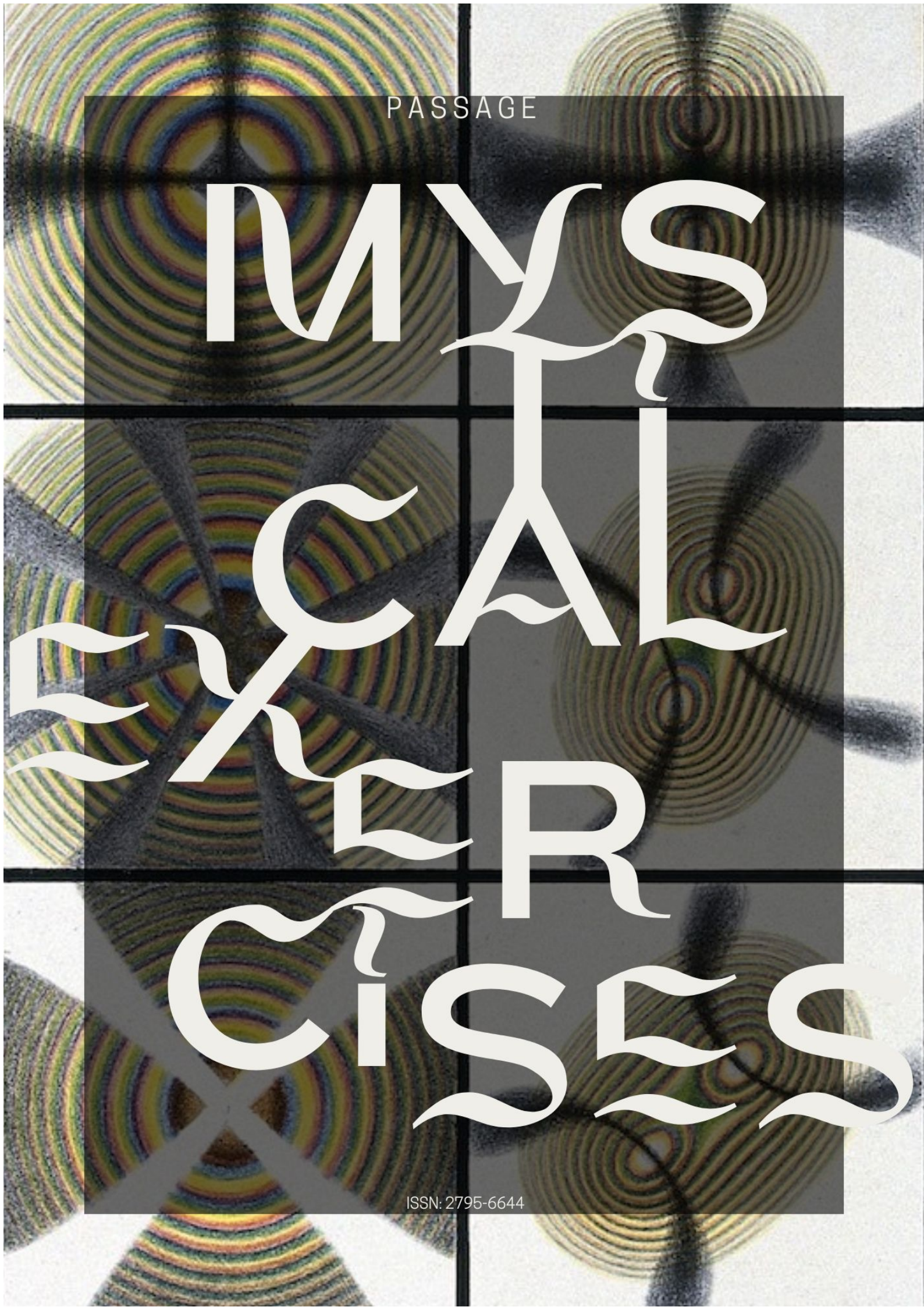

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New Skills for the Old Ceremony [1]

KRIS PINT, NADIA SELS, MARIA GIL ULLDEMOLINS – Hasselt University

Susan Sontag once claimed that "Every era has to reinvent the project of 'spirituality' for itself."[2] For Sontag, spirituality referred to "plans, terminologies, ideas of deportment aimed at the resolution of painful structural conditions inherent in the human situation, at the completion of human consciousness, at transcendence."[3] Even before getting to the actual asking (What is spirituality right here, right now?), there is something to be said about the processual and unfinished nature of the terms Sontag chooses. Something is being worked through. Spirituality becomes a fantastically human exercise – intimate, discursive, socially aware.

In a way, the spiritual struggles considered above mirror what Roland Barthes describes in *A Lover's Discourse*, which opens with a bold statement: "The necessity for this book is to be found in the following consideration: that the lover's discourse is today *of an extreme solitude*. This discourse is spoken, perhaps, by thousands of subjects (who knows?), but warranted by no one."[4] While spirituality is, in all its different forms, hardly silenced (from the quartz-brandishing, hashtag spirituality of TikTok, to the violent resurgence of religious conservatism in Europe and the United States; not to mention non-secularised cultures all around the world), the lonely earnestness of the Barthesian lover might be as unfashionable, or at least, as ripe for renewal, as that of someone trying to grapple with consciousness, transcendence, and structural asymmetries – let alone a God long dead.

The disconnect between the individual's discourse (romantic or spiritual) and the structural conditions (Western capitalist) might be what Michel de Certeau had already identified: the

technocratic focus on efficiency, productivity, and consumption making do without what is not immediately useful to its purpose. These spiritual practices thus get caged in the "zoo of the imaginary,"[5] together with other forms of human imagination, such as science fiction, romance, or the "witchcraft of ethnology."[6] What all these fictions seem to have in common is that they express some kind of desire for something that cannot be fully rationalised or addressed in economic or utilitarian terms: a passionate need for meaning, or a need for meaningful passion. The attractiveness of these fictions lies in a promise, a line of flight that is able to escape the hegemony of the "functionalist totalitarianism"[7] of modern society, as de Certeau calls it.

That said, for de Certeau, a wayward Jesuit himself, this isolation is not necessarily a bad thing; alternative practices and discourses bloom by trying to challenge the hegemonic position. Because it is unwarranted, ignored, and maladapted, a spiritual discourse can become wild and creative. No longer an offer of certainty and salvation, it can now perhaps contribute to a kind of mental survival, a reminder that there are other ways of doing, other ways of speaking about what happens to us. A reinvention, as Sontag foresaw.

Poet Nisha Ramayya, in *States of the Body Produced by Love*, a hybrid work on Tantra, describes this tradition as

> the practice of extending, of stretching to make connections, of creating something from those connections…the weaving of multiple threads and the extrication of one part from the whole…literal, metaphorical and abstract; historic, mythic and imaginary; formal, ethical and philosophical…the plucks and glides of your body as you bend between what you want and what you are able to do or to have.[8]

Maybe this is applicable as one of the spiritual projects for this disenchanted, late-capitalist era: an extension from the lonely lover to become part of a greater whole, even if this whole is imaginary, even if this extension requires the body to "pluck and glide" along the way that brings reality closer to desire (and vice versa).

An impossible autotheology

In this second issue of *Passage,* we want to gather some fragments of a spiritual discourse from an autotheoretical – or rather, in this case, an autotheological – perspective: essays

that blend, just like Barthes and Ramayya, different spiritual discourses and practices of others with personal, intimate experiences.

As Jeremy Stewart succinctly puts it in his contribution,

> creative-critical writing is characterised by a desire to find space within academia for otherwise marginalised experiences. This is often a case of drawing on personal, emotional, or spiritual registers typically excluded from academic writing, rendered illegitimate in advance as modes of academic knowledge.

What makes the inclusion of the said spiritual register in an academic context especially useful is that it provides a supplementary form of knowledge and an opportunity to reflect upon these neglected intimate and domestic experiences, often regarded as far too everyday or too pathetic to become part of serious research.

On being/having a parent

An everyday, complex condition that appears in most pieces in this issue is that of being parented, or being a parent oneself. There are deceased parents (Brady Schuh), estranged parents (Jeremy Stewart), complicated parental figures (Theodore Locke), family separation (Libby King), and the blend of violence and boredom of early parenthood (J'Lyn Chapman and Sebastián González de Gortari). From a psychoanalytical perspective, it is of course not surprising to notice how these literally familiar experiences become entangled with a religious discourse. These are Freudian truisms, after all, not only in the sense that we create gods in the image of these seemingly omnipotent creatures we first encounter, on whom we depend for our survival, but also in the sense that the ecstasies, fears, and drives we experience in childhood keep on haunting us, expressing themselves in both collective and personal myths and fantasies. Religion, in its many forms, provides a framework for dealing with these overwhelming emotions and experiences, while at the same time allowing us to keep a distance and not be overwhelmed, especially if we are no longer capable of taking this religious discourse too seriously.

Tradition

Linking intimate, personal experiences to a spiritual tradition results in an obvious comfort because of the reassurance that you are neither alone nor the first person to experience whatever it is that you are going through. There is a meaning to it that transcends your own life, relating it to other generations. In this sense, the discourse of spirituality offers, to paraphrase Samuel Beckett[9], "a shape to accommodate the mess" (a sentiment that re-appears in some of the texts in this issue, explicitly in King's and Chapman's, but also intuited in Smeyers's, Stewart's, or even Palekaitė's). Tradition is in a way a borrowed practice, a way of working with, and talking about, specific intimate experiences. But, as Schuh demonstrates, in their juxtaposition of contemporary American burial and mourning practices with the short-lived burial fad of Judaic ossuaries during the Roman era, these traditions are already messy to begin with. Traditions do not possess some pre-supposed legacy of ancient wisdom, let alone being able to be neatly transposed to the present as balm for a spiritual malaise when dealing with death and loss. As Amy Hollywood remarks: "our reception of tradition is always also a critical engagement with it."[10] The critical engagement thus has to be also a creative one, transformative, capable of forging new relations, because "we realise that we occupy the world differently – or desire to occupy the world differently – than at least some part of the traditions into which we have been born demand."[11]

And the fact that these traditions are messy and do not fit the present makes them a valuable tool. As González de Gortari makes clear in his essay on the trickster god Tezcatlipoca, religious syncretism, the blurring of boundaries, the fusion with other traditions and other cultures, allowed this god "to survive and thrive."

Fiction, but all the same

Speaking of blurred boundaries, the one between fiction and reality is particularly important. As we stated earlier, considering spirituality, in whatever form, as fiction, a product of human imagination, is not a pejorative statement, nor a way of disempowering it. The question González de Gortari asks himself about his relationship with Tezcatlipoca –

"Is my worship of him a fiction or is fiction the way I worship him?" – cannot get a definitive answer; if anything, it is one way any spiritual discourse may become effective. An acknowledgement of the fictionality may shield the overwhelming feelings and sensations one sought to mediate and express. Going back, once again, to psychoanalysis, we may term this a form of fetishism, a disavowal that Octave Mannoni famously summarised as, "I know well, but all the same."[12] In a traditional, religious context, a fetish has a comparable duplicitous capacity. While clearly a human-made artefact, it is, all the same, believed to be supernaturally powerful. With this double step, the figure of the fetish, independently of context, acts as a substitute that mediates the intolerable absence of the ultimate object of desire, and the equally intolerable excess of the real itself. Referring to the work of David Graeber, González de Gortari re-thinks the role of the fetish. Rather than being a superstition, it is re-interpreted as an ingenious cultural supplement, the basis for creativity – something new, revolutionary.

In Chapman's paper, fetish is an intangible construct that enables her to grapple with reality. An imaginary grid becomes a sort of devotional tool that helps the author deal with the dullness and demands of domestic life as a young parent. The grid, most commonly associated with perspective, secularism, science, and objectivity, turns here into a device she mentally projects onto reality. In doing so, she literally frames reality, contains it, offers some order to it. Citing Rosalind Krauss, she interprets the said grid as a pseudo-fetish: "the grid's mythic power is that it makes us able to think we are dealing with materialism (or sometimes science, or logic) while at the same time it provides us with a release into belief (or illusion, or fiction)."[13] The grid's newly acquired qualities make possible presence in empty space and allow for a contemporary, non-confessional form of revelation, a mystical "showing" of what is there, for better or for worse.

In Goda Palekaitė's text, two archetypical characters, a female Mystic and a Vampire, act as two fetishistic stand-ins in order to allow to creatively think the impossibility of erotic passion. The two characters appear as discursive, clearly artificial creatures, bringing together Christian faith, folkloric superstition, mystical treatises, and the aesthetics of B-films. Again, the artificiality is a crucial factor. As hybrid forms, part fictional, part

historical, part collective, part personal, they are used to express experiences of obsessional love. Here the blurred boundaries are those of the self, as they demonstrate how entangled one is with the self's many discursive others. It is not possible to discern who speaks through whom because the influence goes both ways. Here too, tradition shapes our most intimate experiences, while at the same these experiences distort and transform tradition. A paradox Palekaitė summarises in a quote from Virginia Woolf's *The Waves*: "I am rooted, but I flow."[14]

In Brady Schuh's piece, fiction is used to travel, both across vast spans of time and through different traditions. A Mustang, a casket, and stone boxes all contain not just the physical remains of others, but the stories of who they may have been, and the loved ones who survive them. The author, whose voice acknowledges the performativity of the text ("Listen," it begins), at some point confesses to being deceitful and passing on hearsay as truth, but all the same - after all, what do we inherit from history if not a few well-intentioned guesses, a handful of bones, and some names etched on stone? Schuh fully inhabits uncertainty, furnishing both careful observational details and research data. And a regular appeal to a "you," an imagined reader, keeps bridging the ambivalent reality of their text with that of their audience, who are, in themselves, an educated guess or an assumption.

Phenomenology

Obviously, the trickster god, the grid, and the vampire do not exist in a strictly ontological sense. It turns out that asking whether the discourse one borrows from is believable or not might simply not be the right question; spiritual experiences are a question of experience rather than existence. Or, if you prefer, phenomenology rather than ontology.

Kristof Smeyers makes this clear in his contribution. When it comes to personal accounts of supernatural experiences, like abductions or mystical raptures, a historian cannot reduce them to a strictly linear and rational narrative. The essence of these events is that they do disrupt the normal, logical flow of time; they act as a glitch, an excess of time. These stories are not obviously "true" in an objective sense, as demonstrated, for example, by how, over time, kidnapping fairies have been replaced by aliens from outer space. Just like the

encounter with the trickster god, these disruptive glitch-experiences clearly adapt to and acquire their meaning from their context. Still, that leaves the question of why they keep returning, even if with a difference, to a world that should by now be properly disenchanted. The anachronistic tension this creates is symbolised by the many visiting cards of modern-day "doctors" which promise, in a strange mixture of languages full of grammar mistakes, magical help for a multitude of problems. Smeyers keeps these cards as bookmarks in his scholarly books on religious and the supernatural history. As *Fremdkörper*, alien bodies, the cards' disproportionate claims are a reminder of linguistic games that challenge the hegemony of a rational, materialistic perspective.

On a more personal, intimate level, this tension of the (un)believable is also at stake in Stewart's revisiting of Derrida's *The Post Card: From Socrates to Freud and Beyond*. Stewart links this proto-autotheoretical text by Derrida with the biblical book of Daniel, and a premonitory dream about a certain pastor named Matthew Barnett, whom he subsequently meets. The autobiographical narrative resonates with, and in a way re-enacts, the texts based on the signifier Daniel (referring to the prophet, but also to the name of Derrida's unacknowledged son[MSL3] and the author's own middle name). It quickly becomes clear that a different kind of hermeneutics is at play here. The point is not whether Derrida really refers to a son in his book, or whether the dream in which God spoke to the author of Matthew Barnett was just a strange coincidence, or whether the book of Daniel prefigures the troubles and dreams of the writer. The point is how these coincidences, these associations, this constellation of intertexts and events is able to give meaning or shape to a narrative – even if, in the end, this narrative does not provide closure, and is unable to fully deal with the messiness of life itself.

Theodore Locke writes about precarity, grief, and childhood, and introduces a caretaker, Mema, who, albeit loving, also has very real flaws. Moving in and out of domestic and religious interiors, the relationship between the narrator and Mema is rendered in layers – different affects, different ages, different shifts in mutual dependency. The two grow together, learn of each other's needs and vulnerabilities. Despite the God in the background, the mystical exercise here really is the way-making to Mema: the dirt roads, the

desert vegetation, the couch, the episodes of *Jeopardy!*, a beloved curry recipe, a reproduction of a naive painting of an androginous child. Memory and senses build towards a faith of the familiar and daily, quite literally embodied in this central, complex figure. The loss of Mema leads to a helplessness akin to a loss of faith. What can one hold on to when the person who held so much together is no longer there?

In Libby King's fragmentary, embodied writing, the narrator seeks patterns to make sense of a changing reality. Linking remote landscapes, different phenomena hint at a greater meaning (woodchips, puppies, melanin pools, baseball caps), an almost-tangible pull that weaves people together, enmeshing them in time and space (sometimes violently). Despite the mention of being "suspicious" of myth, symbolic narratives keep on finding their way in and out of this piece, insistent on testing the relationship between thought and reality – a reality full of historical, environmental, and political shocks. By using brief bursts of consciousness and bringing together works by Sheila Heti, Amitav Ghosh, Karl Ove Knausgård, or Ludwig Wittgenstein, among many others, the text keeps on trying to find a reason, or a path, towards hope.

