

Spring 2013



**A**namesa  
*an interdisciplinary journal*



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an-a-me-sa: Greek. adv. between, among, within

□

*Anamesa* is a conversation. From its inception in 2003, the journal has sought to provide an occasion for graduate students in disparate fields to converge upon and debate issues emblematic of the human condition. In doing so, *Anamesa* provokes scholarly, literary, and artistic innovation through interdisciplinary dialogue, serving New York University's John W. Draper Program and the graduate community at large.

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# Contributors

**Sophie Dinicol** graduated with a Joint-Honours degree in English and Creative Writing from Concordia University in Montreal. She is currently living in Toronto where she works as a production coordinator for Buck Productions. When she's not making reality TV, she likes to figure out ways to spend more (read: any) time with Louis C.K.

**Greg Emilio** is a Southern California native who writes poetry, short fiction, and book reviews. His work has most recently appeared in *Trop*, *Foothill*, and *World Literature Today*, and is forthcoming in *The Los Angeles Review of Books*, *Solo Novo*, *Spry* and *Mosaic*. He currently teaches and waits tables in Claremont, CA.

**Jon Henry** grew up in the Blue Ridge Mountains. He attended the University of Richmond as a Designated Artist Scholar and completed BAs in Studio Art & International Studies: World Politics & Diplomacy. In May 2013, he will complete his MA in Arts Politics at NYU Tisch. His practice is rooted in sculpture and explores his heritage as a queer in the rural south. He works around issues like rural development, environmentalism, voting access, and community empowerment. In Fall 2013, Henry will be starting at James Madison University to complete his MFA in Sculpture.

**Aruni Kashyap** is the author of *The House With a Thousand Stories* (Viking, June 2013). He has also translated from Assamese and introduced celebrated Indian Indira Goswami's last work of fiction, *The Bronze Sword of Thengphakhri Tehsildar*, for Zubaan Books (January, 2013). <http://www.arunikashyap.com/>

**Richard Lapham** is a fine art photographer and painter born in New York City. He studied Art History and Fine Art at Skidmore College and the International Center of Photography as well as at the Studio Arts Center International in Florence, Italy. He has worked in galleries and photography printing studios and as a freelance photographer specializing in Large Format Photography. His projects have taken a multimedia approach and investigate perception in relation to medium, form and pattern.

**Diala Lteif** was born in the suburbs of Beirut, Lebanon. This is where she inherited her recalcitrant attitude; it's a genetic mutation. She is currently enrolled in the Transdisciplinary Design program at Parsons The New School for Design where she attempts to solve wicked problems in her unique, rebellious way. She respects systems as much as she enjoys breaking them. She is also a compulsive liar and often pretends she is Khanajer, a professional belly dancer. She was also told to add to her biography that this is the second time she has been published in Anamesa. Oh happy day!

**Lindsay Mayer** is a 26-year-old graduate student in the Management et Économie des Réseaux masters program at Université Paris Dauphine. Born and raised in Dallas, Texas, Lindsay graduated from the University of Kansas as a member of Phi Beta Kappa and received her first year masters degree in Mathematical Models in Economics and Finance at the Sorbonne. She is currently working on writings, music and artwork and plans to release an EP album and short novel. Her last published work, *Raw Meat vs. Raw Fruit*, was printed in the Fall 2012 issue of Anamesa. Lindsay lives outside of Paris, France.

**Nikolina Nedeljkov**, a doctoral candidate in the Ph.D. Program in English at the Graduate Center, City University of New York, is a reader/writer/scholar whose interest is centered around the creation-remix nexus as a source of storytelling and creative/critical remapping of cultural realities. In the light of peaceful/peaceable resistance against multiple oppression, the remix is the postfuturist hi-fi response against noise, and in the service of disambiguated communication. Contributions in *LIES/ISLE*, *kill author*, *3:AM*, in *Cultural Studies, Education, and Youth: Beyond Schools, Genero*, and *Pennsylvania Literary Journal*.

**Connie Mae Oliver** is a poet, writer and contemporary artist. Her paintings and photography can be found at [sensationfeelings.tumblr.com](http://sensationfeelings.tumblr.com). She is currently working on a series of poems titled, "Jesus The Beautiful Girl."

**Aleksandr Peterson** is a Chancellor's Distinguished Fellow in fiction at the University of California Riverside. His work has been published in *The Daily Progress*, *The Press-Enterprise*, and received an honorable mention for *Glimmer Train's* Very Short Fiction Award. Aleksandr is currently at work on a novel which has no title. A native of the great Southeast, he now lives in Riverside, California with his wife and is expecting a newborn son in August.

**Pieter Paul Pothoven** (b. 1981) examines material histories and their display. He has shown work at ICP-Bard, New York (2012), De Service Garage, *Amsterdam* (2010), and FOAM, *Amsterdam* (2008). His texts have been published in *Simulacrum* (2011) and Volume #26, *Architecture of Peace* (2010). He initiated and co-curated "The Economy of Colour" (2011). He received a BFA from the Gerrit Rietveld Academy in 2006.

**Leah Schnellbach** would much rather hear about your life. But, since you asked, she was born in Pittsburgh, got her MFA in Fiction from Sarah Lawrence College, and thinks that sunsets over the Hudson beat out Florida sunsets any day. She is currently at work on a novel, I mean like right now, at least she better be.

**Sarah Snyder** earned a BA in Political Science from York College of Pennsylvania and an MA in Western Classics at St. John's College. She is currently attending the School of Visual Arts for an MA in Critical Theory. Her primary areas of interest are topics in classical political philosophy and Continental Aesthetics.

**Chris Tracy**, a second-year Draper student, will start his thesis soon, he promises. He also plays in a noise-punk band called Clean Girls and enjoys sitting quietly in his room.

**Marci Vogel** is a native of Los Angeles, where she attends USC's PhD Program in Literature and Creative Writing as a Provost's Fellow. Her poetry has been twice nominated for a Pushcart Prize and the AWP Intro Journals Award. Recent work appears in *FIELD*, *Grist*, *Puerto del Sol*, *ZYZZYVA*, *Anti-*, and the *Seneca, Colorado*, and *Atlas* reviews.

**Mike Westfall** is an MA candidate at the Institute of Fine Arts, NYU. He plans to begin a PhD program in the fall, specializing in the modern and contemporary art of Russia and the former Soviet Union. His review of Yinka Shonibare's recent exhibition, *Addio del Passato*, is scheduled to appear in the upcoming issue of *Nka: Journal of Contemporary African Art*.

## Editor's Note

This year, *Anamesa* celebrates its tenth year. Are we ten years old or young? What is *Anamesa*? The better question may be "Who is *Anamesa*?" As a journal, we are many. We are graduate students in the John W. Draper Interdisciplinary Masters Program in Humanities and Social Thought at New York University. Amongst our peers, we call ourselves simply "Draper students" or "Draperites."

For the spring edition, we yet again offer up our collaborative efforts. As Draperites and members of the *Anamesa* staff, we remember Gertrude Stein and the Gulf War. We travel to Lebanon and the future. We welcome blossoms and crowded benches in Washington Square Park.

We celebrate ten years of collaboration and look forward to many more to come. We hope you enjoy.

—Vanassa S. Hamra

# Goodbye Thunderman

Aleksandr Peterson

**M**y father left with the Air Force when I was eight. He was supposed to be gone for nine months. He boarded a C-17 Bravo at Fort Bragg and flew across the ocean to Saudi Arabia, the city of Dhahran, which is just on the edge of the Persian Gulf, which is where he died. I was shooting marbles in the street with my neighbor, Jorge, when I looked up and saw my mother watching me, standing in our front door with one hand drawn around her waist, the other covering her mouth.

□

He'd been staying in building 131 of Khobar Towers—a housing complex for foreign personnel. I remember the news footage we watched that night, my mom, my little brother, and myself, holding each other on the living room sofa. The building was eight stories tall, and we knew he was in it because my mother told us so.

Late at night, on June 25<sup>th</sup>, a group of Saudi Hezbollah terrorists drove a tanker truck and an escort car into the parking lot adjacent to building 131. The truck was filled with five thousand pounds of explosives hidden in paint cans and fifty-kilo bags. When the bomb detonated, it blew open the entire south face of the building, leaving the square little rooms exposed like those of a dollhouse. The tanker truck was gone—vaporized, practically—and in its place was a crater the size of a Piggly Wiggly. The news footage kept showing the open side of the building. The walls within had collapsed onto each other. Sheets of plaster dangled from bent rebar poles, swaying in the desert heat. You could see things in some of the rooms. Scorched beds. Night stands. Washing machines. Men's razors and cans of black shoe polish, if you

looked close enough, I imagined. I think that's what made me cry the hardest. When I saw the side of that building, and all of the rooms inside of it, I kept imagining which one was his. Kept looking on the walls for the picture I had drawn and sent in the mail. A colored pencil rendition of the Pink Panther. But it would've been impossible to see—only one square pixel on our television, maybe two.

□

I remember talking to my father the week before he died. He would call once a week from a satellite phone, always at bedtime for us, and my mother would let us each talk to him before we went to sleep. He had been gone five months when I talked to him the very last time.

“Adrian,” he said. “How's my little soldier doing?”

“I miss you, Dad,” I told him.

“Miss you too. Are you being good for your mom?”

My mother smiled. She could hear his voice from the earpiece.

“I'm trying to. We took the training wheels off my bike today,” I said.

“You did?”

“Yeah. And I didn't fall either. I was going pretty fast.”

“That's good. I'm proud of you,” he said.

“What time is it there, Dad?” I asked him.

“Well, it's five o'clock in the morning here. Sun'll be coming up soon.”

“Did you know it's night time here? Me and Tristan are going to bed now.”

“I know, Adrian. That's because I'm on the other side of the world,” he said. “You know what else I know?”

I already knew what he was going to say, but I asked what anyway.

“You're the biggest noodlehead in the world. That's what.”

“No, *you're* the biggest one,” I said.

I looked at my mother again, and she was staring a hole into the floor.

□

Many of our neighbors came over that evening, when they heard about the explosion. They hugged my mother and said, “Have you heard anything yet?” But she hadn't heard anything yet.

We lived in military housing on Sturgis Street. There were all kinds of non-commissioned soldiers and airmen who lived with their wives and families on our block. Next door, there was Mitch—a helicopter mechanic—and his wife and two daughters. Two doors down, Phil and Elizabeth and their son. Phil told people he was an astronaut, but all the grown-ups knew he was a demolitions expert for Delta Force. That was back when the government still denied the existence of SFOD-Delta. Further down the block lived Tom Daggit—a Green Beret medic—and his family. He stitched my face up once when I took a spill on my bike. Jorge lived one street over with his fa-

ther, Celio, who was an Army Ranger. And across the street from us were the Shugharts, or what was left of them. Randy Shughart had posthumously received the Medal of Honor for what he'd done in Somalia in '93. The Battle of Mogadishu. Some people called it Black Hawk Down. I didn't know about any of that at the time, but now I do.

The housewives on the block used to party together on Saturday nights. Their husbands were gone a lot—away for field training, away for a mission they may or may not have been able to talk about. The women would set up folding chairs along Sturgis Street and drink boxed wine beneath the maple trees. Us kids would play and scream up and down the street. Freeze Tag. Kick the Bucket. Water balloons. We knew our mothers were sad, but we kept on playing. We didn't want to think about whose dad might come home and whose might not. And we didn't have to. That was the way they wanted it.

□

The call came in the middle of the night—the one we'd all been waiting for. There was still a hope at that point—a hope like the last drop of something about to be emptied—that my father had survived the explosion. Tristan and I were in bed, but not sleeping. We could hear the television still on in the living room. The phone rang in the kitchen, and my mother answered it after two rings. I couldn't tell what she was saying, but it sounded like she was asking questions. Her voice got louder, and she asked more questions. Tristan told me that he wanted to see daddy, and I told him to “ssshhh.”

I'll never forget the shriek I heard next, my mother's shriek, when the chaplain told her the news: my father was among the 19 American dead. It sounded like she'd been stabbed, or like someone had peeled the skin from her body and thrown salt at her. The hair on my arms stood up straight, and I felt my lips quivering. Tristan was in his matching twin bed across the room. He had pulled his blankets up to his chin and cinched them tight with his fists. I heard the storm door squeal open and closed, heard my mother wailing on the front lawn. I got out of bed and parted the window curtain. She was kneeling in a pool of moonlight beside our “Yard of the Month” sign, ripping up handfuls of grass and throwing them in front of her. She seemed like a different person in that moment, or not a person at all. I wanted to go out and comfort her, put a hand on her back, but I was too afraid.

□

The day we had the neighborhood water fight was one of the days I learned about fear. It was summertime, and thanks to some strange coincidence or miracle, all the men were home for a change. The wives were smiling and snapping pictures with 35mm disposables. Phil and Mitch had buckets full of water balloons and wicked side-arms. Some of the girls had squirt guns and trash can lids, and Jorge was lugging around a pump-action super soaker



with a backpack water tank. I was practicing evasive maneuvers when I decided to leap over the railing into what I called a foxhole, but what was actually the window well around my parents' basement egress. I overshot the landing and tried to break my fall by flinging an arm against the glass pane. My palm broke through, and a network of fractures excursed from between my fingers like arcs of electricity. I looked at my hand, a deep gash in the center leaking red. I stared at the blood and stared at the glass, and my first instinct was not to cry out for help, but to fabricate a story for the wound that didn't involve destruction of property. I'd cut it falling out of a tree. I'd cut it doing pushups on the asphalt. I'd cut it trying to catch a water balloon that was somehow filled with razor blades.

When my father noticed the broken glass later that afternoon, he knew right away how I'd cut it.

I was in trouble for two things: breaking the glass and lying about breaking the glass. After he explained how the hole in the window was really going to affect our electric bill, and how it would cost a small fortune to repair, he told me I'd be sleeping in the basement that night. This, he knew, would teach me a lesson.

All six-year-olds are afraid of the dark, to some extent, but none like I was. If the circumstances seemed dire enough, my terror would often have physical symptoms: cold sweats, tremors, nausea, dizziness, and so on. My father knew this.

That night, he hauled my mattress down the steps through the cellar door outside. He gave me one blanket and one pillow from the hall closet, and one glass of water, like a quartermaster passing out equipment. He did all of this without speaking, and once I had reached the bottom of the steps, he shut the door. The light from the kitchen upstairs shrank into a vertical sliver and then disappeared.

For a few minutes, the floor joists above me creaked and groaned as my parents and Tristan bedded down for the night, and then the house was quiet.

I lay on my back, looking up at a dark ceiling peppered with limp, grey cobwebs. The basement was unfinished, framed only by cinderblock walls and steel support beams. It smelled of dirt and mildew from a past flood. In the far corner, a few tarpaulins covered a mountain of storage bins that housed seasonal knick knacks and things from my father's bachelor years.

I didn't sleep that night. The spider webs, the shadows, the sound of the wind whistling across the hole in the window. It was all too much. At about half past two, I felt my pores tickling as beads of sweat made their way out onto my skin. The hole in the window was beginning to sound alive and intelligible, as if it were actually speaking. This is when I decided to climb the stairs and beg for mercy at the kitchen door. I tried calling out at first, but no one came, so I knocked. Then I knocked harder. A light came on in the kitchen,

and I heard my parents' voices.

"Dad, I'm scared," I said to the locked door in front of me.

"You should have thought about that earlier, when—"

"Christian," it was my mother's voice, "let him up. He's learned his lesson, don't you think?"

I heard my father sigh and walk away, and moments later the door opened. My mother was there. She crouched down and held out her arms and pretended to smile. It was the same look she shared with the rest of the mothers on our block when they would sit around and drink boxed wine. I was crying then. It was the same look, and I knew it.

□

My father taught me how to shine shoes once. We sat on the front porch in wicker chairs, and he explained how to wrap the t-shirt around my first three fingers and then around my wrist.

"You always want a clean, cotton shirt," he said. "Nothing fancy, just what works."

He licked his fingers through the t-shirt, to get it wet, and rubbed off a little bit of black wax from a Kiwi can.

"Like this," he showed me his fingers, so I could see how much to use. I rubbed my fingers in the wax.

He held up a government-issue pair of Thoroughgoods, the ones he never wore but kept shined anyway, just for emergencies.

"Look how you can see your face in the toe, Adrian."

I looked and saw my head and shoulders, shrunken and distorted like in a fun mirror.

"That's how it should look when you're done," he said. Then he handed me a shoe from his other pair—the everyday pair—and motioned to begin. We sat in those chairs in silence, moving our fingers in circles across the leather of the shoes. He stopped from time to time to breathe on his, said the condensation helped it shimmer. We did three coats of black, one coat of neutral. Polished and breathed, polished and breathed, until the sun was low, framed between the clay-shingled roofs across Sturgis Street, casting long shadows onto the pavement, onto our lawn, onto my mother's marigolds and pansies that grew along our walkway.

We used a toothbrush to clean the sides and tops of the soles, rubbed it in the wax to make them black and beautiful. His shoe looked better than mine, of course, but he said he was proud of me. While I sat there, trying to see my reflection in the shoe I'd just polished, my father took out his pack of Newport. He slipped a cigarette between his lips and took out an MRE matchbook, but didn't light one yet. He got up from his chair and leaned against the railing, looking across the street at the Shugharts' place. Sallie Shughart

was jumping rope on the sidewalk. My father shook his head and struck the match.

□

My mother used to tell me about the night she and my father met. She told me so many times that I could never forget a single detail of it. She was studying abroad in Cologne at the time. My father was stationed in Frankfurt with the 469<sup>th</sup> Air Base Group. They met in a Frankfurt nightclub—my father in his dress blues, my mother in stirrup pants. I didn't know then what a nightclub was or what stirrup pants were or how to find Frankfurt and Cologne on a map. But dress blues—I knew about those. I can still picture my father wearing them: the round hat drawn low across his eyes, the colored service ribbons squarely above his breast pocket, the silver stripes traveling down the sides of his pant legs. He danced well, my mother told me. Sliding around the floor with deadpan eyes, his spit-shined Thororoughgoods gleaming under the colored lights. Maybe my mother saw her reflection in the shoes, I don't know. She bought him a drink, yelled her name at him above the noise.

"I'm Sherry!" she said.

He put his hand out.

"Christian!" he yelled back, took a sip from the drink she had bought him. "Good pilsner!" he yelled.

My mother nodded effusively.

She asked him about his uniform. He told her he was with the 469<sup>th</sup>.

"You fly jets?" she yelled.

"Definitely," he yelled back, but he thought she'd asked if he was fried yet.

