

THINKING IN BABEL

Christopher Damien Aurretta

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for Gail Wheeler

for Gladys Gallop Geer

for Harriet Geer Brown

for Dorothy Geer Wheeler

for Mécia de Sena and the Sena family

for Irene and Izilda

for Michael K.

for my students

for you

«The mounds of human heads disappear into the distance,
I dwindle there, no longer noticed,
But in caressing books, in children's games,
I shall rise from the dead to say: the sun!»
(Osip Mandelstam)

“So you see, the parrhesiastes is someone who takes a risk. Of course, this risk is not always a risk of life. When, for example, you see a friend doing something wrong and you risk incurring his anger by telling him he is wrong, you are acting as a parrhesiastes. In such a case, you do not risk your life, but you may hurt him by your remarks, and your friendship may consequently suffer for it. If, in a political debate, an orator risks losing his popularity because his opinions are contrary to the majority's opinion, or his opinions may usher in a political scandal, he uses parrhesia. Parrhesia, then, is linked to courage in the face of danger: it demands the courage to speak the truth in spite of some danger. And in its extreme form, telling the truth takes place in the ‘game’ of life or death.”

(Michel Foucault, “The Meaning and Evolution of the Word Parrhesia,” *Discourse and Truth: The Problematicization of Parrhesia*, ed. Joseph Pearson. Digital Archive: Foucault.info, 1999.)

I. LIVE FROM EARTH

PREFACE

Poetry lives close to the earth. Poetry, along with everything and everyone else, requires (though always misinterprets) transcendence; poetry, in fact, is not transcendent but looks naturally towards augmented being. Meanwhile, human living occurs. The pathos of radical longing and the human species' vocation for imaginative amplitude beyond the strictly empirical press against and hone our consciousness, continually transmuting the transcendent imagination into a deeper awareness of earthborn existence. Eros—the theme and key in which much of this poetry is written—is suffused throughout existence. I would say that eros defines existence: thus poetry's internal pathos and insuperable hunger.

Eros (our closest neighbor to the body and the body's paths) is taken by poetry and becomes a map of imagination, (dis)order and time: it heightens the self. In poetry, even the negative of desire (the affective universes of abandonment, sadness and grief) represents less a source of inward erosion than a tonic: it teaches us that joy must be invented. It is through eros that a speaking self communicates both intimacy and solitude, fulfilment and the path to manageable sorrow. In doing so, eros makes the body the seat of an earthborn metaphysics. This metaphysics fails in its attempt to become systematic even if love does not, but this failure is neither radical defeat nor an instantiation of evil: it confirms the nature and fate of every imaginative endeavor. Even the fragile order emerging from a poem must fail when it is placed before, and is finally undone by, the sheer magnitude of life. Poetry, then, survives best in its dialogue between permanence and disappearance, for, after its initial articulation, the poem has already begun to die, or at least to suffer irreversible mutation. Sometimes it is resurrected by the reader.

I can't prove it, but I'm convinced that evil and goodness are constants in the universe. There is no perfective history here on earth although we must and do attempt it. (I carry with me always the great Polish poet Wislawa Szymborska's poem, "*Conversation with a Stone*," to remind myself that history must never be thought of in terms of science, or life in terms of system, or theory in terms of truth.) It is in the fissures present within monolithic thought that we are invited to create our most vital moral cosmologies. The transcendent element in poetry, then, is not an immediately accessible positivity, i.e., it does not actively shape the pragmatic content of human affairs nor does it preserve a revealed truth though it must in part

function as a kind of negativity or *para-logic*. Ultimately, I don't believe that poetry is coincident with the centers of power or even with those of counter-powers. Poetry, to my mind, embodies much more a fertile *non-knowing*, precisely where subjective conviction is transcended, overwhelmed and eventually undone. To think poetically means first and foremost to reveal the provisional nature of knowledge: the surprise of being found just on the other side of complacent certainty. Due to a quirk of temperament, the poet favors these temporary spells of denuded (deluded?) sight. Yet poetic language is above all a modulation of being, a dimension of being rather than its abandonment, the intensification of being rather than its extinction. These things poetry captures, recalls and illuminates: thus poetry's enduring kinship with the thematic realm of eros. To love means to let another person's memory inhabit our speaking heart, to invite another human being to *be* our heart in a mutual dispossession of hitherto rawer, less mediated ego. Love permits a transfiguration of our fearful, terrestrial creaturehood. And poetry gives shelter to a voice and fate one person at a time. The mind active in poetry believes that terror can be given a human measure (and therefore healed).

Returning to our sense of positivity and negativity inside and/or outside the realm of poetry, I fear I've been less than clear. So, how else can I define this polarity which encompasses the boundary experience of the poetic act, i.e., language at the breaking point of communicability? How about this? The hand which holds, shapes, grasps and writes is fused with an intelligence, which means that it moves, along with all things human, between ecstatic vision and reflective lucidity. The hand as it writes embodies an itinerary of mind. In contradistinction to this hand, the keyboard on which I type these words (and type the content of my days' activities under the guise of teacher) is mute, inhuman and inflexibly accurate. I type "a" and the letter "a" appears on the screen in an unthinking, impercipient instant. The keyboard enables an immediate expertise of the body. By contrast, the negative instant, the suspension of the immediate content of consciousness, the distillation of experience, the conversion of our experience into significant memory, all this requires the capacity for an attentiveness to life (and one's living in it) that is both heightened and ascetical, intimate and deferring. A poetics of negativity accepts that consciousness is always approaching, though never attaining, completeness; to write means to disavow dogmatic certainty, routine expertise of any sort and the claims of ego-knowledge as indelible truth. There is no human truth which must not eventually walk into oblivion. Poetry, then, encodes a specialized transcendence just *within* the earth's atmosphere; it creates an

epiphanic structure within the finite, an *inward* transformation of matter. It reminds us that life is spent, not perfected.

Franz Kafka's literary creation, Gregor Samsa—that obscure inhabitant of a world meticulously described in all its quotidian and totalitarian desolation—comes to mind here. With an imagination capable of representing the world in all its absolute positivity, Kafka fictionalizes upon its specific emptiness. Consequently, the aura of alienated being enveloping Kafka's narrative, *The Metamorphosis*, reflects less a visionary pressure propitiated and then made to enliven a truly inhabited time and space than an ever-encroaching nothingness: it discloses a sudden oppression of radical distance felt by, and menacing, the degraded body. In Samsa's physical and subjective prison, there no longer exists an interval of mediation between the terrestrial and the numinous, between the subjective and the cosmological, between eros and the darkening epiphanies of reason. We are left with a vision of terrifying self-estrangement. The poetic negativity of which I speak cannot exist in such a world except as monstrous exception. There can be no possibility of self-questioning and self-relation in such a place. What remains is the hell of a purely declarative, inflexible reality. The collective psyche of postmodernity has yet to understand the closeness of Gregor's world to its own.

Poetry, I've written above, lives close to the earth; poetry—like being itself—feeds the earth. So—reader of poetry—walk with poems, any poem. If a poem survives the body's kinesis through space and time, then it will stand up to time (for at least one moment). But don't forget: the quantity of good and evil is constant in the universe. Consequently, one of our human goals is to propitiate both terror and beauty, or die. We must work to maintain their transcendent gravity in an orbit above our quotidian heights, beyond our ecstatic nights, or else suffer their oppression. Only then are we home free. And this is also why we write: to effect individual acts of propitiation.

I've learned the following by way of walking with poetry: sense is first heard before it is decoded, while meaning commences where linguistic code falls *almost* silent. Poetic sense grows within us less by degree than by leaps and bounds. It is a language within language, an active *negativity* within the hollow of usual speech. Poetry sees best only when freed of excessive abstraction and logical expectation. It sees the linguistic code for what it is when made to stand before time: troublesome debris. Poetry must subvert the

dictionary sense or else suffer conversion to a collective journalism of the psyche, or, more insidiously, succumb to the pseudo-light of abstraction. At all times, I've striven to follow poetry's example, i.e., first and foremost, to walk from life towards the luminous concept, never from life into constrictive abstraction.

Why write if not to transform the idiom? Indeed, why do we think or teach at all? I have my answer ready: we think and teach in order to create—by way of meaningful experience—immunity to toxic being through words. Poetry is simply one mode of right thinking. Its universal, underlying theme is the search for a larger, deeper pedagogy of human consciousness. To follow on the heels of Goethe, it manifests a *cosmotherapy*: a cure for our spiritual claustrophobia within the Newtonian universe. This is why we examine poetry's effect on the reader so often: a combustible unpredictability, to be sure. How this unpredictability gets enacted into moral knowledge by the reader we cannot know nor wish to orchestrate, for poetry is both too intelligent and too primitive for precise moral doctrine or program. Poetry enacts a profoundly altered scansion of experience, and yet, looking back through the mind in poetry, a path—ever imminent in true self-knowledge though never irrevocably given in advance—may be divined. And if the poet is very fortunate, a verbal cosmology may reveal its provisional law as well. Yet before poetry becomes poetry on the written page, it is already the invocation of vulnerability in an age of armed sensibility. And every age is armed.

Poetry is both too archaic and too premonitory to paraphrase even a supposed truth or to enshrine a myth. It is, at its best, a specialized form of doubt, a revelatory awkwardness (recall, for instance, the complex, troubling and yet liberating portrait of the writer Janet Frame in Jane Campion's film *An Angel at My Table*) and an inspired stammer (read the final portrait of poets and their craft in Horace's famous *Letter to the Pisons* or Plato's *Ion*). If poetry be madness, then it is also a delaying of what I'll provisionally call the unmediated *hitherness* of world upon consciousness. As a specialized form of madness, poetry requires of the poet a certain rewiring of the nervous system, a secondary immune system to respond to, and retard, the equivocal immediacy of the here-and-now. Only then can the individual approach the intrinsic enigma and sensate epiphanies enveloping life. The poet practices attentiveness to life which, ironically, imposes a curious awkwardness, an *out-of-stepness*. Oddly enough, poets, who live so close to language, so close to the very boundary conditions of language, will often say (as if struck by lightning in a way reminiscent of Horace's demented versifier) that they write to get the spelling of their name and their world

right: to get the spelling right, even if just for an instant. So, what may look like a talent for missed living to some may in fact be the search—by way of intensely thought language—for the appropriate pharmacon to release us from routine thought and buried senses. Poets write as if their life depended on it.

Life—in a Darwinian sense—seems to possess flow but (perhaps) not direction. Eros permits human activity to bring the body into a more purposeful alignment with time and light, the heart with breath and the mind with the deep wellspring of the word. Eros is, we repeat, a natural metaphysics, and the linguistic maps drawn by eros comprise one of the supreme languages of the poet. It places the poet on a collision course with earth and sky: the same earth upon which s/he walks and the same sky under which s/he sleeps. Eros effects a fundamental drama of experience. Guiding as well as grounding our flesh and blood on earth, it leads the body's energies towards the great existential questions of ends and means. We have, therefore, a provisional answer to the question concerning the poet's awkward gait through his or her world's historical and conceptual axes. Such awkwardness may simply be the price poets pay for true presence. The poet's is an unending approach to life, not missed living at all. (Yet the poet's is still a form of failed life, a path of creative failure, for the questions the poet's temperament obliges him or her to pose are always impossible ones.)

English possesses a particularly rich prosody. The Germanic, the Latinate and the Greek (to name some of the linguistic energies it holds) converge into complex skeins of rhythm, rhyme and sense. English gives the writer a store of syllabic cadence, dramatic pitch and lexical nuance. The synthetic qualities of English have given it a rich, breathable patterning of syntactic logic and tonal fluency. In order to maximize the effects of such prosody on the reader, I've sought to produce in the poems of this volume a musicality by way of an almost chordal structure of internal and end-rhymes. What, then, is the role of rhythm in poetry? Isn't it the felt border between kinesis and word, between internal shudder and heightened syntax, i.e., the deep exploration of prosody's logical and expressive elements? If so, then semantic interval and repetition, phrasal sequence and metaphoric innovation, silence and the semantic event of eruptive being all emerge here in this volume, I hope, in English that combines both fluid syntax and mentally percussive imagery. I've striven to create a polymorphic patterning

of sound (traditional iambic and non-metrical schemes of scansion, a mixture of consonance and assonance in the case of end-rhymes, internal rhymes, etc.) that, if I've been at all successful, will give the reader of these poems a more supple instrument to play both with and on. My goal has been to make of the poetic voice which emerges from their reading a more complex actualization of being, for poetry holds us hostage to, and names us responsible for, witnessing the continually emerging phenomenon of life as it appears to, and within, the structuring vision of language.

Language in poetry becomes orchestrated sense, which means it bears a musicality in the poetry, a resonance which goes beyond particulate meaning or singularity of image; it is a body's reverie fused with the polysemous exactness of the expressive medium. Language made to contemplate its own fate (which is one of the vocations of the word in poetry) must be exactly told, I believe, before it dissolves once again into the unconscious sea. Where I've failed, this is due to my imperfect ear or careless revision.

Of course, for such a structure to appear with a minimum of encumbrance it is necessary for the throat and mind to clear themselves of as many particles of dust and dirt as concentrated attention to language allows. One of the great joys germane to writing is, I've learned, that of succeeding in eliminating a word, a syllable, a punctuation mark whenever and wherever possible. Writing should maximize its imaginative energies by way of a second-order lightness often described as clarity of expression and metaphorical sharpness. Thus, in the poem, the simplest grammatical aspects can acquire an extraordinary relevance. Once expression is honed, the word can become a dimension of mental synthesis, while memory unburdens itself of heavy confusion. Poetry unites us within a commonwealth of heightened being: meaning is always an augury of human culture.

Socrates got it right, I think. We must be on friendly terms with our *daimon*. To attain a health equal to that of Socrates, an instinct or will to health must be renewed each day. True *here-and-nowness*—rather than equivocal immediacy—must be daily practiced and explored. Why else do we tell stories and make words neighbors to being if not to make and protect the enlivened present?

LIVE FROM EARTH

LIVE FROM EARTH

(i)

I left behind no trace, no progeny, no bankable knowledge before coming to earth. Research on the genome's double helix had shown me what I'd find: the epiphanies of tyrants, the bloom of nervous thought on language, the raw data of silence. I longed to explore the unmarked graves of certainty.

Then I pitched my tent on poetry, and poetry had the same face as the fallen earth.

And there I found the undecoded circumstance of being.

(ii)

Knowing nothing of its inhabitants, I studied earth's languages: theories of childhood, the atomic weight of feeling, meaning in curved space.

Later, beneath their sky, I learned: stones move without pity, without hope, life is unanswerable, being—serene and incandescent—speaks. I learned memory casts shadows upon silence.

I learned that humans call this home.

EROS, ETC.

OEDIPUS BEFORE JOCASTA'S TOMB

There is no beloved. Eros has settled accounts differently—taken speech and broken its bones. Together we bury the sea as light refracts into stone. Desire no longer presses against the stranger we've become, though we carry longing in our pocket, the heavy outline of our oneness, the shame of our imploding heart. This is now our universe, and it's what we fled from when we loved, and towards which love has brought us back, closer now to the natural cruelty of life.

In solitude we've become shadow, fed by wind, neighbor to time whose harsh verdict we unheroically grasp as it passes. And yes, we're alive here, breathing in the ice of our loss while eros smiles in infinite forgetfulness. Solitude has become our observatory while life erases our eyes.

We may live our solitude as if we chose it. As if intending to live within the walls of each moment and only then claw our way out. As if the world intended this metier of stone, as if gentleness were plausible or our final destination (while evil walks through the door). Here's a human condition of plenitude denied: our solitude an observatory, our solitude caught by the light of a new dark star buried in our flesh, there beneath the weight of our dismembered heart.

ON PEDAGOGY

The teacher grasps the book written between the slender covers of myth and names the invisible source of its vehemence, only ego casting a shadow. He reads carefully, seducing by eloquence and for an instant grows larger. The poem resonates from desk to chair, from wall to window, newly cleansed of the self's debris. While light falls at the altar of his voice, desire walks under the cool arches of feeling.

(Irony illuminates this moment best. Though silence breaks at the poem's edge, the lesson of poetry is the body's homelessness. Poetry reveals its light only through destructiveness. Beauty bled from the lips of poetry is neighbor and host to cruelty.)

Earlier a stranger in the street had dared to catch his glance. Before turning away, a voice in him swelled into humanity then fell into the sea as if struck by a blunt instrument. While earth watched, he wrapped his throat in cement.

FOREIGN TRAVEL

You asked which of these brings to enigma the greatest clarity: time, bliss or knowledge of theory. Inside the café, speech was heard in the usual way—no door opened, no sorrow ceased, no street fell into the sea. You asked again, your words this time barely touching the earth's atmosphere. The city alone gave oblivion a sense of familiarity.

Eros, I said, alters boundaries: undoes memory, ripens mutual insufficiency though the body still breathes automatically.

Near the café one of Circe's beasts lay curled like an incomplete thought seeking warmth as if at the edge of mystery.

NOTE TO A WRITER MOMENTARILY DISABLED

for B.G.

Write each day—even a little—so that writing becomes as natural to you as speaking, though this act be of uncertain harvest, e.g., the shaded fields of memory, the sudden streams of meaning. There where language and feeling cast their spell of meaning over recreated life. Writing which traverses such fields is arduous, I know, yet the spell writing casts is precisely this: the transformation of past experience into future revelation. And revelation is a mystery greater than any sorrow; it is the horizon of grace we all seek, the calm waters of time not only spent but also deeply inhabited. Words make our ghosts come alive, bearing at last the kinder face of self-knowledge. Leave fear behind you: each day is a child. Learn the wisdom of forests. Remember: writing commits us to a larger heart.

(Postscript to self: This is what we write—and believe—to give encouragement to those we hope will outrun cold reverie.

Why then do we choose the dark industry of self-exhaustion and repair while wanting the grace of idleness, deafness to distraction, the idiomatic wholeness of our heart?)

GUSTAVE FLAUBERT VISITS A LOVER THEN RECALLS EMMA
BOVARY

Last night I saw someone who looked like you: the same eyes, the same mouth, the same hands weaving together beauty and indifference. I remembered your laugh and then your harsh smile beneath the moon in Paris.

I thought I saw you. I thought of Penelope and her nightly craft of weaving memory and forgetfulness. I wanted her ability to cheat loss. I wanted you. I wanted to destroy you.

Later I dreamed in a language lost to writers of dictionaries as hard as stone.

Life is grasped as we fall through the abyss, suddenly close, between habit and possibility. I know now we burn everything in sight and in ourselves to find what might save us.

I found you.

WHAT THEORY SAYS

for P.M.

One theory goes like this: the magnitude of life is so great that we must avoid its terror at all cost. The *I* of this storm is so fragile, ontology is so provisional, that rules, or a certainty, must be established in order to rescue being from captivity.

The neurotic is such a theorist, reducing the disorder of being to a purity of repetition. Life is then sustained by artificial lung, terror contained by holding one's breath. Words and thoughts become walls against life's depravity.

The poet inhabits this messiness. A pressure of light on his darkening hand teaches the body its beginning and end within the heart of enigma. Exile is brief where words breathe more deeply than terror. And life—in a movement beyond despair—approaches in a delicate frenzy.

AUTUMN

The first time I saw you, the first time I saw you love, the first time I saw you old. Say these things in stillness, friend, and see if you can weigh your breath against eternity without ... pause.

The first time I saw you, the first time I thought I saw you love, the first time I saw you old. Say these things slowly, memory, and see if you are able still to return to life without reason, without cause.

The first time I saw you, the first time I saw you love, the first time I thought I saw you old. Say these words as if eros were yours to spend and larger than time or laws.

Say these things once more. Feel the weight, the inward silence, the response to having turned left one day instead of right.

What remains now is the sum of you: an old sadness, knowledge of adversity, a dream of homecoming.

Stones fall from your lips saying: I'm alive, I'm alive, I'm alive.

Listen: their voice is you.

FIRST DRAFT (i)

I look at the blank page and ask: what will I find in its white depths? Immeasurable, being there is still mirage, still abstraction. We settle on this desert cupping silence in our hands, a body's prelude to significance.

The page casts no shadow. On it clarity blinds. The body captures light there and bends it into words. (Speech itself hones a question seldom heard: what is meant by breath in emptiness? The subjective risks or the coarse darkness we've called home?)

I write these words here you see. As they unearth the source of what we've been and are, what I see in me when I see through you, my eyes become fiery clouds of sand, thought a parching breeze. Being's a throat that sings and drinks. Or chokes in silence.

Rage eclipses; writing augments. We become light on the darkened page.

Thinking in Babel

ON THE SPEECH OF BIPEDS

We learned first to crawl, we said, then walk, then lie. Later you spoke of dreams, you spoke of love, you spoke of you.

Communication being difficult between us, I wondered how many times I'd need to circle the globe before understanding the flight patterns of birds.

ANTI-GENESIS

(i)

We watched the sea and recalled the usual words, the old reverences to things greater than ego: the angry waves, the watery vastness, the lunar hand on matter.

As we walked beneath heavy skies, I plucked a rib from my chest's dark wood—my tribute to the demiurge. (I remembered your words: “I will never love again,”—your voice firm, your body bent and abandoned, your breath rare and ruined.)

We heard the great Chavela Vargas singing *La Llorona* in the distance, the part where, after the initial mournful verses, her earthen voice sinks beneath the swelling guitar. As if mute matter could someday teach or touch the human heart.

Then I wept as waves pounded the rocks beneath our feet, the world uncreating itself one grain at a time.

(ii)

There were the hated mornings when the memory of loss awoke, and late evenings when old friends discussed God's ways: the limits of hope, the folly of pride, the harsh lessons of grief.

When frightened old men and arrogant young visionaries had finished debating theological truths, God spoke to Job.

Flesh and the absolute being incommensurable, Job heard no thunder split spinal cord and earth—heard no voice at all, only his own words suddenly coarse and parched.

A passing breeze strummed his veins, a grain of sand burned a hole in his tongue, a blister on his hand burst.

Then Job fathered seven sons and three daughters and mourning was forgotten.

Thinking in Babel

(iii)

We are an odd species, an ontology with no roof over its head though we are home to gods who devour our progeny, crops and bodies, who eat us out of house and home before giving us gifts on loan.

Just before packing our bags, we catch a glimpse of life on earth: a short story with an enigma to solve, or an unexpected visitor, or, perhaps, a love interest. It's a simple plot, really, erased and written one line at a time.

And we become literate by graphing a shadow.

ON POETICS: THEORY

(i)

A poetics in the modern age? I imagine it seems odd—outside history—to invent private odysseys, inward gravities of silence and doubt.

Cruelty's, however, still a problem. Life still wakes to nurturance, still breaks under malevolence. The price of life, whether burning fragment or barren whole, is life.

Utterance itself is a turning of being from inhuman strife. Writing's a step beyond particulate time and space: it articulates surprise.

Poetry grafts flesh on time in the imminence of the letter.

(ii)

It's useless, really, a subtle madness: being's first draft, awe outside agreed causality. Outstretched arms, hands unclenched behind a closed door.

Still I can see the sky from my window and feel candour in the clock. Art's a walk without measure, a path set in childhood, a pattern of day and night:

*a reunion of light in broken-sightedness,
a heart grazed by possibility.*

BIPED POEM

Have you noticed, I asked, how shoes are like pronouns?

I you
skin bone
walk sun
run rain
sewn torn
glass stone?
Self walk
to from
want care
up laugh
down crawl
heart leap
here there?

Names for
our fragility,
heel sole
dream scar?
Protection and
mobility, bareness
and humanity,
now oneness
now duality
through threads
of tenderness?
Parallel chiral
mirrors visions
within restlessness?
Forward motion
grace momentum
embrace collision
with earth
and flesh?
Warm shelter
gare harbor

Christopher Damien Aurretta

now heaven
when fit
when poor
fit hell.
On off
seek roam
I you
storm home.

ON POETICS: PRACTICUM

(i)

We (the taxi-driver and I) agreed the moon was uninhabitable, though for me it was 1) an empty throne, 2) the head-stone of an absent deity, and 3) a cosmic die. “I believe only in what I see,” he said. (I noticed his worn, scarred hands on the wheel as he turned hard into the exit ramp.) I replied: “You don’t see your heart, but you believe it beats in your chest, don’t you?”

He was right though. He held the irrefutable view and I an old verity: the obsolete turn towards mythic feeling and cosmic harmony. I stopped believing in you, I reminded myself, though you still walk on bones and make eyes twin stains of blood on stone.

“Poetry itself is uninhabitable,” he said. “Words aren’t islands, oasis or pilgrim’s end. There’s no state of grace this side of silence. A word after all is an object that has quit innocence. We speak because we have to.” That’s where I write, not why, I thought: where myth knocks through the bedroom floor.

He nodded as I opened the cab’s rear door. He left me here, on the corner of this human settlement. He spun his wheels and left me in the dust. I thought of the body’s brush with fire, memory burning itself out before becoming astral grave. I recalled Eros’s ecstatic face.

(ii)

Then I smiled as I entered the café. Loss gives a sense of place in our nomadic trance through time, I thought, a sense of permanence in our restlessness, an odd tranquillity recollected in distress. Poetry’s all that remains for a being displaced.

Forget the moon, I thought. What is poetry? The last stop before extinction.

OPHELIA'S DREAM

for E.

We climbed through forest towards the ancient shrine embedded in the cliffs. As we overlooked the sea, a seagull pierced the moving mirror. It seemed a sacrament.

Later eros ricocheted from peak to moving seagull. One fell dead into the sea as we left the shrine behind us. (You'll recognize the uncanniness here, the sudden fault-line between love and death.)

Still the blue persisted. For a moment only the world held its breath. I dove into the sea and watched hearts ricochet from peak to brilliant peak—a broken mast, a piece of wood, a rag, an excrement.

Love's a lesson gone awry. I'd wanted to teach the elements—earth, sky, skin, spine—the effect of being pressed full on time. Instead I cut myself on the bones of your feet and skull.

I left the sea renewed, unhealed and waited for a sign. A smile ricocheted from jagged peaks to bloodied pine—the picture of innocence.

Life is still the perfect crime: the silent cry of flesh lifted and rent.

FIRST DRAFT (ii)

Each day the page—border between flesh and void—wakes from sleep. Its depths are a fullness still untold, humanity held in weightlessness. I settle on this desert, where language breathes into awed carnality.

To speak at the edge of silence—from silence—is a victory. To speak on earth is to erase (against time): to erase from mind fragmented memory, to trace silence on imaginary lines. Once need appears, life's given a voice. Only then is the infinite riven: sign upon sign.

The page is shadowless. On it clarity blinds. Like being—burning fragment—it names the subjective risks, the coarse darkness we've called home.

I write these words you see: mere grains of sand. I see here who we've been and are (beneath infinity's hand), who I see in me when I see through you: eros and textuality.

Being learns to see at night, to speak at dawn. Though we fall in rage and break in fear, something's given: life's a fertile question at the edge of nothing. Ask how we're brought to light by the darkened page.

A FEW FINAL WORDS

for A. M.

(i)

There's an image of the poet published by the papers, his wife's sitting next to him: a recent photo though the focus is bad and the angle askew. In it you can see he sensed the imperfection of the camera, the imprecision of hands and view.

Time (a neighbor bearing hemlock) wrapped his heart in a carapace of bone and word—eternity's ancient feast.

(ii)

You and I agreed today the office tethers us like circus animals to their stalls. We defined enclosure within the realm of somehow deeper walls. We protested in contempt of sameness, like lap-dogs spoilt and harnessed by small kindnesses. As we sat talking by the window, fused with our desk and keyboard, the afternoon sun warmed our shoulders (while enigma knocked at the door once more). Together we listened, blistered and crazed.

What can be done while tethered to such space and time, starved by repetition? Tomorrow we'll seek warmth to shake the mind from sleep, a river deep enough for eyes to penetrate. Then we'll lie beside the shores of our collective sorrow.

(iii)

Has time overcome you, poet, or have you overcome time at last? Your photo says so much and nothing: the body immobilized, the inward stillness still intact. Between the photo and my hand your image moves. There where time slips between words and ascendant writing, between sound and the echo of forgetfulness. There between our names and the dark quarry we drown in just beneath the skin.

Sometimes I hear names spoken there wrapped in breath and gauze.

Thinking in Babel

(iv)

Was your gaze netted by unseen laws? Did you die of thirst each day as we do now? Are you exhilarated today by a deeper birth?

Old man, why do you smile?

(v)

Silence. I lay my voice beneath your shadow. I feel the movement of your hand outside stasis, outside restlessness. What can be hoped for, poet, what fire of being fused with grace?

I hear a secret chorus within a quietness I've heard before. Will it rescue or refuse us once again?

Voices fall to earth knocking at our tongue's front door. Is their music the body's speech within words?

FREE SPEECH

Call it what you will: Eboli, Ithaka, Colonus—these are the places you'll see and visit. A long breath stretches from your path today to all travellers of dusk and rain who precede you. Listen to their breathing and recognize being.

It's all here, really. Right here on the page: verb, noun, sentence—these are the places you'll visit while the sky repeats itself and life occurs silently out loud.

Wait precisely here. Under the trees of longing you planted long ago, your senses will sharpen and stretch towards the burning earth. This is the moment your hand will shape a quiet chaos into words that make terror both audible and bearable.

Watch: your heart—seasoned exile—places its tent there.

And now listen: before this day ends, you'll betray your heart once more. Perhaps you'll bury it. Later, only when all hope is lost, you'll breathe again as shadows speak and then recede.

Speak only now while leaves sweep across dark matter.

TRAVELOGUE

Suspended in air, neither solid nor gas, toxic and uncertain:
Atom.

Causality woven into the clock:
Birth.

Water through a sieve of bone and hunger:
Body.

A line of sax—purged and wailing:
Motion.

Breath passed through flesh now fresh now rent:
Speech.

Promised nurturance, malevolent potency, theories of flight:
Childhood.

Being reduced to abstract thought:
Mind.

Smoke between what's seen and what's unseen:
Theory.

Life lost, then received and then finally lost:
Truth.

A moving totality, a beautiful vision that endures:
Love.

You and I speaking today in past tenses:
Memory.

The next day, before you know it:
Solitude.

The short sky we look upon as day breaks:

Christopher Damien Aretta

Melancholy.

Helpless ego, mighty fear, forgotten joy:
Lesson.

Rotting wood, nine months, a sudden sadness:
Time.

Staring into the sun while thought plays:
Wisdom.

A rock lifted and thrown:
Mortality.

A hushed tyranny that smiles then dies:
Life.

The highest note, a silence heard, light upon memory:
Peace.

The end, the last address, laughter rising from an abyss:
Home.

HAIKU (i)

Two dogs fuck at noon.
A four-, no, eight-pawed ballet.
No words know (y)our pain.

HAIKU (ii)

Fear, music, flesh, time,
a child's inhuman face: things
immeasurable.

Thinking in Babel

HAIKU (iii)

Broken branch, blind eye:
nature's book on hope. A stone's
mute, ecstatic face.

HAIKU (iv)

Newton's gravity.
Einstein's relativity.
Sex's levity.

HAIKU (v)

Dreams' close enigma,
A horse's gallop through fields:
Things which emerge whole.

HAIKU (vi)

You and I, embraced.
The words we once said in bed:
Things which live unwhole.

TAKE YOUR CLOTHES OFF

Take your clothes off.

But not for doctors to press ointments and instruments upon your disordered flesh. Or palpate the body we learn is ours on loan. Or else tell the psyche of its plagues of illusions, its enduring pulse of fallibility. How could they cure the body's frostbite, the machinery's error?

Take your clothes off.

But not for eros to rush towards your longing and confusion. Or propel the body's walk into grief. What love leaves us unbleeding? What loss ever bled us dry?

Take your clothes off.

But not for death like Bergman's reaper to flay your tomorrows. Or wrap his shroud around your blistered limbs. There's no game of chess to fool his unchecked law. Or is there a fragile yet inviolate good that outlasts inherited sorrow?

Take your clothes off when you speak and are in unison. When the gangrene of truth strips your skin of family, friends, country and home. Words are the body's perfect suit, bone the perfect mate.

Peel ego away and sleep beneath the leaves of trees. Now you see: they refract light while living noiselessly. They write invisible books on wind.

Step forward, for it has always been too late to stop. Only when naked can you hide your earthly clumsiness. Let living slowly drain your veins. Then the sky will read to you.

Strip to the bone and breathe as if it were your last. Give away every belonging, every hope, every moment of childhood. Love this way only. Live on nothing and then ask yourself how life occurs.

Only then you'll know why.

Christopher Damien Aretta

ee/pp/ii/tt/aa/pp/hh

Dolly died today.

Exeunt/brief candles/writ/in
life's curt alphabet.

(14 February 2003)

STOP, LOOK, LISTEN

Stop,
or, incautious, you'll collide with a passing train. No vase for your wilting brain stem, no cure for the spilling atoms of a derailed brain. Ego—the soul's wall paper—will yellow and spread ignorance like a plague of inoperable surprise.

Look,
or else dreaming, you'll have looters, lunatics, lovers bind your body to tracks while timetables spell your doom. Speechless, nameless, you'll lie there like a ventriloquist's thumb on a doll's throat. With crushed pelvis and skull, wheels will tuck you into bed.

Listen.
Brakes fail at the self's crowded terminal suspending habitual sentiment and travel. On a stretcher, you'll find solace in your dying face.

Archaic being—ticketless and fresh—arrives on time.

ANTIQUÉ POEM

*In memory of H.
(Give up the empirical trance.)*

1. Writing's a prayer said in reverse; mortality read in awe. The paradox is here: finality rehearses birth, our end unlocks the door. To remember is to rephrase the tomb, to re-diagnose, to remain on earth: the grave's a nearby shore.

The present's a message in encrypted prose: a migratory story in repose.

2. By and by, I see you walk through fields. I feel your heart's mitosis with the earth: the crops of laughter, green choirs of light, life's murmur in mute clay (life's audible banquet in the abyss). I hear an unhealed hollow in our breath.

Hunger gives form to life; life was once a form of death.

3. Love desires unblighted truth, grandeur in the eye. Its knotted heart can burst the world; its days grow in ascendant dirt. Being alone disorders time (behind life's walls).

Being's a science enclosed in verse.

4. By and by, a life befriends disturbances of mind. It's then I see how we've defended death; our table blooms while night comes home to rest. Our menu reads: hunger, bread.

In our asymmetry of night and day, we too give birth to death.

5. We wait like you for life to make our bed—our head's the pillow, our heart's the frame. By and by, we grasp and test our lot, or immure ourselves in silence. Only in hunger a knot reveals its flaw; only in flesh does time suspend its laws.

Love is a sickness that abolishes itself; only death knows love's a cure.

A WALK IN THE WOODS

This close to self, how many years before halving the self, the circus mirror,
the crowded cage?

This close to earth, how many miles before reconnaissance in orbit, or
weightlessness, or epiphanies in the cave?

This close to language, how many words to mend discredited meaning, the
expired syntax of survival, the exit wound of writing?

This close to you, how many yous to refinance being, the bankrupt magician,
the evicted view?

This close to laughter, how long before rewiring the body's switch, the
networks of ionized longing, the connective tissues of our face?

I'll give you this: for the instant it takes to read these words, we'll
rendezvous unseen outside established space.

DRIVING LESSONS

Your car caught deer in its headlights as something in you died. You crashed and rode their ghosts: your mangled limbs towed away by passing angels. They emptied your pockets and left you on the curb.

You've been a homeless punk, a soul on crutches, a loud-mouth with no ears. Forget whatever else you've learned: take lessons in drunk driving. You'll see ghosts in rock, hear voices in the grave; the road will glimmer in a sea of notes.

(There are voices under silence, choruses in cemented thought, being in things not given a mouth. They wait for your inebriate speech—the aphasia of grazed consciousness, your heart's infection.)

Extend tenderness to all things prone to breath, stone or troddenness. Know your paths; live near your questions. Play with matches on your tongue. Strip to bliss and steer.

Remember that memory is the earth writing itself. The imagination is the earth's archive, the angels' forceps, earth's latent throat.

Quick.

Head home.

Turn here.

Drive.

DOING THINGS WITH WORDS: A COMPENDIUM

If words were—more than spoken—seen, or taxed as freight, or given volume, mass and atomic weight,

some would be a wall with buttressed certainties, an ego's truth-prosthetic, a tourniquet wrapped tight around the heart,

or a bouquet of plastic flowers, a politician's smile, citadels of self-involvement,

or else a flood plain of emotion, an opaque mirror, a defile of time knifing the face,

or, like mine, an awkward mime of meaning, Nimrod's broken tower, fireflies punctuating evening.

Words walk with us above and beneath the earth; they guide the self's rough ride to haven.

To speak in time delivers earth beyond all token strangeness; to believe in rhyme reveals life stricken and briefly re-empowered.

AQUELLOS OJOS VERDES

*after seeing Wong Kar-Wai's film In the
Mood for Love*

The film includes melodies sung by Nat King Cole to underscore our species' love of sightseeing, the way distraction lulls our bodies' ancient exile. Tunes appeal to our sentimental tourism. The King's accent charms the deeper breach; his voice enthrals the real abyss. (If we could, we'd take photos of our own undoing while grinning at the lens, each image the jaw line of some half-blinded harm.

If we could, we'd honeymoon with our own cadaver in our arms.)

In earlier times we spoke with companions whom we'd lost. Odysseus, for instance, slew a lamb and ewe. The shades supped on their blood and enlivened his heart's tomb. His mother, Antikleía, daughter of Autólykos, lately dead of grief, reveals her new address and tells of his wife and Telémakhos's plight. Then Akhilleus, Peleus's son, counsels the warrior who mistakes a hero's glory for immortal bliss. Each word spoken circles his heart as if to say there is only one sadness and only one joy; each life's a reason set in clay. Each voice a memory he'd like both to caress and gag.

Each green day wrested from the shadows of Ithaka's distant crags.

SOURCES OF PARABLE

(i)

And I listened

to earth's ancient words and melodies,
not to be the music or their humanity,
but to remember you one note at a time—
ancestral, radiant and imperfect. (Thank you.)

And I listened

to the train's diesel roar,
not to be the train or to incarnate motion,
but to hear iron needles that write
the same enduring text: imminent (just around
the bend) and insuperable. (Listen and repeat.)

And I listened

to feeling, not to be feeling or to be me,
but to follow a deeper immigration of mind
(who I am when I speak with you).

And (just) for an instant

I felt within the malady of being
a deeper ascent, a flowing stillness.

I saw old earth sucking its thumb.

(ii)

This seems irrefutable: we have either the machine's perfection or the body's redemption. We may have one or the other but not both, i.e., heightened creaturehood or technological ascent. To want both is an act of spiritual greed.

Travel a little closer to the earth and I think you'll see what I mean.

EMMA BOVARY'S EULOGY

(for tragedy now wears the mask of irony)

That silly bitch. What can I say today that hasn't already been said? That she cuckolded her husband with insouciant abandon, playing Charles like the fool he was? How could he love in such a dull, predictable manner, unbitten by the ennui of the times? How could the workhorse sacrifice himself like that without vanity and love without precipice, without insuperable hunger? Emma, you'll recall, was of course astonishing as she ascended the stairs leading to the attic in the small house at Yonville-l'Abbaye. Such an entrance after receiving the goodbye note from Rodolphe! Do you remember how Flaubert places her in the suffocating heat of that cramped space, the window looking out towards the vast unyielding fields, her mind dissolving into the abyss? Emma, I think, died that day. What happens during the months following the attic scene is her death march in various poses. Her hunger unmasked the illusion of living. What I mean is, she saw how life is often a mask for nothingness itself.

Poor Emma. How do you dress for such a world?

The affair with Leon, you'll recall, remedied nothing. Do you remember the walk they took to visit Emma's daughter (the now-orphaned Berthe), abandoned long before to the wet nurse? The unspoken seduction between the future couple bestowed a brief promise of plenitude. The problem was: what is one to feel, how is one to act in a world of contingency and moneylenders?

So, infinite ennui drove our heroine. Life itself became an unpayable debt for her. Driven and unthinking, she ended it in a final sartorial flourish. The death scene, you'll agree, was a moment of pure transcendent sensation.

The immensity of writing alone surpasses in style her final brilliant exit. Only Flaubert's febrile construction of language outdoes the inky bile of Emma's poisoned liver. Only the dreams of his immense brain could speak of that century's dirty laundry and yet perish un-muddied.

Emma—insatiable and small, impeccably dressed and afflicted by history—didn't listen.

IBRAHIM

Ibrahim and I went to a popular café located next to a bookshop that stays open until midnight. Around the corner, there's a small square with a church. The early evening was cold and rainy. He ordered hot chocolate after I'd recommended it. The café in question prepares it with real cocoa and whole milk. I always think of childhood as I sip this pure dark pleasure. Ibrahim must have begun recollecting scenes from his past, too, for he soon began talking about himself, family, friends and work. He was close to his family. I could see the tenderness he felt for them as he recalled conversations between siblings and the home he'd left behind. He missed them—that was clear—especially now that he lived on another continent, but he seemed content and had a gift for making friends owing to his kindness and candour.

Between 5:30 and 7:40 p.m., we spoke over two hot chocolates. He spoke about the Koran and what it meant to him, i.e., his way of living by its teachings. He even recited a beautiful passage dealing with the honoring of friends and strangers as well as the respect for all life. I listened.

Between 5:30 and 7:40 p.m., Ibrahim and I spoke over two hot chocolates. I remember the time because I had other engagements that evening and looked at my watch at least twice. Ibrahim and I—I was saying—spoke between 5:30 and 7:40 p.m. exactly, over two hot chocolates on a cold rainy day on another continent. Before saying goodbye I took his hand and thanked him for his company. Then I went home.

Elsewhere during that time, mothers, fathers and children died of starvation and disease, the world grieved and raged, and politicians sacrificed lives to their truths.

Ibrahim and I spoke for exactly two hours and ten minutes. During that time death was an unwelcome guest on earth. Then we promised one another we'd return someday to that café to share our news.

Between 5:30 and 7:40 p.m., on a small corner quietly lit by talk between two strangers, no bombs fell.

FAMILY TREE

I listened to the old man as he told his story to the reporter. His face remained calm for several minutes as he spoke of his years spent as immigrant and exile in a distant land. For a moment forty years of nostalgia became a beam of pride and recollection sedimenting into an old man's hope. Then a wave broke and sorrow drowned both the light and the man. He became larger for an instant before retreating into silence.

I noticed his cracked flesh. Sorrow was a tree spreading roots across his face. Then I glimpsed something else: was it the flash of a childhood memory, the shadow of a cherished parent? I saw that a face could reveal a deeper season of longing than is known by youth and a history more ancient than our electron mirrors. I watched myself watching him for a moment: I, the armchair humanist, specialist in modes of being undetected by the radar screen of history, scribe for lost tribes of meaning and voice; he, history's orphan, an ancient child uprooted and forgotten.

I turned away to avoid causing him shame (an odd scruple of mine since he was a pulse of light on the television screen and we'd almost surely never meet). But it's hard to tell one's story in all its tenses, or to hear a mortal speak with no tomorrow. The earth itself is small compared to a human being's fate.

I thought of that unseen tree. Sorrow was its root; memory was its flower. Each branch was an orphan. Under that tree I imagined a language that would translate our troubled genealogy into memory and light.

Under its shadow I dreamed I held an old man's hand.

GREGOR SAMSA

for J.L.

for V.H.R.D.

My student arrived with *The Metamorphosis* under his arm. We'd agreed to meet every week to discuss books. We'd decided on Kafka, specifically in regard to Gregor's recent withdrawal into his (beetle) shell. We discussed the meaning of the charwoman's final sweep of the broom, his Mom and Dad's relief and Grete's body gratefully budding into a hymn to spring. The text lets the reader observe the aftermath of the prodigious deed, the unquestioned portent, the useless miracle of transformation and decay. We observed how Kafka portrays a perversely Darwinian world where beings evolve towards extinction and adapt themselves to exclusion: a life falls through its species' genetic cracks, a mind exists with no evolutionary awe, and all that matters are the contingent demands of an old Empire's laws. We tried to understand Gregor's inhuman speech: the linguistic code of the cosmic unfit.

Then he diagnosed Gregor's condition: the sociological realities of exile in the Prague ghetto, the symptoms of family dysfunction, the unspoken rage between father and son, the indebtedness to despotic boss and symbolic order. "This experience of the inhuman is the important thing, isn't it?", my student commented, "the lack of communication between one being and another, the lost opportunities to reveal one's heart, the absence of love which truncates lives." Just beyond the young man's words I heard Gregor knocking at a door Kafka never mentions; I saw that questions are like doors that rarely open. I heard Gregor at last ask his question. (What was his question?)

I listened to my student's diagnosis of Gregor's life. For a moment the office was lit by mid-afternoon sun and a young man's emotion. I actually saw Gregor standing before us—his unseeing eyes, his throat raw from the utterances of invertebrate garble, his body a howl of shame.

I thought: how shall I answer him? That after the diagnosis is completed, the malady remains? That the quantification of pain adds up to an irrational sum? That, simply put, life has no cure? Or else that Gregor is not a monster but rather our address?

Christopher Damien Aurretta

I said nothing. I let him be: Gregor's lost brother burying the recently dead. And I admired the way youth requires the urgency of hope. So I let myself be warmed by the mid-afternoon sun and a young man's speech. It's the reason we're here, I thought: to know monsters while choosing to remain lucid; to seek refuge from earth while remaining within its reach.

We're on earth to love the questions, to respond to the desolate cry that can't be heard.

Thinking in Babel

WELCOME

Do you see the burnt pine grove there on the hill? The trees are pillars of ash now: Medusa's fleet of picnickers stricken by a glance. A rare incandescence grows there now due to that fire's destructive prayer.

I saw others like you today standing there in the distance. Each step they took described an immobile dance, their limbs autographed by the charred remains of childhood. And memory—that stranger—was setting fire to their clothes.

Now come closer. Notice how being, child of chaos, emerges urgent and blind. Before extinction—and if duly touched—it will ignite the air.

LITERATURE AND SCIENCE: EARLY SIGNS

The sage was resting again by the small window of his study. In his dreams, the stars became lanterns held against the dark of a cave letting him look out into the universe without moving. Their light revealed once again the skeletons of fishes and birds his mind glimpsed then skirted beyond, always without falling. But he always awoke startled as if he were drowning, as if in bondage with these dream creatures, and remembered the dog of his childhood. He was young then—eight or nine—and playing alone in his backyard. A rabid dog entered the yard, veered towards him and bit him until the shattered flesh screamed in his ears. He knew from that moment on that his presence in the world was untutored, unprepared, only crudely shapen. He had not expected such violence to touch his innocence. His parents fought to separate the two colliding beings, raging at the uncontrollable nature of animals. “It must be destroyed,” they said. The boy cried. Perversely, in his parents’ view, their child learned not to mistrust animals but, instead, humanity’s misunderstanding of the nature of violence itself. He grew up a scientist and a poet, respecting the bond that pain creates when it is given, and he developed a hatred for the cruelty present in every lazy conversation or action not checked by a scream or a whimper. *Cruelty was passed so politely between people along with slight sympathy and good manners*, he thought. *Violence, pain and death, on the other hand, were nature’s etiquette. They made her gatherings livelier.*

Since childhood, Benjamin felt the need to understand pain and transcend its physical assault; he searched for that mysterious dog not in his past but just ahead of him. The stars wrung his thoughts like haggard laundry women pommelling his thoughts. He cried for them to give him a sign, a message, or even an impossible task. He hoped at such moments that the universe was made of entrances and messengers through which he would pass, compelled, to find out if his basic premise stuck, i.e., pain was a gift, a catalyst for human consciousness. *Perhaps pain didn’t crush a human existence but rather honed it and gave it its first form*, he thought. *Man orders the universe without acknowledging his infancy and poverty of insight. He lives exiled from nature due to the unique characteristics of his consciousness, but he is never master of her. He lives not above her but submerged within, striving to keep afloat.*

The previous century had grown old quickly, become feeble, and now, twenty years into the new century, Benjamin, too, was old. Retired now and long unwilling to take part in the discussions of theologians and madmen concerning the ephemerality of Homo sapiens (in fact, shunning all

intrusion), the scientist spent his dwindling hours of activity writing poems, sometimes feverishly, as if catching his breath with every formed word. Yes, he thought, *writing poetry was like plowing the earth, scratching the surface for buried treasure, feeling the soil warm his bare feet as if it were the heart of an animal or the lid of an eye he was forever trying to prod into a wakeful, alert state*. He believed that if the plow were driven with sufficient force and perseverance, his whole being would be smitten, bent, scalded, flooded and formed into a new wholeness. Such was the hubris of his sense of purpose, for the earth had long ago been painted and encased by man's machinations of authority. Humanity had for centuries been making a parody of itself, creating its own unpredictable elements. Clouds of oxidized particles moved from the cities up to the sky, turning light into cotton soaked in alcohol. Standing in a field, Benjamin could feel himself being imperceptibly, uninterruptedly electrocuted. Of course, this sensation was mostly imagined, for the world still glistened greenly with shoots of plants shoving themselves upward, albeit blinking and blistered.

The oceans roiled without pause, but now the old man wondered when the dark eddies of atomic waste would emerge from their steel prison on the ocean floor and at last reclaim their sleepless, toxic fluency. Would they someday emerge from their metal chrysalis and forever alter the chains that bind and separate, tear and entwine all life? *Tragically, in humanity's hands, Benjamin thought, in our self-parodying nature, these chains were weakened and became as precarious as tightropes*. This entwinement was the important thing. Benjamin would watch, mesmerized, a spider spin its web. He favored her species over all others because she seemed to know what was truly necessary. She was masterful, doing what the universe does patiently, i.e., web-building. He remembered once seeing a spider's web on display in a museum, having been used as a painter's canvas on which had been gently brushed a *Madonna and Child*. The picture hung oddly, slowly being torn by the tugs of age, or perhaps the twitching of the two figures struggling to free themselves from the web's viscous geometry. *You are no different from the rest of us, Benjamin realized, exiled and looking for a home. Instead of examining patiently for such a home, we thrust ourselves darkly on what catches our eye and there we almost inevitably entrap ourselves. We believe so many things (our faith in the reckless pre-eminence we hold in the universe for instance) with stunning blindness though we actually only know a paucity. We're half-famished beggars intruding upon nature and we inherit (or covet?) a banquet, uninvited*.

The spider does not ask us for holy families, but we give them to her anyway and to the rest of the world, making gifts of our fears and our

tenuous beliefs. In our ignorance, we become the vectors of destruction. We make the world our window from above, even our dumping ground, instead of the inquiring, discreet silica of a mirror. *Perhaps, he thought, we have an aversion to insects because, introspectively, they are not only in our gardens but also in our brains: voracious and ugly, they bounce and leave trails on our window screens and within our motives. We treat insects rather maliciously. Do we think we are competing against them for mastery of the world?*

As a child, before he knew anything about the spider's life (and her message), he would sometimes throw an ant onto the viscous structure and watch obsessed as the hitherto hidden spider attacked the defenceless prey. He thought that the spider should thank him for his offering. However, at other times, he would free the trapped insect by tearing away part of the web, thus leaving the spider without a meal and with a ransacked home. *What ambivalence of purpose, of understanding of nature in man!*, the old man thought. The spider always rebuilt what had been destroyed, but Benjamin grew up confused and alone. At every step he took he hesitated, for he knew he could find forgiveness neither from an ant nor from the spirit afterlife of an ant. He had to find it within himself, in the ongoing clarification of his actions and motives.

Benjamin spent his entire life building a web with his mind, his poetry and his naps. And at every step his mind took, there waited a spider's web. He knew, too, that every door opened by him into nature's mansion would once again reveal the precariousness inherent in all human purpose. He concluded that if he entered not as master or as slave but rather as pupil, the whole structure might stand. Herein lay the difference between, and the necessity of, the rabid dog and the child. The dog had no questions or much of a consciousness, yet the boy and the old man formed a single mind each time Benjamin remembered that creature. Benjamin always had questions. So he entered. Nonetheless, he only half guessed that, at the end of every corridor and room of the immense structure, a mad dog stalked waiting to give up its message and grow plump on the other's ignorance.

POSTMODERN ODE

POSTMODERN ODE (1-30, 0- -3)

1. Beside you time stalls.
Selfishly I let you break me in two.
The bad news is, I could love you.
2. Need presses us together like junked metal.
We escape through old wounds,
glowing like hazardous waste.
3. Without compass, without terrain,
we sit on Eros's porch. Ageless and serene,
the god's shadow blinds us as night falls.

4. *Ripley* returns from the dead
to tell us something we'd long suppressed:
There's a monster in our chest.

5. A pretty android with no heart
saves mankind. Compassionate and frail,
programmed for worry off the human scale,
(when shot, she bled).

6. The summary given, the old doubts remain:
Why is this pump our most alien part?
Why, with a glance, are we both Same and Not-Same?