In all these texts, however widely different the spiritual traditions they engage with are, it becomes clear that autotheory is very much a performative genre. All these spiritual discourses are in a way a practice. They *do* something (they "bend between what you want and what you are able to do," remembering Ramayya). In the end, they work and iterate everyday life: In Locke's case, they are used to restore and possibly repair communication; in Palekaitė's and Schuh's, they fuel a process of, respectively, passion and mourning; in Chapman's, they help in dealing with the dullness of domestic chores; identity issues in King's and González de Gortari's, or serendipity in Stewart's, and in Smeyers's case they prevent a historical discourse from closing in on itself, becoming too complacent in its presumptions. In each case, the connection to some form of spiritual discourse allows a person to escape the deadlock of the autobiographical. Just because it was untimely and maladapted to contemporary subjectivity, the romantic discourse became attractive for Roland Barthes. Precisely because of its loneliness, Barthes could turn it into an antidote to

gregariousness. Deprived of power, the discourse became a way of challenging the *doxa*, the common sense, and of exploring alternative ways of talking about the self.

The same goes for a spiritual discourse. It confronts the egocentric with the eccentric, juxtaposes the self with a radical otherness that cannot be fully assimilated in the present.

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[1]Inspired by Leonard Cohen, *New Skin for the Old Ceremony*, recorded at Sound Ideas Studio, New York, 1974.

[2] Susan Sontag, "The Aesthetics of Silence," in *Styles of Radical Will* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1969), 3.

[3] Sontag, 3.

[4] Roland Barthes, *A Lover's Discourse: Fragments*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Hill and Wang, 2001), 2. (emphasis in original)

[5]Michel de Certeau, "Autorités chrétiennes et structures sociales," in *La faiblesse de croire*, ed. Luce Giard (Paris: Seuil, 2003), 95, translation by the authors.

[6] De Certeau, 95.

[7] Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, trans Steven Rendall (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1988), 186.

[8] Nisha Ramayya, *States of the Body Produced by Love* (London: Ignota, 2019), 32.

[9] Samuel Beckett, originally in Tom F. Driver, "Beckett by the Madeleine," *Columbia University Forum*, 4:3 (Summer, 1961), 21-24, reproduced in Rick, "Beckett by the Madeleine," in *Rick on Theater* (25th January 2018),http://rickontheater.blogspot.com/2018/01/beckett-by-madeleine.html.

[10]Amy Hollywood, "On the True, the Real, and Critique in the Study of Religions," *Revista de Estudios Sociales*, 51(January 2015), http://journals.openedition.org/revestudsoc/8953.

[11] Hollywood.

[12] Octave Mannoni, "'I Know Well, but All the Same…,'" in *Perversion and the Social Relation: sic IV*, eds. Molly Anne Rothenberg, Dennis A. Foster, and Slavoj Zizek (New York: Duke University Press, 2003), 68–92.

[13] Rosalind Krauss qtd. in Chapman, this issue.

[14] Virginia Woolf qtd. in Palekaitė

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Picture by the author.

Grid Practice: Everything Happens on a Wall or Through It

J'LYN CHAPMAN - Regis University

On a wall in my home, I imagine a grid. This grid in my mind is Leon Battista Alberti's veil, a weave of loosely woven fine thread intended in the fifteenth century to serve as the artist's perspective tool. The grid organizes space and slows time. It frames and, thus, separates the objects on or in front of the wall from their ordinary milieu, and I, in turn, meditate with these objects. This is an orientation toward banality and boredom, dust, chaos, and the occasional ecstasy. This essay is concerned with how the domestic setting, a house occupied by a family with small children, can be a space of spiritual knowing, even of mysticism.

grid, objects, mothering, practice, spirituality

A Disappointed Woman

I wanted to tell a story about devotion. I called it devotion because when I started to think about this story I sat on the couch and nursed and nursed a baby and stared at a wall, and I called that devotion. I made devotion when I made the baby, as if devotion was a little dog I trained to watch over it. I sat on the couch with my devotion and with our charge, the baby. Our trinity felt like a religion. I wanted to share it with others. For lack of a better word, I called this event of sitting a story. Although nothing happened in my story, there was a feeling of ecstasy and precision. When I tried to share the story of my devotion – I was compelled to share it – people expected a story. But it is not a story because there is no beginning or end.

Narrative is a structure of incidents, a line made of points, a line onto which we hang details and a line that we intend to sever. I could make this line a story with a beginning and end, and in the middle, there would be rising and then falling. The shape of a rigorous walk. A journey. A belly inhaling and exhaling.

There is no structure for the now. I mean there is no place to put it. The child sobbing in his bedroom, my hunger, or the day – the cloudy, disappointing day – its urgencies and their fast fading, the cold sky, the two people walking on the street below, and the amber-coloured dog pulling at its lead.

I am trying to find a beginning where there isn't one. A point on which to place the churning details, the ones called conflict that must steer the story toward climax. Which shame was it? Which anxiety was the driver? What is the shape of despair? Once I imagined that by this point in my life, all conflict would be resolved. I would finally be good; I would be happy. The end.

But the present moves. Here it is, moving.

Now when I sit on the couch, and I stare at the wall, I am not staring at it, I am imagining a grid imposed upon it. In each box of the grid, I leave something. I pull something from the inside to the outside and place it in one box of the grid then move on, until I have filled the grid. Filling the gsrid is like building a wall where there already is one. I'm making the wall something more than a wall. I push out my breath. The first space is always filled with

breath. Then a worry. Then another. Sometimes a sense of satisfaction. Or gratefulness. Then concern. Agitation. More breath. And it goes on like this. I'm done with the exercise when the grid is full. And somehow my body, the tightness in my chest or the shivering in my spine, accepts this.

But this is not revelation. It's management. I am a bureaucrat of my thoughts.

Behind the grid is a wall and behind the wall a stairwell. I imagine that the stairwell with its aquarium-blue light and vaulted ceiling is infinite space. Where procedure turns into enlightenment. Will the grid, once full, become a plane of many windows, a porous film, a thatch to grow?

This is a story of my desire for more, a swelling. I will call it sight. I want more sight, to see more, to see through and more deeply, to see but not with my eyes. To come to the edge of my sight and to go beyond. I'm wrong to call it a story; it's a practice, which is to say that I try. I keep trying, although I sit. I sit, but within my sitting is movement.

I wanted to call this kind of sight a showing, the word for revelation the fourteenth-century mystic Julian of Norwich used to describe the sixteen visions she received from the Lord, some of which were not images but understanding. But when she compares the vision of a small round ball, "all that is made," lying in the palm of her hand, to a hazelnut, I cannot see past the striated husk of a real hazelnut to the vague ball.[1] Julian evokes the hazelnut only to communicate the size of the vision, and the vision communicates something about God – he is the Maker, the Keeper, the Lover – but I leap over the metaphor for the nut I wish to place, shell and all, in my mouth. Julian never mentions a wall, table, bed, dust, or even a window, although we know she had three. She occupies her cell for contemplation, so the fact that her revelations don't involve the objects of her cell, of which there were likely few, or even the wall of her cell or even the window, out of which she was meant to view the adjoining church, suggests that her sight was so close to her own body that it turned inward.

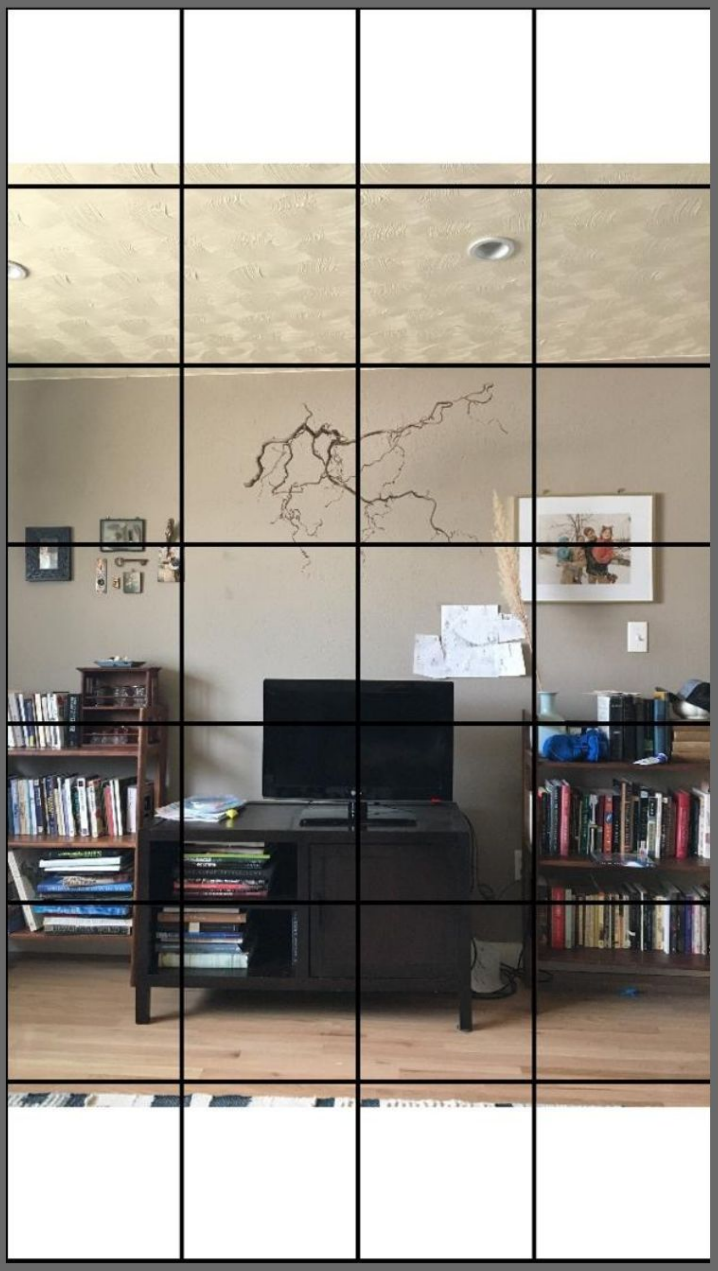
This is how I know I do not want what I see to exist only in words, to merely serve the function of modifying the abstract concept, like the coin that shows scale. But I also don't want to give meaning to what I see or for meaning to emerge from my psyche into objects as it did for the Surrealist Leonora Carrington, who, in her madness, built from her only

possessions in the Spanish asylum (a few French coins, empty refill pencils, eaude cologne, powder, face cream, a boat-shaped nail buff, small mirror, and lipstick) a solar system to save the world.[2] I want "bare things, things in themselves," as Bernard says at the end of The Waves.[3] (To receive the bareness of things, I think I must be a bare person.)

I want to apprehend indiscriminately what is before me, the banal wall and its objects, and for knowledge, knowledge that is perhaps already within me and already within the world, to circulate through a room as atoms are probably doing right now, although I can't see them. It is not that a wall has mystical properties, but that my attention first imbues the pause in which I look with significance and then penetrates beyond the pause, I hope, like light reveals its materiality by first illuminating that same wall. "The wall is a machine that won't stop working," Suzanne Doppelt writes of a wall with light on it.[4]

Just as for Doppelt the wall holds light so that it might be recognised as light and not merely the means by which an observer recognises the wall, I make the wall an instrument for seeing what is there and what is there an instrument for seeing what else is there. I see an object, and I see through the object. "Everything happens on a wall or through it,"[5] but because the wall is "a single point expanded," as Kristen Kreider says,[6]vast and disorganised even when bisected by other walls, I need to add to the wall another machine, a grid.

The machine of this grid in my mind is Leon Battista Alberti's veil, a weave of loosely-woven fine thread separating me from the wall I face and which provides a shape and the elegance of collapsed binaries. It is surface and window, restriction and abundance.
It organises space and slows time. It frames and, thus, separates the objects on or in front of the wall from their ordinary milieu. I use the grid to see and through this sight provoke more, something for which I do not have a word, something on the edge of intelligibility. "Mystery is the content. Intractable expression. Deaf to rules of composition," Susan Howe says. "What is writing but continuing?"[7]



Picture by the author.

There Is Nowhere to Go in This House

I look into the horizon of my things for the seam where procedure becomes enlightenment.

I look into the middle distance and breathe.

I close my eyes and breathe into a square I have pulled with my mind from the grid into the space of my empty face.

I am sliding my hand between two folds of myself. The cold day with the family inside the house was such a loud day. My friend made a star from printer paper, scotch tape, and staples while the children cleaned their mess, crying and blabbering and acting like animals, like horses whinnying. I hung it from the ceiling in the corner of the room. It is in my grid, and so is the filbert branch, its lanugo-like dust, the television, the photo of us in the snow, the child's map of the house, the bookshelves, the toothpick holders, the green thing in the shadow, the exquisite brass hardware from my grandfather's house.

When I sit on the couch and face this wall, I think of the place I have been that is the most far from the place I am. I do not think of geographies. I think of my mind. I am a great distance from my own mind.

And yet other parts of my life feel perpetually at-hand, so familiar as to be transparent. When the baby was born, I perceived my home as strange, un-homely. It was as if the rooms rearranged themselves, the furniture imperceptibly shifted. But then I came to anticipate the house, again, with its new inhabitants, with the scraps of outside that cling to them. Now I take pictures of the sticks and rocks the children bring in from the backyard to make myself pay attention to this space. It is a way to notice the ambient debris, to compose the invisible objects. Through this documentation, I also remember that these people with whom I share this space are beings who find pleasure in shapes and texture, who handle and arrange objects, who are oriented toward me but revolve into their autonomy.

There is nowhere to go in this house. I am at an impasse – an *aporia* in physical space and understanding. There is nowhere to go, and yet passages open to me: to live the life of the anchorite and to live it with one's children, to empty the self of the self and to not suffer, to have a name and to not know it, to attune to these sensations and to orient toward their

object, to feel one's self compelled to the vectors of flattened space and to grow something in the tensions of this taut net. This is what seems possible at the edge of a room.

But no, not grow but adapt, not adapt but exaptate tactics[8] – to co-opt a previous adaptation, maternal nurturance, to suit another function, my survival, or to co-opt this house as my lab. In her essay "Les Goddesses," the photographer and writer Moyra Davey quotes Mary Wollstonecraft's biographer who quotes Wollstonecraft's friend and eventual partner William Godwin: "A disappointed woman," Godwin told the suicidal Wollstonecraft, "should try to construct happiness 'out of a set of materials within reach.'"[9] I hold happiness in an open hand, but, like Davey, I'm obsessed with Godwin's counsel. To see, you need things to see, and thankfully I am surrounded by walls with so many things to see I will never need to stop seeing.

The artist Mary Kelly's meticulous documentation of her son's first six years of life, using his clothing, soiled diapers, and drawings, is a kind of exaptation even as it belongs to a more complex engagement with psychoanalytic theory. Kelly's *Post-Partum Document* couples these objects with Lacanian diagrams printed directly on her infant son's vests, diaries of his solid-food intake under the stained diaper liner, and pseudo-scientific language accompanying the child's scribbles. Kelly co-opts the materials of daily mothering and its concomitant anxiety. I noticed immediately, without having to engage with the psychoanalytic framing, an aspect of the project I resist, how Kelly's documents reveal the way culture conflates fear and obsession with so-called instinctual maternal care, in effect rewarding destructive behaviours and making mothers martyrs. These states of mind and the activities to which they attach consume energy one could spend on their art, unless, of course, these labours become the art. Kelly places these objects and the mother's internalised oppression in the narrative of psychoanalytic theory, but the mother, rather than her child, is the protagonist of this story. These are the mother's objects mediated by theory, as Margaret Iversen writes.[10] In light of Kelly's feminist adoption of psychoanalysis, her relationship to the objects that compose *Post-Partum Document* should be read as fetishistic attachments: When the child can no longer serve as the mother's phallus, she fixates on his objects. These objects memorialise the mother's loss of status within patriarchy and compensate for it. Yet it's not only that the mother has found an

object to compensate for her deficiency; she has found a way to conscript this object, her object, into a powerful narrative that has not included her. The attachment, Iversen writes, "is sublimated in the pleasure of understanding psychoanalytic theory as well as, in Kelly's case, the mastery of her artistic materials."[11]

When a mother keeps and displays these objects, they become cathected objects or, in the case of Kelly, intentional "fetishes"; when an artist keeps and displays these objects, they are "found." The former marks out lack; the latter a seam between the perception of external nature and the unconscious. These objects show up by chance, like "visual residues" of the unconscious, as Andre Breton described.[12] When it comes to found art or by extension the "readymade," seeing precedes designation. But what kind of seeing are we talking about? Or to what do we turn and with what intention? When I look online for "found art," I notice that male artists are never finding dirty diapers. A person finds a urinal by peeing in it. A person finds a diaper by changing it. Are these art objects an emergence of the unconscious into the phenomenal world or things that share a *residence* with gendered bodies? The conceptual work of Kelly's *Post-Partum Document* sits somewhere between found art and assemblage, but if not for Kelly's explicit engagement with the unconscious, its repetitions and duration, its obsessive indexing and systemisation could be read as a conscious turn *toward* gendered labours of the house, as a performance of life, if not of keeping oneself alive, as an artist, as a sentient being, by immersing oneself in the material of one's orientations.