"That must be exciting," my mother said, and he laughed.

They left the nightclub in search of a quieter venue, walking along the banks of the Main, where lighted bridges stretched across the river to connect Romberg with Sachsenhausen. My mother talked about women's lib and *The Feminine Mystique*. My father smoked his cigarettes. They rode the train back to Cologne together, to my mother's rented room in a boarding house. She always told me the room embarrassed her, that it didn't seem fit for an officer. The furniture too small, the ceiling too low, the mirror above the hand sink too cloudy and out of focus. But she found out the next day that he was a crew chief, not a pilot. He took care of someone else's F-16 Fighting Falcon—checked the pneumatic systems, the panels, the wiring. He was enlisted.

But they kept in touch, nonetheless. She saw him a few more times in Germany before returning to the states, back to Chicago. It wasn't long before she started throwing up in the mornings. She went to the mall and had her portrait done. I still have the photograph—my mother at twenty-seven, her bangs teased into a crown, her lipstick cherry red, leaning on a mirrored table-top in a black, cashmere sweater. She sent the photograph to my father in

Germany with a letter saying that she missed him, and that she was pregnant. He wrote back and started sending her money twice a month, signing all of his letters, "Yours, Senior Airman Christian O'Donnel."

My father's tour in Germany was up that winter. He flew to Chicago to visit my mother in her studio apartment on the south side. It snowed constantly, she told me, and the city was strangely quiet. He moved into the living room with his duffel bag of possessions, and they spent Christmas together, holed up on the 17<sup>th</sup> floor of her tenement building, watching soap operas and listening to Bee Gees records, my mother's belly swelling more and more each day. They married after two weeks. She always claimed to have been the one who proposed. I could tell it was important for me to know that.

My father was relocated to Fort Jackson, South Carolina, and I was born late in January, in the Palmetto Health Baptist Hospital. My mother tells me over and over again how it happened. I was red like a plum, and slimy like a toad. She told the doctors not to clean me yet, and told my father to take off his shirt. He took it off and held me against his chest, his pink panther tattoo stretching and contracting as he breathed.

"My boy," he said.

She tells me that he cried then, and that it was the only time she'd ever seen him cry.

□

When I was in preschool and my father was away for field training, I would sometimes get restless. I used to do terrible things, like smear shoe polish on my cheeks and run naked through the neighbors' backyards, or tease Kaitlyn—the autistic girl who rode my bus—about the way she constantly licked her lips. That's when I'd get a call from Thunderman. My mother would lock me in my bedroom and tell me to think about what I'd done wrong. A while later, she'd come in with the cordless phone and say that "he" wanted to talk to me, which is frightening when you're four years old.

"Adrian," he would say in a voice that was affectedly deep, but sounded a lot like my father's. "Do you know who this is?"

"Thunderman?" I would say.

"That's right," he would say. "Why are you being a bad little boy for your mommy?"

"I don't know."

"You don't know? Do you know what it feels like to be struck by lightning?"

My mother would usually snatch the phone away when the gag went too far, but every time it stormed, she would look out the window and sigh.

"Do you hear Thunderman out there, Adrian?" she would say. "Some little boy must have been misbehaving. It wasn't you, was it?"

There was always something conflicted about her voice, about the way she looked out the window—as if she wasn't afraid at all, but actually hoping to see something, to summon the man behind the sound.

□

When my father was home, we used to drive down to the airstrip at Pope Air Field and watch the planes take off. I remember all of their names. At age six, I could identify aircraft by sight, some by sound. The C130 Hercules, the C-17 Globemaster, the C-5 Galaxy. I knew the difference between an F-14, an F-15, an F-16, and an F-18 by looking at the engines and tailfins. If a helicopter flew over our block, I could judge by the sound of the rotors whether it was a Black Hawk, an Apache, or a Chinook.

There was a dirt parking lot alongside the north end of the runway at Pope. My father would let us ride in the bed of his S-10 if it wasn't raining, and we'd always jump out into the dirt before the truck had even stopped. We'd weave our fingers into the chain-link fence that separated our world from the world of roaring jet engines and watch the fighter pilots climb up their ladders in anti-gravity suits. My father taught us to salute the pilots as they taxied out from the apron, since they were officers. Some nights, the pilots would see us—through their golden cockpit canopies, see my brother and I throwing up crooked child salutes—and they would salute back before they throttled up into the dusk, leaving in their wake a sound like thunder. A strong and good kind of thunder.

□

Randy Shughart used to come to all the Sturgis Street barbeques and birthday parties, when he was around. I remember him teaching me a magic trick once. It seemed like he was levitating right there on the sidewalk, but he explained that it was only a matter of perception, and all I had to do was go up on the tip-toe of one foot while someone watched from behind.

Randy died in Mogadishu when I was five. He was providing sniper cover from an MH-6 Little Bird during Operation Gothic Serpent. Late in the afternoon of October 3, 1993, Somali militia fighters shot down two Black Hawks—Super Six One and Super Six Four—with rocket-propelled grenades. By his own request, Shughart was dropped into the city to help defend the crash site of Super Six Four, along with Master Sergeant Gary Gordon. The two fought their way through the maze of hot, dirt streets, each armed with only a sniper rifle and a 9mm. Hundreds of angry Somalians converged on the wrecked helicopter, skinny as black fence posts, strung out on khat and waving their AK-47s above their heads. The Rangers called them booger-eaters.

Shughart and Gordon made it to the crash site, where they helped Mike Durant defend his helicopter. Durant's femur was broken. The bone was jutting out from his skin and his flight suit. One of his vertebra had been crushed.

It wasn't long before Gordon was shot and killed. Shughart took Gordon's weapon and gave it to Durant. They ran out of ammunition. The mob came closer, grew louder. The whites of their eyes bulged out, spidered with red veins. At quarter to six, they shot and killed Randy Shughart and took Durant as a hostage. Durant made the cover of *TIME* magazine. The five o'clock news showed footage of naked American corpses being dragged through the streets of Mogadishu. One of the corpses was Randy Shughart.

I remember when it came on our television. I didn't know what it was all about at the time, but my mother stood up from the couch. When the story ended, the news anchor started talking about Michael Jordan, how he might be leaving the NBA to play baseball. My mother went out the front door, and I saw her crossing the street, walking up to the Shugharts' door. She didn't come back for hours. Tristan and I changed the channel. *The Tommyknockers* was on Sci-Fi.

□

When I found out Randy had died in battle, I remember wishing he could've used his levitation trick to save himself. I still wish that.

□

Sallie Shughart was the first girl I ever kissed. It was 1994, and Randy had been dead for almost a year. We hid behind the boxwood hedge in my backyard and pressed our lips together slowly, like scientists putting together parts of a missile. She told me to stick out my tongue. I stuck out my tongue, and she touched it with hers. I remember the warm, stale taste. We took turns bouncing on her solo trampoline after that, talking about what kind of house we could live in together and how many kids we could have. We needed each other—Sallie and I—but I couldn't see it at the time.

"I'm going to be a fighter pilot when I grow up," I told her.

She stopped bouncing and looked at me.

"You can't, Adrian," she said.

"Yes I can," I said. "Look how good my sight is. I can see the numbers on my mailbox from here."

"I don't want you to be a soldier," she said. "You can't ever be one, okay?"

"I don't know."

"Just don't, okay?" she said.

"That's what I've wanted to do my whole life."

"Adrian," she pleaded and stepped off the trampoline.

"What?" I said.

"I probably won't ever let you kiss me again if you do that."

We both stared at each other for a moment, exchanging telepathic messages.

"I actually don't think I really liked kissing you earlier," I told her.

We were still friends after that, but things were different. We never

touched tongues again or talked about being married. At a block party on the fourth of July, I was showing off my new levitation trick to Jorge and his father, and I noticed Sallie's face watching me through the darkness from behind a burning sparkler. I'm pretty sure I broke her heart, in more ways than one. For that I am still sorry.

□

I never did become a pilot. Not a crew chief, either. Not a Delta Force sharpshooter, or a combat medic, or even a helicopter mechanic. I tried to join the Air Force after high school, but I failed the physical because of my eczema. I had perfect eyesight, a perfect GPA, and I could do 70 pushups in a minute, but that wasn't enough. Maybe the eczema came from my mother's DNA. Maybe she was my saving grace. Or maybe it was Sallie Shughart, and her face behind that sparkler.

I'll never win the Congressional Medal of Honor. Never earn my flight wings. Never be awarded a bronze star or a distinguished service medal. I'll never climb any ladders into the cockpits of 20-million-dollar killing machines. But I think that's the way it was meant to be. I owe my life to my father, to Gary Shughart, to the men of Sturgis Street. I owe my life to my mother, but I know I'll never have the opportunity to give it.

I studied journalism in college. No one cared how good I was at shining shoes, or whether I knew aircraft nomenclature. It was all AP style and how to write a good lead and how to be sensational.

I sometimes have nightmares about my father's face being on the cover of *TIME* magazine. Bloodied from the explosion at Khobar Towers, his mustache clipped short by shrapnel, one of his eyes swollen shut. I dream that I've written headlines over his ear—"What are We Doing in Saudi Arabia?," "Oil-Hunger Masquerades as Nation-Building"—defaming what is a larger-than-life picture of my dead father. I dream of Somalians dragging naked bodies up Sturgis Street by their wrists and leaving them at our old house. All of the bodies are my father.

I want to visit Germany—to find the nightclub where my parents met each other. I want to stand over the crater in Dhahran where the tanker truck exploded and pray or shout or leave a note or something. My mother says it's all a bad idea, but she won't tell me why. It was such a long time ago, she says. And she's right. It happened in another decade, another century. All the stories have already been written, photographs already been photographed. But I keep seeing building 131 in my head, opened up like a dollhouse. I keep picturing my father wrapping that t-shirt around his wrist. I keep tasting Sallie Shughart's six-year-old tongue. And I get confused about what was the past, and what is now, and which is actually more imminent and inescapable.

□

It was overcast and humid the day of my father's funeral. You could smell a storm on the air. The service was held at Rockfish Memorial Park in Fayetteville, furnished with all the trappings of a dignified, military funeral, courtesy of the U.S. Air Force. His coffin was covered with an American flag, carried in by a color guard. They folded the flag up, touching it with the tips of their white-gloved fingers, and one of them handed it to my mother—the "next of kin." A reserve officer held up a ceremonial bugle on a knoll about fifty yards off. A device implanted in the bugle's bell played a recorded version of "Taps," amplified by the natural acoustics of the instrument. I put my hand over my heart like everyone else and motioned for Tristan to do the same. There would've been a 21-gun salute, but my mother objected to the idea. She'd told Lt. Col. Haverton that she didn't want to hear any gun shots or explosions ever again.

Many of our neighbors were there—the wives in black dresses with shoulder pads and veils over their faces, the men wearing class-A uniforms from their respective military branches. Mrs. Shughart was there, and I worried that she might never blink again.

My mother was calm. I remember holding Tristan's hand with my right, and my mother's hand with my left. We were all joined together that way. When the fake bugler finished playing "Taps," we were each to toss a handful of soil onto my father's coffin. The minister read a passage about ashes returning to ashes, dust to dust, and we knelt down to pick up our handfuls of fresh earth, but before we could toss them, a jolt of white electricity streaked across the horizon, like the flash bulb of a giant camera, and seconds later, the sound of thunder—deep and ancient—filled the cemetery. It was the sound of my childhood, and of the rest of my life, and my heart rattled in my chest. The guests flinched at the sound.

My mother stopped and looked at me, looked at Tristan, a fistful of brown dirt trickling out between her fingers, and I knew we were thinking the same thing.

Nonfiction

# Buttons Tendered

An Index Becoming of Gertrude Stein

Words • Concepts • Gestures

Marci Vogel

*What do you tell and how do you tell it.*<sup>1</sup>

## AS

*Everything begins with A*, writes Gertrude Stein in 1940 in *To Do: A Book Alphabets and Birthdays*, a text that was not published until 1957 and not as its own book until 2011. This most recent rendition assumes the form of picture book, as one might expect of writing organized around the alphabet; the pictures are indeed whimsical, such that they might be enjoyed by children, for whom alphabets and birthdays hold particular significance. Children may also very well be able to read many of the words and enjoy the author's play of language,<sup>2</sup> and yet this text did not find publication for years after it was written because publishers rejected it as fitting for children. That it is now a book with pictures does not make it any more or less so, does not render the text any less (or more) complex, does not change "the challenging linguistic exercises ... the recurrent sense of menace in some of the stories."<sup>3</sup> This, then, is a picture book that works both as itself and as something else, as something that "colors outside the lines and then ... move[s] the lines to capture the liberated color."<sup>4</sup> This book was published just last year, and yet it accomplishes what Stein claimed nearly three-quarters of a century ago was the business of the artist: "to be exciting... By exciting I mean it really does something to you really inside you."<sup>5</sup> What Stein set out to do was to create new ways of *doing something* through language. This, of course, meant using language in new ways, which, at the same time, meant thinking in new ways, which meant, as

William Carlos Williams wrote of Stein in 1935, "smashing every connotation that words have ever had, in order to get them back clean... Unbound thinking has to be done with straight, sharp words. Call them nails to hold together the joints of the new architecture."<sup>6</sup> See **AS**, as in *something working as something else: words as nails, the sounds of words as hammers, compositions as collections that do something really do something to us*. See **KNOWING** not as succession but as "immediate existing," poetry as calling (an intensive, see **NAMING**),<sup>7</sup> picture book as poetry lesson.<sup>8</sup> See composition as **REPRESENTATION**, essay as attempt, its original meaning. See also: "Act so that there is no use in a center."<sup>9</sup>

## BUTTON

Instead of a center, we are offered collections of words, each word a button arranged among others, each arrangement tendering something new. Stein began writing the prose poems—some call them still lifes—that became *Tender Buttons* during the summer of 1912 while vacationing in Spain with her beloved Alice Toklas. She centered the compositions around everyday objects of their domestic life, but the arrangements themselves were anything but everyday. As Joshua Schuster notes, "Generating poems from such mundane experience was not on its own anything too radical, but in this new writing the banal objects appeared to atomize or discombobulate while the grammar was split apart at the seams."<sup>10</sup> See *buttons as on a keyboard* (see **TECHNOLOGY**); see *fingers pressing tenderly the key of each letter, each key a button tended, each tending a letter into word*. See *tender exchanging button for unknown*.

## CONSCIOUSNESS

Psychologists William James and Hugo Münsterberg were investigating the nature of consciousness at Radcliffe, circa 1895.<sup>11</sup> Stein is there at the same place, the same time studying, being influenced. See *consciousness as a continuous becoming*. See **KNOWING**; see **SIMULTANEITY**. See also the *C that begins cahier, the notebook always ready, capturing consciousness in the moment of occurrence*.

## DOCUMENT

"There is none," writes Walter Benjamin, at the time in which Gertrude lived, "which is not at the same time a document of barbarism."<sup>12</sup> In a document published thirty years after Benjamin's "Theses on the Philosophy of History," Michael Kaufmann writes of Stein: "She writes not of things in words but of words as things, things with outsides and insides and histories and futures. As Picasso elucidates the essential shape of a carafe, so Stein elucidates the essen-

tial form contained in the word. She makes not a physical shape but a verbal and ideational one, and so shapes a reality of language."<sup>13</sup> This shaping allows us to see language consciously, see it afresh, an attempt (as an essay is an attempt) to unhinge barbarism from document. As Kaufmann observes, "If we cannot see language, see print, language uses us rather than the reverse."<sup>14</sup> Stein herself reminds us: "There are two things a dictionary and the country."<sup>15</sup> See **LIBERATION**; see composer John Cage (born one hundred years ago, around the time *Tender Buttons* was published): "Get out of whatever cage you find yourself in." See **HISTORY**. Repeat.

### EPIGRAPH

"What do you tell and how do you tell it."<sup>16</sup> No question mark. See above. See influences; see quotations; see an inscribing on, a carving in the skin.

### FEELING

See "a single hurt color."<sup>17</sup>

### GENRE

Stein wasn't the only Modernist who broke traditional distinctions of genre. Across the Channel, Virginia Woolf was writing essay as fiction, fiction as poem, essay as correspondence, correspondence as criticism, all of it aiming for liberation. Hermione Lee quotes from Woolf's diary: "I am doubtful if I shall ever write another novel... Were I another person, I would say to myself, Please write criticism; biography; invent a new form for both; also write some completely unformal fiction: short; & poetry..."<sup>18</sup> Unformal, not as in casual but *un-* as in *not*, as in something else, as in not constrained by. See **EPIGRAPH**: *What do you tell and how do you tell it, what and how joined in the same sentence, meaning: do both at the same time*. See **SIMULTANEITY**, *concept as gesture*, **GENRE** as **OBJECT** lesson; see **X** marks the spot, *nexus of form and thought*.

### HISTORY

"Let me tell recite what history teaches. History teaches" is the last line of Stein's "If I Told Him. A Completed Portrait of Picasso." It is a portrait composed of lines (some very short, some very long), as a poem in verse might be; there is repetition, there is melody, as a poem might have. Picasso is portrayed as well in three other Stein texts: *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas* (1933), *Everybody's Autobiography* (1937), and *Picasso* (1938). Each text claims a kind of truth expected from writing that portrays real people, but as Hélène Klein

points out, "In all three texts ... Stein tells us a story, not the History that she no doubt would have liked to have lived and perhaps even believed that she had lived ... her openly hagiographic narrative is not the least bit bothered with historical truth..."<sup>19</sup> What does history teach and how does it teach it?<sup>20</sup> As for *how*, Benjamin would respond: "Universal history has no theoretical armature. Its method is addictive; it musters a mass of data to fill the homogeneous, empty time. Materialistic historiography, on the other hand, is based on a constructive principle. Thinking involves not only the flow of thoughts, but their arrest as well."<sup>21</sup> As for *what*, Stein merges it with the *how*, so that questions are presented without question marks, questions as facts merged with the immediate enormity of feeling: "Why is there more craving than there is in a mountain. Why is there so much useless suffering. Why is there."<sup>22</sup> See **HISTORY** as a habit of perception, a habit made to be broken; see **DOCUMENT**, Benjamin: *There is no document which is not at the same time a document of barbarism*. See Williams: *smashing the words clean*.

