleston-prophet-of.html>

[9] Mark Holborn, *William Eggleston: Ancient and Modern* (New York: Random House, 1992), 16.

Page XX:
William Eggleston, Memphis, TN, Date Unspecified
(Dye Transfer Print). Green Shower.

In the 1970s, dye transfer printing was the chosen method of advertisers and magazine publishers because it rendered the most accurate image reproductions in print. It is a complicated, expensive, and labor-intensive process involving several separate steps to complete. A dye transfer print requires making three separation negatives from an original color transparency. The transparency is photographed in black and white using an individual red, green, and blue filter in sequence. A mold is made from each negative by exposing it to a gelatin-coated film. That film is developed in a solution that hardens the part of the mold to which light has been exposed, and the excess gelatin is washed away. Next, each mold is subjected to a dye bath according to which of the red, green or blue filters it had been previously exposed. The final step is transferring the dyes from each of the molds sequentially and in exact alignment onto a gelatin-coated paper, which completes the process.[10]

After hiring a professional printer to make his dye transfers, Eggleston provided detailed instructions on how he wanted the images to appear, correcting color or exaggerating it for a particular effect. The first two images that he had produced were *Greenwood Moose Lodge*, the facade of a rural cinderblock structure, and *Red Ceiling*, a light fixture with its exposed white wiring against a shocking red background. He was so pleased with the intensity of the colors that he adopted dye transfer as his primary printing method, and this met with Szarkowski's endorsement, as well. Using that process to produce views of everyday subjects was both an aesthetic and conceptual choice that might be considered of the same lineage as Duchamp's *Fountain* and Ruscha's machine finished images. The process carried the commercial connotation of highly desirable consumer products, which Eggleston subverted by printing scenes that most people might prefer to overlook: a rusting tricycle on a Memphis sidewalk, the interior of a green-tiled shower stall, a pair of wingtip shoes under a bed, a dog lapping at a puddle of muddy water, and an assortment of empty plastic jugs in the middle of the Mississippi delta.

What Arthur Danto said of Warhol's *Brillo Boxes* might also be applied to Eggleston's photographs: "the artwork takes the non-artwork as its subject-matter and simultaneously makes a point about how the subject-matter is presented. The mode of representation thus creates a surplus meaning which does not allow the two objects to be equated with one another."[11]

[10] Gordon Balwin, *Looking At Photographs: A Guide To Technical Terms* (The J.Paul Getty Museum, 1991), 43-44.

[11] Anna Dezeuze, "Transfiguration of the Commonplace: The Old Art and Life Chestnut," *Variant Online*, Issue 22, Spring 2005. <http://www.variant.randomstate.org/issue22.html>

[12] Hilton Kramer. "Art Focus on Photo Shows," *The New York Times*, 28 May 1976.

[13] John Szarkowski, ed., *William Eggleston's Guide* (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1976), 10.

In 1974, Eggleston was awarded the prestigious Guggenheim Fellowship to begin a new series of dye transfers that he called *The Los Alamos Project*. During this time, he continued to work with Szarkowski, editing an earlier body of 375 prints for his solo exhibition. When Eggleston's opening day at The Museum of Modern Art arrived on May 25, 1976, he might not have been prepared for the harsh negative reaction. He was treated to Ruscha's "huh factor." Viewers did not understand the unprecedented assortment of 75 images, seemingly taken at random, and often presented in lurid color. They could not appreciate why Eggleston had chosen the subject matter he had and resented the fact that Szarkowski was presenting it as fine art. Leading the attack, Hilton Kramer said of one print that if he really wanted to see a pair of shoes under a bed he could go home and look at his own. He dismissed the work as "snapshot chic."[12] Accustomed to only seeing black and white photographs in a museum, the viewers were simply taken aback. Ansel Adams was so disturbed that he wrote a letter to Szarkowski, complaining that the work was even hanging on the museum's walls. Owen Edwards, of *The Village Voice*, referred to the exhibition as one of the most hated of the year. Those who objected to the use of dye transfers to present ordinary subjects missed the point entirely and failed to grasp that a conceptual art strategy had been deployed, which demanded a new visual orientation.

In his introduction to *William Eggleston's Guide*, the leatherette covered monograph that accompanied Eggleston's solo exhibition, Szarkowski himself speculates on whether his style was calculated, but coyly refuses to draw any specific conclusions.