In *Queer Phenomenology,* Sara Ahmed draws attention to the ways in which we orient toward things that mean something for us. Where we are located determines what we perceive, while what we perceive affects how we inhabit our locations. Ahmed writes that when reading Husserl, she longs for the "particularity of the objects" that share residence with the writer – like the paper on which Husserl writes of paper: "The paper is…'in' the writing, and hence the writing is 'around' the paper."[13] There are other objects too, objects that constellate around the paper on which the event of writing occurs and that form the background of writing. Husserl "turns his back on" these objects, as well as on the rooms of the home in which he writes. The rooms, their objects, and their inhabitants, namely the children, are relegated to the background of Husserl's writing. "A queer phenomenology,"

Ahmed writes, "might be one that faces the back, which looks 'behind' phenomenology, which hesitates at the philosopher's back."[14] A queer phenomenology does not conceal these inhabitants nor the labours that make the writing possible, and it does not mystify the objects toward which we orient.

The people in my house are never really in the background. Even when they are absent, as they are now, my people are in my writing. I evoke them, intentionally, but how can I help it? Even when they are gone, they interrupt me. And when I look away from the screen on which I reproduce them, they are in the objects before me. I direct my consciousness toward them.[15] The children entered the world through me, and the world gathered around them, adhered. And now when I turn toward the children, I must address the world, and when I turn toward the world, I must address the children.

Davey's photographic series *Long Life Cool White* documents the detritus of the house, framing it not as objects with psychic value but as the ambient rubble of domestic life that one either corrects or ignores, that consumes one's time and attention. When I first encountered the book *Long Life Cool White*, which includes plates and two prose pieces by Davey, I was at home with a baby, whose presence in the house changed the house, changed the function of certain rooms, severed and reconfigured my connection to objects and space. Davey's photographs affirmed this estrangement. The spaces in Davey's photographs are different from my own, yet they functioned like a mirror, easing me into my own home and I suppose into motherhood. Davey's images are often close-up shots of private spaces, "heightened absorption and suspended time," to use Davey's terms,[16] but the photographs are also an orientation toward what phenomenologist Maurice Merleau-Ponty calls the "body schema," or habits of daily experience.[17] A still life of kitchen clutter, cereal and cracker boxes lined up on a refrigerator that is itself a surface for notes and children's drawings in the photograph *Glad* (1999), the more discordant and accidental of all the household debris, thrusts that clutter to the foreground, so that it must be tended to with new tactics.[18] The photograph is a way of consuming these items, "digging our way out," Davey writes in the video transcript "Fifty Minutes," "either from the contents of the fridge, or from the dust and grit and hair that clog the place; or sloughing our way through the never-ending, proliferating piles of paper, clothing, and toys."[19] If, as Roland Barthes

suggests, the photograph contains death, the "that-has-been," Davey's photographs of food, which must be replenished, also contain the future, the "that-will-be."[20] Davey has called the Sisyphean cycle of consumption and replenishment "domestic survival,"[21] and the photographs of dusty surfaces a response to feeling blocked as a photographer.[22] This seems to me an exaptation, in which the camera's so-called objectivity "cuts through the carapace of our habitual interest-laden perceptions," as Margaret Iversen writes.[23]

In the way a photograph severs time, the grid brings the background forward by chopping up the domestic space. The grid makes the domestic scene difficult and prolongs perception (as Viktor Shklovtsky wrote of art). I can bracket a few objects while keeping the whole present. Attention excludes nothing.[24] The objects that the grid helps me to identify do not come into my consciousness by chance. They do not emerge from their backgrounds to fill an absence. They are not images of objects, or unconscious fantasies that promise wholeness. I could say the wall behind them pushes them toward me, and the grid offers resistance. And I am here too, with these objects, anticipating more, hoping that the rigid wall is one plane in a many-folded fabric. That my procedure – geometric – might unfold this plane.

Perception Machine

My husband tells me he is not sure what I mean when I talk about grids, and suddenly I wonder if I am in a dream or on my real couch. I wanted to write in and of the real world, not in and of a dream or heaven or even a shadow, but now I wonder if I am in the world I think I am in. Didn't I put my children in the car this morning and move along the grid of my town's streets? Didn't we make a series of right-angled turns and then arrive at our destination? And didn't I travel along this same route back to my origin, my green house?

I think I perceive a shape in the world, not in me. I assume others must perceive this shape. And now I wonder if when I think I see something holy and true, I am seeing the refractions of a shattered nerve or my desperation. Does my reader perceive the bee entering the penstemon? Entering in this drought and heat the sleeve of a purple bloom?

Isn't the better question what I mean by "holy" and "true"? Because in contrast the grid is simple: a series of parallel and perpendicular lines that form boxes and structure the void,

define a space. And in defining that space make the void functional. The grid makes possible presence in empty space. It is a way of getting started *ex nihilo*, an affirmation, permission, precision, or a sense of it. I think you think the grid is a restriction, my husband says, then a child interjects a different question, about the neighbour or dinner or the location of some object. (I don't remember.)

The grid enables our perception of infinity and isn't infinity the opposite of restriction?

What are *holy* and *true* but my subjectivity and desire?

I have heard the grid described as a ghetto, a fortress, a ledger of incontrovertible evidence, as static, predictable, an efficient machine. Michel Serres discouraged "box thought, said to be rigorous, hard and rigid boxes,"[25] and Rosalind Krauss famously argued in her examination of modernism's grids, like those by Mondrian, Johns, Malevich, Reinhardt, and Agnes Martin, that "the grid's mythic power is that it makes us able to think we are dealing with materialism (or sometimes science, or logic) while at the same time it provides us with a release into belief (or illusion, or fiction)."[26] Only myth can hold the contradictions of matter and spirit (or the early twentieth century's "indecision" about its connection to such things) in "some kind of para-logical suspension."[27] At every turn,
Krauss emphasises modern art's grid as a way to mask and reveal the "shame" of "mention[ing] *art* and *spirit* in the same sentence."[28] Understood this way, the grid represses contradiction in the very way Husserl turns his back on biographical interruptions. The paradox of art and spirit and the interruptions of family life interfere with the sanctity of conceptualised experience. In fact, in her critique of modern art's use of the grid, Krauss's language resembles the directional language of phenomenology: The grid is "what art looks like when it *turns its back* on nature."[29] Must the contradiction of nature and spirit be resolved? Or is it simple enough to turn toward it, to move toward it,
to breathe into it?

The grid is a shape and a pattern, and it shows up in other visual images besides those of modern art. If we do look behind the grid, Krauss points out, toward its historical past, we will see that grids were used in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries in perspective studies. For Krauss, these perspective grids differ from the modernist grid that turns away from reality and toward itself, creating a kind of autotelic, hermetic cage. "Perspective was the

demonstration of the way reality and its representation could be mapped onto the one another," Krauss writes, "the way the painted image and its real-world referent did in fact relate to one another – the first being a form of knowledge about the second."[30] Yet, Krauss calls the perspective grid, inscribed on the painting, an "armature of its organization,"[31] suggesting that the grid is not only the framework on which an artist depicts reality but also its protection from that reality or perhaps from the viewer who belongs to reality. Hannah B. Higgins, in her study of the grid in all its forms, *The Grid Book*, calls this perspective grid a transparent screen that creates a simultaneously continuous and interrupted illusion of reality.[32] Alberti called his grid of woven, coloured strings a veil and hung it in front of the object or scene he wished to depict.[33] Even in this more benign form, facilitating the depiction of reality, the grid served as a partition between the real viewer and the depicted reality.

Krauss considers the grid a participant in the early twentieth century's drama, "where science did battle with God,"[34] yet this participation isn't unique to the twentieth century. The grid, especially as a perspective tool, has always participated in a burgeoning secularism, which, "Oriented toward a single human viewer, even a single eye,"[35] privileged human subjectivity and reason. After all, one of the most well-known examples of one-point perspective, in which the grid is represented in the floor tiles and ceiling coffers, is Raphael's early sixteenth-century fresco, *The School of Athens*, a pictorial attempt to wed Catholic theology with (pagan) classical philosophy. At relatively the same time that *perspective* was used to describe "the art of drawing solid objects on a plane surface so as to give the same impression of relative position, size, or distance, as the actual objects do when viewed from a particular point" (1563), so was it used to describe "the aspect of a subject or matter, as perceived from a particular mental point of view" (1605); nowadays, we consider perspective "a particular attitude towards or way of regarding something."[36] Which is to say that a manner of seeing became synonymous with a manner of thinking.

The grid is a spatial device – it organises space and imposes order on domestic chaos – but it is also a perspective machine. It creates a screen that interrupts the domestic milieu. When I focus on a single box of the grid, the objects within that box appear to me

fragmented. The obstruction of the continuous visual field slows my perception. But sight is not enough to achieve the work of shifting perspective. Breath lubricates the perception machine. Like liquid wax, it finds a way through the abscissas and ordinates, like a needle, it punctures the hard surface.

"When we experience pain for the world, the world is feeling through us," Joanna Macy and Chris Johnstone write in *Active Hope*.[37] They suggest a practice of "Breathing Through" when "feelings flow into us from the world."[38] Like other breathing practices, Breathing Through requires a passive alertness. It's an attention that, even with eyes closed, resembles watchfulness. You decide the invisible can be seen so that you can watch your breathing and note how it happens on its own. You visualise it as "a stream or ribbon of air," Macy and Johnstone instruct, weaving in, through, and out your body. Then you breathe in the pain of the world and let that pass through you. This pain is like a needle threaded by red yarn from the skein of pain. I simultaneously breathe into my body and through the grid, up and through and down and through. As if puncturing cloth. My breath is a needle is the pain of the world. My body is the grid is the machine that helps me see. This is a grief practice. It shows me how breath can complement the grid, can plumb what the grid makes strange.

The breath sutures the objects of my house to the world outside my house and to me, my body. It seems impossible to heft this embroidered weight. The structure tears, and in the house a hole opens. In this hole is absence, but more specifically (and more tritely) death. I am sometimes slipping at its edge, but mostly I am just breathing with it. When you breathe in the pain of the world, then there is the pain of the world, you dwell with it. But the breath circulates, loosens the boundaries, makes them soft and the moment continuous. The paradox of matter and spirit dissolves with the breath. In her encounter with Eastern yogic practice, *Between East and West*, Luce Irigaray connects the breath specifically to the mother, who gives life, makes matter.[39] This is breath that begins with the family. It is a breath of the home, where corporeal life takes place. But, Irigaray posits, when understood through Eastern spirituality, the mother need not only share the breath of life, but also the breath of spirit. "From the beginning," Irigaray writes, "she passes on physical and metaphysical existence to the other."[40] This exaptation of the home is one that always-already existed.

The people in my house are never in the background. Even when they are absent, my people are in my writing. Even when they are silent, they interrupt me. My thoughts slalom around them until their presence snags, and I direct the line of my attention toward them. You don't really need me, I scold their crusty dishes. Get a life, I tell their unmade beds.

The day was like a bleating lamb. I could hardly stand it or the way I complied with its entreaties. I couldn't tell what made me angrier – the demands or my acquiescence. You could call the latter devotion, but really it was a frictionless slip into duty. The devotion I want integrates my obstacles rather than appeases them, but it is so much harder to be devoted this way. It is so much harder not just to not disperse into a million fragments for the lambs to eat but to experience in the interruption an opening, what filmmaker Nathaniel Dorsky says *is* devotion: "to experience what is hidden, and to accept with our hearts our given situation."[41]For Dorsky, film has a special power to "[subvert] our absorption in the temporal and [reveal] the depths of our own reality, it opens us to a fuller sense of ourselves and our world."[42] I like this idea, but film is something made; it isn't accidental, not in the way another person's subjectivity is accidental, spontaneous, always emerging into the shared world. I am talking about being interrupted into the temporal from the abstract. It is like thinking, idling, imagining, and then choking.

The grid is a practice toward integrating the interruption. The grid is a way to make things harder. I may be the only person in the twenty-first century trying to make things harder, the process slower. The grid is an obstacle, a texture, a thatch that stalls erosion, that makes possible presence in empty space, an inefficient machine. When joined with breath, the grid transforms the house into a space of slow, unfolding mystery.

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[1] Julian of Norwich, *Revelation of Love*, trans. and ed. John Skinner (New York: Image Books, 1997), 9.

[2] Leonora Carrington. *Down Below* (New York: NYRB, 1988), 46.

[3] Virginia Woolf, *The Waves* (San Diego, CA: Harcourt Brace, 1959), 259.

[4] Suzanne Doppelt. *Lazy Suzie*, trans. Cole Swensen (Brooklyn: Litmus, 2014), 24.

[5] Doppelt, 24.

[6] Kristen Kreider, "On Text & Image" (panel talk for Text & Image Symposium, Naropa University, Boulder, CO, March 2017).

[7] Susan Howe, "These Flames and Generosities of the Hearth: Emily Dickinson and the Illogic of Sumptuary Values," last modified 2005, http://writing.upenn.edu/library/Howe/index.html.

[8] Stephen Jay Gould, "Exaptation: A Crucial Tool for Evolutionary Psychology." *Journal of Social Issues* 47, no. 3 (Fall 1991), 46.

[9] Lyndall Gordon, *Vindication: A Life of Mary Wollstonecraft* (New York: Harper Perennial, 2005), quoted in Moyra Davey, *Index Cards* (New York: New Directions, 2020), 90.

[10] Margaret Iversen, "Visualizing the Unconscious: Mary Kelly's Installations," in *Mary Kelly* (London: Phaidon, 1997), 41.

[11] Iversen, 41.

[12] Andre Breton, "Surrealist Situation of the Object," in *Manifestoes of Surrealism*, trans. Richard Seaver and Helen R. Lane (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1972), 272.

[13] Sara Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006), 26.

[14] Ahmed, 29.

[15] Husserl's thoughts "wander" toward what is behind him (Ahmed, 29).

[16] Moyra Davey, *Long Life Cool White: Photographs & Essays* (New Haven, CT: Yale UP, 2008), 139.

[17] Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, trans Donald A. Landes (New York: Routledge, 2012), 101.

[18] Davey, *Long Life,* 57.

[19] Moyra Davey, "Fifty Minutes," in *Index Cards* (New York: New Directions, 2020), 1.

[20] Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Hill and Wang, 1981), 77.

[21] Davey, "Fifty Minutes," 1.

[22] Davey, "Notes on Photography & Accident," in *Index Cards* (New York: New Directions, 2020), 26.

[23] Margaret Iversen, "Readymade, Found Object, Photograph." *Art Journal* 63, no. 2 (Summer 2004), 47, *JSTOR,* https://www.jstor.org/stable/4134520.

[24] J. Krishnamurti, *Freedom from the Known* (New York: Harper Collins, 1969), 31.

[25] Michel Serres, *Rome: The Book of Foundations,* trans. Randolph Burks (London: Bloomsbury, 2015), 197.

[26] Rosalind Krauss. "Grids," *October* 9 (Summer 1979), 54, *JSTOR*, http://www.jstor.org/stable/778321.

[27] Krauss, 55.

[28] Krauss, 54.

[29] Krauss, 50, italics mine.

[30] Krauss, 52.

[31] Krauss, 52

[32] Hannah Higgins, *The Grid Book* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2009), 151.

[33] Higgins, 157.

[34] Krauss, 54.

[35] Higgins, 150.

[36] *Oxford English Dictionary,* 2nd ed., s.v. "Perspective," Accessed September 5, 2022, https://www-oed-com.dml.regis.edu.

[37] Joanna Macy and Chris Johnstone. *Active Hope: How to Face the Mess We're in without Going Crazy* (Novato, CA: New World Library, 2012), 73.

[38] Macy and Johnstone, 73.

[39] Luce Irigaray, *Between East and West: From Singularity to Community*, trans. Stephen Pluhácek (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999).

[40] Irigaray, 81.

[41] Nathaniel Dorsky. *Devotional Cinema* (Berkeley, CA: Tuumba, 2014), 18.

[42] Dorsky, 18.

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Grief and the Love and Wrath of Divinity

THEODORE LOCKE - Trinity University

I combine personal narrative, prose poetry, and philosophical methods to argue that grief is a response to a metaphysical injury. Building on the theoretical work of others, I use personal narrative to develop the premise that persons are partly constituted by their relationships. Therefore, when a relationship to, say, a caretaker is severed, the bereaved literally loses a part of their self, and grief is a response to that injury. My argument is complicated by relationships where a caretaker sometimes acted in abusive ways. So, I discuss one way a relationship partly founded on abuse can be a proper object of grief. I also argue that since grief is a response to a metaphysical injury, a proper response to grief ought to be based on care rather than rational evaluation. Finally, the essay itself is not merely an act of descriptive or argumentative narration but is itself an act of repair.

grief, personal identity, narrative self, social identity, atonement

I. When you called

It was morning, February 23, 2020. Mema had been in the hospital for a little over a week but sounded so strong and in good spirits when I last spoke to her on the phone. Even though she was in the hospital, she had been in a hurry to get me off the phone so she could eat ice cream and play along with *Jeopardy*. My future employment as a philosophy instructor was very uncertain and things were financially tenuous, so I selfishly used her apparent strength to rationalise not dropping everything to fly to Atlanta. She was ninety-three, but visits to the hospital were not uncommon, and she always made it back home. But then there were serious complications during corrective heart surgery, and she was in the ICU being kept in a heavily sedated state. The doctors said it didn't look good. When I saw my phone illuminate with your number, I knew, and I sank down in sorrow and regret.