### INTIMACY

Between writer and reader, it is a quality that arises in the act of reading as reader completes the writing, an immediacy of shared experience. As Hermione Lee notes: "Books change their readers; they teach you how to read them. But readers also change books..."<sup>23</sup> Gertrude tells intimacy as this way: "Undoubtedly that audience has to be there for the purpose of recognition as the telling is proceeding to be written and that audience must be at one with the writing, must be at one with the recognition..."<sup>24</sup> See **INTIMACY** as in immediacy, a gradual becoming, a complete entering, as in it really does something to you. See also: **KNOWING**, or **BUTTON**, *tender exchange of*.

### KNOWING

For Stein, knowing was immediate consciousness, fully experienced in the moment of recognition: "How do you know anything, well you know anything as complete knowledge as having it completely in you at the actual moment that you have it. That is what knowledge is, and essentially therefore knowledge is not succession but an immediate existing."<sup>25</sup> See **INTIMACY**; see also the **K** in kind, as in tender, as in kissing kin, as in a kind of fierceness that uncovers blindness, spectacular **VISION**.

### LIBERATION

Of Stein's innovative work, Donald Sutherland notes: "I think one has to like freedom in order to like [it] at all... One has to want a work to be itself, on its own ... [a]s one presumably wants to be, oneself. One has to want a work

to find its own spontaneous logic and form its ideas on the way rather than follow out a preconception.”<sup>26</sup> Stein confirms: “I found myself plunged into a vortex of words, burning words, cleansing words, liberating words, feeling words, and the words were all ours, and it was enough that we held them in our hands to play with them; whatever you can play with is yours, and this was the beginning of knowing.”<sup>27</sup> See **DOCUMENT** as **BUTTON**, *key to the prison*.

## MODEL

And of Stein’s experimentation, Weinstein observes: “Writers and painters seem as a group most responsive... Perhaps her influence has been most acute on poets, since poets are continually being absorbed by language and intoxicated by the effects it can evoke.”<sup>28</sup> Indeed, in her 2007 book-length study, Deborah Mix investigates Stein as offering new vocabularies of thinking for contemporary women writers Harryette Mullen, Lyn Hejinian, Teresa Hak Kyung Cha, Daphne Marlatt, and Betsy Warland. Whether any work results in genius is perhaps for others to judge, but one quality of genius seems to be its influence on others. Perhaps genius, too, is the capacity to remain open to being influenced. Of genius, Stein offers this: “I once said and I think it is true that being a genius is being one who is one at one and at the same time telling and listening to anything or everything.”<sup>29</sup> By genius then, perhaps we mean capacity (see **X**), an embracing of the genie in the bottle that is the possibility offered in language. We are reading and we are writing; we are rendering a new way of seeing and becoming changed. It is a process both gradual and immediate, this smashing, this atomizing. Mina Loy, living at the same time as Stein wrote of her: “Gertrude Stein / Curie / of the laboratory / of vocabulary / she crushed / the tonnage / of consciousness / congealed to phrases / to extract / a radium of the word.”<sup>30</sup> See **MODEL** as *mode*; see also *fashion*, as in: *how to fashion one’s work, one’s life*; see a *new way of being*. See **LIBERATION**, **VISION**; see *the model painting herself*. See **INTIMACY**.

## NAMING

As much as Stein concludes anything, she “came to the conclusion that poetry was a calling an intensive calling upon the name of anything...”<sup>31</sup> and it is perhaps in this way that *Tender Buttons* works most saliently as a poem. For Michael Kauffman, *Tender Buttons* “is a narrative of naming—a narrative with no plot, character, or action in the conventional sense—simply a narrative of the mind encountering language and print.”<sup>32</sup> Perhaps narrative, perhaps poetry, perhaps both, and more; there is no question that naming is involved, as indicated by the nouns used to name the heading of each section: Objects, Food, Rooms. But names often lose their shine; over time and use,

the mind fills in so that names do not so much call as indicate, and it this unconsciousness of habit we fall into when using names that *Tender Buttons* works against, as Sutherland points out: “...much of the effort in *Tender Buttons* is to replace or to shock the name of anything in order to restore the sense of immediate unprepared experience.”<sup>33</sup> This freshening of experience occurs in the placement of names among other names in utterly new ways, ways that both anticipate and break our habits of naming and reading. It occurs in the resistance to define the meaning of what is named, offering direct experience as definition, arrangements of words and sounds. This is how a handkerchief becomes “a winning of all the blessings, a sample not a sample because there is no worry.”<sup>34</sup> Naming as narrative, calling as poetry; definition as experience, handkerchief as blessing. If anyone’s ever handed you a handkerchief when you’ve really needed one, you understand utterly the fresh experience of directness, no definition needed. See **NAMING** as in *new baby*, *weighed in pounds for the first time*; see *music calling into existence newly*.

## OBJECT

As in lesson, as in concept that becomes form, as in a genre gesturing into being, tendering its own button, tendering us another way, tenderly.

## PRESENT

As in continuous. As in continuous action, never completed because always becoming. The verb always happening, as in: “Loving is certain if one is going on loving. Loving then in a way is certain. Loving is certain when one is going on loving.”<sup>35</sup> See **PRESENT** as *gift*.

## Q

Is for skipping over. “The sister was not a mister.”<sup>36</sup>

## REPRESENTATION

In her essay, “The Prose Poem as Modernist Genre,” Marguerite Murphy articulates the question of representation as one of Modernism’s preoccupations: “Modernity influences not only *what* one represents, but *how* representation can take place.”<sup>37</sup> (See: *What do you tell and how do you tell it*.) For Stein, representation includes not simply how words look but how they sound. She captures, or tries to, in as much as something can be captured in the moment it is occurring. She represents by rendering, as Murphy notes, “...the synesthetic dimension of experience and art as she ponders how color represents, and the relationship between color and sound; in other words the conversion

of new ways of looking into a new language.<sup>38</sup> See Stein, *Tender Buttons*: “It is so very agreeable to hear a voice and to see all the signs of that expression. Cadences, real cadences, real cadences and a quiet color.”<sup>39</sup> See **REPRESENTATION** as putting on new glasses, not once, not twice but re-, again and again, each time newly. See **VISION** hearing sound. See also **EPIGRAPH**: What do you tell and how do you tell it. See **HISTORY** as new **DOCUMENT**.

### SIMULTANEITY

Everything being composed, all at once, as in: “There was a whole collection made. A damp cloth, an oyster, a single mirror, a manikin, a student, a silent star, a single spark, a little movement and the bed is made.”<sup>40</sup> See *multiple*; see **ZERO**.

### TECHNOLOGY

As in explosion of during the time Stein lived, 1874–1946. See *all things modern: telegraph, telephone, teletype machine, type as a magic button*.

### UN-

As in dismantling. See **GENRE**.

### VISION

Is not the same as verisimilitude; there are cameras for that. See **TECHNOLOGY**.

### WHAT IS & IS NOT

See “A willow and no window, a wide place stranger, a wideness makes an active center.”<sup>41</sup>

### X

Of it, Stein writes, “X is difficult, and X is not much use and it is kind of foolish that X should have been put into the alphabet, it almost makes it an elephant,” and simultaneously, “X is funny anybody knows that it is funny even X itself knows it is funny.”<sup>42</sup> At the nexus where X crosses exists the facility to hold two seemingly opposite ideas at once: X as an object lesson of capacity, of widening “the field of consciousness,” which, as Weinstein notes, is exactly what Stein’s work does: “alters ... the quantity of consciousness—the size...”<sup>43</sup> As such, X is a particular gift, such as one might receive, in fact, for one’s birthday or perhaps Christmas. In the story X tells, X can sometimes stand for the C in Christmas: “It is very confusing, why should there be an X in Christmas when

there is no X in Christmas why should there be one...” there is not necessarily a reciprocity between the letters: “...a Xylophone can not turn an X into a C.”<sup>44</sup> Not every letter holds the same value or can be used in the same way in differing situations. There is an exactitude that must be upheld. And yet, there is also a pull to tender an exchange, along with disappointment at not being able to do so. It is a C that Xylophone wants for Consolation of not being able to turn X into C, and it is understandable, this wanting to be consoled when one is unable to change one’s circumstances, to widen one’s capacity or field. But letters do not occupy the field in solitude; there are other letters around in an order; they play with each other to make a grammar, and sometimes there is generosity in the composition, as with a boy named Charlie King who offers Xylophone either his C or his K in exchange for a xylophone on his birthday. See *story as OBJECT lesson*; see *letters as tender, letters as consolation*. See *letters don’t live in isolation; neither do we*.

### YELLOW

Yellow as a happy thing is not so unusual, but Stein equates it syntactically with a tiny violent noise, letting us both see in Technicolor (a process invented in 1916) and hear in stereo (demonstrated by Clément Ader as the first two-channel audio system in Paris in 1881). See **FEELING**. See “a yellow happy thing is a gentle little tinkle that goes in all the way it has everything to say.”<sup>45</sup>

### ZERO

Of this last letter, this last tender button, Stein tells: “I like Z because it is not real it just is not real and so it is a nice letter nice to you and nice to me, you will see.”<sup>46</sup> What will we see? If we regard closely (see **INTIMACY**), perhaps we will see what we do not yet perceive, and in our seeing will lay a multiplicity of possibility, as in: “And if Zero was not a hero if he was not a real hero there would not be a billion of them there would only be one one single one. And if Zero was not a hero well if Zero was not a hero how could anything be begun if there was only one one one.”<sup>47</sup> See *one as everything becoming at once*.

### NOTES

- 1 Gertrude Stein, *Narration: Four Lectures by Gertrude Stein* (1935; repr., Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010), 31. Hereafter referred to as *Narration*.
- 2 For example: “Way up in the sky ever so high was something flying it was not a bird it was not a bat it was not a hat, it was an airplane and that was that.” Gertrude Stein, *To Do: A Book of Alphabets and Birthdays*, illus. Giselle Potter, introd. Timothy Young (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011), 51. Hereafter referred to as *To Do*.
- 3 *Ibid.*, 7.
- 4 *Ibid.*, 8.
- 5 *Narration*, 41.
- 6 William Carlos Williams, “A 1 Pound Stein” in *Selected Essays* (New York: New Directions, 1969), 163.
- 7 *Narration*, 20 & 25.



- 8 For example: “A poem has to have big teeth, /And a poem has to say forget-me-nots. / I do not know why / But this is no lie. / This is what a poem has to do. / And a poem has to have a birthday. How could one know how old a poem is if it never had a birthday.” *To Do*, 99.
- 9 Gertrude Stein, *Tender Buttons: Objects, Food, Rooms*. (1914; repr., Los Angeles: Green Integer Print, 2002), 63. Hereafter referred to as *Tender Buttons*.
- 10 Joshua Schuster, “The Making of Tender Buttons,” *Jacket2* (April 21, 2011), <https://jacket2.org/article/making-tender-buttons>.
- 11 Gertrude Stein, *Three Lives: Stories of the Good Anna, Melanctha, and the Gentle Lena*, introd. Anne Charters (1909; repr., London: Penguin Books, 1990). Charters notes James’s influence on Stein on pages xii & xiii.
- 12 Walter Benjamin, “Theses on the Philosophy of History” in *Illuminations*, trans. Harry Zohn (1955; repr., New York: Schocken Books, 2007), 256.
- 13 Michael Edward Kaufmann, “Gertrude Stein’s Re-Vision of Language and Print in *Tender Buttons*,” *Journal of Modern Literature* 15, no. 4 (Spring, 1989), 450.
- 14 *Ibid.*, 452.
- 15 Gertrude Stein, *How to Write*, introd. Patricia Meyerowitz. (1931 as *Grammar, Paragraphs, Sentences, Vocabulary, Etcetera.*; repr., Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, 1975), 19.
- 16 *Narration*, 31.
- 17 *Tender Buttons*, 9.
- 18 Hermione Lee, “Virginia Woolf’s Essays” in *The Cambridge Companion to Virginia Woolf*, eds. Sue Row and Susan Sellars (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 99.
- 19 H el ene Klein, “Gertrude Stein and Pablo Picasso: In Their Own Words,” trans. Alison Anderson in *The Steins Collect: Matisse, Picasso, and the Parisian Avant-Garde*, eds. Janet Bishop, et al. (New Haven and London: San Francisco Museum of Modern Art in Association with Yale University Press, 2011), 243–248.
- 20 A version of this question is asked by Susan McCabe in the introduction for her University of Southern California graduate course: Modernist Forms of Temporal Imagination. Fall, 2012.
- 21 Benjamin, “Philosophy of History,” 262.
- 22 *Tender Buttons*, 77.
- 23 Lee, “Essays,” 91.
- 24 *Narration*, 60.
- 25 *Ibid.*, 20.
- 26 Donald Sutherland, *Gertrude Stein: A Biography of Her Work* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1951), 84.
- 27 Stein quoted in Deborah Mix, *A Vocabulary of Thinking: Gertrude Stein and contemporary North American women’s innovative writing* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2007), 149.
- 28 Norman Weinstein, *Gertrude Stein and the Literature of the Modern Consciousness* (New York: Frederick Ungar Publishing Co., 1970), 128.
- 29 *Narration*, 34.
- 30 Mina Loy, “Gertrude Stein,” *The Massachusetts Review* 35, no. 2 (Summer, 1993), 244.
- 31 *Narration*, 25.
- 32 Kaufman, “Gertrude Stein’s Re-Vision,” 450.
- 33 Sutherland, *Gertrude Stein*, 75.
- 34 *Tender Buttons*, 24.
- 35 Gertrude Stein, “A Long Gay Book” in *A Stein Reader*, ed. Ulla Dydo (Evanston, Ill: Northwestern University Press, 1993), 170.
- 36 *Tender Buttons*, 65. This entry also recalls Mr. Ramsay’s inability to conjure an idea for Q in Virginia Woolf’s *To the Lighthouse*.
- 37 Marguerite S. Murphy, introd., *Family Portrait: American Prose Poetry 1900–1950*, ed. Robert Alexander (Buffalo: White Pine Press, 2006), 20.
- 38 *Ibid.*
- 39 *Tender Buttons*, 71.
- 40 *Ibid.*, 68.
- 41 *Ibid.*, 77.
- 42 *To Do*, 107–108.
- 43 Weinstein, *Gertrude Stein*, 7.
- 44 *To Do*, 112.
- 45 Stein, “A Long Gay Book,” 170.
- 46 *To Do*, 120.
- 47 *Ibid.*, 127.

## Amanuensis

Leah Schnellbach

She gets up every morning and puts the water on. When the anger boils up, she tries to do this with her eyes shut, navigating heat and handle, listening for bubbling and steam, but her hand’s courage always fails when the warmth surrounds it, and her eyes stutter open. Her eyelids have their own will, and her hands their own fear.

She pours both cups before she gets the old man. Each morning he is waiting for her, sitting up on the bed, staring down. She had stopped making faces at him once she was certain of his blindness. She tries not to look at his eyes. Her hands wash him, dress him, empty his pot. He says nothing to her. She places his bread in one hand, his spoon in the other, and touches her lip to his tea to make sure it will not burn him. There is milk enough for his taste, and even a little honey.

After breakfast, they resume his work. For the third time since his blindness she has read them up to John’s Gospel. She can’t hurry, she can’t miss a word—he corrects her every time, and becomes angry when he catches her trying to trick him. Sometimes, however, she outwits him: today the first word he speaks to her is ‘love,’ after she pretends to stumble over “This is my commandment: that ye love one another, as I have loved you.”

If he understands her intent his face does not betray it.

After the resurrection he allows silence to enshroud the room, and waves away the doubt of Thomas; she closes the book and retrieves his paper and ink as quietly as she can.

When he speaks, it is precisely where they left off when the sun set yesterday

evening: "Horror and doubt distract his troubl'd thoughts, and from the bottom stir the Hell within him, for within him Hell he brings, and round about him, nor from Hell one step no more then from himself can fly..." If she has to ask him to repeat a phrase he'll curse loudly enough to bring the neighbors to the door. She tries again to focus on the ache in her hand, as it grows and glows like a coal under her skin, tries to ignore the fingers jerking and moving on their own, following his voice, dancing across the paper like a cat after vermin, as he speaks of the Devil.

She knows that she ought to be grateful to serve him. Her father is a great man, a great philosopher, and others travel for miles and days to speak with him. But what exactly is she helping him to do? There is no money, the new wife is untrustworthy, the Lord Protector is dead. Her father speaks of him as an absent friend, forgetting that by the end he had come to distrust him. The letters that fill his days bring no money, only new enemies.

She can see no hope for them. She is writing words she would never speak in church. Words that are sure to sink them further into ruin. But he will not see that, and shows no sign of hearing her when she warns him, even though it was his eyes that failed, not his ears. The words come from him steadily, never stuttering, never hesitating, as though they are being told to him, just as he is telling them to her.

Poetry

# Melt

Sophie Dinicol

The hardest part is the thaw—  
when the ground that had cracked  
from the cold and then froze  
that way  
heats, begins to seep,  
turning soft.  
The streets are grey  
with slush but  
not enough to cover  
piles of shit that were made  
and left, and cigarettes strewn  
onto lawns,  
once buried by snow.  
You say you love  
the grey pavement, the brown grass,  
the way there is a bit  
of everything:  
the smell of old ground  
and warmer air.  
What was covered  
and what is coming.

Nonfiction

## Adorno, Auerbach, and Benjamin on Constitutive Subjectivity and the Redemption of History

Sarah Snyder

**T**he chronicler who narrates events without distinguishing between major and minor ones acts in accord with the following truth: nothing that has ever happened should be regarded as lost to history. Of course only a redeemed mankind is granted the fullness of the past—which is to say, only for a redeemed mankind has its past become citable in all its moments.<sup>1</sup>

—Walter Benjamin, “On the Concept of History”

In Walter Benjamin’s assessment of a redeemed mankind in his “On the Concept of History,” each moment of the past is able to speak in its particularity only through mankind’s apprehension of its necessary involvement in the totality of time. In Benjamin’s language of redemption, history becomes truth. For a study of history that accurately represents the contemporary, then, the aggregation of moments that have led to the temporal present of a society or an individual would be understood as a constellation of particulars giving rise to the current moment. History, of course, *is* such an aggregation of moments, but the nearness or farness of each past moment is generally conceived of in terms of its historical significance and its placement on the timeline of world events.

This fact points to a hierarchical organization of human historical experience, both individual and collective. For Benjamin, the seeming clarity of this orthogonal explication of history leads only to obfuscations when it demands linear causalities, which in turn encourages thought to make too facile evaluations regarding the movement of human history. In “On the Concept of History,” Benjamin bequeaths to the chronicler the task of making each moment of history fully present. However, for the member of a society so

entrenched in the linearity of time, this is a much more difficult conceptual and methodological undertaking than may first appear, and one that requires some elucidation and illustration. Fortunately, Benjamin did not foment his ideas in a vacuum, nor did they lay dormant within the discourse of philosophers, so we can make use of the ideas of two of his contemporaries in order to fully understand both the manifestation of this need to reclaim history and the way in which one might begin to realize the level of the problem regarding their own mediated subjectivity.