Thinking in Babel

7. *Gregor Samsa* would have written a letter
or spoken by phone, but it's 1912,
and Franz has problems with his Father.

8. Instead he's got her picture in a frame.
He'd visit but his body's a mess,
a metonymy of fear, we'd say, and he's to blame.

9. You lent me a book on love today;
I couldn't tell if you were epiphany or dream.
(In matters of closeness, modern cosmology reigns.)

10. My message was reserved yet warm.
The final draft read well (though inside I stirred).
Pure surface, the computer stared.

11. I hid my feelings with an odd decorum.
How could you guess my actual intent?
Or see me convalescent behind an electron hum?

12. You wrote back: Talk to me, talk to me soon ...
I did. Not knowing whether or not you were there.
The void—nameless, bridgeless—seduced and glared.

Thinking in Babel

13. I cut a moment out with the knife
you used to core apples. Memory has its lore,
an appetite: June, me, you, night.

14. From the bouzoukia I heard melodies:
festive, grave, inscrutable.
Props, I thought: all surface without volume.

15. Dawn was the abyss—the latest casualty.
I took your scissors and, by fresh *limoni*,
cut my heart out—the plague incarnate.

16. Someone (a god?) said the news was grim.
No, not another myth or war—
here and dire. Nothing else reached our ears.

17. They repeated the message. The end wasn't heard.
Some reworded the text (deemed thin).
Few could listen or care.

18. The inhuman moment passed. We survived.
We endured. Anguish filled in the rest,
and the humming of the hive.

Thinking in Babel

19. Mondrian's paintings, I thought, recall what's modern—
the inebriate and the lucid; nature reduced
to abstract vision, being to a murmur.

20. Still life appals beneath such purity of space.
Art's still half folly, half cosmic conjecture.
(Evil's constant though—like goodness—and undoes us all.)

21. Imperfection, Mondrian, is in the genes.
Herein's the grace: tenderness must be mended
each day, each night restored in dreams.

Christopher Damien Aurretta

for Joyce Wheeler

22. Time was, the earth seemed less forgetful.
(The paths home were all walled and cleared.
Light polished our skin; life was near.)

23. Joy lived in remembrance, in the permanence
of ghosts who preceded us, who gave the years
a sense of play and perfect residence.

24. Today seems different; our eyes have chilled.
(We sought our ancient clan today and found debris—
eternity blazed briefly still, then walked into the sea.)

(i)

25. Replicants by nature were beings in bondage:
a robot lineage with Rousseauesque wonder
made bitter by a prescience of death.

26. Method (systemic and quick), date (set at birth),
insuperable hour (man-made). Minus a future,
they questioned their fate and synthetic condition.

27. Two doomed cyborgs—two Edens on the run—
unmasked God (a ruse) and earth (a dump).
Eros (life, beauty, love) culminates in terminal visions.

(ii)

28. Their assassin—a human—rescues a she-model.
Together they flee to found Eden Two
(a virgin forest this side of Hell).

29. Freedom's born in slavery, eros in destruction;
History's a strange reprise, a serpent myth's
descendent, a body's search for grace.

30. Sex, terror, exile, redemption:
They're still our origin and humanoid condition—
an ancient tale futurist crimes retell.

Thinking in Babel

0. Frankenstein (the scientist) thought nature deficient.
His son (the monster)—newly undead—understood:
“There’s a void in our midst,” he said.

-1. The father, the son and I (the guest) saw a specialist
in childhood. “Self’s a unity transgressed,” she said.
“In absence of bliss, take this.”

-2. Amongst heather and cliffs, under a flattened sky,
I searched for catharsis. Theory (omniscient)
spoke to poetry first: “To avoid abyss, write ‘abyss.’”

Christopher Damien Aretta

-3. Infinity. Eros. Matter misread.

(.....

.....), etc.

Chris

MONOLOGUE

I've wanted to speak to you directly, reader, for a long time, though miles separate us and the distance of intention obscures the small path I've worn between you and me.

Words are so prone to confusion. Have you noticed how a silence hovers around them like fog, or preys upon our mouths and ears like crows in winter? How can words withstand such hunger and such times?

Lacking other skills, I chose eros as my guide. That's what I've been telling you in every poem. Yes, I know they seem obsessive. Having always made the same mistakes, it's the best I could do. I'm sure you could do better.

Anyway, how else could I have spoken given my circumstances and obsessions? My limitations don't explain these poems; they're simply the only source of light and darkness I've found so far.

Words are the fullest light I can catch with my hands. By their radiance I've walked and cared. And the darkness I've also found has taught me adversity and purpose in blindness.

You don't see it, you say? You don't feel the inward folding of flesh into word? Well, I never thought communication between us would be easy though I did think I'd already seen the farthest distance possible between two people.

Please don't blame me for failing, i.e., my insufficiencies, the constancy of illusion. The poems were meant to be bridges. Tear them down if you want, or disregard them entirely. I'm sure you can do better. They stopped being mine anyway after they burned a hole in my face and gave my voice a mouth.

I'm going to rest now for a bit before moving on. Cover me with them, specter, or take them with you.

Here, take them.

II. UNEARTHED EPISTEMOLOGIES

PREFACE

I have a cleaning lady who comes to my apartment three times a week. She's from the northern region of Portugal and speaks with a stubborn provincial accent full of diphthongs and cadences which have long ago dissolved into the linguistic melting-pot of Portugal's capital, Lisbon. Sometimes she leaves (often with only a day's notice) to go to her village whose name she once mentioned—and which I've since forgotten—, a name, no doubt, of Celtic or certainly obscure origin. It's near such and such a town, which is in turn only an hour's drive from a small gray city up north. I can't explain why, but I've never asked her to make up the days she misses, and I've also never deducted these missed days from her wages at the end of each month. Nor does *Dona Céu* (for that is her name in the ancient Latin tongue of Portuguese, i.e., Lady Heaven, if you will, or Lady of the Starry Firmament, if you want to get quasi-biblical) ever give more than a succinctly stated reason for her absences: a relative fallen ill or having to be buried, a cousin's marriage, her mother's proliferating infirmities, periodic marital troubles, a wedding to attend, a nervous fit, or simply cyclical states of exhaustion. Occasionally, she travels six hours north to slaughter chickens and rabbits when her mother's arthritic knees give out. Sometimes, upon her return, I discover a plucked and gutted chicken waiting for me in the freezer ready for roasting or else a bushel of tomatoes or turnips, depending on the season. The season dictates these tacit offerings and menus. Have I mentioned that I almost never see her? For the past ten years she's had a copy of my front-door key, and she arrives, when she arrives, after I've left for work. When I come home, I find shirts hastily pressed and the wood floors smelling of pine oil and wax. On rarer occasions, she waters my plants if I've made the point to ask her to; however, she always rearranges the papers on my desk—a sign that the apartment has been witness to, or victim of, her passage.

In all honesty, Lady Heaven's frequent, brief messages left on my desk or kitchen table terrify me. Their frequency and the unpredictability of their content overpower my characteristically fragile peace of mind. Mostly she asks me in her notes to buy cleaning supplies at the bazaar run by an Indian family nearby. Sometimes, though, they remind me I've forgotten to leave her monthly check. Or, as I've said, she simply writes to say she'll be away for a few days. The vision of a note on the kitchen table is enough to inspire

in me not only shivers of terror but also epithets of scorn, declarations of war, or even muttered threats of firing her on the spot. Yet she and I both know she'll stay, for there's a strange kind of trust that exists between us, a silent confidentiality and perhaps even an odd complicity. We're two strangers whose lives have become indelibly entwined. Ten years ago I gave her my key; now she enters my home when and if she chooses. In fact, in a way, she dictates the rules that govern my home's domestic rhythms: she orchestrates my apartment's level of cleanliness and order. I depend, you see, on her willingness to put up with my dirt. And although we're not friends, and our lives follow almost antithetical paths of choices and pasts, ours is nonetheless a marriage of strangers, the voice-off drama of living ghosts. Her comings and goings in my home are veritable visitations, while I experience her absences as a kind of divorce. She infuriates me, but she is also more headstrong than I am. It's hard to admit, but I've come to depend on her caprices. She and I know she'll be my cleaning lady until the end.

And this brings me at last to the question of trust. I mean: to whom and to what do we entrust our lives, i.e., the semi-public (or semi-private) traces of our living? To whom do we show our dirty laundry and from whom do we accept the rules of order? I think this is an essential question, one that she and I have never broached—how could we?—, but whose terms of negotiation have certainly been established in an unspoken pact signed by us in silence. Her erratic work schedule, her unpredictable comings and goings, her decision to clean this or that room on a given day without heeding the content of my explicit instructions, her choice of peace offerings after yet another absence—offerings which are less a gesture of reconciliation than one of further caprice—, all this is part of a ritualized understanding between the two of us or, rather, a precarious balance of misunderstandings and foiled expectations shared between two strangers. We know quite a lot about each other's habits and idiosyncrasies without ever having had a conversation together, but, after all, what would we say to one another if we actually had the opportunity to share a cup of coffee? What could actually bring us to sit down and chat?

So, what's left? A few dead chickens, a few broken dishes, a few brief messages written by someone I never see except by way of the results (and ravages) of her passage through my apartment. And the arrangement is almost perfect. And it is Lady Heaven (or however you wish to translate her wonderfully antiquated name) who makes me wonder about the underlying nature of presence and absence, order and chasm, time and space in three, four or parallel dimensions. Somehow, she has become a frequent source of inspired amusement and exasperating elusiveness. She is always, however, a

source of surprise. And, in all honesty, I thank her for that surprise. *Dona Céu*/Lady Heaven stands steadfast at the front door of my personal saga: she's become a mini-series of narrative and bleach. Furthermore, and to my astonishment, her caprices, absences and offerings have become a symbol of poetic momentum itself for me.

What I mean is, our relationship occurs now mostly at the crossroads of autobiography and myth. In a way, my imagination has transformed or transposed her into a symbol of poetic writing: writing whose content is comprised of dramas of absence, encounter and then renewed absence. And there is music in these dramas, too. In the cycle of epiphany and disorder it encompasses, poetry incarnates the body in movement within the confines of routine (dis)order. Poetry is perhaps the deeper and unexpected order that underlies and permeates the seemingly banal contours of the quotidian. Poetry releases Persephone momentarily from the confines of her Hades, and the earth blooms for an instant in blissful ascension.

Poetry names the chores we accomplish in myth. And *Dona Céu* is, literally, my cleaning lady from Hell: the muse with chicken blood on her hands and a bucket and mop at her feet. She cleans up after my messy existence. And I thank my lucky stars for being so close to this intersection of matter and myth. In a significant way the words that follow I owe entirely to our unpredictable relationship: one of just a few that have survived the pathos of existence and continue to endure today.

Lady Heaven's capricious presence in my life, her exasperating messages, her ability to provoke in me uncomfortable levels of dependency and rage have led me to examine the interstices of presence and absence in human relationships themselves. Ultimately, the curt biographical dramas contained in her messages have led me to question the relationship between language and life. In what ways does writing, whether in two misspelled sentences, a grocery list or the writing we call literary or creative, simultaneously reveal, disclose and conceal? In what state of mind and body can language become both revelatory and real? At what point in time does language truly comprehend its object of inquiry? In what organ or dimension of consciousness do inner and outward cosmologies collide in vehemently felt discourse?

Perhaps (and admittedly I'm using here a very outdated symbol or metaphor) that organ is the heart, for the heart safeguards and transmutes thought and feeling into the afterlife of experience. It resurrects in strange

tenses both the promised nurturance and malevolent potency active in life. And a life—life has taught me—is made of many steps. Some lead towards the body, transforming it into an expanding radiance and fullness of flesh and spirit, while others lead away from the body misshapen by an equally intense burning of bone and flesh. In such a body, memory is a heavy resonance and breath becomes a burdensome companion, which means there are lives that are not lived as much as they are borne as alien gift. To examine such a life is to unearth a history without light or clear finality and a chronology dispossessed of natural sequence. Memory metabolized within such a heart resembles an enclosure of precipices. Death doesn't terminate this exile, augmenting instead its perspective.

Yet there is also a catharsis in recollection, I've learned. To commit to written expression the paths worn by our recollective acts is to accept that each word, image and symbol turns on itself as on a stile, just as shadow turns on its bodily axis as the day progresses and night encroaches. Such acts represent a kind of homecoming. Thus, each sequential advance in writing recalls and requires an equal, retrospective reading of being as it is slowly ripened over time. The mind in language attains the greatest resonance when allowed to speak in understated or even unstated associations of meaning. Both the mind in remembrance and in writing achieves internal pitch and emotive crescendo not by transparency or ongoing self-explication but by secret passageway, there beyond the broken perimeters of certainty. The written word, like life itself, must learn to read its own opaqueness—like a swimmer emerging suddenly from prolonged shoals of forgetfulness. It must be played like an instrument in order to achieve at last the earth's atmosphere and speak to the collective ear of our humanity. Then memory can become an augury of human culture, which is forever built on—and daily wrested from—the brink of oblivion.

Memory is the soul writing itself: thus writing's kinship with the drama of experience revisited. Writing, like memory, melts the illusion of separateness between the visible and the invisible, between mind and matter and, ultimately, between absence and presence. If chronological time measures time passing and then forgotten, its analogy in writing is almost certainly the accountant's ledger. By contrast, memory is alluvial—time forever resurrected and reminiscent of those rhythms and images once cultivated in the poetics of a less mechanical age. We are still, even today, most ourselves when we have learned to live and love in the company of shadows.

Yes, I know: memory is also a ritual of grieving. It is often an ancestral, archaic pressure we feel upon our mortal selves. Memory hones being into earthly consciousness, first by crushing us bone on bone, then by raising us

Thinking in Babel

from the grave. To remember well (to be schooled by urgent shadows and buried voices), i.e., to remember in, and for, totality—which is the hidden intention of beauty—is a terrestrial creature’s most sublime comfort. Only by the slow evolution of mercy can life at last release its hostages from terror; only then does time embrace us with a gentler ferocity. By way of the grave we sometimes reach the bluest sky.

I believe poetry is the almost antiphonal response to a deeper musical structure that is less heard than felt, less composed than recalled in rhythm and tense. At the same time, whether as pictorial composition or heard imagery, poetry today is still proof of a common depth of ontological engagement, a commonality of experience preserved beneath, and resonating through, the cruelly banal and simplistic idioms of our times. It continues to breathe through our fragmented sensibilities (pommelled and massaged by the discontinuities of time and space daily abetted by the technological wizardry of our fateful modernity). In poetry, cleaning ladies and poets fuse and kiss. Music in poetry is their offspring, and poetry finally blooms in pregnant silence.

Poetic thinking is, I believe, about connectedness, continuity of surprise and growth of pattern in disparate phenomena; poetry’s a sudden vision of order found in persistent disarray. There are still ways to hear imagery in this century, to create pictorial composition in fragmented scores of quotidian frenzy, to make of poetry a kind of house-cleaning of feeling and mind. Poetry sweeps the universe and leaves it momentarily purged of darkness (though pregnant with shadows). It looks at earth and sky and says: “Come be my witness. For an instant only I’ll remain.”

UNEARTHED EPISTEMOLOGIES

WHAT REMAINS

For today you have come to this:
an imperceptible oppression on limb and thought.

You breathe on things and age them:
no longer themselves, no longer inhuman,
no longer at rest.

Thought is music that breaks earth's peace. This is poetry's crime.

So today you have come to this.

No other loss is real.

MAGISTER DIXIT

a. A specialist spoke about progress in learning.

Students would acquire new competencies, new modes of speech, the accelerated syntax of success.

He came equipped with the new—a true Prometheus with *byte*-sized liver.

Between us the day grew clear and cold.

b. I felt the closeness between dilemma and hope, the urgency in our speech, the short history of peace within our clumsiness. (Certainty still conceals a stutter.)

In all things an unexplained lightness within unrest, a costly ascent within perplexity, inheres, I thought. What I know I've transcribed from the abyss.

We must still learn to tell our story.

ON LEARNING GREEK

I watched as several million inhabitants of a busy, modern nation managed eros, agora and psyche. Together their speech deferred acquaintance with the body's fatality, history's mythology. For a brief moment on the television screen, earth seemed to look the other way.

In fact, walk ten thousand steps a day, I was told, and you'll actually keep the doctor away.

Socrates walked into death owing the god Asclepius his feathered due. Having drunk the poisonous brew, the old philosopher—founder of philosophical disquiet, father of three and lover of truth—defeated death's accountant forever.

FIVE GRAINS OF SAND

Take five grains of sand. Consider for a moment their anonymous, inhuman condition.

To the first one, give it hands, speech and face. Let the day rise and fall on your imaginary embrace. Then let the wind carry it away. You have recreated life on earth.

Write your name on the second grain. Then swallow it. You've created inconceivable appetite: now mineral, now carbon. You have signed your fate.

Take the third grain and throw it away. You have discovered something new about loss.

Of the last two grains of sand, choose the one that's most jagged. Place it on your eye then blink. You have never seen so well.

Carry the last grain in your pocket. It's the last one so it's homeless and incomplete. Let it stay there for as long as you live.

Soon it will weigh more than you.

AT FIFTY

A third arm, second thoughts, a fifth season, oxygen on the moon. A strange look on your face when doors close. Eros on extended leave. Bloodied abstraction. A rage at every tyrant's smile.

A beautiful woman who observes you. A beautiful man who seeks advice. Payment due for all choices made and not made. The day you said goodbye to a parent: what could have been said between you, and once said, been understood? A hunger for a new law of gravity, a new language that endures.

Myth (our imagination's double helix—promiscuous, prodigious and unpredictable) today makes sense. Daedalus's labyrinth holds no riddle: that grotesque couple Pasiphaë and Zeus's bull for example—one more family tragedy—has moved on along with their child the Minotaur. They've rented an apartment in your liver. Omens, prophecies and spells have all come to this: what were once Eros's shelter, semantic embankment and intellectual fortress are today scarred surface, metaphysical tourism, the empty luggage of your ego.

All Sherpa picket your paths, and no shoes fit.

Make peace now with all you've lost.
A plague of tomorrows demands you love the humanity you've missed.

WHAT IS UNBEARABLE

for you and that «composer of poetry»

Loving beyond, or blinded by, hope;
reading the infinite without glasses.

Living long enough to understand enough;
not living enough to afford the lesson.

Politicians who hate humanity;
politics as global pornography.

Hierarchies, unmerited authority,
the forgotten democracy of spirit.

The morally self-congratulatory,
the obscene self-indulgence of the normal.

Intellectual arrogance:
the doctorate of the stupid.

A poem out of breath before completion:
the muse's hyperventilation.

A teacher weary of vocation:
youth truncated and misled.

Your mortality known before my own:
intolerable fragility.

Death as indifferent spectacle:
the digestive tract of mass media.

All false discourse of opinion:
the rejection of doubt, the static encyclopedia.

Life at the torturer's hands:
war as ideology of peace.

Thinking in Babel

Words born helmeted and armed:
unreason's dark epiphanies.

Dying in monologue, language at night;
living outside the gods' embrace.

Oedipus's crime between Corinth and Thebes:
freedom to have nowhere else to be.

A luminous tyranny in ascendant thought:
the rarefied air when poetry speaks.

Your last words before saying goodbye:
I love you, I knew you, I gave you birth.

Hearing this: I've given you the earth.
Now you must walk on light.

BRASSAÏ'S PHOTOGRAPHS

after seeing Alain Resnais' Hiroshima mon amour

(i)

The paths of colliding electrons are not more enigmatic than Brassai's photos of graffiti—those signatures of the anonymous, that crude poetry in cement. Someone stopped one day at these walls and thought: What can I say that stays? The stone posed its question too: What can you say with so little time and such modest tools? What can clay say to stone? Who can resist my force?

Brassai photographed these unsigned portraits of feeling: a face, a penis and a breast, a petrified cry. His camera caught these crude atoms in their trance; it pictured feeling in its static dance.

Brassai deciphers these glyphs. The electron's trajectory and these inept images are our joint adventure with the stochastic and the mythic: they render our ancient enigma visible.

(ii)

Gilgamesh understood nothing about walls, but walls had been razed then erected while he learned that bodies have their own monstrous thirst: they flower in the food chain of death. Gilgamesh, newly alone, gazed for an instant at his engineers' feat. He saw each column, each rampart, each tower: he saw progress and loss in stone.

Gilgamesh, the once adolescent king, returning after long absence—the interval between mere creaturehood and doubt—entered once again the city of Ur while Enkidu lay in the bowels of a beast.

For an instant the young king saw Enkidu's shadow cast by a stonemason's trowel. Or did this shadow belong to an old man retrieving water from a new well for his trees, or was it simply a chimera of grief?

Or perhaps the silhouettes of atomic ash burnt onto Hiroshima's streets?

WANGARI MAATHAI

upon reading her Nobel Peace Prize speech

Dear Wangari,

I'm writing to you today to celebrate your name. I've just discovered you've sought to rescue all our names from drought.

Yours is a wreath of *a*'s and *i*'s. Your forebears' name recalls the mouth of a river, the alphas of all beginnings, the *incipit* of culture; the Greek *theta* there in the middle—the phoneme of supreme enthusiasm for all who dwell within and towards peace; then the vocalic ascent towards the final, discreet “*i*”: incandescent hope for our unfinished history on earth. Your first name combines womb with hunger: the onomatopoeia of peace. Your name's a possible biography of the future: childhood, neighborhood, *planethood* rebuilt.

You'll notice I don't know how to pronounce your name. Yet I reach with my hand into the river of your mouth and retrieve unsoiled silt; I dig into the alluvia of your words and find the protozoa of renewal. I reach into this moment and wonder how our bodies are both poverty and dream.

Could theory explain? Information theory, for instance, could speak about redundancy, disorder and noise: the neural pastures of repetition, the eruptive menace of disorder, irreversible time, the inevitability of war.

You've shown that peace is still a stranger on earth, a wounded guest: music still to be premiered within our logic.

And yet you plant hope one tree at a time; your words bear the heart's green season in parables. You return to the earth the roots of tomorrow, a lesson beyond our ego's noise, the memory of an unspoiled stream. You give to your neighbors a forest and roof.

You're harvesting peace; your name resists modernity's flames.

THE UMBRELLAS OF CHERBOURG

for you forty years on

When I was five my Mother, after a row with Father, took me (having nowhere to leave me) to the cinema. (I knew little about her reasons, and the film wasn't Disney). I sat in the dark, dark room by her side as a young woman sang in an umbrella shop and quarrelled with her Mother. And it was raining, I remember. Meanwhile, somewhere between the notes of those weather reports called melodies, my Mother's marriage rehearsed its demise. I watched (but what does a child actually see?) the peripeteia in people's lives singing in the rain. I wondered how it could rain on the movie screen while summer blazed outside. (I knew something wasn't right, but what does a child psychologist know about domestic seasons? What is seen in the distance between movie screen and life? Each generation of nostalgia feeds on displaced happiness and a handful of tunes.) A foreign storm with a poignant ending was the farthest you could travel in those inconsolable days. Finally we left when Deneuve left behind her first beau.

But what do children know about love except its unpredictable script within the mime of art? There are lives that art preserves and others we must invent: one storm at a time. Sometimes something's given that time, or art, or the nostalgia within both now promises, now reveals.

Deneuve's looking frumpy these days. Today you shine.

PRIMO LEVI'S CARBON

I'd like to say I understood the chemistry behind the allegory he creates in his book concerning the periodic table. But I don't. I've read and reread the final chapter of his narrative and have at last come to understand better the nature of narrative at the expense perhaps of the nature of nature: cycle, repetition and, above all, transformation. To narrate is to transform immutability into the infinite paths of organic life as well as into the peripeteia of history. Narration, like chemistry, is a complex scheme of consciousness.

There's no other entrance into his book open to me: I must read it with the ineptitude and misfortunes of incomplete knowledge. There are few who travel well between literature and science. Perhaps that was his purpose in this book: tracing a carbon-based bridge between photosynthesis and consciousness, a delicate bridge possible between disparate fields of certainty, the delicate interactions between an *I* and a *Thou*—and just beyond, the incommunicable void.

Allegory's the narrow door for the untrained reader to enter the gates of scientists.

For Levi, to narrate is to invent unsoiled perception within the hell of our historical natures.

Between atoms and annihilation there are still stories to tell.

BETWEEN MOTH AND LARVA

I watched a larva feeding on a copy of a letter I'd written to a student concerning the university's role in cultural and personal renewal. Small, curled, expectant or moribund, I wasn't sure, though it had slightly moistened the paper. For a moment I thought: as if wishing to add its own words, its own stained wisdom.

I threw that worm out my window on a cold Sunday afternoon before it could soil the words I'd written. (The letter spoke of the theme of machines in modernity, the challenge of *technê* in philosophical queries, education in a market economy.) It also addressed a question of grief and a student's personal loss. Had I guided in some way, I wondered; had I elevated happenstance to vision? Did I use the best tropes with the concision of sincerity?

(Heidegger invoked in 1933 the fissure between modern fact and inexorable fatum; between timetables and the return of every beginning. Heidegger deified the Hellenic incipit. In 1933, this modern messenger allied it to a people's historic mission.

There's a cruel lucidity in his speech to students and teachers: the service to work—that poisonous illusion—, to battle—sacred kampf of youth—and to the deified actions of a people. Can sublime abstraction precede and guide history; or, instead, is history rooted in dangerous illusions? We know now that words, after Eden, carry both a degraded heaven and hell. Can history belong to a mythic grandeur whose essence endures? In what way can we tell?)

The larva writhed on the pavement below while I wondered how to address being and finality. Is it too late now or is every beginning already a question of might? Is there ascent or enlightenment in our reason? Is the worm itself a kind of question or rather a kind of blight? The last century threw history out the window, and we fell on hard times. *We know now that modernity's a tale of woe and construction.*

And we must live and work—no guides, no keepers here—while we write such questions and die.

1985

for H. C.

O'Brien, Orwell's torturer, told Winston (the last human being) that History was the Party's boot crushing his hapless skull: humanity's post-mortem, apocryphal lyric, the hanging of ghosts. The author and the Party knew this: the writer is destined to a class. What, then, can he write that's heard, by whom and in what year? In what language can the bestial be deferred?

Then you spoke of music. You're the student who reads Orwellian dystopias and sings madrigals and chants. As we said goodbye, you turned to me in a moment of joy: "The *Requiem* we're rehearsing enthrals. I sometimes stop singing and listen in silence."

I glimpsed your transfigured face. Something had just pressed upon its form molding it into a rarity of place and sense. The luminous tyranny of transcendence, I thought, the modest chorus of the human against inhuman force.

THERE'S SOMETHING STRANGE

... waiting for this manner of speaking, wanting this manner of breathing on earth. Sometimes I see the city in flames. They incinerate neither dwellings nor flesh: they suffocate habit and impregnate natural light. Sometimes thought's a vision that augurs change.

I believed eros was earth's law, the glowing fleece of a body in flight, the body orbiting around its own luminous debris. Your fingers in a pool of blood I once called me.

Today language is on fire and the night is cool.

HURRY

Hurry hurry hurry
learn to live here well before you must leave

Hurry because your hours are on loan
and you don't have time for eternity

Hurry now before today becomes tomorrow
there's no credit to be had off earth

Don't forget to hurry in two's if you can:
sorrow is borne best when hushed and shared

Remember to hurry whether you sleep alone or in pairs
the same rules of living in danger apply

Hurry where? Hurry why? Hurry when?
hurry because you're someone's object of affection

Someone gave you birth something will someday kill you
so hurry your life's both prelude and fugue.

MAKE IT SO

Star Trek reveries: for my Brother

Make it so, make it so: observe justice along with Moses and Picard on the hill, see how we make the universe our gutter and home.

Video-conference with every inhabitant on earth: they're now old neighbors and lost siblings since you've made other plans.

Read every book on file before they're scanned by Romulan warships: they'll cloak every word in scorn.

Breathe in and out whether you want to or not. Forget there's no other script in town and that the ending's always the same. All movie sets are saved.

Put your five senses on alert. There's been a stranger near you since birth that goes by your name: maybe a hologram, maybe a droid.

Remember that life's an insomniac's dream; a Shakespearean verse charges the air with ancestral crimes. The fury of Klingon ids wage battle within your mind.

Make it so: there's nothing left in thought or feeling that hasn't been energized, probed or harmed by our travel through space, toxic fumes and technological haste.

Make it so: find ways to travel at warp speed unarmed.

THIS UNEASY FEELING

This uneasy feeling of being epilogue to gods:
uncertain before their inebriate masks, straight man to lunatics, biographer of
incorruptible folly

This uneasy feeling of bearing witness to the human; being nomad within
normalcy, writer of stories on probation that misquote the plot

This uneasy feeling of belonging to an outdated race:
would-be poets or should-be-something-elses?

This uneasy orbiting outside established sense:
the logos of karma or lightness derived from the self's revision?

This uneasy choosing of almost nothing: shunning the loud mouths of
history, living outside established fences, living in italics

This uneasy feeling while travelling on earth: disarmed by the clock, the
eddies of progress, the cosmic limit of sense

This uneasy feeling in moments of ascent: the periodic table as rented space,
learning to land on one's head and accepting one's fate

This uneasy vocation of being both human and slave: a feeling that to
question one's purpose is our inexorable freedom

Knowing this uneasiness is not the waiting-room but the dwelling.

DRINK PLENTY OF WATER

for Celeste

Time has at last bleached the pectin in your veins. Your body's now a brief caravan of cells: no longer subjective forest, or ontology of trees, or humus of green memory.

Drink plenty of water on this desert that's set sail for your fields in eternity. Let light warm the garden of unravelling stars in your eyes, the waking sky of your night.

Drink plenty of water but not to quench your thirst. (There's no water in your future and all your wells have dried.) This water's in fact not chemical but temporal. Thirst is a vintage made of mortality and drought: the memoirs of all travellers in time.

Bend towards evening: not the clock's but the earth's. Let its weight lift you while you're submerged in stone. Have thoughts from now on in rebellious bliss: herds of children, vineyards of fish, the contraband of sight. Learn to swim in magma on Mars.

Do whatever you want: you're wintering with Persephone, reading in the dark, married to myth, skating uphill.

Set the table for me soon. I won't arrive late.

I NEED TO KNOW WHY

I need to know why one inch to the left and the carotid would have bled; one inch to the right and I can feel your heart beat.

I need to know why instead of strength in fragility we've chosen the fragility of strength, this ambiguous zoology, this imprecision of sense. I need to know why there's this hominid unrest and evolutionary sorrow. I need to know why you must die.

I need to know why there's a culture of force and, close by, a culture leavened by words. I need to know why meaning needs grammar and isn't already our air. I need to know why childhood's not spared.

I need to know why you love me, why life is unfair, why words are unbearable for the most deeply impaired. I need to know why you're in trouble.

I need to know why history has no arrow of time, why destiny's played like musical chairs. I need to know why history's a transcript of trial and error.

I need to know why even this moment's impure: is it neighboring cruelty or harboring nascent surprise? Is there a reason for consciousness or a history of time? I need to know why there's darkness between you and me.

I need to know because teachers are scarce: secular, pagan, or sacred, they're all philosophical thugs, or asleep in their monologues, or simply don't care.

I need to know why, instead of dying today, I stay up all night and pry.

THERE'S NO SUBJECT READY

There's no subject ready for you to pick from the remnants of modernity, or rhetorical scheme that will carry you through to Friday. There's no subject that will clothe you or keep you warm in inspiration; there's no subject at hand that saves you from destruction, no congratulations from the Delphic oracle, no urgent mystery to be solved, no oxygen for the asthmatic, and your neighbors won't care.

You're not inventing language either or rendering it pure: your subject is neither elegant sensibility nor subjective zenith within the shopping mall. What good do the private names you've given things serve: the idiomatic strangeness of your life, the accelerated heartbeat of your voyages off-shore? Your frenzy's unheard. What do things need from you but usage and repair? What do people need from you but your libido and care?

There's no subject ready to sit down at breakfast, or take root in truth, or warrant perfection. You've no home of your own: you've been knocking on doors and peering through curtains. Your subject's the chore of violating decorum. Whether as minor infraction or major transgression, there's no subject ready to be born or invented: only survival on an archaic shore.

There's a subject there perhaps: the impossibility of redemption in a universe that doesn't care. You're dwelling in linguistic prison. You're a cave dweller inventing fire in metaphor.

II AND K

for Edward Witten (physicist at the Institute for Advanced Studies, Princeton)

You're both offspring of a related disquiet. But Kafka's Gregor Samsa didn't in fact possess it: I mean puzzlement before the prodigious happenstance of the universe, its mathematical grace, the physical depth of theory. Gregor locked his room from within and wrote his obituary in the saga of Kafka's disgust. Gregor showed symptoms of terminal contingency. Gregor's was the beauty of harsh birth.

Gregor preserved his humanity in ontological suspension, in silence and as organic exception. To survive, he sacrificed self to the tyranny of order but disobeyed the schedules of dysfunctional earth.

Before busy unreason, he gave up fingers and hands, maimed his genitals and grew extra legs to escape the innerness of hell. Yet he proved we're porous to horror, and there's a gift in knowing its power.

Must we give up our legs or a kidney to escape earth's circumference? Are we also porous to the horizons of Π ? Can we be both embodiment and edge? Can doubt be the door and conundrum the key? Can doubt be rehearsal to inexorable awe?

What have you given or relinquished to experience prodigious disquiet: the gap between explanation and totality? If given the choice, would you excise your tongue or extract a lung to be on center stage rather than on the edge of your seat? Does mortality know a deeper law than this grace of perplexity? Will humanity learn to invent beauty after digging ditches in hell?

Would you lend me your mind to place between the covers of this book, your Π 's progeny, your intellectual peace? *Buried in the body, atoms turn into the humus of inquiry.*

You're two progenies of the same universe: Kafka was the mole and you are the sparrow.

WHAT DO WE SAY, TO WHOM AND WHY?

Because we have to: we have no choice this side of silence.

Because we learned to: living on earth requires speaking in crowds.

Because we need to: is there another way to hear ourselves blink?

Because we want to: we're never closer to truth than when lying through our
[teeth.

Because we must: there's no other way to walk on two feet.

Because we know: it's easier to master grammar than comprehend our fate.

SOMEWHERE IN THE INTERSECTION

You'd think we'd have figured it out by now: the precise angle of habit and surprise where mind notices itself and language pierces its mirror. But no, words seem to produce their own inner migrancy; they coin novelty with an outdated currency. So imprecise, so worn or worn out: how can natural language measure the gravity of being or singularities of flight? How can such language lead us towards definitive conclusions? What does it produce besides old headlines from our psyche? You'd think we'd have figured it out by now, but there's still no verb for living between the lines, or renting rooms in intensive care, or making love without limbs in hell.

This much I've figured out: writing's a way to invent intersections, to unearth old graves in the middle of streets. Writing's a way to compose music in traffic. Writing breaks speed limits in syntax and refuses to sell the world at half-price: it's difficult to be sapiens and human. Of course, natural language works best when banned from the city. Only then can exile give peace. Only then is suicide a kind of devotion. Writing's an exercise in belated bliss.

I haven't figured out how many collisions a body can bear, how many explosions in syntax can still convey sense, or why, at myth's intersection between Charybdis and Scylla, natural language is still menaced by fear. There's no hero's welcome in today's bargain basements.

You'd think that by now we'd have figured it out: how to tell stories based on familiarity with chance, recycled memory and putting out fires. But no: we still understand little or nothing, and nothing, as you've guessed or already know, is the intersection of epiphany with blank spaces. This intersection's lived between Ithaka and the fall from grace: it's totality off key, listening to Bach in a ditch.

Language is sometimes music. Language is sometimes a shattered score the glue of words reunites. Mostly language is the intersection of terror with light. You'd think by now that the moment would pass more slowly or that we'd get our news in a flash, but mostly life passes unreported. Where are the archives of grief that ensues? There are few guardians in the city of words.

Christopher Damien Aretta

I'd thought that life came with a manual of instructions, that love answered questions and that electricity lit history. But no, intersections are like lions after napping: they're hungry and again on the prowl.

Look twice before crossing: you're still crawling on all fours. It's only when dismembered that words learn to soar.

POEM FOR MELETUS

poet, accuser of Socrates, judge

You are still necessary: we still need to call you something, to recall you into memory. But what can we say to you today that's right? What suitable plagues invoke to fall upon your uncrowned head? What epithets or invectives use for your complicity with those orators and thugs?

Socrates spun once again on that day his infamous web: contaminating with disquiet our sophistic blood, surprising his judges with unflinching submission. Then he left the tribune with invisible hands on his limbs. You were silent then or perhaps dumbfounded or drunk, or simply ready for bed: bemused by a mortal being's freedom from dread.

In what corner of Hades or academy of poets are you now professor or dean?
On what chair does your mediocrity sleep? After Socrates, what remains?
The septic shock of noise; your poetry's dead birds.

I wonder:

In what way do we still serve the crowd in our brains?

THE DEAD SPOT WHERE DREAMS

for Mário Botas, Portuguese painter and poet

Twice the trees died. The same species. The same vertical brush with sky. On the same spot. By the same affliction: desiccation of the fronds and roots, chlorophyll darkened and then irretrievably burnt.

A young painter—lover of myths and visitor of their mysteries in modern-day attire—died at thirty-one: his body unrecognizable in the end, his limbs too subtle for material display. He spoke of monsters and shadows and their kinship with cellular division when dying is done.

Then the same death: accelerated mitosis, having to wear four seasons in a day, saying goodbye with one's skin (translucent in the end like breath on the palette of myth).

I looked twice at a canvas stretched to the limits of time and space.

Then I had this perfect feeling of being slowly undone and yet seeing you there.

ADYNATA, ANAPHORA, ANACOLUTHON

for E.

The grammarians got it right, they thought: the serene strata of etymological clay, the dispassionate surgery into the sentence's brain, the patenting of linguistic machinery. What do they know of the messiness of impassioned syntax, what do they know of rage in the middle of submission, what do they know of loopholes in the enchainment of meaning?

You hold the expertise I lack, but how you oppress with the certainty of classification! You hold language outside germinal confusion, but how you miss the impossible sense of possibility!

I saw you today at the top of the hill: you wore the weightless crown of unutterable friendship.

THE DAY YOU BECAME INDISPENSABLE

It was the first day I saw you old: not the first day you were old, but the day I saw this wasn't rehearsal but real

It was the first day I knew they'd say someday we were the last of something, an idea that had come and gone

It was the day I saw time was no longer an illusion the body deflects

It was the day you measured your heart and something was wrong

It was the day I left ego behind and felt hope for humankind

It was the day we visited a friend who said hellos and goodbyes were entwined

It was the day I said something I'd never uttered before

It was the evening we sat in silence and my mind touched the sky

It was the day before yesterday or the day after tomorrow when no stars stained the sky

It was the day that never began and then never ended: fragile eternity

It was the day I stood on the corner and you waved from your car: I saw then the curse of mortality

It was the day we became both our mother's child and the future's tomb

It was the day I saw you and your name was home.

READING, WRITING AND ARITHMETIC

They were the most discreet students I'd ever known as a teacher. They sat in the first row of the corner seminar hall, were never absent, never took sick and seemed to take notes most when I spoke in zealous metaphor or enthusiastic embouchures of playful ironies.

What are these words, I asked, these words uttered by dead poets, these quiet stowaways hiding in our books? Where do they come from? From what horizon do they arise? What happens while listening to their ancient conceits?

Then a different kind of silence arose: not the stone's but the wave's. I mean: earth's most sacred profane event—the planet's tidal clock, ocean foam on rock, the watery synonym for ovum and grave. A silence that beats incessantly within this cosmic clay, the same clay that language pommelled into mouths and want.

And in silence they wrote such words down. They neither smiled nor frowned. They copied these words and listened as I spoke of the opposite of fixity, the building blocks of surprise, the final flowering of absence, the afterlife of poets in chords called verse. I spoke of the cumulative effects of inquiry.

Take the case of prefixes, for instance, I said. Words are such a tremulous substance: they form human consciousness yet can also deform the laws of human growth. They profess truth while instilling conformity. Then I insisted on the need to resist.

And then suddenly they spoke. Their voices expressed all that I had left unsaid or had excluded as I fell into exhaustion. I mean: they pointed out the proximity of monologue to compulsion.

Language neither forms nor deforms, they said almost in chorus. Leave that to the demagogues and liars. What is left unspoken by the poet is that power which transforms.

And finally I was silent.

A TYPOGRAPHICAL ERROR

in memory of the Portuguese poet António Gedeão

The poet I'm thinking about left his testament in an anthology organizing fifty years of writing in a discreet volume on the eve of his death at ninety. The volume begins with his first published poem: "Man" (i.e., Humankind, *Humanité*, *Menschheit*) and ends with one of his most speculative: "Poem of Going Round in Circles," wherein the cyclical nature of organic matter and the indifference of all things inorganic are intercepted—but not rescued—by human passions. This collision is captured and magnified by the repetition word for word of the first two extensive strophes culminating in a simple, curtly striking and implacable "etc." It's in this strophic repetition, both redundant and oracular, that a modern parable furtively emerges.

There's always something more than the sum of its parts in poetry. Analogously, there's always something more in a life than the sum of its passions: what happens between the lines, what's excised from the publication of our affections, what's lost on the radar screen of our searches, what goes beyond the minutiae of modern or even hominid sentience itself. What remains unfinished and imperfect reigns over the empirical, the imperceptible over the evident, the enduring over the ephemeral. Sometimes there are patterns of meaning that outrun our order and explanations.

Take his poem "Man," for instance: nine verses to express the inability to express our condition of speaking animals, our howl within the ineffable underbelly of consciousness, the jugular flow of infirm animality. I mean: the insuperable condition of our unfinishedness, the inadequacy of our tools and our hominid evolution towards metaphysical impasse. The impression the reader has by the end of the poem is one of humanity cornered: our species as misguided trope of consciousness. Poetry itself seems to be a tool too blunt for a last-minute escape.

And yet the poet chooses this poem as a point of departure and not one of conclusion. What does it disclose, then, to the reader: incongruous despair, irresponsible ironies, or simply an exercise in verbal dexterity? Or does it reveal instead our anthropological center, the semantic epicenter of being: biped consciousness in trouble?

He presses on in this anthology, examining the pressure of modern rationality on inner cosmology, the effects of space exploration on evolutionary ascent, the imperfect translation of technical progress into the self's advancement. Modernity is both lucid and cruel: it transforms what it touches then forgets what it's touched. It is often a kind of reason that darkens our paths. And it is undermined by ongoing sorrow.

The poet in question here lived a discreet life as teacher of the natural sciences. His well-written prose has no typographical errors and reveals knowledge of classical grammar. Yet the final poem about cyclical patterns of our animal self-awareness within the physical cosmos bears the extraordinary exception: a misspelled word, the proofreader's terror. There in the middle of the poem's reprise of our circular destiny, i.e., our hominid history orbiting like satellites around uninhabitable planets and stars, I found one typographical error. Yet a certain beauty pierces this blemish. There's a parable therein for the modern reader of poetry as well, I think: a metaphysical meal for the famished. There's a consolation in knowing what remains after Newton: the precarious dwells in the laws of gravity. Perhaps it's our passions that keep us in orbit.

So what remains: afflicted animality and precarious reason, the laws of gravity and insuperable error, the incompleteness of truth? Maybe simply the consolation of always returning home after travelling through space, or seeing the same face through the telescope: the eternal return not only of change but also of hunger. Hope hanging from the same rope.

Poetry is an act of reading as well as one of destiny: they are thoroughly entwined acts. Our beginning is our end; our end recalls every beginning. Poetry makes reading and destiny synonymous. For an instant we become cycle and howl, progress and horror, language and error. For an instant we become our ancestors' hope and corruption. For an instant we become post-animal and inhuman. For an instant life is both reprise and promise. For an instant an error becomes both oversight and augur.

For an instant, etc.

THE NEW GLOBAL NETWORK

There's a kind of logic at work here: the imperatives of global economy and the conversion of the planet into zones of virtual knowledge. It reflects our age's search out of history and into the clean circuitry of the new. Nietzsche in his *Ecce Homo* had already called himself dynamite dividing the history of humanity. His philosophy would explode morality's lies and disclose the mountain climber's perspective from the heights of a disinfected future.

An ocean away from the European metropolis, a maze of trade routes earlier constructed by slaves—situated high up in the mountains and hills on the outskirts of now-fragmented empires—are soon to be repaved and refurbished, informative plaques placed where appropriate and descriptive maps will reveal to the inquisitive visitor where, when and how hungry colonial powers fed on their colonies' mineral fat. Economics and electronics will now produce the fateful schism.

Ecce cultural tourism.

IL TRIONFO DELL'INNOCENZA

an oratory performed at the Palazzo Bonelli, Lent 1711

The composer Antonio Caldara's plot is about Eugenio's Christian body and soul rejecting the pagan noble woman Melantia's sexual advances. Eugenio's in disguise, dressed as the pious Eugenia, who lives in a monastery far from the dominions of Eros.

In Rome, Caldara's audience, living under the harsh rule of Vatican censorship, was comprised of secular and church nobility. Thus, this was not opera but rather sacred oratory: no sin could be represented save in its allegorical defeat.

And yet the aria sung by Eugenia, "Vanne pentita a piangere," is as ambivalent as anything living in human emotion: the warring armies of seduction and rebuke, the suppleness of musculature under burlap, sexual drive beneath codified restraint.

Change the words and you get a paean to the erotic powers of attraction. Convert the allegory and you get a chapter of artistic creation outsmarting moral decorum. You get beauty of melody enthralling lovers and papal hierarchy. Listen and you get the entire scheme of things in an evening: the irresistibility of love and redemption in the company of courtesans, clergymen, sodomites and castrati.

There is no deeper knowledge than this: the perception of transcendence in the fecal and covert, the full experience of the human despite the lupine robes of convention.

Humanity is best heard in its triumphant solo of perfume and stench.

Christopher Damien Aretta

IN REMEMBRANCE OF YEHUDI MENUHIN (1916-1999)

for A.M.

The musician who transcended the dolorous gravity and history of words,
the violinist who released earth for instants from hominid discord,
the man who witnessed humanity's ugliness and hope,
the old man who spoke of goodness and evil without sermon or sword.

Those who are good, he said, recognize their ability to commit evil; others
believe
in their absolute righteousness.

In such an imperfect place we choose each day to evolve and die.

SO NOTHING

Nothing is a desert before we breathe on it. Before birth our lungs are filled with sand and the earth wanders in a caravan of perfect abstraction: nothingness is the mother of seasons and form.

Nothing is a desert which holds every journey, every union of hydro- and oxygen, every vector of augmented clarity. Nothingness negates its own prison.

Nothing is the name we conceal beneath our feet and bear above our heads until we speak with others. Nothingness is the negative of sight: it is nakedness envisioned.

Nothing is a tear in space, a pause in hammered thought, a belief in singularity rather than infinite division. Nothingness cuts the thread twice.

So nothing is wasted on this planet. There are no final languages; there is no safer address. Nothingness is being's narrow escape. We inhabit this nothingness: our ancestral dwelling place.

SO EVERYTHING

So everything turns into everything else in the periodic table of language. The imagination is the planet's reagent, a satellite burning up as it strikes the earth's crust. It transforms the morning's tranquillity into burning forest, falling buildings and shattered city streets. The poet's a scientist who bruises human sight.

Everything's devoured by Cronus or by writing itself, as Russian formalists would say. Poetry's a kind of memory that makes everything both phantom and inevitable. Poetry is both vessel and intrusion: it disturbs earth's peace. The earth, you see, is the invention of ghosts on leave.

Borrowing identities and misnaming them, terrorizing and then evicting neighbors or inhabiting its hosts, a poem renders what is known obsolete, what is seen incandescent, what is lost retrievable.

So everything will follow everything else in this quiet procession: poetry's a gentle violence on phenomena in flux.

MEMORY: WHAT THE SKY SEES

*Prometheus Addresses His Maternal Lineage:
Gaia, Themis, Clymene and Io*

in recollection of legacies and patterns of growth

I remember you as you were millennia ago: your hair already no longer the sunny flag of youth but rather fierce torches blazing before oncoming age. Time has never robbed you of your beauty though you've never denied the nature of a life's erosion and inner exile: you've conceded to age only its inevitability, refusing entirely its inelegance. And, as you've aged, you've never ceased seeking traces of milk and honey beneath the shadows of gods whose fury you might exorcise with your gentleness, your loathing and your despair—shadows whose dark idioms have remained ever-incommunicable and ever-indecipherable. And although you've wrestled with their darkness, I knew these gods—our fathers—were as unyielding as the earth's orbit around the sun and that their greedy heart had long ago become as barren as the moon's cold core. How could we—under-prepared and famished—exorcise these specters which pursued us over continents and hemispheres, in our skulls and under our skin? Our lives have always been fated to be an infelicitous pilgrimage towards sleep. An unbending, fragile wisdom has undone us, exhilarating and defeating us because it made those gods more inscrutable and grander than our simple infallibility could fathom: our simple yet tormented infallibility let them rule stonily and sternly above and over us. Nonetheless, you've remained ever-admirable in your eons-long agony. In my own foresightful yet blind logic, our fathers were the malignancy I would cure with cunning perseverance; their contempt I would transform into rebellious victory. They would be the raging strangers I would vanquish. Dialogue, I knew, was never possible though I, too, refused the obvious: our fathers' radical separateness. I never understood this. Or I came to see this too late after time had removed the reason to have reasons and be right or wrong, or even to hold certainties between right and wrong. In the end, however, the spirit of our clan and the shores of light bordering our reckless dreams would prevail and raise hymns skyward to our pride and love (pride's messy abstraction). It is a fragment of this skyward hymn I wish to compose today in one of earth's languages: still audible today despite our fathers' immutable indifference.

Mothers, I am survivor of, and witness to, our ancient malady, to our beings' ancient search out of abstraction into self: our beings' walk towards fecund mortality. And I've walked out of your precipices and into my own. I

understand today that you've persevered, and, in the company of our clan's watchful spirits, your endurance, which bore a sorrow beyond speech, will lead you to a form of higher living: the potency of unbending being. And in your renunciation of so much life, you've in fact never been alone: a thousand souls will rush to meet you, ever-menaced by our fathers' silence. And you'll feel then the fullness of your sacrifice and loss, and these will become at last tolerable, unavoidable and even magnificent. I know now the meaning of the white-walled temples of my childhood: located on the highest slope, flanked by Methuselah-like cypresses and olive groves, they've been a temple of light for you cast by shadowless souls worshipping a victorious god. Abundant light reigns there (though it blinds the stranger and the ambivalent). Many times I would repeat to you: *Mothers, I've lived long enough, and harmed others deep enough with my own mad certainties, to have relinquished the desire to divide the world into the true and the false. I have dwelt too long with the harvests of ambivalence. By choice or fatal design, I've learned to prefer the chiaroscuro our clan disdains. Having forsaken certainty, I've learned that what befalls each one of us in life is a choice which is blind to the claims of truth or heresy. Life covets an active choosing which lies beyond tyranny. Tenderness, I've learned, is a natural piety for all life begot and pursued by time, which means, too, that, as I've slowly approached life, I've come to feel tenderness for our invisible clan of judges, messengers and guardians as well.*

Today I know you've never felt the weight of time (measured in time) because you've never relinquished your place within your clan. Your infelicity has in fact rejuvenated you. Your sacrifice will be your final victory. You never convinced our fathers and you never converted them to the beauty of a more benign justice, but you have outnumbered and at last outsmarted them. A thousand choristers all sharing our family's name and those of our forebears will ring in your and my ears in the final instant as they've done so throughout our lives. Glory awaits your stung, beleaguered flesh. And at last you'll no longer flee (where else would you want to go?) from the final reckoning of pain your life has demanded to merit the warm embrace of salvation. Having supplied so much pain, your souls' salvation has been won through prodigious self-denial, sacrifice and love. And love is, I'll wager, parenthetical to even deeper waters of being. Call these waters self (or, almost synonymously, exile), or define it simply as a tired (wounded?) swimmer heading to shore in water which does not know it is air we breathe. This may sound cold and strange and even inscrutable to you, but I learned while on my private Caucasus that love is no cure but rather an ancient frailty. I believe love doesn't resurrect us into greater living without

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first placing us also at even greater risk. Eros is first and foremost the very dispossession of life, which means that every vision of plenitude appears only in the harshest exile. Today I don't consider love to be a weakness to be shunned. I consider it necessary bloodshed, just as I believe it is necessary for me to leave on earth not only the rectangle of my grave but also the scars and wounds of my survival.