Teddy. She's gone. I've lost a part of myself, and it hurts so bad. Somehow you stitched those words together against the clamour of ventilators, heart monitors, and the overwrought voices of nurses and orderlies. Somehow those words managed to hold together just long enough to make their way to me. Then your voice quickly unravelled into uncertainty. *I don't know what to do.*

I didn't know what to say. I compulsively traced a figure eight around two pieces of dust stupidly sitting on my desk. With the trembling in your voice, I was suddenly eight years old again. You were piling us into that used, rust-trimmed Chevy hatchback – my emotionally precocious three-year-old sister, two smelly dogs, and an anxious cat – so we could begin our five-day exodus from Roswell, New Mexico, to Lake Placid, Florida, where we would live with Mema. There was still a dull ache murmuring from my back from when that man had thrown me against the wall above the couch. But there was also a measured relief in knowing that he wouldn't be able to do that anymore. Not to me, not to you, and not to Nicole. Yet there was that same trembling and uncertainty in your voice then. You knew we had to leave, but you weren't sure you could be whole without him. He was not my father. He was a strange man to me. Even so he had almost been more to you, and he was Nicole's father. I could tell from your watery eyes that you hoped maybe Nicole and I could help hold you together, hold all of *us* together, even as fragile as we were. I didn't know what to say. But I tried to be there as best I could as you drove day and night. First under the stubborn

steel desert sky and then through the shallow water pan swamps of the Gulf Coast under the heat-lamp sun, malodorous animals panting and whimpering the whole way. You had been working as a receptionist at a hospital. There was no way you could afford to leave him and carry the burden of taking care of me and Nicole on your own. Mema had been living alone on a fixed income in a house she and your dad mortgaged just before he passed ten years prior. Highlands County consisted mostly of retirees, orange groves, and cattle pastures, but the cost of living was low. With her help we could make it, and so we made our way to the safety and security of Mema's.

II. Confronting the question of grief

This was not the first time someone I cared about passed away, not the first time I felt sadness after a loss. But this was the first time I lost someone I loved so much and who had been so integral to my life. This was my first substantial experience with grief. The first thing I realised about grief is how ageist our assumptions about it can be. I frequently lived with Mema growing up. She had not merely been my grandmother but instead a dominant caretaker in my childhood and adolescence. As I grew older, we remained invested in one another's well-being, and our relationship grew into a deeper friendship. And when a friend – a best friend – leaves your life, it does not matter how old they are, the void is there all the same. In the months following her death I found myself thrown against a relentless wall of facticity every time I felt an acute desire to check on her, to let her know I was okay, or I started looking forward to my next visit when we would surely have yet another fiery debate about religion. The realisation that she was dead would stiffen my chest, leaving no breath but only a lump in my throat, and I would start crying yet again, unable to speak. And in trying to escape out of these episodes, sometimes in bad faith, I would wonder if this was what grief was – a debilitating sadness driven by a desire that was made deranged by the impossibility of its object.

Mema meditated on the existence and nature of God daily and held a deep conviction that God exists. And despite knowing that I was a sceptical person when it came to these questions, she always told me to pray – after all, what could it hurt? But Saint Anselm seemed to suggest that one cannot even think about God without acknowledging the real

existence of God, since our idea of God is of an absolutely perfect being, a being greater than any other conceivable being, and by definition what is absolutely perfect cannot be a mere idea but must exist outside of the mind – otherwise, we are left only with empty entertainments and gestures.[1]The monk Gaunilo was suspicious of Anselm's assumption that finite minds could fully harbour adequate thoughts about what exists, other than those based on what could be felt and seen, and so was suspicious finite minds could harbour any adequate notion of absolutely perfect beings. But even after setting questions about our finite minds aside, Gaunilo goes on to parody Anselm by pointing to the absurdity in thinking that we might have some reason to truly believe that a Lost Island – an ideal island more excellent than any other conceivable island – exists simply because we might be able to stir it up from the depths of our thoughts.[2]

Less worried about proving existence, and half a century after Anselm and Gaunilo, Blaise Pascal appeals to the *homo economicus* by asking us to consider the expected payoffs of believing in God. Pascal weighed an infinity of infinite happiness against finite losses – "But your happiness? Let us weigh the gain and the loss in wagering that God is... If you gain, you gain all; if you lose, you lose nothing. Wager, then, without hesitation that [God] is."[3] But since late adolescence, the larger issue for me hasn't really been about payoffs. Instead, I've often found myself feeling more ambivalent about the question itself, and it seems my incessant anxiety has been driven mostly by a plague of more insistent worries and insecurities that continually hammer away whether I believe God exists or not. Yet unlike God, Mema was rarely hidden from my life. So losing her has made me wonder if I shouldn't still hold out hope for an ideal afterlife where we are all reunited. Perhaps we will all live together with perfect, infinite joy and unconditional love. Such a potential reward might somehow make my acute and painful desire to talk to and see her again rational, it could turn my grief into an ever-expansive desire that allows me to suspend any disbelief that I will be with her again.

But that also feels disingenuous, and I suspect that Gaunilo's worries apply to any of Pascal's potential payoffs just as well. Even if I could conceive of some hidden Lost Island of Paradise – an island of which no greater can be conceived and so promising unconditional love, infinite happiness, and perfect joy – and even if that possibility provided some small

reason to believe that such an island exists and that I might find it, wouldn't it still be foolish to wager on that possibility, to let go of what is in my hands right now and set sail in search of that island? More importantly, while Mema was integral to my life, the history behind our relationship was filled with complicated knots. So I do not know if our relationship in full, with all of its messy and often painful parts, could even exist on this ideal island. Our relationship did not, and could not, originate from unconditional love or infinite and perfect joy, but only from a very vulnerable love and finite joy. It seems that is the best any of us can do or expect from one another while maintaining empathy, while still holding on to one another – because what we actually hold in the palms of our hands is finite. And if an imperfect relationship that constitutes an important part of who I am cannot exist on this Lost Island of Paradise, how could I? Like all idealisations, no matter how formally well-behaved, ideals of God, of unconditional love, and of perfect joy seem much too thin to hold the significance of our particularities, our individual finiteness and imperfections. Yet those things are needed to bond us with one another and in turn give us a real sense of expansiveness and possibility.[4]

But, in my grief I was reduced and confined by the experience of such a significant loss, an experience which remained mysterious to me and left me feeling helpless.

III. The love of divinity

The exodus from New Mexico was not the first time I was going to live in Mema's house. Three years earlier, Mema flew to Roswell and took me back to Lake Placid to attend kindergarten. The public schools in Roswell did not offer full days for earlier grades. My mother was struggling with her mental health just after Nicole was born. Nicole's father had lost his job as a repairman for the cable company. My own father was a police officer in the military and was newly married overseas; his presence in my life was minimal. My mother faced multiple burdens of maintaining her mental health, early motherhood, underpaid labour, and unpaid labour at home, all at the age of twenty-six. Mema was lonely and felt isolated, so my living with her seemed to be a good arrangement for everyone. It was an arrangement that continued for many years throughout my childhood and adolescence and became constitutive of who we were. Mema constantly wrote to my father, keeping him

up to date and demanding he be more involved in my life. I am forever grateful that he gave me those letters thirty years later. *I am well aware that I cannot keep Teddy but in the meantime I can give him so much – a nice home, clean, nice clothes, a lot of attention and love, help him develop his own personality. Teddy asks 1000 questions a day, his mind is like a sponge. These are the formative years, I strongly believe now is the time to shape the future man.*[5]

Over the years, it was most often just the two of us living together, along with my dog Smiley. Mema and I went to church nearly every Sunday morning. Service after service, I sat lost in awe of the vast amount of empty space contained between us and the cathedral ceiling high above. I found the inverted mountainous valleys of the ceiling rolling overhead, framed by the ridges of the monumental buttresses, both comforting and vertiginous. And there was Mema looming above with her closely contained yet wild head of black curls, her boundless blue eyes, and her long red nails guiding her voice along the faded white hymnal page. Her bright ruby red lips dancing gracefully against the many colours of the stained-glass images of angels and prophets – *What wondrous love is this, O my soul, O my soul.*[6] Earlier on those mornings I would often carefully watch her reflection in the wall-to-wall mirrors of her bedroom, poised at her black veneered vanity bursting with faux gilded handles, as she assiduously applied her lipstick. And at church her mezzo-soprano voice took flight from those ruby red lips, rapturous as it ambitiously tried to fill the sweeping void of the cathedral vault above – *And when from death I'm free, I'll sing on, I'll sing on.*[7] It was a voice so many would compliment her on, especially men. It was a voice that soared above the chorus of the more modest and pious. It was a voice that carried a confidence I admired but also felt self-conscious of as I stood demurely by.

Yet it was a voice that was always absent during the last hymn because we would furtively leave service from the back pew so that we could make it to the American Legion Hall for the Sunday afternoon bingo games. And as Mema impatiently waited for me to put my seatbelt on, she would remind me that the luckiest cards for the big $250 jackpot were most certainly at the tops of the sheets the vendors pulled from. The expansive American Legion Hall could easily seat at least two hundred players. When games were in session, the cardinal croupier stood high in a pulpit at the front of the hall and carefully attended to

whichever white ball managed to escape from the multitude acting out their rituals of chaos inside the massive bingo ball-blowing machine. This machine composed a comforting white noise in chorus with the many exhaust fans sucking the gauzy white smoke from white cigarettes nervously burning down in the smoking sections. Most of the white-capped players were elderly wives or widows of veterans, though some were veterans themselves. And as they sat in formation, paired off in rows of long folding tables, bathed in fluorescent light, they were all focused with feral expectancy on the grand divining flashboard of seventy-five numbers sitting high above the croupier's pulpit. And as the croupier revealed the next number, a flurry of red bingo daubers and red chips would call in response along with weary groans of frustration.

The times before and between games were times of mingling, conversing, and gossiping. Mema's dark hair suspiciously stood out against the whitened crops of her peers, yet her French accent and lively prosody genuinely stood out against the more patient and calmer Floridian dialect. Children hardly ever came to the hall, so at nine years of age my presence also stood out every weekend. Everyone would comment on how nice and well-mannered I was, in which Mema took great satisfaction, given how much effort she put into making sure my hair was parted to her liking, that my shirt was properly tucked into my second-hand Sunday slacks, and that I always said "yes, ma'am," "may I please," and "thank you." Aside from practicing manners and courtesies, I also formed many meaningful friendships at bingo. When I wasn't sitting next to Mema reading or drawing, I would commune with the many retired, elderly women and men who missed their grandchildren, or perhaps never had any. They would compliment my drawings, and ask me questions about school and what I was reading. I would ask them about their luck, their families, and what their favourite soap opera was. And I would gladly serve them, going to the concession stand to refill their decaf coffee or grab them a bag of chips. Sometimes I was rewarded with a quarter or my own snack, which I graciously accepted since I did not receive an allowance. But those rewards were mostly irrelevant to me. In serving my friends I felt the intrinsic joy and immense pleasure that comes with being helpful for others. I learned about the gratitude one feels when one recognises they are the object of the gratitude of the person they are helping. And these loving moments and friendships lasted throughout many years of my childhood and adolescence.

But during the games, when I started to feel angst and to grow bored with keeping myself occupied at the table I shared with Mema, I would often escape to the bathroom. I enjoyed the private solitude that came between the four lacquer-finished stall partitions, the calm sounds of running water, and the minty aroma of antiseptic urinal cakes incensing the air. But those sounds and smells would change into something much more curious later in the afternoon. At the back of the bingo hall there was a smoky, dark bar for veterans that would open at two p.m. when the sale of alcohol could begin on Sundays in Highlands County. That back bar was always hidden from me, but the patrons would use the bathroom shared with the main hall. And I would nervously and covertly peer from underneath the stall partition and watch the men at the urinals. I did not understand their strange words, but I was made curious by the sight of their fleshy, reddish penises. Something within me would stir, something that felt uncertain but not unfamiliar. It brought to mind the closeness I experienced years before with my friend in Roswell as we tentatively explored the sensuality of skin against skin in her tree house. It evoked the feelings of warmth I experienced with my friend in North Port when we slept in his parents' camper parked next to their house, and we unexpectedly spent much of the night tenderly exploring the secret places of one another's bodies despite being told "homosexuality" was a sin. Suddenly my heart jumped – *Teddy! Where are you? You better not be in that damned bathroom again. Have you seen my grandson?*

IV. The wrath of divinity

Before I was ten, I had already been to five different elementary schools in three different states. I did not act out in school, at least not often. But I did not pay attention and was disengaged, which resulted in many teacher notes. I know this is one reason why I often lived with Mema, who mostly stayed at home and could maintain steady pressure on my behaviour. Yet while she desperately wanted me to learn and grow, her methods were often cruel. The atmosphere at home could quickly turn tense, even dreadful. She would sometimes make me read the Bible alone in my room for hours. I remember how hard it was to stay focused, but nobody understood. She would quiz me on the reading and was prone to impatient outbursts of verbal insults when I did not perform up to her expectations – or worse, I would be thrown into a cold shower. These outbursts were terrifying – "Yet for all

this, his anger is not turned away, his hand is still upraised."[8] One morning, breakfast had been pleasant enough, and afterward I was washing the dishes. Mema stood over, scolding me: *Argh, no, Teddy! How many times must I tell you? Pay attention. You are wasting water. But I'm not wasting water, Mema!* Suddenly I felt the sting of her hand across my back. I turned, desperately searching for mercy in her eyes, finding only a multitude of wrathful angels with bodies crushed underfoot, mere rage and blood loosed against the narrowing blue. She began screaming. Innocence fled, leaving my insides quivering as she chased me down and into my bedroom, slamming the door closed on me. I felt confused and betrayed. Alone. Hours later she still refused to talk to me or to let me out – "How long, Lord? Will you forget me forever? How long will you hide your face from me?"[9]

While trying to process my grief after Mema passed away, I was talking to a close friend about the work of bell hooks and the possibility of reconciling love and abuse in the context of grief. My friend was participating in a Torah study group and recommended I look at the work of Rachel Adler.[10] The early books of the Abrahamic religions are filled with stories and metaphors that portray the relationship between God and humanity as fraught with antagonism, threats, and abusive punishments. Adler emphasises how these stories seem to be premised on toxic masculinity, on aggression and misogyny.[11] Overall, the stories and metaphors raise important theological questions about the extent to which the dynamics they convey can have any place in doctrines of salvation and liberation, both of which are radically inconsistent with abuse.

Of course, the general issue is not merely theological, since all caretakers are in some way bound with those cared for, often by some implicit or explicit covenant. Caretakers are charged with helping us grow and develop and with providing us with emotional and material support. Ideally this bond of dependence can be characterised as loving, but failures in caretaking are unfortunately common. Too often those charged with caring for us might provide some of the things we need while also expecting unquestioning obedience and loyalty and will punish us with abuse if we fail to meet those expectations. So how could any dynamic involving such abuses ever serve as a foundation for moral development, for redemption, for freedom from ignorance and suffering? How could any dynamic involving such abuses ever serve as a model for future relationships based on love and care? It seems

impossible, and often "we spend a lifetime undoing the damage caused by cruelty, neglect, and all manner of lovelessness experienced in our families of origin and in relationships where we simply did not know what to do."[12]

We navigate discontinuities in our lives by extending ourselves into the future through various narratives, for example, the narrative of family member, the narrative of caretaker, the narrative of dependent, among many others. The narratives not only work to make us whole by mending the discontinuities we suffer in life but are also a source of holding one another responsible. "Narrative is our construction of integrity. Through it, we seek to assume responsibility for our fractures and our fracturing without relinquishing our hopes of being trustworthy and being trusted. For if all errors were fatal, we would be too paralysed by despair to wish to assume responsibility or to desire integrity. If discontinuous selves are to be continuously responsible, our only hope is in the possibility of *teshuvah*, return and reconciliation, that injuries can be healed."[13] Fractures in our lives create a demand for reparation. However, reparation requires nurturance and love, and abuse and injury are significant forces that work against those requirements and so prevent repair. Moreover, the narratives that make integrity and responsibility possible are *themselves* defined through our relationships with others, especially those we live with. So the problem is easily compounded by a tragic dilemma that too often shapes domestic spaces, especially when they are relatively isolated from broader communities – the only person who might be the source of the nurturance and love needed to repair the narratives that shape us is instead the very person who is abusive and who needs to be held responsible. "When we understand love as the will to nurture our own and another's spiritual growth, it becomes clear that we cannot claim to love if we are hurtful and abusive. Love and abuse cannot coexist. Abuse and neglect are, by definition, the opposite of nurturance and care."[14] There were many times I felt fractured and unloved in the shadows of Mema'srage, when I could not see her face, and was deeply unsure if we could be made whole again.