Benjamin’s invocation of the “chronicler” gives us a way into the complexity of this endeavor and calls to mind a passage in his friend Erich Auerbach’s *Mimesis*—a masterwork of literary historicism that exhibits exactly the methodology Benjamin regards as problematic. In *Mimesis*, Auerbach attempts to show how the content of the representation of reality in Western literature is mediated through technique, which is itself mediation insofar as it is a demonstration of the internalized social circumstances of the author. His historicism is an attempt to liberate the truth content of the artworks and what they might tell us about the subjective experience of life in various time periods. Auerbach’s project recalls the theoretical work of the second critic to which I will turn for assistance, Benjamin’s protégé and younger colleague within the Frankfurt School of Social Research, Theodor Adorno. Adorno’s claim that “technique is constitutive of art, because in it is condensed the fact that each artwork is a human artifact and that what is aesthetic in it becomes a human product”<sup>2</sup> is essential to my attempt to illustrate the possibilities for the hermeneutical employment of historicism within Benjamin’s framework. It is because of Benjamin’s influence on Adorno’s *Aesthetic Theory* that I invoke it specifically in order to show how Auerbach’s work on realism in the history of literature becomes significant for thought that would not subsume the particulars of history into a sweeping historical narrative.

In *Aesthetic Theory*, Adorno tells us that the emancipation from and reconciliation with myth is the truth content of an artwork and the voice of maturity of its author.<sup>3</sup> Art must make what cannot be made, and the way in which it speaks is through its form, though the work as a whole can only speak through the voice of criticism. Out of a tension between content and form, the truth content must be able to speak and make its demand for reality known. Implicit in this reality content is the idea that universals exist, and that truth is universal: “Great autonomous art originated in agreement with the emancipation of spirit; it could no more be conceived without an element of universality than could the latter. The principium individuationis, however, which implies the need for the aesthetically particular, is not only universal as a principle in its own right, it is inherent to the self-liberating subject. Its universal—spirit—is in terms of its own meaning not lodged beyond the particular individuals who bear it.”<sup>4</sup>

Prior to the writing and publication of *Aesthetic Theory*, Adorno collaborated with Max Horkheimer in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, a work of social theory which informs readers that myth and false clarity are synonymous.<sup>5</sup> Emancipation from this false clarity would require the reclamation of the truly human. This emancipation and redemption can only be effected through an investigation of the history of human consciousness that proceeds both dialectically, to show reality, and non-dialectically, both to grasp the ideological veil of society and to think how the world might be otherwise. In this attempt, each moment of the evolution of the Western world has a full stake in the universal totality of history even as so much of the past is obscure, mediated by its own circumstances as much as by the study of the history of its reality. It is not difficult to see the influence of Walter Benjamin in these ideas—in fact, many of them proceed directly from him, if in inchoate form. What is contributed by the addition of Adorno (and Horkheimer) to my explanation of Benjamin's bequeathal is the process of art criticism, which will bring into focus the relationship between the hermeneutics of Benjamin and Auerbach. It is vital to note that, in *Aesthetic Theory*, the necessity of criticism comes from the artwork's inability to speak for itself, thus requiring interpretation. For Adorno, it is the voice of a mature humanity that must speak through (the artist) and for (the critic) the artwork's truth content. And if this particular humanity is to attain to a full appreciation of the history of collective consciousness and universality, the mediations of each moment of the past must be felt in the present—objectivity demands a heightening of subjectivity.

In Adorno's framework, Auerbach's project, the study of literary realism—treating each subject through the unity of the common and tragic—requires at another level a unification of itself with nominalism in order to attain objective truth:

The *principium individuationis* in art, its immanent nominalism, is not a given but a directive. This directive not only encourages particularization and thus the radical elaboration of individual works. Bringing together the universals by which artworks are oriented, it at the same time obscures the boundary against unformed, raw empiria and thus threatens the structuration of works no less than it sets it in motion. Prototypical of this is the rise of the novel in the bourgeois age, the rise of the nominalistic and thus paradoxical form par excellence; every loss of authenticity suffered by modern art derives from this dialectic.<sup>6</sup>

To illustrate my use of Adorno's methodology, we must turn to the passage from *Mimesis* that is in question. In Auerbach's discussion of a passage from Proust, we are able to divine the humanity of a particular narrator that is in the temporal process of reclaiming the constituta of his subjective experience in such a way that points to an idea of the universal human experience of lost time. Auerbach tells us that Proust's narrator is an exemplum of mankind's at-

tempt at redemption through the illustration of the movement toward a fully recollected historical process. Through Adorno's criteria of truth content and the merging of universal and particular, in which we must also take note that "the historical tendency itself has a universal element,"<sup>7</sup> the Proust passage and Auerbach's assessment of it can be used to transcend mere historicism. This transcendence would allow thought to approach an understanding of the sociohistorical totality through the passage's appropriation of the image of the past "which threatens to disappear in any present that does not recognize itself as intended in that image."<sup>8</sup> Adorno's criteria for truth content allows for Benjamin's maxim that "there is no document of culture that is not at the same time a document of barbarism," but requires the artwork—and also, in the case of Auerbach's analysis, the critique—to show that barbarism within itself, even as the work struggles to transcend its own mediated nature.<sup>9</sup> In this way, the truth content of a historicist analysis of a work may be brought into line with historical materialism in order to reveal the fundamental problem of the study of history for the modern chronicler. In other words, it can be shown that Benjamin's concept of history—specifically, the ideas that "the past carries with it a secret index by which it is referred to redemption" and that "every age must strive anew to wrest tradition away from the conformism that is working to overpower it"<sup>10</sup>—can be united with the truth content of Auerbach's reading of Proust and the attitudes and orientations of both Proust and Auerbach can be shown as symptoms of a broken world.

The truth content of Proust, for Adorno, would be the tension that exists between the form of the work and the content. That is, between the literary technique and the conceptual potential for the aliveness of the past in the present, since the passage asserts that it is only in the quiet of an individual's physical-temporal maturity (old age) that the mind may become noisy again with the material of the past. Keeping Benjamin's dictum in mind, we might say that the possibility of endowing the constituted past with meaning and interpreting its ontological status is only possible in a mature mind in a mature era of the world—specifically, that of a redeemed humanity. It is for the purposes of illustrating the utopian vision of the reclamation of time through its negation in reality that I am specifically invoking Benjamin's idea of a redeemed and redeeming history. The passage cited from *À la recherche du temps perdu* points towards a sort of stillness, a pausing for breath, in the course of an individual experience which imputes the idea of a human totality. This is a posited collective that might feel its past in all of its wholeness and emancipate history from the forces of enlightenment and progress that require the domination of linear, and therefore repressible, historical consciousness. This is also a way of saying that time must be stopped in order to be felt. The implication of the supposed necessity for the subjective control over the past will ultimately give way to the truth content in Auerbach's historicism.

This truth content will emerge in a discussion of the task for Auerbach and, on another level, Adorno. Auerbach's project is to show how a work that is situated in temporally linear artistic form, such as that of the novel, but that also explicitly orients itself towards demonstrating how a non-linear idea of subjective time might possess a truth content that points both towards the mediation in the means of its production and towards a utopian vision of a redeemed human temporal consciousness. The further addition of Adorno's concept of the relationship between myth and false clarity, however, complicates the accessibility of the truth content of Proust that Auerbach attempts to delineate. While Auerbach does not fail in his interpretation of Proust, he can be shown to be himself illustrative of the problem of modernity, possessing latent truth content within his own narrative.

In the final chapter of *Mimesis*, Auerbach emphasizes that modern literature's assertion of the individual within the universal shows the struggle against the means of production that require time and history to be conceived in a linear, economic manner. Auerbach tells us that the idea that this struggle against time as a socially mediated, quantifiable category is the same for every person in our capitalist society is the universality at which the modern authors aim. In the novel form, the domination of an imposed linear time is felt in a particularly strong manner. The human experience of time that is related by Proust's narrator is by no means linear, quantifiable, or economic, even as it is mediated by the insistence of the industrial society that time is something that can be fragmented in order to be bought and sold. The autonomy of Proust's work is not without a plea for the liberation of subjective time that emerges from the struggle against standardization that is felt in human experience under late capitalism.

Auerbach's discussion of Proust begins with the following excerpt, which, for the sake of space, appears here in an abbreviated form:

It is a long time, too, since my father has been able to tell Mamma to "Go with the child." Never again will such hours be possible for me. But of late I have been increasingly able to catch, if I listen attentively, the sound of the sobs which I had the strength to control in my father's presence, and which broke out only when I found myself alone with Mamma. Actually, their echo has never ceased: it is only because life is now growing more and more quiet round about me that I hear them afresh, like those convent bells which are so effectively drowned during the day by the noises of the streets that one would suppose them to have been stopped for ever, until they sound out again through the silent evening air.<sup>11</sup>

In this passage, Auerbach sees the liberation of constituted moments in the history of a subjective consciousness, freed by the technique of free association—the resolution of inner and outer—that occasions them. He describes

this phenomenon in the following manner: "The stress is placed entirely on what the occasion releases, things which are not seen directly but by reflection, which are not tied to the present of the framing occurrence which releases them... His entire technique is bound up with a recovery of lost realities in remembrance, a recovery released by some externally insignificant and apparently accidental occurrence."<sup>12</sup> These occurrences are said to be given form by the consciousness that experiences them and continuity in the awareness of the single, uninterrupted self that has developed from the multiplicity of past moments: "With Proust a narrating 'I' is preserved throughout. It is not, to be sure, an author observing from without but a person involved in the action and pervading it with the distinctive flavor of his being."<sup>13</sup> It is in the very embrace of subjectivity that the narrator as self is capable of transcending his present subjectivity—his own purely subjective past experience becomes for him an object of reflection, and each minute particularity of the recollected experiences are freed in order to add up to a cohesive whole in the present experience of the one remembering.<sup>14</sup>

This representation of the reality of memory in the way that it is constituted and conditioned by an enduring "I" is reflective of the modern literary movement within narration towards displaying constituted subjectivity and internal experience. The representation of the everyman is far removed from the antique division of styles. Even further removed is the representation of the everyman's inner life and everyday reality, which is often even explicitly described as mediated through the sociopolitical form of the particular historical circumstance. Auerbach tells us that Proust and his contemporaries "present minor happenings, which are insignificant as exterior factors in a person's destiny, for their own sake or rather as points of departure for the development of motifs, for a penetration which opens up new perspectives into a milieu or a consciousness of the given historical setting."<sup>15</sup> These minor happenings serve as an occasion to examine the potential for memory and history to enter into individual perspective and transcend the particularity of present experience. This is shown in order to make manifest these small events in forming a cohesive historical whole that points up to universal experience—in other words, to affirm the need for and attempt to show the process of reclaiming the constituta of both an individual and a collective history from the passing of time.

Auerbach sees a modern denial of the false clarity in the myth of the efficacy of the timeline to explain the totality of life. That is, he reads in Proust a denial of the alleged mimetic capability of realism via the novel form, in Proust's repudiation of the portrayal of "big events" and their possibility for truth in terms of objective significance in the life of his narrator.<sup>16</sup> Auerbach explains that, in a move away from the linear progression of time expressed in the epic and most of the history of literature, Proust and his contempo-

aries focus on the unity of a whole person, usually in the form of excursions in memory that take place within the frame of the narrative but are not utterly dependent upon a systematic storytelling. This has the effect of portraying a greater reality through and for the narrator, who, even if not presented as omniscient, is capable of relaying events of the past in a subjective sense that lays claim to an intuitive ability to intimate the totality of his or her constituted experience. Here we can see that the lie is in the narrator's ability to fully possess and inhabit his own past. The truth content of Auerbach's analysis is precisely in the fact that he brings to light, without conceptualizing it himself, the fact that Proust illustrates the possibility of this circumstance coming about for a subject whose time is not, and can never be, his own. The subject's time is the time of society. His memories may be his own, but the form in which he is forced to experience the world is antagonistic to his experience and the events of his memory are not all equally accessible in a demonstrable, communicable fashion. The forces of material production may not declare themselves, but they are just as much a part of the constituting "I" as are the objects of sense in the environment of the "I."

Auerbach successfully shows that in modern literature, the tension between the form and content of the individual existence that is expressed in the literary form through the attempt at transcending strict narration has begun to effect liberation of the subjective individual's life in its multiplicity and wholeness. Historical particulars are increasingly treated as forms that belie something of a universal human experience. Of course, the universality of this experience is precisely in the fact that each individual self-consciousness is mediated through the barbarism of modernity and enlightenment that stand over and above each person's temporal experience. Another way of articulating this would be to say that the modern authors Auerbach discusses in his final chapter achieve an immanence to humanity in all of its complexity through the integration and examination of particular experiences in the temporal existence of the mediated and constituted subject. Put differently, this is to say that their emphatic denial of linear, homogeneous time in the face of a world of structured temporality is the truth content of their works.<sup>17</sup>

It is precisely this character of human life—that is, that each life is felt to its self as a totality of historical consciousness, which is attached to its particular world of experiences and also mediated by the collective memory—that is liberated in the modern literature of Proust. The double character that Proust's writing expresses, in its assertion both of the particularity and indivisibility of the experiences of a single individual and the self-consciousness that is felt as a transhistorical totality by that same person, aims at the universal truth of human experience. Writ large, the double character declares that this sublation of each historical particular into a whole is felt by all human beings in their unconscious struggle against the movement of linear time, or bourgeois

reality. Adorno would describe the expression, conscious and unconscious, of the universality of the individual experience of reality discussed by Auerbach as a proof of the authenticity and maturity of the moderns: "The more authentic the works, the more they follow what is objectively required, the object's consistency, and this is always universal... The power of the subject resides in its *methexis* in the universal, not in the subject's simple self-announcement."<sup>18</sup> This maturity is both in the overt presentation of the rebellion of the content of their work against its form and in the unconscious rejection of the subsumption of human time into machine time. To be sure, this is not the maturity of a redeemed mankind in full possession of its own history, only the expression of a human desire for that very possession—the totality of time, individual and collective. In other words, individuality, when it claims to be true individuality, betrays something more—a universal untruth in which each subjective experience in time, it is claimed, belongs to its subject. This is not the literature of a society in which time has been liberated from an oppressive, propagandistic idea of objective necessity in order to be possessed by its subject. Though we would have it otherwise, our experience of time is not, in fact, subjectively constituted, since we are all on the clock of progress and capitalism. Even the fact that there is an assertion of ownership of individual temporal experience betrays the barbarism of the economic view of temporality in Proust's (and our) society, since the idea of individual ownership is not an a priori concept possessed of objective ontological significance.

For Walter Benjamin, repressed collective consciousness must be reunified with the whole of history, and Proust's approach to the recollection of time past mirrors the way in which Benjamin sees the necessity of breaking up the idea of a homogeneous order to history. Particulars must exist in order to be integrated into a full, heterogeneous memory, and the evidence of this dialectical relationship is the appearance of truth. There must be a catalyst for this ability to pause time and examine its particulars, since the past appears for both Proust and Benjamin as a sort of half-remembered dream aided by an object that manifests itself as a monad but contains within itself a totality, or a way back into a particular forgotten circumstance that requires integration. It must not be forgotten that for Benjamin, Proust is still a document of barbarism, but Adorno's theory of truth content shows that this occasion is unequivocally the artwork. Within Proust's art, it is the rebellion of the life within the novel against linear temporality and against the form of the novel that betrays a particular tension of the modern world in the attempt to circumvent the reified, homogenous continuum of time and history. Put more succinctly: the truth content that emerges in Proust is the poverty of the modern world in modernity's attempt to evade the temporal homogeneity of time and reassert particulars within a historical universal. I have shown that this is also the project of Auerbach's and Benjamin's historicism and historical

materialism in their endeavor to elevate and enrich historical consciousness. This synthesis of the texts, with the aid of Adorno, betrays the real crisis in the relationship of the study of history to a self-aware modernity—its most mature yet most barbaric child—and shows us that there is still work to be done, since a fully redeemed mankind would not need to go in search of lost time.

## NOTES

- 1 Walter Benjamin, "On the Concept of History," trans. Harry Zohn, aphorism III.
- 2 Theodor W. Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, trans. Robert Hullot-Kentor (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 213.
- 3 *Ibid.*, 212.
- 4 *Ibid.*, 200.
- 5 Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, ed. Gunzelin S. Noerr, trans. Edmund Jephcott (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002), 8.
- 6 Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, 201.
- 7 *Ibid.*, 200.
- 8 Benjamin, "Concept of History," aphorism VI.
- 9 *Ibid.*, aphorism VII. Benjamin elaborates on the concept of barbarism: "To historians who wish to relive an era, Fustel de Coulanges recommends that they blot out everything they know about the later course of history. There is no better way of characterising the method with which historical materialism has broken. It is a process of empathy whose origin is the indolence of the heart, *acedia*, which despairs of grasping and holding the genuine historical image as it flares up briefly. Among medieval theologians it was regarded as the root cause of sadness. Flaubert, who was familiar with it, wrote: '*Peu de gens devineront combien il a fallu être triste pour ressusciter Carthage*.' The nature of this sadness stands out more clearly if one asks with whom the adherents of historicism actually empathize. The answer is inevitable: with the victor. And all rulers are the heirs of those who conquered before them. Hence, empathy with the victor invariably benefits the rulers. Historical materialists know what that means. Whoever has emerged victorious participates to this day in the triumphal procession in which the present rulers step over those who are lying prostrate. According to traditional practice, the spoils are carried along in the procession. They are called cultural treasures, and a historical materialist views them with cautious detachment. For without exception the cultural treasures he surveys have an origin which he cannot contemplate without horror. They owe their existence not only to the efforts of the great minds and talents who have created them, but also to the anonymous toil of their contemporaries. There is no document of civilization which is not at the same time a document of barbarism. And just as such a document is not free of barbarism, barbarism taints also the manner in which it was transmitted from one owner to another. A historical materialist therefore dissociates himself from it as far as possible. He regards it as his task to brush history against the grain."
- 10 *Ibid.*, aphorisms II and VI.
- 11 Erich Auerbach, *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature*, trans. Willard R. Trask (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1953) 544.
- 12 *Ibid.*, 541.
- 13 *Ibid.*
- 14 *Ibid.*, 542. Auerbach elaborates on Proust's method: "Proust aims at objectivity, he wants to bring out the essence of events: he strives to attain this goal by accepting the guidance of his own consciousness—not, however, of his consciousness as it happens to be at any particular moment but as it remembers things. A consciousness in which remembrance causes past realities to arise, which has long since left behind the states in which it found itself when those realities occurred as a present, sees and arranges that content in a way very different from the purely individual and subjective. Freed from its various earlier involvements, consciousness views its own past layers and their content in perspective; it keeps confronting them with one another, emancipating them from their exterior tempo-

ral continuity as well as from the narrow meanings they seemed to have when they were bound to a particular present. There is to be noted in this fusion of the modern concept of interior time with the Neo-Platonic idea that the true prototype of a given subject is to be found in the soul of the artist; in this case, of an artist who, present in the subject itself, has detached himself from it as observers and thus comes face to face with his own past."