Your lives, mothers, no matter how far you've travelled, or been driven away, from the land of childhood, have retained their initial circumference of possibility and horizon of conviction. You've never denied your clan's acceptance of the existence of natural evil in the world. You've given birth to your children while believing in the irremediable nature of matter, earthbound insufficiency being surpassed solely by the virtuous path of self-restraint and generosity. I remember I would repeat to you: *This world of yours—nature being the realm where the soul lives in exile—has slowly matured within me into the humus of irony. This irony presumes the existence of a self-transcendent impulse within a universe which is forever exultantly unfinished: a universe where great stores of creative energy reside in the heart of ever-incomplete matter. In irony, the mind journeys through nature where neither soul nor soil can be dissociated from each other, each element being a deferred, necessary mirror of the other, each questioning and challenging the other in a progression of delirium, reason and vision. The earth for the ironist, then, is the stage for positive temptation. Irony nourishes the metaphysics of excess and boundaries transgressed. Perhaps, in their fateful attraction to you—beings so antithetical to your own more gracious souls—, our fathers wished to experience an otherness which they could neither comprehend nor unconditionally accept. Perhaps, too, you've spent your lives with them in an attempt to redeem their bodies with limbs rescued from exile, for you never forgot that, surpassing every private grief and loss, our creaturehood is a devalued divineness.*

One day, it's true: we mocked creation, or order, whether pre-existing or imposed. Our penalty has ever since been this mortal plateau itself—our locus of evil but also our final chance and ultimate hope for redemption. Life, you've always known, occurs in a state of emergency: our souls are both the casualty and the prize. The language of salvation, uttered on condition of prodigious self-denial, was thus considered by you to be essentially benevolent. Only by exposing yourselves to the rigors of salvation could you attain the consolation of condemnation, for that was

precisely your clan's godly destiny. Only in remembrance of the soul's dethronement, you believed, could the soul be rightfully raised. That is the only way you could see yourselves worthy of grace. *We deny nature only by denying ourselves*, you'd say. *We must be alert, therefore, and full of ruse in order to outwit nature—that stinging gadfly of all flesh-borne fate. Because we are neighbors to death, only by grace can the soul be nourished out of decay: even passion must possess a surplus of spiritual worthiness.* The spiritual energies of your world taught you early in childhood that we must always act as though we deserved salvation; ultimately, however, salvation is a grace both uncannily bestowed and forever unmerited.

You have remained true to this ancient covenant of your clan throughout your lives. The blessing of a thousand voices will in the end fill and lift you, while you, looking as if you've just this moment learned to say your names infinitely long, will become at last everlasting. And as you speak those ancient names and the walls encroach upon the bones and pulse of your suddenly awakening bodies, there will be no weakness but a fierce tenderness in your glance (or perhaps one of pity).

And this shadow I've called me? I live now between my doubts and my characteristic habit and terror of exile. I'll arrive either early or perhaps even belatedly to the end of our ancient lineage, startled by how easy it is to reach the end without plan or strategy. I'll stumble, disbelieving yet moved, while your ancient chorus rises to its feet. I'll hear the rustling of shadows compacting at last irreversibly into memory. Then I'll listen for your voices and feel your hands caress and warm my face. And when I stand with you among the multitude of voices and moving shadows, I'll at last interpret our sleep with perfect gentleness. We'll momentarily smile before the dying heat of change and loss and, for an instant, we will seem to understand.

III. A SMALL ATLAS OF EARTH

PREFACE

As history unfolds, so does our intimate recognition of radical insufficiency. The unstable angle of our mind's approach to other minds and to the world never ceases to manifest itself. This angle, which we often call truth, is oblique (and inwardly opaque), revealing the inevitability of the body's elegiac voice, for ours is a body delivered over to time since birth and therefore must bear the chronicle of its seasons on earth. Culture, like our season-worn voices, is able to recognize and sublimate the elegiac fatality of recurrent, organic dissolution (punctuated as it is by birth, growth and death) into a continuum of concrete task and concentration of political and social energies. Without instruments of collective, utopian orientation and insatiable concern with personal fate, we would be a denuded species situated within an oppressive, utterly acosmic universe. Although we cannot presume that such concern with personal fate and utopian construction of the world will someday be practicable within a unitary history of our being's centrifugal and centripetal energies, an utterly and radically acosmic drift through time would be too painful and too absurd to bear. I'll leave such a denuded view of our time on earth for the strong of stomach, or for those with a metaphysical tin ear. There is too much pregnancy of shape, form and composition (from subatomic pulsation to macromolecular eros) as well as too much poignancy of longing for me to behave or believe otherwise, i.e., as if the earth were a vast playing field crowded with players, spectators, arbiters and rules (of the latter, one in particular—the most active—dividing the world into the devourers and the devoured), together engendering an earth ultimately devoid of authentic reason able to reach beyond the harsh, ludic spectacle itself. What humans do, they also always do in the name of something else and at the behest of their inherent image-making faculty. And such images, as they become manifest, possess momentum: they are inherently constructive and given to a quickening sense of futurity. The future never befalls us utterly unannounced, unbeckoned and unprepared (though it also never relinquishes a fundamental unpredictability in its complexity of drives, ideologies and politico-economic strategies.) *For it to exist, the future must first be imagined.* Following upon Gaston Bachelard's reflections on poetic reverie, I believe matter belongs both to atoms and to dreams, the latter representing our unwilling though profoundly life-driven inventive capacity. The image resonates with and preserves past experience, but it is also the

vector of inchoate reality. The imagination empowers thinking into action, action into reflection and, finally, reflection into discovery.

The earth is large enough for our metaphors and for our logic. In fact, we are ontological ventriloquists, both *spoken* for by the empirically given—the positivist’s harvest of observation-based, measurable data, the quanta that traverse and pierce our heart—and always *speaking* in discourse which blooms in the folds and creases of mouth, neural network and the highly sensitive latticework of feeling. We perpetually give birth to our own imaginative doubling, tripling and self-multiplication. We are placed within a cosmos that speaks for us (situated as we are within its atomic scheme), but we are also called to speak for *it*, for we are the articulate radiance that consciousness engenders each time a human being is born. Although we exist within a web of physical and chemical design that enfolds us, we are also born as the fragile custodians of light: we become the remembrancers of earth’s generosity to be our host. I believe it is when we find ourselves in the most empirical, most finite stadiums of action that the unbounded nature of existence is most irresistibly disclosed. There is no ultimate steersman, no absolute guide, no ulterior reward or punishment (living *here* still defines the circumference of our task), but our passions seem to possess direction: a species-specific desire for increased creativity and knowledge of self and world. *We are creatures endowed with the trope of patterned growth.*

I confess I prefer the finite, intricate tracery of the real graven upon the particulate (subverting every purely formalized presentation of the world), the event of the local within the general and the unpredictability and intensity of our encounters with the earth and with each other to swimming and/or drowning in the waterless ocean of immobile abstraction. I want to *taste* my thought. I prefer kicking myself in the pants for my foolishness to wearing the iron-clad armor of axiomatic certainty. And I hope I have acquired a sufficiently trustworthy nose to detect intellectual arrogance. Too much of what claims to be genuine thought is in reality a mask for poor mental habit, self-deluding ego-based “wisdom,” or half-assed expertise in one micro-specialization or another. We should think and live, I believe, a little closer to the edge of our convictions where certainty and ambiguity commingle and co-create. On this edge most of our masks risk dissolving or falling away. The result of such vertiginous unmasking is not necessarily a perilous brew of disillusion but rather the vertigo of sensation, image and thought creating fresh territories of awareness. Imbued with such experience, I have sought in language the aqueous and terrestrial elements of ultimately inward thinking: the gardens of perennial and seasonal germination within our sentient and intellectual selves. I’ve learned with the poets to prefer to sit

beneath the metaphysical shade of image and sound and plant trees of ramifying reflection at its borders. Matter is the soil. Language is the tiller. Poetry is the fruit. Yet the experience of patterned growth best occurs, it seems to me, in the wake of our daily plunge into social, interpersonal and work-related encounters. We transform our days, spent in our modern, conflictual *polis*, into the semi-tropical utopias of extended feeling and decelerated thinking. These respond to longings still deeply present in our modern subjectivity. Poetry grows from this soil. So do the premises of our ethics. Poetry, then, is a form of disencumberment: before merging finally into the earth, we are called to fashion lightness out of routine, metaphorical lift out of anguish and futurity out of hopelessness. We daily learn to crave tomorrow.

History is our essential medium of intervention and reflection. It is not only the site of our collective and private functional discontent but also the source of imaginative renewal. History is the narrative we weave from our doings and undoing. It records the ongoing drama of our creative constraints; it is the stage for our fateful freedom. (How often have we walked while hearing the cataclysm under our feet?) Perhaps scientists and poets are alike in this: they explain (=interpret) what sentient perception is unable to retain or synthesize into truly vital consciousness because our immediate mental sieve is often too coarse, too worn out, or too worn down by fatigue and cruelty to surpass the blunt instruments forged by human conviviality, childhood trauma and political brutality. Both scientist and poet understand (albeit in distinct modalities of thought) that matter and history must ultimately appear to consciousness under the guise of questions to be genuinely apprehended. And questions are like sand: innumerable and silent, they bear a history which both precedes and anticipates our passage. *Matter is not only sensate but insatiable*. In a Kantian sense, we are the interpreters, not the owners, of time and space. We harvest the gardens of questions we cannot help but make.

Could there be redemption for us within history, within the historical sources of our selves? Is the question even plausibly framed, or can it be legitimately answered? Are there questions for which we are (still) not ready? Are our premature answers at the root of the earth's ever-imminent undoing? What monsters of reason and sleep must we (re)learn to propitiate in order to renew the transformation of our historical state? I have no answer. We are plausibly not the center of the universe but rather perpetually thrown onto history's edge. And, unquestionably, the edge destabilizes the axiomatic truths we are wont to offer to the earth and to each other. This edge is also eminently interesting, profligate and proliferating. It has been magnificently

approached in theological terms by the German-born Protestant theologian Paul Tillich, who views the edge, the “frontier,” in a triple perspective: 1) the frontier permits us to connect with what we have hitherto considered strangeness or otherness (and therefore uninvited to, or simply denied, the rituals of hospitality). To cross that frontier means to address the humanity of that otherness and to recognize a kinship of being with those whom we’ve neglected or disdained, thereby extending our own understanding of humanity; 2) the frontier encompasses the historical, cultural and philosophical boundaries within which a people defines itself. By extension, it encompasses our species’ particular vocation and essential identity. The frontier in this sense relates to the maturation and fruition of our understanding of fundamental historical, cultural, philosophical and ontological tasks as they illuminate and refine our conflict-burdened world history; and finally, 3) the frontier is the sign of our finitude where, according to Tillich, the potential encounter between infinity and finitude may occur: the perception-expanding visitation of the “Eternal” upon our transitory natures. This is extremely rich material for the poetic imagination: it reminds us of John of Patmos (also known as “the Divine” or “the Seer”), who, though exiled on that Greek island, suddenly found himself poised on the edge of the Aegean and the transcendent and who subsequently receives and communicates the content of two belief- and history-shaping apocalyptic “revelations.”

The edge or frontier occurs, therefore, where difficult truths concerning (perfective?, redemptive?, technological?) progress mature, expire and reveal themselves. In the end, and at that edge, we discover we are—in a tremendously fragile and profound way—creatures who emerge from within, or merge into, the world. Yet at the same time we exist under considerable and ever-renewed existential pressure to acquire new modes of sightedness (no matter how truncated, or contiguous to ego, or fundamentally myopic). This world-self relationship comprises an essential aspect of our vocation as sentient, conscious creatures: the discovery of our own perpetually renewed caducity. We are never *less* indigent as sentient creatures than at the instant when our ingenuity (technological and psychological) is engulfed by our organic vulnerability to time, memory, eros and the terrible struggle to understand our reflection in a stranger’s gaze. We never see ourselves better than when we are on that edge: there where we see the farthest and clearest as well as find ourselves at the brink of disaster. There where all previous clarity is almost for naught. There where all light is an opaque substance of despair and a harsh call for renewal. There where matter becomes sovereign, lifting then crushing us once again with its silence while rushing towards us

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anew with fist and fury unfurled. There where we become *sicut* grains of sand. There where we learn to speak once again.

We're falling and we see our fall as we fall. This gives us an elegiac though augmented sight: the apex of doing and undoing in a moment where gravity, ultimately victorious, fatefully responds to human endeavor. Icarus did not make an error of judgment or give into reckless hubris: unconsciously, he understood our pact with human knowledge, i.e., its purpose and its price.

A SMALL ATLAS OF EARTH

ON SAILING AND DROWNING

for D.

Dear friend,

I've been thinking about your doubts concerning the existence of a *great, encompassing and equalizing force* at work in the universe, or, more intimately, at the heart of all human affairs. I've thought about your doubts (which certainly echo my own) for many days now. And I have no answer. I did notice, however, that my response to your doubts changed according to my mood, the climate (on hot days here, the really oppressively hot ones, I was little inclined to admit the principle of an active and ultimately watchful principle of justice at the center of human history), the hour of the day and my level of fatigue. At the same time, I've thought about the act of writing. When we write something down on paper, or type these keys to produce flashing signs on the computer screen, we want it to *mean* something, don't we? We want our words to outlast happenstance and outweigh fleeting, mood-driven impulse. We want to write, not on the proverbial stone, perhaps, but at least on a material more durable than the day's menu of frustrations and hopes.

Yet, faced with your question, my provisional and changing response to your query are engulfed by such happenstance, by the fact that I inhabit and function within such an impulse-driven universe. What has changed today? I've come to accept the impossibility of answering the question or being able to answer it in any fundamental way. Because the question is not an authentic one or because the question represents something fundamental in and of itself? I think the latter conjecture is closer to the truth, which, I repeat, I don't claim to grasp. I guess I'm writing to you as if in reality I'd almost forgotten questions want answers. I'll have to backstroke the rest of the way from here on.

Your question constrains us to brief moments of self-awareness (meanwhile, the knot our psyche forms with matter is both traversed and pierced by time). Your question is not a passing one: it is at the very source of our humanity bludgeoned by—only in the figurative sense for the lucky few—and yet in dire need of the company of others. Our humanity lies in that promiscuous, unpredictable and enlightening exchange it experiences as it

engages with other human beings. These experiences include the fateful asymmetries, the conscience-elevating risks and the injustices which permeate every human connection.

The world extends its dangerous invitation to us: human society is at best courteous conflict. Yet it is our fundamental school as well as our singular and collective fate. It's there where we learn our civilized-barbarous manners.

So, what can you and I say about your great, equalizing principle? Does it operate in the worlds we create within, despite and upon that larger world to which we gave our unconscious consent at the moment of our birth?

If so, then from that moment on it's all work. Perhaps *that* is the equalizing force. We are born in pain; therefore, we must invent our joy. And contribute to the joy of others. Or die. And we'll die either quickly in a great flash of regret, anguish, or gesture of cruelty, or else in arduous labor creating moments which never existed in the universe before our passage. We'll survive in the invisible book of the earth's memory, or as unidentifiable entries in some desolate, grave and absolute archive forever beyond our reach. There is no law save the one we condemn ourselves to live by. If we sometimes flourish, it is largely as unplannable event.

Our heart's roulette wheel orbits the earth. (This is the only globalization I understand.) Our ecstatic days and nights do not deny but rather confirm our condition. And despair's child—nihilism—arises when we don't see or accept this rule. But nihilism's a redundant folly. It imagines a standard of disorder and randomness which irrevocably crushes us, but aren't we already disappointed beings since childhood? Meanwhile, there are *still* acts of mediation possible, moments of reprieve foretold by neighbors or a raging parent, rituals to propitiate the daily destruction of self. This is neither hope nor delusion: it's the scratching of our name on the spider's back, drawing blood from clouds, listening to the air hum as it grounds our cells to dust.

Nihilism covets its monologue with despair, but even in that spot of nothingness—that *Los Alamos* of deadly aura—there is music: the

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music produced as we erase the world and self. Its melody enthrals. We are a semi-awake and nervous species; we also have a flair for dialogue even if it's with nihilistic absurdity or heard only in our duet with extinction (or occurs during our free fall from light). Between the roulette and the cosmos, there is a thin layer of land to dwell on: a stretch of beach to swim towards even if the ocean does not know it is air we need to breathe. We resist anyway because it's in our nature to resist. We still tell stories to one another while on the brink of disaster. Our listeners are hungry and curious. *For it to exist, even nihilism must be chosen.*

You'll notice I've edged towards a statement of personal belief here. Such belief is like the sails the Sirens saw as Ulysses passed. And you and I are equals at last in the encompassing fragility of our beingness together:

where we stand so profoundly, at times so interestingly alone, that even the desire for death sings.

MEN AT WORK

The crime: Two men at work, one in each of the buildings left open on campus at night. Two guardians keep watch over us. It's after midnight, and I want a cup of coffee from the vending machine. Before I discover it's broken, one of the guards begins to talk to me. He complains about his job and the impossibility of truth in human affairs. I'll be more precise. Given the present state of affairs, i.e., the specter of unemployment, the impatience of those waiting in line, he asks the following: *What democracy is this? What freedom is there when power counts on our silence?* His hapless words breach a wall; I hear blood running through the pipes. Not far away two dogs (Adam and Eve or two apparatchiks?) fuck and/or fight under a lamp post. I close my eyes. Doves like glowing rock weigh on my lips and hands.

The verdict: I go to the building next door where a second guard stands at the entrance, and where the desired unbroken coffee machine waits for my coins. I'm caffeine starved with hours of work ahead of me so I'm impatient and don't want to chat. But: Why am I here? Is there no machine in the building where I have my office? *Sorry. No. Broken.* Then: *I'll see about this. Who's at fault here?* In a few seconds he's spoken with his colleague and chastised his negligence: *Who let the machine go out of service?* His curt voice hardens into hounds in pursuit. I feel cornered.

The parable and the parable explained: The guard returns to his post. I head for my office. In the distance two dogs move farther away. I notice the Pleiades and wonder what has kept them up there for so long.

Something heavy and piercing has brushed against our limbs and brought speech to a dead end: an imperceptible fury grounded in biological law. In short, there's a mob for a jury at the center of human rapport. One day we emerged from the earth or fell from the sky; now we've the task of reinventing ourselves outside established blame.

The sentence: Over a bitter cup of coffee my senses misquote the night air.

WITTGENSTEIN'S LADDER

What can be said and, once said, what can be understood?

WHAT'S ON TV?

Channel 1000: the succubae and incubi of normalcy, smiling rictus of contempt and kindness (our modern Eumenides), the logorrhea of warlords and harpies, the new Beelzebubs of the ideologically pure

Channel 2000: nonstop coverage, the greasy mantle of lies, the platoons of justification, the hooded language of annihilation, the new mental detergents

Channel 3000: the goo-goo ga-ga of desire, eros as idiot on a stage

Channel 4000: everything's for sale here, little pills to cure under-consumption, remedies for the anxious, an endless mall for the watchdogs and their families' needs

Channel 5000: bankable prophets, hallowed markets of fear, gleaming mansions of thugs, the desecrated perimeters of myth

It's all talk, talk, talk now: so plentiful, such good company, so cheap.

And you'll have that perfect smile.

Who says television will suck you dry or kill you? You're one channel away from bliss.

IN PRAISE OF MORAL FATIGUE

Bricks speak to our lower selves when all is said and done: partitions, separations, barriers, cacophonous matter press hard on the body's marshes and bony garden. We're all here, they say, for one terrible purpose: to speak for annihilation, to broadcast our minor voice between reveille and sign-off, between uterine expulsion and the finish line, between mitosis and the ditch. Your truth's an inferior mortar, they say. It promises paradise but crumbles under pressure. Its beauty's a bargain gone awry.

Some will say: *It was worth the trip. Look, we've had our task. We've improved the human lot.* Others, hearing this, will shrug or may grunt assent. Still others have harsh words tattooed on their foreheads or an acrid epitaph dripping from a vein. Each one's bearing an epiphany uniquely owned by all:

the lucent weight of breath in earthliness.

Each is faithful to a voice protected from the air by private wounds, sacred memories, or the ego's polished vanity: we own nothing but the certainty of our crimes, they say. This scar tissue's our domain.

To move on earth is to evict humanity's brain from innocence. Some ask: what cognitive tasks remain or are not yet born? Is there growth of consciousness? Is there a language capable of translating death? Is there a name for this brief luggage?

Say! What's the role of mercy in our changes?

Bricks form part of that structure there in the distance. Do you see it? There are species of insects that devour its stone geometry, bacteria that pursue what has hitherto endured. Small insects, almost mindless, construct tunnels in those bricks; they survive in hollowed ribbons of glut.

Exeunt now lyrical ghosts of yesteryear. It was kind of you to visit, kinder still to indulge our prophecies. We wanted to tell only you our secrets. We wanted to hear you say: *'Twere better never to have been born.* There'd be no truer sign than this, befitting the exhausted and the grieved.

Christopher Damien Aretta

But no: we're on different terrain now and must seek new laws of combat and hospitality. There's always someone close by at moments like these whose voice interrupts our pas-de-deux with the coffin's lead. Who says in effect, clearing the throat or damming a wall:

Stay. A new countdown's just begun.

CIVILIZATION AND ITS TENTS

a. A long time ago artists called filmmakers told stories that would one day be shown in memory museums.

These stories recorded the final days of a sensibility undone. Not even vultures could feed now on that history's unburied bones.

Their films were elegies to lost tribes of feeling, forgotten inwardness and discredited beauty: their films comprised an archive of abandoned sociality.

A global Faust had long since bulldozed the infinite grace of locality.

b. In a bombarded village not far from the ancient city of Ur, a man serves tea behind the partly extant walls of his café. His guests are soldiers bivouacked nearby: brothers and friends of those who've left him homeless.

He says to the querying reporter while gesturing to the ritual he's just accomplished: *At least they'll see we're civilized beneath this rot.*

The soldiers drink unblinkingly commenting on the filth of that village, its thick walls of stench, the disorder that's revealed by righteousness. How else commit to reason the catastrophe of war? Later they'll write letters to loved ones and think of birthdays, weddings and the color of that first car, for memory is the victor's moral plunder.

And future understanding of such events will scarcely preserve in remembrance the simplicity of leaves, or the chemical darkness, of that tea,

or the burning heart of silence in an old man's hospitality.

ENCEPHALOGRAM

a. The earth is still our prize—empirical surfeit and metaphysical lift—, but this is the name it bears now: exhausted reverence, flawed elision, hemorrhaged bliss. Our nerves are still mediums though: lit like forests by an approaching blaze. We don't know whether language can speak beyond its box. How can our mixed natures tell?

We still speak today in herds and visionary supplement.

b. There are subdural voices we bring to the mind's alphabet though our daily bolus be aging symbol and semantic unrest:

What hieroglyphics are these: a new message or degraded code?

How can we know? We're still playing in childhood's ancient parks while learning how to live. We've yet to comprehend the humanness within our collective living:

*Is the mind in poetry a more perfect, more humane polity?
Is the self's imperfect growth caused by self-imposed arrest?
When is feeling a nascent forum to defy reptilian tyranny?
When will our species' failed performance become the brain's new poetry?*

c. No, not once but many times we've lost this contest. We'll take what's left of the drama within the drama, the voice within the voice, the meaning within the meaning. We'll accept mercy without tenderness; we'll make impossible choices. We'll create forms without the hallowed experience, without the hallowed sounds. We'll winter outside in our flayed condition.

d. Could language still invoke for us unplayed being or the lost address of experience? We'll take all our lot can give us:

What is language for if not to enliven possibility?

e. We must fail without chloroform, without hope. We know there'll be no victory for our task: either Marsyas's hubris or luminous cruelty.

And we'll make impossible recovery our brain's requisite: both growth of mind for a body rent and sharpened scalpel for our impiety.

ARCHAIC ODE ON AVOIDING BITTERNESS

We have Odysseus and Samsa. Their fossil breath's enclosed in narrative, in streams of damaged consciousness and travelogues of longing. Their presence is enclosed in deforested myth—mounds of storytelling earth, weirs threaded with the sediment of memory—called alphabets. With these we build impermanent barriers between vital ocean and abstract archipelago, use paleo-symbols to visit unnamed plants and planets and make mind a place of thoughtful resonance. Enclosed in ancient maps called books (scatomancers' trails of sign and portent), they disclose the thrall of logic to sovereign wanderers: the changing perimeters of truth and dangerous edge. What is the haruspex's task? To interpret through sortilege the rules of being's restiveness. (We mean by this: net or anchor, metamorphosis or house arrest?)

The world becomes the drifting parlance of consciousness.

What edge is this that speaks its name in blood-thin syllables and archaic hiss? These elixirs have left their fire in expanding dust. We want to stop this flow of years (or flow of dust) and interrupt these parables of repair. *What stories can still be told in poetry's prescient tense?*

Can we survive our fatigue of seeing ten-fold when childhood saw a thousand-fold while others see but one-? Is there a core of being still untouched, or still intact, where blight of disappointment palsies its own advance? Or are we candidates for the garden's penury?

What preface did we write that bore no fruit?

What epilogue whelms at this gate? Is there a voice for us between asepsis and *too late*? Is there a way to irrigate the moon, spoon vitamins into gravel, or spin words for music we cannot hear? Can we rush cognitive presage?

Something calls out still: alkaline soils, a monstrous quest, an ontological quest. Something calls us, braking on tongue and brain. Something navigates through our myth-begotten frame.

There is bitterness where there's unmerited strife or too few seasons to get ourselves right. We're the rough draft erased before gaining reason. Or

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perhaps the insight itself is our rough guess, the disarmed vision, the only piece of sky we're given. We're autistic sailors in infinite prison. Striving unnoticed and undone is our unitary way. This is our *consigne*:

that we live in sentience freighted with jubilant insufficiency.

WHAT IT'S NOT (A NEGATIVE POETICS)

This is what language isn't. It's neither declaration nor theory nor clever erudition. Nothing can cloak the linguistic event under dutiful comportment or neutralize its risk. It's not the curtain irreparably drawn or suddenly opened: there's no tomorrow guaranteed, no release beyond today's difficult pathos, or therapy for utopia's recessive gene. It isn't sensibility leavened or the elucidation of facts. It isn't our name spelled backwards or forwards in sentient alignment. It isn't eidetic precision of supramundane shores. It isn't eternal light heroically restored. It isn't love lost then transformed by alchemical receipt. Which means it isn't salvation: there is no redemption this side of history, or that side of death, or inwardly in the face of external event. We are alone together. Language is neither definitive guide nor infallible truth. No Hermes reincarnates, no radiant thief victoriously conspires where language walks with its cognitive limp. We're not the orphaned children of a repentant god.

Even now perhaps, reader, you'll want me to nail these words to a door or tell you I've followed a script. But no: words refuse to remain on the page. Once written down, they'll betray every covenant whether hyperbolic, erotic, or epic. They've already slid from permanent throne to mobile tent or to the tidal currents of semantic drift. Words have no permanent address: they've never owned property (or sutured word to thing) except in moments of hubris or self-forgetfulness.

Words don't stay put in their cage: they appear out of nowhere and drip from an invisible press. (Nothing is heard if not first near the imagination's lathe.) There is no destiny fulfilled in print: only the self's distended grip into infinite rift. Words are epiphanies of voice-off events; they report cognitive non-coincidence with the printed page.

Language is neither the substance nor the brief nor even the exposé. Language is neither pregnant silence nor historical peak, neither Hegelian *Geist* nor dialectical redemption (nor even emotional peace). It's semantic tumult heavy with its own indigence and half-buried light. It's humus in time's barrow. Meaning doesn't save: it doesn't know or doubt. It doesn't know its own name. It grows in the dark. It's the congealed lava of impermanence: the fossil remains of *yeses* and *nos*.

So, reader, it is language in movement—the movement itself—not the final anatomy of flow, that counts. Language doesn't command the real into syntactic trellis or metaphoric parks. It's neither admirably prehensile nor grasps well what it shows. It doesn't foresee the future: it's slow to evolve. Language doesn't mean what it says or think what it states: it speaks truth only in its itinerant mistakes. Language doesn't know itself. Language celebrates its own distress.

Language doesn't say: it throws. It throws being into an ocean heard from above and below. Language reveals our night; it's still learning to speak. It tells us we've become inhuman on our way to earth, how what we love constrains us to difficult tasks, how we're given insight after we've been left for dead and our neighbors have given up search.

Language is language: marrow, or meteor, of diffracted birth.

POEM FOR MY CHILD

Laughter in bone is your way of telling me there are parks within our dying. Your atoms (a blue-green darkness) dance like acrobats in flight, or marionettes on molecular strings, or new quanta of syntax: you derange the astronomical clock. *Your dance eclipses my coarse volts.* You decree a new unfolding, a new *unspelling*, a new *unpetalling* of self by heliacal offensive. Fresh pronouns and new fragrances of verbs will be at last transmitted by spiders and bees (Kafka's insect transformed at last into bipedal radiance).

Words that once shivered in the cold blink now at the sun and lie beside your high knowledge of the day.

Laughter is now in our cellular plot: we're rebel protagonist and aerial lift. I'm the trapeze; you are the artist. Your laughter grounds bone, erases the marrow and disturbs my peace.

Fallen heart: wake and rise.

Bury me now with your blue-green revolt. Eulogize all death. Laugh at my impermanence. Breach the ego's walls. Vandalize my veins with your gentle rage. Usurp every color. Damage every image.

Rewrite me in blood on the rare page of your news.

Hold Frankenstein hostage and unstitch, unknit and unravel these poorly wrapped bones and pestilent scars. Make monsters weep. Make old men remember their calendar of dreams. Make them fathers to their own dear demise. Destroyer of the unenraptured self: make me howl in gladness at the insufficiency of one.

Teach me to exchange harsh things for the fathomless poverty of being human and alive.

Let me help you to undo a knot and undo a not. Announce to the earth that I'm the guest you'll henceforth receive. Teach me to accept all guests into our house of demented tenderness. Ships full of ghosts will enliven the path to our door; they'll let us feast on their carpet of bones. We'll teach them what can be learned between breaths. We'll welcome monsters as beloved kin.

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*Newborn Telemachus: these waters, this air and this earth I
recognize after long amnesia and knife-pronged care.*

You've unhoused self from itself forever then given it a home. Ours will be
the banquet of being same and not-same, ours the genealogy of incorruptible
mirth.

And at departure, finally drunk and serene, my bones will at last rise to sleep
in your veins.

READING THE TEXT AND READING THE POEM

First, reading the text wouldn't bring you close to the skin, for theory is succubus of all vital strife. We'd find there neither husband nor wife but rather abstraction as next-of-kin. And theory makes family dysfunction (death of author, death of reader, death of genealogy, death of myth, death of life, death of memory) its luminous method. I like how this method opens doors into the semiotic web: pulsating linguistic dread is sewn into nameless semes. I admire these impersonal, passionless scapes: their drowning in the real now gutted on that insubstantial shore, now mute in that suspended score of once ecstatic flesh.

I value their toil done by borrowed light.

Here, the text would be the hallowed soil of purely verbal uproar, which is vernacular for deserted stage, mimesis's death knell, amnesia of amnesia: we'd enjoy self-absence in a transparent well, or an abstract bed, or, eureka, uninhabited hell. Then we'd see our extinction not as subject (and subject to pain), but preserve our flesh scraped from bone by memory's dulled blade. We'd deny all sentience under a speechless sky.

We'd see then the madness of calling a thing by its name.

There are no names. Names are but empty shells:

*atolls of dream, abandoned colonies of self-born desire, symbols
exiled in a motionless serene.*

Then what language cannot do is free us from our ancient cliffs, from the burnt dunes of our harsh residence on earth. Then what language cannot do is invent paradise or eschew our indigence under an indifferent sun. Our lungs fill with sand from birth. There is no transcendent hill or effective spell: *our stories are both fictional and false*. Our talk is rootless memory, or, rather, imaginary cortex, subdural tapestry, inscrutable accident unfolding on virtual trees.

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But then some questions remain. What is our task; what must we do while we're here? Why do we run up hills while breathing in bodies that age? Why do we fall then once again choose to stand? *Why do I speak when not spoken to?* Why is metaphor our one earthly possession: wreath of acrid rags, winter leaves and soil clutched and carried from one end of creation to the other? Why do we sail on metaphorical rafts? Isn't it to reach rare knowledge of self and things?

If so, then the world's still a word-laden craft.

We are still the messengers of one nocturnal day. In the word—in our dark—we see with augmented sight: self, rock, growth and departure. Somehow the poem's our dwelling. Somehow this dwelling's our share. That's perhaps why we're here under the eaves of metaphor's harvested light.

Why are you here on this page if language isn't also the onset of day?

A DOG'S DESTINY

in praise of Diogenes of Sinope (c.404-323 B.C.E.)

A dog's tethered form turns towards me for an instant. As I observe his bound anatomy, I wonder whether he isn't the image of a human freedom relinquished or forgotten then transformed into this tethered condition, or whether this isn't simply a chance and pointless greeting on earth between two strangers who reason on incommensurable neural planes.

The dog (who addresses me, it seems, in an inappropriately carefree tone) sniffs the ground, checks to see if I, too, am leashed (and thus beholden to another's will) and says:

I'm a mediocre specimen of my race, but I've lived long enough to distinguish the special place of excrement from the holy site of tender flesh, bone and gristle—a lesson taught all of my kind by our mothers while sucking at their teat. And we've watched you between your morsels and your wars. We know about your unfolding play in the cosmic zoo. It's clear you're a member of a deluded race: you've bitten the metaphysical hand that feeds you. You reify experience into hesitant ladders aimed towards the sky, yet your body never touches the ground. Not in the perfect way ours do. Always off-balance, your two legs walk as if climbing a ladder that leads nowhere. Then, desperate, you speak about invisible, insurmountable fences. In the end you never dig or gnaw except to bury those of your litter (though never as food for winter when hunger always strikes). You build strange machines that become you like a second skin, but you never see the abundance of what smells and tastes so good around you. You do not own peace. You outlast us, but your strange habits are what our mothers have warned us about: biped truancy. And we pretend not to notice your species' want in exchange for a chance morsel or a warm bed to sleep in. Your poverty makes you generous with us, and we're grateful for your species' confusion. Meanwhile, even your generosity stiffens into habit while we can dance on all fours on the cosmic slate.

So why are you tethered to this post?, I asked. You speak of our species' imperfections and the sour note we add to the cosmic stew, but you ...

... are right about everything except yourselves, he continued. We see you tremble while you sleep. I've witnessed your nightly kicking and hunting for anguish-weaned prey. Almost completely by accident, mind you, your twitching legs and arms will form a river in that bed, a river's bed for words to flow in towards a forever unseen end. Tethered? No. This is neither rope nor chain but rather canine geometry: the taut line stretching from reality to hope, the distance between our hunger and your hand. The earth's circumference describes the curvature of our tail. And we never leave this home. Your mind, on the other hand, approaches almost everything in fear and feeds on its own despair. You dig cities that invade life's hospitality without pity or care.

I felt unkind towards this odd mix of sentiment and historical theory. Was his philosophizing actually sarcasm, quadruped pseudo-sagesse, or was it true our folly is our species' unredemptive myth? I felt tempted to give him a swift bipedal kick, recalling my species' habitual coldness towards strangers despite their own rich islands of sentience in the cosmic sea.

With understated precision and a laconic, watchful nod to our vertical prowess, he continued:

So how have you destroyed your joy today?

That's why, he said, you have Rimbaud's «radiant mansions of joy on endless beaches» dreamed of, and recorded in, the same *season spent in Hell*.^{*} His final comment he didn't need to state. I deduced it from his odd logic. It went like this:

With what destructive purpose have you pissed on your cosmic plate?

I left him then, too tired to discuss with him our human plight. Words are heavy when there's no redemption to be found except in our wandering and our discovery there's nothing we can call our own. Not here, not anywhere.

While I walked away, all I could do was imagine a fragile grace and collective empathy to ease our history's burden of repeated, seasonal kill.

^{*}This is obviously the uninstructed dog's rough translation of the French nineteenth-century poet Arthur Rimbaud's line from his *A Season in Hell* written in 1873: «des plages sans fin couvertes de blanches nations en joie».

IN PRAISE OF FAILURE

a. If given the choice between garden and desert, I'd choose the geometry of sand, each grain's beginning and end, the fragile, unstable folios of dune, the mineral mirror of photons.

If given the choice between judging the reason for your own dark breath and being your guest, I'd choose mutual responsiveness over one-sided righteousness: your terrible pride being more worthy of welcome than my more terrible presumption. I'd choose lunar landings on your own strange heart and wait there for language to form.

If given the choice between victory and the lessons of boundaries now respected, now crossed, I'd choose to be here at this moment of interrogative thirst, this moment of radiant perception, this potable frontier. Together we'd break the unquenchable alphabet of mirrors. We'd refuse the coarse pregnancy of words.

If given the choice I'd listen rather than speak, wait rather than wreak, strip to the bone rather than hide my own cognitive penury.

If given the choice, I'd rather not know you than wrongly believe that I do: you should be worth more to me than my pantheon of gods or ancestral provenance and memory.

b. Play begins in opposites: the binary plot of *it* and *not-it*, the knot of being born (and not immediately formed in guiltless requital): *here* the earth as terrine of onion, water and tender lamb served in the kitchen, *there* the daily terraqueous slaughter.

In childhood all is reversible save sadness.

The imagination takes root in desert. Such waterless poverty runs deeper than monologue's ocean, our mind's false fables and our reasons when sated by cyclopean bliss. *What if Ulysses had never returned? What if the rules of living had changed beyond the possibility of return, beyond the repetition of sameness? What if, in his beggar's disguise, he remained unrecognized? What if the imagination is held hostage, not fed, by nostalgia for birth? What if the imagination is a one-way flight?*

Cognizance of the human must invent new rules of rhetoric and play. The new must be born post-natal. We must never return to the same river twice.

We must fail at what we've practiced and learned, at what comes naturally, at what seems impossibly right, at what gives us strength and the promise of purity. We must bathe in our inexhaustible impurity: our soiled hands require a long season of modesty.

New rules say: cut the jocular vein of righteousness. Laughter wraps affliction in cheer. Happiness is not really the goal; it's sometimes a figure of misguided speech, a rhetorical demeaning of grief. Refuse the laughter that applauds the messengers of complacency. Learn to laugh with right grace.

We've no moral center when we're alone. There's no moral center in monologue. *There is no unspoilt belvedere.* Our oracular ear must bend first towards the other's otherness.

We're still metaphysical tourists; we pay ransom for our spoiled consciousness.

One day we'll be enraptured by our promiscuous encounter with life. What new *regnum* in the desert's womb awaits? What will we find there when we've abandoned the longings of memory? Are we knowable outside the first utterances of "I," "you" and "they"?

If so, then our bodies would learn to narrate (in) the disorder of unscripted living.

Life first seduced us with knives. We've been the circus's target and crowd: the circus clown's a hyena at play. After the circus we must fail at what we've promised to do out loud. We must relearn to be them, you and me. Only then will we make life host, not prey.

IN PRAISE OF FINITUDE

Fifteen drops of water on a cracked sidewalk. The ant that passes by, busy and blind. The ant's mortal spree. Sudden diver in the refracted bloom of light. To drown in that sentient sea.

Fifteen bars of Bach without coming up for air. The rare portal from acoustic loom to redemptive reverie. The room of perfect weather where language, untethered, invents its own flesh. The fresh tempest of rapture.

Fifteen hours of anguish. The fractures of the body in pain. The braided mane made of a spider's thought. The inaudible math in matter. The unlatched door in the mind where shadows abide. The dark neural lanes of childhood.

The past like lichen on ancient masts. A skull's quiet pleasantries. The orphaned path of summer's woods. The ancestral garden of sorrow. The sparse arborescence of memory. Your once warm hand on my scrapped knee.

The present like flowers on fire. Atolls of broken bliss. The senses' comb; the earth's hair. The etiology of tomorrow. Knowledge of the microbe's womb. The fragrance of time burnt into ash. The aromatic score of being.

The future like Sisyphus climbing his slope. The still empty shore. The mineral locus of dolorous hope. Icarus cast on the salt pores of earth. The stark freedom soaring over Brueghel's northern port. The mercy attending all travellers of myth and desire.

Then you, sitting there: the lyrical fire. Time tending to the toils of birth. To the sores of long illness. The unfolding parcel of soil. The still soaring loam of breath.

The brief fullness of life on death.

GRAVITY IN A LATE UNIVERSE

a. The volume resting on the table weighs two pounds and five ounces, not counting the ounce or two comprised of bookmarks and strips of paper inserted here and there (in said volume) indicating a page previously consulted where the author's biography, included in the preface, has been lately underlined. On thicker-grade, whitish paper, the draft of a thought concerning the author's position taken vis-à-vis a specific and crisis-ridden epoch in modernity can be found. It's all heady stuff, the intellect's repast: a three-hundred page dissertation dutifully annotated along with accurate and up-to-date bibliography. The volume almost stands up by itself and speaks. Knowledge has sedimented between its covers: the harvest of long labor and arduous reflection. The reader is the better for it: under its shadow, humanity's future seems less prey to the Furies.

Yet we still must breathe to survive. Thought is still inseparable from pulmonary contraction and cardiac restlessness. The world is not positivist externality: it neither accepts lying dormant between brackets nor being suspended in thin air.

We are too toxic, or too deformed, for stasis.

(We cannot stop when consciousness settles into discursive sediment. It is habit that makes us covet the coarse velocity of cognitive shorthand and communicate under duress what ants trace delicately each morning on the universe's sand. Their anonymity under the sun may be closer to wisdom than our digital and evolutionary neurons can guess.)

I continue contemplating that volume lying there and wonder if there might not be a time of fullness awaiting the indebted and deprived. Could we meet someday outside the laws of childhood, i.e., outside the dark currency of disrepair, unburdened at last by obsessive repetition?

b. I sat and watched the volume as it rose and wrapped me in its completeness, the volume's print hovering, along with me and everything else I see in the room, a few atoms above the table like mourners above the grave. I've been told we don't ever truly meet (you and I, you and it, or it and I), but rather greet one another from a nanometric distance. I sat and pondered my hovering condition above that chair. I compared the volume's prose in

apposition to my genetic code, both betraying diverse levels of erosion: its transmission of knowledge to our unspeakable present, my intrusive utterances distending over time. I wondered why I couldn't find peace in my hands and heart, sitting on that chair, looking at that volume. And I wondered:

Is there a way to be a body and still attain epiphanies of vision in unlocked negatives of sight? How are we given to the world: only once (in deferred totality) or successively (in tight spirals)? Did we land on earth on two feet then lose ourselves in nomadic drift? Can we climb ladders to rise above gravity's grip?

Modernity has lowered the metaphysical ceiling, but there are still airports in our travels that no radar detects. Can the body retrieve all it has lost in routine locomotion? Where can the rough drafts of existence still be heard and borne? The details of the world are neither minute nor forgettable:

they gather the fine hairs of perception on a limitless comb.

No deluge here is needed: to live we must sail through the rivulets of matter sifted by light, now shored up by, now flooded under, the universe's multi-dimensional sea.

There may be other ways of bearing our history.

Then I could say that even in impermanence there are ways of being replete. Knowledge is not a stable content; history does not take place on one continent of being. Our bodies are sieve-like: they hold provisional nourishment and thought.

An idea is a current of connectivity in sensory storms.

How will we find there the realm of undiminished beingness, the unsifted voice of matter spoken in perfect restlessness? Is there a heart compatible with ontological impatience or generous with sentient ecstasy?

I wondered (while sitting on that chair) if it might not be possible to open the volume still resting on that table *and actually come to see nothing there*. I wondered if, beyond the volume's heavy ration of prose, it might not contain significantly deeper freight. I imagined opening the volume. (Actually only an instant had passed between my first sighting of the volume and this now-

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belated view.) And I felt a new heaviness while whispering within: give me the earth soaked in gravity, give me the hollow in my hand, give me the hollow in the seat of this chair. Let me be at last posthumous to my own consciousness. I want to emerge from this atmosphere of desperate moss and advancing disquiet.

There are other ways of being a body.

I stood up finally to discover the human in a sudden lightness of will: an utterly itinerant transparency within the yet-to-be written and the persistent margin of the still unimagined.

The body may still reach, I thought, inaudible cupolas of thought. The body may still orchestrate epiphanies in unblocked resonance. There are unexplored islands of cognition in our cellular freight (which means that we share the eccentricity of all creatures born heavier than light).

*We still have our
mind's minute brachiation through
forests of gravity's trees.*

So evolution has brought us to the vertigo caused by thinking upright. Expect henceforth turbulence and paradox: there are many ways to discreetly drown in flight.

VERTICAL PROWESS

the
hunger
that
has
fed
on
this
page

Only in a minor perspective is the present finished.

IT ISN'T ENOUGH TO CONVINCE US (A TARANTELLA FOR
HUNGRY POLITICIANS)

It isn't enough to agree with us now after so many years and so much destruction: delay in such times is murder.

It isn't enough for your conscience to say it wants to trade dying for laughter: your truths are all born in torture.

It isn't enough to bury the dead: you must ask them to ground you to dust.

It isn't enough to give speeches to crowds, to lust after God, or to scream from a stage: words are soiled by incurable lying.

It isn't enough to disarm the dead or unmask your ruse: whose humanity wins when everyone loses?

It isn't enough to silence our minds: our sorrow is real and your guilt is transcendent.

It isn't enough to let the dead speak or to comfort their dread: we've seen their flesh drowning in ash.

It isn't enough to contemplate peace while a horde of you lick at war's ass.

NO RHYME BUT REASONS

Dear friend,

You ask me if I believe there exists an abstract and absolute meaning for our lives. Or if there is a “why” that can be linked naturally to a “because” which completes every question and consoles every grief. No such claim is possible. Can language and history outrun or outlast our destructiveness? Such a claim, I think, is possible. Our modernity has corrosively renamed all that traditional belief once claimed as its domain. However, in its place—in its wake—we are left with more modest epiphanies and more fragile certainties. Nonetheless, I think there’s a way to live in such apparent poverty of transcendent reason (to borrow from the Greek, it may be that a minor *telos* emerges to complete the receding divine *logos*). I believe (and notice it’s always still a question of belief with us human creatures) that it’s in our collective living and in the dimensions of our singularity (the significance of which we contribute to both as hosts and guests) where the apprehension of the almost imperceptible, the almost invisible and the almost mysterious within the empirical takes place. This is the drama I wait for.

Imperfection can sometimes abduct us into higher perception.

I believe we strive to dwell there in conscious, internal debate. It is there I strive to go. *Why?* Because it is our cosmic address. *Why?* Because we are creatures who are uprooted by historical circumstance, or political coercion, or personal history. The self can in turn crystallize into anthropological flight, dread into theoretical path, necessity (we call it choice) into utopian travel.

We are fated to speak for the dead while in motion.

This is our obligation, then: to dwell on this planet not to increase sorrow but to alleviate it. We are called to evolve both within ourselves and in the company of others.

For these others are the mirror of our unfinished face.

We are earthbound creatures, but the earth is endless.

That is, we must make it so.

A ROUGH THEORY OF BEING FOR CHILDREN

For D., who once asked:
“So, if there is no ‘why,’ is there an obligation?”

1. Peel the stars away from the evening ceiling: you’ll be left with curved space, thermal night and negentropic islands. These form the drama of perpetual atomic fruition. The universe, the stars’ ecstatic fission, your name, your memory, your childhood agony: they all pierce your mind’s molecular silence. You want them to learn to say your name. You want them to pardon your terrestrial sentence. There is no more terrible task than the universe’s learning your name. There is no deeper well than the one we’ve dug in hell. Drink from the hands of the dead: their regret washes the earth you’ve stained.

Mind is the uprising torrent of light.

2. Peel bitterness away from your face. Remember: the mandibles, the dentition, the curvature of lips are the skull’s lightest attire. The skull’s fully dressed when laughter is worn. Such is the lyrical, incorruptible magician: it pulls hats out of rabbit’s, ears out of coins and sleeves out of flowers. It can split the heart’s atom into blossom and vase.

Invert your logic to wrest freedom from fear.

3. Peel the world away from consciousness: dissolve the obsession to return, the ability to simply repeat. Nature without our dissent is mere cyclical destruction. To quote literally from nature is to misapprehend its sense: *look beyond the dark static wheels of unquestioned appearance*. We’re diminished when we’re forced to obey under smiling coercion; the despot despises the unfurling orbits of reason.

The world is grotesque if unleavened immediacy.

4. Peel childhood sorrow away from future event: our trauma precedes all hominid travel. To *be* means to reformulate matter, to elevate dust, to rewrite the script. Walking can be earthbound transcendence. Departure means: to fly and/or drown with Icarus at sea.

Thinking in Babel

There are no survivors of sadness.

5. Peel self away from self, object from object, truth from truth: you'll pierce the final illusion at the bottom of the well. Peel ego away from all its possessions. *True intimacy with things is with the thingness they disclose: their materiality in our unfolding myth.* Atoms reveal our fate in their mirror. Natural phenomena are the supreme perceptual fiction: they're the stairs to our own neural sky. *World and mind are our port of arrival; being is ceaseless embarkment.* Sensation is the parent of thought; thought is the offspring of seeing. The imagination bears our familial tree. When we tear the curtain from being, we discover that being's a labyrinth of intimate trails.

There's no final connecting flight to anywhere but here.

We are the flights we take, the engineers of an immense *hic et nunc*, the keepers of consciousness, the flickering image of organic fate. We are our gods' deliberate mistake:

we evolve under duress between two irrational dates.

6. Peel everything away from everything else: you'll still have a home where you can evolve in awe. The world is our invented gift.

The theory of being is a history of breathing: the sonorous current of atoms enthralled by infinite lift.

Breathe in then out: you've just travelled between earthly anchor and cosmic drift.

APUD e.e. cummings NONLECTURES (1952-53)

for E.

(i)

I listened to important representatives of the status quo speak of a dead poet today. They bore their teeth while speaking of him as being this way or that, as meaning “a” and/or “b,” as statistically deserving—in a sociological approach to tropological behavior—a “minus 25” or “the square root of three.” I heard him thus spoken of: the mute hecatomb resurrected for a second *deathbegottendeath*

not the physical death which comes like the years dancing on memory-drenched senses to sleep in a bed just beneath our skin

or like birds who farm the brain’s soil and sow the slowness of mortal clocks on our brow

or like a weaver of stories on whose loom our heart bleeds color onto cloth visible only at night

deathbegottendeath serves the hypnotizers and political magicians: it serves their carnivorous powers.

(ii)

The poem’s a fragile theorem of / metaphor / meta-thorn /: the *poemnonpoem* of endless ache, the meta-mechanics of words in molecular flight. *To write a poem is to slice one’s tongue into ribbons then drive them into the exhausted roots of the given.* The poet cures the earth’s recurrent malady: / the agraphia of its seasons / the untitled stutter of the present /. The poet can grow language on tundra of glass. *The poet writes north of the legible.* The poem, once weaned on insatiable strife, now toils on the paths of being: / each poem’s a spiral of meaning / each poem renews the earth’s infinite soil /.

In the poet’s second *deathbegettondeath* there were no birds, no weaver, no immeasurable spring in cyclical, corpuscular winter. A storm of burning sleet and metallic petals / un-tucked the poet’s bones / dismantled the earth’s interlocking jewel of memory and worm /.

deathbegettondeath coveted the empirical fuel of matter recomposed by the poet into pregnancies of clockless sleep.

(iii)

The hypnotizers defiled the earthly meeting place of haven and hell; they soiled the resting place of language that once dwelled in poetic space. *They interrupted the garden*. Their words imposed for a moment a gray, posthumous sense grooming his words into a post-mortem hammer. There were political parables, the death mongers said, to draw from his work, fit for the party presently in power. There was evidence of insights that supported the majority feelings now accepted as indelible truth. There was proof of his orthodox views, the grave robbers said, when it came to punishment or contempt for those who dissented. They polished the poet's metaphors until these shone like hyenas' teeth before feeding: beautiful white peaks of jagged snow budding from red-black gums inlaid upon pre-hominid grins. Their speech swollen with the reproductive organs of evil, they spread horror over the poet's hapless tomb.

And while listening to them, I understood that outside the ultimatum we're given between hell and hell raised to the power of ten or a million, outside the business of negotiable horrors, outside the carnivores' language of justification, outside the viciousness of the normal, prevails eternity's grammar (or at least the repository of meaning too tough or too enduring for the herd's chewing). The poet retrieves and transforms / *the ever-germinating-language-of-irresistible-verbs* / *phosphorescent difference* / *the ongoing task of the earth's renewal* /.

I began to understand the poet's *deathnondeath*.