> "Eggleston...shows us pictures of aunts and cousins and friends, of houses in the neighborhood and in neighboring neighborhoods, of local streets and side roads, local strangers, odd souvenirs, all of this appearing not at all as it might in a social document, but as it might in a diary, where the important meanings would not be public and general but private and esoteric. It is not clear whether the bucolic modesty of the work's subject matter should be taken at face value or whether this should be understood as a posture, an assumed ingenuousness designed to camouflage the artist's Faustian ambition.[13]

It would appear that on the level of personal intentions, Szarkowski might have been as perplexed by Eggleston as the editors of *Artforum* had been by Ruscha. Eggleston's comments about his work tend to be cryptic or self-deprecating, and he once managed to achieve both by telling Alfred H. Barr,

Jr., the founding director of the Museum of Modern Art, that his photographs were compositionally based on the pattern of the Confederate flag.[14] Making such a comparison was Eggleston's way of communicating that some of his subjects, like the crossing bars of the Confederate flag, were located in the exact center of the field of vision. However, given that he had achieved many unique compositions, choosing odd vantage points and frequent low angle shots, his comment to Barr could, in fact, be interpreted as a bit of posturing designed to conceal his objective.

In raising color photography to the level of consciousness in the art world, Eggleston and Szarkowski had won an important victory. Like it or not, the critics were confronted with an exhibition calculated to gain serious recognition for the medium, which would give the next generation of photographers much greater freedom of expression. It was an aesthetic paradigm shift that prompted Szarkowski to hail Eggleston as "the beginning of modern color photography."[15] As Jim Lewis commented,

> In a way, Eggleston did for color photography what the Dutch Masters of the genre did for painting in the 16th and 17th centuries: He took it out of the hands of the wealthy institutions that had sponsored it (fashion magazines and advertising agencies in one case, the church in the other) and turned it into an expression of the everyday. It is not so far, after all, from the vulgar to the vernacular: Eggleston bridged the gap, and in so doing delivered color photography back into the hands of art.[16]

It took more than a decade for his work to gain a secure foothold. During that time, he exhibited in a growing number of solo and group exhibitions internationally, particularly in Europe. He is now represented in the permanent collections of most major art museums in the world, and he has had a profound impact on the current generation of photographers, who came of age after the proliferation of color television. They are accustomed to seeing the world represented in color and not in black and white.

Rejecting aesthetic hierarchy and any notion of canonical images within his *oeuvre*, Eggleston contends that he is "photographing democratically."[17] It is a way of working that he adopted early and continues to pursue, stubbornly refusing to select one scene or image as more important than another. They are all equal in his estimation, each one just as worthy of being framed in the viewfinder as the next. His ability to transform the mundane into a vibrant experience through saturated color and informal, yet balanced, compositions

[14] John Szarkowski, 11.

[15] Kevin Jackson, "William Eggleston in the Real World," *Sight & Sound*, January 2006.

[16] Jim Lewis, "Kodachrome Moment: How Eggleston's Revolutionary Exhibition Changed Everything," *Slate*, 10 February 2003. <http://slate.com/id/2078059>

[17] William Eggleston, *The Democratic Forest* (New York: Doubleday, 1989), 171.

has been cited as an influence by some of the most important photographers working today, including Nan Goldin, Ryan McGinley, Juergen Teller, and Wolfgang Tillmans. Directors have also paid homage to his work, ranging from John Huston, Gus Van Sant, and Larry Clark to David Lynch, Sofia Coppola, and Harmony Korine.[18] There is a quality to Eggleston's images that leaves one with the notion of a story unfolding beyond the edges of the print, that one image is not isolated, but part of a stream.Color functions in Eggleston's work on a broad sensory level, engaging the viewer in a way that black and white could not. His images evoke the feeling of heat under a glaring summer sun, the taste of highway diner food, the sound of blues music, the aroma of wisteria, and the pungent smell of earth after rain.

[18] Carlo McCormick, "William Eggleston: Democratic Camera," *Aperture*, No. 195, Summer 2009.

[19] John Szarkowski, 12.

> "Reduced to monochrome, Eggleston's designs would be in fact almost static, almost as blandly resolved as the patterns seen in kaleidoscopes; but they are perceived in color, where the wedge of purple necktie, or the red disk of the stoplight against the sky, has a different compositional torque than its equivalent panchromatic gray, as well as a different meaning. For Eggleston, who was perhaps never fully committed to photography in black and white, the lesson would be more easily and naturally learned, enabling him to make these pictures: real photographs, bits lifted from the visceral world with such tact and cunning that they seem true, seen in color from corner to corner.[19]

William Eggleston, Memphis, TN, 1973 (Dye Transfer Print). Shoes under bed.