Sometimes there are cases of abuse so severe that reparation is impossible, but even when reparation is possible – when the narratives that constitute us can be made whole so that we can be made whole again – love and nurturance are not enough unless they are grounded in

forgiveness, trust, and shared power. Forgiveness involves a recognition of the injurer as finite and imperfect. In cases where reparation is a possibility, it should also be possible to recognise the injurer as someone vulnerable and susceptible to emotional injury, even when they yield power.[15] But the process of forgiving the injurer should not have to begin with the harmed. The injurer must be able to confront their own vulnerability and imperfection. Furthermore, the narratives that make us whole only provide for the *possibility* of forgiveness, but in order for that possibility to be realised the narratives must be premised on trust, which involves a *mutual* recognition of our roles in those narratives. Unless the injured person can recognise a caretaker as whole, unless the injured person can reliably feel that the caretaker is motivated by a *genuine* desire to nurture growth, the injured person cannot recognise the caretaker as loving or caring but only as something strange and even dangerous. This means that the injured person must be able to recognise that they are the proper object of a caretaker's intention to love and care; the injured person must be able to see their *own* feelings, desires, and beliefs through the caretaker's eyes as something whole and worth caring for. An injured person cannot fully open up to another's attempts at love and care, no matter how ardent, if the injured person's voice is not heard, if the injured person's suffering is not felt through empathy, and if the injured person is not recognised as a co-creator of the narratives that define the relationship. Thus, being recognised as a genuine caretaker cannot be coerced – to be recognised as a loving and caring parent one must actually act and respond in those ways, which means the sufferings and demands of the injured must be heard and acknowledged.[16] So, when reparation is possible, there must be mutual recognition and shared power in addition to forgiveness and trust.

My interests in queer theory have partly stemmed from my overall interest in philosophy, but they mostly come from trying to make sense of the idiosyncratic gendered narratives that have shaped my values and dispositions towards others, starting at a very young age. The dispositions to forgive and to accept forgiveness, to be caring and to accept care, to be vulnerable and to accept vulnerability are often entangled with complicated gendered narratives. And there is a lot of debate about how these gendered narratives originate and operate in our lives. On the one hand, it seems that many gendered narratives are largely

shaped in public spaces and through public rituals, that there are broader social-juridical forces constantly shaping both gender and sexual desire.[17] On the other, some might worry that overemphasising these external factors leaves out the possibility of agency and the possibility that there are private narratives that work with or against the public pressures. But domestic spaces are an often-overlooked space in between, from where idiosyncratic gendered narratives can originate and are shaped by performances within the domestic space, a space that is not quite fully private and not quite fully public.[18]

Mema moved into her small two-bedroom house just after my grandfather passed. She lived on a fixed income, so over time her home became a museum for a post-WWII middle-class life. It was filled with mass-produced goods: replicas of still-life paintings, porcelain figurines, catalogue rugs and furniture, and a modest collection of Time-Life and Reader's Digest books. These artefacts once conveyed a vague degree of culture but had since lost most of their bourgeois qualities anywhere other than perhaps rural Highlands County. My room, which I was not allowed to decorate, always had the air of a quaint bed and breakfast. It was never the kind of room that could germinate masculine sensibilities typical of modern US culture. The carpet was a pastel yellow. The bed was headed with a scantily scrolled brass frame and skirted by a fine piece of laced fabric. The nightstand and dresser were littered with vases and baskets bursting with artificial fuchsias and roses.

But the artefact that always captivated my attention was a replica of an early Victorian-era painting, *Young Boy with Dog*, by Samuel Miller, which hung just over my bed. The painting itself is underwhelming. There is a young child holding a small picture book with one hand while resting the other on a small dog, which is gazing subserviently at the child while standing on its back legs and resting its front paws on the child's hips. Yet the painting shows very little depth, which creates the odd effect of the young child and dog looking more like paper doll cutouts than substantive creatures. The young child's hair is carefully parted, and they are wearing a peculiar billowing navy-blue frock with a white ruffled collar and soft yellow breeches peeking out underneath. They do not convey burgeoning masculinity but express a certain softness and deference instead. It is a young child who is wearing a frock because the child has not yet been fully *breeched*, i.e., classed as a man by their family, which was common in many Western European cultures during the

eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.[19] So the young child seems to be in an ambiguous state between early childhood and adolescence and between femininity and masculinity.

There were numerous periods of time when men were completely absent from my childhood. Yet there were still too many times I witnessed qualities of toxic rage from the strange men who did manage to pass through. And there were too many times I witnessed the same kind of rage in Mema. From later conversations I realise that rage partly came from the unprocessed trauma of having been treated like a catalogue porcelain figurine – broken, glued back together, traded off – by imperious or philandering men for so many years of her life, like when she was swept away from her family by her first husband, an older US military chaplain, at the end of the Nazi occupation of France. The dynamics of aggression and control typical of toxic masculinity that often echoed through our life together were terrifying. And while Mema also conveyed less toxic qualities such as a sense of pride in herself and a sense of self-reliance, which she tried to instil in me as well, I know that the toxic dynamics have manifested in me at certain times in the form of deep anxieties and a tendency to close myself off to people when they have tried to get close to me.

But the domestic space that defined my relationship with Mema was also shaped by deference and vulnerability, which constantly worked against the unhealthy manifestations of toxic masculinity. Ever since I was a toddler, Mema had encouraged and shown me how to be delicate, sensitive, cooperative, forgiving, and nurturing, all of which were traits that were often disparagingly relegated to femininity and domesticity in larger social contexts. So there was a peculiar kind of gendered narrative, a domesticated kind of masculinity, that shaped my life with Mema – not typical masculinity that was performed in a domestic space, but a queer kind of masculinity moulded by certain ideals of femininity grounded in domesticity. I internalised this domestic kind of masculinity, which did not fit well with the dominant ideals of masculinity I encountered outside of the home, and this meant that I often failed to meet the gender expectations of my peers – I was too nice, I was too unassertive, I was too weak, I was too emotional – and I was labelled a sissy or cast into some worse homophobic category. These incongruencies even confounded my relationships as a young adult when I failed but was expected to perform a certain kind of aggressive and assertive masculinity. Nonetheless, I'm sure that the strange idea of

masculinity that Mema impressed upon me has continued to shape who I am and has been instrumental in processing past traumas by allowing me to learn how to make myself vulnerable to others, how to accept my shortcomings, and how to have compassion for others and myself.

After the conflagration had settled, in the early afternoon, Mema called for me. She had just woken from a nap. I crawled into her bed. In the soft yellow light pouring through the delicate window curtains, lying close together, she asked me about how I was feeling, we cried, and then we talked about the beauty of the red cardinal's afternoon song. These tender moments were so valuable because they were necessary for the possibility of forgiveness and the reparation of our bonds that would continually develop with time. These tender moments were so valuable because they helped define us as persons capable of real love, a love based not only on a desire to nurture but also on mutual recognition and shared vulnerability.

V. The creation of ourselves through repetition

I was nearly sixteen and living with my mother and Nicole in North Port, Florida, when Mema sold her house in Lake Placid and moved four hours north to Ocala. A year later I had a new sister, Cheyenne. An abusive man who struggled with addiction had found his way into our lives, and my mother struggled to keep us afloat financially. So, when Cheyenne was just four months old, we had to move in with Mema, but five months later there was a bitter argument and we had to leave Mema's and move yet again, this time to Georgia. By the time I was eighteen, I had been to four different high schools in two different states, and I started working full time to help out financially, though I still did not have a high-school diploma. But the stress of family dynamics eventually became too much for me, and I moved out on my own. I spent a lot of my twenties estranged from my family and without intimate relationships. I was trying to build some stability in my life, and I mistakenly believed that the only way I could grow as a person was to be on my own.

At the age of twenty-seven, after years of working in low-paying restaurant and retail jobs, I finally managed to gain enough confidence to take a risk and start college. But, at the same time, after years of turning in frantic circles to avoid fear, worry, and stress, I started

collapsing mentally with panic attacks and general anxiety. In my early thirties, I finally confronted my denial of my mental health challenges and started seeing a therapist. One of the most important things I learned was that family dynamics can contribute to mental health regardless of how much contact you have. So, while it was good to create healthy boundaries for myself, there was no way that I could ever cultivate compassion for myself and others while completely ignoring my family and family history. There could be no healing of the "self," there could be no "individual" growth as a person, because in ignoring my family and family history, I was ignoring an important part of what I was. Even more, this meant not only ignoring the painful dynamics but also the loving dynamics.

> There is then now and here the loving repetition, this is then, now and here, a description of the loving of repetition and then there will be a description of all the kinds of ways there can be seen to be kinds of men and women... Mostly every one loves some one's repeating. Mostly every one then, comes to know then the being of some one by loving the repeating in them, the repeating coming out of them.[20]

Living with anxiety, I came to appreciate both the destructive and reparative nature of repetition – through the debilitating repetition of a worry and through the restorative repetition of mindful breathing and counting.So I was naturally drawn to Gertrude Stein's work, which so effectively embodies the power and significance of repetition. And in *The Making of Americans*, we see that we can learn a lot about the nature of persons when we interpret seemingly particular characteristics and experiences in terms of repetition at multiple scales – across generations, across lifetimes, and even across the hours in a day. What emerges is a realisation that the self is not hiding in some rational black box of reflexive determination moving towards what satisfies its desires and away from what does not. Instead, the self is woven together with a multitude of connective tissues that bring our idiosyncratic first-person point of view together with our histories, our families, and many other people and living things. These tissues are built up over time with repeated performances and shared expectations, many of which are passed down through generations. Throughout many years of my life, Mema and I had an ongoing practice of performing narratives that involved one another, narratives defined by common and shared

expectations and realised in the repetition of our daily, weekly, monthly, and even yearly routines. Through those performances, as well as improvisations on those performances, connective tissues formed that held our personal identities, *who and what we were*, in place.[21] Without those connective tissues we would have begun to unravel, reduced to mere organisms tumbling through a turbulent stream of sensations and instincts with no guiding narratives, no means of navigating our way.

> Loving repeating is always in children. Loving repeating is in a way earth feeling. Some children have loving repeating for little things and story-telling, some have it as a more bottom being. Slowly this comes out in them in all their children being, in their eating, playing, crying, and laughing.[22]

We are finite and vulnerable, which creates a need for constant care and new growth. Some of the tissues that held Mema and I together were knotted and unhealthy because they were predicated on abusive dynamics. But through our mutual concern for one another, through our striving for mutual recognition, there were many other tissues that grew and compensated for what was unhealthy. Nearly every afternoon during my formative years in Lake Placid, I cautiously walked home from the school bus. Down a long, white isolated dirt road gravelled with old, crushed Florida shells and sediment simmering under the sun. Through the strange densely packed Florida scrub tangled with palmettos, sand pines, prickly pears, silvery armadillos, and scrub jays. Then there was Mema's house foregrounded with four small beige arches like a castle atop the Rock of Gibraltar. And every day, she waited for me knowing that I knew that she knew that I desperately wanted her to be home. And every day, I hiked home knowing that she knew that I knew that she desperately wanted me to make it home. And every day, those mutually enforced expectations were realised and over time wove together beautiful bonds that made me really me, made Mema really Mema, made us really us. With each repeated performance, we became something loving and something loved, and she and I became more real. It would have been impossible to know who and what we really were without knowing these daily performances.

And each day we repeated so many other loving performances. We held one another on the couch and watched *Jeopardy*. She encouraged me to draw from the musty, worn Time-Life

books on French impressionism. I asked endless questions about her soap operas, about her childhood in France, about her. Every Sunday we left church early, Mema impatiently waiting for me to fasten my seatbelt, and we spent the afternoon at bingo in communion with friends. To a lesser degree, my friendships with people at bingo also formed connective tissues. For years I would repeat the same loving rituals with Mary, Abagail, Bill, and many others, and those performances also made us who we were, me who I was. Though unlike my relationship with Mema, those tissues deteriorated more quickly and were eventually replaced as I grew older.[23]

But Mema and I remained close until she passed away. In fact, our bonds continued to grow and grow stronger. She eventually moved to rural Georgia, and though I lived far away, I would visit when I could afford the trip. Every time, I would prepare her favourite curry dish. Since she could not drive and no longer liked to leave the house, I would make extra servings to freeze, which she could enjoy after I left. And we would laugh about how she would surely eat them all within a week anyway. We had a reliable routine of phone calls, and sometimes we would talk for hours. We would often talk about the past, trying to make sense of our choices. We would sometimes cry over the pain, the conflicts, and the alienation that needlessly divided our family. We would sometimes mourn the loss of those times we were all joyously connected to one another. We would often talk about our interests – she would share her fascination with Chagall, and she would tell me about her own paintings in progress. Of course, we would talk about God. And once she told me about a moment in which she felt like she was sitting within a great expansive space and how, even though her individual sense of self felt so very small, in that moment she felt large with great peace. Throughout the years we were often there for one another during many other important life realisations. When I started college in my late twenties, she was very much emotionally invested in that project and always encouraged me, even when I was overcome with self-doubt. Mema's active recognition of and investment in my life was significant in stabilising my deepest goals and values.

But on February 23, 2020, the connective tissues that held us together ruptured and grief began to seep in, leaving me reduced, confined, and without direction. Eventually, I attempted to overcome those feelings by trying to accept the impossibility of reunion and by

trying to rationalise my experience. And I tried to validate this strategy by looking into what various philosophers had already said about the nature of grief. I quickly found my initial rationalist intuitions were shared. Donald Gustafason argues that grief is an emotion that essentially involves a belief that a living person or thing has died and a desire that it not be so.[24] He further argues that since such a desire cannot be satisfied, grief is irrational. Carolyn Price responds that only feelings of anguish based on a continued search for the deceased are irrational but not the feelings of desolation and isolation that come with the acceptance of the loss.[25] Both focus on rationality, but neither addresses the rationality of grief in the context of a possible metaphysical reunification with the deceased. I've already expressed scepticism about relying on promises of future celestial rewards as a means of confronting grief. But more importantly I no longer think that rationality is a meaningful focal point when thinking about grief. Care ethicists like Nel Noddings[26] and Virginia Held[27] argue extensively that caring and empathy are better guides to what morality requires than rational calculation. I think this is even more clear when it comes to understanding and living through the experience of losing our loved ones. Focusing on rationality might encourage us to look past the emotional significance of grief, and it might encourage us to think of grief in individualistic terms rather than in terms of our relationships. This is not only misguided in terms of how things are but also confused in thinking about how we should live together with grief.

VI. You very clearly understood what matters most to grief

I've lost a part of myself, and it hurts so bad.[28] When the connective tissues that hold our personal identities in place are ruptured, we experience a very real and significant *metaphysical injury*, an injury that is as real and significant as breaking a bone but is rooted in our histories and relationships with others. It is an injury that causes deep pain, it causes feelings of sadness and anger, and creates a desire for repair. When we grieve, we are responding to the loss of a literal part of who and what we are. This need not only be a matter of losing a close loved one. If grief is an awareness of this kind of metaphysical injury, it also begins to show us the nature of the grief someone experiences when they lose an entire community, history, or culture that previously helped constitute who and what that person is. Importantly, when grief is a response to a metaphysical injury,

it is no longer clear that rationality is what really matters. When someone is in physical pain, what matters most is that we care for them, not respond with explanations and rationalisations. Likewise, we need to care for the bereaved, not rationally evaluate them. We should care for them by helping them to repair and build those relationships that can continue to hold together who they are after their loss. One way we can do this is by helping the bereaved hold what has been lost in a continued memorial narrative.[29] But we can also help the bereaved rehabilitate by building on the strength of the connective tissues that remain, that are still holding them together, such as their relationships with others, especially those relationships that were partly linked by what has been lost.

When Mema passed, I was no longer an object of her expectations – I could no longer know that she knows that I was looking forward to our next visit. When Mema passed, I lost a significant part of my self, which caused anguish and created a need for healing. I lost the narratives that Mema and I practiced and created together. Those narratives played a role in holding my identity, my values, and my goals in place. Suddenly I had to again confront questions about my sexuality, my career goals, and my religious beliefs on a level more fundamental than merely passing doubts. Importantly, I also had to confront questions about my relationships with Nicole and Cheyenne and with you.

The fact that I had lived with Mema so much growing up, the fact that she shaped so much of who I became, the fact that Mema and I had been very close even through adulthood, was always a source of tension between the three of us. When I was a child, I could feel your vulnerability and pain, and even wanted to make it go away, but I was still too young to fully understand it. And even though I had been so close to Mema, I also loved you and wanted you to drop everything to be with me. But the harsh realities of being a wage-working mother, the harsh realities of always being burdened with double duty, whether single or not, made that materially impossible. Because I could not fully understand that as a child, there were moments I felt resentment, even later as a young adult reflecting on my childhood.

But when we fail to see our peculiar first-person point of view as something bounded and distinct from those who care for us, we expect too much from them and we are apt to see our particular wants and needs as something universal. Kaja Silverman suggests that when the

child realises their endless expectations cannot be satisfied by their caretaker, usually the mother, because their caretaker is finite and imperfect, the child turns to a figure that is less limited and more powerful, usually a fantasy of the father, and eventually to God, whose love is supposed to be limitless.[30] And there is a real injustice in turning away from those who sacrifice so much to care for us. Yet there is an additional tragedy involved when our lives are shaped by individualistic assumptions. Who and what we are is not exhausted by an idiosyncratic first-person point of view – a calculating black box of desire satisfaction. The person is held together by their histories and their relationships, which is far more expansive than a meagre first-person perspective. So when we fail to see our peculiar first-person point of view as something bounded, when we fail to also feel and look from the perspectives of others we are related to, from the perspectives of the different histories that have converged on our seeming particularity, we also fail to see who and what we are; we fail to understand what really holds us together.