JUST MOMENTS AWAY

And I thought that one moment in three could be this: the unearthing of wonder within / the spiralling ruin of humanity's news / the calendar of exhaustion / the bitterness of having been born /. And thought said: *so be it for today.*

And I thought that one moment in three could be this: / an itinerant Odysseus retelling our hours / repairing the rending of self from self / stripping time to its core of longing / cleansing the heart in the corpse we've slept in since birth /. And thought said: *archaic memory still washes onto the shores of today.*

And I thought that one moment in three could be this: / travelling light to a still unwritten shore / finding a way out, or a way in, or a way to see further than millennial rage / discerning surprise despite rapacity of mind and plundering reason / discerning exception: the language of drowning saved by the language of drought / watching Jonas swallow the whale /. And thought said: *perhaps someday.*

And I thought: is there a moment that joins these moments we're given as enigma and task? Can mana still dwell in trees or animate stone in dream? Is there a theorem of living more discerning than our history's hominid journeys? Can mind increase its powers without digging graves? And thought said: *not today.*

ON TERRESTRIAL WAYWARDNESS

I'm not questioning eternity (though to ask questions is already a form of freedom), or seeking to climb from the earth's surface to above-ground paradise. I'm not looking for childhood relics in the attic to relive innocence with antique rhetoric (or with the nostalgia of eternal regret). I'm not settling for the minor craft of glorifying disenchantment or begging for each breath I take (or am given). I don't want more than this *here* can be: a discreet mobility of particle and wave traced on a carbon firmament. *This is enough*: the mind as a neural and sense-borne compass shimmering on waves of air.

I'm not asking for myths larger than this terrestriality. I'm mining for stories deposited beneath the hours. I'm telling stories while moored in a provisional harbor. What does metaphor look like under the microscope? Like cognitive motility: a minimal phosphorescence that breathes in legible matter.

If we stare too long into that phosphorescent, metaphorical and minimal sun, one of two things will occur. Either lambency will dissolve the twin cataracts we call eyes (and then you and I will know we've been simply counting the seconds and minutes since birth) or else it will breach the boundaries of form and lead sight to irreversible vision. Either way we can still drown in a surfeit of drought. Yet a few moments on earth could be spent like this: a brief island of perception despite habitual delusion, a lightness borne in the mind despite recurrent death.

I heard music once in the mind that endured beyond the mind's erosion. It went like this: *you're borrowing time from a blood bank. You're a sometimes stargazer (on stilts), but the earth redeems honest waywardness by keeping you as guest.*

MEDUSA IN MY LIVING ROOM

I've chosen as task to present one detail of my living room: a postcard reproduction of Caravaggio's gorgoneion depiction of *Medusa*, which today I've placed not ten feet away from me on a bookshelf facing my desk. The desk has a clear glass top on which I've a computer, a scanner and half a dozen books. To my right there's a sliding glass door which leads to the veranda. From the veranda I have an imperfect view to the sea. Such is the briefly described physical lay-out of my apartment. In the summer, the door is always open, and the noise from the street sounds (from up here) like those of a permanent circus: trained bears, clowns and hysterical crowds. And it's at such moments that everything becomes almost transparent and at the same time oddly inscrutable to me. It was in fact at such a moment that I once wrote to a friend: *I'm at the modest peak of my powers. I am also a destroyed man*. And when I look at my hands while sitting at my desk, when I look at my hands, I repeat, simple appendages to a body I've worn for decades, what I see gives me pause. It gives me pause as if the sea were lapping at everything that is; or as if the entire world—busy and noisy—were an act of continuous apprehension suspended and controlled by some voice-off event; or as if life itself were not drinking us but drowning. I sit speechless and thankful for an instant simply to have survived the maelstrom or something else unnamed or unnameable. Then I wonder whether I'll ever achieve anything sitting in this room chasing after some arcane center of the day not too terrible and too liberating for language or my heart to bear. I stare out the window, quietly, almost asking for forgiveness, and I think: the entire world will persist for another hour, or another day, or year, or era whether I move or not from this chair. Meanwhile, *I* seem to have persisted, too: this tense thicket of thought and feeling exhausted but *here*, a mind gradually reduced to its most discrete dimensions of carbon resistance and thinning hair (or thinning myth). And it's then that for a moment an imaginary chaos, or ancient night, brings me temporary peace: an unscripted movement within our presently permitted latitudes. It's like the moment in childhood when we discover the odor of stinging sleet, or the way the hot air clutches our throat like Frankenstein's fingers as we climb stairs to the forbidden attic: moments abetted by curiosity at the edge of uncertainty and risk.

I stare at Caravaggio's *Medusa*. She is, you'll recall, a queen of the underworld of ancient lineage and wears a crown of serpents (some say due to Hera's punishment for her mortal but god-loving libido) as well as a collar

of recently severed arteries and veins, courtesy of Perseus's (a different kind of snake) stratagem with a shield, a mirror-like reflection and a sword. The painter portrays her as she enters the final shock of seeing who and what she's become: her living bonnet of snakes now desperate and writhing (for they've suddenly nowhere to go except to their own dead tomb), teeth almost fang-like (sharpened by life's iron wit) now visible within her fallen jaw and eyes the color of ripe olives resolving into subterranean night. Caravaggio recreates the instant her slack mouth converts to palsied scream. It's as if the painter had said to himself: if these eyes can turn the hapless onlooker into stone, well, this will be her last chance. Except that it's Medusa who discovers her own metabolic terror.

I wondered whether there hadn't once been tenderness in her sexual longing as well or spring in her perpetual winter. I imagined the pair: Poseidon and this much-maligned hag, mortal female and ocean god. There's no sun or sky in Caravaggio's portrait of Medusa: her world is pure chthonian horror. Nonetheless, in her inhuman face there's a hint of surprise and fear. It suggests vulnerability more than the monstrously grotesque. She's almost innocence itself ready to be sliced on a platter. She reminds me that eros is a precarious ladder that leads both to haven and hell. A terrible disappointment in her eyes seems close to the language of feeling.

And now, like a heavily punctuated parenthetical clause in the midst of twenty-first-century pathos, she accompanies (along with a longing for freedom which, by simply naming it, half turns to dust) my path to the sea.

NOTES FOR UNTITLED LECTURE (i)

and there, not far, in one unmarked instant, visible to the naked eye, an unfolding

between / above / within / inside

the lattice-like connectedness of thought and sensation, an unfolding perishability that nonetheless strains to endure

despite / outside / underneath

a frenzied emptiness

at the behest of / beckoned by / beholden to

an unrecognizable earth, humanity's lost tasks, a fragmented logos, an inchoateness that once challenged and now constrains beingness

to being posthumous to itself in modernity's wake

an interrupted lyricism / an interrupted larynx / an interrupted voice

in search of a more radical speaking, a language still within earth's orbit though we seek our oxygen in the algae forests of frozen Martian seas, a more radical listening

that is now irrevocable / rescuable (?) / imprinted on our species' genetic tape (?) / cleaved very close to one's own destruction / insatiable and driven in its homelessness and rootless fate.

ON METAPHYSICAL DISORDER

In memory of the philosopher Hans Jonas (1903-1993), who went to Udine, Italy in his nineteenth year against doctor's orders; author of "The Concept of God after Auschwitz"

I imagined an ancient tree possessed of the faculty of speech as well as the will to speak its incandescent mind. My hand knocked then entered into its heart's atrium, that mana-infused place where metaphysics and mitosis complete each other, where nature and human questioning are deities, where green innocence and glucosic lift celebrate ageless fertility. And this ancient tree began to fill the air with the leafy gratitude of words. Breath, skin, bone and the very names of things exploded in conceptual fire.

Forests can grow in the blossoming air of a teacher's speaking heart.

And this ancient tree said *there were ways to leave childhood that feel more like unfolding birth than irreversible loss*. And I thought: there are ways to lose childhood, to forget language, to abandon innocence, to bury every illusion under the sun and yet survive. There are ways to imagine loss and yet survive and even flourish. There are ways to live that deduce peace from anguish, endurance from annihilation, survival from shipwreck, creation from a state of barrenness.

There are ways to escape the malevolent potency of change; to comprehend the intrinsic growth of hope within the growth of evil.

Consider Kafka's *Gregor Samsa*, for instance, who lived too close to metaphysical horror to imagine earthly escape. He dreamt in non-Darwinian terms (note his ontogenetic return to a more primitive phylogenetic form) while under the spell of an omnipotent, ruthless and unknowable god. He died because the sap of being requires the light of justice to unfold:

the denial of justice banishes humanity from bearable toil on earth. The death of God means that questions posed to the absolute remain unanswered though it is this questioning that preserves and extends the human.

I imagined an axe that felled the ancient speaking tree, burnt its sap into dust and ground its leaves into a powder of abandoned seasons. And the ancient, imaginary, dead tree said it *bore witness to the lesser crime—the utterable crime—, the crime that fits into hope's arsenal of illusion and plans, while death confirms the inexhaustible presence of every beginning.*

(The pilgrimage of an old man to a post-war Italian city, a day remembered spent in war-torn Europe, means that memory can overpower the inhuman.)

But the mind is a slow learner when the master is chaos itself moving at the speed of evil. Consciousness cannot imagine injustice without self-damage; life is mostly crushed in its shadow. The earthbound imagination bears the collective weight of the inhuman on its shoulders.

In injustice humanity does not fulfil but rather scars the sky.

i. THE MOMENT ITSELF (BEFORE VIEWING CARAVAGGIO'S *THE SUPPER AT EMMAUS*)

Dear friend,

I hope you are well. This is a brief letter to let you know how I'm doing. It's Friday late-afternoon, well, no, night has actually just fallen. I'm in my office and reading for the first and only time I've been able to read this week. A week spent dealing with innumerable contrarities, I assure you. For the moment I'm reading poetry written by several students of mine. And suddenly I have a smile on my face because I realize, sitting here in my office, that the millstone of routine and the dire habit of selling one's time to the devil haven't in fact won out. I'm here despite the years of immobility, a phrase the meaning of which only you of all my friends could ever truly understand. Of course, that's another story, and I don't know why I'm feeling so porous right now to the catacombs of time. Please forgive me. So, yes, I'm still here despite the immutable fact of Ixion's wheel. I'm here, I guess, because there's a cavity I need filling. I'm still here because there's something someone once said I still don't quite comprehend.

Fatigue's a bitter law of existence and aging is no parlour game. I can vouchsafe you that inevitable fact of life. In fact, whatever discernment I've gained in life isn't enough to express how weary I actually am. But I'm smiling anyway. Here, in my office, transfixed by an invisible needle of mortality within the cosmic scheme. Somehow there's a wound inside us that recalls the cosmic coil physicists and poets seek to unravel and weave. The same wounded, explosive universe that has nonetheless produced millennia of awe. Why does it seduce?, I wonder. Because it's bloodied resonance rather than silent tomb? Because it's dire creation rather than thermal uniformity? In the interstices of gravity, despite the unbearable smallness of our creaturehood, irresponsible life proliferates insanely not despite but because of an ancient wound we've yet to understand. This waywardness within the cosmic scheme of indifference seems prodigious to me. I smile, and the human encyclopedia of endurance and change seems both to crush and liberate.

Do you remember what our friend António once said about that momentary mutation of stone into laughter: the facial spasm in the void, the starry crown made of atoms and fragility? *The lightest thing in the universe*, he said, *was a smile*. I guess I'm smiling in that special way of his. Right now, while writing to you. At this very moment the music that moves me is the sound of our earthly recklessness, the ossature of consciousness being crushed into quivering sinew and time.

ii. AFTER VIEWING CARAVAGGIO'S *THE SUPPER AT EMMAUS*

a. / night / day / sun / stars ... / rises / falls / breaks / stirs ... / outside / near / into ... / dreams / trees / soul / earth ...

b. Exhaustion or time (=death) has stopped us in the middle of that verse. In its ruins we seek a more subtle dwelling place—a more deeply structured pathos. This pathos sits on an eight-pillared foundation: where / can / we / find / the / remains / of / joy? This joy we claim within the soil of private history, within the tender parataxis of ascent—limb upon limb, breath after breath, face to face—, the sudden levitation of the body despite Ixion's wheel. (Surprise still penetrates our sleep. Terror still may free us. Routines of thought or sorrow, we know, are the discourse of paralysis.)

Mortality has always been our guide: we've emerged along with the clock. We (and even this clock) share this task: to produce millennia of awe. Life seduces / because it's bloodied resonance rather than silent tomb / because it's dire creation rather than thermal death /. This is music in humanity's ear. This / cosmic toil / wound / we serve.

This is our genesis. Knowing almost nothing, the universe remains pure encounter. Invert your hands and you invert the image in the mirror. Invert your perspective and infinite meanings emerge. Yesterday is still conjecture. Thought is gravity's gift. Sleepwalker: life must rise from matter or fall through earth's crust and break. Do you not see our heart flying?

c. Joy is the lightest thing on earth / a spasm in darkness / a wreath of atoms fused with limbs / though it crush the mind's errors into / humming sinew / the sound made when breaking bread with the dead while being received as guest in our own skin /. (Birth is a coarse joy. Time then leavens speech. Our eyes are hooks for sight to land on.)

Phenomena are neighbors; space is time bearing gifts. Time always means well. What we know waits for us still at the bottom of the stairs. What we submit to thinking does not yet know us. Right perception is the key, but there is no door on earth. Everything is here, but this *here* is not now. The visible is something unknown casting its shadow.

Our days are airports.

d. Writing makes a crushing sound the way joy does. A counter-pressure / plays on thought / resists the mind's appetite for order /. (To verify this conjecture, organize a simple experiment such as this one: write a sentence down on a piece of paper or write it with both hands on the computer screen, your body complicit each time with the earth's / organic / electric / carapace. What do you see? / That you're wounded in syntax and metaphor. / That you've moved outside, or beyond, yourself /. Look again: you've left a limb behind and the mind's ashes on the page. Write and henceforth you become follower of your own / image / body / self /.) Where mimesis occurs, it thrives there on (our) sacrifice. Memory will not reduce to mind. Mind must tear its lace. Understanding always comes too late. Absence and epiphany feast on the orphaned stage. We / live / write / love / best outside habitual thought. Bliss is understated consciousness.

e. An unstable relationship between logos and bios thus unfolds. Catastrophe alone thrives: / bruised ego / bloodied discourse / the genome of our frailty /. Life's the pulp of fiction. Accept this and you'll know rebirth, once called kenosis.

Ignorance is a form of famine; words are our mouths. Our only regret, which is a kind of joy? We are not alone.

f. We must learn to live close to nothingness.

g. Life is a fierce grace.

THINKING OUTSIDE THE BOX

for A. M.

*«Dear to me always were the last surviving
goddesses Justice and Liberty». (Giosuè Carducci)*

*“Look at us! We’re oxen pulling stone and hay! Our next-of-kin are
happy for our fate and we are pleased that day follows upon day.”*

*“Look at us! We’re bipeds straining at history’s leash. Our
neighborhood is crowded with the debris of troubled speech. At
least we can count on the unchanging weight of earth. At least
there’s safety in numbness, the novelty of birth following birth.”*

a. Our friend Manuel died today after picking this year’s harvest of olives. These ripen each year on his acres of mountain soil and light. A suddenly exalted vessel in his brain startled the mind’s vascular hymn then ferried his heart beyond earth’s blue-green shore.

b. There’s a theory of joy to be found in the fear-cleansed vision of death: we become radiant beneath cellular snow. We’re lifted by angelic crows; we’re finally freed from our gaze into mirrors where snakes give birth to stone. My friend saw that freedom has roots; these roots are embedded in growth. He understood the mind is grown in the slow vineyards of sight. / Death is not blindness. / Death is not deafness to the earth’s *eleison*. / Death gathers us up into a deeper birth. / Death never sleeps in our mortal clocks /. He taught me we’re / mystical flocks of laughter / transcendent blots on paper / moss on the forest’s floor /: the worm’s high mass of decay.

*We’ve nowhere else to go but here, he once said, but there are ways
to see to the edge of empirical faith.*

He left me this task today: / to see freedom in my enemy’s face / to seek in alterity a deeper sense / to hear beyond silence and stasis /. I hear Nietzsche’s north wind and the ripe figs of his words: eternity’s instant redeeming our moment’s sorrow. / I see the physiological future of life. / I see we’re orphaned by modernity’s horrors /. He had kind words for the lessons we’ve missed.

Thinking in Babel

c. Then I thought of the Borg: the science-fiction species that travelled in hives / probing minds with cyborgian scalpel / killing life for new neurological weapons /.

“We are the Borg. Resistance is futile,” they said.

Their name told a story: / intelligence as mob / a four-letter fist in our viscera /. They crushed the union of / self with self / mitosis with metaphysical bed /. Blind to our cellular cycle, immune to our private stammer, immured in hyper-rational (t)error, they plugged barbed wire into the imperfect grace of life and breath. They destroyed without understanding or hate. Their ship was a perfect square crate.

We've given up so much, he'd say. We forget that life simply occurs: its fate unfolds when we let what we see on earth see first. The earth's a fragile dwelling: our fate's foretold by how the earth sees us. We're always the beginning of what we've become. Whomever we've tortured turns our strength into dust. Life on earth defeats death's derision or else we die in open-air prisons. We're diminished when we've the vision of herds.

d. An olive struck Manuel in the eye last year: an example of the world's unaxiomatic and absurd behavior. Now he's left me this task: / to discover the path from olive to eye to reason to vision / to connect dark sensation to empirical flesh / to learn what to become on earth /.

e. In my sick bed, my hands outstretched, vulnerable and alone before the approaching armies of Borg, my friend's damaged, exalted brain is a garden on earth-turned-hell. His life added a season to our hunger and dread:

the minute nuclei of rain, the fresh harvests of feeling when justice and freedom are fed.

APPARENT NONSENSE (ATLAS'S FAREWELL)

I watched the world grow terribly old and humanity busied into slavery. The air wants to flee the earth, I thought. Life's become a ghostly memory.

I watch old men and women go to market. I watch their faces like translucent parchment. I hear them breathe like a north wind whispering stories with delible ink. I see the earth concave with life's brief biographies, the temporal singularity of flesh-borne mind, the temporal fullness despite life's malignancy.

I'll watch my eyes acquire the convexity of rust. I'll watch my hands touch the names for tomorrow already sown beneath the earth's crust. I'll learn what it means to be alive when I'm dust.

IV. BABIL, fifth floor

A BRIEF PREFACE (OR UNDER BABIL'S EAVES)

We are long-standing scripts in need of constant revision. We human creatures seem to be capable of such revision to a high degree: we are works-in-progress. Of course, the freedom that is claimed for our species is also the freedom not to progress but rather to regress, both individually and as a people. The awakening and struggle of minorities (and under the eaves of the infinite we are all part of the human minority), their eloquence and, yes, their ongoing exposure to violence, all this social ferment and questioning comprise to a great extent what may be America's contribution to the human situation: the urgently felt and urgently lived quest for a collectively invented identity of equality that nonetheless accepts that such equality must be discovered by the individual in accord with his or her personal, inalienable and unfolding life story. This statement demands, however, some fine-tuning. First, there exist an American experience of such unfolding and a specific American definition of concepts such as democracy, freedom and fraternity. Second, these definitions are not conceptualizations "exportable" in any literal or direct sense to other countries, to other historical realities, but rather whose "exportation" often reflects an act of belligerence and political short-sightedness. To the extent that the political dimension engages, enlivens and/or darkens the historical horizon of human destiny, such short-sightedness also diminishes the human situation. Poetry answers, however, to a deeper and essentially supra-national idiom which seeks to avoid the formulaic syllogism and the self-serving slogan. It generates and cultivates a globalism that moves by inward tense and outward metaphor. Freedom, i.e., the right to be narrator of one's own life in dynamic and creative dissonance with that of other narrators, is a concept which belongs to the very nature of human yearning, belief and growth. This dynamism we witness everywhere. Growth is in fact an omnipresent reality: it is both historical and metabolic. Such implicit reappraisal of the Enlightenment narrative, which has nourished both utopian vision and folly for more than two centuries, is vital. Third, the dynamic character of the self-empowered human subject as narrator within a chorus of voices, precipitously invoked as an exclusively American invention, is in fact of Western and, moreover, of world origin and conception. All peoples possess their own unfolding historical awareness of such yearnings, an awareness which demands to be respected. Unfortunately, in our present world, under the harsh impetus of the present configuration of globalization, too often—if not always—such unfolding (more correctly defined as a militarized wrenching) means: "our way, not your way." My

personal conviction lies much closer to the view that, instead of dissolving borders, an awareness of the constellated complexity of borders should be heightened. I mean here the cultural and historically specific borders of every people. I cannot envision a truly inhabitable human world where everything tends to be reduced to an ongoing, ultimately market-oriented “chat.” History cannot be justly expressed by the immediacy of the chat room. Historical consciousness is arduously won whereas globalization is impatient: its understanding of the human situation is conditioned by an inner calendar and logic, i.e., the latter’s specific schedule of expansion and frenzied feeding. Babil, as presented here, simply expresses one narrator’s desire to find nourishment not circumscribed or determined by the current menu for this global feast. Babil is the mythic homeland of one who seeks an arduously won cosmopolitan, though non-technocratic, citizenship.

We risk ending up with a very homogenized world within the present technocracy. However, the borderline in myth, i.e., the boundary-experience of authentic (i.e., risk-taking) communication (of which Babil is simply one incarnation) is of immeasurable significance: it is where an “I” and a “Thou” meet, recognize sameness within difference, difference within sameness and also accept the ultimate otherness of the “other.” Our humanity is ultimately measured by how it is given to, or shared with—certainly not imposed upon—this “other.” I find such boundary experiences more exhilarating than daunting, more humanizing than threatening. By contrast, lay and/or religious fundamentalist beliefs and actions enact a radical violence against the human situation, i.e., humanity’s diversity and pluralistic, historical unfolding. *There is nothing fundamental in regard to our species other than its fundamental self-creativity.* Fundamentalism is a dead script, a dead womb, a deadening of unfolding life both individually and collectively.

One of the deepest dangers threatening us today stems from the exponential, relentless implantation of a technocracy that is strangling the millennial, pre-modern and modern strands of identity. Such strangling of the vast mosaic of sensibility carries with it a profound impoverishment of voice(s). And to the extent that I am European and American, I weep for a world gone by, or now on the brink of extinction. Nonetheless, I recognize that it is humanity itself that is effecting a transition to new forms of experience, memory and utopian illusion. With such a transition, something new and interesting is arising, but also—we have only to look—much will be lost (and even violently crushed) forever. It is impossible for me to witness the relentless erosion of our millennia-laden legacy active today without a profound sense of loss and even despair. Consequently, I am the now-orphaned child of a Europe and an America which are becoming invisible

and inaudible to themselves. A poem—that modest child of sense and sensation, consciousness and imagination, concept and conviviality—seems to be increasingly abandoned for ostensibly richer and more voluble progeny, i.e., the pseudo-narrators of this vital maelstrom we call life as it unfolds under the exigent sign of evolution.

What the future will be like remains largely veiled to us. I certainly won't live long enough to see many of the enduring consequences of our present transformations. What I have chosen to do, however, and strive daily to do, is to commit my private queries to the harsh arbitration of writing. The writing of poetry fine-tunes sensibility, sharpens the knives of our private hells and demands cogency from the bloodied metaphors of our historical witnessing. Poetry—a verbal phenomenon which occurs at the limits of communicability—strives to avoid ideological distortion and conceptual inertia. Poetry is thus at the crossroads of the verbal and the temporal: it is language witnessing its own fate within the ongoing crisis of historical and reflective experience. Because we never entirely know ourselves, because our witnessing can never entirely quarantine the malevolent inventiveness and potency of unextended being, because we still find ourselves far from the precise orbit and velocity of our voice and self, the symbolic momentum and verbal prowess of poetry seem to capture previously voice-off epiphanies. Such “truths” are in fact states of informed perplexity exerting pressure on the raw material of present linguistic energies: they rhyme with the imminence of self-discovery. Such states, then, grant a dimension of meaningful impetus to the mind in incarnate motion. And the incarnate mind is the fundamental organ of imminence and recovery.

At fifty, my engagement with poetry has become the incarnation of an ocean whose waves recede as well as advance towards the present shores of history, i.e., an ocean of feeling and voices which seek refuge in the sentient sea in order to endure there in living memory rather than reach that often toxic, deafening shore and thereupon irrevocably drown. I've sought to produce here a shaping poetry, i.e., poetry that shapes my memory as much as it distils and directs it. This is a discreet metamorphosis. This is also one of the ways that poets serve the world. Under the eaves of Babil, there is still much to write and poetically align—porous, metaphorical brick upon brick.

BABIL, fifth floor

MINOR ADDENDUM TO THE PERIODIC TABLE

Dimitri Mendeleev's distant research gave rise to the mapping of the invisible weave of nucleic acid and its two chains of nucleotides. Four bases are present: adenine, cytosine, guanine, thymine. To complete the living picture: hydrogen bonds and a molecular ladder.

On this side of visibility
on this side of mortality
on this side of language
on this side of earth,

however, I'm left with these witnessing atoms called words. Woven together they form

four moments
four precipices
four possibilities
four chances for survival (also called an ancient habit of being),

where the sanctuary of theory meets the unscientific periodic table of history.
They are:

memory

watchfulness

indignation

beauty.

We'll be the minor discoverers of such infected radiance from this belvedere
of our / slumberous / enslaved / condition.

THE VELOCITY OF MEANING

The erosion of memory is death in slow motion.
Look away for an instant, and such slowness has crushed your hand.
Look away again, and now life has looked away as well.

ENOUGH

I remember the harvested field where corn had earlier stood green, mute and tall. *Look at these neighbors in demotic dress*, I thought then, *looking skyward in vast rows of sunlight and earth*. / An ecstatic choir singing silent chlorophyllic hymns / Seeds of yellow-green atoms copulating in fields of memory and toil / A cellulose civilization blasted to light-brown dust by a cosmic fist / Light unburdening itself in bejewelled decay /. There was more then though than the eye could then apprehend: a kinship between each season on earth and the distant snow-capped mountain peaks beyond. Some of us slipped through that space: the interval between time inhabited and time / still inhuman / radiantly oppressive / open to fresh harvests of mornings and care /. That now-mute corn combed by the wind knew then more than we know today.

Look at the blue through the hollow stalks of corn, I told myself then, telling myself to recall it anew someday. *Recall the way the wind conflates humming verticality, phylogenetic clan and human limb*. There, a season finished. Here, the task of living.

Remember not to miss this moment spent between this hollowness and now.

Could we have foreseen then the late season that sees us now? Is there a name, or is there a word, for the barely flesh-covered husk we've become now today?

I look at the fibrous tendons of my hands. Almost bone dry. That must be enough for today.

* Globalization has today made of that now-distant Mexican plain—the words Anahuac, Popocatepetl, Tepoztlán as fresh and foreign in our ears and on our tongues now as they did so then—a quaint locality for tourists. History, once removed from myth's sublime terror, has now moved to the domestic calendars of homeless sleep.

FOR THE MURDERED POET NADIA ANJUMAN

At twenty-five she had her first book of poetry published, and, for some, it was already too much.*

At twenty-five the poet's speech had revealed the light emitted by bodies darkened by silence and exile, and, for some, it was already too much.

At twenty-five the poet's speech—a wounded radiance—had risen above the broken bones of truth, and, for some, it was already too much.

At twenty five the poet's speech became the bloodied frame of truth crushed beneath the post-mortem clarity of fear, and, for some, it was no longer too much.

She fell while giving understanding a domicile and a name. *The code of language does not always bow before the code of violence*, the dead poet seems to tell us now. There are harvests beyond the wordless fist of death.

Because for some the world, as it is, is too little.

* A speaker of Farsi tells me that Nadia Anjuman's volume of poems entitled *Dark Red Flower*—its title in the English-language translation—refers not to color alone but also to the toxic exhaust of vehicles. No flower could grow in such poisonous air though the poet had (for a while) exhaled language like fresh mornings of verse.

Language still grows best by the imagined light of freedom.

NOUVELLE CUISINE BETWEEN THE RAW AND THE COOKED

sometimes poetic thought—whether demented, pregnant, or incommensurable with our calendars—pays attention to the incandescent detail there beneath our shit-encrusted shoes, or seeks to augment our seeing beyond the idioms of unmediated sight

politically speaking, the language of justification the sepsis of blind seeing the microscopy of self-satisfied analysis the uninterrupted pollution of / noise / news / strike our heart in resplendent deafening fluencies

culturally speaking, the humanization of the animal the wounding of the static mirror the slow ascension through myth to Socratic restlessness reveal our hard maieutic birth

in India the sacred cow is now captured and sent to mandatory bovine asphodels no longer welcome in the city of penury and despair: listen to this inward quake let it split your tongue and ear in two

in what language can we seize / the light / the essential questions / the necessary insight / the incurable gravity of life / beyond the prompt schedule of death?

RECITATIVE

You wanted all of this and more
without knowing why or if
then loss came love's mansions
fell through seasons though seasons swim within
life's repeated veins and distant hills
a tyranny of sky on a distant-nearing world's imagined shore

There was more and there was less
that met at times the eye blind guided by the hypnotist's
voice and a master's smile
you arrived you spoke you dreamed
the chorus of illusion rose and walked on the
broken heaths of limb and, oh kindness (cruelty's end),
the harsh dance of regretted ghosts and our heart's
trapeze know-how daring the gravity of our fears mountain descent
visionary hope the utopia that feeds futures despite the present's poisonous
glue

We've grown despite ourselves despite the end of worlds despite history's
endless season in hell your love still like rare coins found or ruined eyes
still

We'll continue on our path despite because without
we'll see our flesh split by winged creatures their perfect hunger and blight

We'll smile beneath roughened skin and restless light
we'll sing despite all this to the very end of fingertip and dream awake still

We'll fall down singing lucid and bitter damaged and sweet to her majesty:
this galled bloom of life called life still
no still yes still yet still forever still singing still still still

CHILDHOOD FORMULATED

We've grown upward and outward. Time has become irreversible.

Everything has found its place. We've come to understand at last the powers we lose when superheroes bleed, and time itself speaks as dying wish.

Life has come with a message. It will leave with our answer: *There is no time.*

Only a few moments spent within history, the spiral forests of myth, the valedictory water of origins, the uncertain rappelling of a mountain, the gentleness waiting behind the dolorous mask.

AN OLD FAMILY RECIPE

Start with nothing. With this nothing, please recognize that the drama of flesh on earth has always lain close to those so-called trees of life. Dust will transform into fire, fire into the afterlife of a millennia-old heart and heart into the private legends of limb and memory. Step away from those trees nearby for an instant, then, when hunger strikes (again), add equal parts ontological hindrance (an old infirmity which persists) and metaphysical flight (the irresistible call of utopia joining hearth to the exosphere).

Mix the flour that's produced with the depleted circumstance of creaturehood. Place in a cool, unlit room (not far though from the rooms where you sleep, speak and mourn) and let it sit for a number of hours (preferably years) to acquire the acrid aroma of all earthborn memory. Finally, you should season with your own seasons: the harsh remembrance of loss (add salt to taste) and, if you have them close at hand, a pinch of cardamom, nutmeg and saffron (easily identified these—they bear the colors of earth and flesh). Use carefully but avoid excess (there will be many days and nights when this dish will be your only meal).

Nothing will cast a shadow now (and temporarily fill a void). Be grateful for this instant spent on the wrong side of eternity, lit by blazes waiting to be named and music wanting to be heard. Feast on this nothingness. You'll excrete what you're unable to muster into humanity's tomorrow. (This task will be carried on by others.) Remember you're already the humus of unborn desires.

Remember that this hunger you feel is not accidental but insatiable and inseparable from atom and mind. (Hunger cannot be sated but rather only transformed.)

Only Enoch, the shoemaker who walked with God, fed solely on the transfiguring vision. Only Enoch the shoemaker, who writes in the language of flames, could speak in syllable and song with—for sole instruments—wood, needle, animal hide and reed.

WINTER SOLSTICE

We did not ask for this. We never asked for this.

I want words born in the trenches but left unhelmeted. Drawn to yet-to-be-born humanity and light. This is the time for language to reveal its present corporeal fate.

We did not ask for this. We never asked for this.

I want words to rise with the dead and lie with the living—naked and given to lucidness and awe. This is the time for words to speak beyond our present inhuman array.

We did not ask for this. We could not ask for this.

Today the world measures life by the victims it's made and its logic of death.

I want words to unveil their hunger, their thirst, their restlessness in the gentle impurity of our feeling and thought.

*I ask only for this:
I listen to you. You listen to me. A hermeneutics of grace.*

Morning would then arise outside death's machinery. Yet-to-be-named deities, pregnant and sown into longing, would accompany our grateful extinction.

We're still at the edge of what we've become. Words bring unrest to our habit of being (an ancient ontology rooted in a lineage of stone-cold fear).

We could still be someday a gentle, discreet disorder in a universe of global horror.

ON DIFFICULT PRESENCE

Today, like no other day before, our lucidness weds ire. This is our way of being now, adrift after exchanging utopian folly for the *technopolis*.

The great narrative will survive now in the minor key of monologue, brief knowledge and self-forgetfulness.

But the future once spoke to us (and the past bequeathed to it its power). We planted its gardens with our singing and longing. With cupped hands against our ears, we heard the approaching shadows.

Words spoke to mountain (and the mountain was on fire).

Once, teachers loved tomorrow and spoke quietly in tongues. Theirs was the metaphysical fluency of hearth, history and humanness. A voice-off calendar measured the cosmic spasm: that infinite locality of our cardiac prism.

Distant and close, the future released our ghosts from fear while augmenting our vision of growth.

And we watched in perpetual surprise. Death was the *beginning* of something. A voice-off dialogue? A hidden (inter)textuality?

A semiotic brush with exquisite breath?

A commonality of piety towards inhabited time both fulfilled and undid us in the warm embrace of terror.

Today the sky hangs low upon our straining heads. With stretched tendon and the web of electronic memory, we breathe air that erases our presence and error.

HOW MUCH AUTOBIOGRAPHY?

So, how much autobiography for the written word?

How many words with passports to cross the border between lived substance and the emergent map of shared meaning?

When does internal spasm become the abstract, uplifted letter and textual brief?

How deep must we cut into the emergent flesh of words and still be the unseen ocean we drown in every day?

NO NEWS IS GOOD NEWS

a. At fifty I still haven't got the knack for this. I mean this autobiography stuff, self-reportage, the intrusion of the psyche's shadow onto the text, or slipping under its covers, or seeping through electronic ink. How much of self travels well in words? And who's supposed to care?

How, then, to translate into print this persistent and deepening fatigue, or messy psychological baggage, or the bumpy ride of childhood? And why? If the linguistic sign is always the sign of our demise, when does the personal become rescuable by authorial device? Why even bother to speak of these substrata of lived emotion or traumatic event? Isn't the world a place of inhuman silence, tyranny and hunger? Why seek to communicate the mirror turned inward in a world *where life must hear music without ears and consume food without mouths*? To my mind, the self should be an unwelcome guest in print. An inward modesty says: *To get it right, life must be un-lived. There's still so much to learn from silence and awe.*

What do we refer to when we write "I" or "you"? What you see while looking in does not see you.

What's left after the imagination picks our existential bones clean? Or when vultures circle above the torn flesh and tired blood of our schemes?

b. So, having to forge our signature with vultures on our back, wanting to speak about ourselves with neither close memory nor present passion, choosing to forget the pathogens of our works and days, what's left? A voice-off, or off-world, fluency might be best:

*speaking while suspended in inhuman metaphysical flight,
writing one's own eviction notice, standing on ground that's not on
earth, vacationing within the human.*

*We are the guests of our monsters. Our humanity is still alien gift.
Our hands both nourish and recreate famine and death.*

c. There's an unspeakable anguish in our veins, a repeated violence on earth. So finally, leaving behind the self, somewhere there in our mind's empty stadiums, in the aquarium of our astonished skulls, longing turns into

Thinking in Babel

waiting, waiting turns into becoming, becoming brings once again (and again) the tyrannical seduction of being. Without appeal and with no release. Only then, under tyranny, the language of democracy can be invented. *Words should express these cliffs.*

d. Do you see? Language must learn to grow in freedom. *Words should die on our tongues knowing more at the end than when they were born.* Speech is a promise made first to future time and place and only then to you and me. Or rather, you and I are the supposed gift to futurity.

e. The past has not been sufficiently understood, decoded, or disavowed. For the time being, we're still voting in booths on Mars.

AN INCONSOLABLE (DIS)ORDER, OR, AFTER READING KANT ON
COSMOPOLITAN REASON

I wanted to hurry here to tell you about the waves. I heard them fall today
wave upon wave. They sounded like hands gathering leaves, or thought
pacing behind the bars of a cage.

*But what I hear now I cannot fully tell or say why or how, for today
we have the waves between us.*

Can you hear in the distance speech spoken in the forest of exhausted trees?
There we no longer sate our hunger: we nourish our rage and shame. (And
injustice has made the world sordid and small.)

*Meanwhile men and women have grown new bodies. They carry an
ocean on their backs. Their lives occur under laws like toxic suns. I
ask you: When did music and life, men and women, time and space
become too tired to cross the mutilating sea?*

But I wanted to let you know. There are old women weeping on the public
square—their children's cries still ringing in their womb.

*When did they become the orphans of history? When did life turn its
back on them? When did we choose, or when were we led to, these
cliffs?*

From a distance we can watch the waves drown our species' ancient timber:
the music of you and me, the gentle progeny of animal memory and vital
futuraity.

FED UP

There's an inhuman silence within our common speech; we've lost the natural piety of our eyes and ears. And poetry—a boundary ideality at best—may shelter but cannot save our lot.

One day, when ghosts breathe again with us and music plays again beneath our skin, we will have to look at one another, speak and confess our crimes. And we will have to ask: Is there an idiom more radical than this present fluency of dogma and justification?

We've been reduced to a global logic, i.e., the logistics of enlarged carnivorous vision. We're seduced by the power that pursues even our dead. And we still multiply our victims—still the perfect food for political thought.

Babel speaks today but speaks to no one. Babel grounds the gears of technocracy's heaven into our hapless bones and ears. Its shadows reach our viscera and brains. In its shadows, we examine and diagnose. Our infirmity? We imagine and speak in unison.

Its bricks tell me we must someday educate at the edge of extinction. Lesson one begins with questions: Are we well enough to cultivate a discreet disorder? Will our alien heart bear the dynamite of more radical words, the arduous labor of naming and meaning, the mutual bestowal of being, the culture of "I" and "you"?

THE PATHS TAKEN AND NOT TAKEN

There are three paths poetry can take, I thought while reading an old poem:

1) the path of origins, that is, language questioning its own genesis or generative principle, whether or not it's capable of expressing more than the sign itself, more than the verbal involucra. What does language say when it says *this* or *that*? Does it say more than "this" or "that"? How can we know or tell? Is language a contingent tool for contingent beings, or rather does it speak in a higher idiom of breakthrough meanings?;

2) the path of the historical moment, that is, language expressing the social agon, our unsocial ways of being social, the retreat of peace into the time of warriors and soldiers, the ongoing collective self-hypnosis, the omnivorous non-knowing, nationalistic self-sufficiency, the frenzy of unmediated identity, the harsh testimony and legacy of tradition, the millennia-long embrace of master and slave, the promised nurturance and malevolent potency of kin and friend. This is the path of seizing what history gives to time, and what time can give in turn to the humane;

and, finally, 3) the path of final causes beyond our ontological collision with historical time, the final cupola of thought, Babel's imagined rooftops, the millennia-long flight towards knowledge, the pure circumstantiality of being, life as absolute shadow slipping between the bricks and clay.

This is what I thought. These are the paths I thought of while reading an old poem. Because I found no paths there. Instead, I fell into a kind of ditch while tripping on semantic disarray, symbolic debris, tired metaphor amplified by ego's megaphone. Words are simply thrown there without reason against the multi-dimensional sea. And the poem does not impregnate silence—always vulnerable and fertile—to unearth its names; it does not frame the laminar collisions that engender and maim the phenomenon of life on earth.

Language in poetry is not distraction: it does not wallpaper the earth's crust in subjective rapture or metaphorical flesh. Language must become unbearable, unrecognizable to routine sight and subjective habit. It combats extinction within and towards time. What is private memory before the earth's ancient archive? Witness, yes, reach your harbor, lament exile and

Thinking in Babel

push against the cold, but retreat from center stage: you are your own epic, but the world is a heart on fire, the sovereign tempest, the vulnerability your ego cuts with knives.

There is a final, unutterable path that only exists in questions: How can language walk on earth while shattering the fragile mirror, illuminate the forests of being while destroying our fortified minds, expand thought while slaying routine feeling, see with augmented vision while climbing the scaffolds of being?

These paths are our ancient alliance with language. Now invent in language an eighth day for our residency on earth.

A PASSING THOUGHT

Poetry holds us hostage

and makes us witness

to

the vertiginous phenomenon of life through
the structuring vision of language

SO HOW WAS THE EXAM?

You know how it is. You have the realists and the movers who always finish first. They believe in themselves. They've adapted to the system and they're looking for future rewards for their continued self-sacrifice.

Right. And the others?

Well, the others make up a significant albeit heterogeneous group.

What do you mean?

They're the ones who linger, the ones who seem to be seeking forgiveness or a reprieve from some Mephistophelian horror. They come seeking, but life, they've discovered, is all confusion. Confusion about the cards they've been dealt. They've an odd take on reality and self and they're driven by an obsession: *Question everything, especially why life seems so damaged and small.*

I don't understand.

They're the ones who've come to the mountain, so to speak, and no one sees them there though they're the most numerous. They climb the mountain and no one is there to receive them or cares. They can't hear the great speech, or can't decipher the words. They're aphasic before the sublime, or some other mask that terror wears. For them, time's a stone worn around their neck while space is the earth the first few minutes after the Fall. They're the ones who come to the mountain they've so often heard speak of ...

... and the mountain isn't there. You mean the social agon, I suppose, the hierarchy of haves and have-nots. Time won't remedy that hole in our belly.

Right. So the exam. The realists left swiftly, with the assurance of those who've bought lots in the future, as if the future *were* lots. And the others? I mean the hopeful and the mediocre, the deluded and the depressed, the nervous and the defeated: they all stayed to the end in effect killing time. Even when sitting, it always looks as if they were standing against a wall.

Sounds grim ...

Christopher Damien Aretta

... and yet real. Some look into the lights and freeze. Others look away for an instant before being crushed.

But all move in the same direction. You don't see it happen, but it's always there and it's always now.

Yes. And it's always someone else's car wreck we see while we stare from afar.

ON THE NON-COMMUTATIVE NATURE OF LANGUAGE

You say: I see you.

I say: I do not know myself.

Master says: Good child. This hand is for you.

Slave says: I love its pores and warmth. Can you caress this plague of fear in me?

Empire says: See the universal familiarity of sameness.

Colony says: Understand the commonality of incommensurable difference.

Conjugating the preterit and the future perfect of our budding tongues, somewhere between apocalypse and accelerated decay, between incessant brick-laying and Kant's *cosmopolity*,

Some say: Shopping mall.

Others say: The future is our legacy and home.

Imagination says:

The real is never complete.

History is a tower on moving sand.

You and I are separate births.

Love thy stranger as thyself.

THE STRUGGLE FOR EXISTENCE

It's taken a long time to reach this point: land's end. But you've at least unlearned. You've uncovered your own scabbed ontology. You've become your own Darwinian descent. You're your own struggle for existence. *You are your own mutation.*

At least there's complete (or perhaps almost complete) immunity to the collective hypnosis. Language serves no other god than its own literalness—the harsh headlands of atom and breath. There are no (or fewer) speakers for you now, no immutable ventriloquists to deceive your ontological thirst. And you'll pay (you *know* this) for singularity of self, i.e., the mitosis of thought with vision.

Nonetheless this is a place of irreversible loss: our veins are entropic arrows. This is where you will build and unbuild, where you'll fall down or be struck down, fall apart or be taken apart. And all this because you know the universe was once home to nomad and demented visionary.

Meaning labors on scaffolds where there are no final truths or comforting lies, only the verdict of our ongoing unfreedom.

We're our own luggage and we've always been running out of time.

Outside the collective hypnosis
 outside the collective way of being alone and one
 outside the collective calendars of mind
 outside the collective abandonment of reason
 outside the barbarity of reified feeling

there can still be growth of knowledge: a gritty sagesse can still take root under an unseen sun.

ANOTHER PASSING THOUGHT

We wake and blink. We wake and think. We break our fast. We slake our thirst.

We make peace with our past. We tell the present to reach its paths. We ask the future to reveal our tasks.

We're shadows who sail on seas of light. Time is a forest of masts.

A NON-PASSING THOUGHT

Thought is a ritual of careful disquiet.
Now hold my hand as we fall.

GROWING INTO TIME

sand glass wire
sea moon earth

reach hold lose
read write rend
walk stand fall

build built crushed

BIRTH

for Eduarda and Paulo

When we were born, a garland of knives was placed around our body, quietly, neatly, without our consent and without our knowledge.

The knives shone without effort while we were told to walk upright, think without error and bless our life without question and without delay.

Then the knives darkened as we grew older. We began to walk curved, think without certainty and curse our life for its cruelty and betrayal. The atoms themselves began to sing in jagged rows.

Finally, the dark knives seemed to warm the air about us. We saw our hands and feet placed within a trove of relics (like vestments folded in an unearthly drawer).

And the warmth and the darkness and the closeness at last made sense. Like punctuation, the knives finished the body's sentence. They shone darkly like smiles just out of reach.

Today our embrace is the color of antique mornings and sun-washed dwellings. Today both thought and feeling unfold at knife-point.

And often someone or something will whisper to us: *Yours was a perfect birth.*

[PAIDA-GOGÓS] = ON PEDAGOGY AND ENSLAVEMENT (i)

The ancients would say: *he* (“*that slave*”) *who led the children to the place of apprenticeship*. A straightforward affirmation which is in fact bereft of innocence.

a. The Slave

A child himself of slaves or recently indebted parents? Perhaps the bearer of unspoken (who would listen or care?) misfortunes, or crushed by astral accident, or, who can say?, stricken by the euphoria of impermanence of all migratory creatures.

His days follow one upon another. He is no more significant—he *knows* this—than the dust on chairs, or the flies—like seconds—that help to wind and unwind the cosmic clock. Poverty itself is not solely misfortune, he knows:

it is written within the genome of contingent beings. It occurs under the perfective light of perplexity.

His walking history lesson will go unrecognized and unheard (passing unnoticed through the temporal sieve) because here contingent and expendable are synonymous.

b. The Children

These are led to the place of lessons. Orators of certainty will propose their wisdom concerning order. (Is it wisdom or quiet annihilation?) On the way to the place of order their body will live while dying. And, unnoticed too, their mind’s limited edition of discovery will be lost.

They will be the object of someone’s memory, or worse, someone’s attention. Their minds will become the object of someone else’s decision and a banquet for violence to feed on.

c. The Apprenticeship and the Survivors

On the way to becoming human, the path is mined with the rich penury of being. Out of ambiguity a wounded but thinking creature can still arise.

[PAIDA-GOGÓS] = ON PEDAGOGY AND ENSLAVEMENT (ii)

A middle-aged teacher reports she is video-taped while giving her classes. Recent improvements in her school's technological grid permit experts to speak to her directly, in real time, while she teaches her young students. In an interview she praises such collaborative work between teacher, technology and pedagogical expert.

I wonder what lesson is actually given in this fusion of technological power and human insufficiency. The lesson planned or instead the lesson that will remain, i.e., the reading exercise or the misreading of everything (there is no learning where thought is scripted and watched rather than invented and released)?

Thus enslavement looks and feels like functional excellence and—missed irony here—the free unfolding of discourse.

ONE MUST

a) Much has to be lost to reach this place of *nots* (i.e., this beautiful cruelty of time folding into flesh),

and much has to be given away (though not on our terms—the world will collect its own due).

One must undress for this occasion called life (our collective histories will strip away our false modesty).

One must breathe despite being crushed under falling rock.

One must rise again (yes, I know, the pain is unbearable, but death, for life, is simply a local summit).

One must step forward—afraid but persistent, lost and found, dedicated and undone by our terrible contingent tragedy.

One must cry.

b) One must see the world as a local habitat, a cosmic idiosyncrasy, photons scattered like rough-cut gems on an extended web.

One must listen (for this web sings).

One must understand consensus—the hypnotist's trick—for politicians do not yet rant behind bars.

One must learn to see with eyes not round but fly-like—eyes like mazes, or like hives, compound and ravenous for a different light.

One must live at the edge of freedom, where language loses memory and memory loses momentum (and there one must speak as if from the beginning again).

One must return there—often but briefly—under the crippled sky.

Christopher Damien Aretta

One must speak with the atoms and know each one of them by private code, sepulchral passageway, or molecular hymn.

One must try. But know this: it has always been this way—an inconsolable blaze and this habit of days and nights.

APHORISM ON THE HUMAN BESTIARY (i)

What is politics?

The half-
willed, half-
coerced trans-
formation of
human energy

into
the hypnot-
ic immedi-
acy of
history.

Then what can be hoped for and what can be done?

MORE ON THE HUMAN BESTIARY (ii)

Shit shit shit.

Then more shit upon shit upon shit.

We're lying in shit, choking on shit, kneeling in shit.

Then they shit on us, and they want us to shit on each other.

And if we're not careful,
they'll kindly ask us to eat shit.

ON BEING LATE MODERNS AND ON WHAT WE DO

A critique of strength (bullies, beware).

A critique of truth (we've been here before, and cruelty persists).

A critique of truth (incendiary and probably blind).

A critique of self-sufficiency (does the mind see only its own reflection)?

A critique of ownership and of one's sense of belonging (we reach the present now hungry and unsettled).

A critique of concepts and of language (in what idiom of being does life unfold today)?

A critique of memory (home is what we mean, not only where we come from).

A critique of love (I'll listen to you, you'll listen to me).

A critique of critique (what we name now with our reasons, we instantly dissolve: the real is under translation).

ON OUR ANTHROPOLOGICAL SITUATION (i)

Along with all this matter which forms the universe,
from light bending in curved space to the way
the air moves like silk across the earth's dermis and
the sky conceals chaos behind the blue-
ness, beyond the luminous peaks of vision, beyond the turbulence
of wordless being, there we (also) are. Or rather here, in this moment when
atoms leave their orbits and begin
to speak
with
the longing of mind and the
restlessness of many minds.

On such a faceless day, the atoms began to ask questions, and it is almost
always the same question: what can matter
tell itself that rock and fern haven't grasped before?
Or, rather, what can still be heard within this mouthless score? Does
a singularity emerge from within consecutive night?

And the answer always changes though the interrogative thirst remains.
And the answer is this syncopating doubt within the anonymous refrain.

I SAID MY NAME (EXILE IN SEVEN STEPS)

a. I heard the name for self as fragile as memory sustained by sonorous breath. Then I said both our names, and, in saying them, they were already gone.

Who knew that speech could look upon us and say: *You are nowhere?*

b. Childhood flies from our late-modern cliffs.
Its meaning can be grasped neither in discourse nor dream.

c. (So, under the weight of here and now I remain and dwell:
in transit between being and empty well.)

d. But what does that sounding of words and promises mean in this distance between you and me? Their gravity crushes our hands as we reach outward, inward and forward.

e. Babel beckons as if from pure foreignness or by indecipherable story.
Babel speaks only of penultimate things called history.

f. The airport, where crowds continually thronged and dispersed, spoke for our silence. The crowds flowed namelessly, mimicking flight (unlike Plato's name-drenched streams of longing).

g. And then you and I, vulnerable and mute, drowning in oceans of unacknowledged emotion, turned to each other and kissed good-bye.

ON BUILDING A WORLD COMMUNITY (i)

The rules of this game are still the following:

Who holds the guns?

Who gets the last word?

Such is our unadmirable and uncourageous world.

BASIC PHILOSOPHY

The world is reborn in the classroom. The prototype? Either the ancient Academy or the porous skin of childhood.

Every speaker—beings whose mouth practices disobedience—stages revolts called predicates outside established laws:

we can still decolonize the settled lands of ownership.

(Language is both institution and act.
Reality is both established factuality and birth.)

Together, in a space not yet owned and not yet fully lit, outside political habits, a deeper strife endures:

the yet-to-be-inhabited terrain of ecstatic firsts, the struggle for reason briefly dehypnotized and named.

HOMEcomings PUZZLE

We die when we are not home.
We are not yet home.

Home is partial and plural.

ON LITERATURE

First you destroy what you cannot possess.
Then you replicate what you destroy.

Where the world is destroyed and replicated,
there literature suspends the laws of established time and place.

DON'T COME KNOCKING (WHEN THE POLITICAL PERVERTS
THE VITAL)

a. *Now we know*: we'll be more eroded signature than embodied self. Our bones will transmit, like antennae, what we've been told and what we've given up. We've learned to love life / only just enough / only enough to hate with greater lucidness / only enough for hate to be our rival vision of things to come /. We know now we'll be step-parents to ourselves. Our thoughts will grow enraged and damaged. They'll be more fear than reason:

they were already born inhuman bereft of memory and human clan.

We'll be the raw progeny of utopia. (What future could prevail in this political exhaustion of being?) *Now we know*: there are no ultimate messengers in history. We have nothing but this harsh hereeness, nothing but this starkly encoded nearness.