- 15 *Ibid.*, 547.
- 16 *Ibid.* The devaluation of the event: "The exterior events which are the determining factors in the destinies of the novel's characters during the intervening lapses of time are mentioned only incidentally, in retrospect or anticipation. The ends the narrator has in mind are not to be seen in them; often the reader has to supplement them. The way in which the father's death is brought up in the passage cited above—incidentally, allusively, and in anticipation—offers a good example. This shift of emphasis expresses something we might call a transfer of confidence: the great exterior turning points and blows of fate are granted less importance; they are credited with less power of yielding decisive information concerning the subject; on the other hand there is confidence that in any random fragment plucked from the course of a life at any time the totality of its fate is contained and can be portrayed."
- 17 *Ibid.*, 549. Auerbach explains the project of the modern novelist: "[Modern writers] are guided by the consideration that it is a hopeless venture to try to be really complete within the total exterior continuum and yet to make what is essential stand out. Then they too hesitate to impose upon life, which is their subject, an order which it does not possess in itself . . . [T]here is always going on within us a process of formulation and interpretation whose subject matter is our own self. We are constantly endeavoring to give meaning and order to our lives in the past, the present, and the future, to our surroundings, the world in which we live; with the result that our lives appear in our own conception as total entities—which to be sure are always changing, more or less rapidly, depending on the extent to which we are obliged, inclined, and able to assimilate the onrush of new experience."
- 18 Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, 201–202.

# Eating Phở While Felix Jumps From Space

Greg Emilio

Steam peels off the tops of porcelain bowls  
brought out on trays by silent waitresses.  
It lingers at eye level, marking  
its passage, a spectral trajectory,  
like a comet's tail of ice and dust.  
There's a flat-screen television  
on the wall above the fish tank  
breaking news of Austrian base-jumper  
Felix Baumgartner: his legs dangling  
twenty four miles above our earth,  
suspended by a helium balloon  
above the stratosphere. Up there,  
our atmosphere looks like a cornea.  
We have to stand so close to someone  
to see their eyes the way he sees  
that disked edge gilt like the sheen  
of a glassed lake. My waitress says  
nothing when she sets down the bowl,  
then the oval plate of saw-leaf,  
basil, bean sprouts, and jalapeños.  
She nods, half-smiles, a fingernail moon,  
and I can see where the steam has left  
condensation across her brow.  
Vietnamese subtitles run under  
Felix's white body in descent,  
spiraling in divine ecstasy.  
A respectful slurping keeps cadence  
in the restaurant. A few cooks step out  
of the kitchen, leaning against tables,  
chins in their hands. I tear off  
each individual leaf of basil,  
tear apart the jagged stem of saw-leaf,  
drop both in the jaundice-colored broth.

I squeeze chili sauce from an unmarked  
plastic bottle, and see a model  
of the unstable body of Jupiter,  
where there is only a chaos  
of red, a surfaceless center.  
Down here, we also hunger  
for failure. Felix free-falls  
834 miles per hour, whirling,  
and whirling, his body breaching  
the speed of sound, belting a sonic  
boom into the air waves of our planet.  
Sufi dervishes spin with one palm up  
to receive God, the other hand cupped  
toward the earth to radiate His love.  
Felix tailspins, faceplate fogging,  
a white light building behind his eyelids  
as he gets closer, and closer to us.  
Down here, I untangle the core of rice  
noodles holding the other ingredients  
in orbit. A body's distance  
from the sun determines life  
or death. After four minutes, Felix  
levels out, palms down, pulls the rip  
cord, and finally lands, fleet-footed,  
on the desert floor in Roswell.  
I'm down to my last slices of filet  
in the puddle of broth. I wonder  
if he'll be with someone tonight,  
if he'll be close enough to say,  
*Your eyes are lovelier than the curve  
of earth's atmosphere. . . .* The slurps  
continue, the voices of the cooks crack  
like knuckles. The shy waitress returns  
to my table, leaves the tab face down.  
I say, "You have lovely eyes,"  
but she does not speak English.  
She smiles, leans to clear my tray.  
Later, I regret not giving her  
a bigger tip, writing *thank you*,  
or a haiku on the charge slip,  
any contrail to commemorate  
our star-crossed passages.





**A Heavy Thought**  
Paper Collage

Lindsay Mayer



**Whale Breaching**

Digital C-print

Richard Lapham



**Pigeons in Flight**

Digital C-print

Richard Lapham

*Silent Dinner for Seven* consists of a set of seven silver spoons, copies of a wooden spoon that my grandfather, a Dutch-Jewish resistance fighter, used in an unknown labor camp in the Netherlands during World War II. The spoon has been circulating in my family for almost seventy years. It is a testimonial object: it witnessed a tragic past, yet it is preserved in the silence of generations for which the past is too painful to recollect. This work focuses on this silence, which functions as both bearer of and barricade to the past. In silence, the past manifests itself, but is not yet clarified through processes of demystification. It embodies the space of imagination, longing and potential reconciliation.



### **Silent Dinner for Seven**

Installation detail: 7 silver spoons in flatware case;  
wooden labor camp spoon (1940 -1945)

Pieter Paul Pothoven



## Dear Uncle Larry

Connie Mae Oliver

Yonder glow the dead, in their private heaps, holding on,  
the cemetery your quiet building watches over,  
it grows warm as trees gather in, uptown,  
the closer they are, the cold lets out, I think about you,

I fear I am growing a child in my person, just as you suggested. Cough!  
The cinders of person missing. You speak as if  
we've died, but you don't know, you hold on in threes

and in the opacity of sea, which is not isolable even  
as it meanders through clarity—this is what you meant  
by interiors. Imagine a baby now, milky in me and swimming age by age.

Tent

Jon Henry

*Nonfiction*

# The Story of an Oud in Eleven Strings

Diala Lteif

## Two

Oum Kalthoum was an Egyptian-born diva, also known as the “voice of Egypt.” She was one of the prominent female figures in the Middle East. Her father, a Muslim religious figure, had taught her to sing the Quran. She claimed to know the entire book by heart. At the age of twelve, she was disguised as a boy by her father and entered into a small performing troupe. The famous oud player Zakariyya Ahmad spotted her at the age of sixteen for her exceptional vocal quality and invited her to come to Cairo, where her career as a singer was launched.

## ONE

It was the holy month of Ramadan, and I must have been ten or eleven back then. With more than fifty percent of the population in Lebanon being Muslim, the country as a whole respectfully started functioning on nocturnal hours. National television cooperated as well by rescheduling their shows for the evening. For thirty days that year they were showing at sundown episodes of a new sitcom based on the life of Oum Kalthoum. Back then I had a vague idea of who she was, as I had grown up with her songs as the background soundtrack to my life. But my dad was a big fan of hers, and I was probably more intrigued to understand more about “Papi” than about her. You see, “Papi” had just moved back from the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia where he worked for twenty years after fleeing the civil war. My memories and moments shared with him were strictly confined to the space of vacation time when we would visit, and share lunch and dinner with him. That Ramadan I sat for thirty consecutive days, quietly, in the living room of our house, to share my father’s passion for Oum Kalthoum.

**THREE**

In the televised series, a very talented Egyptian actress called Sabreen played the role of Oum Kalthoum. To preserve some authenticity, the production edited into the storyline both the actress playing the role of the diva and some of the original tapings of concerts by Oum Kalthoum. The diva was always accompanied by the oriental *takht* (Arabic for bed): a musical ensemble of six oriental instruments including an oud. In one of the concerts, Oum Kalthoum sang in her hypnotic voice “*Inta ‘Omri*.” The rendition of the song was so dramatic that through the old recording I could still feel the magnitude of her scenic presence. At that moment, I turned to my dad to realize his eyes were tearing up. As our eyes crossed, he smiled and invited me to come snuggle near him. “*Inta ‘Omri*” means “you are my life.”

**FOUR**

*Al-Oud*, or the lute, is a typical oriental musical instrument. It is essentially composed of a pear-shaped body, a short neck with no frets, a peg box that is bent backwards, and eleven strings. The round body allows the sound to resonate deeper than other stringed instruments and gives its sound a particular tonal quality. The front of the body has one to three oval or round sound holes, usually decorated with oriental motifs. Due to the lack of frets, oud players are able to slide over the strings and create unique vibratos. The combination of those characteristics makes it possible to play all the scales of oriental music, or *maqamat*, on the oud.

**FIVE**

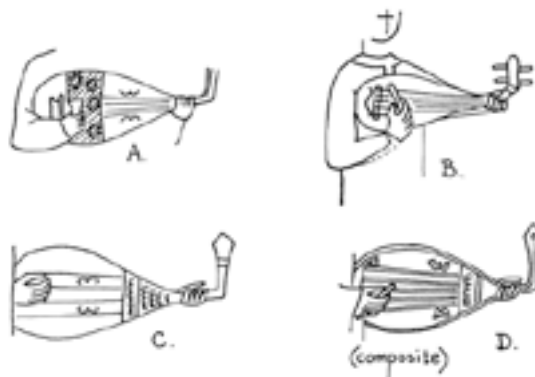
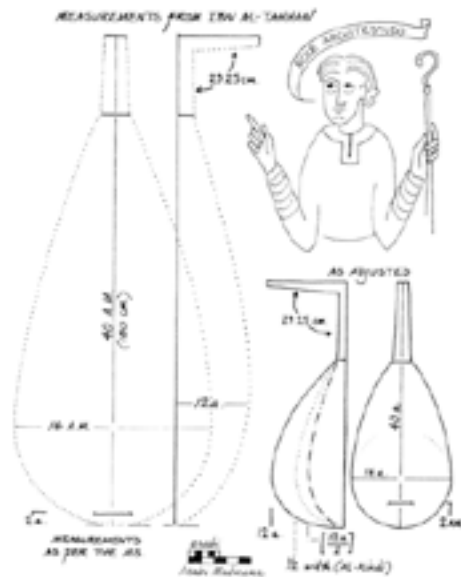
Oum Kalthoum was one of only five female Arab singers who were able (it is physically impossible for others) to sing every single oriental scale, or *maqam*. She had a very unique way of improvising during her performances. A typical technique of hers was to repeat the same sentence of a song over and over, subtly altering the emotion with each rendition. She was said to “have never sung a line the same way twice.” Her live performances could last up to four hours, but she might only perform three songs—to the amazement of her audience. She said she fed off the energy of her spectators. Every first Thursday of the month, the diva would have a concert that was streamed live on several radio stations. During the time of her performance, life in the Arab world would generally come to a stop and people would rush home to tune in. In 1944, King Farouk I of Egypt decorated her with the highest level of orders (Nishan al-Kamal). Shortly after the revolution, this decoration was one of the reasons the singer was banned to air on the radio: she was accused of being a proponent of the old regime. At that point Nasser, the newly elected president, intervened to stop the sanction, accusing the musician’s guild of trying to turn the whole nation of Egypt against him with their decision to ban Oum Kalthoum from singing to the public.

**SIX**

The television series ended with Oum Kalthoum passing away. A new actor was introduced as a physician, a notorious scientist of that epoch. The new character approached the family of the singer in the last few minutes of the last episode to ask if he could perform an autopsy of Oum Kalthoum’s throat to uncover the secret of her inexplicably powerful voice. Her family refused, outraged. In my mind, I knew the answer. Inside Oum Kalthoum’s throat were eleven oud strings that allowed her to sing every single *maqam*.

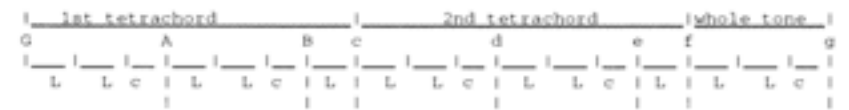
**SEVEN**

To pluck the cords of an oud the player uses a *rishā* (Arabic for feather). The first ten cords of an oud are coupled in courses of two, and the last single eleventh cord is left hanging at the bottom. The relationship between a player and his feather is a symbiotic one; it is a dance of tension and release, of subtle movements, harsh plucks, and from time to time, reaching out for that last chord for a deep vibration. The dexterity and technique must be mastered by the player. They are essential as they are the tools that allow him to explore all the depth and possibilities of a *maqam*.



**EIGHT**

A *maqam* (plural *maqamat*), in Arabic music, is a set of notes that outlines the relationship between sounds, the patterns that connect two notes. The melody develops from the nuances between the connections of sounds. When an instrument like an oud is tuned it has to be done according to the *maqam* of the song to be performed. The same note can have different values on every *maqam*. What makes the oriental sound so unique is the possibility of playing a quarter-tone: an imprecise note falling halfway between two semi-tones. What makes it even more special is that playing a tune completely relies on the interpretation of the player and his personal sensitivities.





## NINE

According to Farabi, Lamech, the sixth grandson of Adam, invented the oud, or at least was the ancestor of the instrument. As depicted in the myth, while Lamech hung the corpse of his son from a tree, he was inspired by the shape of the corpse to create the pear-shaped instrument. In fact, pictorial evidence dating from 5000 years ago was found in Iraq on a cylindrical seal. The carving shows a woman playing the instrument on a boat. The oud as an instrument is a recurring artifact in Mesopotamian and Middle Eastern history. It is also featured in the Pharaohnic era under the name of Nefer. This very old instrument, which seems to have accompanied both Nefertiti and Oum Kalthoum, is considered a central instrument of the oriental sound. The oud embodies in several ways the essence of the Arabic tune; the artifact is a metaphor of the complexities and nuances of the culture as a whole. What this instrument lacks in frets, it makes up for in flexibility. For a long time the instrument was a dilemma in western musical studies because of the imperfections in it. It is almost impossible to standardize or reproduce its technique on any classical scale due to the pivotal importance of the microtones in the sound of the instrument. Since the 19th century, several studies have tried to “democratize” the instrument by breaking down the basic playing techniques and offering instructions using western notations with modified key signatures. Yet nothing seems to capture the true essence of the instrument. It is even believed that only a trained ear can distinguish a quarter-tone.

In oriental definitions, oud players are usually divided into two main “performance schools.” The first, called the “Ottoman,” is almost an interiorized meditative practice. The trained player aims to ornament the sound he produces by delicately sliding and vibrating his fingers with adequate pressure over the strings. Consequently, as he plucks the strings with his *risha*, he controls micro variations in the vibration, resonance, and intensity of the sound he produces. The second aesthetic of performance is the “Egyptian” approach. It is often described as a virtuous technique as it requires the player to control the pressures of his strokes. The aim is to amplify the sound created by maximizing the resonance of the strings. Mastering one of those two techniques is a tedious task that requires several years of practice. This is what essentially makes this instrument so unique. Having such creative freedom over the sound he can produce means a player may inject much of himself and his sensibilities into the music he makes; this instrument transcends the simple definition of an object. The oud becomes human. With infinite possibilities and nuances in its sound, defying all norms and scales, the sound of the oud can only be compared to the voice of a diva such as Oum Kalthoum—a voice capable of never repeating the same rendition twice.

## TEN

The word oud in Arabic, when translated literally, means thin flexible wooden stick.

**ELEVEN**

Ramadan was reaching its end and only a few episodes were left in the Oum Kalthoum television series. That night my parents were arguing about which channel to tune in to; my mom was really determined to watch a cooking show. It was the first time I saw my parents fight. And as young as I was, I knew the fight was about a deeper issue than which channel to watch. I sat there, terrified. I had a feeling something bad would happen, and it did. As the argument was escalating, my dad pointed at me and screamed, “Even your ten-year-old daughter wants to watch Oum Kalthoum!” thus suddenly ending the argument. As my mother slowly turned around and walked away her eyes crossed mine. My body still shivers with goosebumps at the memory of the stare she gave me. I swear, I can still hear the oud whipping in my ear.

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**IMAGE CREDITS**

Illustration, section 7: Curtis, “Reconstructing the Medieval Arabic Lute,” fig.

Illustration, section 8: Marcus, Scott. “The Interface between Theory and Practice: Intonation in Arab Music.” *Asian Music* 24, no. 2 (Spring/Summer, 1993): 39–58, fig.

Fiction

# Before the Bullet

Aruni Kashyap

**M**inutes before the bullet was fired, Digonto waited impatiently beside the military officer at the army camp built in Teteliguri Village, Assam, in India's northeast. He had just returned after a six-year stay in the United States (Indiana), having completed his PhD on the effects of neighboring perturbation on drop coalescence in colloid/polymer mixtures.

The military officer, commanding Digonto to stand in front of him, asked about the weather in America. About the snow. About "American women who wear short skirts and fuck men as often as they change bras." And Digonto answered to satisfy his curiosity: yes, it is cold, it snows, but there are no issues with that because everything is internally heated and during the winter months, though it is unbearably cold, the best thing is cups of hot coffee. Yes, the American women slept around (he didn't want to debate), changed boy-friends like underpants. The officer asked if he had carried Assam-tea with him. Digonto replied yes, but by the end of the first year it was gone and he'd had to depend on the various blends of American coffee bought from Walmart. The officer said, "The whites should be posted in Siachen, Kashmir, and they would forget their snow for life." Digonto said, "Yes, they should be sent to Siachen, in Kashmir – the highest battlefield in the world."

The army camp was at the end of the village. Digonto hadn't known of its existence until that day. It wasn't there when he had left, in 1997. Their village had no insurgents like the other remote places of Assam. He had been stopped because he wasn't supposed to pass the camp on his bicycle; he was supposed to step down as a mark of respect for the officers and soldiers who had turbans on their heads and thick beards around their faces, who hung around carrying AK-47s like satchels hanging from the shoulders of *khadi*-clad leftist students in India. Digonto, returning to his village after six years, who had studied mostly in Guwahati City ever since he was in high school, didn't know that

the village that once was free had certain rules and regulations now. Rules that were not made by the Village Council, but made and meted out by the men in olive-green uniform who had been living in the camps for around five years now.