Taking everyday situations and objects as the locus of his artistic vision, Eggleston captures each image on its own merits in a moment of fresh recognition, as if seen for the first time, not taking anything for granted. The most ordinary scene is transformed into something recognizable, yet strange and

disorienting, demanding further examination. One might infer from this approach a visual parallel to defamiliarization, a literary device in which the adoption of a naïve perspective by the author disturbs the reader's habitual perceptions of the world. This parallel is all the more striking, given Eggleston's response once when asked what he thought he was accomplishing with his photographs: "I think of them as parts of a novel I'm doing."[20]

In an essay in *The Democratic Forest*, a book of photographs published in 1989, Eggleston was inclined to take aim at his early critics and at those whose lack of visual curiosity will only allow them to accept what is familiar:

> I am afraid that there are more people than I can imagine who can go no further than appreciating a picture that is a rectangle with an object in the middle of it, which they can identify. They don't care what is around the object itself, right there in the centre. Even after the lessons of Winogrand and Friedlander, they don't get it. They respect their work because respectable institutions tell them that they are important artists, but what they really want to see is a picture with a figure or an object in the middle of it. They want something obvious. The blindness is apparent when someone lets slip the word 'snapshot.' Ignorance can always be covered by 'snapshot.' The word has never had any meaning. I am at war with the obvious.[21]

One is left to wonder whether this attack was an act of self-defensiveness born out of initial rejection as a photographer, or out of complete disdain for those whom he considers to be visually illiterate. Perhaps it was both. Can he really fault his early viewers for being slow to understand his peripheral way of looking at the world, mistaking him for a casual snapshot shooter? Innovation in art has always taken time to resonate with the public.

Over the years, Eggleston has acquired a reputation as a dandy Southern gentleman with a Faulknerian proclivity for alcohol consumption, discharging firearms, and late night prowling, although he just turned 70 years old. He once maintained two houses in Memphis, one for his wife, Rosa, and another for a mistress, Lucia Birch, who recently died. The two reportedly knew and liked one another. Inherited family wealth freed him from the necessity of working for a living, allowing him to take frequent photographic excursions, produce thousands of prints, and concentrate on his other passion, musical composition. Many of those who have interviewed Eggleston and written about him have referenced his eccentricities, while neglecting to contextualize his work. A 2005 documentary film by Michael Almereyda, *William Eggleston in*

[20] Walter Hopps, "Eggleston's World," *The Hassleblad Award 1998: William Eggleston* (Göteborg, Sweden: Hassleblad Center, 1999), 6.

[21] William Eggleston 1989, 172-173.

the Real World, struck a balance between the two, but showed the legendary photographer at his laconic best.