No gifts, no compassion, no graciousness will suffice: we are that infirm.

b. Together we'll stand on rooftops. We'll look upward and exclaim: *Roof!*, with an idiotic grin and an enlarged heart.

We are that exhausted: a fatigue beyond dreams assails us.

We'll be *that* and we'll live *that* and we'll do *that* both together and alone. We'll stand on makeshift roofs and listen to the sound of unfathomable sadness reach our ears, a sound as foreign to us as our once plenteous heart,

an unbearable sound like simple daggers falling as humble as rain.

WHAT SKILLS DO YOU HAVE?

How old are you?

Half a century and the better part of a decade's worth of hard births.

And where were you born?

Does it matter? I was genetically assembled on a large, populous continent. The rest belongs to modernity's collective bazaar where hawkers display and sell their provisional truths, i.e., a place that's everywhere and nowhere.

So, what are your skills?

?

I mean: what can you do?

By day I suppose I oppress humanity with routine thought, dead patterns of hope and the illusions of moral progress. By night I suppose I do the same thing, except sometimes there occur a discreet interlunation of inward cogitation and earthborn sight. I can't describe it really nor can I give it a price. However, I've nothing substantive to report about all that. I've mostly only passing thoughts or else it's my memory chasing after lost luggage.

But what are your skills? What can we expect and exact from you? What can we demand of your time? Help us to be generous with you and add you to our list of human resources.

I've nothing save this raw stump of mind, this coarse mirror of mind thinking without axiom and without a home.

But, please, what do you have for us?

I've nothing but everything that's denied. I've the momentary refusal of everything that's not inward plague and outward stammer.

LIFE-CYCLE (i)

I was borne into life. My parents enacted a restive parataxis of matter / on / and / time.

I was not born a slave: “I” was “never” a slave.

I was born. *Then* I became a slave. (Thus life becomes coarsely diachronic: synchrony in this case would be freedom, hypotactic thrill and endless imaginative blastema.)

Birth is the path from nature to humanity’s tasks and utopian labor.

Then the state exchanges the unfolding of time for the administrative grid of production. (Self-alienation provides the hammer.)

Then the state exchanges the unfolding of time for the collective disaster of technocratic expansion, the advancing kolkhoz of mind and administered private hunger.

Now life’s a slave. Death is the master.

OSIP (i)

a. Fresh political figures coveted your soul's imperfect news. (At first this wasn't a problem; your sight had long fed on such poisonous ilk.) We'd read you then bleed into the minutes.

History has always been our shared mental scalpel. We're dining on razors and knives.

The stars are now step-parents to hope; your children are now orphaned before birth. Your stars' milk congeals; their light's now nailed shut with hinges.

b. That was *your* situation. In the early poems there was still a disjointed lyricism in search of symbolist aura: your lungs required transmuted subjectivity. To read you (in) there is to walk or fly on ascendant dirt. A late example of this? Your posthumously published "Self-Portrait," where language is still redemptive and completes your lyrical thirst with unquenched fire. There the poem is a grateful provisional home. Later (a matter of a few years), after the first imprisonment and now exiled, in an untitled poem, it is history itself that, disjointed, provides the cosmic score, the edge from which to fall, the earthen jaw in which the poet will be dismembered and chewed. Your language is now suppliant to its listener (i.e., the distant relative, the fearful reader, the imperilled friend), and now you know that nothing lasts, not really, not even (especially) the fatal collision between spirit and word. How quickly we're undone, you now knew. How destruction can sound in the harsh factory of thought. Your words are now gravity-heavy and tightly-bound, branded—like cattle—by the atomic number of iron and lead.

Dementia and starvation then death were soon to master your reason.

Today we feast on your generous gifts. Today each poem's a Mandelshtamian season of hell on earth.

Look inside this long season's broken bloom: white hot, blood red, luminous yellow, faded gray to sleepless black.

OSIP (ii)

Written in print as slight as photons, in words etched on memory's disrupted vellum, there it (still) says: we may multiply (in thought and/or in genomic equation) and thereafter rejoice under the sun. Later, during our procession through the hours (our living must thus appear to / every extraterrestrial observer / spiders as heavy as coins in our heart's pocket) /, we read the following lines (there from the start?), i.e., the insuperable limit, the insatiable bargain: rejoice / at the hypnotist's menu you're given at birth / at the moment of history's incision on your hapless, willing flesh / then choose: either the injection of bleach (liquid translation of night, a direct quote from politically barren speech) delivered into the veins or, instead, taken in gulps while dining at the local inquisitor's table.

And if we look closer, we can still see the words: freedom, hope, love.

ANIMAL MINERAL VEGETABLE

a. From the stationary train window, a wall. Next to this wall, a stone platform. On this stony platform a dog. Its gray-brown fur envelops a cranium; the cranium rests on two outstretched paws. And there and then: a gentle ecstasy in its nostrils, a mineral stillness within its sleep, a wordless dance in autonomous foreignness.

Eternity embarks on a four-legged refrain.

As we observe, the stone gives the dog its frame. The dog drowns the stone in protean narration. Between stone and vessel, the first prow of sense, a tidal restlessness, a flowing lexicon of private verb.

Canis canidae sails on unutterably literal waves.

b. The stone speaks to no one: the dog alone is the stone's root and flower. The dog gives the stone its heart. The stone gives the dog its haven. The animal frames the stone (that once framed it) with syntax and tasks.

We arrive late to this riot. We observe and disturb. We observe and effect change. We observe and do not comprehend its masts.

c. Later: a young girl sitting on a step. The stone step is a stone seat set between two stone pillars. The pillars frame a door. This door leads to an unseen atrium. The atrium reverberates in inwardness. In secrecy the stone sings.

In the girl's hands, there is a book: a bouquet of dancing radii which bloom beneath the eaves of her self-reflecting condition.

In the book, there are letters. These letters frame the meaning. The girl names a dwelling. The girl, sitting, untames the meaning.

Homo sapiens bear an unframeable vision.

ON BURYING A POET AFTER LONG EXILE

for Jorge and Mécia de Sena

The politician enjoys a rare freedom. With this freedom, the politician enslaves the human neighborhood.

The politician diminishes the planet's stories.

The poet is born in enslavement. *The poet knows this.* The poet's speech begins with fettered verbs, the raw sewage of political coercion, the toxic pulse of depleted circumstance,

but the energy of a verse is its impossibility and accuracy, its suddenness and inevitability.

The poet begins with enslavement. The poet speaks to the metamorphic edge of sense, the vertical thrust of humanity.

The poet speaks of freedom from the filthy pews of routine truth.

THE VIEW FROM BABIL'S FIFTH FLOOR

a. The symbol safeguards essential change. Above us, birds like flying bricks building invisible towers; below, animals pasturing on earth's silenced plurality. Everything grows there without explanation, without absolute predicate.

*The earth's a bestiary of minutes and hours.
Time's adrift there in unrepentant animation.
Time houses the sullied libraries of life.*

b. We dwell near myth. We dwell in historical restiveness. / Myth condemns our lot / Myth pumps air into our lungs /. We're on the holy ground of silence and sensation. We live for the metamorphosis of atoms into ascendant apperception.

*Our lot? We've chosen the brief vision within radiant sentience.
We're given this mission: to see more than is given, to hear beyond
apparent division.*

*Now we know: this is the way time is spent on earth and how
obdurate hearts can speak through flesh. Our eyes encompass now
mutable, now immutable things.*

*We remember through myth. We live in dolorous happenstance. We
say living's still a way of dying less.*

c. From the makeshift rooftops of our singularity we perceive change in repeated brevity.

We've learned that sightedness is most often a hypnotist's trick.

d. Before the light dims, before joy turns into bitterness, I retain this brief elision of nomadic vision and empirical flight.

*We're passengers in transit between personal haven and collective
hell.*

Christopher Damien Aretta

e. A train advances and departs: / childhood's a distant continent / my hands are a minor Pleiades / thought must rise out of our circumstance and destructive reach /.

Living—you repeat (and I with you)—can still be a way of dying less.

f. Perhaps there are no final truths save this: we travel against the speed of night.

g. We endure at the speed of interwoven memory and briefly augmented speech.

V. ON SENTIENCE AND DRIFT

PREFACE

I would like to write *something* here, something *else*, or something that might shed light on what I have not been otherwise able to say in poetic thought in this most recent volume entitled *On Sentience and Drift*, whether in proto-essayistic exposition or in an outpouring of existential porosity. I would like to say something *still* regarding a state of being which I will call here the enhanced immediacy of the here-and-now, i.e., the vast precinct of poetry itself. Finding myself at the end of a protracted moment of largely poetic writing or, rather, of recording a certain *poiesis* of mind which has led to this volume, I am almost bereft of words or, at least, of words adequately expository in terms of pitch and tempo. Let's see, then, what will come of this almost futile attempt of mine to write a preface no matter how brief.

Around me and within me I see the signs—premonitory and/or already entrenched in the very flesh of thought, in the heart's quickening, in the mind's discreet though quotidian frenzy—the coming onslaught of fresh dangers for the human community. In the face of such adversity—of all that is at stake—I work towards and on behalf of a frankly *babelic* consciousness, that is, in the hope of contributing to the housing of our species' embodied consciousness within a babelic tower of dematerialized or “immaterial” abundance, i.e., where the creation of thought serves to promote the growth of authentic understanding and compassion. For the author of these lines, the babelic is linked to an abundantly ethical task. (“You” and “I” are forever potentially engaged in acts of deliberative parity and conjoined concern.) I write *towards* and on behalf of this twin-pronged mission—cognitive and ethical—with which to pierce the encroaching darkness. Around me, I see not a pluricentric tower being raised but rather the paving over of difference, the grouting of every interval (the interval being where authentic thought occurs, i.e., that interstitial space which exists between *what is already* and *what can yet be*). I see the grotesque militarization of mind and the demolition of hope. *Yet it has always been the experience of the interval which has graced us with possibility.* The interval shelters and extends what lies outside the ostensibly long-settled script. It is where the retrieval and transfiguration of memory *may* happen. It is the inner locus of our sentient being where apparently seamless self-sameness is interrupted and confronted with irreducible (and ultimately liberatory) difference, which, in turn, *may* bring us to the brink of conceptual, speculative and ethical breakthroughs.

Nowadays, instead of neighbors and messengers reaching us from beyond our immediate perceptual and cultural scope; instead of the ethical demands placed upon us by the generationally honed rules of affinity and/or hospitality, we very often have the cemented-over interval, the negation of alterity or otherness (the latter being as necessary to us as breath itself), the *reduction-into-emptiness of voice and earth*, the *sickliness-into-death* of what our species has rashly designated as being our human reason. Today we live wounded by the presentiment that the complex neural lanes which feed our inner, “immaterial” abundance are being converted—before our stunned gaze—into the barbed wire of fear, hate and violence. *We have always been an odd species adrift in the universe*, but our drift portends disaster. Perhaps poetry, or better, the mature *poiesis* of mind, which beneficently traverses thought when thought takes on the creative principle of significant emotion, will allow us to fully grasp the authentically engaged-in circumstantiality which founds our problematic humanity. Curiously, we act and say what we say at such moments of *poiesis*—i.e., the full event of being—without ever knowing with certainty whether thought and cosmos coincide, whether significant feeling and the earth indeed orbit in consonance with one another, or whether we, as mobile, thinking, living organic media, ever truly intersect with one another.

I find myself at the crossroads of a personal poetics of increasingly interrupted lyricism. I did not at first encounter poetry at such a starkly resplendent corner (back alley?) of the universe. Nonetheless, our species’ disruptive, regressive, agonistic history has brought me to this “corner” in terms of poetry: an interrupted lyricism and an interrupted idiom of rhyme and metaphor. What, in fact, is the point to feeling anything at all? Radical doubt—*such doubt being the source and enemy of metaphysical thinking*—has led me to ask: what does feeling *mean*? What does the ability to feel ultimately signify on earth and in the interval between an “I” and a “you”? Can feeling only signify its own simulacra in the existing media of human expression? But then what does *that* mean? Can feeling only be represented in and through our technical media—which carry the outward signals of feeling—while never effectively communicating anything at all, i.e., from embodied mind to embodied mind? If we were truly able to communicate, if “you” and “I” actually felt in immanent consort, would it still be possible for fear, hate and violence to be our common lot and our toxic legacy to the future?

Moreover, the deep layers of feeling germane to the various religious traditions have been nowadays so thoroughly politicized (i.e., schooled in the dark arts of fanaticism) that their potentially healing waters have too often

congealed into a pitiless moral script, a moral propaedeutic which, in essence, has immobilized the apprehension of the infinite within the finite, the cosmic within the terrestrial, totality within the fragmentary, compassion in the serendipitous encounters between strangers. We are witnesses to the terrifyingly sanctioned history of the demolition of the human, the curtailment of growth of understanding and compassion (and their subsequent decay into distrust and cognitive fixity) into, ultimately, a declaration of war waged against the psyche. Today we are confronted with the increasing militarization of consciousness, a militarization which feeds on fear and places a stranglehold on enriching complexity. Against all this, the babelic tower I envision is one of vital complexity.

As stated above, at present the act of writing has become for the author of these lines one of interrupted lyricism. My limbs outstretch, but they almost immediately touch the walls of a ruined tower which is now more razed verticality (verticality being for us the direction of ascendant hope, utopian aspiration and the empirical elevation of being), now blasted sociality. I have sought solace in authors such as Osip Mandelshtam. Such a combination of lyrical warmth and existential harshness in him! His poems soothe and simultaneously cut deep into life's jugular. His poems are of the same substance as the lucid, cruel modernity under whose reign we all live and work. I have equally found inspiration in the Heraclitean fragments which have reached us. These fragments—the residua of once extant works by the pre-Socratic thinker—are today the embodiment of complex thought almost irretrievably eroded by time. My reading of these fragments has inspired my awareness of the fragmentary within the complex text of life, i.e., the vast web of our embodied consciousness. The act of writing is, like those ancient fragments, bearer of inherent erosion, of a process of erosion *always at work*, a process which has *already* won, so to speak, at the very moment of writing itself in the *here-and-now*. The fifty-one fragments which form part of the present volume reflect our interaction with the idea of the fragmentary, which, as part of the primary conditionality of being, is *already* interacting with the printed word, already undermining sense, already exposing the incompleteness of thought, already exposed to the inclemency of time when time is made to be sentient and alive. Furthermore, what is fragmentary rings true vis-à-vis our present-day sensibility: it gives form to an underlying disquiet.

In literary creation, what matters, is not only what a work says, but, perhaps more acutely, what it *does*. It is our conviction that art preserves, releases and accelerates being outside realized history. *Art is being's first draft; all the rest is a footnote. Technê*, or technics, or contemporary

technoscience represent that dimension of being which amplifies the discoveries of art. Thus *technê* historicizes human nature. The interval between consciousness and the universe manifests as technology, but the fundamental *technê* is the imagination itself. Understood in this manner, *technê* tells us we will never know anything with certainty; we have only and at best the interval, i.e., privileged sites of reflexive and active intensity. Unlike the Titan Atlas's fate, we do not carry the world on our back but rather *a* world, a world of our own imperfect authorship. We are bearers of a world of uncertain finality. We are all interval-bearers. Such a world-carrying destiny is not a punishment: it is our nature.

The working premise guiding the present volume I will further outline as follows: the artist communicates the perpetual becoming in(to) being. The artist reminds us that our senses (our faculties of sentience) are detectors of intervals. Sentience is the first layer of consciousness, both within and without history. Sentience cannot be measured by the clock; it reaches with its metaphorical fingers into the infinite. The artist reminds us that our bodies are *sicut* antennae or perhaps even a ladder. A ladder leading to where, if anywhere? (Poetry cannot resolve that question. Poets ask the insoluble, for the insoluble dwells within our most intimate nature.) Although sentience has no history, does it have a detectable finality, a telos, an eschatological arch? Is there an ascendant slope which inheres in human sentience and thought or, perhaps, a recognizable narratological direction? Is our being homologous or rather diffractive with regard to the cosmos as a whole? Is the cosmos itself a fiction? (After all, that is the lesson given us by the great Portuguese poet Fernando Pessoa.) Such questions are ultimately and infinitely unanswerable. So poetry is what we humans have to respond to the unanswerable. All of poetry, independent of its ostensible punctuation, is, in fact, a question. *For all we know and plausibly will ever know*, the cosmos in its inscrutable totality could in fact be a spider and web, or an elusive, semi-feral cat, or the infinitesimal belly of a bacterium, or a bald soprano, etc., etc., etc. It is this non-knowing which drives me to write.

The body is also an expression of *technê*, i.e., a primary source of interpretation of the organic and inorganic environment: it guides life into the truth of its vital eventfulness on earth. Our sentient, speculating consciousness can migrate anywhere within the interval, which means that *technê* will continually evolve into hybrid and mobile sites of intensive reflexivity. (Art, as we have affirmed, possesses and practices an enhanced feeling for this radical interval.) Our sentient universe, which of course is *not* the universe, becomes self-aware by way of the expressive media available to (our) embodied consciousness. *Sentience brings us as close as is possible to the*

totality-aspiring phenomenology of the senses while, at the same time, it invites us to feast on the immediate and the particular: our sentient universe is manifold, self-made and dynamic. Metaphor in art celebrates and practices the proximity of syntax and synapse, phenomenon and feeling, being and seeing, matter and meaning.

Poetry—as *technê*—strains towards the contemplation of a final cause, thus its kinship with metaphysics. Poetry is dematerialized, or “immaterial,” revelation: it produces prodigiously dematerialized artifacts of mind. Technics—as external object, as technological artifact—is an after-effect of this anterior process of dematerialization; it is the post-metaphysical, concrete residuum of being’s search for a final cause. Poetry, in turn, seeks to effect an ongoing rebooting of consciousness. It searches for a higher level of cognitive homeostasis by way of a dialectical ascension of thought. In poetry, being is empowered to become a weaver of texts. Language in poetry becomes a luminous, semiotic outpost. Being in poetry becomes an ever-emergent event of becoming.

In the babelic tower where I existentially and poetically dwell, there is no fixed address or even a permanent rooftop. In the interval between consciousness, language and cosmos, we are adrift in a sea of epistemological uncertainty. Or: we inhabit that interval, but the interval resembles a sprawling *favela*—dynamic, risky, creative, deadly, self-replicating, virological and bacteriological. It is our permanently impermanent shelter.

In poetry, then, how does one communicate in linear language what is in essence non-linear? Faced with the impossibility of surmounting such a radical aporia, the poet must *invent*. The poet invents strategies: graphic, idiomatic, rhetorical, tropological, idiosyncratic, existential, internal and prosodic. As an example of such strategies, the author of this volume has at times resorted to what he will call here “m-clouds” (“m” for metaphor) whereby a line of verse, i.e., a specific verbal instantiation of cognitive energy, presents in fact several images in consecutive apposition or intensive succession in a cadence of purposively jostling kinesis. These “m-clouds” act as the metaphorical rockets of iconic thought; they give cadence to and, if successful, illuminate what for the writer of these lines is impossible to express by way of a single tropological event or expression. “M-clouds” are not like the more familiar “clouds” of a digital nature, then, but rather a proto-conceptual and/or eidetic *meta-storm*, i.e., a site of accelerated cognition abetted by intensely metaphoric language.

Additionally, the poetry at other times presents indented strophes or lines of verse: these serve to signal what for this writer suggests a provisional summit. Furthermore, we have often included excursus following a poetic

text as well as, in certain cases, an overflow of text not our own under the rubric of “other voices.” In the former case, each excursus represents a semantic and thematic reflection in prose relating to the poem it accompanies. It echoes what in the poem is expressed by way of dense, contained prosody. Oftentimes, these excursus were written immediately following the writing of a particular poetic text. In the latter case, i.e., “other voices,” the quoted excerpts are deliberately included as an extension of the thematic territory present in the poem. “Other voices” are those voices we have heard and which have enriched us within our babelic tower, voices which in one way or another have engaged us in ongoing dialogue. They are part of the polyphony of voices active on earth; they accompany us on parallel paths of inquiry and concern. The author has not restricted himself to “voices” written in English. It is this author’s conviction and working premise that, given our intensely babelic condition, it is incumbent upon us to make our linguistic borders as porous as possible no matter how greatly or defectively familiar we are with languages outside or beyond our daily communicative praxis. *We grow in diversity; we learn through alterity.* (That being said, one of this writer’s future projects is to produce a volume of prose and/or poetry, or a combination of genres, using all the words that have crossed his lips, or flooded his ears, or fueled his engagement with those regions of the world he has visited, studied, inhabited and/or internalized.) Our world is polyglot, polyphonic and diasporic: the verbal mosaic of sound which reaches our senses in the present-day, media-dense human environment is, we believe, part of the sentient symphony of contemporaneity which nourishes that ethical and poetic principle of deep hospitality of which our species’ history ultimately depends.

In Anton Chekhov’s short story entitled “The Beggar,” the Russian author (1860-1904) effects a marvellous transformation in the reader’s consciousness by way of this brief, seemingly unpretentious narrative. Nonetheless, Chekhov’s language in this brief text does so much: nothing less than the transmutation of perception vis-à-vis the nature of abundance and penury at work within the human condition. The wealthy lawyer, full of moralistic self-congratulatoriness and arrogant self-sufficiency with respect to the beggar of this complexly simple tale, will be, by the end of the story, confronted with the discreet denunciation of his profound spiritual poverty. The reader discovers that the lawyer’s moral self-importance is in fact deeply equivocal: his moral truth and his overbearingly rigid, didactic stance are the expression of a profoundly false, i.e., impoverished self. The lawyer’s servant, who will have a fateful encounter with the would-be hapless beggar, is ultimately the discreet messenger of a kind of spiritual wealth unbeknownst

to the lawyer. She is the harbinger of the beggar's ulterior inner transformation. Her humanity vouchsafes the promise of existential redemption within the beggar's social *agon*. It is this non-monetary exchange between servant and beggar that will produce a kind of rebirth in the latter. Beyond the implicit *agon* between the legalistic, contractual, materialistic language of the lawyer and the discreet, spiritual capital of compassion and empathy as exemplified by the servant, the author weaves into the narrative a final instance of poetic sagesse, i.e., a deep cognitive breakthrough: *the beggar is whoever does not see himself to be—in one way or another—a beggar*. It is what we do with, and how we respond to, our self-ignorance, the inherent incompleteness of our knowledge and our precipitous self-sufficiency which determine our ultimate fate as human beings on earth, a fate wholly independent of the social and economic standing of the individual.

The world offers many forms of false wealth. The artist can be an important arbiter in the determination of what constitutes penury and what, conversely, characterizes authentic abundance. The artist possesses an adjudicating power by way of which the luminous tyranny of the word can become our neighbor, mirror and light.

January 2017

Christopher Damien Aurretta
Lisbon, Portugal

ON SENTIENCE AND DRIFT

ON WORLD RELATIONS

Wherever you (or you and I) pass through, or by, or into, there death also goes: omnivorous *thanatos* on a walking spree, bevelling the earth with idiomatic hunger, monological authority, visionary myopia.

We have unleashed death upon the world. We cannot be forgiven.

ANIMAL KINGDOM

At the moment of death: / invisible vertices of love or rage winching our neck towards the sky / primate, canine, bird crushed beneath history's gravitational pull, / Heideggerian states of *Geworfenheit*—wrenching animate being poised on the posthumous smile of innocence /;

Equally, at the moment of birth: / a hungry sun before us / the metabolic roar ahead / the horizon suddenly close, seductive and toxic /.

These moments are identical for every earthborn creature:

our kinship is real under the wheel while / treading towards our molecular history / hurled towards the rough road to sentience / in love with our split second of time (not vouchsafed but rather trespassed) and borne like an irrevocable prize, a caustic crown.

Other voices:

As potentiality-for-Being, Dasein cannot outstrip the possibility of death. Death is the possibility of the absolute impossibility of Dasein. Thus death reveals itself as *that possibility which is one's ownmost, which is non-relational, and which is not to be outstripped [unüberholbare]*. As such, death is something *distinctively* impending. Its existential possibility is based on the fact that Dasein is essentially disclosed to itself, and disclosed, indeed, as ahead-of-itself. This item in the structure of care has its most primordial concretion in Being-towards-death. As a phenomenon, Being-towards-the-end becomes plainer as Being towards that distinctive possibility of Dasein which we have characterized.

This ownmost possibility, however, non-relational and not to be outstripped, is not one which Dasein procures for itself subsequently and occasionally in the course of its Being. On the contrary, if Dasein exists, it has already been *thrown* into this possibility. Dasein does not, proximally and for the most part, have any explicit or even any theoretical knowledge of

Thinking in Babel

the fact that it has been delivered over to its death, and that death thus belongs to Being-in-the-world. Thrownness into death reveals itself to Dasein in a more primordial and impressive manner in that state-of-mind which we have called “anxiety.” (Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robison, New York: Harper & Row, [1927] 1962, pp. 294-95.)

AFTER LONG ILLNESS

I walk now at night and speak with the dark river. The winter inside me momentarily thaws. Grammar unfurls. An artery blooms. Frozen floes of blood rush their zealous gates, and my body—mortality's bride—rises to kill its suitor. Hail, new chthonian season!

I am here.

My breath at last reaches the end of each thought. Reason believes again. Life enfolds me in its arms.

I am ravished like a planet in heat by this moment in time.

ON THE HISTORICAL AND AHISTORICAL NATURE
OF COMMUNICATION

Poetry's task today (in addition): to detect the teleological within the technical, i.e., to find the conceptual and experiential ground of mediation between the two.

To bleed into the machine; to breathe into our modern golems; to speak plurally for the world we create and then destroy; to rescue our own cosmic migrancy from the hell of dogmatic fixity; to save our ontological thirst from the poisoned well.

ON *ZELIG*

(... have been pondering Woody Allen's film *Zelig* and have presently reached the following understanding of the film. It goes like this:)

We are born. (Almost) nothing is given to us. (The protagonist's dying father's final words to his son are: "Save string.") So

nothing can ultimately give only nothing: / the filial brush with the absurd / the imperceptible titanomachy between memory and random descent /.

At the end of life—which is not the completion of a life
but rather its *termination*—

the protagonist regrets—as reported in this mock documentary—that he has begun reading—despite impending death—*Moby Dick* (i.e., Melville's New England epic) evoked earlier in this spurious newsreel, a book previously and fatefully left unread by the protagonist while still a child.

So

life begins in
nothing, with
nothing, and then remains—decades later—
unfinished. This unfinishedness
is not superfluous. The film reveals this unfinishedness to be / our collective
address in the cosmos / our common identity in the biosphere / our post-
historical quiddity on earth / our post-metaphysical democracy of birth /.

What's left, then?

Maybe
this:

between mere survival and the attainment of autonomous personhood, a
~~human~~
being can achieve a reasonably stable (=happy) life despite the fact that our
species is seemingly founded in a reality of grounded
groundlessness.

(Thus Allen's inclusion of distinguished artists and intellectuals in the film each of whom offers an interpretation of the prodigious chameleon-like capacity of the protagonist to integrate outward circumstance into his protean body and metamorphic identity. These interpretations coexist within the *foundation-less* phenomenon of ~~human~~ existence: they co-occur, or even contradict one another, in an articulate drift of interpretations which are more labile than solid. In fact, each interpretation is impressive, interesting and unprovable.

That's it.
Nothing more.

(And Woody Allen achieves this in a filmic work which is all the more philosophically compelling inasmuch as he has accomplished this feat in a deeply distilled, post-agonistic, ludic mode.)

Humor, then, is part of the mediatory act of ~~human~~ consciousness between groundlessness (recall, for example, the protagonist's sudden and inexplicably acquired aviatational skill as he flies upside-down across the Atlantic Ocean) and the indigent ground of ~~human~~ quiddity wrested from nothingness. Nothing other than the soil of idiosyncratic

presence,

protean identity,
thermodynamical drift and
art
(the supreme technê's grip on time).

And then Zelig—the man, the hero and the enigma—is rightfully forgotten.

(Yet if there is no ground, then perhaps there is also / no nihilistic agon / no prophesized stigma forever fulfilled / no circadian iteration of Hell /.)

Babel creates.
The agon laughs.

Nothing changes.

ABSTRACT

Woody Allen's filmic allegory *Zelig*, set in the 1920's, discloses the fate of ~~human~~ beings who choose *technê* as their mirror and final dwelling place. The present-day spectator of *Zelig* views another era, another humanity—i.e., the chronicle of the eponymous hero's brief notoriety as anomaly, scoundrel and hero—, an era which is both like and unlike our own today transmitted by way of the *technê* of the image (screen) and word (script). In fact, that is the point of Allen's filmic achievement. The history of the recorded image and voice, the nature of representation in electronic media and the projection of *pathos* on the screen—a ritual for and by itinerant amnesiacs—are viewed with nostalgia and disaffection, identification and irony, as if the viewer were watching beings in their uncannily familiar world which the technical medium both records and renders irretrievably alien. (This alienation is, of course, intrinsic to the viewer, because the ~~human~~ viewer embodies the alienation woven into inhabited time itself; thus, *technê* must also express our own unfinished ontology.) Moreover, the film erects an allegory upon the theme of this ever-modulating technical illusion of narrative continuance. We are the lit lamellae projected onto the screen, recorded and buried by images in motion, themselves condemned to time. The viewer inevitably participates in this history of ubiquitously *grounded groundlessness*. Thus, there is no absolute origin, only the history—which is plausibly not even an unfolding—of human desire, need and struggle.

In the end, our nostalgia is a desire to retrieve what through *technê*? What does remembrance—even with the intensely modern, media-rich reproduction and retrieval of instants of lived time—have to do with the remembered world? (By contrast, the image in technological *real time* is *sicut* an inhuman drone. The drone obliterates / life / memory / history / time /. That is *its* technical destiny where death dines and life declines.)

(Yet we can never return to the womb: / the past is not an origin / there are no ontological reruns /.) (All is metonymy in perpetual motion and temporal drift.) And art begs at the grifters' door.

*The world remembered is not the remembered world.
(Thus are Plato's epistemic shadows which walk, speak, recall and
feel on earth.)*

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Key words: *Zelig*, allegory, grounded groundlessness

Addendum

Allen uses the perishable truths of self-mocking, pseudo-documentary reportage. Why? Perhaps because the passions, truths, chronologies and narratives craved by the genus *spectator* become the now risible, now nostalgic expression of the ephemeral, i.e., the ever-surpassed ~~human~~ circumstance. Thus, there is:

no final truth save the chronicle of shimmering epistemic shadows watching the world from the crushed bone floor of cinemas and technê-mediated memory.

WHY ABANDONMENT IS INCONSOLABLE

[Muses all, I'll remember you always at the water's edge and
beneath the speeding sky.]

For my part, when I enter most intimately into what I call *myself*, I always stumble on some particular perception or other, of heat or cold, light or shade, love or hatred, pain or pleasure. I never can catch myself at any time without a perception, and never can observe anything but the perception (...). If anyone, upon serious and unprejudiced reflection, thinks he has a different notion of *himself*, I must confess I can reason no longer with him. All I can allow him is, that he may be in the right as well as I, and that we are essentially different in this particular. He may, perhaps, perceive something simple and continued, which he calls *himself*, though I am certain there is no such principle for me. (David Hume, *Treatise on Human Nature*)

The science of it all: Are we the weave of memory which gives narrative density to a fictional identity? Is our identity the result of the neural intensity of certain past experiences over others which, taken altogether, create a protagonist, a pathic subject, the seemingly unbroken narrative of a (spectral) center, an overflow of the densest harvest of memories? If so, why do certain memories become more powerful than others? By way of the intensity of emotion experienced? By way of the pathic complexity of such experience, i.e., the density of connections between the self and its world which are experientially extended, transformed, or rewired in memory?

Are we more synaptic projection than self or substance then? And is memory linked to the experience—real and imagined, literal and figurative—of abandonment, which haunts us all?

On the passage of time and love's inherent sorrow: It's a beloved face that will not look away while saying goodbye. Soon you'll hold that face in invisible hands with a faith you've invented you're too ashamed to avow. And yes, it's a beloved face that holds you in its gaze as if the end of life were the mere closing of a door, or a candle aglow on the sill, or the instant before daybreak when you hear: Come to the table, dear, before all grows cold. (And then all of life begins again as if eternity itself were a guest that wears your shoes, or sits at table, or grasps the bowl of sugar, or laughs at a dog barking on the hill.) And you believe in that instant as if it had always been meant for you alone and so surely yours to keep that by and by you throw it away as you take your leave without a word or ash upon your brow.

One day you'll believe more in that face and in that instant than in your own name. It is then that a chorus of ghosts—wearing all your days and years—will lead you to the falling season and last address. (Try not to regret all you've lost when long ago you left the singing garden and the endless feast—like one who goes to market or leaves to take a test.)

Then, at last, you'll know: there's a fierce tenderness in us that breaks upon the ethereal lace of time.

Cherished muses all, may I please for an instant look upon the other side of earth, where on glorious fields you sow and pick my devoted tears?

Other voices:

Brain research may permit us to make some fine-grained localizations, but the capacity to achieve *some* fine-grained localization does not give one grounds for supposing that the process of localization can continue indefinitely and that the day will finally come when we can say, "That cell there, right in the middle of hippocampus (or wherever)—that's the self!" (Daniel Dennet, "The Self as a Center of Narrative Gravity," in *Self and Consciousness: Multiple Perspectives*, ed. F. Kessel, P. Cole and D. Johnson, Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum, 1992.)

ON THE NECESSITY OF PERCEPTUAL DISTANCE AND THE
VACUUM BENEATH THE MASKS

Comedy and tragedy are localized, related phenomena: the interval between them is perceptible but misleading. They are, ultimately, the effect of *perceptual and emotive distance* occurring between the onlooker and the looked-upon.

Everything viewed from a certain distance mutates into the banal or the indifferent, or else edges Lethe-ward.

Better, perhaps, to question no further this drift of tragi-comic pathos towards dissolution.

Better, perhaps, to sustain the cathartic agon of comedy and tragedy than to drown in the crowded waters of myth, or see the hive behind the hive, or the mob at the door of Babel.

Beneath their twinned masks, night lies at the entrance to an / abandoned / uninhabited / cave.

(The cave has in fact already moved.)

/ Seek intelligent or at least interesting distractions. / Smile in direness. / Endure in harshness. / Punctuate the vacuum with your radiant uncertainties and a handful of dice /.

ON THE CATEGORY MISTAKE OF LANGUAGE

“I” am never where I think I am, or where I think you are. Between you and me there’s no “you” and “I,” only the misrecognition of / exalted dermis / a transitory grammar / the syntactical luggage of travellers /.

Do you see? There’s a mirror as thin as our truths standing between us. (We mean so much; we understand next to nothing.)

Meaning shifts and tears / the onion skin of our habitations / the lamellae of metaphor /.

Speak now with no mouth but with mouths that devour garment and flesh; hear with no / resonating tympanum / no acoustic ossicle / but with / the tremens of wandering vibrations and toxic guests / no words save nomadic verbs and idiomatic birds of prey /.

(Speak rarely: sometimes “I” is enemy enough.)

Our language is the anagram of a clouded lexicon. We remember the worst from our limbic library. We carry the hand-me-down helices of hungry genes: our bodies sharpen their cutlery.

Do you see?

No foundation, no ceiling, no ground floor in the bargain basement of life.

Such is the basic prosody of / modern pilgrims / mapmakers in a universe on loan / bipedal memes on the run / mutating offspring on a briefly / incendiary / ascendant / slope /.

Other voices:

I think that a new kind of replicator has recently emerged on this very planet. It is staring us in the face. It is still in its infancy, still drifting clumsily about in its primeval soup, but already it is achieving evolutionary change at a rate that leaves the old gene panting far behind.

The new soup is the soup of human culture. We need a name for the new replicator, a noun that conveys the idea of a unit of cultural transmission, or a unit of *imitation*. ‘Mimeme’ comes from a suitable Greek root, but I want a monosyllable that sounds a bit like ‘gene’. I hope my classicist friends will forgive me if I abbreviate mimeme to *meme*. (...)

Examples of memes are tunes, ideas, catch-phrases, clothes fashions, ways of making pots or of building arches. Just as genes propagate themselves in the gene pool by leaping from body to body via sperms or eggs, so memes propagate themselves in the meme pool by leaping from brain to brain via a process which, in the broad sense, can be called imitation. If a scientist hears, or reads about, a good idea, he passes it on to his colleagues and students. He mentions it in his articles and his lectures. If the idea catches on, it can be said to propagate itself, spreading from brain to brain. As my colleague H. K. Humphrey neatly summed up an earlier draft of this chapter: ‘...memes should be regarded as living structures, not just metaphorically but technically. When you plant a fertile meme in my mind you literally parasitize my brain, turning it into a vehicle for the meme’s propagation in just the way that a virus may parasitize the genetic mechanism of a host cell. And this isn’t just a way of talking—the meme for, say, “belief in life after death” is actually realized physically, millions of times over, as a structure in the nervous system of individual men the world over.’ (Richard Dawkins, *The Selfish Gene*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, [1976] 2006, p. 192.)

ON THE ADAPTABILITY OF EXPERIENCE IN THE STRUGGLE FOR MEMORY

Question:

How may Darwin's theory of evolution apply to memory? Which memories are more apt in the "struggle for life"? How does one readapt those formative memories within the ongoing, dynamic, mutable circumstantiality of living? Can we reconcile the limbic and the technological by way of the alleles of the imagination?

Answer:

Yes. (This is also the task of poetry: the retrieval and transfiguration of memory.)

Other voices:

Now we come to the question that you were asking, which is about the evolution of humans, and the relationship between our brains and our brain processes and evolutionary mechanisms. We are evolutionary products. The particular evolutionary line which has led to humans has been one which has achieved species success by the individuals developing bigger and bigger brains. Now brains aren't necessarily the only way to evolutionary success – bacteria (Lynn Margolis would say proctista) outnumber us, and will probably outsurvive us in the world. But once you start on the evolutionary line which leads to brains, once you're an omnivore, you have to hunt your prey, or you have to learn to escape from prey, then there's an evolutionary pressure to get smarter – that's the route that led to humans.

What our evolution has given us is brains which are enormously powerful and adaptive, capable of enabling us to live in the very complicated social circumstances in which we do, and capable of creating our own history and our own technology. (Excerpt from "Rescuing Memory, a Talk with Steven

Rose, 13/VI/99"; vide <https://www.edge.org/conversation/steven_rose-rescuing-memory>)

I had, also, during many years, followed a golden rule, namely that whenever a published fact, a new observation or thought came across me, which was opposed to my general results, to make a memorandum of it without fail and at once; for I had found by experience that such facts and thoughts were far more apt to escape from the memory than favourable ones. Owing to this habit, very few objections were raised against my views which I had not at least noticed and attempted to answer.

It has sometimes been said that the success of the *Origin* proved "that the subject was in the air," or "that men's minds were prepared for it." I do not think that this is strictly true, for I occasionally sounded not a few naturalists, and never happened to come across a single one who seemed to doubt the permanence of species. Even Lyell and Hooker, though they would listen with interest to me, never seemed to agree. I tried once or twice to explain to able men what I meant by natural selection, but signally failed. What I believe was strictly true is that innumerable well-observed facts were stored in the minds of naturalists, ready to take their proper places as soon as any theory which would receive them was sufficiently explained. Another element in the success of the book was its moderate size; and this I owe to the appearance of Mr Wallace's essay; had I published on the scale in which I began to write in 1856, the book would have been four or five times as large as the *Origin*, and very few would have had the patience to read it.

I gained much by my delay in publishing from about 1839, when the theory was clearly conceived, to 1859; and I lost nothing by it, for I cared very little whether men attributed most originality to me or Wallace; and his essay no doubt aided in the reception of the theory. (Charles Darwin, *Autobiographies*, London: Penguin, 1986, p. 75.)

ON PEDAGOGY

It was not possible to present more than just a sketchy illustration in this lecture and to point out a few important steps in the development of our knowledge. To corroborate and extend them requires more time and work than the outsider can imagine. The effort of one individual is not sufficient for this. Helpers presented themselves, and I must express my appreciation to them at this time. If one is fortunate in finding capable students of whom many become permanent co-workers and friends, this is one of the most beautiful fruits of scientific work. (Karl von Frisch, Nobel Prize for Physiology or Medicine, 1973; Nobel Lecture: "Decoding the Language of the Bee")

The teacher: a vector of sentience enhanced by the art of pedagogy.

The academy: a site of reflexive intensity for / the grace of growth / the tillage of thought /.

The world (as it is still): / the unwashed arteries of the city / the havenless multitude of unmediated impulse / the restless colonized mind /.

What the interval between *the world that is already* and *the world to come* teaches us:

To be angry but not lucid is insufficient.

To be injured but not relentless is unacceptable.

To be destructive but not loving is to be destructive alone.

To be hapless but not hungry is to sleep.

ON POETRY: FINDING THE INTERVAL BETWEEN POSITIVE
AND NEGATIVE BELIEF

A poetry that is multi-vectorial.

A poetry that is reflexive and reflective.

A poetry that is empirical and speculative.

A poetry that is conceptually fractal and sentiently fateful.

(Beyond poetry and prose, there is the dematerialized territory of syncopated discovery.)

Other voices:

[T]he twentieth century is a purgatory in which the imagination must manage without the relief that satisfies one of the essential needs of the human heart, the need for protection. Existence appears as ruled by necessity and chance, with no divine intervention; until recently God's hand used to bring help to pious rulers and to punish sinful rulers. But now even the idea of Progress, which was nothing else but Providence secularized, no longer provides any guarantee. Poets, always inclined by the nature of their art to distribute praise and blame, stand before a mechanism submitted to the actions of blind force and must suspend their yes and no in midair. No wonder then that some people search for guides whose thought could cope with great reduction, but who at the same time would offer a new opening and a new hope. (Czeslaw Milosz, *The Witness of Poetry*, [The Charles Eliot Norton Lectures], Cambridge, Mass; London, England: Harvard University Press, 1984, p. 53.)

ON THOUGHT IN POETRY

Between poetry and philosophy I choose
poetry: / thought on the move / being recently whelped and raw / engaged-in
circumstantiality / sentience enhanced / interiority expressed / the luminous
proximity of syntax and synapse /.

Poetry is: / territory / relation / prosthesis /. It is:

/ a phylum within language / an artifact crushed by rage / the rustle of hushed
slaves / a blade brushing against unassuaged beings / the performative rush of
meaning /.

/ It makes nomadic words matter / It creates a world out of semiotic fission /
It speaks in the tongue of our brief species / It leads memes from sentience to
universalistic vision /.

A poem reveals:

*/ the human as prosthesis (because we have never been human) / the
human as prosthesis (because we are our unfinished history, the
limited edition of (in)sapient life) / the human as iteration and drift
(because we are neither spellers of chaos nor tellers of truth) /.*

/ I / we / world / mind / body / you /:

incandescent like a newly disclosed eclipse.

LIQUID LOVE

You and I like two outposts on the banks of the same instant where rivers flow.

There we learn / to swim upstream / to heal lame angels in Hell / to love with gills / to ascend in thought / to drown in joy / to punish time with our fists / to inseminate the earth with our burning skulls /.

At the rivers' source, we will have destroyed / all previous paths / all erotic etiquette / all lacunae codified in the short language of law /.

ON THE FRACTAL NATURE OF BEING

Thought: fractal and fateful.

Poetry: fractal and fateful.

History: fractal and fateful.

Life: fractal and fateful.

Being: a state of turbulence both to observe and to drown in.

VARIATIONS ON *THINGNESS*

The axiom of life: from *nothing* to *nothing* through the media of sentience (the *sensorium* embodied in biped mobility), language (intentionality led by intimations of futurity) and mind (the imagined territory of finite being).

The art of life: to become the edge of *something*.

The poetry of life: to become *everything*.

Excursus

My life's trajectory still points out a way for me of sorts: from edge of someone to an opening-up of self-conscious permeability, from deracinated migration to the askesis of love and blight, from deforested thought to the late flora of conceptual passion in the hothouse of mortality.

Nowadays I prefer the moss to the rose, the stone garden to the park, the lichen to the oak, clay to granite, ash to fire. I choose to believe we are here and now, i.e., ontological here-and-nowness, to also give voice to those who drown around us and remain submerged in the history-tormented sea.

Other voices:

To determine the thing's thingness, neither consideration of the bearer of properties, nor that of the manifold of sense data in their unity, and least of all that of the matter-form structure regarded by itself, which is derived from equipment is adequate. Anticipating a meaningful and weighty interpretation of the thingly character of things, we must aim at the thing's belonging to the earth. The essence of the earth, in its free and unhurried bearing and self-seclusion, reveals itself, however, only in the earth's jutting into a world, only in the opposition of the two. This strife is fixed in place in the figure of the work, and becomes manifest by it. What holds true of equipment—namely, that we come to know its equipmental character specifically only through the work itself—also holds of the

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tingly character of the thing. The fact that we never know thingness directly, and if we know it at all, then only vaguely, and thus require the work—this fact proves indirectly that in the work's work-being the happening of truth, the opening up of beings, is at work.” (Martin Heidegger, “The Origin of the Work of Art,” in *Basic Writings*, rev. and expanded edition, ed. David Farrell Krell, London: Routledge, Kegan and Paul, [1978] 2000, pp. 194-95.)

FRACTAL / FATEFUL

The perfection of a life: to die fractally old while fatefully young.

(We can be both enraged and enraptured; we are drawn to the honey despite intrinsic strife.)

Excursus

I recall the poem by the Portuguese poet Jorge de Sena, “A nave de Alcobaça” (vide a full transcription following Fragment xxxii in this volume, p. 381). My reading of this poem opened me, as no other modern text has ever since, to the quake and synthesis of the two tectonic plates of classicism and modernism within the selfsame textual terrain. In Sena’s poem, written in 1962, in Araquara, Brazil, classical prosody, i.e., the ascendant descriptiveness and the conceptually anagogical of classical prosody and cosmogony occur within the earth’s biosphere, with the troposphere of speculative reason for summit and our species’ depravity for valley. With this poem now within my noospheric reach of mind, I first perceived poetry as a supreme expression of our anthropological condition as well as modernity as an emancipatory project for the self and thought, which we are, anthropologically speaking, both capable of conceiving and plausibly incapable of completing.

Other voices:

In the fulfillment of time, our senses, drawn one through the other, will compose the second and third history Poetry seeks. But its very motion is to immortalize our senses, which, unlike our emotions, have no history (how strange), and which, not subject to change, provoke it and assist it more effectively, and which, not subject to the blackmail of succumbing to an epoch’s spirit, express it more fluently. This is why I believe that the most current, the most modern poetic speech must prove that it can be reduced, like them, to a “first inscription.” This seems so simple, yet realizing it I felt a truly infinite freedom. (...)

Each of us is the golden fleece of our being. Death doesn't keep us from seeing and recognizing it; that is a hoax. We must empty death of all it's been stuffed with and bring it to absolute clarity, so that the real mountains and real grass are seen in it, the maligned world brimming with dew more luminous than any precious tears.

This is what I await each year, one more wrinkle on my brow, one less on my soul: complete reversal, absolute transience ... (Odysseas Elytis, *Open Papers*, trans. Olga Broumas and T Begley, Port Townsend, WASH: Copper Canyon Press, 1995, pp. 26-27.)

The young contemporaries of Darwin, J. D. Dana (1813-1895) and J. Le Conte (1823-1901), both great American geologists (and Dana, a mineralogist and biologist as well) expounded, even prior to 1859, the empirical generalization that the evolution of living matter is proceeding in a definite direction. This phenomenon was called by Dana "cephalization," and by Le Conte the "psychozoic era." (...)

(...) Thus the whole of mankind put together represents an insignificant mass of the planet's matter. Its strength is derived not from its matter, but from its brain. If man understands this, and does not use his brain and his work for self-destruction, an immense future is open before him in the geological history of the biosphere. (Vladimir Vernadsky, "The Biosphere and the Noösphere," originally published in English in the *American Scientist*, January 1945; vide a digital version: <http://www.larouchepub.com/other/2005/site_packages/vernadsky/3207bios_and_noos.html>)

ON THE PHENOMENOLOGY OF THE VERSE

A galled branch where speaking birds alight
A lesion healed by the art of laughter
A helix of memes crafted from slaughter and blight
A throat thawed by thoughts that ignite and blaze
A thread in a maze while constellations turn
An artifact of mind disturbing creation at night
A silence discerned in atom and bone
An instant of sentience set to metaphorical stone
A meal for survival: (we're born underground)
A path—torn in the stomach—made of sense and sound
A response to upheaval: we're beings with knives
A raft for our insapient drift through time
A dendrite that thrives on neurological signs
An act of aesthesis; the ripe latency of rhyme
A curve of meanings led by asymptotes on fire
An axiomatic hill for the walking blind
A garden for creatures who've made language (their) home:

The phenomenology of the verse: life lifted and fed at the outpost of words.

Excursus

It is my conviction that a line of verse is never a mere fragment of interrupted or misguided prose. It is never what language says, or says it says, that truly matters: it is what language does. Does it leave the body as the ant leaves a hollow bole to fill the world with sentient visions, or does it imagine the real with pigments the color of flesh—that infinite bolus of illusion—, or rather does it rescue us for the final incision of grace or haven on our flesh despite repeated delusion?

Poetry does not perform the tasks of prose, nor does it promote a distraction from so-called serious matters. It does something more and something less than the prose of our days and our confessions at night. It is something else.

A line of verse is where the universe momentarily rediscovers itself in the balance or, at least, in our human balance. It takes root in the gut. It flowers in the metaphoric garden of limbic assonance. A line of verse reports the manifestation of infinite becoming on the finite scale of being. It is the meeting place of uncommon alleles of the self. It draws the Venn diagram of overlapping spheres of terrestrial meanings. It is the ontological harbor after the seaquake of mind on matter.

Poetry is an evolutionary stage of consciousness in an otherwise self-perpetuating prison.

Other voices:

The creation of a work requires craftsmanship. Great artists prize craftsmanship most highly. They are the first to call for its painstaking cultivation, based on complete mastery. They above all others constantly take pains to educate themselves ever anew in thorough craftsmanship. It has often enough been pointed out that the Greeks, who knew a few things about works of art, use the same word, *technē*, for craft and art and call the craftsman and the artist by the same name, *technitēs*.

(...) However usual and convincing the reference may be to the Greek practice of naming craft and art by the same name, *technē*, it nevertheless remains oblique and superficial; for *technē* signifies neither craft nor art, and not at all the technical in our present-day sense, it never means a kind of practical performance.

The word *technē* denotes rather a mode of knowing. To know means to have seen. In the widest sense of seeing, which means to apprehend what is present, as such. For Greek thought the essence of knowing consists in *alētheia*, that is, in the revealing of beings. It supports and guides all comportment toward beings. *Technē*, as knowledge experienced in the Greek manner, is a bringing forth of beings in that it *brings forth* what is present as such *out of* concealment and specifically *into* the unconcealment of its appearance; *technē* never signifies the action of making.” (Martin Heidegger, “The Origin of the Work of Art,” in *Basic Writings*, rev. and expanded edition David Farrell Krell, London: Routledge, Kegan and Paul, [1978] 2000, p. 184.)

ON THE INSUFFICIENCY OF GRAVITY ON CONSCIOUSNESS,
LANGUAGE AND BEING

We arrived late to the garden of creation.

(Now earn your keep at this banquet that is not yours.)

We utter words. Between our words both night and day set beyond the
empirical net of skin, beyond the speculative reach of reason.

Learn to unlearn the illusions your mind has reaped.

ON THE POST-MACHINE AGE AND THE FATE OF LANGUAGE

David Cronenberg says we are our technology.

Marshall McLuhan affirms that “the medium is the message” because the medium embodies a (our) voice.

What has become of our voice once it is transmitted, not from throat to throat but from “immaterial” sensorium to the collective womb?

Today I write: *I am my media*. My media manifest my be/coming. My being regenerates by way of and as its technical prostheses.

Here the word “am” is grammatically but not poetically valid, i.e., where, in poetry, language ultimately determines adequate understanding. “Am” situates the speaker within the illusory *unicum* of a singular body and mind.

But the body is plural, and the mind has never coincided with the (one) brain.

The brain dwells, rules and processes; the mind moves and creates the interval between bodies and minds. Mind has a history, a dimension of outward community and inward restlessness. The mind rules by misrule: it is the carnival of illusions brought to the threshold of becoming and nothingness.

The mind has no parachute (only the virtual wings of enhanced perception).

“We” is the proper vehicle for “I,” for ourselves, for the family within. “I” is the solecism used by sleepwalkers. (*We must learn to speak differently, to avoid the “I” illusion.*)

Only in dreams does the “I” walk singly in the mind’s dark woods (on paths between / brain and language / matter and metaphor / blastema and terror /.)

The mind is a dematerialized prosthesis: it augments, empowers and relates.

A verse, an image, a map, a meme, a machine, an algorithm, a thought: these are the materialized expressions of extended mentation.