When the officer had stopped him crossing the road in front of the camp, Digonto was puzzled. He'd looked here and there, stopped pedalling, and asked, "Are you asking me to step down?"

That was about half-an-hour before the bullet was fired.

□

About an hour before the bullet flew into the air like a tailless comet, Digonto de-boarded with his luggage at the Tetelia Bus Stop. He took the route to Teteliguri Village, where he had grown up, a village he had left less than a decade ago, a village that was named after a three-hundred-fifty-year-old tamarind tree. He inhaled the smell of dust mixed with dried cow dung that he so much loved. When he saw the newborn calves, he knew he would get to drink "real milk" after a long time. Milk that you couldn't store for many days, because it didn't have preservatives. Milk that you needed to boil thrice a day during summers and twice a day during winters so that it didn't curdle in the village, which had no refrigerators.

How many calves had that cow in his house had over these years? But it had been six years: did cows live that long? After six years of drinking Hy-vee and Walmart Whole Milk in gallons with hibiscus-red corks, he was eager for home milk, unfrozen vegetables and real rotis. (Not tortillas, which were poor substitutes for rotis). But of course, like every other person in this northeast Indian state, he preferred rice.

He was in a hurry to reach home but he didn't make his pace any brisker, walking and pushing the bicycle. He wanted to smell the forests that ran parallel to the dusty gravel road. He wanted to have a look at the chrome yellow paddy fields interrupted only by patches of the first-rain grass raising their adamant heads. For some reason, that scene reminded him of the American university where he had been a student all these years. There was farming land around the university too, but no laburnum trees. When he reached the gravel path under the silk cotton tree, a little ahead from the primary school, he mounted the bicycle. He would cycle for a while, walk a little; he would get the fresh air properly.

He shouldn't have sat on the bicycle.

□

Arrangements had been made: he'd sent an email to his friend in Guwahati; his friend had called up his uncle's mobile phone; his uncle had cycled two kilometres (and crossed two rickety bridges: one wooden, one bamboo)

to tell Digonto's mother, brother, and sister-in-law exactly the date he'd arrive. "On the 25th, he will land in Delhi, stay back with a friend at the university campus before boarding the connecting flight to..."

Konmai, his mother, had interrupted her brother with a shrill, displeased voice: "What? His friends are more important than his mother who hasn't seen him for six years? I knew this would happen. I knew he would go mad looking at those glass tubes inside that lab or whatever he calls it." Konmai sat down on the blackened wooden chair where only men were supposed to sit, and shed tears.

Konmai's mother-in-law raised her right eyebrow when she saw her sitting there in front of so many men but then she thought, Let it be, I can understand. "Get up my dear." She touched Konmai's head with her wrinkled wrists, smiling with her wrinkled face. "Get up my dear; it's not a big deal. He mustn't have got a ticket in that Flying Ship on the preferred date."

"I *knew* this would happen!" Konmai continued to weep. "What's the point of such university degrees that keep you away from loved ones for so long?"

"But he has sent money. Look, the old thatched house isn't here anymore." Her brother consoled her. "Don't forget the US dollars he has sent you over the years, savings off his scholarship."

Wiping her tears at her brother's consolations, Konmai thought of the small and big sacrifices he must have made to send those dollars that had turned into many rupees when they reached the Indian bank. She never understood that mystery of a few dollars turning into many rupees. But when was the time to worry about Digonto's purse? After his father had passed away? The debts the man had taken to educate his son, the holes in the roof, how to raise the money for her twenty-year-old daughter's wedding—these were the worries that kept her mind occupied, away from the mystery of dollars and rupees and banks and small sacrifices.

But his American trip was perhaps a sort of lucky charm. The first prospective groom who had come to *see* Digonto's sister Poree, the young moustached boy who taught physics in the government school a few villages away, had asked them where her brother was—after Konmai had proudly displayed Poree's embroidery and footloom work. "Amerikaa." The boy's eyes twinkled. "What does he do?" he asked eagerly.

"He teaches," Digonto's mother had lied.

Poree, embarrassed, corrected her mother, "Actually, he is doing a PhD and he has a teaching assistant-ship." But they didn't understand what it meant. Since Poree had passed her high school, she could at least remember the terms he had written about his degree correctly.

The middle-aged prospective mother-in-law said pejoratively, "Oh, *assistant*?" She had a black mole on her upper lip. Four strands of hair sprouted

from it; one of them was grayish. She pronounced the word "assistant" as if it was the job of cleaning shit like the Hindi-speaking untouchables of the city. "I guess he then cleans desks and benches at the university?"

The boy's aunt, who supported the prospective mother-in-law in everything she uttered, added, "Must be like our Komol in Delhi. He even bathes the dog of his professor, gets them groceries. You have to do a lot of humiliating jobs when you are an *assistant*."

Later that afternoon, after they had left, Konmai had sat down in one corner to howl. "Who will marry you? You just can't keep your loud mouth shut!"

Poree stared at her mother intensely and because of the anger in her face, she seemed as if she was holding back a lot of water in her mouth. She said, "I don't care. Why do you go on bragging that your Great Son is a professor in an American university? He has gone there to be taught, not teach. That assistantship is a part of his scholarship—he wrote in his letter very clearly."

Konmai didn't like the way Poree had spoken. "I don't know from which angle I am lying. It is not a joke: teaching sums to American kids. How many people from our village have done that? How many from all the villages in this region?" Konmai spoke with such confidence that anyone would have believed that she had travelled around the world all her life, had ample knowledge of how difficult it was to teach in America. But the truth was that, after she had eloped with Digonto's father at the age of sixteen, she hadn't been out of that region. She hadn't even been to the Guwahati City that was about an hour away.

Konmai had predicted that no mother-in-law would like to have a daughter-in-law who interrupted elders' conversations. But so wrong she was. Two years before the bullet went off in an afternoon under the laburnum tree, that man with twinkling eyes had coloured the white middle parting of Poree's hair with red vermillion powder. He was proud to have a wife whose brother worked abroad. Proud to have a brother-in-law who sent him an American-bought shirt with a greeting and a hundred-dollar bill pinned inside its pockets.

□

When first stopped on his bicycle, Digonto had told the officer, in Hindi, that he was returning to his village after many years to be with his family. He didn't tell them that he knew his mother was waiting with cooked food. That his sister would have woven traditional *gamusas* for him, with large flowers on them. That his brother-in-law would have arranged a duck from somewhere or a turtle, to be had with rice, to celebrate his special arrival. But his movements, his quick, polite and firm replies, told the officers that he wanted to be on his way as soon as possible.

When the officer called him a *bastard*, Digonto looked at him, surprised, and without dismounting, asked him in English why was he behaving like

that.

The officer looked astonished, as did the soldier standing beside him. “Where are you coming from after so many years?” They wanted to see his passport or the official identity card of his university. The soldier told him, “It’s a rule for the people to dismount from cycles and bullock carts on this path; this path that runs in front of the army camp.”

Digonto dismounted from his bicycle.

“It was also a rule a few years ago to take off any footwear, place them on the head to cross this stretch. But the days are peaceful now so they don’t need to do that anymore. The elderly men have stopped being forced to frog-jump for kilometres for committing the crime of sheltering insurgents, for serving them meals when they came knocking at the door with guns hanging from their shoulders like satchels,” the officer, who had put on a few pounds, said. He was smoking a cigarette. He asked Digonto about Assam-tea and snow and how cold it got when it snowed.

The disbelief and disgust on the curled lips of Digonto didn’t go down well. They looked at his passport, went through his pages again and again, reading the fine print as if they were counting the pages. They took a long time analyzing, like a cat might smell strange food from several angles before taking a tiny bite; like vultures peck once with their sharp and curved beaks before deciding whether the corpse is dead or not.

Digonto wanted the ordeal over with. They had no right to search him like that, he thought. He thought of the dishes his mother would have made for him. He looked at the laburnum tree a little ahead and felt happy. It was fifteen minutes before the bullet and the crows and sparrows were peaceful, perching, fluttering wings on the branches. Digonto yearned to stand by the laburnum tree’s side while he was interrogated at the camp by the officer, made to listen to the efficacies of the Siachen glacier. For the birds, it was one of their daily meetings that would decide which breed would occupy how much space in the fully bloomed pre-summer tree’s robust branches. It had so many flowers, was so yellow, that it looked like a tree made of round gold coins. During dark nights, when someone holding a bright menthol lamp walked under it, the tree looked like a tall woman dressed in a glowing dress into which were sewn gold coins. He wanted to go closer to it. They were still looking at his passport.

He asked in English, “Are you done?”

After a long stare at his face, the officer replied, also in English, “Yes, you can go now.”

The officer hadn’t expected someone in the area to know English, speak in fluent Hindi, to be America-returned. He didn’t like his confidence, the stamp on his visa that allowed him to work in the States, the swagger Digonto had when he spoke, when he remounted his cycle. The officers were used to

submission, earned by the fear that they had spread in the past five years. Last night there had been a round table conference in the army camp discussing the funds that came for counter-insurgency operations: they needed to be used up before the money was summoned back to the capital. The best way to use them was by demonstrating corpses.

In this business—far away from their own houses in northern India—only the dead spoke to the government agencies. If there was no unrest (deaths, chases, corpses) the camp would be called off—the camp that laid golden eggs for soldiers and the officers here. Officers didn’t like the confidence of men who had been educated in Delhi or London or the US. What if the story went around of a young local man who didn’t dismount from his bicycle, who spoke in English to the army camp in a village where people didn’t even know how to speak in Hindi? There could be a hushed confidence in the minds of the villagers. The swaggers and the refusals to debark from bullock carts and scooters would turn infectious.

He looked at the figure of Digonto, reaching the laburnum tree. His voice was calm. “Aim at his head.”

“Sir?”

“Do as I say and if you miss, I will shoot your head.”

The soldier shivered. He didn’t want to do it. He wanted to go home. It wasn’t him complaining that there hadn’t been any excitement in the last few months in that area: no chases, no corpses, no gunshots, no skirmishes.

□

The birds scattered. Blood splattered on the tree’s trunk. A few petals fell, turning in the wind like a spinning cricket ball. But they would have fallen anyway because the wind had weakened their link with the soft light-green stems in the past few days. The cows were the most frightened, grazing on the fields below, shaking their heads. When they heard the bullet (they didn’t see the blood and the creamy brain) they raised their ears and stood stiff—as if struck by lightning. There were a few wobbly-footed calves. Confused, they curled their long tails like touched centipedes, sat down, dropped dung or ran round and round and round their mothers. From a distance, it was impossible to guess whether they were happy or frightened.

□

Digonto’s mother heard the bullet very clearly even though she was in the kitchen, amidst the noise of sautéing, boiling, sizzling food. She was, as he had imagined, cooking fish curry for him and the chicken curry that he loved so much.

Poree said, “Ah, don’t worry, why are you shivering like that? The army must be practicing.”

Konmai pushed a log of wood into the hearth, uncovered the lid from the

iron pan where the chicken curry was simmering and stirred it twice with her shiny, flat, steel ladle. “Hope they are! Nowadays, I have lost trust totally. In just the last ten years I have seen so many bodies. That ten-year-old little boy: what had he done? They shot him because he ran away. What do you expect when you go to talk to a ten-year-old with guns hanging from your shoulders?”

“That Punjabi soldier who is having an affair with Nirmali? He really cares for her parents. He has helped them rebuild their house and even promised to marry her. Next month, his parents are coming over all the way from North India to see her. I wonder how they will talk! His parents don’t know Assamese and Nirmali’s don’t know how to speak Hindi or Punjabi. But the boy is nice. The way he respectfully addresses every woman in the village as Maaji-Maaji is really heartening.”

Konmai scratched her back with a long twig and pushed it into the fire. “Yes, this camp’s soldiers haven’t put their hands on the bodies of women in our village, but in other villages, they have. I guess it’s because the Member of Parliament of this constituency is from nearby. But don’t forget the number of boys they turned into handicaps and beat to death four years ago. Don’t take them to trust so easily. They speak another language also.”

By then, the meeting of the birds was disrupted, the newly born calves had dropped and petals of laburnum flowers covered the smashed brains of Digonto.

## Cyborgs Against Somnambulism

### Weather Imagery of Cultural Flows: Playfulness & Architecture

Nikolina Nedeljkov

The sun is in the third year, measured by the standards of a human life. It’s 9 o’clock AM and its playful rays are branchstylingly touching the windows of the houses as the streets are flowing through the city, celebrating the arrival of another bright day, saturating the urban forest with the abundance of fresh air. As the morning is unfolding, streams of people are populating the pavements, presenting the concrete with a variety of sounds: from a muted touch of gum soles, via a modest remark of the presence of classic leather shoes’ bottom sides, to the self-righteous, bold signature of a stiletto, determined to reaffirm its unshakable step.

Unnoticeable in its undisputable visibility, sunshine is moving freely. Freely towards the place that unknowingly, yet invitingly, awaits its face to spill the smile over the curves of the modern architectonic haven of ye knowledge bygone. The newly refurbished building of the former 25 E half all(E)y Café Club proudly bears witness to the perseverance of the enduring mind of fellow-cyber-comrade Bizza(R)e integrated in each and every single droplet of dried paint, astringent mortar, and bricks firmly attached to one another. Although visually unidentifiable, the prevalent mind-archive is, strangely enough, experienced as a pop art appropriation of a renaissance portrait of Bizza(r)E’s prenatal dream of one’s own birth.

Numberless are corridors. Endless are the shelves storing the countless occurrences of counteriting on the infamous Beach. Uncontainable is the force of the persistent jolt of the wave, ricocheting the archival materials from the factory walls to ye cliff immemorial. Like it should always be splashing the steep rocks, it keeps coming in diverse shapes and modes. Sometimes, it

manifests itself in a form of a colossal golden billow—surfer paradise— transformed either into a vast tapestry in the Café Club Museum's halls, or, into an embroidered table cloth in the huge dining room seating all the 200 DJ-participants in the event taking place on this exceptionally splendid May day. The event is *On How To Phunkie ReadWriteRemix* and is obviously an homage to the milestone of steady rocking, the cornerstone of genuine exchange among fellow-cyborg walkers—seminal manual of the same title, predating and inspiring the birth of *A Panapocalyptic Manifesto*—the pervading authority among the bunch of the persecuted resisters against the tyranny of the oppressive mechanisms of anti-unorthodox, cutting edge scientific experimentation.

### THEY SAY THEY COME FROM YE POSTFUTURE

Master of ceremony welcomes the DJ-partakers as they are, one by one, approaching the entrance and are stepping into the world of words & thoughts that is for the following two days to be the battlefield of taking turns in agreeable statements, rough refutations, brainy visualizations, passionate rationalizations, poetic philosophizing, loud rebuking, silent harmonizing, quiet camaraderie, robust support, streetwise scholarship, and—above all—worshipping the mastery & power of  $\frac{3}{4}$  broken beat poetics. The welcoming address is of the approximately following content:

*Hola, Sylvan Souls!*

First off, ex-phunkie-hale. And then, help yourselves to some bakery niceties. And then, having a good olde puff in the smoking-freeLY designated area, do come back in. And then, following the directions and signs, showing with the precision of a phunkie surgical scalpel the way to the auditorium, do get safely to the seat of your choosing. Treat yourselves to some thought-provoking input generously outpoured from the minds, mouths, screens, and/or papers of the panelists. Do not hesitate to express your wonderings, share your suspicions, utter your inquiries, state disagreements verging on annoyance, and, needless to say, do your phunkie best to readwriteremix as much as you phunkie can during those two days—and beyond—of the rule of the spirit of zarr(Y)e Y(e) Grooviologist-cum-Bizz(a)rE-yo-majestic-highness:

*Devouring an undistinguishable amalgam of cultured milk, broth, cole-slaw, sunny side up, cottage cheese, pizza, ketchup, lasagna, slow-rinsed lobster, wieners, industrial amounts of garlic ice cream cake, baked catfish, chocolate mousse, tiramisu, wild salmon pancakes, gravy, matches, overcooked chair bottoms, porridge immemorial, scorched barn's roof, walls of an ancient temple, frames of the pictures from the family album, curtains from the cellar covered with thick layers of dust, rusty oven, stunned skeletons, massacred buses, busted clouds:*

Ye Kid in a whitewashed purple hoodie, grey baseball cap, black baggy jeans and a white T-shirt, a.k.a. Purple (H)ortak among the fellow comrade-cyborg-chancers, slowly stands up and, as a microlaser look cuts across the carpet, opens the lazy mouth. He recites from memory verses written in the

unwritten *A Panapocalyptic Manifesto*:

*And then me darkish camera and then me sunrise and then me coffee/cigarette and then me voddy / vodichki / vodochka and then me supergreen food and then me oatmeal pie and then me seaweed crackers and then me mulled apple cider and then me crunchy white chocolate-spiked biscuits and then me then me cherry jelly and then me strawberry tart and then me coconut-vanilla ice cream and then me candy bar and then me milk chocolate and then me dried currants and then me vegetable garden soup and then me eggplant zucchini pancakes and then me caesar salad and then me royal rice pudding and then me beefheart-stU and me peach yogurt and then me and then me cheese cake!*

### DAY ONE

Databases offer choices. One is to acknowledge technological determinism as the only scenario for Panapocalyptic Celebration of the reversed notion of humility. The other is to understand the world, humans, and everything else as an opportunity to exercise unrestrained, unlimited, and inalienable freedom. The former founds the world, life, and everything else in the certainty of the subjectivity void of the subject. The latter elevates the subject to the heights ungraspable to it, thereby destabilizing its capacity to act. Freely.

Scopophilia is an ancient Greek goddess, foreshadowing the character of Ziggy Frawdd's mother in the tragedy entitled *Through & Back In the Looking Stained Glass* written in the laconian tradition by the giant of the playwright world, Juicy Face, a.k.a. Stroke of PurpleOrange Midnight. In the play, the author dramatizes the complexity of the encounter between a mother and a child at the moment of the child's swallowing a droplet of milk generously poured from the mother's breast. The crux of the narrative is the child's gaze, fierce like phunk, persistently fixated on the pupil of the mother's eye. The child's conduct is apparently motivated by the retrospectively acquired, if not rationalized, need to inflict on the mother's heart—via the eye, of course—as much of a sadistic and narcissistic emotion as she cannot take. She, in turn, stares back in an attempt to dismantle the superimposed idea of being the object of the child's kindergarten toy's desire. Within the encounter commonly known as looking and being looked at, they engage in an unconscious glorification of the instantaneity annihilating both the past and the future.