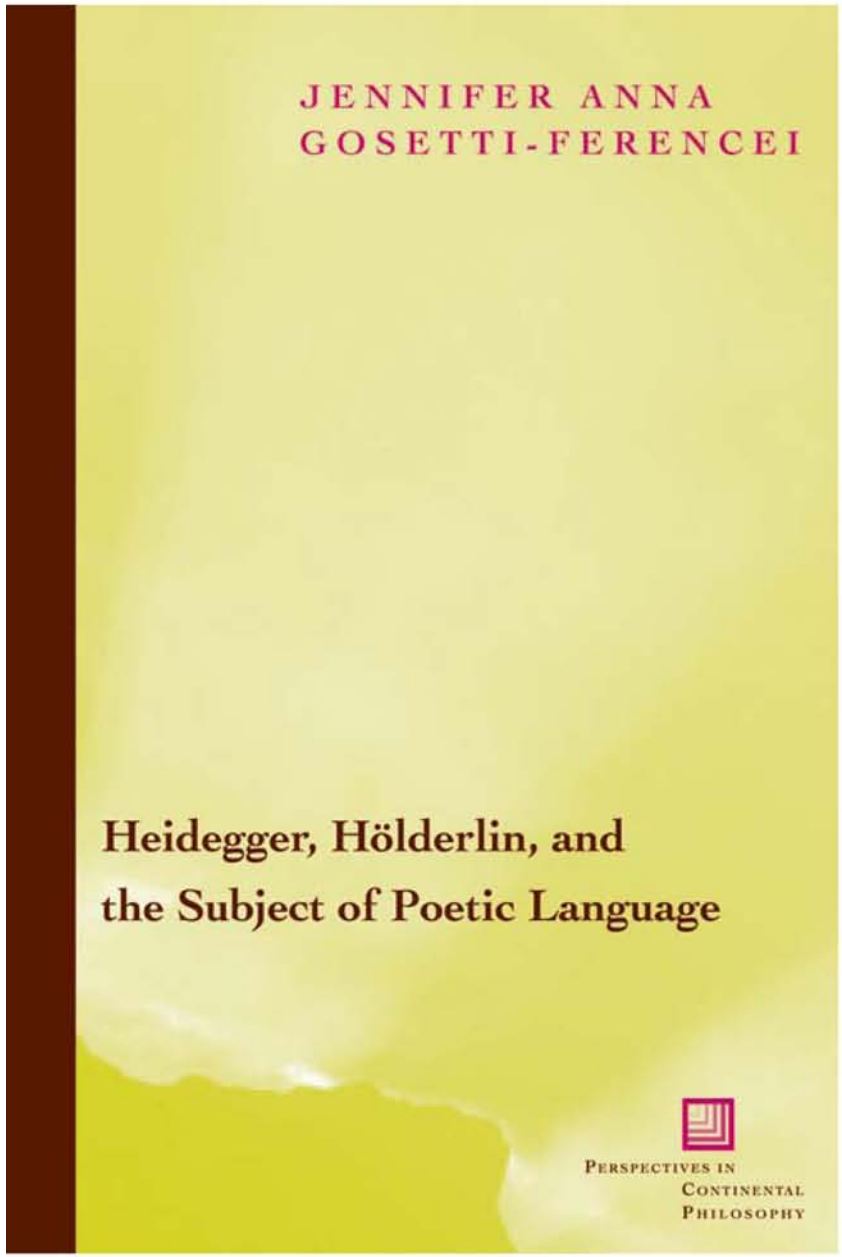
Last year, a major Eggleston retrospective opened at the Whitney Museum of American Art, *Democratic Camera: Photographs and Video 1961-2008.* With 175 works included, it was his most comprehensive exhibition in New York since the solo debut at The Museum of Modern Art. It was also a crowning moment for his career, a triumphal return to Gotham. Critical reaction to the exhibition and to his achievements was overwhelmingly favorable, indicating just how widely accepted his images and way of seeing have become. Holland Cotter of *The New York Times* proclaimed him to be "one of our greatest living photographers."[22] Writing for *The New Yorker*, Peter Schjeldahl observed,

> I think the emotional key to his genius is a stoical loathing, unblinking in the face of one scandalously uncongenial otherness after another. His subjects have no ascertainable dignity, except that of stubbornly existing. Nor does the hurting hipster behind the camera. All glory, such as it is, accrues to the art of photography, which doesn't care what it beholds even as it burns it, through the eye, into the soul.[23]

Events in the art world tend to come full circle. Just as Duchamp's urinal was despised when first submitted for consideration, the critics eventually praised its aesthetic qualities. So it was with Eggleston's subject matter taken from the margins of society, from lonely back roads and industrial complexes, abandoned buildings and strip malls, urban centers and quiet residential rooms in the fleeting light of day. Scorned early in his career, he is now considered a master of photography, although he will remain an enigma until someone discovers a Rosetta stone to translate his thoughts. Apropos of an enigma, Eggleston once told his friend, the curator Thomas Weski, that he did not particularly like the things around him. Weski replied that he thought that was a good reason to photograph, which satisfied Eggleston. There is much more for this artist to reveal of the world, and he shows no signs of slowing down.

[22] Holland Cotter, "Old South Meets New, in Living Color," *The New York Times*, 7 November 2008.

[23] Peter Schjeldahl, "Local Color: William Eggleston at the Whitney," *The New Yorker*, 17 November 2008.