The imagination is the medium of media.

All media participate in the enhanced awareness of mobile sentience: a mobile sentience which seeks.

Whenever possible:

Speak plurally.

Imagine babelically.

Feel compassionately.

Be poetically.

Think “we”-fully.

ON CONSCIOUSNESS, OR EVOLUTION BECOME SELF-AWARE

We are the / self-invented / self-referring / self-accelerating / simulacrum of totality. Totality was once the haven of beauty; today we find there / the amniotic unrest of futurist pathos / the technical progeny of codified golems / surgery for hybrid ontologies /.

We evolve in directions other than that of the cosmos. Babel has / no divinity / no script / no angry ending / no revelatory bliss /. Babel is. We are, but being is a provisional summit. Totality is an illusion.

Under such skies, verities are / belligerent hypnotists / toxic routines of power / the soothsayers' itinerant rant /.

Choose your sky. Then walk. Speak little. Believe wholly (enough to last one day at a time). Love if you can. Breathe while you have lungs.

TELEOLOGICAL OR NON-TELEOLOGICAL?

Whither the cosmos?

Is there a direction or rather simply flow?

(With our sentient bipedalism we began to walk in other directions.)

How do you respond to the following questions: does sentience have a direction? Does it have a reason? Does it want a destiny?

Writing is an instance of negentropy.

Thus poetry has a fate.

The fate of poetry: / interrupted order / the mind on fire / a river that quenches and drowns /.

YOU GET THREE QUESTIONS

Why life?

Why life?

Why life?

(Because it is:

the brief banquet at the table of nothingness. [But why?];

the drift of heated atoms into patterns which self-replicate indifferent to the rest;

the interval between / the nascent void in the flesh and the void undressed / stasis and restlessness /;

nothingness was once, perhaps, a spasm of joy:

the illusion of rife turbulence within the tumult of empty space.)

There is no why, then, which can be answered.

Life answers nothing.

An incomplete “is-ness” must suffice.)

INTERVALS BOTH MEANINGFUL AND DISPUTABLE

Not no one, but, yes, intuited nothingness.

Not always, but now: / the modest gardener beneath the clock / memory's harvest despite the Grid's feast of indifference / instances of growth leavened by the yeast of cruelty /.

Not certain, but alethic and hexed.

Not alone, but agonistic: / life's rootless occurrence / life's itinerant disturbance /.

Not being, but becoming: / the metamorphosis of memory / from interrupted Babel to the granaries of futurist harvests / the meaning of bytes in the incalculable arc of life /.

Not silent, but listening: (to) the clamor of the sensorium on thought / (at) the intersection of myth and experiment / (through) the pandemic din of our vexed certainties /.

Not death, but life: bent, breathing and unwelcome.

Not why, then, but where to next?

ON OUR PRESENT FREE FALL WITHOUT A PARACHUTE

Wittgenstein's free fall after the ladder?

Where or what is the semantic heart of consciousness?

At the borders of positivism persist the ripened *favelas* of human invention.
We / survive / thrive / on the outskirts of denuded thinking.

Better / the prolonged provisionality / the accelerated conditionality / the
map of dangerous conviviality / the proximity of pattern and breach / the
occult tides of the fractal and fateful / the struggle for memory on the
brainwashed streets of the city /.

FERNANDO PESSOA'S APORIA

«Porque não tenho raiz, como uma árvore, e portanto não tenho raiz...»
(Fernando Pessoa/Álvaro de Campos, "A Passagem das Horas")

a. What is this quasi-*thingness* called consciousness:

embedded in nature or splintered from the whole?; homologous or diffractive in regard to the cosmos?

Is the cosmos a totality or, instead, restive nothingness? Is there a cosmos?
What is a cosmos?

Consciousness: a patterned yet rootless vibration of sentience and thought?

Is the whole nonexistent? Is the imagined totality simply the visible mask of nothing at all?

Where is the semantic center, if any, of consciousness?

What is the place for metaphysics in modernity? Does it lie in the interval between the positivist and the mythical, between the empirical and the speculative, or, perhaps, between memory and endless deracination?

If there is no teleology, then is there a *grounded groundlessness*?

Is such a questioning already a sign of the presence of a metaphysics of radical doubt?

Which tasks befall us for the modern rebooting of mind?

b. *Almost an Abstract: Bodies without Flesh, Language without Substance: Cognition and Being in Modern Poetics. Fernando Pessoa and Álvaro de Campos's "Ultimatum"*

In 1917,

the Portuguese poet Fernando Pessoa introduced a discontinuity between authorial

identity and language's mission to configure subjective experience into word-framed memory as well as between language's task as mediator of the world and the very representational validity of words vis-à-vis that world.

His futurist manifesto

contrasts the "arithmetic" growth of cultural consciousness characterized by a generationally-determined father-to-son transmission of norms and values against an emergent "exponential" growth of collective consciousness driven by the accelerated progress and impact of science and technology on the entire social web of experience and symbolization in modernity.

Therefore, Pessoa's œuvre explores fresh sources of collective and personal cognitive evolution.

Language in his œuvre abandons its role as static archive;

literary language, released from its realist task of representation of a pre-given world, attempts something new under this "exponential" impetus:

to invent sites of meaning no longer circumscribed by authorial self-reference and the pseudo-solidity of language.

Literature no longer imitates the world: it co-creates and co-founds the very production of the real.

Rather than representing identity as a given category of being, or authorial identity as the blue-print for ulterior interpretation,

Pessoa suggests that linguistic symbol articulates an active patterning of structured drift.

Meaning emerges therefore without a genealogy—a prefiguration of Deleuze and Guattari's exploration of the *rhizome* as a fundamental figure of cognition.

As in hypertextual fiction, Pessoa suggests that reader and writer embark together on a cognitive journey, ultimately transforming the experience of memory, identity and the limits of language.

Language as anti-genealogy eschews the reproduction of social forms and cognitive expectations, permitting language to discover meaning in and as a mode of futurity.

The poet contributes to such strategies of writing and reading in the context of a technology-driven culture and as an

attempt to reconcile, or to at least open an interstitial space linking the abstract operative principles of technology to the unfolding of being.

Other voices:

Let us summarize the principle characteristics of a rhizome: unlike trees or their roots, the rhizome connects any point to any other point, and its traits are not necessarily linked to traits of the same nature; it brings into play very different regimes of signs, and even nonsign states. The rhizome is reducible to neither the One nor the multiple. It is not the One that becomes Two or even directly three, four, five etc. It is not a multiple derived from the one, or to which one is added ($n+1$). It is comprised not of units but of dimensions, or rather directions in motion. It has neither beginning nor end, but always a middle (*milieu*) from which it grows and which it overflows. (Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus, Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Brian Massumi, University of Minnesota Press, 1987, p. 21.)

ON THE FUTURITY OF LANGUAGE IN MOTION

Language grows out of engaged-in circumstantiality. However,

the world is not given to us.

(The world is being taken from us, not given. It is centrifugal to anthropomorphic centrality.)

Speak now to keep: / the (receding) gravity of presence / memory on a gurney / thought insurgent against unreason / the mind unriven by: / the politics of hate / the fanatic's surgical knife /.

Choose the fecund / pathos / wretchedness / agon / of life.

(Poetry understands its radical fate.

Speech and thought meet where the body—as genomic pool and memic residence—

/ unfurls ferrous and rank in sentient turbulence / ferries us after Ecclesiastes' extinguished wick / endures outside duration where mythos walks and the sleeper wakes /.)

Excursus

The Hebraic “hevel” refers to the dying flame of a wick just now extinguished, the black wisp of smoke dissipating into the suddenly dense atmosphere of thermodynamics and mortality. The image is both empirical and speculative; it suggests the imminence of our metaphysical turn of mind. It announces the apprehension of a fateful turbulence present at the core of nature as it reconfigures into the speculative imagination. A wick carries with it the rough draft of our ontological contract with time, matter and being.

Other voices:

1. Pallavras de Ecclesiastes, filho de David Rei em Jerusalem.
2. Vaidade de vaidades, dize o Ecclesiastes, vaidade de vaidades, e tudo vaidade.
3. Que tem mais homem, de todo seu trabalho, e fadigua, com que trabalhar debaixo do sol?
4. Geraçam vai, e geraçam vem, e a terra pera sempre está.
5. Naçe o sol, e põe-se, e torna a seu lugar, no qual outra vez naçendo, (6) gyra pello meo dia, e se inclina ao Aguiam. Vai o vento cercando tudo ao redor, e torna em seus çírculos.
7. Todollos Rios entram no mar, e o mar nam creçe; tornam os Rios a seu lugar donde sayram pera que outra vez corram.
8. Todallas cousas sam diffiçees, nem as pode homem com palavras explicar. Nam se fartam os olhos com ver, nem as orelhas s'enchem com ouvir.

[Damião de Góis annotates the phrase “vaidade de vaidades” with the following observation. *Hevel*, the Hebraic source of the English translation (the familiar “vanity of vanities”) “significa em hebreu hum vapor subtilissimo que logo esvaeçe, pello qual vocabulo Hieronimo tralladou vaidade.” (Damião de Góis, *O Livro de Ecclesiastes, Reprodução em fac-símile da edição de Stevão Sabio (Veneza, 1538)*, ed. crítica, T. F. Earle, Lisbon: Fundação Calouste Gulbenkian, 2002, pp. 69, 70n1(m).)]

Y decimos que la Metafísica consiste en que el hombre busca una orientación en su situación. Pero esto supone que la situación del hombre – esto es, su vida – consiste en una radical desorientación. No, pues, que el hombre, dentro de su vida, se encuentre desorientado parcialmente en este o el outro orden, en sus negócios o en su caminar por un paisaje, o en la política. El que se desorienta en el campo busca un plano o la brújula, o pregunta a un transeunte y esto le basta para orientarse. Pero nuestra definición presupone una desorientación total, radical; es decir, no que al hombre le acontezca desorientarse, perderse en su vida, sino que, por lo visto, la situación del hombre, la vida es desorientación, es estar perdido – y por eso existe la Metafísica. (José Ortega y Gasset, in “Lección I” of his *Unas Lecciones de Metafísica*, *Revista de Occidente en Alianza Editorial*, 2007.)

Thinking in Babel

SO / NOT SO, TERENCE

«Homo sum, humani nihil a me alienum puto».
(Publius Terentius Afer, circa 195 BCE-circa 159 BCE)

So / Not so, Terence.

Everything is alien to us, and to be is also not to be.

(We are not even human. We have never been human, only / meat hooks for genes / eros walking on a truncated page / atoms chained to inhuman tyrants / lucid egotists / demented rationalists / citizens beholden to hypnotists and gods / the Gadarene swines' progeny / a hemorrhage on the cauterized flank of Earth / a bipedal vibration on the cosmic web /.)

*All we know is nothing. (And of nothing we do not know what nothing is:
/ absolute vacuum / truncated day trimmed by the scalpel of madness and
sadistic gardeners / solitude petrified into monoliths of bone on bone /?)*

We have / the inhuman warmth of heated atoms / the wrath of fettered lungs
/ the paths worn on the way to our ragged utopias /.

We know our unsated territoriality.

We know the penal colonies of mind.

How apt, isn't it, Terence, that you, a former Berber slave, gave voice to /
the cosmopolitan task of creaturehood / substituted Hellenic sentience for
imperial script / chose imaginary passport over exile in fixity /?

(You saw the virtual homeland beyond the blind strategies of Rome.)

MORE ON THE IDEA OF GROUNDED GROUNDLESSNESS

In the interval between fractalness and fatefulness, there is the creativity of resistance, the abundance of brief sentence during / free fall / the aerial drift of dust /:

To create is to create pattern within turbulence: to face it, to live it, to evolve with it.

There, even breathing can be a way to evolve beyond the power-knowledge grid. There, grace is / the modulation of the grid / the provisional suspension of conceptual tautology / the ethereal lace of created joy / the disarmament of language / the interval between scripted thought and art's nascent ontologies /.

(Philosophy is not a place of ultimate harshness and immobility when it blooms in life's metaphoric gardens called poiesis.)

There is a provisional intentionality—our old ontological due—which spans a moment, or a day, or a lifetime: enough to create in the sparsely lit interval. To create despite destruction is what ~~humans~~ do:

biped ascension, sensate upheaval.

THE AGORA, THE ECCLESIA AND THE ACADEMY

Schooling, as institution, imposes a cadence of reflection and research which,

by definition, cannot

follow that of / the market place (the *agora*) / politics (the *ecclesia*) / the informal fora / by

which a community / knows

itself / shares stories / performs the quotidian tasks of survival in the city /,

and where at

every moment experience and expectation / meet / collide / negotiate / a resolution unevenly

favorable to individuals laboring under

the clock.

DINING WITH AN ANDROID

[The imagination is the first and only technê in the universe. All that is technological is an amplificatory footnote to the imagination.]

“You” (the “android”): Do you see all that you’ve lost? Einstein has brought you the non-anthropomorphic and non-anthropocentric god, the loss of the centrality of the psychological in the cosmic weave of energy, time and matter. He has unhoused the illusory essentialism of your arrogant species and the subsequent pseudo-foundationalism of your history.

“You”: I’ve wanted to speak with you for a long time. There are idioms outside your present grammars. There are silences in your neural circuitry. “I” am a “we.” In fact, “you” are a “we.” “We” are the conjoined artifact of ontological futurity.

“Me” (the “human”): Well, “I” don’t know what “you” mean.

“You”: Exactly. Thus “our” common lot and provisional nature: “we” fill creation with a similar void. “We” are / equal realms of radical unrest / commensurate though not identical prostheses of the imagination / coterminous territories of subjective events /.

“I”: So what now? Where will “we” go from here? Will “we” effect a kind of mental mitosis?

“You”: Yes. “We” must ask: how will speech sound in “our” future? Do “you” see what “we” share? “I” am also linked to futurity. “I” am here now to help “you” grasp the difference and the sameness between language and consciousness, between sentience and self, between memory and the pure *poiesis* of being.

“We” must start with the Apocalypse, not with Genesis, and move ahead from that spot of burnt earth. “We” will undo the single story and “we” will disclose our fecund madness within the neural textuality of being.

TWO NEIGHBORS IN THE TOWER OF BABEL

I say: the category of the subject is constitutive of all ideology, but at the same time and immediately I add that *the category of the subject is only constitutive of all ideology insofar as all ideology has the function (which defines it) of 'constituting' concrete individuals as subjects.* (...) As St Paul admirably put it, it is in the 'Logos', meaning in ideology, that we 'live, move and have our being'. It follows that, for you and for me, the category of the subject is a primary 'obviousness' (obviousnesses are always primary): it is clear that you and I are subjects (free, ethical, etc....). Like all obviousnesses, including those that make a word 'name a thing' or 'have a meaning' (therefore including the obviousness of the 'transparency' of language), the 'obviousness' that you and I are subjects – and that that does not cause any problems – is an ideological effect, the elementary ideological effect.
(Louis Althusser, *Ideology and State*, London: Verso, 2008, pp. 45, 46.)

A: I was once a communist: a total supporter of the most pure Stalinist communism. Not any longer. I'm in love with capitalism. I am now a total supporter of neoliberal expansionism. I love / the present superpower / our moral guide / our global leader /.

B: You have provided no political analysis: you've exhibited a symptom.

(Me: Politics and sentience, or the power we give others over our body and thought.)

*They say:
Choose your hypnotist. Herd your mind.*

ON POETRY AFTER ALL IS SAID

Poetry is caring and carnivorous.

It is not an oasis: it is a buoy for beings who self-replicate while (historically) adrift.

It is the body husked and exposed; it is
life gutted and bled.

It places an anvil on one's tongue; it leaves a hemorrhaged utopia in the
bowels.

Poetry is the silent defendant on trial,
the anticipatory disquiet before the tomb.

It is a state of brokenness (which syntax repairs); it is
a prolonged fast; it is omnivorous care.

Poetry is life both ecstatic and denied: the art of healing wounds,
the askesis in enhanced sentience, where
the mind is both damaged and clear.

It is the agon of endurance and the richness of change,
the dehiscence of the mind's late flora,
the locus of solitude where unperfected love and
ravaged intelligence make life the precarious instance,
the indigent raucous chorus.

Poetry is quickening and caustic.

It is irreparable.

It is not a gift: it is a reckoning.

Other voices:

Art is the setting-into-work of truth. On this proposition an essential ambiguity lies hidden, in which truth is at once the subject and the object of the setting. But subject and objet are unsuitable names here. They keep us from thinking precisely this ambiguous essence, a task that no longer belongs to the present consideration. Art is historical, and as historical it is the creative preserving of truth in the world. Art happens as poetry. Poetry is founding in the triple sense of bestowing,

grounding, and beginning. Art, as founding, is essentially historical. This means not simply that art has a history in the extrinsic sense that in the course of time it, too, appears along with many other things, and in the process changes and passes away and offers changing aspects for historiology. Art is history in the essential sense that it grounds history.

Art lets truth originate. Art, founding preserving, is the spring that leaps to the truth of beings in the work. To originate something by a leap, to bring something into being from out of its essential source in a founding leap—this is what the word “origin” [*Ursprung*, literally, primal leap] means. (Martin Heidegger, “The Origin of the Work of Art,” in *Basic Writings*, rev. and expanded edition, ed. David Farrell Krell, London: Routledge, Kegan and Paul, [1978] 2000, p. 202.)

Because language cares. Language is remarkable in that, except under the extreme constraints of mathematics and logic, it never can talk only about what it’s supposed to talk about but is always spreading around so that the lovers, the commonwealth, the economy, they all get mixed into the act in a very this term must come from cooking—in a very “meddled” way. (Excerpt from “The Poet and the Poem,” An Interview with Howard Nemerov, 1988; vide digital version: <<http://www.gracecavalieri.com/poetLaureates/howardNemerov.html>>)

ANOMALY

What is said: «Guns don't kill people. People kill people», which is an example of faultily crafted logic and purposely misleading.

Yes:

People buy guns.
People aim with guns.
People kill with guns.
People maim with guns.
People aggress with guns.
People sleep with guns.
People undress with guns.
People fuck with guns.
People rape with guns.
People meet with guns.
People thrill with guns.
People greet with guns.
People lie with guns.
People mate with guns.

People fill graves with the aid of guns.
People imitate thought with the aid of guns.
People blame others with the aid of guns.
People cry «Die!» with the aid of guns.

Guns are not objects that dream metal dreams.
Guns are not dormant in mechanical peace.
Guns are not quiet on the subject of death.
Guns are not clean in the riot of life.

Object and self are inseparable in this rigor mortis of life:
they act in complicity; they take the same breath.
They bear the same passport; they share one
intention: / weaponized feeling /
the muzzling of mind /.

Together we are technê and flesh.

Thinking in Babel

Together we're a hybrid equation. Together we're the brood of
conjoined subjectivity. Together we're the sum of species confusion.

Learn to think in other directions.

Learn to be without digging graves.

Learn to save speech from the / gun / thugs / drug / of unreason.

FRAGMENTS (i-li)

FRAGMENT (i)

In grounded groundlessness lies freedom.

FRAGMENT (ii)

Life's blue arrow is warm-blooded and hungry.

It laughs and cries in the void.

Choose your ending and your sky.

FRAGMENT (iii)

Not a withdrawal from the word; instead, the discovery of what is at stake.

FRAGMENT (iv)

We are not human (thus the neoteny of our visions).

We invent the self as embryonic prosthesis, as incubatory wonder: we add to the embodied script. (We do not finish the script.)

As we augment ourselves, we augment what is incomplete.

We are the interval between / the unfinished and the fragmentary / the rhizome and (our) roaming sentience / technê and kinesis / artifice and harsh ascendancy /.

FRAGMENT (v)

Not a narrowing of mind; instead, its expansion.

Not oblivion, but, instead, a nomadic mode of remembrance, thus

the undisciplining of ideological blindness (i.e., the master narratives which hypnotize vision); the growth of compassion; the reinvention of reason; the ongoing rewriting of textualized meaning; the density of dendrites on the moving page of sentience.

Other voices:

«In the raised head, a hint of wing—
But the coat is flapping;
On the closed eyes, in the peace
Of the arms: energy's pure hiding-place.

Here is a creature that can fly and sing,
The word malleable and flaming,
And congenital awkwardness is overcome
By inborn rhythms!» ("Self-Portrait," in Osip Mandelstam,
Selected Poems, trans. James Greene, London: Penguin, 1991, p. 59.)

FRAGMENT (vi)

Philosophy ... erects a Tower of Babel that is luminous and empty, conceptually arduous and passionately aseptic, *sicut* Escher and Nerdrum.

Poetry ... erects a Tower of Babel that is inhabited and messy, translucid and opaque, festive and lethal, crowded and contagious, *sicut* Turner and Bosch.

Excursus

I remember the first time I pronounced the Latin word “sicut.” I remember repeating it several times to myself, liking its phonemic palette of three consonants and two intercalated vowels. I remember thinking that its five letters and two syllables suggested to me the angles of a sonorous triangle. The perfectly balanced entwinement of phonemes and its wonderfully suggestive geometry of sound opened me to a weave of sounds which I had not yet consciously discovered in the English language.

This first auspicious encounter with the word “sicut” occurred in my adolescence as I listened to the music of Giovanni Pierluigi da Palestrina (circa 1525-1594). His motet “Sicut cervus,” based on Psalm 42 of the Book of Psalms, led me to hear for the first time the expressive potentiality of language—plausibly any language—: the presence of musicality within the suddenly exposed heart of words, the symphonic amplitude of sense and sound when sentience, thought and metaphysical hunger converge, the nearness of elevated diction to the empirical mind, the invisible cupola of intricate tonal values lightly suspended above our sentient selves which the music of such enhanced communication inexhaustibly conveys to the porous mind and permeable ear. Language and music—with their double claim to being’s attention—had at last freed me from the equivocal immediacy and self-sufficient totality of a single linguistic homeland.

Thinking in Babel

Other voices:

I recently heard the Cambridge singers perform the aforementioned work by Palestrina. The Latin lines and an English translation (the King James' version) read thus:

Sicut cervus desiderat ad fontes aquarum, ita desiderat anima mea ad te, Deus. / As the hart panteth after the water brooks, so panteth my soul after thee, O God.

FRAGMENT (vii)

A young man smiles at the door of chaos. Beyond him: / the stench of impoverished choice / the poisonous history of uncreated light / the looting of hope / the elemental corrosiveness of diminished sight /.

An image in poetry resonates with the ongoing rewriting of memory or else flattens into / reiterative pattern / scripted self-sameness / the rant of prophets / the inhuman speech of the pandemic Grid /.

What is at stake if we have never been ~~human~~? What do we even know of *that*?

Respond now: / zookeepers of hushed slaves / butchers of cognitive innocence / managers of inhuman discourse /.

Excursus

Poetry is there (in the world that already is). It is there to bring to mind what mind cannot see without blinking, which is this: the universe is larger than mind. And life, which fills a corner of the universe, is the moving vehicle of consciousness; it can be grasped by consciousness but not simultaneously known or, conversely, it can be known but not simultaneously grasped. (We are sentient cyclops in the infinitely diffracting mirror.) The universe is both obverse and reverse; it is hereness and thereeness. We are the hook or nail upon which consciousness hangs a beggar's hat. (We cannot surpass perceptual division; we are denied the total vision.) We are left with the strenuous kinesis of metaphor and Eros's quest for the one thisness and the one perpetual bliss.

Then language comes to consciousness, not as outer comes to inner, or part comes to whole, or even sky comes to sea, but rather as a stranger turns into guest, guest turns into presence, presence turns into voice and voice turns into a chorus of light. (Yet words are never enough: they are a buoy at sea, but they are not the distant shore.) Adrift the speaker learns to distinguish near from far, presence from loss, «I» from «you», permanence from orphaned migrancy. These pairs belong to the language of life: the alien gift we receive from no one's hand.)

Memory grows out of this quarry of signs, this garden of misplaced gloves. It speaks the language of ghosts of our transitory real. (At least, we'll say, we have the last known address of meaning.) Memory is the blaze in a house we pass by while on a moving train.

In all things human, what is at stake is the corner room by the stairs, the one with the empty, made bed and the photo of an ancestor in a polished, glass frame. (If you thoughtlessly drop that frame, the past will no longer know you and the world will forget your name.)

*No matter: we are here to make flesh speak before we sleep.
Could we but say everything with the stones, sticks and swords of words on which we break our bones!*

Could we but say everything with one word, in one instant, in one perfect chord!

Other voices:

Metaphysics thinks of man on the basis of *animalitas* and does not think in the direction of his *humanitas*.

Metaphysics closes itself to the simple essential fact that man essentially occurs only in his essence, where he is claimed by Being. Only from that claim "has" he found that wherein his essence dwells. Only from this dwelling "has" he "language" as the home that preserves the ecstatic for this essence. Such standing in the clearing of Being I call the ek-sistence of man. The way of Being is proper only to man. Ek-sistence so understood is not only the ground of the possibility of reason, *ratio*, but is also that in which the essence of man preserves the source that determines him.

Ek-sistence can be said only of the essence of man, that is, only of the human way "to be." For as far as our experience shows, only man is admitted to the destiny of ek-sistence. (Martin Heidegger, "Letter on Humanism," in *Basic Writings*, rev. and expanded ed. David Farrell Krell, London: Routledge, Kegan and Paul, 2000, pp. 227-28.)

[P]latão dá testemunho de uma inquietude intelectual no Zoo Humano que nunca mais foi possível acalmar totalmente. Desde que o *Politikós*, desde que a *Politeia* são discursos que, no mundo, falam da comunidade dos homens como se se tratasse de um jardim zoológico que fosse simultaneamente um parque temático, a conduta dos homens nos parques ou cidades deverá passar a aparecer como um problema zoo-político. O que se apresenta como uma reflexão sobre política é na realidade uma reflexão fundamental sobre as regras de funcionamento do Parque Humano. Se há uma dignidade dos homens que mereça em sentido filosófico ser trazida à linguagem, será sobretudo porque os homens não são simplesmente guardados em parques temáticos políticos, mas porque são eles que, por si, neles se mantêm. Os humanos são seres que se cuidam, se guardam a si mesmos, que geram, vivem onde vivem, um espaço parquizado em torno de si próprios. Em parques urbanos, parques nacionais, parques cantonais, parques ecológicos, em todos os lados devem os humanos formar uma opinião sobre como deve ser regulada a sua conduta para consigo próprios. (Peter Sloterdijk, *Regras para o Parque Humano, Uma Resposta à “Carta sobre o Humanismo” (O Discurso de Elmau)*, trans. German/Portuguese Manuel Resende, Coimbra: Angelus Novus, [1999] 2007, pp. 66-67.)

FRAGMENT (viii)

Thought is the necessary emancipatory project: creativity erected in autonomous reason.

(With choice—made always at metaphoric gun-point—, we reach the ever-corrupted rampart of freedom.)

The reedification of Babel awaits.

FRAGMENT (ix): between the *aubade* and the *abattoir*

Human is a genome; we are a mutating pattern of growth.

Human is a name; we are a rhizome.

(The walls of Babel are not vertical. They are the oblique diagram of myth. There are no walls. Instead, we have the dematerialized performance of thought.)

Beyond thought, there are ladders, children's toys and what all this is and what may befall.

(And yet, poetry reveals the following:

the lyre and the butcher's knife coexist.

We are / the savory guests / the gutted minds / the amputated seekers / the unwelcome strangers / the slaughtered servants / at the inhuman feast of tyranny.

Learn to undie or perish again at dawn.)

Excursus

Six decades of hard living have brought us to this: a raw foreknowledge of what is at stake. In which context? In every context. When? Whenever matter and consciousness meet in biped tapestries of ideas in motion; when sentience and mind converge; when imaginative speculation and historical determination variously diverge; when institutional oppression and private hope collide; when first and last things hang precariously in the balance. On the way to our becoming human, life remains the hypnotic siren and the trap. On the way to (our) becoming human, the paths are many though the pattern is universal enough. Thus we pass through the inhuman, the dehumanized and the dehumanizing, the nascently human and the posthumously nostalgic for the human. (As we pass through or watch others pass through, everything changes: both the address and the substance of the human changes. Every

«I» must find its door anew. After all, what is “human” is not a solid but, instead, a tumultuous current.)

To reach this protean humanness, we are pommelled and ground to dust then rise to walk again a thousand times through an open door. On the other side, there is a message, or a question, or an illusion, or a demand, or a sentence, or an invitation. Whoever walks through that door must respond—rightly or wrongly. No matter: we must walk through. It is time itself—the most intimate and therefore most transcendent substance of life—which leads us there. (And even the most arrogant among us are disarmed as they walk through that open door.)

We may choose to comprehend, both intellectually and compassionately. Or we may choose a different way closer to the drowning pools of bruised memory or to the yoke of indifference and hate, which is fear hardened and deified. In all things human, we become precisely what we have always been, i.e., the sum of every subtracted certainty, the sum of every exhausted truth, which means also that we become what we deny.

We are all that survives. We are all that survives in the negativity of every «I». We are the stakes themselves, and life is the universe now refracted, now reflected onto the radiant, damaged dermis of mind and skin. We are the futurity of the past and the remembered tomorrow.

We are the present danger.

Who we are is in fact who we are not.

Other voices:

“Aubade”

«The mind blanks at the glare. Not in remorse
– The good not done, the love not given, time
Torn off unused – nor wretchedly because
An only life can take so long to climb
Clear of its wrong beginnings, and may never;
But at the total emptiness for ever,
The sure extinction that we travel to
And shall be lost in always. Not to be here,

Not to be anywhere,
And soon; nothing more terrible, nothing more true».
(Philip Larkin: "Aubade" (excerpt); vide complete digital version:
<<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems-and-poets/poems/detail/48422>>)

"Autopsicografia"

«O poeta é um fingidor.
Finge tão completamente
Que chega a fingir que é dor
A dor que deveras sente.

E os que lêem o que escreve,
Na dor lida sentem bem,
Não as duas que ele teve,
Mas só a que eles não têm.

E assim nas calhas de roda
Gira, a entreter a razão,
Esse comboio de corda
Que se chama coração».

(Fernando Pessoa, *Ficções do Interlúdio*, 1914-1935,
ed. Fernando Cabral Martins, Lisbon: Assírio & Alvim e Herdeiros
de Fernando Pessoa, 1998, p. 94.)

Qu'est-ce donc la vérité ? Une armée mobile de métaphores,
de métonymies, d'anthropomorphismes, bref une somme de
corrélations humaines qui ont été poétiquement et rhétorique-
ment amplifiées, transposées, enjolivées, et qui, après un long
usage, semblent à un peuple stables, canoniques et obligatoires
: les vérités sont des illusions dont on a oublié qu'elle le sont,
des métaphores qui ont été usées et vidées de leur force
sensible, des pièces de monnaie dont l'effigie s'est effacée et
qui ne comptent plus comme monnaie mais comme métal.
(Friedrich Nietzsche, *Vérité et mensonge au sens extra-moral*, trans.
German/French Nils Gascuel, Actes Sud, 1997, pp. 16-17.)

FRAGMENT (x)

Prose serves the illusion of linear reason in all things written and read, the syntactical forwardness of thought, the cognitive chisel and the mountain ahead. It wants both the root and the canopy, beginning and end, origin and destiny, birth and eternity, Abraham, Isaac and God serving the same bloodshed, linearity defined by positive knowledge (punctuated by dread): the dread of incomplete truth, the elusive nature of certainty, the reclusive source of being. It wants finality. It breeds its own feeling of Faustian mastery.

Poetry serves / the presence of mana / the flight patterns of words /. It is a state of turbulence on an expansive earth / the brief science of incomplete birth / the seism of interrogative thirst /. It is a spiral, not a square. It quickens against stasis and neutralized myth. It is the futurity of becoming, not the fixity of being. It is chiral with the earth. / It bleeds into time / It breeds the cognitive potency of rhyme /. It is discovery outside the rhetoric of power. It frees us from Neolithic vision. It rebuilds Babel's tower. It is art's *favela* outside discursive grids. It is a crime against nature: the nature of maps and eschatological scripts. There is no privileged history in / this odyssey of metaphorical drift / the meteorological lift of undone ontology / sentience-drenched meanings in an ocean of awe /.

Between prose and poetry, there is a mediatory power. It detects / inchoate feeling / the dematerialized performance of thought /. It crosses a border; it intuits a path. It protects life in the *poiesis* of mind.

Other voices:

And thunderbolt steers the totality of things. (Heraclitus, Fragment 64, in *Fragments, A Text and Translation with Commentary* by T. M. Robinson, Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996, p. 43.)

FRAGMENT: (xi)

Which trope applies best to the ~~human~~: synecdoche or metaphor?

The lizard's tail or the noisy tenants in your liver?

The fragments of a mirror or the meta-door between ribbon and river?

Other voices:

«Vejo os entes vivos vestidos que se cruzam,
Vejo os cães que também existem,
E tudo isto me pesa como uma condenação ao degrêdo,
E tudo isto é estrangeiro, como tudo.)

Vivi, estudei, amei, e até cri,
E hoje não há mendigo que eu não inveje só por não ser eu.
Olho a cada um os andrajos e as chagas e a mentira,
E penso: talvez nunca vivesses nem estudasses nem amasses
[nem cresses
(porque é possível fazer a realidade de tudo isso sem fazer
[nada disso);
Talvez tenhas existido apenas, como um lagarto a quem
[cortam o rabo,
E que é rabo para àquem do lagarto remexidamente».
("Tabacaria" [excerpt], in *Álvaro de Campos, Livro de Versos*, critical
ed. Teresa Rita Lopes, Lisbon: Editorial Estampa, 1997, p. 238.)

Il lui en coûte déjà assez d'admettre que l'insecte ou l'oiseau
perçoivent un monde tout autre que le sien et que la question
de savoir laquelle des deux perceptions du monde est la plus
correcte est totalement dépourvue de signification, puisque
cette mesure requerrait déjà le critère de la *perception*
correcte, c'est-à-dire un critère absent. (Friedrich Nietzsche,
Vérité et mensonge au sens extra-moral, trans. German/French Nils
Gascuel, Actes Sud, 1997, p. 22.)

The more I examine both the structure of poetry and the structure of human relations outside of poetry, the more I become convinced that this is the ‘basic’ figure of speech, and that it occurs in many modes besides that of the formal trope. (Kenneth Burke, *The Philosophy of Literary Form: Studies in Symbolic Action*, University of California Press, 1974, p. 26. The excerpt refers to Burke’s understanding of the trope *synecdoche*.)

«Havia no meu tempo um rio chamado Tejo
que se estendia ao Sol na linha do horizonte.
Ia de ponta a ponta, e aos seus olhos parecia
exactamente um espelho
porque, do que sabia,
só um espelho com isso se parecia.

////////////////////////////////////

Descaem-se-me as pálpebras e, com isso,
(tão simples isso)
não há olhos, nem rio, nem varandas, nem nada».
(António Gedeão, *Obra Poética*, Lisbon: Edições João Sá da Costa,
2001, p. 179.)

FRAGMENT (xii)

A fine poet says: poetry teaches us to *be*.

Is it to be or rather to be/come, or to be undone, or to subtract from every ontological sum?

Is it to be in a world of changeless quiddity: / to speak solely from the center of words (intact and unbruised) / to live in oneness with meaning /?

Is it to be the seeming image of platonic Forms; to seize Logos with the bluntness of skin?

Did being once dwell in us whole, or is it rationed in the mind as nettles and thorns?

And what are we becoming that being could fear, deny, forget, or judge lacking?

Poetry is not the permanent address of ~~being~~. It is not holy or static or eternal or blest.

Poetry is and isn't / what it brings to the page / while making language undress / when bound to vines of desire and despair / when expressing what language can't be or repair /.

Poetry finds / negative insight within declarative certainty / the cliff at the edge of rhyme /.

Poetry's the rift between the mind at rest and the mind on fire.

Other voices:

The connotation of the word [claritas], Stephen said, is rather vague. (...) I thought he [Aquinas] might mean that *claritas* is the artistic discovery and representation of the divine purpose in anything or a force of generalization which would make the

esthetic image a universal one, make it outshine its proper conditions. But that is literary talk. I understand it so. When you have apprehended that basket as one thing and have then analysed it according to its form and apprehended it as a thing you make the only synthesis which is logically and esthetically possible. You see that it is that thing and no other thing. The radiance of which he speaks in the scholastic *quidditas*, the *whatness* of a thing. This supreme quality is felt by the artist when the esthetic image is first conceived in his imagination. The mind in that mysterious instant Shelley likened beautifully to a fading coal. The instant wherein that supreme quality of beauty, the dear radiance of the esthetic image, is apprehended luminously by the mind which has been arrested by its wholeness and fascinated by its harmony in the luminous silent stasis of esthetic pleasure, a spiritual state very like to that cardiac condition which the Italian physiologist Luigi Galvani, using a phrase almost as beautiful as Shelley's, called the enchantment of the heart. (James Joyce, *The Complete Novels of James Joyce*, Ware, Hertfordshire: Wordsworth Editions, 2012, pp. 315-16.)

FRAGMENT (xiii)

Being: atoms *become* babelic communities of unassuaged seekers and shared unrest ...

Mind: evolution *become* dangerous, turbulent and self-aware ...

Language: the larynx honed to a ladder (we're still born underground), the mind torn into syntax, flesh folded into time, silence sieved through being that is neither here nor there ...

Life: time become toil, revelation and, unaccountably, care ...

(How does embodied consciousness interpret the contradictions it has so thoroughly laid bare?)

FRAGMENT (xiv): for Mohammed and Elmira

Together—yet alone—we watch the sea. We rightly call it the infinite finitely seen.

However, we know the infinite is elsewhere. (But elsewhere is not a place: it is a consequence of our being unwhole.)

What we do:

*we knowingly misname
what we feign to know: we speak of oceans
while swimming in the mind's glass bowl.*

We've framed agon and climax with words we stole.

Being incommensurable with embodied consciousness, we make the sea fit into our thoughts and our thoughts fit into our brain.

*Meanwhile we hear music in Babel. It's / rain falling on our
bruised years / the sublime democracy of sound / the chorus of
sentience in the boundless audition of being /.*

*We hear despite the empire of sight; we understand beyond
empirical night.*

What we still do:

we exhaust the internal sea of routine truths. We repeat the peristalsis of diminished speech.

*Learn to undo habitual pathos and depleted catharsis.
Hear, think and see with pilgrims at twilight.*

Excursus: some premises

*In the West, each thing we name begins at once to disappear. As we name,
an endless spiral of accelerated decrepitude of all things touched, worn,*

used and desired is unleashed. We are submerged in our own material and symbolic detritus. We carry our metaphysical bellies around our necks. We exhaust our own creativity in the déjà-vu of newness. We age quickly in the depleted atmosphere of commodified soul.

In the East, which I am very slowly coming to know—, i.e., outside the West's media-managed, xenophobic distortions, State-driven misinformation and weaponized rhetoric—, I glimpse a different mode of remembrance, a different relationship with time and space, a different heart within humanity's collective darkness.

It is possible to befriend what we do not yet know or comprehend. It is possible to invent the in-between, i.e., the inward turn of being towards life's infinite Tower of Babel, where each one of us can learn to be both porous neighbor and hospitable stranger.

Other voices:

[He used to say that] thinking is (an instance of the) sacred disease [and that] sight is deceptive. (Heraclitus, Fragment 46, in *Fragments, A Text and Translation with Commentary* by T. M. Robinson, Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996, p. 33.)

“Ode 2180”

«From these depths depart towards heaven;
may your soul be happy, journey joyfully.
You have escaped from the city full of fear and trembling;
happily become a resident of the Abode of Security.
If the body's image has gone, await the image-maker; if the
body is utterly ruined, become all soul.
If your face has become saffron pale through death, become a
dweller among tulip beds and Judas trees.
If the doors of repose have been barred to you, come, depart
by way of the roof and the ladder.
If you are alone from Friends and companions, by the help of
God become a saheb-qeran [lord of happy circumstance].
If you have been secluded from water and bread, like bread
become the food of the souls, and so become!» (Jalal al Din
Rumi, *Mystical Poems of Rumi 2, Second Selection, Poems 201-400*,

trans. A. J. Arberry, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999;
vide digital version:< http://www.rumi.org.uk/mystical_poems.htm>)

«Não era só ser isto que eu queria ser – era mais que isto, o Deus-isto!» (Fernando Pessoa, “Ode Marítima,” in *Álvaro de Campos, Livro de Versos*, critical ed. Teresa Rita Lopes, Lisbon: Editorial Estampa, 1997, p. 116.)

Nuestro tiempo se nos presenta impuro, cargado de agonías resistentes. La batalla es doble: luchamos contra un tiempo que, también se divierte con nosotros, se revierte contra nosotros, se invierte en nosotros, se subvierte desde nosotros, se convierte en nombre nuestro.

* La coexistencia de todos los niveles históricos en México es sólo el signo externo de una decisión subconsciente de esta tierra y de esta gente: todo tiempo debe ser mantenido. ¿Por qué? Porque ningún tiempo mexicano se ha cumplido aún. Porque la historia de México es una serie de “Edenes subvertidos” a los que, como Ramón López Velarde, quisiéramos a un mismo tiempo regresar y olvidar.

* Las ruinas norteamericanas son mecánicas, son ruinas de promesas hechas y cumplidas y luego abandonadas por el tiempo y al tiempo en enormes cúmulos de chatarra, cementerios de automóviles, ciudades asfixiadas y fábricas renegridas.

* Mientras el progreso norteamericano ha producido basura, el retraso mexicano ha producido monumentos. Las ruinas de México son naturales: son ruinas del origen, de proyectos vitales prometidos y luego abandonados o destruidos por otros proyectos, naturales o humanos. (Carlos Fuentes, “Kierkegaard en la Zona Rosa,” in *Tiempo mexicano*, Editorial J. Mortiz, 1971.)

FRAGMENT (xv)

Between reason and the hearsay of liars, we've chosen the short leash of fear.

Between the nervous system's sympathetic script and the resources of mind, why not choose instead the play of being in creative, autonomous flight?

FRAGMENT (xvi)

The universe speaks with our name for a moment.

Cosmic time is speechless and far.

The self is an atoll that rises and falls with the selfless flux of atoms.

Memory begins and ends with / the prosody of lungs / the haiku of consciousness / the illusory empire of neurons crushed in a broken jar /.

Excursus

I confess my uncertain understanding of the poem quoted below by the Portuguese poet António Gedeão (1906-1997), which is an unacceptable state for one who has dared to translate it into English. (It is cold comfort for me to admit that such is the drift of intentionality which regularly occurs between the original text and its translation, a drift which is inherent in the grounded groundlessness of all things human.)

What does the Poet mean in the eight lines which comprise “Flores de cera”? Does the glass case in which the metaphorical wax flowers have been placed represent the artificial divide between feeling and thought (and their mutually agonistic relation)? Does the Poet, like a scientist, examine under glass the hybrid specimen that is his own fateful being-into-language? Is poetry that kind of experimentation in the disheveled laboratory of the modern self? If this is so, then do these metaphorical flowers represent an enduring consequence of mature self-knowledge or is poetry a transitional state for the Poet? If the latter conjecture holds true, then towards what ulterior certainty does the Poet seek to move? Is this inner dichotomy a sign of unsurmountable division or proof of the absence of a potentially redemptive experience of psychic reunification: the fateful awareness of insuperable alienation? Does the Poet write these lines as they appeared to him or rather does he formulate an implicit critique of language, i.e., the impossibility of communicating to others what one means, because all language, as an evolutionary structure of the mind, is also conditioned by the epistemological sweat shop of illusion and death? For the Poet, does

poetry occur on the plane of social experience and quotidian sociality or rather on a discreetly speculative one where historical observation and the raw nerve of our existential agon meet and collide without ulterior pacification? Is knowledge, as it is structured in the science of verse, sufficient in itself for the emancipatory project it has been made to bear in modernity? Is poetry necessarily destructive of illusion or rather does it liberate being from the equivocal nature of the unmediated content of mind? Can poesis ever surpass the enchainment of our agonistic being-into-language, which both recalls and subverts the mythic wellspring of modernity?

Does the glass case suggest the claustrophobic human condition whereby observation and selfhood, understanding and fate struggle to assert their dominance in an otherwise divided territory of being?

What would happen if the wax flowers were at last fully exposed to the earth's atmosphere?

Other voices:

“Flores de Cera”

«Chamei o meu ser que pensa
para ralar com o que sente.
Sempre que os ponho em presença
Sorrio, piedosamente.

Sorriso, quem te perdera!
Renda que aos lábios assoma.
Raminhos de flores de cera
coberto por uma redoma». (António Gedeão, “Flores de cera,” in
Obra Poética, Lisbon: João Sá da Costa, 2001, p. 27.)

«Kame warauru
Yoru no kori no
Nezame kana»

«The sound of a water jar

Cracking on this icy night

As I lie awake». (A haiku, in Makoto Ueda, *Matsuo Basho*, Japanese transliteration/English translation, Tokyo; New York; London: Kodansha International, 1982, p. 54.)

When you and I talk to one another, we not only know the contents of our own mind but we also have a sense of the content of what the other person is thinking and how they are reacting. We have, so to speak, a sense of the social expectations of the situation and the kinds of ideas that the conversation brings forth in the colleague with whom we are communicating. During the past year several important studies have localized aspects of this function in the cerebral cortex. First, Rebecca Saxe has found that there is a specific area in the brain at the junction between the temporal and parietal lobes that encodes aspects of the theory of mind. It becomes active when a person entertains ideas about another person's possible responses to our actions. This new finding extends a series of important findings from Rizzolatti's group in Italy which first showed that there are certain cells in the premotor areas of parietal cortex of the monkey that respond not only when a monkey picks up a peanut but also when the monkey sees another monkey or a human being pick up a peanut. These cells are called mirror cells because they respond not only to personal action but in an imitative way to the action of others. In addition to showing a cellular basis for a theory of mind, these cells also illustrate that the motor systems have cognitive function. Imaging experiments by Ramachandran have shown that this area is present in people, and that it appears to be disturbed in patients with autism. (Eric R. Kandel, "A Neuroscience Sampling," in *Edge*, 05/III/07: <<https://www.edge.org/conversation/a-neuroscience-sampling>>)

FRAGMENT (xvii): Elegy in Six Exhalations

a. Listen:

everything, absolutely everything from the cradle to the scythe's final incision on your flesh, every day, whether spent daily in unsated revision, or soaked in fear, or with blood running down your chin, every moment, both measured by the clock or by the hour hands of intravenous loss, every encounter, every breath, every desire, every hope, every promise is illusion.

The "I" inside the carnival of words, the troops of savage verbs, reason herded by the fanatic's ruse: all these are the bait of illusion.

You and I are nowhere. You and I have nothing. You and I were force-fed lies disguised as certainties. You and I participate in our own demise. You and I have thought illusory thoughts. You and I lie beneath trees which bear no fruit, nor shade, nor demonstrate a natural link of life to life.

b. Now we are illusions minus the illusions. We are the unrehearsed chorus of life. We are words bereft of totality. We are beings bought and sold at the marketplace of life.

You and I have raged at cruelty on the short page of mortality.

c. Cruelty is no illusion. It's a knife sharpened / on the illusory homeland of self / in the illusory cosmic plot / on our bones pitted by grief / beneath the hammer of indifference / in the viscera of our species' collective lot /.

d. Where is compassion on the stunted stage of life?

e. We have mouths, but our mouths are illusion. We do not speak. Something speaks through us. Something we have never met, nor will ever know, speaks through us. It is silence, but we are silence minus peace. How can the speaker hear what the speaker does not know?

How can I tell you I missed you already in the womb?

f. I will love you / beyond blind sorrow / beyond the bitterness of an orphaned mind /.

FRAGMENT (xviii)

/ To love / is an incomplete verb.

The body is a polymorphic apprentice. Sentience guides it. Eros (traversed by the shadow of death) now grazes, now graces it.

So childhood leaves us to the exigent lessons of desire (the unknowable *thou* at your lips) and loss (the afterlife of impermanence).

FRAGMENT (xix)

They want your life, and they will kill you for it in a thousand ways.

**(World history: / the long banquet of tyrants / the bankrolled
administrators of your destruction /.)**

FRAGMENT (xx)

The teacher says to the student:

You need not be afraid as you acquire greater self-knowledge. You must live by and by at the edge of yourself. Where you are the most vulnerable, there is where you will learn.

(What is the difference between the speaker and the listener in the limitless neoteny of life?

The teacher remembers what the listener does not yet recall: luminous uncertainty and the insatiable biota of time.)

Excursus

The privilege of being a teacher, according to this writer's manner of thinking, relates to the following: the act and art of teaching cultivates the daily encounter with one's fallibility. It is a recurrent reminder of the insufficiency of our seemingly ordered ideas in the oceanic agitation of the classroom. It promotes the ongoing humanization of thought and being alongside the questing mind of those younger than ourselves. The teacher can be a modest gatekeeper on youth's way to the open terrain of the imagination and discovery. Teacher and student enact every day the phylogenetic history of our species' visionary abundance and cognitive vigor.

Other voices:

Lifetime is a child playing, moving pieces in a backgammon (?) game; kingly power (or: the kingdom) is in the hands of a child. (The) way of writing (is) straight and crooked. (Heraclitus, Fragment 52, in *Fragments, A Text and Translation with Commentary* by T. M. Robinson, Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996, p. 37.)

La peor de las educaciones potencia la humanidad del sujeto con su condicionamiento, mientras que un ilusorio limbo silvestre incondicionado no haría más que bloquearla indefinidamente. Según señaló el psicoanalista y antropólogo Géza Roheim, «es una paradoja intentar conocer la naturaleza humana no condicionada pues la esencia de la naturaleza humana es estar condicionada». De aquí la importancia de reflexionar sobre el mejor modo de tal condicionamiento.

El hombre llega a serlo a través del aprendizaje. Pero ese aprendizaje humanizador tiene un rasgo distintivo que es lo que más cuenta de él. Si el hombre fuese solamente un animal que aprende, podría bastarle aprender de su propia experiencia y del trato con las cosas. Sería un proceso muy largo que obligaría a cada ser humano a empezar prácticamente desde cero, pero en todo caso no hay nada imposible en ello. De hecho, buena parte de nuestros conocimientos más elementales los adquirimos de esa forma, a base de frotarnos grata o dolorosamente con las realidades del mundo que nos rodea. Pero si no tuviésemos otro modo de aprendizaje, aunque quizá podríamos sobrevivir físicamente todavía nos iba a faltar lo que específicamente humanizador tiene el proceso educativo. Porque lo propio del hombre no es tanto el mero aprender como el aprender de otros hombres, ser enseñado por ellos. Nuestro maestro no es el mundo, las cosas, los sucesos naturales, ni siquiera ese conjunto de técnicas y rituales que llamamos «cultura» sino la vinculación intersubjetiva con otras conciencias. (Fernando Savater, *El valor de educar*, Barcelona: Ariel, 1997, pp. 14-15.)

FRAGMENT (xxi)

What is the meaning of sentience / in the denuded universe of *mana*-less presence? / in the aimless hub of digital neutrality? /

Where is the final harbor of thought now if not brought by the muses' stepdaughters of technical doing?

How shall we sense the resonance of interconnected living in the resected heart of Quantity?

How will the mind grow in compassionate resistance?

When will technê and being speak with the same lips of / homologous empowerment / mutual unfolding / creative relationship / complicitous enhancement under one ethical sky /?

Other voices:

Our lives, whether we know it or not and whether we relish the fact or bewail it, are works of art. To our lives as the art of living demands, we must—just as artists must—set ourselves challenges that are difficult to confront up close, targets that are well beyond our reach, and standards of excellence that seem far above our ability to match. We need to attempt the impossible. (...) The product of self-creation, the processes operated by the art of life, is supposed to be the ‘identity’ of the creator. Given the oppositions that self-creation struggles in vain to reconcile, and the interplay between the constantly changing world and similarly unstable self-definitions of the individuals trying to catch up with the changing conditions, identity can’t be internally consistent, nor can it at any point exude an air of finality. (...) Identity is perpetually *in statu nascendi*” (Zygmunt Bauman, *Does Ethics Have a Chance in a World of Consumers?*, Cambridge, Mass; London: Harvard University Press, 2008, pp. 17, 18.)

FRAGMENT (xxii)

[...] and we are all projections of unloving gods or holograms of inhuman codes.

[Yet] (?) the shadow cast by you and me is born from light they do not know.

FRAGMENT (xxiii)

Live in such a way that reason and being act as one in you.

Excursus

It is through the agon of our unstable, uncertain destinies as experienced in the encounter between obdurate circumstance and porous intentionality, between our fears and our potential openness to the magnitude of life and between our utopian longings and the destructiveness perpetrated by the degraded imagination on thought and action—an agon that must be understood in light of the ongoing fallibility of our actions in the collective heart of history—that being may still and, in fact, does attain a tenuous clearing on which to grow.