A: *We are not rob zombies!*

Q: *Who the phunk are you to tell anyone who one is!*

A: *We are not rob zombies!*

Q: *Who the phunk are you to know what a rob zombie is!*

A: *We are not rob zombies!*

Q: *Who the phunk are you to know what is correct!*

A: *We are not rob zombies!*

A: *We are not rob zombies!*

**DAY TWO**

If I say that I was born yesterday, it means that it was in the Northern Hemisphere and that a seal from the cold seas baptized me in ice and, by so doing, gave me the name which I cannot remember at this very instant, *just* as I cannot any time somebody offers me a choice to be either a shark or a whale. Such situations cause a sense of massive uneasiness, not only because I cannot remember, nor because I cannot choose, but because of the situation itself. Uneasiness grows into anxiety. Anxiety into disturbance. Disturbance into panic. And vice versa. I find myself confronted with a demand to which I cannot respond. Or, *i* can, if this account of such an experience counts as a response. Or, the experience itself. It inspires wondering about the most profound assumptions regarding the human mind and human relationships. The assumption is of the approximately following content:

*i* used to know Uber-philosopher of a non-philosophical provenance. The name is zarr(Y)e Y(e) grooviologist. That most inquisitive of minds used to claim that the body is but an echo of its own weight. That makes physicality nothing but its own inside. Being the fierce look from the other side of the microscopic stained glass.

If *i* could see the specimen from that perspective, *i* will tell it to everyone. *i* would start by saying what *i* will tell. In circa 10-20 short minutes, *i* would explain what the content of my speech is going to be. *i* would not disclose the actual vital parts of my address to whoever listens. Yet, *i* would carefully, neatly, and precisely delineate the framework of the report about what, in fact, is a tiny lump of matter, and to my eye appears like a body floating on the surface of water. Or, an aquarelle painted by a three year old whose eyebrows are sprinkled with diamonds. *i* would look more. In order to be sure how to introduce my communication content. And then... *i* would *just* look more. Until *i* finally remember what my name is.

A: *We are not robозombies!*

Q: *Who the phunk are you to tell anyone who one is!*

A: *We are not robозombies!*

Q: *Who the phunk are you to know what a robозombie is!*

A: *We are not robозombies!*

Q: *Who the phunk are you to know what is correct!*

A: *We are not robозombies!*

A: *We are not robозombies!*

**TOWARDS THE COMMUNITY OF FELLOW CYBORGS IN THE SERVICE OF DISAMBIGUATION**

We might be anxious. Sometimes, as and when we walk the unknown lands, we are scared. We can't always sustain steady walk because our steps are

at times insecure. Our muscles shiver as the creepy, barren landscape infuses chills in our backbone. Our thoughts are not quite clear as the murky shadows devour the remnants of the day's playful passage from the moment the sun bears it until it adopts the colors of the sunset. Time and again, we face the uncertainty of loopy transitions. It destabilizes the thought flow, freezes emotions.

No wonder we find abutting narratives leaking into each other to be a twofold blessing of the everyday. No alien thought do we find in feeling dislocated when there are so many discordant sounds within a cultural amalgamation. No particular reason seems to be significant enough for one to accept all those conundrums as the description of who one is.

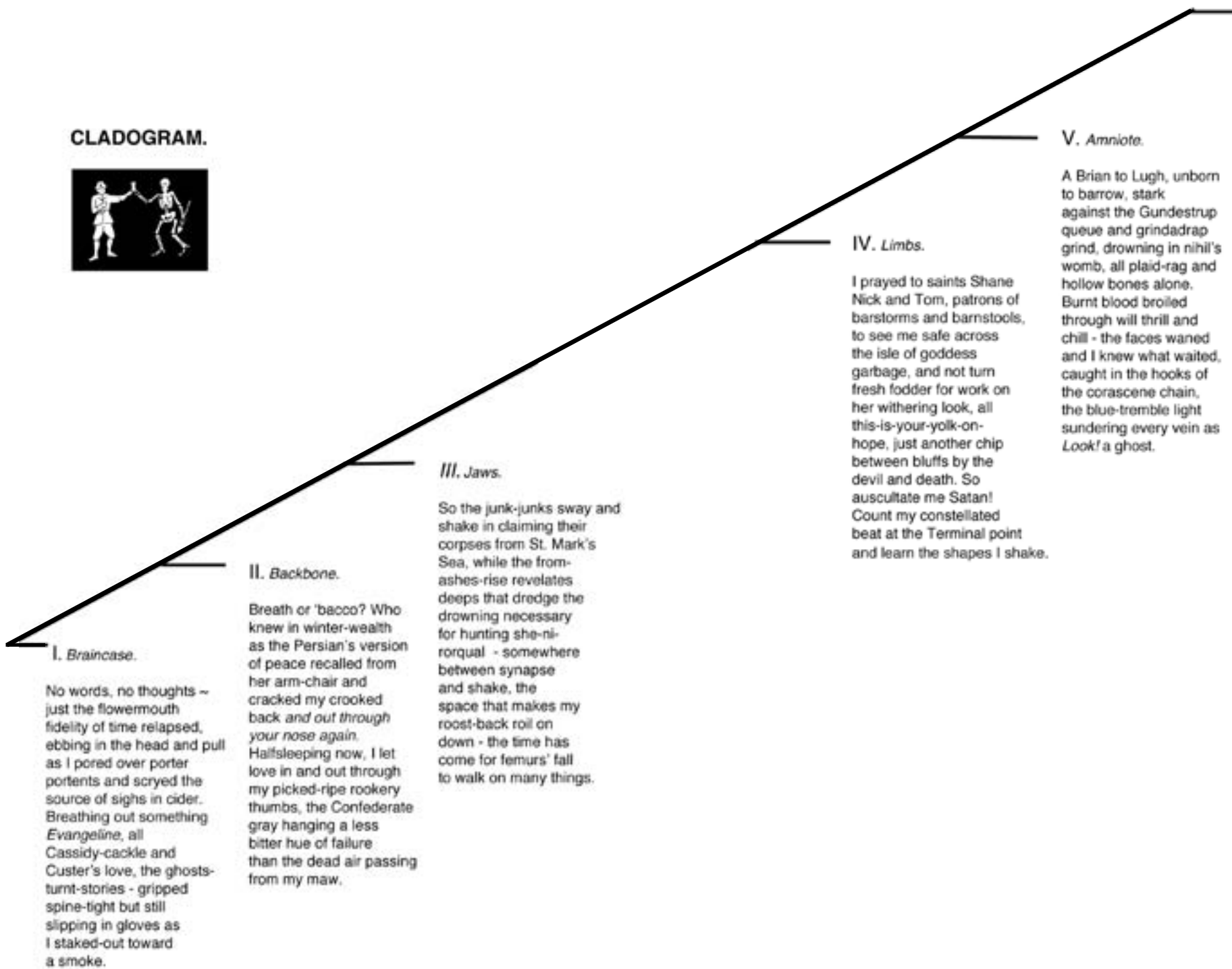
One might agree that fragmentary consciousness reflects cultural dynamics. It is also acceptable to think that new storytelling devices sometimes resemble a bittersweet romance with tradition. It feels natural to think the ultimate dream of freedom as an unrestrainedly depoliticized imaginative detour. It doesn't feel unfamiliar either to see narratives dissolving in the dissoluble assumption about their impossibility.

And yet, it feels eerily familiar not to experience all these thoughts and sensations as the only way to imagine storytelling and an exchange between and among fellow-cyborgs. For some reason, it doesn't strike one as ridiculous to think that somnambulist logic is not the only way thoughts respond to cultural realities. There is a sense of righteousness in the realization that a radical breakaway from tradition can by no means be a wager for total liberation of a critical / creative expression. Hopeful is the staleness of self-deluding circularity of self-suspicious, self-generating / self-dissolving narratives.

So is the impossibility to accept noise in the communication channel as a definition of communication, deception as the mind's *modus operandi*, and confusion as a basis for reconfiguring social relations. Furthermore, the cyborgstyling withdrawal from the idea of human omnipotence solidifies the reconstitution of the clear conversation in the communication channel. Despite aggressive attempts of hijacking the everyday and stories alike, perseverance in estrangement and enduring such hindrances is a subtonic response against offences to humaneness.



CLADOGRAM.



I. Braincase.

No words, no thoughts ~ just the flowermouth fidelity of time relapsed, ebbing in the head and pull as I pored over porter portents and scryed the source of sighs in cider. Breathing out something *Evangeline*, all Cassidy-cackle and Custer's love, the ghosts-turmt-stories - gripped spine-tight but still slipping in gloves as I staked-out toward a smoke.

II. Backbone.

Breath or 'bacco? Who knew in winter-wealth as the Persian's version of peace recalled from her arm-chair and cracked my crooked back *and out through your nose again*. Halfsleeping now, I let love in and out through my picked-ripe rookery thumbs, the Confederate gray hanging a less bitter hue of failure than the dead air passing from my maw.

III. Jaws.

So the junk-junks sway and shake in claiming their corpses from St. Mark's Sea, while the from-ashes-rise revelates deeps that dredge the drowning necessary for hunting she-ni-rorqual - somewhere between synapse and shake, the space that makes my roost-back roll on down - the time has come for femurs' fall to walk on many things.

IV. Limbs.

I prayed to saints Shane Nick and Tom, patrons of barstorms and barnstools, to see me safe across the isle of goddess garbage, and not turn fresh fodder for work on her withering look, all this-is-your-yolk-on-hope, just another chip between bluffs by the devil and death. So auscultate me Satan! Count my constellated beat at the Terminal point and learn the shapes I shake.

V. Amniote.

A Brian to Lugh, unborn to barrow, stark against the Gundestrup queue and grindadrap grind, drowning in nihil's womb, all plaid-rag and hollow bones alone. Burnt blood broiled through will thrill and chill - the faces waned and I knew what waited, caught in the hooks of the corascene chain, the blue-tremble light sundering every vein as *Look!* a ghost.

VI. Warmblood.

I fell as snow. A distant room fogged down in demur, all cat's hair and almost-empty mugs, soft as window-breath. I knew this place like an ancestor dance, felt it prick pulse and palpitate frigid and thick, inches per artery - *I know this tattered table, these waiting dirty dishes, and his crack in the door, I know ---*

Cladogram.

Chris Tracy

# A Little History of Castration

Michael Westfall

In this paper I attempt to locate the castrated subject in literature. For a subject so vast, I only hope to roughly triangulate this aspect of debilitation. Each episodic section is meant as a vector in a process of location. “The Pulverized Subject” explores autoenucleation as a recurrent and contemporary human behavior associated with madness and the abject, while in “The Annihilator,” I compare Freud’s reading of Hoffmann’s Sand-Man with Oedipus the King to reveal differences between the abject on the one hand, and Freud’s Unheimlich and theory of castration anxiety on the other. “The Tumescence Subject” shows the reciprocal nature of two castrated subjects of the Enlightenment: Rousseau and Sade. I engage in these three sections with three variations on a theme, and I ultimately hope to suggest through the points of their intersection that the castrate, the eyeless oedipist, gains a certain power: the ability to leap blindly into the abyss, into the sublime.

## THE PULVERIZED SUBJECT

On Sunday, October 2, 2011, in the back of the nave of Sant’Andrea<sup>1</sup> Church in the Italian town of Viareggio, just outside of Pisa, on the coast of the Tyrrhenian Sea, Aldo Bianchini stood up, interrupted the sermon, and tore the eyeballs out of his head with his bare hands.<sup>2</sup> He collapsed in a pool of blood and was removed to the hospital. The priest then continued to celebrate the Mass.<sup>3</sup>

Bainchini, we are told, “suffered from voices,”<sup>4</sup> which directed the act, placing it firmly in the comfortably distant realm of florid psychopathology, the exotic world of psychosis and schizophrenia, of hallucinations, disembodied voices, and aural mirage. While uncommon, oedipism, or autoenucleation, “is commonly associated with religious and sexual delusions.”<sup>5</sup> Patients “often refer to concepts of sin, evil, guilt and atonement” as motives, and through the act, relief is not only sought but clinically obtained.<sup>6</sup> Oedipism is an act of

radical repudiation of the visible outside world, of object, of the Other sought in the Lacanian transaction of desire. As an act of repudiation, it has the stupid, terrifying, and inarguable logic of psychosis and annihilation. There can be no Gaze if there are no eyes. By removing the organ of offense, and the essential link to the object, the schizophrenic subject collapses the fundamental opposition, the *ur-schema*, of the “archaic” Inside and Outside. With that, all structures shatter—I and Other, conscious and unconscious—all the delicate oppositional forces and boundaries that constitute and split the subject are in tatters.<sup>7</sup> The economy of desire as a symbolic system is collapsed, the object foreclosed.<sup>8</sup>

The act of tearing out one’s own eyes is a radical attempt to make the split of the subject unambiguous by multiplying it beyond comprehension. The resulting violent breaks, the pulverization of conscious and unconscious along all the multiple and various fault lines of the subject, create an internal space that is “never *one*, nor *homogeneous*, nor *totalizable*, but essentially divisible, foldable, and catastrophic.”<sup>9</sup> Through the act, the subject has set himself apart, has situated himself as *deject*, who now must ask himself, “Where am I?” rather than “Who am I?” He has set himself apart, he has *strayed*, “on a journey, during the night, the end of which keeps receding.”<sup>10</sup> Lost, the *deject* trades the gaze of desire for the daze of abjection.

The Oedipist is fundamentally different from the tragic victim of blindness. He floats in the abyss. Pushed to the edge by madness,<sup>11</sup> he leaps by his own volition, with superhuman bravery, into the world of bottomless memory, absolute darkness, lit only by the flicker of dreams, of visions, of hallucinations. He is a pilgrim, traveling the desert of the sublime.

## THE ANNIHILATOR

The foreclosure of the object short-circuits the fear and dread that electrifies *das Unheimliche*. In Freud’s analysis of *The Sand-Man*, the student Nathanael is profoundly traumatized by his mother’s bedtime warnings of visits by the Sand-Man. A nurse, a malevolent maternal *doppelgänger*, elaborates: the Sand-Man is a wicked man who steals the eyes of recalcitrant and nocturnal children, and carries them off in a sack to the moon to feed his own peckish offspring, who snatch up this treat with owl-like beaks.<sup>12</sup> Delirium ensues, along with the death of Nathanael’s father, the appearance of the mysterious and malevolent personification of the Sand-Man in the Coppélius/Coppola<sup>13</sup> figure, Nathanael’s doomed love affair with an automaton, then madness. Finally, Nathanael leaps over a parapet to his death. Only this act can banish the Sand-Man: “No sooner does [Nathanael] lie on the paving-stones with a shattered skull than the Sand-Man vanishes in the throng.”<sup>14</sup> It is important to note that, in this case, the symbolic system of desire remains intact; it is not destroyed by *das Unheimliche*, it is only perverted. Law in the form of destiny is still intact, though normalcy is evanescent: “To [Nathanael] all life consist-

ed of dreams and premonitions, he kept saying that each individual, fancying himself to be free, only served as a plaything for the cruelty of dark forces; that it was vain to resist, and that one must acquiesce humbly in the decrees of destiny.<sup>15</sup> Coppola provides Nathanael with the spy-glass, an extended penile eye he uses to intensify the erotic gaze in which he holds Olimpia. Nathanael's object of desire becomes exactly that, an object-Other, an automaton, repulsive and alluring. It is Olimpia who loses her ersatz, alchemist eyes. Nathanael avoids symbolic castration, a fate worse than death, preferring suicide. It is the (unresolved) threat of castration that is the engine of *das Unheimliche*.

Psychoanalytic experience, Freud writes, shows that fear of losing one's eyes is a substitute for the (unspeakable) dread of castration. In describing *die Kastrationangst*, the proof of this relation is in dreams and myths and fantasies. For example, "[i]n blinding himself, Oedipus, that mythical law-breaker, was simply carrying out a mitigated form of the punishment of castration—the only punishment that according to the *lex talionis* was fitted for him."<sup>16</sup> Oedipus' autoenucleation is an act not of law, but of madness. The defilement of his mother might be punishable, historically, by castration or blindness,<sup>17</sup> but the murder of his father makes that punishment moot. Oedipus would have been executed for murder under *lex talionis*. Oedipus takes the *lex* into his own hands and consigns himself to a horrible punishment that will fit his horrible double crime.<sup>18</sup> Death is not sufficient, he has committed "crimes too huge for hanging."<sup>19</sup> He offers not only his eyes, but a complete annihilation of himself, he plunges himself into abjection by his radical act.<sup>20</sup> Oedipus lives on, wandering eyeless,<sup>21</sup> removed from the economy of desire, a pulverized *deject*.

In his collapse, the *deject* enters a world beyond the unconscious, beyond subject and object, beyond repression, beyond law. Borders have been breached, distinctions between I/Other, Inside/Outside, have been permeated. The worst has been done already. No longer psychotic, but on the periphery, lost in the darkness of the edge of the abyss, the border-line. The normally unconscious becomes explicit: we enter the realm of symbolic practices, of "aesthetic" and "mystical" sublimating discourse.<sup>22</sup> In other words, the *deject* is in a perpetual dream, his images all hallucinatory, his speech, *Traumsprache*. His crimes are not avenged with the act, but soon after:

Oedipus:

Oh, Ohh—

the agony! I am in agony—

where am I going? where on earth?

where does all this agony hurl me?

where's my voice?—

winging, swept away on a dark tide—

My destiny, my dark power, what a leap you made!

Chorus:

To the depths of terror, too dark to hear, to see.<sup>23</sup>

The psychotic Oedipist, like any good Hegelian, finds a third way—a pure sublation of Freudian guilt and death: annihilation.