As a child, it was difficult for me to believe or imagine that God was perfect or contained limitless love. It was simply not the picture of God I took away from reading religious texts such as the Bible. Instead, I saw God, even in the New Testament, as something to be feared, something capable of wrath, something whose love was far from unlimited. And still today I worry that even though we want a picture of God that is infinitely powerful and contains limitless love, we haven't really managed to get that picture clear other than in some vague philosophical sense—a philosophical fantasy that I've often struggled to find existentially compelling. Mema, however, was really there, could be touched, and I could be immediately arrested in both her rage and love. There were many times I saw Mema as someone to be feared, as someone loving but whose love had limits. Still, when I was a child, she was someone powerful I turned to in the moments when I felt resentment towards the absence of my father, who primarily existed in the form of letters, and the moments I felt resentment towards you, when you would leave me with her, yet I could still smell you on my clothes.

I no longer feel that resentment, and I think that I have come to a fuller understanding of the challenges and unfair burdens you faced. Over the years we have made progress in repairing our relationship with one another and have been speaking more since Mema passed, and I

hope we continue this process. Finally, I hope that *this* very act of writing does more than describe a life or a personal and philosophical perspective. Instead, I hope that this very act of writing about Mema is an act of caring, a movement towards healing. I want this act of writing through *our* shared life with Mema to keep her with us and help hold *us* – grandmother, mother, son, and sisters – together in a continued narrative and to help us process our grief by rediscovering and repairing these parts of ourselves, our relationships to one another.

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[1] Saint Anselm, "Proslogion," *Monologian and Proslogion with the Replies of Gaunilo and Anselm*, trans. Thomas Williams (New York: Hackett, 1996), 95–101.

[2] Gaunilo, "Reply on Behalf of the Fool," in *Monologion and Proslogion with the Replies of Gaunilo and Anselm*, trans. Thomas Williams (New York: Hackett, 1996), 121–25.

[3] Blaise Pascal, *Pensées*, trans. A. J. Krailsheimer (New York: Penguin, 1995), 123–24.

[4] Kaja Silverman, *Flesh of My Flesh* (Redwood City, CA: Stanford University Press, 2009), 4.

[5] Pierette Ory Denis, personal correspondence, 1985.

[6] American folk hymn, c. 1811, "What Wondrous Love Is This," *The Presbyterian Hymnal: hymns, psalms, and spiritual songs*, (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1990).

[7] Ibid.

[8] *The Holy Bible: New International Version, Containing the Old Testament and the New Testament*, Isaiah 5:25, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Bible Publishers, 1978).

[9] Ibid., Psalms 13:1.

[10] Rachel Adler, "The Battered Wife of God: violence, Law, and the Feminist Critique of the Prophets," *Southern California Review of Law and Women's Studies* 7, no. 2 (March 1998), 171–202.

[11] Ibid., 174–177.

[12] bell hooks, *All About Love: New Visions* (New York: Harper Collins, 2001), 28.

[13] Adler, 188–189.

[14] hooks, 37.

[15] See also Adler, 192.

[16] Compare with Adler, 196.

[17] Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble* (New York: Routledge, 2006).

[18] Compare with Nancy Chodorow, "Family Structure and Feminine Personality," in *Feminism and Philosophy*, eds. N. Tuana and R. Tong (New York: Routledge, 1995), 43–66.

[19] For more background history on the practice, see Chantal Lavoie, "Tristram Shandy, Boyhood, and Breeching," *Eighteenth-Century Fiction* 28, no. 1 (September 2015), 85–107.

[20] Gertrude Stein, *The Making of Americans* (NY: Something Else Press, 1966), 290–294.

[21] Hilde Lindemann, *Holding and Letting Go: The Social Practice of Personal Identities* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 16, 23–24.

[22] Stein, 295.

[23] Lindemann, 16.

[24] Donald Gustafson, "Grief," *Noûs* 23, no. 4 (September 1989), 457–79.

[25] Carolyn Price, "The Rationality of Grief," *Inquiry* 53, no. 2 (February 2010), 20–40.

[26] Nel Noddings, *Caring: A Relational Approach to Ethics and Moral Education*, 2nd ed. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013).

[27] Virginia Held, *The Ethics of Care: Personal, Political, and Global* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

[28] Jackie Denis Deverick, personal conversation, February 23, 2020.

[29] Lindemann, 198.

[30] Silverman, 93–95.

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The Uncertainty of Ossuaries

BRADY SCHUH - Harvard Divinity School

This paper braids together scenes across time and place, and discusses different burial traditions, especially Jewish ossuaries.

Judaism, autofiction, burial rites, ossuaries, funeral

Listen: In the year 3000, my uncle's corpse will be exhumed. Future archaeologists will ponder the desiccated remains of a human man in his sixties from the late twentieth century, found at the same, standard depth beneath the ground as the surrounding burials in a cemetery in formerly Waco, Texas, placed in a metal vehicle. The paint will long have dissolved in the slightly acidic and moist underground conditions, and only chips of cerulean recovered from crevices within the metal frame will reveal its colour. The canvas hood and leather seats will be rotted away, but the fragile finger bones will still be wrapped around the wheel. The image of a long-extinct animal known as a 'horse' adorns the unusual topless car's front, a leaping figurine from a bygone era. They will marvel at this primitive form of transportation being the casing for this corpse, and equally puzzle as to why the vehicle is vertical, with the headlights pointed away from the earth above.

Naturally, they will say, this has to do with this human male's religious beliefs in life, and from it we can extrapolate much about the culture. Though an unusual burial for the period, it is part of a larger trend of people being buried in car-like encasements. To support this, they will produce the crumbling images of children with racecar coffins,[1] an article from The Paper of Record,[2] a workshop named "Cruisin' Caskets,"[3] and anecdotes of men in their forties who die in sports cars they do not know how to operate.[4] They will astutely note that many ballads from this time in history use vehicles and the paths they travel on as metaphors for the moral outlook on one's life. Thus, they will hypothesise, laterally placed car-like encasements indicate that those within saw life as a highway, whereas this unusual example placed vertically indicates the deceased was on the highway to hell. Based on these findings, they will speculate, anthropologists should expect to find door knobs in or on some burial containers, since their residents must have believed themselves to be knocking on heaven's door.

* * *

My father's casket was oak. Thus, it will decay long before any extraterrestrial encounters it. Its rounded top was polished well, and the grain of the wood streamlined, like the current of an artist's river, only aesthetically pleasing knot-whirlpools preserved. The steel poles for pallbearers, carefully bolted into the wood, dully shone in the fluorescent lighting of the showroom. The casket salesman told us the legend of this box: the last one in stock, made

from wood reclaimed from New England buildings constructed in the Gilded Age that now impede modernity, far more precious than the price would indicate, et cetera. I was struck by the storied nature of it, despite most of it probably being hogwash. Like a good American of Irish stock, I love a story or a scam, preferably both when possible.

I jokingly asked the salesman if he had any used caskets or rentals available. After all, it was just for a brief show. My joke elicited no laughter in the funeral home. So much for putting the "fun" in "funeral."

We selected the oak one, my mother and sister and I, despite the fact that he requested pine. Pine was cheapest, in his mind, and, according to him, he wouldn't be there to enjoy the benefits of a particularly nice casket. I still feel slightly odd about compromising on his burial request, but, to be fair, the oak one looked nicer and we stuck with the unassuming wooden theme. He used to joke and say that if we disobeyed his interment wishes that he'd come back and haunt us, but I still haven't seen his ghost.

* * *

Free from the tethers of the North American tree as principal building material, the ancient craftspeople who made Jewish ossuaries dabbled in limestone.[5] A common sedimentary rock in and around Jerusalem at the turn of the common era, it composed a majority of building materials in the construction of a sort-of restored Jerusalem under Herod the Great.[6] Around this same time, cultists in the desert and scholars in their communities arrived at the conclusion that limestone was purer than other rocks.[7] I'm fairly certain its preponderance informed that decision (as though it were made by committee), and that the democratisation of rock and religion go hand in hand,[8] but far be it from me to ascribe economic influence to divine revelation.

As a general term, ossuary can refer to any number of kinds of inhumations involving bones. Catacombs, some mass graves, charnel pits, those spooky European churches with femur walls and skull sconces, all of those are technically ossuaries. That's because the word ossuary comes from the Latin verb *ossilegium*, meaning "to gather bones." Another translation could be "to *select* bones," and, in some cases, this is more appropriate. Instead of collecting all of an individual's bones, a skull, a tooth, or a pelvis can become

metonymous, taking on the power of an individual's full interred essence. Indiginous American bundle burials, and the French catacombs, are examples of this sort of thing.

Jewish ossuaries may have originated from this kind of metonymy, as one of the earliest finds that could be considered *ossilegium* from the appropriate period is simply a skull in a box, found in the tombs of a springfed community on the edge of the Dead Sea. [9]

One of the earlier literary references to *ossilegium* appears in the Torah. Joseph, dying in Egypt, commands his family to ascend with his bones from Egypt.[10] Jacob, too, is said to have been asked to be buried with his family in the Holy Land, out of Egypt, though as a primary (rather than secondary) burial, his body preserved through mummification and allegedly carried out of Egypt.[11] These two figures' mode of rest speaks to the emphasis on family seen in the history of Jewish burial; it also prefigures, in some ways, the preoccupation with the gathering of bones during the Second Temple period.

* * *

It's astounding how obeying the patriarchs is something that gets ignored when they make obstinate requests. My father, for example, at first said he never wanted a feeding tube. That the moment he was unable to eat naturally, that meant G-d had ordained it his time to pass on. Since that was what he said when he could still speak, I prepared myself for the prospect of seeing the strongest man I ever knew starve to death. Not an appealing thought. Eventually, he changed his mind. He relented, I think, because my mother made it clear that she wasn't on board with that approach.

He wanted his body donated to science, too, and his organs taken for donation. We didn't follow those requests, either. The body of my father, as it lay there in that hospital room at 2am, surrounded by its owner's family, disinvested of its ghost, could have been divided up and helped with healing or health science. I quite like the imagery, my father's physical form being a source of life for others, or, at least, sight or something sensory like that. My father's eyes could see the world from another perspective, the empathy he expressed in life realised bodily. But, alas, degenerative illness cut out those who would have themselves cut up; at least, in this case they did. Still, we jealously guarded his body against marauding scientists seeking samples.

Stone Ossuary of " Simon, builder of the Temple " , The Israel Museum, Jerusalem.

* * *

When scholars dissect the ossuaries as a phenomenon, they have a tendency to categorise, each for their own purpose. They all agree that Jewish ossuaries store bones.[12] They are *usually* made of stone, soft limestone, to be specific.[13] Almost all preserved ossuaries are decorated[14] – after all, until recently, archaeologists and grave robbers (which is to say the same thing twice) gave little thought to what was ordinary. A distinct minority of this group are inscribed in some way, roughly 25ish% of most ossuary collections.[15]

Even the ossuary of Simon the Builder, monumental architect of one of Jerusalem's new gates during the Herodian period, is buried in an unassuming stone box.[16]

Make no mistake, these are boxes, rectangular versions of the ones you kept folded and hidden in the back of the closet or beside the hot water heater when you moved a lot in your twenties. Actually, the average volume of the two isn't that much different.[17] Some scholars think that their size and design are based on the boxes many Roman legionaries and their families kept at the foot of their beds when stationed at some distant garrison, ready to move from one place to the next efficiently.[18]

* * *

My mother looked through the cedar chest at the foot of her bed for photos of my father for the obligatory funeral slideshow. The box is long and deep, perfect for storing quilts and a wedding dress, or a body curled upon itself. When opened, it smells of woods and balsam, not-quite-aftershave and better-than-cologne. Like the kind my father wore only to church, weddings, and funerals. The womb-like, pale-red-and-orange-punctuated-by-pink wood flows and whorls like a river, and the knots are eyes staring at shins. When they could stare, that is, as the flat top of the box has become the dropping point for the distruss acquired over the course of a lifetime deposited in a home, stagnant, for twenty years, and thus blocks their view.

But I still feel their gaze, so, during this mourning period, I compulsively organise and clean my parents' things. This will eventually cause my mother stress, and she will fear I am judging her, then be flustered when she inevitably can't find one thing or another. It's because I move it, usually. She'll acknowledge her somewhat haphazard stacking-sorting

that peppers flat surfaces where they can be found with a slight apology, and I think she almost means it. Not enough to change, but enough to feel some judgement when others are present. Now she is alone, on a farm far from the end of town, with only the eyes of God upon her.

We had several days to hunt for such photos, which was good, since my father was the family photographer and not a subscriber to the collecting lifestyle that my mother embraced. We had a few, maybe five, photographs of him in his younger years hiding at the bottom of a filing cabinet in a closet in the room that formerly housed our desktop computer. In that chest, my mother found a few from their dating years, and those of their wedding. After that, within albums of childless vacation folios, from what my mother called the BCE, Before Children Era, there were landscapes, Cherokee dances, slain deer, and my mother, but perhaps two of our quarry.

We had plenty of time to prepare for my father's funeral because it was one of the last before the end of the world. You see, in a moment of serendipity, my father had died the evening of the 14th of March in 2020. That was the day Texas finally initiated lockdowns and the day before a moratorium was placed on funerals. Just like in life, my father was timely in death. The funeral home, despite the late hour of my call to them from the sterile, dimly-lit hospital hallway, was grateful for the timing. They had heard whispers, they said, of what was coming down.

Right in the nick of time, they said.

* * *

It seems important to me to note the temporal dependence of Jewish ossuaries before going any further into their use and the disagreements that arise about that use. Jewish ossuaries appear in the archaeological record around 20 BCE and end their classical period by 70 CE.[19] In those ninety years, Jerusalem was a hotbed of economic growth. The stone mason guilds began to develop factories to create pieces for the monumental building projects financed by Rome.[20] Herod is, in part, called Great because of his ability to suck up to Rome during this period despite having just demonstrated Palestine's unwillingness to be under any external, non-Jewish rule. The Tomb of Zechariah and Herod's Mausoleum stand

as testaments to their artistic talents, talents that can only be fostered with a particular kind of wealth.[21] As the money rolled in from the Roman means of production,[22] the families of those in power naturally took their fair share, tolling gates and taxing goods.

Jerusalem, the city of the crossroads between Europe and Africa, was also a *tohu* of multiculturalism. Roman imperial influence was felt with increasing heaviness during this period, culminating in the destruction of the Jerusalem temple in 70 CE. As Jerusalem's temple burned, it is not hard to imagine the last ossuaries, the ones of those killed in the early stages of the conflict, being interred by heavily conflicted families. The ideological reactions to imperialism – nationalism and assimilation – had developed into some of their most extreme forms by the time Rome felt it necessary to lay siege to the city. Assassinations and protest, talk of nationalism and prophecy, wandering messiahs, all threatened Roman hegemony. As such, it was essential for any people, but especially the Jews of the time, to somehow accommodate themselves to Hellenistic ways, the alternative being isolation from the stream of civilisation and brutal repression.[23]

The wealth and multiculturalism gave rise to ossuaries and very concretely influenced its use. The same primitive production centres that built columns for palatial estates were later converted to make ossuaries as the money dried up.[24] A single ossuary could cost a peasant's wages for a week;[25] thus, those who could afford them were those capable of paying the peasantry and affording the rock-cutting of their final resting places.[26] By some estimates, only about 5% of all burials from the period are of this kind,[27] and an even smaller number of those chose to be buried in ossuaries.

The multicultural nature of the Roman legion brought with it different ways of caring for the dead, along with their travelling chests.

* * *

Dear reader, I have a confession to make: I have lied to you. My uncle wasn't buried in a Mustang pointed down. That would have been more interesting than the plain pine box he was buried in, a box he chose due to its inexpensiveness. He had the money to be buried in a Mustang, but he, like my father, was rather loathe to spend.

But the story is one I've heard before; it's one that I heard at church several times. It was an example of how greedy some people can be, a morality tale. One that someone had always heard about, read an article about, or had a cousin who. I guess all their social circles were small.

* * *

Similarly closed but equally diverse were the compilers of the Talmud, who had little to say on ossuaries. They remember ossuaries as bone boxes less than they remember the process of secondary burial. The deceased, having decayed a year and a day, would be anointed with herbs and oil; a single day of mourning was permitted as the deceased's son, who was exempted from non-essential religious injunctions on that day, moved the bones; remains were moved in a shroud, the sheet acting as a barrier between the living and the dead. Husband and wife may be buried together, as may mother and child, even if they die at different points; otherwise, ossuaries are said to contain the remains of individuals.[28]

As of course they would – after all, only individual names are inscribed on the outside of these boxes. The writers of the Jerusalem Talmud and its Babylonian appendices, pious, would not have opened the boxes to check. When visiting an old family tomb from a few hundred years previous and finding twenty-eight limestone containers, some of which have words of rest or a single name on them, what other conclusion do you jump to?

* * *

But we, the impious, have opened the boxes and found them wanting. Out of a survey of nearly two hundred ossuaries, only 42% were individual burials.[29] Coupling accounts for few of these, and even that explanation is lacking, for what has the Talmud to say about two unrelated men and a child being interred together?[30] Or, for that matter, a man and his dog? Stranger still are the burials that contain incomplete remains: two skulls and one pelvis, among other bones; three femurs, one skull, and two separate vertebrae; the ossuary of two children and a teen boy, comingled. Geographically, this blending in burial seems pretty focused in Jerusalem, as most Jericoh internments have only single internments.[31]

Some have speculated that the lack of vital skeletal remains may be due to the inability of the original inter-ers to gather all the necessary bones, or from them emptying most but not all

of the bones from previous burials.[32] Maybe, in the end, we are as impious as our ancestors.