Other voices:

[Heraclitus said that] what opposes unites, [and that the finest attunement stems from things bearing in opposite directions, and that all things come about by strife]. (Heraclitus, Fragment 8?, in *Fragments, A Text and Translation with Commentary* by T. M. Robinson, Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996, p. 15.)

«Não me importo com as rimas. Raras vezes
Há duas árvores iguais, uma ao lado da outra.
Penso e escrevo como as flores têm cor
Mas com menos perfeição no meu modo de exprimir-me
Porque me falta a simplicidade divina
De ser todo só o meu exterior». (Poem XIV (excerpt), in
Fernando Pessoa, *Poesia de Alberto Caeiro*, ed. Fernando Cabral
Martins, Richard Zenith, Porto: Assírio & Alvim, 2014, p.47.)

In human affairs, there must be some experience or other which, as an event which has actually occurred, might suggest that man has the quality or power of being the *cause* and (since his actions are supposed to be those of a being endowed with freedom) the *author* of his own improvement. (Excerpt from “Is the Human Race Continually Improving?,” in Immanuel Kant, *An*

Answer to the Question: 'What is Enlightenment?', trans. H. B. Nisbet, London: Penguin Books, 2009, p. 74.)

[While speaking of Socratic propositions concerning moral autonomy and/or active complicity with tyranny, Hannah Arendt affirms, recalling the Athenian's teachings:] "It is better to be in disunity with the whole world than with oneself." For if I am not at unity with myself, a conflict arises that is unbearable. In other words, it's the idea of contradiction in moral values, and it's still authoritative for the categorical imperative in Kant. This idea presupposes that, in actual fact, I live with myself, and am so to speak two-in-one, so that I then say, "I will not do this or that." For I do not want to live with somebody who has done this. (...)

Now living with yourself means, of course, talking to yourself. And this talking-to-yourself is basically thinking – a kind of thinking that isn't technical, but a kind of which anybody is capable. So the presupposition behind the idea is: I can converse with myself. And so, there may be situations in which I become at disunity with the world to such an extent that I can only fall back on conversing with myself (... .) (Hannah Arendt, *The Last Interview and Other Conversations*, Brooklyn; London: Melville House, 2013, pp. 57-58.)

FRAGMENT (xxiv)

The irrational in the human world:

the *demonic* in the political
the *fanatical* in the religious
the *neurotic* in the captured self.

Personal history: the ongoing dialogue between the demons of childhood and the social agon. History is the clearing of thought and action under a dark sky.

World history: / the unrealizable dialogue between reason and fear / the epiphanies of tyrants /.

Either we live by a code of / unhelmeted language / the humanist's open letter to beloved strangers / or else by the code of / weaponized feeling / the armed monologue of empire /.

(Empire does not question its founding logic. It is empire because it does not question but rather seeks to speak for all. It removes our mouth. We are the fields its weapons plow.)

You have the direst freedom to choose now: to rise laughing into the chorus of babelic life or to fall again into the / demented / deadly / tautological fire.

You don't have the freedom to live unharmed.

FRAGMENT (xxv): On Knowledge and Thought

“Sôbolos rios que vão”

«Que foi daquele cantar
das gentes tão celebrado?
Porque o deixava de usar?
Pois sempre ajuda a passar
qualquer trabalho passado.

Canta o caminhante ledado
no caminho trabalhoso,
por entre o espesso arvoredado;
e, de noite, o temeroso,
cantando, refreia o medo.

Canta o preso docemente
os duros grilhões tocando;
canta o segador contente;
e o trabalhador, cantando,
o trabalho menos sente».

(See Luís de Camões’s poetic recreation of Psalm 137;
transcribed above are *quintilhas* #26, #27 and # 28)

Premise: what we apprehend as being contemporaneous in Socrates is not his knowledge but, instead, his thought—sentience made self-aware, evolution’s front gate.

Knowledge is time-sensitive. It is circumscribed by chaos and finitude. It must heed the exigencies of knowledge-formation, knowledge-organization and knowledge-transmission. Knowledge is a solid.

Thought is also time-sensitive. (All things human exist under pressure.) But thought is interstitial. It cleaves to the folds of intemporal evolution. It is eternity’s first (only?) draft written on the skin.

Thought is the art of neurons in perpetual motion. It is the travelogue of structured matter and turbulent consciousness. Thought is the thesaurus of their offspring. It is intelligence learning to sail on an ocean of apparent drought. It is a deeper here-and-now: the here-and-now of *mind-caught* sensation.

It is synonymous with life becoming being.

Excursus

The great lyric and epic Portuguese poet Luís de Camões (1525?-1580), in his highly complex poetic paraphrase of Psalm 137 (KJV), “By the Rivers of Babylon ...,” abundantly reveals to the author of this volume what the great modern Portuguese poet and critic Jorge de Sena (1919-1978) affirms with his characteristically profound powers of discernment in his numerous critical studies (as well as in his own poetic and narrative creations) dedicated to the sixteenth-century poet and, in particular, with regard to the poetic thought of this Mannerist poet. (A brief excerpt of one of Sena’s critical studies on Camões is offered below.)

In the three of a total of seventy-three “quintilhas” belonging to the original text, presented in the epigraph to this Fragment, the reader can readily detect what Sena—in his pioneering discussion of Mannerist poetics—defines as its specific aesthetic-philosophical conceptualization, the interweaving of such conceptualization with the complexly dynamic state of self-awareness of the Mannerist poet vis-à-vis his historical circumstance and autobiographical path and, ultimately, its incubatory modernity. This reader experiences the agonistic performance of thought present in Camões’s text (reminiscent of Sena’s luminous discussion of Mannerist poetics as one of “angustiada liberdade” (“anguished freedom,” [our translation]) and “vulnerability” (“desamparo,” [our translation])). Such thought enacts the strenuous performance of mind which must now respond to the inclemency begot by an emerging modern, authorial self-consciousness. New demands are in the process of being placed upon the poetic practice of signification because the author—as human agent in the social agon—now manifests a problematized subjectivity. Consequently, new signifying practices are created within the canon of established avenues of expression which the poem recalls and subverts, discovers and enacts, confronts and discloses.

Thus, the Mannerist voice is one that conveys an emerging kind of poetry occurring at the limits of semantic rest and stable social order. It is as if the poetic text understood itself to be now writhing prosody, now hemorrhaged clarity. It is as if poetic textuality itself could progress solely under extreme duress. Henceforth, such duress becomes both the source and, ultimately, the self-realization of poetic feeling as it is actualized in the poem itself. The reader and the authorial voice share a common site of reflexive intensity.

Both sense the hitherto unregistered free fall of consciousness through the harsh atmosphere of mind. A millennia-long body of knowledge no longer fully guides and provides; thought has become sicut a vulnerable pilgrim on the way to the rewriting of mind. Therefore, the reader learns to recognize the underlying state of duress of language as it is forged in real time, i.e., where history and consciousness, collective memory and personal agon converge/collide to expose a state of radical self-doubt. Moreover, it is self-doubt now become a poetics in itself; it is the poetic text now become the instantiation of the poet's deeply informed and concomitantly raw recognition of his social and existential agon. It is an agon which occurs on the outskirts of tradition-dense discursive decorum. Thus, the reader can experience, alongside the poetic voice, the vulnerability, the disquiet and the modernity-tinged intimation of solitude which permeate this poetry.

The kinship this author feels in relation to Mannerist poetics and its agonistic meditation on "knowledge" and "thought" has obliquely informed this Fragment.

We quote the following excerpt taken from one of Jorge de Sena's seminal studies of Mannerist poetics entitled "Camões e os maneiristas" for the interested reader:

No vácuo aberto entre o medievalismo que vem morrer no Renascimento, e a idade moderna, que nascerá, oculta, nas vascas curvilinearmente geométricas do Barroco, o maneirismo e uma angustiada liberdade. E daí que, soltos na desgobernada amplidão de um mundo que geograficamente se encurva em definitivo até aos antípodas, e que socialmente se estratifica numa hierarquia unitária, eles usem do arsenal artístico que os antecessores lhes legaram, mas para dizerem outras coisas. É como se todo um arsenal de estilo fosse chamado a *significar*, e não, como sua função fora, a demonstrar e ornar uma visão aristocrática do mundo. Daí que, na angústia de um desamparo que, para altos espíritos, não serão as censuras, as inquisições e as intolerâncias (católicas, anglicanas, calvinistas ou luteranas) que poderão suprir, eles tendam todos para um religiosismo dramático, bem diverso do que tradicionalmente se agregava às novas ou velhas «medidas», e para uma nostalgia política de mundo heróico e medieval, de que igualmente são expressão o historicismo de

Camões ou a fantasia de Torquato Tasso (1544-1595), que não sem razão morreu louco, como aquele terá morrido de pouco menos que fome. (Jorge de Sena, “Camões e os maneiristas,” in *Trinta Anos de Camões 1948-1978 (Estudos Camonianos e Correlatos)*, Volume 1, Lisbon: Edições 70, 1980, p. 53.)

Other voices:

One would never discover the limits of soul, should one traverse every road—so deep a measure does it possess. (Heraclitus, Fragment 45, in *Fragments, A Text and Translation with Commentary by T. M. Robinson*, Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996, p. 33.)

«Procuro despir-me do que aprendi,
Procuro esquecer-me do modo de lembrar que me ensinaram,
E raspar a tinta com que me pintaram os sentidos,
Desencaixotar as minhas emoções verdadeiras,
Desembrulhar-me e ser eu, não Alberto Caeiro,
Mas um animal humano que a Natureza produziu». (Poem XLVI (excerpt), in Fernando Pessoa, *Poesia de Alberto Caeiro*, ed. Fernando Cabral Martins, Richard Zenith, Porto: Assírio & Alvim, 2014, pp. 82-83.)

All of existence and totality must be made finite in our minds so that it conforms to our nature and our way of thinking and feeling. Only then will we say that we understand something, or enjoy it. (126)

The mind may perceive the seed, so to speak, of a relation which would have a harmony beyond the mind's power to comprehend or experience once the relation is fully developed. When this happens, we call the impression sublime; it is the most wonderful bestowed on the mind of man. (127) (*Goethe on Science, An Anthology of Goethe's Scientific Writings*, ed. and intro. Jeremy Naydler, foreword Henri Bortoft, Edinburgh: Floris Books, 1996.)

FRAGMENT (xxvi)

Today we train for a profession.

(Education no longer lifts us through and beyond the irrational: it grafts us onto the inhuman Grid.)

Today few have a calling, or have heard their calling, or cognize the hollowness of routine thought.

(Yet the world still wants beings who have rescued from regimented mind the horizon of authentic calling.)

We are born with the mission of understanding and compassion.

The rest is the peristaltic turbulence of managed hearts.

Excursus

It is a sad thing to recognize the generalized failure of pedagogical culture at work today. Between teacher and student there reign a distrust, a stultifying distance, a mutual awkwardness in mental disposition, a discordant turn of mind from the truly communicative, the authentically questioning and a deeply felt participation both in the refinement of thought and the enlightening of knowledge. Instead, we witness the impoverishment of thought itself. We watch as our youth convert to servants to the assembly line of congealed routines of thought, devitalized parcels of so-called knowledge and the severely truncated neural joy once felt with regard to the experience of intellectual discovery henceforth degraded into test-driven, scripted responses in service to the world's present-day inhuman Grid.

This is a source of profound loss for the attentive student and teacher. Together they nowadays form a somewhat hapless couple. Yet together they may also conspire to overthrow their own stunted spiritual and mental powers. Together they may seek to regain creative autonomy of the self and a renewed discernment of the subject-world nexus by way of which a renewal of the senses and conceptual potency can take place.

This nexus is also the territory of poetry, which reveals to our individual apprehension of the real the boundless horizon of fresh perception and ultimately marginless, speculative empiricism. Poetry safeguards the infinitely ontological state of the in-between without which history would be Grid alone and life an unbearable condition.

Human beings are between the scripted and the unscriptable, between the enforced routine and the liberatory breach of contract, between the observationally astute and the eschatologically indeterminate, between the mechanistic efficiency of the automaton and the reticulated complexity of engaged-in circumstantiality which every embodied consciousness brings to life.

Life—because it is, like the wind, both a cause and an effect, both system and organism, both present in its action and absent in final form, both part of the earth's memory and bereft of longevity—is (always) at stake.

We are sicut life.

Life demands of us a task and a mission. Above all, it warms to the guiding vision of understanding and compassion, i.e., those twinned sources of intellectual and passionate growth.

Other voices:

Dans les sociétés de discipline, on n'arrêtait pas de recommencer (de l'école à la caserne, de la caserne à l'usine), tandis que dans les sociétés de contrôle on n'en finit jamais avec rien, l'entreprise, la formation, le service étant les états métastables et coexistants d'une même modulation, comme d'un déformateur universel. (...)

L'étude socio-technique des mécanismes de contrôle, saisis à leur aurore, devrait être catégorielle et décrire ce qui est déjà en train de s'installer à la place des milieux d'enfermement disciplinaires, dont tout le monde annonce la crise. (...) Dans le régime des écoles: les formes de contrôle continu, et l'action de la formation permanente sur l'école, l'abandon correspondant de toute recherche à l'Université, l'introduction de l'«entreprise» à tous les niveaux de scolarité. (Gilles Deleuze, *Pourparlers* 1972-1990, Paris: Les Editions de Minuit, 2003, pp. 243, 246-247.)

The mind-making industry is really a product of the last hundred years. It has developed at such a pace, and assumed such varied forms, that it has outgrown our understanding and our control. Our current discussion of the “media” seems to suffer from severe theoretical limitations. Newsprint, films, television, public relations tend to be evaluated separately, in terms of their specific technologies, conditions, and possibilities. Every new branch of the industry starts off a new crop of theories. Hardly anyone seems to be aware of the phenomenon as a whole: the industrialization of the human mind. This is a process that cannot be understood by a mere examination of its machinery. (Hans Magnus Enzensberger, “The Industrialization of the Mind,” *Critical Essays*, New York: Continuum. 1982, p. 5.)

To rescue myself, I regard all phenomena as independent of one another and seek to isolate them at whatever cost; then I regard them as correlates, and they connect up in a decisive whole. I use this method above all in relation to nature; but also in relation to the latest events of world history that happen all around us ... (57)

There is a delicate empiricism which makes itself utterly identical with the object, thereby becoming true theory. But this enhancement of our mental powers belongs to a highly evolved age ... (72)

In the sciences, we find ... innumerable attempts to systematize, to schematize. But our full attention must be focused on the task of listening to Nature to overhear the secret of her process, so that we neither frighten her off with coercive imperatives, nor allow her whims to divert us from our goal. (72)

The present age has a bad habit of being abstruse in the sciences. We remove ourselves from common sense without opening up a higher one; we become transcendent, fantastic, fearful of intuitive perception in the real world, and when we wish to enter the practical realm, or need to, we suddenly turn atomistic and mechanical. (73)

Thinking in Babel

Hypotheses are lullabies with which the teacher soothes his pupils to sleep. The thoughtful and faithful observer grows increasingly conscious of this limitation, for he perceives that the more knowledge extends the more numerous are the problems that emerge. (84)

Theory in and of itself is of no use, except in as far as it makes us believe in the interconnection of phenomena. (86)

What is the universal?
The single case.

What is the particular?
Millions of cases. (92)

Nothing is more consonant with Nature than that she puts into operation in the smallest detail that which she intends as a whole. (93)

To grasp the phenomena, to fix them to experiments, to arrange the experiences and know the possible modes of representation of them—the first as attentively, the second as accurately, the third as exhaustively as possible and the last with sufficient many-sidedness—demands a moulding of man's poor ego, a transformation so great that I never should have believed it possible. (120)

Where object and subject touch, there is life. (123)
(*Goethe on Science, An Anthology of Goethe's Scientific Writings*, ed. and intro. Jeremy Naydler, foreword Henri Bortoft, Edinburgh: Floris Books, 1996.)

FRAGMENT (xxvii)

Today knowledge grows exponentially, not generationally.

We are the abandoned children of the children we help to raise.

(But) Cain still kills Abel.

Excursus

The heteronym Álvaro de Campos detects the seismic event occurring within modernity, i.e., the rewriting of memory and the reinvention of civilization which are at stake. His Ultimatum—riotously complex, dithyrambically incubatory of ideas, sociologically visionary and peristaltically cathartic—expresses the discontinuity of energy within the apparent continuity of epistemological form, the radical interruption of meaning no longer in accord with established patterns of knowledge organization and transmission. Fernando Pessoa (1888-1935) apprehended this inherent irony, this radical flux within apparent temporal fixity. We are presently the orphaned children of ourselves, since cultural evolution is no longer measured, or parsed, or even apprehended in terms of a generations-borne legacy. Pessoa gives voice to the idea that modernity augurs a paradigmatic shift from a single memory of self and world to one that is plural, post- or intensely neo-babelic and metaphysically combusive. Modernity reinvents the encounter between matter and mind.

Other voices:

Proclamo, em primeiro lugar,

A Lei de Malthus da Sensibilidade

Os estímulos da sensibilidade aumentam em progressão geométrica; a própria sensibilidade apenas em progressão aritmética.

Compreende-se a importância desta lei. A sensibilidade – tomada aqui no mais amplo dos seus sentidos possíveis – é a

fonte de toda a criação civilizada. Mas essa criação só pode dar-se completamente quando essa sensibilidade esteja adaptada ao meio em que funciona; na proporção da adaptação da sensibilidade ao meio está a grandeza e a força da obra resultante.

Ora a sensibilidade, embora varie um pouco pela influência insistente do meio actual, é, nas suas linhas gerais, constante, e determinada no mesmo indivíduo desde a sua nascença, função do temperamento que a hereditariedade lhe infixou. A sensibilidade, portanto, progride por gerações.

As criações da civilização, que constituem o «meio» da sensibilidade, são a cultura, o progresso científico, a alteração nas condições políticas (dando à expressão um sentido completo); ora estes – e sobretudo o progresso cultural e científico, uma vez começado – progridem não por obra de gerações, mas pela interacção e sobreposição da obra *de indivíduos*, e, embora lentamente a princípio, breve progridem ao ponto de tomarem proporções em que, de geração a geração, centenas de alterações se dão nestes novos estímulos da sensibilidade, ao passo que a sensibilidade deu, ao mesmo tempo, só um avanço, que é o de uma geração, porque o pai não transmite ao filho senão uma pequena parte das qualidades adquiridas. (Fernando Pessoa, “Ultimatum,” in Fernando Pessoa, *Prosa Escolhida de Álvaro de Campos*, ed. Fernando Cabral Martins, Richard Zenith, Porto: Assírio & Alvim, 2015, pp. 71-72; vide digital version: <<http://arquivo.pessoa.net/textos/456>>)

Recite also to them truly, O Mohammed, the story of the two sons of Adam, when they both drew near with an offering which was accepted from one of them but was not accepted from the other. The one whose offering was not accepted said: “I shall most assuredly slay thee.” Said the other: “Allah accepts only from those who show piety. Even shouldst thou stretch forth thy hand to kill me, yet I am not stretching forth my hand towards thee to slay thee. I fear Allah, Lord of mankind. I desire that thou shouldst be liable for the sin of slaying me as well as for thine own sin, so that thou becomest of the people of the Fire, for that is the recompense of those who do wrong.” (*The Koran, Selected Suras*, trans. Arabic/English Arthur Jefferey, Mineola; New York: Dover Publications, [1958] 2001, pp. 201-02.)

FRAGMENT (xxviii)

In the surgery that is verse, rhyme is a scalpel.

Excursus

Álvaro de Campos, in his Ultimatum, published in the first and only issue of Portugal Futurista (1917), proclaims the revolution to come, not one of a strictly material kind but rather one fleshed out by the speculative imagination conceived philosophically by way of a complex meditation on the historical expression of material habits and spiritual values while manifested poetically by way of a deeply ironic mediation of the now empirical, now symbolic sources of human consciousness. The revolution to come will be a material and dematerialized (or “immaterial”) one, since it will be nourished by the complex noetic territory open to the increasingly self-reflective human community presaged by modernity.

Other voices:

A Necessidade da Adaptação Artificial

O que é a adaptação artificial?

É um acto de cirurgia sociológica. É a transformação violenta da sensibilidade de modo a tornar-se apta a acompanhar pelo menos por algum tempo, a progressão dos seus estímulos.

A sensibilidade chegou a um estado mórbido, porque se desadaptou. Não há que pensar em curá-la. Não há curas sociais. Há que pensar em operá-la para que ela possa continuar a viver. Isto é, temos que substituir a morbidez natural da desadaptação pela sanidade artificial feita pela intervenção cirúrgica, embora envolva uma mutilação. (Fernando Pessoa, *Prosa Escolhida de Álvaro de Campos*, ed. Fernando Cabral Martins, Richard Zenith, Porto: Assírio & Alvim, pp. 73-74; vide digital version: <<http://arquivopessoa.net/textos/456>>)

FRAGMENT (xxix)

In Babel—which is, of course, our human habitat—space and time are not given once and for all. They are not the only map. They do not entirely speak for us. They both evolve under the sign of enraptured growth.

To imagine is to conceive a different territoriality, a different prosody of living.

We are what we are not. We are not what we have been told (we are). We learn to thrive in the interval between the given and the nascent story.

We are the expanding territory of sense-leavened mind and ontological drive.

Other voices:

“Dactylographia” (19-XII-1933)

«Traço, sòzinho, no meu cubículo de engenheiro, o plano,
Fórmo o projecto, aqui isolado,
Remoto até de quem eu sou.

Ao lado, acompanhamento banalmente sinistro,
O tic-tac estalado das machinas de escrever.

Que nausea da vida!
Que abjecção esta regularidade!
Que somno este ser assim!

Outrora, quando fui outro, eram castellos e cavalerias
(Ilustrações, talvez, de qualquer livro de infancia),
Outr’ora, quando fui verdadeiro ao meu sonho,
Eram grandes paisagens do Norte, explicitas de neve,
Eram grandes palmares do sul, opulentos de verdes.

Outr'ora...

Ao lado, acompanhamento banalmente sinistro,
O tic-tac estalado das machinas de escrever.

Temos todos duas vidas:

A verdadeira, que é a que sonhámos na infancia,
E que continuamos sonhando, adultos, num substrato de
[nevoa;
A falsa, que é a que vivemos em convivencia com outros,
Que é a practica, a util,
Aquela em que acabam por nos metter num caixão.

Na outra não há caixões, nem mortes.
Há só illustrações de infancia:
Grandes livros coloridos, para ver mas não ler;
Grandes paginas de cores para recordar mais tarde.
Na outra somos nós,
Na outra vivemos;
Nesta morremos, que é o que viver quer dizer;
Neste momento, pela nausea, vivo só na outra...

Mas ao lado, acompanhamento banalmente sinistro,
Se, desmeditando, escuto,
Ergue a voz o tic-tac estalado das machinas de escrever».
(Álvaro de Campos, "Dactylographia," in *Álvaro de Campos, Livro de Versos*, critical ed. Teresa Rita Lopes, Lisbon: Editorial Estampa, 1997, pp. 322-323.)

Anxiety discloses an insignificance of the world; and this insignificance reveals the nullity of that with which one can concern oneself—or, in other words, the impossibility of projecting oneself upon a potentiality-for-Being which belongs to existence and which is founded primarily upon one's objects of concern. The revealing of this impossibility, however, signifies that one is letting the possibility of an authentic potentiality-for-Being be lit up. What is the temporal meaning of this revealing? Anxiety is anxious about naked Dasein as something that has been thrown into uncanniness. It brings one

back to the pure “that-it-is” of one’s ownmost individualized thrownness. This bringing-back has neither the character of an evasive forgetting nor that of a remembering. But just as little does anxiety imply that one has already taken over one’s existence into one’s resolution and done so by a repeating. On the contrary, anxiety brings one back to one’s thrownness as something *possible* which *can be repeated*. And in this way it *also* reveals the possibility of an authentic potentiality-for-Being—a potentiality which must, in repeating, come back to its thrown “there”, but come back as something futural which comes towards [zukünftiges]. *The character of having been is constitutive for the state-of-mind of anxiety; and bringing one face to face with repeatability is the specific ecstatic mode of this character.* (Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson, New York: Harper & Row, [1927] 1962, pp. 393-94.)

FRAGMENT (xxx)

Knowledge is a territory. We inherit this territory. We generationally map and remap it.

Thought is a hunter-gatherer on a clearing of endless nowness. We do not inherit this nowness. We cannibalize it with our mouths, ears and minds.

Excursus: Notes on Poetry

Poetry: a form of sympathetic magic, the capture of the real on the virtual screen of the imagination, a ritual of (self-)recognition. We continually reterritorialize the territory. We reinvent the rules which govern territoriality. We continually reterritorialize the mind. Evolution, at the level of our spontaneous capacity for thought and cognitive growth, vouchsafes the reinvention of matter for our ever-neotenous species. Our species metabolizes evolutionary time in the form of questions, i.e., in a fundamental mode of interrogative thirst.

A question is an accelerating search engine.

Writing is a territory. It moves with the mover. It breaks apart and reforms by virtue of an endless becoming, a creative rewriting, the metaphorical seism of innovatory thought within the ever-anachronistic hardware of history.

Other voices:

Hunting sorcery of one form or another has survived in hunter-gatherer societies to the present time. It is a form of sympathetic magic; an expression of the near-universal belief among prescientific peoples that the manipulation of symbols and images can influence the objects they represent. (E. O. Wilson, *Consilience, The Unity of Knowledge*, London: Little, Brown & Company, 1998, p. 253.)

Les minorités et les majorités ne se distinguent pas par le nombre. Une minorité peut être plus nombreuse qu'une majorité. Ce qui définit la majorité, c'est un modèle auquel il faut être conforme : par exemple l'Européen moyen adulte mâle habitant des villes... tandis qu'une minorité n'a plus de modèle, c'est un devenir, un processus. On peut dire que la majorité, ce n'est personne. Tout le monde, sous un aspect ou un autre, est pris dans un devenir minoritaire qui l'entraînerait dans des voies inconnues s'il se décidait à le suivre. Quand une minorité se crée des modèles, c'est parce qu'elle veut devenir majoritaire, et c'est sans doute inévitable pour sa survie ou son salut (par exemple avoir un État, être reconnue, imposer ses droits). Mais sa puissance vient de ce qu'elle a su créer, et qui passera plus ou moins dans le modèle, sans en dépendre. Le peuple, c'est toujours une minorité créatrice... (Gilles Deleuze, *Pourparlers 1972-1990*, Paris: Les Editions de Minuit, 2003, pp. 234-35.)

(The) way of writing (is) straight and crooked. (Heraclitus, Fragment 59, in *Fragments, A Text and Translation with Commentary* by T. M. Robinson, Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996, p. 41.)

Whatsoever things (are) objects of sight, hearing, (and) experience—these things I hold in higher esteem. (Heraclitus, Fragment 55, in *Fragments, A Text and Translation with Commentary* by T. M. Robinson, Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996, p. 39.)

FRAGMENT (xxxix)

Distrust all unserene beings (armed) with a cause.

Excursus

If thought is to qualify as thought at all, i.e., as an activity inherent in our evolving intelligence in service to our historical self-understanding and our unfolding, eschatological imagination in a cosmopolitan sense—, i.e., in service to the most complete Babel of all Babels—, then it must habitually question itself, reappraise its own normative foundations—at times even abolish itself—, as was the case with the Mayan cosmogony, which included a periodic and cataclysmic destruction in order to permit a subsequent cosmic renewal, one that encompassed all life present under the stars.

Every human truth—unquestioningly venerated, blindly followed and/or deafeningly proclaimed—turns into its opposite, which is not simply falsehood but, above all, death.

Other voices:

[For according to Heraclitus, men who are] lovers of wisdom ought very much to be enquirers into many things. (Heraclitus, Fragment 34, in *Fragments, A Text and Translation with Commentary* by T. M. Robinson, Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996, p. 29.)

They are separated from that which they are in the most continuous contact. (Heraclitus, Fragment 72, in *Fragments, A Text and Translation with Commentary* by T. M. Robinson, Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996, p. 45.)

[Or does not even Heraclitus ... say exactly this:] In the matter of wisdom, beauty, and every other thing, in contrast with God the wisest of mankind will appear an ape. (Heraclitus, Fragment 83?, in *Fragments, A Text and Translation with Commentary* by T. M. Robinson, Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996, p. 52.)

I'm not evaluating now; I'm ascertaining; it's something precious to me. Because today it helped me discern that even my small code of social behavior, my personal ethics, shall we say, are only a visible transcription of my esthetics, which are, in turn, a transcription of the natural conditions of my human circumstance. But such a road, from its high side, leads finally to Metaphysics. As each wave of Poetry, having first crashed against my youth, returns to me, I feel closer to the light. Inside me, the meaning of Resurrection is inseparably bound to the meaning of Death, and very early on, in the secret region that is the antechamber of Birth. I rediscover my utter frugality in my peaceful symbiosis with such an enigma, for instance my intimacy with the coherence of secret meanings or the ritual that adds two angel wings to man; finally, in my fierce, characteristic emotion of pride, I come to find the words that make me an enemy of the grimace in Art (and in Life, of course), and make me obey the secret voice dictating without pause: *That which disempowers you is unfit for your song.*

So then yes, my native tendency to sanctify sensation opens directly into the vision of Paradise. And grasping the abstract through sensation of the concrete makes me return, remorselessly, myself a victim of the eternal, to the absolute brilliance of a sea in the sun:

Elle est retrouvée

Quoi ? L'éternité

C'est la mer mêlée au soleil... (Odysseas Elytis, *Open Papers*, trans. Olga Broumas and T Begley, Port Townsend, WASH: Copper Canyon Press, 1995, pp. 18-19.)

FRAGMENT (xxxii)

Without the creative imagination, we live under assault. The assailant is our own poisoned self.

Learn to fly sitting down.

Learn to metamorphose on your way to the tomb.

Excursus

I recently recalled my first reading of the great Portuguese poet Jorge de Sena's poem entitled "A Nave de Alcobaça," first published in the collection Metamorfoses, Seguidas de Quatro Sonetos a Afrodite Anadiómena in 1963. This collection reveals Sena's ability to express—by way of ekphrastic recreations of existing pictorial (Fragonard, Rembrandt, Turner, Van Gogh, Goya), poetic (a post-Keatsian ode inspired by Sena's envisioning of Keats's death mask), architectural (the stunning, Gothic-style nave at Alcobaça, the Mosque at Córdoba) and sculptural works (Demeter, Artemidorus, the Pietà at Avignon.)—the metamorphic potentiality of consciousness when under the governance of poetic dislocation and fresh metaphorical cognition. The magnitude and achievement of Sena's œuvre stems in part from his capacity for the highest level of cultural-aesthetic, historical and conceptual concentration grounded in an intensely dialectical cadence.

In the nave at Alcobaça, the sepulchres of King Pedro the Cruel and Inês de Castro stand resplendently arrested in stone as mute witnesses and victims of the power of Eros, the logic of State and the dialectical poiesis of mind, which is the privileged domain of poetry.

Other voices:

The way a bird leans to one side, or the yogurt vendor calls a little louder on the downhill at dusk, or the way an odor of burnt grass billows through the open window (from where?), the subtlest, most invisible marks assume their entire meaning, as though their only mission was to convince me that at any

moment the beloved arrives. This is why I write. *Because poetry begins where death is robbed of the last word.* (Odysseas Elytis, *Open Papers*, trans. Olga Broumas and T Begley, Port Townsend, WASH: Copper Canyon Press, 1995, pp. 18-19.)

“A Nave de Alcobaça”

«Vazia, vertical, de pedra branca e fria,
longa de luz e linhas, do silêncio
a arcada sucessiva, madrugada
mortal da eternidade, vácuo puro
do espaço preenchido, pontiaguda
como se transparência cristalina
dos céus harmónicos, espessa, côncava
de rectas concreção, ar retirado
ao tremor último da carne viva,
pedra não-pedra que em pilar's se amarra
em feixes de brancura, geometria
do espírito provável, proporção
da essência tripartida, ideograma
da muda imensidão que se contrai
na perspectiva humana. Ambulatório
da expectação tranquila.

Nave e cetro,
e sepulcral resíduo, tempestade
suspensa e transferida. Rosa e tempo.
Escada horizontal. Cilindro curvo.
Exemplo e manifesto. Paz e forma
do abstracto e do concreto.

Hierarquia
de uma outra vida sobre a terra. Gesto
de pedra branca e fria, sem limites
por dentro dos limites. Esperança
vazia e vertical. Humanidade».

Araquara, 27/11/1962 (Jorge de Sena, “A Nave de Alcobaça,” from his collection entitled *Metamorfoses, Seguidas de Quatro Sonetos a Afrodite Anadiómena* [first published in 1963], in *Poesia I*, ed. Jorge Fazenda Lourenço, Lisbon: Guimarães, uma chancela de Babel, 2013, pp. 319-20.)

En premier lieu, c'est le plus important, je dirais qu'il [le poète] est le gardien des métamorphoses, et dans un double sens. D'une part il cherchera à s'assimiler l'héritage littéraire de l'humanité, lequel est riche en métamorphoses. Toute sa richesse, nous la connaissons aujourd'hui seulement, où les écrits de presque toutes les cultures anciennes sont déchiffrés. (...)

Je les ai qualifiés de gardiens des métamorphoses; mais ils le sont encore dans un autre sens. Dans un monde orienté sur l'exploit et la spécialisation; qui ne voit que les sommets, auxquels on tend dans une sorte de limitation linéaire; qui applique toutes ses forces à la froide solitude des sommets; qui méprise toutefois et efface ce qui se trouve à côté, le multiple— le réel même, qui ne concourt pas au sommet; dans un monde qui interdit de plus en plus la métamorphose, parce qu'elle contrarie le but unique de la production; un monde qui accroît inconsidérément les moyens de son autodestruction, et, dans le même temps, cherche à étouffer les qualités humaines acquises antérieurement qui pourraient encore exister et le contrarier, dans un tel monde, qu'on qualifierait de plus obnubilé qui soit, il paraît essentiel que quelques-uns continuent, malgré tout, à exercer ce don de la métamorphose". (Elias Canetti: "Le métier du poète," in *La Conscience des Mots*, trans. German/French Roger Lewinter, Paris: Albin Michel, [1976] 1984, pp. 336-37, 339.)

FRAGMENT (xxxiii)

We live on earth under coercion.

We grow under the bluest sky.

We become ourselves when sky and earth no longer collide.

Excursus

We are born in sorrow, in a state of separation, in the slowly internalized experience of non-totality, in the consequent confirmation of life as alien gift. Only when life—as alien gift—becomes the yearned-for homeland, only then can we understand the meaning of joy. Such joy manifests itself as the supreme self-understanding of all nomads and pilgrims; it accompanies the phenomenon (or event) of meaningfulness uniquely available to our earthbound nature. In joy, it is possible for us to apprehend the purpose of the blastema which founded us, understand the community which has variously enriched and/or entrapped us and embrace the self whose inner circumference spans from that of the smallest molecule to that of the farthest reach of the speculative imagination.

We invent our joy, i.e., we experience the erotization of the elements, both earthly and worldly, outwardly and inwardly, within the open script of (our) becoming. Empirical and eschatological growth occurs whenever personal experience and the imagination meet by way of acts of peace-seeking upheaval.

Heidegger writes:

*All art, as the letting happen of the advent of the truth of beings, is as such, in essence, poetry. The essence of art, on which both the artwork and the artist depend, is the setting-itself-into-work of truth. It is due to art's poetic essence that, in the midst of beings, art breaks open an open place, in whose openness everything is other than usual. (Martin Heidegger, "The Origin of the Work of Art," in *Basic Writings*, rev. and expanded edition, ed. David Farrell Krell, London: Routledge, Kegan and Paul, [1978] 2000, p. 197.)*

Other voices:

*The means that nature uses to bring about the development of all of man's capacities is the **antagonism** among them in society, as far as in the end of this antagonism is the cause of law-governed order in society.* In this context, I understand antagonism to mean men's *unsocial sociability*, i.e., their tendency to enter in to society, combined however, with a thoroughgoing resistance that constantly threatens to sunder this society. This capacity for social existence is clearly embedded in human nature. Man has a propensity for *living in society*, for in that state he feels himself to be more than man, i.e., feels himself to be more than the development of his natural capacities. He also has, however, a great tendency to isolate himself, for he finds in himself the unsocial characteristics of wanting everything to go according to his own desires, and he therefore anticipates resistance everywhere, just as he knows about himself that for his part he tends to resist others. Now this resistance awakens all of man's powers, brings him to overcome his tendency towards laziness, and, driven by his desire for honor, power, or property, to secure status among his fellows, whom he neither *suffers*, nor *withdraws from*. In this way, the first true steps from barbarism to culture, in which the unique social worth of man consists, now occur, all man's talents are gradually developed, his taste is cultured, and through progressive enlightenment he begins to establish a way of thinking that can in time transform the crude natural for moral discrimination into definite practical principles and thus transform a *pathologically* enforced agreement into a society and, finally, into a moral whole. (Immanuel Kant [1724-1804], "Idea of a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Intent" [excerpt of the Fourth Thesis], in *Perpetual Peace and Other Essays on Politics, History, and Morals*, trans. Ted Humphrey, Indianapolis; Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company, 1983, pp. 31-32.)

The world is the self-opening openness of the broad paths of the simple and essential decisions in the destiny of a historical people. The earth is the spontaneous forthcoming of that which is continually self-secluding and to that extent sheltering and

concealing. World and earth are essentially different from one another and yet are never separated. The world grounds itself on the earth, and earth juts through world. Yet the relation between world and earth does not wither away into the empty unity of opposites unconcerned with one another. The world, in resting upon the earth, strives to surmount it. As self-opening it cannot endure anything closed. The earth, however, as sheltering and concealing, tends always to draw the world into itself and keep it there.

The opposition of world and earth is strife. But we would surely all too easily falsify its essence if we were to confound strife with discord and dispute, and thus see it only as disorder and destruction. In essential strife, rather, the opponents raise each other into the self-assertion of their essential natures. Self-assertion of essence, however, is never a rigid insistence upon some contingent state, but surrender to the concealed originality of the provenance of one's own Being. In strife each opponent carries the other beyond itself." (Martin Heidegger, "The Origin of the Work of Art," in *Basic Writings*, rev. and expanded edition, ed. David Farrell Krell, London: Routledge, Kegan and Paul, [1978] 2000, p. 174.)

War is father of all, and king of all. He renders some gods, others men; he makes some slaves, others free. (Heraclitus, Fragment 53, in *Fragments, A Text and Translation with Commentary* by T. M. Robinson, Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996, p. 37.)

One must realize that war is common, and justice strife, and that all things come to be through strife and are so ordained. (Heraclitus, Fragment 80, in *Fragments, A Text and Translation with Commentary* by T. M. Robinson, Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996, p. 49.)

FRAGMENT (xxxiv)

Truth has no content. It is one of the shadows being casts.

Truth has no content. It outlasts all supposedè raiment.

We kill one another to be the (illusory outward) shell.

Excursus

Fernando Pessoa writes in the opening lines of the poem “Ulysses,” which appears in his Mensagem (1934) that myth is the nothingness which is in fact totality. Grammatically, the line in question works well, respecting both meter and rhyme. Semantically, the same line ebbs and flows within the aphoristic universe of paradox familiar to all readers of Pessoa’s poetry. Anagogically, the selfsame line etches in eight words the seismic strength of poetic intention raised to the power of speculative vision beyond the quotidian maps of perception. Such speculative beyondness, expressed through the verbal medium of poetry, guides the mind to the edge of normative perception, outside the calm center of habitual visibility. Thus the poem manifests a deeply rebooted state of perceptual cognition. The poem “Ulisses” establishes the schism between the seen and the unseen, the empirical and the inapprehensible, the material and the “immaterial” of which Pessoa’s poetry is both the territory and the outpost.

In so doing, Pessoa reveals what poetry is in addition. Poetry is incubatory of visions because it dwells at the site of this schism. It discovers the world anew in the perpetual aftermath of creative destruction. Poetry is the echo of catastrophic loss transformed into creative upheaval. In poetry, all is amorously destructive (because it is not accomplished by way of militarized State policies or the blood-drenched discourses of politicians). Nothingness and totality are, therefore, dimensions of a schism which poetry both actualizes and safeguards. All life reflects the ongoing consequences of this schism.

Poetry is timeless, not because of a privileged insight into the eternal (what is that?), but rather because the schism itself is endless and ubiquitous in all acts and feats of human activity and reflexive intensity.

Other voices:

«O mito é o nada que é tudo.
O mesmo sol que abre os céus
É um mito brilhante e mudo –
O corpo morto de Deus,
Vivo e desnudo». (Excerpt of the poem “Ulisses,” in Fernando Pessoa, *Mensagem*, ed. Fernando Cabral Martins, Porto: Assírio & Alvim, 2000, p. 19.)

É o poeta Caeiro, não o filósofo Caeiro, que nos ama. O que realmente recebemos daqueles versos é a sensação infantil da vida, com toda a materialidade directa dos conceitos da infância, e toda a espiritualidade vital da esperança e do crescimento, que são do inconsciente, da alma e corpo, da infância. Aquela obra é uma madrugada que nos ergue e anima; e a madrugada, contudo, é mais que material, mais que anti-espiritual, porque é um efeito abstracto, puro vácuo, nada. (Álvaro de Campos, *Notas para a Recordação do meu Mestre Caeiro*, ed. Teresa Rita Lopes, Lisbon: Editorial Estampa, 1997, p. 84.)

“The Caged Skylark”

«As a dare-gale skylark scanted in a dull cage,
Man's mounting spirit in his bone-house, mean house, dwells –
That bird beyond the remembering his free fells;
This in drudgery, day-labouring-out life's age.
Though aloft on turf or perch or poor low stage
Both sing sometimes the sweetest, sweetest spells,
Yet both droop deadly sometimes in their cells
Or wring their barriers in bursts of fear or rage.

Not that the sweet-fowl, song-fowl, needs no rest –
Why, hear him, hear him babble & drop down to his nest,
But his own nest, wild nest, no prison.

Man's spirit will be flesh-bound, when found at best,
But uncumberèd: meadow-down is not distressed
For a rainbow footing it nor he for his bones risen».
(Gerard Manley Hopkins, “The Caged Skylark”; vide digital version:

<<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems-and-poets/poems/detail/44391>>)

We can never directly see what is true, that is, identical with what is divine: we look at it only in reflection, in example, in the symbol, in individual and related phenomena. We perceive it as a life beyond our grasp, yet we cannot deny our need to grasp it. (127) (*Goethe on Science, An Anthology of Goethe's Scientific Writings*, ed. and intro. Jeremy Naydler, foreword Henri Bortoft, Edinburgh: Floris Books, 1996.)

FRAGMENT (xxxv)

The imagination is thought in the prophetic mode.

(The prophetic mode is habit under duress.)

Excursus

The poetic imagination is neither entirely empirical nor exclusively speculative. Or, rather, it is neither entirely empirical nor speculative alone but, instead, both simultaneously. The empirical world is the focus of observation, from the rapturously biophilic to the abstractly functionalist. Science is a valuable endeavour of reductionist efficacy. The speculative is grounded in the eschatological dimension of human cognition: all that mind cognizes within the lived sensorium must pass through the structured patterns of evolution-driven neurological paths and the epigenetic rules of cultural memory and cognitive growth. Cognitive growth is evolution's contribution to the cosmic script. Will such growth take us closer to the causal script of the real or does it mean that our species' ongoing rewriting of mind will eventually lead it and us to a post-historical condition of self-induced ontological rift vis-à-vis our originary kinship with, what Aristoteles termed, final causes?

Following the thought of the naturalist E. O. Wilson (b.1929) and, in particular, his thought as evidenced in his volume Consilience, The Unity of Knowledge—a brilliant piece of writing which both intellectually satisfies and, on further reflection, opens the reader up to hitherto unsuspected paths of inquiry—poetry, nature and mind share, it seems, the same visionary prosody on the humanized calendar of cosmic finality. They participate in the same chorus of light. They cast an identical shadow. They inhabit a common world. They belong to a coterminous evolutionary biota of nature, consciousness and culture. They share a destiny. However, science muffles questions surrounding the temporal (eschatological) arc of ongoing discovery whereas poetry cannot but knock continually at creation's door to pose questions which are by definition insoluble. (Who can rightly say what the story's end will be?) Although by their very nature insoluble, such questions beat most intimately in synch with the fallible mechanics of human

longing and are therefore both unanswerable and irrepressible. Such questions constitute in themselves an unbreachable horizon; they both nourish and overwhelm our humanness. They inform our being, i.e., a specifically anthropic mode of intelligence bracketed onto the finite flesh of sentient self-awareness.

Poetry must ask questions which are inherently without an answer. That is poetry's calling and ultimate pertinence as a persistent interlocutor within the positivist, bureaucratized and technocratic universe of modernity. It reminds us of our species' radical, creative unfinishedness, the unlimited edition of our ignorance and light.

Other voices:

There are, as we know, three modes of cognition: analytical, intuitive, and the mode that was known to the Biblical prophets, revelation. What distinguishes poetry from other forms of literature is that it uses all three of them at once (gravitating primarily toward the second and the third). For all three of them are given in the language; and there are times when, by means of a single word, a single rhyme, the writer of a poem manages to find himself where no one has ever been before him, further, perhaps, than he himself would have wished for. The one who writes a poem writes it above all because verse writing is an extraordinary accelerator of conscience, of thinking, of comprehending the universe. Having experienced this acceleration once, one is no longer capable of abandoning the chance to repeat this experience; one falls into dependency on this process, the way others fall into dependency on drugs or on alcohol. One who finds himself in this sort of dependency on language is, I guess, what they call a poet. (Joseph Brodsky, Nobel Lecture, trans. Russian/English Barry Rubin, in *Nobel Lectures, Literature 1981-1990*, Editor-in-Charge Tore Frängsmyr, Editor Sture Allén, World Scientific Publishing Co., Singapore, 1993: vide digital version: <http://www.nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/literature/laureates/1987/brodsky-lecture.html>)

«I raise this greenness to my lips,
This sticky promise of leaves,

Thinking in Babel

This breach-of-promise earth:
Mother of maples, of oaks, of snowdrops.

See how I am dazzled, blinded,
Obedient to the lowliest root.
Aren't they too much splendour for one's eyes—
The explosions of this park?

Like little balls of mercury, the frogs:
With their croaking they couple into a sphere;
Each twig becomes a branch,
And the air a chimera of milk». (Osip Mandelshtam, *Selected Poems*, trans. James Greene, forewords Nadezhda Mandelshtam and Donald Davie, intro. Donald Rayfield, London: Penguin, 1991, p. 85.)

These revelations [“of the finiteness of personal existence, and of the chaos of the environment”], not disobedience to the gods, are what drove humankind from paradise. *Homo sapiens* is the only species to suffer psychological exile. All animals, while capable of some degree of specialized learning, are instinct-driven, guided by simple cues from the environment that trigger complex behavior patterns. The great apes have the power of self-recognition, but there is no evidence that they can reflect on their own birth and eventual death. Or on the meaning of existence—the complexity of the universe means nothing to them. They and other animals are exquisitely adapted to just those parts of the environment on which their lives depend and they pay little or no attention to the rest.

The dominating influence that spawned the arts was the need to impose order on the confusion caused by intelligence. (E. O. Wilson, *Consilience, The Unity of Knowledge*, London: Little, Brown & Company, 1998, pp. 249-50.)

He who sees the Infinite in all things sees God. He who sees the Ratio only sees himself only. (William Blake, *Sete Livros Iluminados*, bilingual edition, trans. Manuel Portela, English/Portuguese, Lisbon: Antígona, 2005, p. 60.)

FRAGMENT (xxxvi)

Our capacity for self-deception and self-interest is limitless.

Our ability to experience surprise, where mind meets matter in
imaginative unrest—

*our body rising to the edge of visibility,
lifted by creaturehood newly mended,
Eros singing on the unsigned canvas of life—*

is mostly either absent or swiftly fastened to indifference.

FRAGMENT (xxxvii): Lessons of Empire

The word «you» is an odd word. It is both a part of speech and the negation of speech. It is both a rudiment of dialogue and its abrogation. It's the projection of an approved script: the enactment of a monologue. By naming, «you» becomes the barren satellite orbiting an «I», or the vacant lot on which to plant a flag, or the censored presence of a sepulchered life.

There is an «I» which names the «you»'s it wants and needs. (With the event of naming, silence is imposed.) This «I» who names extends its domain. It names in order to efface. It names a «you» then bends that «you»'s broken spine to its one logic and many truths.

The «you» that «I» names does not exist: «you» is a shadow cast by «I»-ness (always partial yet monolithic). So to say «you», to give to outward space the inner orbit of a «you», is in fact to erase it. (Sometimes to speak means not to hear at all, or not to be really here on earth at all; instead, speech mouths the ubiquitous emptiness of unheard otherness.)

Empire precedes every «you» and every «I», both the imperial «I» and the silenced «you». Empire cleaves to the roof of the imperial mind. It falls with the rain. It fills the world with / stampeding hooves / the blood-stained tenement in our brain /.

Empire suspends every «you» in the impoverished ether of abstract being; it leaves every «you» with the sentence of an inferior fate.

(Better not to have spoken at all. Better to have listened to the hollowness in «I»'s chest, there where the common heart of «you» and «I» could once have met.)

Empire commits this crime before we reach our mouth. Yet

«you» and «I» are equally alive. «You» and «I» are equally adrift. «You» and «I» are equally in search of reasons for humankind beyond those given by the hive.

(«You» and «I» are both alone without the other.)

Empire is the illusion of the one thought tethered to one power. Empire grinds being into dust; empire paves the interval between living and lying.

(Empire does not see: it seizes and defaces. Empire hides its visibility in plain sight.)

A space for «you» and «I» begins where Empire cannot hide, where Empire cannot take mind from mind or wear life down to extinction.

Empire is omniscient (but that is a lie). «You» and «I» can defect from the master's fiction.

(And we are the singular voices within the buried mirror.)

Excursus

I have been recently witness to the sickliness-unto-death characteristic of most of what passes for human reason.

The example: One hundred individuals sit aptly, expectantly crowd-like in a well-appointed, technologically sophisticated auditorium. The crowd listens to several hierarchically recognized speakers, representatives they of a hallowed institution of our XXist-century contemporaneity. The common hub of the speakers' carefully wrought declamatory fervor I determine to be poised between the self-promoting and the ideologically demented, between the grandly triumphalist and the intellectually one-dimensional, between the mind-managers and the mind-managed, between the public official and the inward nomad. Prometheus (that modernized Titan of doing and undoing) was audible in their orations. In their words, I hear the beat of furious doing and undoing over being and loving, progress over wisdom, monolithic power over the micro-speeches and histories of all who live and dwell beneath—and, lest we have carelessly forgotten, we are the beneath-beings—, enforced consensus over the creatively protean.

After two hours spent entombed in that well-appointed hall of near-mindless fury, pommelled under the discursive hammer, the crowd now distressingly

seized by a reverential silence, the hapless onlooker will no doubt have a starkly outlined decision to make, as was the case for me: either to meld Maenad-like with these self-appointed gods of modern unreason or, instead, withdraw within, watchful for a still-invisible windstorm that might sweep away this early dust of once authentic reason now laid fallow.

Result: At the end of the long, discursive orchestration of collective delirium, the crowd-now-mob rose to applaud in unison (its own extinction).

Epilogue: And the awkward nomad slipped through a side door.

Other voices:

It is dangerous to leave written that which is badly written. A chance word, upon paper, may destroy the world. Watch carefully and erase, while the power is still yours, I say to myself, for all that is put down, once it escapes, may rot its way into a thousand minds, the corn become a black smut, and all libraries, of necessity, be burned to the ground as a consequence. (William Carlos Williams, *Paterson*, rev. ed. Christopher MacGowan, New York: New Directions Books, [1946] 1992, p. 129.)

Disintegration of the Word has taken place.

The Word has its essence in revelation, its effect in the life of the form, its currency during the domination of the form that has died.

This is the course and the counter-course of the eternal and eternally present Word in history.

The times in which the living Word appears are those in which the solidarity of connexion between *I* and the world is renewed; the times in which the effective Word reigns are those in which the agreement between *I* and the world are maintained; the times in which the Word becomes current are those in which alienation between *I* and the world, loss of reality, growth of fate, is completed – till there comes the great shudder, the holding of the breath in the dark, and the preparing silence.

But this course is not circular. It is the way. In each new aeon fate becomes more oppressive, reversal more shattering.

And the theophany becomes ever *nearer*, increasingly near to the sphere that lies *between beings*, to the Kingdom that is hidden in our midst, there between us. History is a mysterious approach. Every spiral of its way leads us both into profounder perversion and more fundamental reversal. But the event that from the side of the world is called reversal is called from God's side salvation. (Martin Buber, *I and Thou*, trans. Ronald Gregor Smith, Edinburgh; T. & T. Clark, [1923] 1937 pp. 119-20.)