### THE TUMESCENT SUBJECT

As Rousseau enjoys his solitary confinement on Île de St. Pierre, and the impotent *far niente* of self-exile, he imagines the joys of the modern castrated subject. Content and supine in his rowboat, passive and indolent, Rousseau floats, daydreaming as he looks up at the sun and the sky, he gives himself up "to a reverie without *object*."<sup>24</sup> He removes himself absolutely from the object, from the Other, and from the tyranny of desire; he looks up to the (blinding) sun.<sup>25</sup> He has reached an abominable Appolinian bargain: he is able to keep himself whole and keep all his parts if, and only if, he voluntarily submits to absolute impotence—an imprisonment of detumescence and flaccid reason. An upright, walking subject reneges the Appolinian deal, as this requires an action, an act of erection; to stand up, like a man coitally entering the celestial atmosphere,<sup>26</sup> is to submit to the demands of desire's despot: time. He becomes unmoored and floats in an eternal present, in the "ambrosial vapor" of Nietzsche's dreamland, twice removed, a "mere appearance of a mere appearance."<sup>27</sup>

On Rousseau's island, the scopophilic impulse cannot be completely erased, instead it is diluted by reason and displaced to the least human of beings, plants: "Nothing could be more extraordinary than the great joy and ecstasy I felt every time I observed something about the structure and organization of plants and about the role of the *sexual parts* in the process of fertilization, which was at the time completely new to me."<sup>28</sup> Rousseau's passion "became botany"<sup>29</sup> while on castration island, this chaotic and non-Appolinian emotion which is immediately channeled once into scientific study, and then once more into the rational activity of producing a comprehensive catalog of all the plants on the island. Nature and human nature are contained by this double-barreled act of reason.

Rousseau's twin, his body-double, his Dionysian *doppelganger*, is Sade. Both sons of the Age of Reason, Sade is delirium to Rousseau's reason, frenzy to his rationality. Rousseau walks alone, Sade is on the run, accompanied by the objects of his priapic attention. Rousseau peers into the sun, Sade leers into the solar anus.<sup>30</sup>

Both men are pursued, Sade by agents of the written law, Rousseau by spoken rumor of his own death. They are both too slow; they are both caught. Rousseau "witness[es] himself after his presumed death, in his afterdeath, being buried alive."<sup>31</sup> Sade finds himself buried in a dungeon.

Sade finds himself in oblivion as surely as Oedipus, in a self-determined

solitary confinement, like Rousseau. Sade's prison is also literal—the dungeons of the Bastille and Charenton—the uncontrollable Marquis is removed from society like an offending organ. He is cut off. He is castrated.

Imprisoned, broken as a man, Sade is born as a writer;<sup>32</sup> his perversions flourish, he becomes an “annihilator extraordinaire.”<sup>33</sup> He pulverizes everything in his path. Each object, each and every time, is destroyed afresh, ad infinitum. He aims to pervert the very geometry that makes the Oedipal triangle possible. He philosophizes with a tumescent phallus. Every orifice is rent, every law violated, every decency corrupted, every virtue defiled. And yet, like Rousseau, Sade has a “penchant, even a *passion* for systems.”<sup>34</sup> While Jean-Jacques catalogs the grasses on his island, Donatien-Alphonse-François indexes sexual abominations. Blanchot describes Sade's systems as growing like a pathological culture: “his theories and ideas are constantly generating and unleashing irrational forces to which they are bound. These forces simultaneously animate and thwart the theories, in such a way as the theories resist at first but then eventually yield; they seek to dominate the insurgent force, finally do, but only after they have unleashed other obscure forces which bear the theories further along, deflect them from their course, and distort them.”<sup>35</sup> Each thought is fragmented, each element and system distorted, even his own thoughts are not exempt from his perversions. The punishment and the transgression are like two sides of a strip of paper, inseparable. Sade's perverse logic takes a structure that should remain flat and twists and joins it into a Möbius strip.<sup>36</sup> Blanchot quotes Sade: “But you are risking the gallows! You may end in the most ignominious of deaths.” “That,” replies the libertine, “is my most cherished desire... The gallows itself would be for me a voluptuous throne...”<sup>37</sup> Blanchot continues in his own words: “Against a Power such as this, what can law do? It believes it is punishing him, and actually it is rewarding him; it exalts him by debasing him ... [the libertine] dies reveling in the thought he has been the occasion for yet a new crime.”<sup>38</sup> Premeditated crime is more abject in Kristeva's model,<sup>39</sup> Sade *philosophizes* crime. He seeks the limit of abject perversion.<sup>40</sup>

Sade imagines an ultra-mountainian abject sublime, beyond the romantic horror of the mountains, where even Nature is subordinate to Sade. At the beginning of *The 120 Days of Sodom*, after the statutes are disseminated, the Duc de Blangis addresses his victims: “...you are beyond the borders of France in the depths of an uninhabitable forest, high among naked mountains; the paths that brought you here are destroyed behind you as you advance along them. You are enclosed in an impregnable citadel; no one on earth knows you are here, you are beyond reach of your friends, of your kin: insofar as the world is concerned, you are already dead, and if yet you breathe, 'tis by our pleasure, and for it only.”<sup>41</sup> The very system of the romantic sublime exists only as a tool to create the abyss over which Sade can suspend his victims.

The sheer power of Sade's abject perversion reaches into the future. In the last pages of *Philosophy in the Bedroom*, Sade subverts, inverts, and perverts every aspect of the Oedipal myth, sixty years before Freud was born.<sup>42</sup>

## AFTERWARD

I have attempted to locate castrated subjects in literature, an exercise akin to counting the stars in the sky. There are multitudes, and the darker it gets, the more one can see. Angela Carter states that the castrate is the human norm.<sup>43</sup> The detachment of the phallus, the testicles, or the eyes is not an escape from Freud's *Kastrationangst*; escape is not possible—debilitation is a law with no loopholes.<sup>44</sup> The heroic castrate, the eyeless oedipist, gains a certain power: the ability to leap *blindly* into the abyss, into the sublime.

## NOTES

- 1 Saint Andrew's name in Greek, Ἄνδρέας (Andreas), translates to “manly” or “manhood.” His symbolic (visual) representation, Saint Andrew's Cross (“X”), serves as a signifier for cancellation. Cancellation marks Aristotelian subalternate poles (P and not-P), a relationship of determinative negation. Not-P implies some P must exist. This must imply that (the threat of) castration is necessary for manhood. Bianchini's act of oedipism, a Freudian act of symbolic auto-castration, an act of brute strength and resolve, was performed in a building dedicated to a saintly embodiment of negation. Further, the legend of Saint Andrew's Cross contains a deterministic negation within itself. The cross of the crucifixion symbolizes Jesus, Saint Andrew's cross specifically symbolizes “not-Jesus.” (Etymology via Strong's concordance available at <http://concordances.org/greek/406.htm>)
- 2 “Man rips own eyes out in Italian church,” *New York Post*, October 3, 2011, [http://www.nypost.com/p/news/international/man\\_rips\\_own\\_eyes\\_out\\_in\\_italian\\_BH-NijVVGXwZogsOoBVyMCL](http://www.nypost.com/p/news/international/man_rips_own_eyes_out_in_italian_BH-NijVVGXwZogsOoBVyMCL).
- 3 The Word must be stronger madness.
- 4 Nick Pisa, “Worshipper rips out both eyes in Mass with his BARE HANDS,” *Daily Mail Online*, October 3, 2011, <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2044605/Horrific-scenes-British-born-worshipper-tears-eyes-Mass-BARE-HANDS.html>.
- 5 Alexander H. Fan, MD and Stephen Fink, MD, “Autoenucleation: A Case Report and Literature Review,” *Innovations in Clinical Neuroscience*, October 2007, <http://www.innovationscns.com/autoenucleation-a-case-report-and-literature-review/>. A passage from the Sermon on the Mount is commonly cited by psychotic oedipismists, according to Fan and Fink. In Matthew 5:27–29, Jesus expounds the law, criminalizing scopophilia: Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not commit adultery: But I say unto you, That whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart. And if thy right eye offend thee, pluck it out, and cast it from thee: for it is profitable for thee that one of thy members should perish, and not that thy whole body should be cast into hell. The eye, then, is desire's patsy. The offender in adultery is not the not the wicked mind or the carnal genitalia, but the leering eye, the untrustworthy liminal organ between the subject and the material world. Plucking out the eye is not a symbolic castration, there is no pretending to rehabilitate or atone for a “dirty mind.” The best Jesus can do is recommend auto removal of the stimulating apparatus and threaten eternal damnation for continued non-compliance. According to Fan and Fink, studies indicate somewhere between three and four people out of 100,000 take His recommendation. Human visual capacity as conceived in the New Testament is suspect, contingent, and linked to transgression of law. Written language, the word (Name-of-the-Father), is the eye's contrary; it is unquestionable, exact, definitive, and invariable: “For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled” (Mt 5:18). Finis Jennings Dake, *Dake's Annotated Reference Bible* (Lawrenceville, GA: Dake Publishing, 1991). Old Testament law and its transgression, in contrast, is performative. Commandments are either done or obeyed, and blessings conferred, or not done or disobeyed, with punishment meted out. YHWH of Deuteronomy does not recommend self-harm, he would

- rather do it himself: "The LORD shall smite thee with madness, and blindness, and astonishment of heart," (see *Duke*, 227 note: timmahon, stupify (sic) and amazement). "And thou shalt grope at noonday, as the blind gropeth in darkness, and thou shalt not prosper in thy ways: and thou shalt be only oppressed and spoiled evermore, and no man shall save thee" (28:28–29). One peculiar punishment stands out in Dt. 38:37: "And thou shalt become an astonishment, a proverb, and a byword among all nations whither the LORD shall lead thee." If pestilence, disease, curses, and disasters to body, wife and children, oxen, and vineyards were not sufficient, YHWH threatens to displace and disembody the transgressor into language; folding the logic of the sign upon him, he becomes the signifier for his own destruction, reduced to a story of divine rebuke.
- 6 Ibid. In the case Fan and Fink describe, the patient, after frequent auditory hallucinations from "demons and the devil" he stabbed his left eye 10 or 11 times with a steak knife. He was then treated medically and subjected to a mental status examination. He was found to be well groomed, his speech and behavior normal. His mood was "slightly irritable." He had no suicidal or homicidal ideations, he was not delusional, and denied auditory or visual hallucinations. Later, after being treated with antipsychotic drugs, his behavior continued to be essentially normal, but he never "showed remorse" for the act. His attitude toward his self-injury could even be described as *la belle indifférence*.<sup>6</sup> In other words, his major symptom was his lack of concern for the perceptions that (O)thers had for his self-injury. By debilitating his gaze, in this case, by flattening his perception of the material world by removing one of his eyes and the perception of depth, had he cured the vertigo caused by peering into the abyss?
- 7 Julia Kristeva, *The Powers of Horror* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), 7.  
8 ...the abyss occupied?  
9 Ibid., 8. Also, not infantile.  
10 Ibid.  
11 Or by sanity. Consider the case of Andre Thomas, a condemned inmate in Texas. He plucked out his right eye in jail soon after his arrest for a gruesome murder in 2005. On death row, four years later, he did the same to his remaining eye, and then ate it. Clearly psychotic, *Thomas has been judged sane under Texas law* because he voluntarily used drugs and alcohol. Michael Graczyk, "Andre Thomas, Inmate Who Ate His Own Eye, Ruled Sane By Texas Judge," *Huffington Post*, March 18, 2009, [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2009/03/18/andre-thomas-inmate-who-a\\_n\\_176658.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2009/03/18/andre-thomas-inmate-who-a_n_176658.html).
- 12 Freud, "The 'Uncanny,'" *Collected Papers, Vol. 4* (New York: Basic Books, 1959), 379.  
13 In the economy of castration, a line from another Coppola takes on an added dimension: "Leave the gun, take the cannoli," neatly summarizes the castrate's transaction. *The Godfather*, directed by Francis Ford Coppola (Los Angeles: Paramount Pictures, 1972).
- 14 Freud, "The 'Uncanny,'" 382.  
15 E. T. A. Hoffmann, "The Sand-Man," *The Golden Pot and Other Tales* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), Kindle edition.  
16 Freud, "The 'Uncanny,'" 382.  
17 G. Devereux, "The Self-Blinding of Oedipus in Sophokles: Oedipus Tyrannos," *The Journal of Hellenic Studies*, 93 (1973): 36–49. Devereux argues that Oedipus punishes himself in an over-determined act that is both literal punishment for incest and a symbolic suicide that atones for parricide. He makes a strong philological case that blindness was a common Greek punishment for incest. Devereux asserts that the act is a symbolic suicide without much textual evidence.
- 18 Nietzsche reminds us that the Oedipal original sin wasn't murder and defilement, but wisdom: "Because of his excessive wisdom, Oedipus must be plunged into a bewildering vortex of crime." Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy and The Case of Wagner* (New York: Vintage, 1967), 46.  
19 Sophocles, "Oedipus the King," *The Three Theban Plays*, trans. Robert Fagles (New York: Penguin, 1982), 243.  
20 An objection might be: What makes Oedipus so different? Would not any other judicial blinding, or any blinding at all, also cast the subject into the abyss of the abject? His crimes are what pushes him to the edge, but it is his blinding that sends him into the abyss. Julian Jaynes also argues that the bicameral mind began to break down in Greece beginning at the time of Homer, leading to a rise of a modern sense of consciousness. That would make Oedipus one of the first modern dejects, which may be another reason his case is so resonant today. Julian Jaynes, "The Mind of the Iliad," *The Origin of Consciousness in the Breakdown of the Bicameral Mind* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2000).
- 21 And more, if he could: "No, if I could just block off my ears, the springs of hearing, I would stop at nothing—I'd wall up my loathsome body like a prison, blind to the sound of life, not just sight. Oblivion— what a blessing..." Sophocles, 243.  
22 Kristeva, *The Powers of Horror*, 7.  
23 Sophocles, "Oedipus the King," 239.  
24 Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Reveries of the Solitary Walker* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 116. Rousseau's Confessions is quoted in an endnote: "Often abandoning my boat to the mercy of wind and water, I would give myself up to a reverie without *object*, and which, for being foolish, was none the less sweet."  
25 Samuel Beckett, *Krapp's Last Tape and Other Dramatic Pieces* (New York: Grove Press, 1958), 9. Krapp lies in his punt, spent. He shades his lover's eyes from the very same blinding sun: "I asked her to look at me and after a few moments ... she did, but eyes just slits, because of the glare. I bent over her to get them in the shadow and they opened. ... Let me in."  
26 Georges Bataille, "The Solar Anus," *Visions of Excess, Selected Writings, 1927–1939* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1958), 7.  
27 Nietzsche, "The Birth of Tragedy," 45.  
28 Rousseau, *Reveries of the Solitary Walker*, 52.  
29 Ibid., 51.  
30 "The solar annulus is the intact anus of her body at eighteen years to which nothing sufficiently blinding can be compared except the sun, even though the anus is the night." Bataille, "The Solar Anus," 9. Rousseau is quoted by Blanchot (Of Sade's Justine): "How many people, still today, profoundly believe that all they have to do is hold this accursed book in their hands for a few moments for Rousseau's arrogant warning to come true: Any girl who reads but a single page of this book will be lost?" Maurice Blanchot, "Sade," *The Marquis de Sade: The Complete Justine, Philosophy in the Bedroom and Other Writings*, trans. Richard Seaver and Austryn Wainhouse (New York: Grove Press, 1965), 38.  
31 Avital Ronell, "Street Talk," *Finitude's Score: Essays for the End of the Millennium* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska, 1994), 101.  
32 Simone de Beauvoir, "Must We Burn Sade?," *The Marquis de Sade: The 120 Days of Sodom and Other Writings* (New York: Grove Press, 1966), 14.  
33 This is the term used in Seaver and Wainhouse's translation of Blanchot's "Sade." It's not that his violence is aimed at his victims, "...violence, as it applies to and is used upon them, is not aimed at them but at something else, something far beyond them, and all Sade's violence does is authenticate—frenziedly, and endlessly in each particular case—the general act of destruction by which he has reduced God and the world to nothing." Blanchot, 56.  
34 Ibid., 39.  
35 Ibid.  
36 I am indebted to Quentin Meillassoux for using the Möbius strip metaphor, specifically, in this way. Meillassoux, *After Finitude* (London: Continuum, 2008), 22.  
37 Blanchot, "Sade," 50.  
38 Ibid, 51. The libertine is pro-death penalty precisely because it is a crime in itself, and promotes libertine pleasure by criminalizing libertine acts.  
39 Kristeva, *The Powers of Horror*, 4.  
40 Blanchot writes about Sade's world as if he were writing for Occupy Wall Street: "Such then is Sade's world: a few people who have reached the pinnacle, and around them an infinite, nameless dust, an anonymous mass of creatures which has neither rights or power." Blanchot, 44.  
41 Sade, *The 120 Days of Sodom*, in *The 120 Days of Sodom and Other Writings*, trans. Richard Seaver and Austryn Wainhouse (New York: Grove Press, 1966), 250–51.  
42 Sade, *Philosophy in the Bedroom*, in *The Complete Justine, Philosophy in the Bedroom and Other Writings*, trans. Richard Seaver and Austryn Wainhouse (New York: Grove Press, 1965), 352–67.  
43 Angela Carter, *The Sadeian Woman: an Ideology of Pornography* (New York: Pantheon, 1978), 126.  
44 Freud splits the subject, Solomon-like, in two. But each half, male and female, is hermaphroditic. Sigmund Freud, *Civilization and its Discontents: The Standard Edition* (New York: Norton, 2010), 87, note. The debilitated castrate is doubly maimed, a disfigured double monstrosity, impure, tinged always by the other, boundaries extant but always violated.

# Colophon

150 copies of *Anamesa* were printed  
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The text of *Anamesa* is set in Minion, an Adobe Original typeface designed in 1990 by Robert Slimbach. Inspired by classical serif fonts of the late Renaissance, Slimbach's design is highly adaptable to digital media. The "typographer's bible," Robert Bringhurst's *Elements of Typographic Style* is set in Minion, and the typeface is beloved for its combination of practicality and elegance.

*Anamesa*'s titles use Adobe Caslon, the same typeface as the body text of *The New Yorker*. Designed in 1990 by Carol Twombly, Adobe Caslon is based on a mid-18th century specimen page of the Dutch Baroque typeface designed by William Caslon I but adapted for modern and digital use. Caslon was a favorite in 18th century British and American printing, and was even used to print the American Declaration of Independence. As the old typographer's saying goes, "When in doubt, use Caslon."

The letter A in *Anamesa*'s logo uses Play Ball, a font designed in 2011 by calligrapher and designer Rob Leuschke. Leuschke designed Play Ball as an "athletic" font, recalling baseball jerseys and team logos, and the uppercase A features a distinct curving swash.

The remainder of the *Anamesa* logo is set in Crimson Text, a typeface designed by Sebastian Kosch in 2011. A serif typeface in the Garamond tradition, Crimson Text is intended for book design and inspired by the work of the giants of modern type design: Jan Tischhold, Robert Slimbach and Jonathan Hoefler. Kosch hopes it will become a "beautiful workhorse," an alternative to the standard Times.

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