* * *

I first encountered Jewish ossuaries during a crisis of faith in my academic future. I was Thomas, seeing the potential of humanities research and finding it unfulfilling. In a fit of existential anxiety and dread, I told my adviser that I wanted to pivot to archaeology and conclude a degree wrapped in papyrus and vellum and encase it in stone. She paused for a moment and asked if I had ever heard of Jewish ossuaries.

Her own explanation highlighted many entry points for me: the rather mysterious relationship between this mode of burial and afterlife traditions, this form's spontaneous and seemingly unprecedented appearance, its unclear place in the context of the Second Temple cultural milieu. I went home from that meeting, energised, feeling revitalised in my fight for faith in that to which I had devoted years of my life. That evening, I got a call from my mother after her Wednesday night church service.

My father, it seems, wasn't well, and they were going to a special doctor to find out why.

One thing that has kept me attracted to Jewish ossuaries as a focus of study is their accessibility. Everyone thinks about the end, of mortality, of what becomes of their remains. Like elephants, we are morbidly curious. So sharing with someone that, a few thousand years ago, a burial fad occurred and that we don't really know why, and that those who wrote about it did so inaccurately, awakens within a person some kind of wonder…that things have not always been this way, that an abyss of time separates you from The Past, but also that you and those people who were interred in and around Jerusalem share some kind of uncertainty.

In a way, the uncertain past continually impinges on the present, its passage a comforting story, even though its movement, like death, is inevitable.

I personally like this uncertain quality that ossuaries have. Reading history books, it's easy to think of these ancients in an overly reverent fashion; where they are strong and were certain in their choices leading to a better future, we are neither of those things. This may be an overly Freudian read of the situation, but it reminds me of how, in childhood, we

worship the confidence of our parents, only to have that broken down and these gods become just people in our eyes as we age. Do we not grow out of this and just displace it onto our ancestors? Or is the past truly so distant and unrelatable that we have no choice but to idealise it until we look at it with a magnifying glass?

* * *

We buried my father with his spectacles, bifocals with a thin brass frame. We also included a pen, one of his good ones, in his breast pocket, and a handkerchief in the back of his jeans. Despite our Protestantism and Civility, we still provide goods for the dead to aid them in the next world. It flies in the face, I think, of some of what I was raised to believe about the passage to the next world, the ending of pain and the inconveniences of a ramshackle body and such.

My father was a mute, you see, in his final years. The disease robbed him of his voice, and stole his voice from our memories. I now remember more the robotic droning of the iPad my father used to communicate now than his human intonations. When without the electronics, my father kept a small pad, as he long had, in his pants pocket, and used the best breast pen he could muster from the cluttered ranch desk in the kitchen each morning to write out his thoughts. Eventually, his hand became so unsteady that one couldn't read his writing well.

* * *

His slanting, folding skript, the one there at the end, was also found on ossuaries. Of the 250 inscribed ossuaries surveyed, roughly 37% are strained.[33] The words are slanted, letters doubled-over and inconsistent in size, phrases crammed into odd spaces. Not the kind of thing done by a professional scribe or by a quarryman: this was a script that slanted and swam across the stone carelessly.[34] These strained inscriptions are not like others, whose steady hand[35] and use of high holy language[36] indicates a high written proficiency. Several ossuaries, shockingly, have their design violated by the act of naming.[37] The swirling rosettes and metope frames are gouged through by chisel, and the tool's lines lay large against the delicate backdrop.

Onomastics comprise the majority of ossuary inscriptions, but they often appear in unexpected ways. Yehohanah, daughter of Yehohanan, son of Theophilus the high priest,

has the first line of her epitaph poorly, almost hurriedly inscribed.[38] Another, thrice-repeated, ossuary inscription bears marks showing the work of at least two scribes, memorialising the name and lineage of one Joseph, son of Haggai.[39] There are a whole series of ossuaries that have multiple names, unlinked by language of relation.[40]

Names are just some of what we find on ossuaries with these kinds of inscriptions. We find invocations of peace, *Shalom*, with *lameds* larger than life against small, slanting letters. Some, helpfully, declare familial association, whose son of this was or whose wife these remains belong to. Some, quite mercifully, tell us exactly what it is we are looking at, declaring the box to be a space of *ossilegium.* Some, too, invoke the cosmic, the magical, things that we find in so-called pagan burials throughout the Hellenistic and Roman world. [41] These texts, in particular, are noted as being "written in a careless manner, with no attention given to the appearance and proportion of letters."[42] Another group, though, makes no sense at all: small symbols, or letters so scrambled they are unintelligible.[43] That lettered uncertainty is what made my father switch to using a robotic voice he could cause to speak for him.

* * *

I think the uncertainty of ossuaries is no better epitomised than in their analysis. For the past century or so, scholars have tried to speak purposefully to the situation and meaning of Jewish ossuaries.

For example, in 1994, a very valuable step forward was made in ossuary research. Levi Rahmani, Chief Curator of the Israeli Antiquities Authority, published *A Catalogue of Jewish Ossuaries in the Collections of the State of Israel*, a wordy title for a book heavily populated by pictures. It contains, as you might guess, a catalogue of the ossuaries held by the Israeli Antiquities Authority, along with some references to ossuaries no longer within that institution's hands. The book also amassed the conclusions of Rahmani research into the practice of ossuary burial. It was a triumph, a fitting capstone on a career preoccupied with this burial curiosity.

Historiographically, developments in ossuary research speak to the ages in which they were conceived. But their conclusions are guesses, in the end. Even Rahmani's theories were

critiqued within a few years of his *Catalogue*'s publication.[44] Scholars cannot tell us definitively why ossuaries were used, in what state they were interred, or from what firmament they originated.

* * *

Imagine: In the year 70 CE, you are in a tomb, bare sides of ossuaries sticking slightly outward from their charnel niches, and, in the centre, the pit whose bones form a slight mound. You're surrounded by family. The darkness deepens as the sun sets, the flickering firelight of a sacked city above you creating the ambient light needed for only the barest of shapes to be visible.

Once the children sleep, there are hushed discussions about what happens next. Do you flee to Jericho? Galilee? Alexandria? How far is far enough from the anger of the rulers of this world, and how close is close enough to stay near to the power of G-d, if they still reign beyond the rubble? You don't know, so you must do something beyond your usual moral ken – and gamble. So your family decides to gamble on Galilee – at least there you know there will be others like you and distant family you can find community with. You all decide to leave as the light arrives.

So you sleep a little bit, and you wonder, idly, and then with increasing concern, about what becomes of your family's tomb. Will you ever come back? Who will ever know those in the charnel pit, in the ossuaries? You wake your brother, who has scribal training, and ask this question with concern: Will the dead haunt us if we do not remember them? His brow furrows, and he says he does not know, but that now is no time to tempt spirits.

In the grey morning light, as the brood begins to stir, the two of you begin to scavenge the tomb for an empty ossuary or two and a few nails. You find both, an ossuary prepared for your father and mother upon their eventual death, and one that contains the skull of a cousin who died in war, and that was all that was recovered. You follow your brother to conform and confirm with him who lies where, which occupied ossuaries are whose. Hastily, unsteadily, but with decisiveness, he carves the names you recall into those exposed sides. For a few, you do not remember, and neither does he. For those, you simply record a singular message, "Shalom," and hope that wishing them well is enough.

The burial niches that are occupied must be cleared, and are done so into the empty ossuaries. This is a hasty job, but is done cleanly. Surly the deceased will understand if their burial is rushed, you say to each other, in times of war. So your cousin rests with your dead sister and what is left of her child, and your nephew rests with a few small children who died of malnourishment during the siege. "Peace," too, will be their resting phrase.

As everyone rises and begins to prepare to leave, your elders look upon you and your brother with approval. Your eldest relative, though, says that there are other guards against the dead that can be done. She instructs your brother to carve on the smooth face of an ossuary lid alphabetical sequences. These, she says, will confound spirits with their esoteric meaning, and thus encourage them to rest peacefully. Place it by the door, she says. So, for one of the older bone boxes, the heavy limestone lid is lifted and placed against the inner threshold of the door. You and the others must step over it as you squeeze through the narrow entrance left the previous day.

The last you will ever see of this tomb will be in the blue-grey morning light, as its shaft penetrates the tomb, slowly narrowing as the stone is rolled back over the entrance.

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[1] Associated Press, "Iowa boy who wanted racing stickers for his casket dies," *KCRG-9 TV News,* September 10, 2018, https://www.kcrg.com/content/news/Iowa-boy-who-wanted-racing-stickers-for-his-casket-dies-492878441.html.

[2] Jim Motavalli, "You Can Take It With You, if the Grave Is Deep Enough," *The New York Times*, February 24, 2022, https://www.nytimes.com/2022/02/24/business/car-burials-funerals.html.

[3] Danny Mendez, "About Us," *Cruisin Caskets*, http://www.cruisincaskets.com/About-Us.

[4] You know the ones…

[5] L. Y. Rahmani, *A Catalogue of Jewish Ossuaries in the Collections of the State of Israel* (Jerusalem: The Israel Antiquities Authority and the Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities, 1994), 3.

[6] Yitzhak Magen, "The Ossuary Industry," in *The Stone Vessel Industry in the Second Temple Period: Excavations at Hizma and the Jerusalem Temple Mount*, ed. Levana Tsfania (Jerusalem: Israel Excavation Society, 2002), 133–34.

[7] Yitzhak Magen, "Jerusalem as Center of the Stone Vessel Industry during the Second Temple Period," in *Ancient Jerusalem Revealed*, ed. Hillel Geva (Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society, 1994), 253–55.

[8] Magen, "The Ossuary Industry," 137.

[9] Rachel Hachlili, *Jewish Funerary Customs, Practices and Rites in the Second Temple Period* (Leiden: Brill Academic Publishers, 2004), 87–88.

[10] Genesis 50:24–26, Exodus 13:19, Joshua 24:32.

[11] Genesis 50:1-14.

[12] As mentioned earlier in this piece.

[13] Rahmani, 3.

[14] Rahmani, 1.

[15] Rahmani, 11.

[16] Anonymous, *Stone Ossuary of Simon, Builder of the Temple,* soft limestone, 1st century CE, The Israel Museum, Jerusalem, https://www.imj.org.il/en/collections/227513.

[17] The average ossuary volume is 47.6 cm^3, while the average volume of the moving boxes I keep under my bed is about 45 cm^3. See Rahmani, 6 and me for the measurements needed to arrive at this conclusion.

[18] Rahmani, 5–6.

[19] Rahmani, Catalogue, 22.

[20] See Magen, "Jerusalem as Center of Stone Vessel Industry."

[21] Lee I. Levine, "Herodian Jerusalem: The Urban Landscape," in *Jerusalem: The Portrait of the City in the Second Temple Period (538 B.C.E. – 70 C.E.)* (Jerusalem: Jewish Publication Society, 2002), 206.

[22] Richard Hingley, "Attitudes to Roman Imperialism," *Theoretical Roman Archeology: First Conference Proceedings* (1993), 25.

[23] Paraphrasing from Moses Hadas, "Aspects of Nationalist Survival Under Hellenistic and Roman Imperialism," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 2, no. 2 (April 1950), 131–32.

[24] Magen, "Jerusalem as Center of Stone Vessel Industry," 244–45; see also Rachel Hachlili, "A Jericho Ossuary and a Jerusalem Workshop," *Israel Exploration Society* 47, no. 3 (1997), 247.

[25] Hachlili, *Second Temple Funeral*, 360, 373, 696.

[26] Sean Freyne, "Galilee, Jesus, and the Contribution of Archeology," *The Expository Times* 119, no. 12 (September 2008), 577.

[27] Erwin R. Goodenough, *Jewish Symbols in the Greco-Roman Period: Volume Four, The Problem of Method* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1953), 63.

[28] Semahot 12: 1-9, 13:1; Jerusalem Talmud Mo'ed Qaton 1,5; Babylonian Talmud Sanhedrin 47b; Mishnah Mo'ed Qaton 1,5; Mishnah Pesachim 8,8

[29] Original research by author using various published sources of ossuary burials; earlier estimates of larger samples place the number at around 50% (see Steven Fine, "A Note on Ossuary Burial and the Resurrection of the Dead in First Century Jerusalem," in *Art, History, and the Historiography of Judaism in Roman Antiquity* (Leiden: Brill Academic Publishers, 2014), 48, and Amos Kloner and Boaz Zissu, "Ossuaries," in *The Necropolis of Jerusalem in the Second Temple Period* (Dudley, MA: Peeters Publishing, 2007), 118.

[30] Baruch Arensburg and Y. Rak, "Skeletal Remains of an Ancient Jewish Population from French Hill, Jerusalem," *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research* 1, no. 219 (October 1975), 69.

[31] Rachel Hachlili, Baruch Arensburg, Patricia Smith, and Ann Killebrew, "The Jewish Necropolis at Jericho," *Current Archeology* 1, no. 1 (December 1981), 701.

[32] Arensburg and Rak, 69.

[33] Original research done by the author using Rahmani's *Catalogue.* Here, the category "strained" denotes inscriptions that are rough or unusual in their composition.

[34] For example, see Charles Clermont-Ganneau, trans. Aubrey Stewart, "The Mount of Olives," in *Archeological Researches in Palestine During the Years 1873-1874* (London: Harrison and Sons Publishing, 1896), 393.

[35] L. Y. Rahmani, "A Bilingual Ossuary Inscription from Khirbet Zif," *Israel Exploration Journal* 22, nos. 2–3 (1972), 114.

[36] Yuval Baruch, Levi Danit, and Ronny Reich, "The Tomb and Ossuary of Alexa Son of Shalom," *Israel Exploration Journal* 61, no. 1 (2011), 102–3.

[37] See numbers 9, 64, 573, 797 in Rahmani's *Catalogue*.

[38] Dan Barag and David Flusser, "The Ossuary of Yehohanah Granddaughter of the High Priest Theophilus," *Israel Exploration Journal* 36, nos. 1–2 (1986), 39–40.

[39] See Lawrence T. Geraty, "A Thrice Repeated Ossuary Inscription from French Hill, Jerusalem," *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research* 1, no. 219 (October 1975), 77.

[40] See the series cited by Tal Ilan, "An Inscribed Ossuary from a Private Collection," *Israel Exploration Journal* 51, no. 1 (2001), 93–95.

[41] See Alice J. Bij de Vaate, "Note on L. Y. Rahmani, 'A Catalogue of Jewish Ossuaries,' Nos. 319 and 322," *Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik* 1, no. 113 (1996), 187, 189–90.

[42] Doron Ben-Ami and Yana Tchekhanovets, "A Greek Abecedary Fragment from the City of David," *Palestine Exploration Quarterly* 140, no. 3 (November 2008),198.

[43] Roughly 3% have unintelligible inscriptions; 18% have symbolic inscriptions (original research).

[44] In my view, the definitive work critiquing Rahmani's theory of ossuary origins is Eval Regev, "Individualistic Meaning of Jewish Ossuaries: A Socio-Anthropological Perspective on Burial Practice," *Palestine Exploration Quarterly* 133, no. 1 (July 2001), 39–49.

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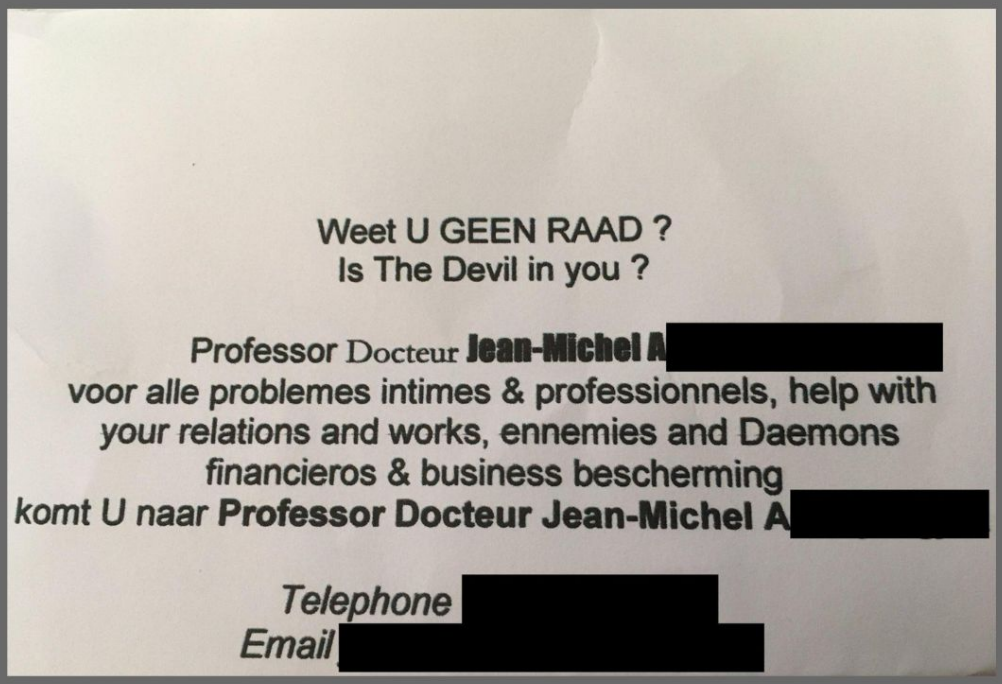


Picture by the author.