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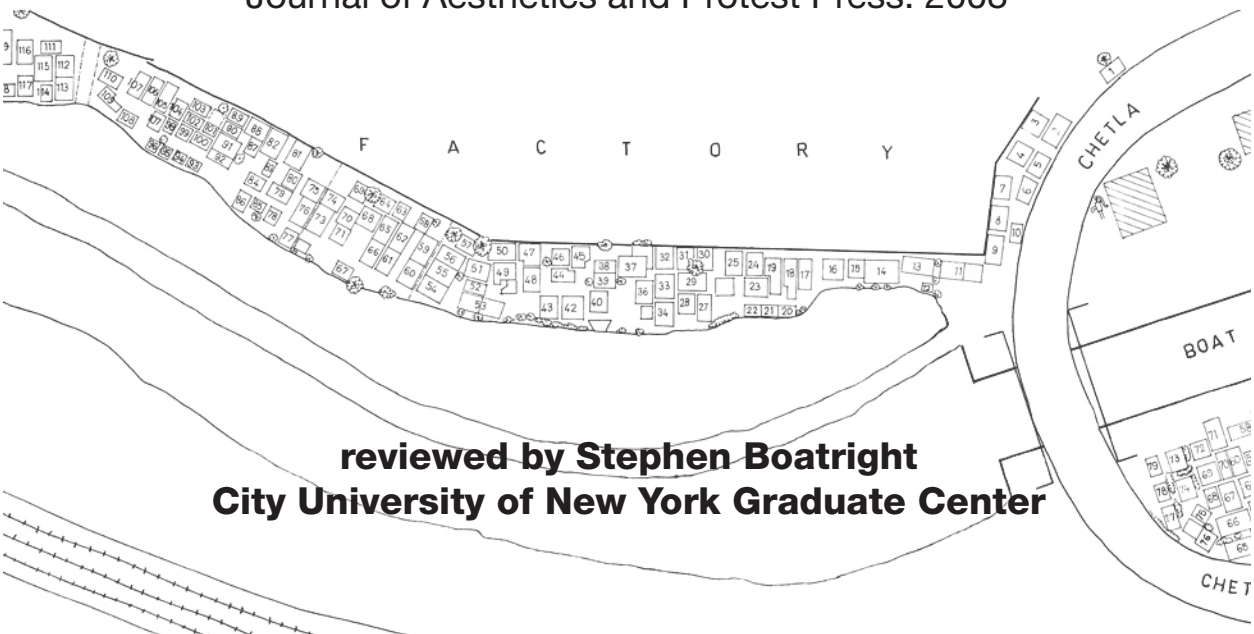
a review of

AN ATLAS OF RADICAL CARTOGRAPHY

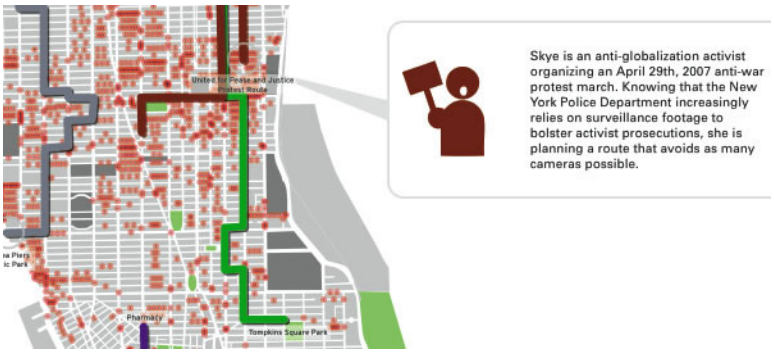
Lize Mogel and Alex Bhagat, eds.

Journal of Aesthetics and Protest Press. 2008



reviewed by Stephen Boatright
City University of New York Graduate Center

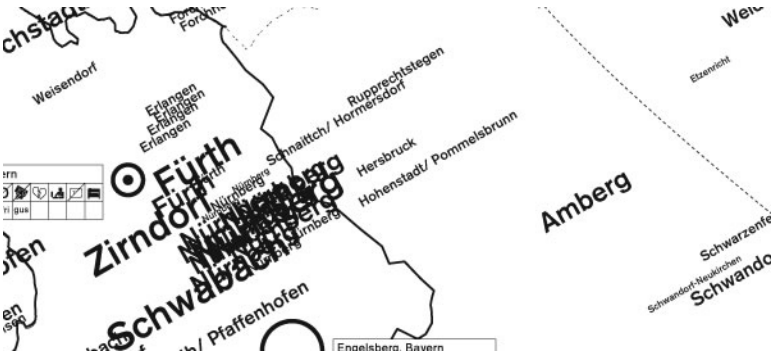
A self-defined 'primer' on the geography of contemporary geo-politics, *An Atlas of Radical Cartography* is a collection of 10 maps and 10 companion essays about a wide breadth of issues ranging from migration patterns in the Americas and Europe to mapping informal settlements in India. The collection is particularly interesting in the ways in which the social, political, and spatial aspects of each contribution meld with those of the others, bleeding across physical and conceptual boundaries. Largely structured around geographically delimited 'local' issues, the maps and essays provide critical perspectives on a range of globally significant socio-spatial phenomena. As a collection, the atlas affords multiple points of entry for the reader to analyze the ways in which the diverse localities are linked and the varied processes inter-implicated and does this in a visually and intellectually stimulating way. The maps are as aesthetically diverse as the topics are broad, and similarly varied are the styles of the essays. Some of the essays are introductions and extensions of the maps, others take the paired map as a jumping off point for thinking more broadly about an issue, while others yet present conversations among



activists, planners, and scholars. In sum, the *Atlas* succeeds in creating a space for ripening understanding and enriching conversation; however, it has one significant shortcoming, which is that due to the brevity of the essays the reader is often left desirous of further analysis and conceptual development.