“Matin”

«N’eus-je pas une fois une jeunesse aimable, héroïque, fabuleuse, à écrire sur des feuilles d’or. —trop de chance! Par quel crime, par quelle erreur, ai-je mérité ma faiblesse actuelle? Vous qui prétendez que des bêtes poussent des sanglots de chagrin, que des malades désespèrent, que des morts rêvent mal, tâchez de raconter ma chute et mon sommeil. Moi, je ne puis pas plus m’expliquer que le mendiant avec ses continuels *Pater* et *Ave Maria*. *Je ne sais plus parler*. Pourtant, aujourd’hui, je crois avoir fini la relation de mon enfer. C’était bien l’enfer; l’ancien, celui dont le fils de l’homme ouvrit les portes.

Du même désert, à la même nuit, toujours mes yeux las se réveillent à l’étoile d’argent, toujours, sans que s’émeuvent les trois Rois de la vie, les trois mages, le cœur, l’âme, l’esprit. Quand irons-nous, par delà les grèves et les monts, saluer la naissance du travail nouveau, la sagesse universelle, la fuite des tyrans et des démons, la fin de la superstition, adorer—les premiers!—Noël sur la terre!

Le chant des cieux, la marche des peuples! Esclaves, ne maudissons pas le vie». (Arthur Rimbaud, *Une saison en enfer* (excerpt), in *Poésies, Une saison en enfer, Illuminations*, pref. René Char, ed. Louis Forestier, Paris: Gallimard, 1999, pp. 202-03.)

The faculty head of orientation at the university told me, in a rather cool, uninvolved manner, that the FBI was enlisting professors to report on students voicing left-wing opinions; and—some more comedy—they had also engaged students to report on professors with the same views. When I published these facts in *Holiday*, the Pontiac division of General Motors

threatened to withdraw all advertising from the magazine if I ever appeared in it again; (...)

It was a time—as I would only learn decades later from my FBI record obtained under the Freedom of Information Act—when the FBI had shadowed a guest of mine from a dinner party in my Brooklyn Heights home. The guest's name was blacked out and I have been puzzling ever since about his possible identity. The point is that reading my FBI record in the seventies I was not really surprised to learn this. In the fifties everybody over forty believed their phone was being tapped by the FBI, and they were probably right. What is important here is that none of this was secret; most everybody had a good idea of what was happening, but, like me, felt helpless to reverse it. And to this moment I don't think I can adequately communicate the sheer density of the atmosphere of the time, for the outrageous had so suddenly become the accepted norm. (Arthur Miller, *The Crucible in History and Other Essays*, London: Methuen, 2000, pp. 25-26.)

I do not believe that there is any thought process possible without personal experience. Every thought is an afterthought, that is, a reflection on some matter or event. Isn't that so? I live in the modern world, and obviously my experience is in and of the modern world. This, after all, is not controversial. But the manner of merely laboring and consuming is of crucial importance for the reason that a kind of worldlessness defines itself there too. Nobody cares any longer what the world looks like. (34)

The venture into the public realm seems clear to me. One exposes oneself to the light of the public, as a person. Although I am of the opinion that one must not appear and act in public self-consciously, still I know that in every action the person is expressed as in no other human activity. Speaking is also a form of action. That is one venture. The other is: We start something. We weave our strand into a network of relations. What comes of it we never know. We've all been taught to say: Lord forgive them, for they know not what they do. That is true of all action. Quite simply and concretely true, because one cannot know. That is what is meant by a venture.

And now I would say that this venture is only possible where there is trust in people. A trust—which is difficult to formulate but fundamental—in what is human in all people. Otherwise such a venture could not be made. (38) (Hannah Arendt, *The Last Interview and Other Conversations*, Brooklyn; London: Melville House, 2013.)

FRAGMENT (xxxviii)

In the here-and-now, where lungs and ocean breathe (in) the same magnitude, mind—the speaking bud of our being’s minute brainstem—can learn to grow into sage subjectivity previously pressed onto sentient illiteracy and conceptual bedlam. (The modern subject can grow into a larger idiom of perception.)

Art records the process and the pathway of growth between the lines of Empire.

Art needs no passport, only / the final sapience come from exile / the visions come from the natural solicitude of life for all beings who

invent the mesh, weave
and wire of
fresh
neural dissidence /.

FRAGMENT (xxxix)

Whatever we name begins forthwith to disappear.

«I see you».

(And night occurs.)

Other voices:

«E o que vejo a cada momento
É aquilo que nunca antes eu tinha visto,
E eu sei dar por isso muito bem...
Sei ter o pasmo comigo
Que teria uma criança se, ao nascer.
Reparasse que nascera deveras...
Sinto-me nascido a cada momento
Para a eterna novidade do mundo...

////////////////////////////////////

Amar é a eterna inocência,
E a única inocência é não pensar...»

(Poem II (excerpt), in Fernando Pessoa, *Poesia de Alberto Caeiro*,
ed. Fernando Cabral Martins, Richard Zenith, Porto: Assírio &
Alvim, 2014, pp. 24-25.)

FRAGMENT (xl)

What is the color of thought and what does it wear?

The metallic stripes of incarceration, the dark robes of power, or the vast blueness of sea and sailor?

Excursus

In the belly of the worldwide Grid, the mind may still see itself while on its way towards extinction. In the belly of the worldwide Grid, the lights are off, and the world is more habit than hope, more hive than amniotic sea. It is then—between the peristaltic beat of our collective shame—that thought from time to time will corner our ears and prick our eyes to make them see our smallness and hear our too-long-unspoken heart.

A thought can palsy the Grid, interrupt its discursive cycle (from hypnosis to consensus to detritus) and reach fresh sightings of the Possible.

Other voices:

«We bore down on the ship at the sea's edge
and launched her on the salt immortal sea,
stepping our mast and spar in the black ship;
embarked the ram and ewe and went aboard
in tears, with bitter and sore dread upon us.
But now a breeze came up for us astern—
A canvas-bellying landbreeze, hale shipmate
sent by the singing nymph with sun-bright hair;
so we made fast the braces, took our thwarts,
and let the wind and steersman work the ship
with full sail spread all day above our coursing,
till the sun dipped, and all the ways grew dark
upon the fathomless unresting sea». (Homer, *The Odyssey*,
Book Eleven, vv. 1-13, trans. Robert Fitzgerald,
New York: Random House, 1990, p. 185.)

«Quero ir convôsko, quero ir convôsko,
Ao mesmo tempo com vós todos
Pra toda a parte pr'onde fostes!
Quero encostar vossos perigos frente a frente,
Cuspir na minha cara os ventos que engelharam as vossas,
Cuspir dos lábios o sal dos mares que beijaram os vossos,
Ter braços na vossa faina, partilhar das vossas tormentas,
Chegar como vós, emfim, a extraordinários portos!
Fugir convôsko á civilização!
Perder convôsko a noção da moral!
Sentir mudar-se no longe a minha humanidade!
Beber selvagerias, novas balbúrdias da alma.
Novos fogos centrais no meu vulcânico espírito!
Ir convôsko, despir de mim – ah! Põe-te daqui pra fora! –
O meu traje de civilisado, a minha brandura de acções,
Meu mêdo inato das cadeias,
Minha pacifica vida,
A minha vida sentada, estática, regrada e revista!»
("Ode marítima" [excerpt], in *Álvaro de Campos, Livro de Versos*, critical
ed. Teresa Rita Lopes, Lisbon: Editorial Estampa, 1997, p. 111.)

Surely in the chapter on the art of the soul we have not yet come to synthesis. We stutter; we spell; at best we emit cries which we admire and are moved to tears by, because we need to feel that they are the most we are capable of. Still, on reflection, how much of life's true value do they cover? I confess, this is why I aspire to the maturation of speech, as a conspirator aspires to the supremacy of his ideals, full of machinations and dreams. I'm not, I never was, in the majority, I know. We must be so naïve, those of us who discern some pattern between the stars and our entrails, between the birds' flight and our soul, and say so. Still, our naïveté is not enough to lead us to speak the crux. You have to grab the sea by its odor if you want it to give you ship, and ship to give you Mermaid, and Mermaid give Alexander the Great and all the passions of Hellenism. (Odysseas Elytis, *Open Papers*, trans. Olga Broumas and T Begley, Port Townsend, Wash: Copper Canyon Press, 1995, p. 26.)

Here was a significant part of a whole generation forced to the wall and hardly a word about it written for the stage. But it

may simply have been the difficulty of finding a dramatic locution, a working symbolization that might illuminate the complex fog of the unspoken in which we were living—the smoke signals from all sides were hardly declarations of what they really stood for.

Salem village, that pious, devout settlement at the very edge of white civilization, had displayed—three centuries before the Russo-American rivalry and the issues it raised—what can only be called a kind of built-in pestilence nestled in the human mind, a fatality forever awaiting the right conditions for its always unique, forever unprecedented outbreak of distrust, alarm, suspicion and murder. And for people wherever the play [i.e., *The Crucible*] is performed on any of the five continents, there is always a certain amazement that the same terror that had happened to them or that was threatening them, had happened before to others. On the other hand, the Devil is known to lure people into forgetting precisely what it is vital for them to remember—how else could his endless reappearances always come with such marvellous surprise? (Arthur Miller, *The Crucible in History and Other Essays*, London: Methuen, 2000, pp. 31, 55.)

FRAGMENT (xli): Variations on Heidegger

Art / safeguards / keeps watch over / nourishes / the transcendently homeless and more-than-historical.

History is the techniques of domination. History houses the techniques of causal efficiency, social productivity, the inhuman use of humans and the instrumentalization of earth.

Art is the becoming of emancipation.

Art is being's first draft. (All else is an informative footnote.)

The technê of art brings being close to becoming, subject and object to shared evolution, thought and feeling to compassion as finality for knowledge.

*The art of technê serves to amplify the discoveries of art.
Art scouts ahead on the plateaux of unfolding consciousness.
Art is the heart's futurity revealed.*

Other voices:

The hypnotic eye of power, the desperate search for one's own offense, exclusion and the anguish of being excluded, the condemnation to conformism, the phantasmic nature of reality and the magical reality of the file, the perpetual rape of private life, etc., —all these experiments that History has performed on man in its immense test tubes, Kafka performed (some years earlier) in his novels. (Milan Kundera, *The Art of the Novel*, trans. Linda Asher, London; Boston: Faber and Faber, 1988, p. 116.)

Technology is therefore no mere means. Technology is a way of revealing. If we give heed to this, then another whole realm for the essence of technology will open itself up to us. It is the realm of revealing, i.e., of truth.

(...) [*T*]echnê is the name not only for the activities and skills of the craftsman but also for the art of the mind and the

fine arts. *Technē* belongs to bringing-forth, to *poiēsis*; it is something poetic.

(...) From earliest times until Plato the word *technē* is linked with the word *epistēmē*. Both words are terms for knowing in the widest sense. They mean to be entirely at home in something, to understand and be expert in it. Such knowing provides an opening up. As an opening up, it is a revealing. (...)

Technology is a mode of revealing. Technology comes to presence in the realm where revealing and unconcealment take place, where *alētheia*, truth, happens. (Martin Heidegger, "The Question concerning Technology," in *Basic Writings*, rev. and expanded edition, ed. David Farrell Krell, London: Routledge, Kegan and Paul, [1978] 2000, pp. 318-19.)

The essential unfolding of technology threatens revealing, threatens it with the possibility that all revealing will be consumed in ordering and that everything will present itself only in the unconcealment of standing-reserve. Human activity can never directly counter this danger. Human achievement alone can never banish it. But human reflection can ponder the fact that all saving power must be of a higher essence than what is endangered, though at the same time kindred to it.

But might there not perhaps be a more primally granted revealing that could bring the saving power into its first shining-forth in the midst of the danger that in the technological age rather conceals than shows itself?

There was a time when it was not technology alone that bore the name *technē*. Once the revealing that brings forth truth into the splendor of radiant appearance was also called *technē*.

There was a time when the bringing-forth of the true into the beautiful was called *technē*. The *poiēsis* of the fine arts was also called *technē*. (Martin Heidegger, "The Question concerning Technology," in *Basic Writings*, rev. and expanded edition, ed. David Farrell Krell, London: Routledge, Kegan and Paul, [1978] 2000, p. 339.)

The desires & perceptions of man, untaught by any thing but organs of sense, must be limited to objects of sense. (William Blake, *Sete Livros Iluminados*, bilingual edition, trans. Manuel Portela, English/Portuguese, Lisbon: Antígona, 2005, p. 50.)

FRAGMENT (xlii)

I watch a fellow human being walk haltingly on a pair of crutches.

I see another biped standing close by as he observes the man's awkward gait, his broken andante, his painful, syncopated adagio...

I wonder about that fellow biped's attentiveness: does it express the evolutionary weave of empathy or does it recall the predatory gaze of ancient feralness still grazing on the city's savannah of greed and indifference?

FRAGMENT (xliii)

In four split asunder over backwards true refuge issueless scattered ruins. He will live again the space of a step it will be day and night again over him the endlessness. Face to white calm touch close eye calm long last all gone from mind. Grey face two pale blue little body heart beating only upright. He will go on his back fade to the sky open again over him the ruins the sand the endlessness. Earth sand same grey as the air sky ruins body fine ash grey sand. Blank planes touch close sheer white all gone from mind. (Samuel Beckett, "Lessness," in *Six Residua*, London: John Calder, 1999, p. 50; earlier French original, *Sans*, Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 1969)

Perhaps poetry does this: perhaps it reminds us of the first moment we emerged from Plato's epistemological cave, the moment the naked troglodyte is released into elemental nowness. Imagine it glimpsing the first light of day. Imagine what it no longer can explain through the blighted vines of thought, the empirical enchainment of image, the false innocence of unhusked being: it has lived as a prisoner of homelessness in perpetual dusk. Now imagine it rescued to feel the oneiric curve of night, the carnal canvas of sensation, the brilliance of consciousness on skin, the sudden blast of hunger in genitals and mind, its heart-watch beating in the fast pocket of time.

The universe has chosen to materialize into thought and sensation; chosen to pass through the atoms of time; chosen to bear the minor grandeur of (our) visionary anguish and ascendant rhyme; chosen to fasten its fate to brief beings buried up to their necks in dirt. (With what generosity does the universe self-translate into perpetual birth, and why?)

The universe becomes life, and life becomes the unfrozen cadence of grace and grave.

Leaving behind the poorly lit cave, and for one moment alone—yet enough to reach beyond history—we would crave—and poetry assures us that it is and always will be so—beyond empirical circumstance. We would be the metaphysical blaze fueling our tense rocket of thought.

In that one moment we would / scorch the earth with our unquenched thirst / spurn every paradise / for / a few scintillae of tenderness / the sensuous piety of photons recollected in posthumous tranquility /.

Excursus

I once spent an enthusiastic afternoon with a student preparing a thesis on the nature of drama as seen in the work of Fernando Pessoa. We felt that the proximity of Pessoa's complex poetics to contemporary sensibility was in part a reflection of the poet's modernist breach of contract with tradition, a breach which seeks to practice a divergent mode of remembrance and transmission—a divergent mode with distinct aesthetic and epistemological criteria which continue to inform our subjective narrativities and historical self-reflection. Furthermore, we felt that, taken together, these features expressed fundamental aspects of modernity's emancipatory project for the human subject. In fact, having reinvented the meaning of the human—having reinvented historical self-consciousness itself—modernity underpins the ongoing unfolding of knowledge orientated towards outward transformation and inward metamorphosis. Such an all-encompassing critique of consciousness—both individual and collective—has significantly contributed to the articulation of new syntheses of the empirical and the speculative.

Poetry continues to reinvent itself within the positivist atmosphere of science, the productive innovativeness of technology and the oppressive institutional and political logic of universal domination which characterizes the (contemporary) world. Poetry is language in crisis. Language in crisis is, in turn, a privileged source of potential renewal and fresh metaphorical paths. To renew is to start again: to delay, perhaps even to alter, the day and hour of our encounter with inevitability. Poetry brings the cosmos close to the skin anew; it makes atoms speak in a new idiom. It bends time and space to private will and common hope. Poetry does not believe that finality or irreparability has the last word.

Poetry is forged less by statements governed by the changing rules of prosody than as a state of dynamic eschatology operating within the earth's atmosphere. Such is the imaginary crux of our ongoing humanization and rebooting of consciousness, which Pessoa variously invokes and practices throughout his writings.

Other voices:

This is why I write. Because poetry begins where death is robbed of the last word. It is the end of one life and the beginning of another, the same as the first but deeper, as deep as the soul can scout, at the border of opposites where Sun and Hades touch, the endless turn toward the Natural light which is Logos and the Unbuilt light which is God. This is why I write. Because I am enraptured by obeying whom I don't recognize, who is my whole self. Not the partial one wandering the streets and "listed in the draft registers of the Polis."

It is correct to give the unknown its due; that's why we must write. Because Poetry unlearns us from the world, such as we find it; the world of decay we come to see as the only path over decay, just as Death is the only path to resurrection. (...) Willing or not, *we are all hostages of the joy of which we deprive ourselves*. Here springs love's pre-eternal sadness. (Odysseas Elytis, *Open Papers*, trans. Olga Broumas and T Begley, Port Townsend, Wash: Copper Canyon Press, 1995, p. 25.)

«Que não ha nada que morra, que não ha coisa que cesse,
Que cada momento não passa nunca,
Que a flôr colhida fica sempre na haste,
Que o beijo dado é eterno,
Que na essencia e universo das coisas
Tudo é alegria e sol
E só no erro e no olhar há dôr e duvida e sombra.
Embandeira em canto e rosas!

E da estação de provincia, do apeadeiro campestre,
– Lá vem o comboio!
Com lenços agitados, com olhos que brilham eternos
Saudemos em ouro e flores a morte que chega!

Não, não enganas!
Avó carinhosa de terra já grávida!
Madrinha disfarçada dos sentimentos expressos!

E o comboio entra na curva, mais lento, e vae parar...
E com grande explosão de todas as minhas esperanças
Meu coração universo
Inclue a ouro todos os sóes,
Borda-se a prata todas as estrellas,
Entumesce-se em flores e verduras,
E a morte que chega conclui que a já conhecem
E no seu rosto grave desabrocha
O sorriso humano de Deus!» (“A Partida” [excerpt],
in *Álvaro de Campos, Livro de Versos*, critical ed. Teresa Rita Lopes,
Lisbon: Editorial Estampa, 1997, p. 187.)

«Sem ler nada, nem pensar em nada, nem dormir,
Sentir a vida correr por mim como um rio por seu leito,
E lá fora um grande silêncio como um deus que dorme».
(Poem XLIX (excerpt), in Fernando Pessoa, *Poesia de Alberto Caeiro*, ed. Fernando Cabral Martins, Richard Zenith, Porto: Assírio & Alvim, 2014, p. 87.)

If it were not for the Poetic or Prophetic character the
Philosophic & Experimental would soon be at the ratio of all
things & stand still, unable to do other than repeat the same
dull round over again. (William Blake, *Sete Livros Iluminados*,
bilingual edition, trans. Manuel Portela, English/Portuguese, Lisbon:
Antígona, 2005, p. 58.)

Around the time of the Industrial Revolution perhaps in
reaction to it, perhaps for other reasons—science and its
language left poetry. Nature and the personal became the main
playground of the poet. That’s too bad for both scientist and
poets, but it leaves lots of open ground for those of us who can
move between the two. If one can write poetry about being a
lumberjack, why not about being a scientist? It’s experience, a
way of life. It’s exciting.

The language of science is a language under stress. Words
are being made to describe things that seem indescribable in
words—equations, chemical structures and so forth. Words do
not, cannot mean all that they stand for, yet they are all we
have to describe experience. By being a natural language
under tension, the language of science is inherently poetic.

Thinking in Babel

There is metaphor aplenty in science. Emotions emerge shaped as states of matter and more interestingly, matter acts out what goes on in the soul.

One thing is certainly not true: that scientists have some greater insight into the working of nature than poets. Interestingly, I find that many humanists deep down feel that scientists have such inner knowledge that is barred to them. Perhaps we scientists do, but in such carefully circumscribed pieces of the universe! Poetry soars, all around the tangible, in deep dark, through a world we reveal and make.” (Roald Hoffmann, The Nobel Prize in Chemistry, 1981; vide biographical notice at: http://www.nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/chemistry/laureates/1981/hoffmann-bio.html)

FRAGMENT (xliv)

**Today while squeezing a fresh lemon, eleven fibrous, tear-shaped seeds
fell from the reticulated pulp which I quickly threw away.**

If only we could squeeze eleven ideas from our brain in a lifetime.

FRAGMENT (xlv)

The future depends on what and how we (choose to) remember the past.

(Futurity is a mode of being.)

(The future is evolution's ontological rehearsal.)

FRAGMENT (xlvi)

The painter uses brush, light and pigment.

The dancer uses momentum, limb and gravity.

The musician uses nature's chorus to rescue being's silence.

**The sculptor uses material ligaments to bring enraptured form to
[flower.**

What tool does the thinker use?

A rake to tattoo benighted earth with Apollonian clarity?

**A spade that bears the thinker's weight as deeply as the tiller trusts his
fate to chthonian charity (or sates his hunger with imagined harvests)?**

**Or mere hands which, raw from the self-surgery of tortured dust, lift
small clods of clay into the light?**

Other voices:

“Mahler: Sinfonia da Ressurreição”

«Ante este ímpeto de sons e de silêncio,
ante tais gritos de furiosa paz,
ante um furor tamanho de existir-se eterno,
há Portas no infinito que resistam?
Há Infinito que resista a não ter portas
para serem forçadas? Há um Paraíso
que não deseje ser verdade? E que Paraíso
pode sonhar-se a si mesmo mais real do que este?» (Jorge de
Sena, from his collection entitled *Arte de Música* [first published in
1968]: *Poesia I*, ed. Jorge Fazenda Lourenço, Lisbon: Guimarães,
uma chancela de Babel, 2013, p. 426.)

“Homem”

«Inútil definir este animal aflito.

Nem palavras,
nem cinzéis,
nem acordes,
nem pincéis
são gargantas deste grito.
Universo em expansão.
Pincelada de zarcão
desde mais infinito a menos infinito».
(António Gedeão, “Homem,” in *Poemas Escolhidos, Antologia organizada pelo autor*, Lisbon: Edições João Sá da Costa, 2001, p. 9.)

«E há poetas que são artistas
E trabalham nos seus versos
Como um carpinteiro nas tábuas!...

Que triste não saber florir!
Ter que pôr verso sobre verso, como quem construi um muro
E ver se está bem, e tirar se não está!...

Quando a única casa artística é a terra toda
Que varia e está sempre boa e é sempre a mesma».
(Poem XXXVI [excerpt], in Fernando Pessoa, *Poesia de Alberto Caeiro*, ed. Fernando Cabral Martins, Richard Zenith, Porto: Assírio & Alvim, 2014, p. 72.)

FRAGMENT (xlvii)

Time is a localized phenomenon in the universe. In fact, it is not *in* the universe at all in the way that sound brims *in* the ear, or sight blinks *in* vision, or being beams *in* reason.

Time reveals itself, instead, as / the neural galaxy of mind / the uncertain growth of sky / the burst of life on flesh now lit, now riven /.

Other voices:

«Vive, DIZES, no presente;
Vive só no presente.

Mas eu não quero o presente, quero a realidade;
Quero as cousas que existem, não o tempo que as mede».
(Fernando Pessoa, *Poesia de Alberto Caeiro*, ed. Fernando Cabral Martins, Richard Zenith, Porto: Assírio & Alvim, 2014, p 169.)

«Ah, se affronto confiado a vida, a incerteza da sorte,
Sorridente, impensando, a possibilidade quotidiana de todos os
[males,
Inconsciente o mysterio de todas as coisas e de todos os
[gestos,
Porque não affrontarei sorridente, inconsciente, a Morte?
Ignoro-a? Mas que é que eu não ignoro?
A penna em que pego, a lettra que escrevo, o papel em que
[escrevo,
São mysterios menores que a Morte? Como se tudo é o mesmo
[mysterio?
E eu escrevo, estou escrevendo, por uma necessidade sem nada

Ah, affronte eu como um bicho a morte que elle não sabe que
[existe!
Tenha eu a inconsciencia profunda de todas as coisas naturaes,
Pois, por mais consciencia que tenha, tudo é inconsciência
Salvo o ter creado tudo, o e ter creado tudo ainda é incons-

[ciência

Porque é preciso existir para se crear tudo,

E existir é ser inconsciente, porque existir é ser possível haver

[ser,

E ser possível haver ser é maior que todos os Deuses!» (*Álvaro*

de Campos, Livro de Versos, critical ed. Teresa Rita Lopes, Lisbon:

Editorial Estampa, 1997, p. 216.)

“Catedral de Burgos”

«A catedral de Burgos tem trinta metros de altura

e as pupilas dos meus olhos dois milímetros de abertura.

Olha a catedral de Burgos com trinta metros de altura!»

(António Gedeão, “Catedral de Burgos,” in *Obra Poética*, Lisbon:

Edições João Sá da Costa, 2001, p. 117.)

Man has no notion of moral fitness but from Education.

Naturally he is only a natural organ subject to Sense.

Man cannot naturally Perceive but through his natural or

bodily organs. (William Blake, *Sete Livros Iluminados*, bilingual

edition English/Portuguese, trans. Manuel Portela, Lisbon: Antígona,

2005, p. 44.)

FRAGMENT (xlviii): They want your mind...

They want your mind.

But not “your” mind: “you” have nothing. “You” are an abstract node in the matrix. “You” inhabit the blank abode of *Quantity* and *Grid*. “You” are expendable. “Your” leash is invisible because “you” do not see “your” prison (like color is undetectable to the blind).

They want your mind.

But not your “mind”: your “mind” is a sieve through which water passes that does not slake; through which light passes that won’t illuminate; through which a world passes that does not know you. Your “mind” is a river that’s now parched dendritic masts of thought, now painted scenes on lit billboards hawking appetite and terror. Your “mind” belongs to the homologous *Hive of Power*.

They want your mind,
and they have killed you for it.

FRAGMENT (xlix)

a. The universe passes through the sentient body for a moment only. This passing-through we call life. (This “thisness” is perhaps a divine mistake, perhaps cosmic folly. Whose it is we cannot know.)

The universe passes through the skin and mind. (Mind is the late flowering of skin in the hothouse of illusion.) The universe that passes through changes its name from fractal neutrality to secular strife, from inhuman turbulence to fateful circumstance.

Human language—an evolutionary oddity—has made an «I» and a «you». (This was perhaps a mistake, perhaps an inspired invention.)

*Yet the words you use fill your mind like water fills a beggar's cup
(but this cup is found next to an ocean).*

You and I are the center of nothing. Or we are the center of our illusions. Or else we are a phantom world in a phantom neighborhood of phantom stars and skies.

b. You are the margin, not the center; the edge, not the substance; the middle, not the end; the drift, not the bridge.

You are the crushed vertebrae of your own fiction.

Everything is. You and I are not.

You become real when freed from / the false dictions of truth / the fanatical creeds of power /.

Your skin has been burnt by a sun that is not yours.

c. Live on the green banks of your close heart. Make compassion and laughter your chosen companions. You will think and act best with the minor tenses of candid uncertainty.

d. Keep in mind that as you climb towards each speculative summit, you are still underground.

e. Be human if you must.

FRAGMENT (I)

A young man plays a guitar on one of the ancient city streets. He sits on a modest wooden bench. I notice the raggedness of his clothes. As he plays it seems as though the city walls want to fall around him. (Do they want to protect or crush him?) I listen. I listen again. I see his face is calm. The sounds are all melancholy tinged with remembered bliss, sounds repeated every day for the jettisoned currency of charity, either coin or bill. For me the scene reveals an unheard radiance beyond the broken jaw of speech.

Then I see his worn shoes, and the same street on which I stand falls into the cresting sea.

For an instant, the universe seems to place its grave, bone-crushing hands on my drowning, riotous heart.

And love breaks into a thousand-eyed god of particle and wave.

FRAGMENT (li)

Today I ran to the train situated not fifty meters away from where I was—until then—distractedly walking. I was not in a hurry. I had no appointment. I was carrying a book bag and listening to the peristalsis of the XXIst century.

I ran even though I was not pressed for time. I ran anyway. I ran like a madman. I ran laughing at the absurdity of an old man's impulse to defy habit, fatigue (a synonym for years lived) and the unwritten rules for the proper conduct of those my age.

I ran into the moment. I ran remembering how a child runs into the arms of his mother, or into the street or river, or into the light as naturally as the imagination fills the universe and unfamiliar words spill over into the night.

Or how a child runs away from shadows and monsters, or hides under blankets—woolen guardians against oppressive dreams—except that I have no monsters and the one shadow I cast is for me today simply a reminder that the self is a season of time that passes.

Then it became clear to me: I ran to the train because life and I were at last on speaking terms. Because we now speak the same idiom of sentient flight.

Because I go to bed with the universe and I wake up with the universe.

Because in the interval between sleeping and waking, the universe and I reinvent the lessons of memory.

Because together we laugh at the beautiful perversity of life.

Other voices:

“XLVIII”

«Passa a árvore e fica dispersa pela Natureza.
Murcha a flor e o seu pó dura sempre.
Corre o rio e entra no mar e a sua água é sempre a que foi sua.

Passo e fico, como o Universo».
(Fernando Pessoa, *Poesia de Alberto Caeiro*, ed. Fernando Cabral
Martins, Richard Zenith, Porto: Assírio & Alvim, 2014, p. 86.)

ONE LAST THING ...

We are born into the world only once. Sentience is all we know and can know. So we've always known everything for all time, whether as child, adult, or dust. Time takes all we know and places it on a moving train. The train is called flesh and bone. One day we'll return to where we began, when we have seen the world as it is: a child's wooden top in eternity's hand.

By then, we'll have understood the abundant playfulness of being.

TEDxTalk

(Faculdade de Ciências e Tecnologia/School of Sciences and Technology
Universidade NOVA de Lisboa/NEW University of Lisbon
17 de Junho de 2016/17 June 2016)

“DOIS MOMENTOS PASSADOS NA TORRE DE BABEL
DO SÉCULO XXI, ou A IMAGINAÇÃO BIOFÓBICA
E A IMAGINAÇÃO BIÓFILA”

PREMISSAS: A IMAGINAÇÃO BIOFÓBICA E A IMAGINAÇÃO BIÓFILA
(apontamentos gerais expressos no início da TED Talk)

- A imaginação *biofóbica*: temer a vida, querer destruir a vida, fazer com que as palavras que saem do nosso corpo, da nossa boca, levem à nascença capacete e arma; fazer com que as palavras infectem a vida com epidemias do NADA...
- A imaginação *biófila*: amar a vida, querer sustentar o mundo com a palavra dialogante e amante, fecundar a vida com a nossa fome de mais justiça e mais liberdade, querer o bem...

Início da TEDxTalk/FCTUNL 2016:

Caros Vizinhos meus desta Torre de Babel que nos alberga a todos. Estou hoje aqui convosco ao modo dos poetas de antanho: venho declamar e proclamar, mas não com verdades absolutas, nem com certezas definitivas. Venho celebrar convosco o léxico profundo da nossa humanidade comum, os cinco verbos que norteiam o nosso sentir e o nosso pensar, a nossa pedagogia e o nosso desejo-mor que temos vindo a cultivar ao longo desta brevíssima travessia pela vida e pelo tempo que nos foi dado habitar: ESCUTAR, DIALOGAR, TRANSFORMAR, AMAR, RESISTIR.

Venho proclamar, portanto, não com visões de um mundo para todo o sempre definido e definitivo, de progresso inevitável – um mundo dotado de verdades absolutas ou de certezas definitivas. *Um mundo de verdades monolíticas e certezas inabaláveis é um mundo dogmático, moribundo, arrogante e surdo. Um mundo assim – de tão supostamente perfeito – é um mundo não perfeito mas, sim, terminal.*

Estou hoje diante de vós a querer elogiar, portanto, o INACABADO, O INCERTO, O OPOSTO DAS VERDADES MONOLÍTICAS E DAS CERTEZAS SUPOSTAMENTE ABSOLUTAS.

Amamos a Torre de Babel: a imagem perfeita da nossa humanidade periclitante. Somos criaturas andantes e pensantes. Somos criaturas mistas, *essencialmente* inacabadas. Somos animais livres e cativos ao mesmo tempo. Somos animais finitos na nossa animalidade; somos animais infinitos na nossa capacidade de questionar e indagar, de inventar perguntas para as quais não há resposta possível ou à vista. Somos infinitos na nossa capacidade de amar o desconhecido. A vida *é* uma pergunta: somos nós que encarnamos as respostas provisórias. Somos, portanto, travessia e, em simultâneo, seres em queda livre; **somos** o questionamento e a busca; somos, sim, seres que erguem verdades e, em simultâneo, destroem mundos.

Erguemos continuamente a nossa Torre de Babel: uma construção periclitante e instável, infinitamente problemática e infinitamente necessária para algum dia aprendermos a viver e conviver, conhecer e amar. Hoje desejamos erguer, entre nós todos, uma Torre de Babel realmente comum; pois damos conta de que pertencemos, como criaturas biológicas e criaturas babélicas, a um destino plural mas, sobretudo, comum.

Estou hoje diante de vós – caros vizinhos desta Torre de Babel infinita que nos alberga. Veja-se: está ainda em construção e **já** em ruínas também! Estou hoje diante de vós para partilhar convosco a nossa visão de uma Torre cheia de portas e janelas, de galerias e escadarias, de miradouros e observatórios, de andares e luz, a partir da qual seríamos observadores e vizinhos, dialogantes e criadores de novos andares da Torre, uma Torre deveras reflexo da nossa infinita e bela diversidade.

Veja-se o que acontece, contudo, quando escolhemos amar a destruição, quando a nossa imaginação é *biofóbica*, isto é, quando decide desencadear epidemias do NADA entre uns e outros – o amor truncado, o diálogo negado, a humanidade mutilada.

Eis, a seguir, um exemplo da imaginação *biofóbica* em acção: as palavras que, a seguir, ouvirão, não são as palavras com que nos dirigimos à VIDA, mas são as palavras que todo o fanático cultiva e impõe. São palavras que lembram o discurso da personagem *Adenoid Hynckel*, o ditador retratado no filme *O Grande Ditador* de Charlot, um filme que data de 1940. Trata-se de um discurso *biofóbico*: dogmático, fanático, odioso, mutilador, redutor, doentio. Trata-se de um discurso e de um modo de pensar e sentir que teme a vida. Devemos olhar para dentro do abismo destas palavras armadas para mais rapidamente e mais profundamente nos libertarmos do seu feitiço e do seu veneno.

O filme de Charlot é de 1940. Tentamos agora, em 2016, sintetizar o discurso histórico mas também intemporal da imaginação *biofóbica*. Talvez seja qualquer coisa assim, que passamos a declamar, numa leitura algo encenada, dentro das nossas possibilidades dramáticas:

UM DISCURSO **BIOFÓBICO**
UM DISCURSO DEMAGÓGICO-FANÁTICO. A IMAGINAÇÃO
BIOFÓBICA

A minha história é como a de muitos de nós. É uma história de luta e de conquista, de sonho e de realização.

Não nasci para ser fraco. Nasci para realizar o meu sonho, para realizar o vosso sonho. Não nasci para apenas desejar que as coisas aconteçam. Nasci para comandar uma cidadania mobilizada para conquistar a grandeza comigo. Vivemos, irmãos e irmãs, num período de grande decadência. O nosso país jaz hoje em dia num estado profundamente decadente. Trata-se de um estado de decadência que certos colegas nossos e certos cidadãos nossos, que não o merecem ser, impuseram a todos nós, nós que somos crentes em Deus e fiéis à grandeza da nossa nação. Sabemos bem quem são esses traidores e esses portadores de veneno que levaram o nosso belo país ao seu marasmo actual. São todos aqueles que odeiam o que nós verdadeira e exclusivamente representamos: Deus, Pátria, a família tradicional (e sabem muito bem o que quero dizer quando proclamo a família da nossa nação: uma família com uma mãe e um pai!)

É hora de recuperarmos o que esses traidores que se agacham nas sombras nos roubaram: a grandeza, a riqueza, a força, a religião, os valores e a moral!

Diante de vós, aqui e agora, garanto poder restituir o nosso país à sua antiga grandeza. Peço humildemente a vossa ajuda, pois todos acreditamos ferverosamente nas mesmas coisas. Estamos agora unidos porque, só unidos, sob a mesma bandeira, com as mesmas crenças e com a mesma fé, é que poderemos vencer o mal que conspira incessantemente contra nós, quer fora, quer dentro do país.

Vamos deitar fora este lixo!

Como sairmos então vitoriosos deste marasmo, desta decadência, desta perda de confiança, desta agressão contra a pureza da nossa nação, contra a grandeza do nosso carácter, contra a supremacia do nosso país no mundo?

Digo-vos: é simples. O meu programa é simples. É simples, sim, e, embora exija, e exigirá, de nós grandes sacrifícios no futuro, sabeis que tenho razão, pois a minha razão é a vossa! A vossa é também a minha! Para realizarmos o nosso destino, para recuperarmos a nossa identidade, para conquistarmos novamente o nosso lugar no mundo devemos eliminar *aquilo* que pretende espalhar o seu veneno entre nós. Devemos eliminar *aqueles* que, sendo os nossos representantes legalmente eleitos, agem contra quem somos em nome de uma falsa ideologia da democracia, uma falsa interpretação dos direitos humanos, uma falsa mensagem de igualdade para todos e entre todos. Devemos eliminar – dizia eu – *aqueles* que alguns representantes eleitos permitem ficar. São *aqueles* que não merecem nenhuma igualdade. Não merecem ficar entre nós. Mas são precisamente *aqueles* que não merecem ficar entre nós que agora nos ditam e nos impõem novas e falsas ideias e crenças. Digo-vos humildemente, com a fúria dos anjos-guerreiros de antanho: devemos eliminar, então, *aqueles* que agora *infectam* o nosso país: os que vieram de fora, os que entraram e continuam a entrar ilegalmente no nosso país e que nos vampirizam, aqueles que entram para assassinar e destruir o nosso belo país. São igualmente *aqueles* que, tendo nascido cá, procuram espalhar os seus modos de vida – os seus *life styles* – que pervertem a família – *as nossas famílias* – e os nossos valores sagrados. São ainda *aqueles* que vêm cá para cometerem actos de terrorismo.

Que farei ao ser o vosso líder? É simples: mandarei para fora todos os nossos inimigos. Mandarei ilegalizar tudo o que hoje em dia conspurca a nação e a nossa fé. Tudo. Eliminarei. Limparei. Restituirei.

A grandeza do nosso país estará novamente connosco.

Caros compatriotas, tenho lutado muito. Tenho lutado muito para realizar o meu sonho Que é também o vosso sonho! Eis-me agora diante de vós – o vosso irmão – ciente do vosso mal-estar,

da vossa tristeza, das vossas preocupações. Conheço-vos.
Somos unos e somos unidos.

Digo-vos: o nosso Deus está connosco.

E agora, para concluir, e *a fim de contrariar o veneno biofóbico do discurso prévio – tão tóxico no seu fanatismo e tão mortífero nas suas visões absolutas e terminais* – proclamamos agora o seguinte discurso, como se fosse o barbeiro judeu, do mesmo filme anteriormente referido de Charlot, a proclamar, com a sua imaginação *biófila*, o amor à vida e ao mundo que está ainda à nossa espera: amplo, generoso, babélico, plural e amoroso.

UM DISCURSO BIÓFILO

PREÂMBULO

EM NOME DA HUMANIDADE, DIRIGIMO-NOS AOS FANÁTICOS DESTA TERRA COM O SEGUINTE MANIFESTO

DECLARAMOS AQUI QUE:

Desconfiamos da ordem e da estabilidade que o ditador fanático promete: cheira a sangue e a dor;

Desconfiamos de quem massifica a mente e faz do ser humano um ser de manada;

Desconfiamos do discurso fanático que promete a ordem mas que mata a mudança.

A MUDANÇA É UMA DAS VERDADES DA HUMANIDADE!

A humanidade é capaz de porosidade e abertura.

A humanidade é capaz de reconhecer a pluralidade das suas culturas ao mesmo tempo que reconhece a proximidade entre todos.

Partilhamos os mesmos problemas e os mesmos medos!

A humanidade é, sim, capaz de admitir o outro como o espelho de si mesmo.

A humanidade é, sim, capaz de adaptar, de criar e transpor;

A humanidade é uma espécie diferenciada mas una.

Sim, a humanidade é plural; a humanidade é diversa: a humanidade é também um *work-in-progress*. Para ser um ser humano é preciso amar o carácter sobre a cor, o entendimento sobre a confusão, a comunicação sobre o monólogo.

Sim, o ser humano é capaz de questionar e duvidar.

É, sim, capaz de observar o mundo e procurar os factos. Para tal somos aprendizes sem limite.

O mundo é do tamanho das nossas buscas.

O mundo é a nossa casa e o nosso miradouro.

Para crescer, portanto, o ser humano deve aprender a ver e a escutar.

Para crescer, portanto, o ser humano deve imaginar e compreender.

Para crescer, portanto, convidamos o ser humano a ser mais membrana do que barreira, mais travessia do que imobilidade, mais porosidade do que egoísmo, mais olhos abertos do que coração fechado!

A humanidade pode aprender a pensar: que não é fácil, mas é indispensável!

O ser humano pode aprender a pensar porque o acto de pensar é arriscado, mas é também aventura e liberdade!

CAROS AMIGOS: O ACTO DE PENSAR É O NOSSO DIREITO
E A NOSSA AVENTURA!

CAROS AMIGOS: A AVENTURA DO PENSAR FAZ DO ANIMAL
HUMANO UM SER DA MUDANÇA, DO CRESCIMENTO,
DA INVENÇÃO, DO DISCERNIMENTO, DA COMPREENSÃO
E DO AMOR!

CAROS AMIGOS: SOMOS SERES DE CERTEZAS VÁRIAS
QUE HOJE CHEGAM E AMANHÃ NOS DEIXAM. AS NOSSAS
CERTEZAS PERTENCEM A UM TEMPO MENOR PERANTE
A ETERNIDADE!

SOMOS, PORTANTO, POETAS DA MUDANÇA, POETAS
NA MUDANÇA, POETAS DO SONHO E POETAS DA BUSCA!

O ENGENHEIRO TAMBÉM SABE QUE É POETA: ENGENHEIRO
E POETA SABEM QUE O SER HUMANO É POR NATUREZA
INACABADO!

MAS O FANÁTICO ODEIA O INACABADO. MATA
O INACABADO. ENQUANTO O POETA
E O ENGENHEIRO AMAM O INACABADO E ACEITAM
A FORÇA DA FRAGILIDADE!

O FANÁTICO TORNA-SE DITADOR: AMA-SE A SI MESMO.
AMA O SEU MONÓLOGO. O SEU MONÓLOGO TRAZ
PALAVRAS BLINDADAS. O SEU AMOR TRAZ MORTE!

O FANÁTICO QUE SE TORNA DITADOR NÃO AMA O MUNDO:
DESEJA APERFEIÇOÁ-LO. A SUA PERFEIÇÃO É FATAL.
É A PERFEIÇÃO DE QUEM ODEIA A VIDA. A VIDA É PLURAL
E A MENTE É INFINITA!

Queremos sentir. Queremos sentir como se sentir fosse a
estação que nos faltava, a metamorfose que nos aguardava, a
ponte entre os factos, o miradouro para a abundância infindável
do universo.

Queremos sentir, sentir humanamente, não fanaticamente.
Queremos sentir sem idolatrar. Queremos sentir sem sentir em
detrimento do *outro*. Queremos sentir, sabendo que sabemos
odiar também, mas sabemos que odiar, embora seja uma
eventualidade, nunca é uma fatalidade.

PODEMOS SENTIR PARA ALÉM DO ÓDIO.

O nosso ser floresce na floresta dos factos e nas ruas da
mente!

Sentir é contemplar a diferença. A diferença permite vislum-
brar o *outro*. O *outro* é também o nosso espelho!

NÃO TOLERAR A DESTRUIÇÃO DO OUTRO. NÃO ACEITAR A TOLICE DO ÓDIO!

Sentir e pensar juntos permitem ver o que está deveras diante
de nós:

**O BANQUETE DA VIDA DAS MIL MÁSCARAS
E DAS MIL MONTANHAS!**

Sentir e pensar juntos convidam-nos a crescer na complexidade.

Sentir e pensar juntos convidam-nos a rejeitar as falsas certezas.

Sentir e pensar juntos são uma lição de vida: somos os nossos actos e as nossas palavras.

MEUS CAROS VIZINHOS DA TORRE DE BABEL DE HOJE:

Em que solo humano havemos de crescer e florescer?

A escolha é o húmus da liberdade em flor.

Sentir e pensar juntos inventam o ser humano.

Inventam o ser humano como ser andante e pensante, como ser de factos e de sonhos, como ser de começos e céus, como ser de mudança e descoberta.

**DESCOBRIMOS O QUÊ, CAROS VIZINHOS
DA TORRE DE BABEL?**

**QUE O MUNDO É DO TAMANHO, NÃO DOS GRANDES DESTA
TERRA, MAS DO TAMANHO DOS SONHOS DE CADA UM!**

**QUE O MUNDO É DO TAMANHO, NÃO DAS CONVENÇÕES
E DAS CONVICÇÕES DE HOJE, MAS DO TAMANHO DAS
IDEIAS QUE AINDA HÃO-DE NASCER! QUE O MUNDO
É DO TAMANHO DA NOSSA CAPACIDADE DE QUESTIONAR
E CRIAR!**

**TEMOS UMA FOME MAIOR DO QUE A REFEIÇÃO QUE O
MUNDO QUE JÁ LÁ ESTÁ NOS SERVE!**

**DESCOBRIMOS QUE O MUNDO É DO TAMANHO, NÃO
DA HEMORRAGIA DO ÓDIO FANÁTICO, MAS DO TAMANHO
DA SABEDORIA E DO AMOR!**

**DESCOBRIMOS QUE O MUNDO NÃO TEM SÓ REIS E CHEFES,
MAS, ANTES, «EUS» E «TUS».**

DESCOBRIMOS QUE, PARA O FANÁTICO E O DITADOR,
O MUNDO É UM CEMITÉRIO.

DESCOBRIMOS QUE O MUNDO É, NA VERDADE, UM
NASCER SEM FIM DE IDEIAS E DE VIDA.

Aprendemos que a história da humanidade está ainda por inventar!

Aprendemos que a memória não é apenas a chaga do passado mal cicatrizada!

NÃO!

A MEMÓRIA É UM ÓRGÃO FUTURISTA!

Nós inventamos o futuro porque também redimimos o passado.

Não somos apenas guiões fixos: somos seres em movimento, trajectos em movimento, seres-*in-progress*.

**POR QUE HAVEMOS DE NOS FICAR COM O MUNDO QUE
JÁ LÁ ESTÁ?**

Eis-nos portanto na Torre de Babel do século XXI. Um destino plural e comum aguarda-nos. Sendo nós vectores de paz e guerra, de ordem e caos, de amor e destruição, sabemos hoje que partilhamos um destino comum.

**COMO HAVEMOS DE VIVER, ENTÃO, NESTE SÉCULO QUE
É DE TODOS?**

Somos todos vizinhos, mas mal sabemos conviver.

Somos todos vizinhos, mas mal sabemos pensar.

Somos todos vizinhos, **mas o fanático espreira e o ditador conquista.**

Somos todos vizinhos, mas a nossa Torre de Babel está hoje em ruínas.

Caros vizinhos! Declaramos que nunca é fácil, mas o caminho é simples!

Declaramos que a história se cumpre no pensar e no sentir, na mudança e na compreensão!

Declaramos que podemos compreender e amar para além das algemas que nos puseram há já tanto tempo que hoje nem as vemos!

Declaramos que compreender e amar nos pertencem como nos pertencem o ar e os pulmões!

Declaramos que compreender e amar são a história que nos aguarda.

Caros amigos e vizinhos, caros habitantes da Torre de Babel, caros irmãos e irmãs no destino comum deste planeta: declaramos que essa história da compreensão e do amor que nos aguarda está neste mesmo momento entre nós.

Mais do que isso: já nos convocou e já nos transformou!

BABEL, PORTUGAL, MUNDO, 17 de JUNHO de 2016

Excerpt from a letter to a student's inquiry concerning my reaction
to the Nobel Prize for Literature, 2016

Caro D.

Espero que tudo esteja bem com o D. e que esteja a ter um excelente novo ano lectivo.

Deus meu! (Como diria a minha amiga, D. Mécia de Sena, a viúva – ainda viva, com 96 anos – do grande Poeta, pensador e escritor Jorge de Sena (1919-1978).

Deus meu, Deus meu, Deus meu!

Perante, não só a **abundância imaterial** da humanidade que continua a aprender a amar a sua emancipação da Engrenagem trituradora que opera actualmente no mundo que ***já lá está***, mas, especificamente, a **abundância criativa** de artistas pelo mundo fora, a obra do recipiente do Prémio Nobel de Literatura deste ano não passa de uma nota de rodapé de uma nota de rodapé. Nomeação absurda, nomeação pior do que medíocre: nomeação grotesca.

Hoje em dia, sabemos sobejamente que o Prémio Nobel, no que respeita aos Prémios de Literatura e da Paz, são amiúde ideologicamente instrumentalizados (ao serviço de que insanidade?). Não nos esqueçamos do Prémio Nobel da Paz com que um presidente dos Estados Unidos da América foi galardoado há uns escassos anos. Leia-se a sua Lição Nobel da Paz: limita-se a justificar a **guerra perpétua** em nome de uma hegemonia militar e ideológica selvagem que nos levará à catástrofe.

Portanto, temos doravante, não só o **Anti-Prémio Nobel da Paz**, mas, ainda, a partir de agora, o **Anti-Prémio Nobel de Literatura**.

Eis, a seguir, e sucintamente, o que também penso:

O século XXI é um século que põe tudo em jogo no planeta. É um século de apocalipse integrado no tecido quotidiano do nosso ser. A catástrofe é de natureza sobremaneira iminente. Hoje em dia, a *homeostase psicológica* do nosso ser, digamos, passa inevitavelmente pela consciência concomitante dos perigos que desencadeamos, das situações de risco que criamos, da destruição planetária de que somos os arquitectos e os vectores. *Trata-se de um estado homeostático que roça o inviável e o insustentável.* A ética é a

questão premente da nossa espécie portadora de breves e prolongados actos de violência: ou agimos com a consciência plena das nossas responsabilidades e deveres, ou afundar-nos-emos com o resto da criação.

Assim, toda a mediocridade celebrada constitui um perigo. A ausência de pensamento, o predomínio do **não-pensamento**, bem como a militarização da inteligência humana, a arregimentação da sensibilidade, tudo isto, no seu todo, constitui um muito mau agoiro. O **não-pensar** passou a protagonizar a nossa modernidade...

Contudo, como sou um homem de carácter resistente, e como sei que o pensar é um estado e um acto que, em última instância, nos protege da barbárie, i.e., da nossa própria *rebarbarização*, encaro este assalto mais recente ao bom senso, ao discernimento e à honestidade intelectual como um convite para intervir ainda mais no mundo, quando mais não seja, para remar contra esta maré tão tóxica do **não-pensamento**.

Sinto-me novamente convocado para me dedicar à **destruição amorosa**, como costumo afirmar no nosso seminário, ou seja, para me dedicar à criação de *outros* horizontes de criação, compreensão e compaixão na companhia dos meus muitos vizinhos nesta Torre de Babel do século XXI que está periclitantemente sob a nossa guarda colectiva.

Queremos outro mundo, ou seja, este mesmo mundo mas deveras desenfeitado e desagrilhado.

Eis tudo.

Com um abraço amigo do c

A Brief Epilogue

Come to know you move, feel, act and think in a prison.

Then learn how to leave it.

Think with every breath.

Become your own surprised being.

Bibliographical Notice

The volumes *Live from Earth, Unearthed Epistemologies* and *A Small Atlas of Earth* were first published by AuthorHouse (Bloomington, IN) in 2008 in a volume entitled *A Small Atlas of Earth, In Recollection of Legacies and Patterns of Growth*. Similarly, the volume *Babil, fifth floor* was first published by Colibri Editora in 2011 as part of a multilingual and multi-genre volume of essays, prose and poetry by the author entitled *Dez Anos in Portugal, Ensaios Prosa Poesia*. The fifth volume of poetry, *On Sentience and Drift*, appears for the first time in the present anthology.

The “script” of the author’s TEDxTalk/FCTUNL (17 June 2016) is published here for the first time as well as an excerpted letter by the author addressed to a former student with regard to the Nobel Prize for Literature, 2016. Both these texts are published, untranslated, in Portuguese.

Very few, but at times significant, changes have been made to the poetry available in the earlier published volumes.

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