Political activists, critical artists, and radical scholars comprise the collection's intended audience, and for this motley group much information and inspiration can be gained; although, any reader looking for or in need of theoretical or contextual background will remain unsatisfied. The editors introduce the atlas with the caveat that the collection is intended as a 'primer.' Unfortunately, this reads as little more than an anemic excuse for a lack of argumentative development.

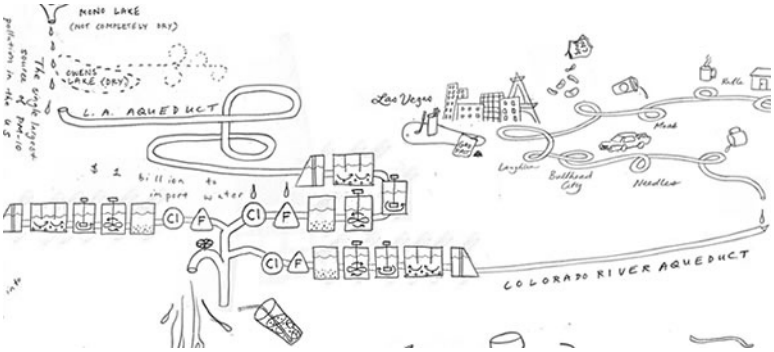
Still, though, the palpable energy, personal investment, and creativity of the contributions make up for this shortcoming. The atlas was complied as a critical counter to the purported and assumed objectivity of maps, of information presented by hegemonic institutions to the public about migration, land use, global connectivity, capital flows, and border control. As the editors note in their introduction, "This Atlas is *an* atlas and not *the* atlas" (6). The political implications inherent in geography are often obscured and obfuscated in standard mappings, but following Henri Lefebvre they argue that, counter to the assumption of homogeneity and staticity, space is produced through the processes of capital accumulation, population management, and information control, among others (Lefebvre 1991).



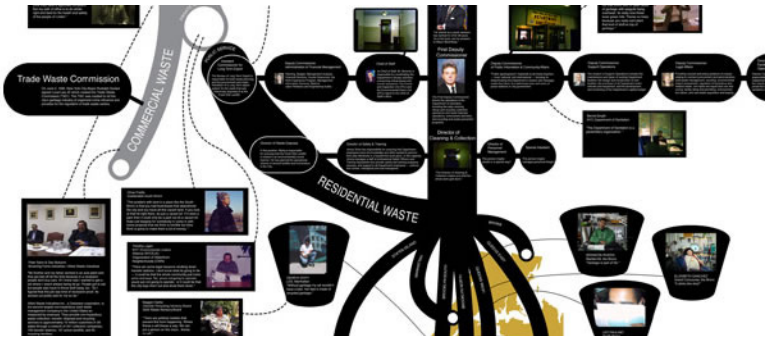
The maps by Trevor Paglen, the collective An Architektur, Lize Mogel, and Ashley Hunt are particularly striking for the ways in which they show how the local is multiply enfolded in the global. These maps and a few others have a level of coherence and self-contained explication that allow them to stand alone from the accompanying text,

but not all of the maps are self-explanatory, a problematic that is explicitly, if somewhat prosaically, addressed. “Radical cartographies are, as Trevor Paglen writes, ‘a departure point … that can aid in analysis but cannot speak for themselves’” (11).

Upon the initial unfolding, the first map of the collection hardly seems radical. Produced by Unnayan, an activist community organizing group that worked to alleviate and counter the encroachments of municipal development programs, it simply looks like a standard real estate blueprint—a series of small, numbered buildings clumped together along the sides of large-scale industrial constructions—a railroad, a factory, a canal, a road. However, upon reading Jai Sen’s accompanying essay we learn that this seemingly mundane map is one of the few remaining from an extensive, decades-long project of organizing and mapping Calcutta’s ‘unintended’ settlements. A member of the group, Sen explains that the word *unnayan* means ‘development’ in Bengali and that the choice of this name was made with its myriad potential connotations in mind—industrial capitalist development, demographic development, community development. The urbanizing forces that attracted migrants to Calcutta and left them to fend for themselves in acquiring the most basic of services are often the same as those that deny official recognition to these settlements, a willful ignorance that allows for a legal rationalization for eviction and coercive social disenfranchisement. That the atlas begins with this map and essay is appropriate—it is pointedly local, intimately specific while also able to demonstrate how a range of geo-political scales are messily imbricated.



Still, graphically underwhelming is an odd way to start for a collection of maps complied by two professional artists, yet the very banality of Unnayan’s map grounds aesthetic beauty and wide-ranging concerns of the collection



Pedro Lasch | Guias de Ruta / Route Guides

Jane Tsong | the los angeles water cycle: the way it is, not the way it should be and one day will be

the Center for Urban Pedagogy (CUP) | New York City Garbage Machine

Pages xx and xx (top to bottom):

Institute for Applied Autonomy with Site-R | Routes of Least Surveillance

Trevor Paglen & John Emerson | Rendition Flights 2001-2006

An Architektur | Geography of the Fürth Departure Center

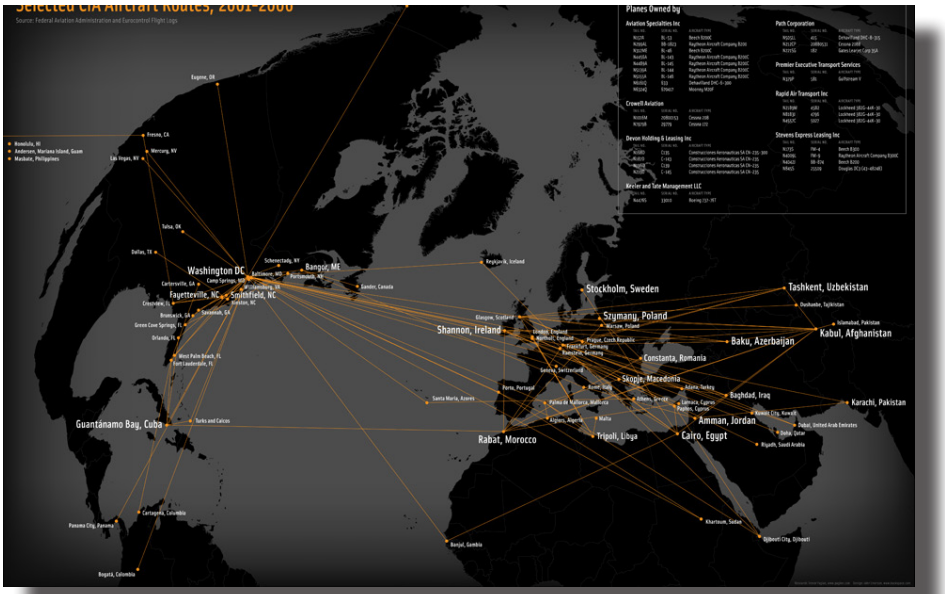
as a whole in the parsed down grit of the biopolitical quotidian. Unnayan's map was produced to provide tangible proof to official bureaucracies of the real and permanent neighborhoods that existed throughout the city's industrial and infrastructural interstices, entire neighborhoods whose existence was officially denied. Conscious of the ways in which geographical information is corralled by institutional powers so as to further enhance their hegemony, Unnayan decided to adopt the bureaucratic language of planning to speak not only against but to those governmental and corporate offices that sought to extend their epistemological denial of the existence of Calcutta's unintentional communities into a physical effacement of their presence. In his essay Sen gives an honest assessment of the mixed results of Unnayan's activities for housing rights, political empowerment, and community organization. In a way similar to the way that Mogel and Bhagat frame the atlas as a whole in their introduction, Sen offers his contribution to the reader as a point of activist departure and source for radical imaginings. This level-headed attitude towards activism and social justice is representative of the atlas as a whole and of the individual contributions.

The essay by Maribel Casas-Cortes and Sebastian Cobarrubias that accompanies An Architektur's map of the detention center in Fürth, Germany, also introduces four other maps not included in the atlas collection. Each of these maps is concerned with graphically presenting data about the plight of 'illegal' migrants to Europe, but while severely limited in length, the essay does more than merely introduce five maps. Casas-Cortes and Cobarrubias describe the evolving, 'fractilized' structure of European border controls, e.g., the ways in which the 'border' manifests at frontier checkpoints, central-city train stations, and in suburban detention centers. An Architektur's map is a well-chosen representative of the five discussed to be published as a part of the print atlas. In this map, scale, process, place, and person are clearly articulated, but significantly their interconnections are depicted in a manner that effectively produces a simulation of the bureaucratic complexity, cultural

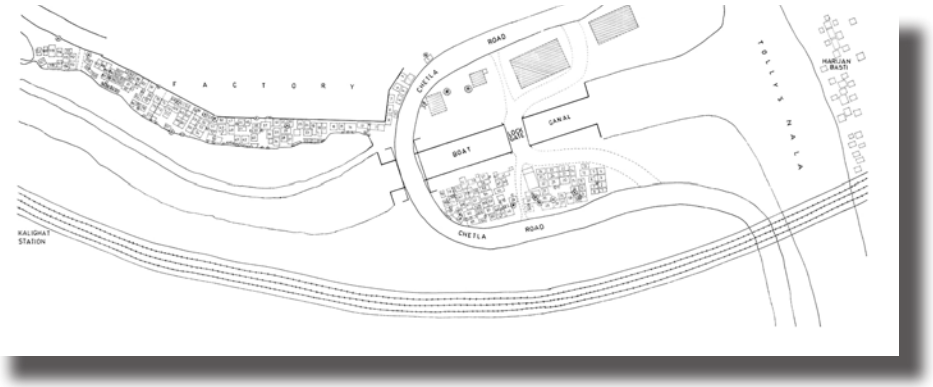
confusion, and foreign fear that greets the migrant at each successive confrontation with governmental population controls. Spaces, processes, and actors are given distinct representations, but using graphic overlay An Architekur manages to bring the reader into the despairingly labyrinthine apparatus that confronts people who seek asylum in Germany. One shortcoming of this pairing is that the other four maps described in the essay are included only as small, hardly legible images appended to the text and not as fold-outs like the other maps in the collection. This is partially compensated for by the inclusion of Internet addresses for pdf versions, although typing in their awkward URLs proves a bit tedious. Overall, this essay and the map of the Fürth detention center provide clear, critical if abbreviated, graphic, and textual examinations of one of the countless trans-local sites (Europe) in the non-centered, political fraught phenomenon of global migration.

The most challenging and stimulating map in the collection is Lize Mogel's. A non-scaled, conceptual mash-up of the ways in which geographically distant places are multiply implicated that is juxtaposed with similarly mashed-up texts whose physical layout mimics the actual imbrication of the places and processes addressed. This piece succeeds in radically challenging the reader's geo-historical orientation by cutting up and breaching the boundaries of space and narration. Further, the accompanying essay by Sarah Lewison adds more insight and detail in a way that parallels and strengthens Mogel's map. Lewison speaks with and directly about the map with clarity of purpose and connection that regrettably is less present in several of the other contributions not addressed in this review.

The last map in the collection, *A World Map: in which we see…* by Ashley Hunt, is the atlas's most graphically overwhelming and analytically underwhelming map. It is also the map most representative of the collection's overall strengths and weaknesses. An honest attempt at reflecting the heterogeneity of contemporary capitalism, it strives to depict the connections between the myriad social



phenomena that sustain capitalism by drawing from the ideas of a dozen philosophers and social theorists. It is bright, colorful, and confusing—characteristics that produce both its success and failure. Success for its compilation of the heterogeneous social relations implicated in actually existing capitalism—slavery, wage labor, bare life, the tendency for the rate of profit to fall, etc. However, the map's shortcoming comes from Hunt's desire to evade any sort of analytical coherence. "[T]he map seeks to undermine the intellectual tendency to see one's analysis as total and absolute. Providing no beginning or end to the reader, there is no thesis or conclusion to finally be mastered. Any analysis drawn from it must be seen as imperfect and contingent, used only as a guide for thinking and always reconciled with local realities and history" (146). This may speak to a certain epistemological truth, but as an end to a counter-hegemonic collection of radical maps and essays, it comes off as an anemic disclaimer for a less than rigorous conceptual analysis. Fortunately, this map, the other contributions, and the collection as a whole do not apologize for their political and philosophical positions. Hunt's project may be too grand and open-ended for its own good, but despite its failures and second-guessing the map's attempt to map the emergent complexity of contemporary capitalism is audacious and inspiring—two words that accurately describe Mogel and Bhagat's collection as a whole.



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