Broken histories of the supernatural

KRISTOF SMEYERS – Ruusbroec Institute, University of Antwerp

This essay is about when time splinters and breaks under the pressure of the supernatural. It suggests that the stolen moments in which people experience the divine, the demonic and the otherworldly provide us with important conceptual and methodological tools with which to think about -- to think with -- stories of the supernatural. I use historical sources, personal (re)collections and glitch theory to argue that, in the end, the structure and significance of supernatural experiences are not revealed in linear narrative but in their brokenness.

supernatural, glitch, time, philosophy of history, narrative

1. Untimeliness

On my desk: a pandemic-sized pile of crumpled business cards and DIY adverts. They come in all sizes, are printed on different kinds of cheap paper in a dazzling range of fonts – sometimes on the same small card – and many are written in a melange of languages. The text on the faded card on top of the pile crams Dutch, French, English, and Spanish into one breathless sentence. The card offers a wide range of specific services. It promises quick-fix solutions to any problem you may have, mundane or magical. And it uses plenty of exclamation marks to convince you of the supernatural skills of "Professor Docteur **Jean-Michel**." The ad appeals to an assumed desperation in its recipients, but its tone suggests a desperate "professor docteur," too. It is simultaneously a remedy and a symptom.

In March 2020, I stopped throwing away these cards each time one arrived in my post box (which over the past few years has been often). Without any clear purpose, I began to keep them in my office. Some function as bookmarks in historical studies of shapeshifters, urban necromancers, UFOs; they stick out of books on the myths of disenchantment, the alleged decline of magic, the birth of modernity: the books that underpin my work as historian of religion and the supernatural. Inadvertently this collection has grown into an unofficial Yellow Pages of the twenty-first-century magical marketplace of the city of Antwerp. And, at first unthinkingly, I have put these ads into contact with (literally: touching, lying on top of, pushed between bits of) their own past, like some sort of feedback loop between now and then.

The thing is: My research has since then begun to fray at the edges, or rather, my subjects have started to chew away at it, defying any linearity and pushing back against my discipline. Multiple acts of transgression – temporal feedback loops, glitches – have been taking place at my desk since March 2020. Some, like bringing modern-day business cards into a historical environment, are of my own doing. Others cause disruptive interference from within the records themselves. A diary fragment from 1834: "They took me I don't know where, and next I know I have a beard o' days, but I feel as like I've only been gone a moment!" Another entry in a different diary, from 1902: "And sure enough the little joker appears in their bedroom and pounds and punches them until he has them demented with fear. Then disappears just as mysteriously as he came…This is the queer thing…He never

left his house."[1] From Reddit, posted in 2021: "'[A]round 10:00 I go lock the front and back door…at about 12:00…I see the back door unlocked and open…I make sure the basement door is latched and I go back upstairs after making sure the back door is locked as well. At about 2:00…once again I see the back door wide open, so is the basement door. I just close the door…and lock it as hard and as fast as I can. I go upstairs and I did not sleep for the rest of the night." Later, watching the footage of that night on the home camera security system, time jolts strangely backwards and forwards, much like the doors in the house keep opening seemingly by themselves.

How do you study a past – and a present – inhabited by people for whom the linear experience of their own lives was suddenly, sometimes violently, disrupted by the supernatural, and for whom time and place momentarily collapsed in on themselves? "They" in 1834 are fairies; they abduct people and, doing so, pull someone out of their own time stream, "away with the fairies" for a while – whatever a while can be. The "little joker" in 1902 is a malevolent entity nicknamed "Petie," bilocating to terrorise people in their homes, shimmering in and out of existence at will. Folkloric beasts, flickering ghosts, and faltering aliens can all cause such glitches: in how people sometimes perceive time, their own bodies, and their surroundings as out of joint or out of place. These glitch encounters are cognitively jarring for the people who experienced them, and they should be jarring for anyone who tries to write *with* the experience rather than analyse it away. This point, and the perspective of glitch and fracture, can be extended to other histories, of disruption, dislocation, trauma: histories in which individuals or groups were also ripped out of their own timelines by forces outside of their control. Kodwo Eshun, for example, writes evocatively about slavery and the Afrodiaspora in terms of temporal disjunction and displacement when he rethinks "the idea of slavery" as an alien abduction: "[W]e've all been living in an alien-nation since the eighteenth century."[2] Supernatural histories especially attune us to the potential of the glitch as starting point for historical inquiry; they even offer a (metaphorical) way into attempts to capture the experience and consequence of the slave trade.

But to begin with the glitch also means to unsettle my own practice. My starting point is Katharine Hodgkin's phrase about the study of witchcraft as "a place where history asks

questions about itself."[31] Simply put, supernatural glitch accounts and business cards from an enchanted economy have put me in a place where I cannot but ask questions about myself, my praxis, and my conception of historical time. The pile on my desk has become a methodological inflection point, inflicting itself quite literally, quite physically, on my research. Witch doctors and palm readers with email addresses and WhatsApp reach out to me – interrupt me – from between pages that hold their colleagues and predecessors from previous centuries. History's "questions about itself" when faced with glitches are about language, representation, and narrative truth. Perhaps just as fundamental, they are about the practices of the historian: collating, selecting, curating, collecting, dismissing, narrating, explaining. And, crucially for me, they are about change over time and changes *in* time. These last two categories especially interrogate how we can denaturalise the psychopathological and historicising perspectives that many sources for supernatural histories embody. Witchcraft, and by extension encounters with what I will call "supernatural glitches," put these questions centre stage because they confront us with the limits of linear approaches, and of historical methods more generally.

Can we reconstruct people's supernatural glitch accounts in historically meaningful ways? What does that mean? And how, if at all, can we do so without writing those accounts into histories that force a linearity onto moments that actively resist it – histories that would remove the glitch from the experience? These questions matter because people in the past and present often describe their encounters with the supernatural as not fitting and profoundly disruptive in their individual lives: beards that grow in mere minutes; a gnome-like creature that causes havoc in two places at once; doors that unlock and open in the stolen moments of a security camera recording. Such encounters break the linear conception of one's own timeline, sometimes momentarily, sometimes lastingly.

These questions matter also because a mainstream conception of history continues to relegate encounters with the supernatural to the dustbin of an irrational past, an ill-defined and imaginary dark age. The supernatural does not belong in this conception, even if professional historians have criticised it for nearly half a century now, especially since the publication of Keith Thomas' foundational study of early modern England, *Religion and the Decline of Magic*, in 1971. Every manifestation then merely serves as a spectacular

anachronism that underpins the validity of the disenchantment paradigm (or myth) in societies that build themselves on the idea of rational modernity.[4]

Here, then, is a double non-belonging or untimeliness that needs unpicking: in the life of the individual who experienced a supernatural glitch, and in popular understandings of history as trajectory towards rationality. How to do justice to the former, even to put the glitchiness of supernatural encounters central to our inquiries, and not reinforce the Weberian narratives that run like a current underneath the latter, which paint such encounters as incompatible with modern society and history as time's arrow moving relentlessly forward?[5] How do we keep the strange and broken character of glitch accounts intact when trying to make sense of them? Glitch histories disrupt what historians do in fundamental, outright scary ways.

Here, also, manifests a tension between historicism – understood in this instance as the power of condemning something undesirable to the past; the dustbin – and the timeless impression that so many supernatural experiences make on us. Whether in 1834, 1902, or 2021, time and again, accounts of glitch encounters follow along similar narrative beats even if their internal mechanisms are often dissimilar. The repetitive and referential nature of glitch anecdotes in the past and present can make them appear as a massive, shapeless, hypnotic corpus. They become a hypertext in which deeply personal stories of the extraordinary shed their spatial and chronological coordinates, their situatedness. If, for example, the account of a fairy abduction in the early nineteenth century reads familiar to modern eyes, it may be because strikingly similarly worded testimonies exist of twentieth- and twenty-first-century alien abductions: They emphasise time jumps, temporal amnesia, blackouts (as well as sexual violation). Such stories then become part of something else entirely, something ahistorical and separate from ourselves, something that oscillates between past and present but no longer belongs to either, much like the pile of business cards from an enchanted underground economy on my desk.[6] How to reconcile their individual situatedness and the contextual sense of rupture they all share? How, in other words, to think historically about the palimpsestic nature of all those different lived temporalities that intersect with the supernatural, and that are so densely layered in meaning not least because they influence and shape each other, often across time?[7]

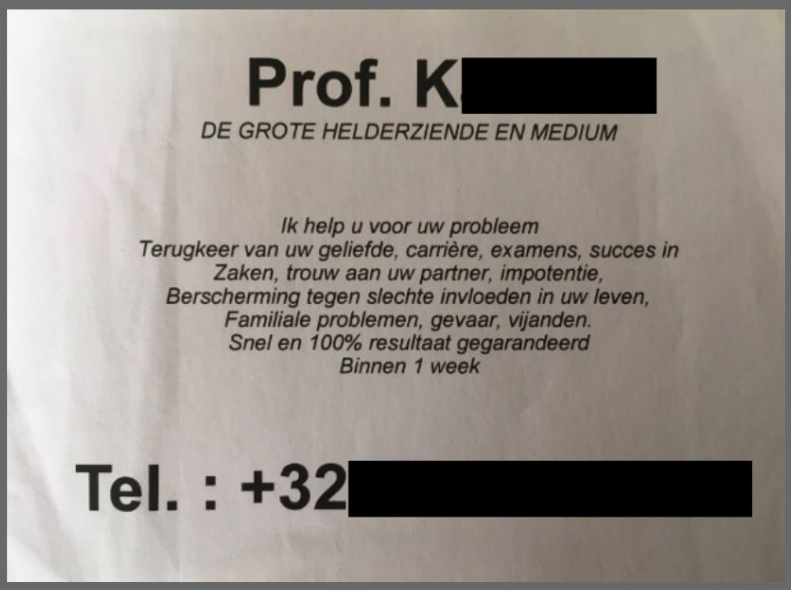
The two tensions, of (individual, historical) non-belonging and (social, cultural, historical) context, are crucial if we are to come to grips with the brokenness that permeates personal histories of the supernatural without attempting to "fix" them, and without making too much sense of them. These tensions circle around the figure of the historian who curates, interferes, misplaces, destroys, and makes haphazard piles to create a narrative – a chronological sequence – that, because of its linearity, itself becomes an anomalous glitch of sorts.

So we set out to break the timeline.

2. End time

> *"Prof. K., the great clairvoyant and medium. I help you with your problem: return of a loved one, career, exams, business success, fidelity, impotence, protection against bad influences, family issues, danger, enemies. Fast and 100% guarantee of result within 1 week."*[8]

The business cards on my desk are quaint, out-of-time-looking – not because of their content but because of their materiality. Scraps of paper, *objets trouvés*, relics of a bygone age. They attest to the kind of supernatural underground economy I usually read about in histories of nineteenth-century Europe. Cunning-folk, wizards, exorcists, fortune-tellers, people accused of witchcraft, unwitchers, palm readers, shamans, demon tamers: They were the entrepreneurs that operated on the margins of industrialisation and urban expansion; now they operate on the margins of a globalised service economy. I have seen adverts just like the ones in the pile, in archives, dating from over a century ago. But by and large, this economy has moved online, tapping into new markets: a migration accelerated by Covid-19. Acts of occultism and ritual magic have also gone digital. Djinns arrive by courier at your doorstep from eBay depots; trans-Atlantic covens take place on Zoom; self-styled sorcerers broadcast live on YouTube to place curses on capitalism and big pharma; WitchTok brings New Age spirituality and warped ideas about historical witchcraft to new generations.



Picture by the author.

In 2020 thousands of people caused 'manifesting' (asking favours of the universe) and 'shifting' (sending your conscience temporarily to another reality) to trend on TikTok. Banking on the perception of a worldly disenchantment, these deliberate and recorded glitch manifestations present themselves as alternatives to, even critiques of, a materialist mainstream, and they do so in profoundly materialist ways. Enchantment has always benefitted from technological developments, from print press to virtual reality.[9] The Sunday Times announced 'manifesting' the buzzword of 2021 and explained its popularity, in journalistic hyperbole, as a reflection of "the peak of anxiety about world collapse."[10] The supernatural thrives in apocalyptic settings. The cards on my desk, much like their predecessors from earlier centuries, use a language of magical anchorage and solace while painting a picture of a world in disarray, confusion, alienation. They speak of the end times, Judgement Day, and the Millennium. They haunt me (/hound me) in my writing.

Hauntology can be described (too) succinctly as an ontology with a ghost 'h' that differentiates between being and presence. Or it can be summarised as "to be is to be haunted" – not necessarily just by a past that manifests in the present.[11] Derrida developed his hauntology in part as a reaction to the popular understanding of Francis Fukuyama's argument about the victory of liberal democracy as the end of history.[12] (And, more implicitly, hauntology responded to the turmoil in the immediate aftermath of the collapse of the Soviet Union.) Haunting has always been political. Mark Fisher refitted Derrida's hauntology to describe the folk horror cultural products that flooded the British market in the 1970s, but also to place that popularity against a backdrop of Thatcher's ideological war on cultural spaces that resisted or escaped market-driven neoliberalism.[13] Hauntology popped up again in critical theory after the financial crisis of 2008.

History does not move like a straight arrow from one point to another all the way to an endpoint. Derrida blurs past and present into a spectral whole that negates the notion of a historical end and replaces it with a loop. But even if Fukuyama's argument about the end of history has often been reduced to a catchphrase deserving of mockery, the sense that civilisation or history has ended or was hurtling towards the curtain call is a recurring flex in

historiography, and in cultural criticism more broadly, as well as on homemade business cards. The early twentieth-century historian Marc Bloch wrote poignantly about the eschatological nature of historical practice in Europe, and about historians' incapacity to escape linear structures of temporality and meaning.[14] As a historian of the Middle Ages writing during the Second World War, Bloch was well aware of the European proclivity to apocalyptic language. This is a language that has its inflection in a corpus of modern analyses of the dire state of the West, most famously in Oswald Spengler's Der Untergang des Abendlandes,[15] published after the First World War at a moment in time when many people in Europe had close encounters with the mystical and the supernatural.

Spengler ostentatiously rejected linear understandings of a world history landmarked by major chronological turning points: history conceptualised as global timeline. Instead he imagined history as an ebb and flood of self-sustaining, ultimately doomed cultures. Surrounded by destruction and grief, Spengler observed the winter of Western culture. (Seasons move slowly, if still teleologically, in such big histories. In his magnum opus, Spengler's contemporary, the Dutch historian Johan Huizinga, wrote of the later Middle Ages as an "autumn-tide."[16]) Not a singular arrow, then, but waves crashing onto a beach: a natural progression of time just the same. Besides, historians never had the monopoly on eschatological moods. Some adverts from the underground economy then and now describe this world as staring down the precipice of total annihilation. From atop the pile of business cards Professor Docteur Jean-Michel announces the imminent apocalypse. The end times are upon us, and supernatural salvation is the best we can hope for. Fortunately for us, it comes cheap.

3. Glitch experience

> Howling at distance, ocean
>
> pulling between us, bending time
>
> (Anne Michaels, "Three weeks")

While business cards from the underground economy accumulated on my desk, and while researching nineteenth-century supernatural phenomena, I began to search online for recent accounts of glitch experiences. I was not alone. As early as June 2020, the digital

consumer research company Brandwatch pointed out that people were, since March, increasingly going online to read accounts of bizarre encounters on messaging boards and social media.[17] They are everywhere: a pandemic paranormality in which people share, discuss, and reach out to others; a living, global archive.

Spectral apparitions in particular abounded as people spent their days inside, looked around, and listened to the unfamiliar sounds of their familiar surroundings. (Around the same time, the American ghost researcher John E. L. Tenney suggested in the New York Times that the noise of expanding floorboards and old pipes explained each instance of "spectral roommates."[18]) Perhaps an increased awareness of self, aided by society momentarily slowing down, does lift the veil between worlds. "Haunted places are the only ones where people can live," Michel de Certeau wrote riffing on Derrida's hauntology.[19] Even if all human places are haunted, as de Certeau argues, the pandemic-induced sudden awareness of a haunted home caused glitches around the world. In this abundance of anomaly experiences, fractures showed; supernature was healing.

The countless stories online repeat and share a sense of temporal dislocation. Encounters with ghosts at home, but also with cryptozoological and extraterrestrial creatures on ever-longer pandemic walks, and experiences of deepened, ecstatic, sometimes theophanic spirituality – all increasingly recorded since March 2020 – mess with people's already fraught sense of time. The use of tenses in accounts reflects this. They shift fluidly, and at first unnoticed, between past and present. Someone "saw" a ghost that "moves" through a wardrobe; someone "feels" a presence that "had been" nearby. As such these accounts defy the curatorship of historians and ethnographers: They resist the structure of timelines and narrative arcs. ('You know who had an arc?' Paulie Walnuts, not incidentally the most supernaturally attuned character in The Sopranos, quips: 'Noah.')[20] Temporal dislocation and anti-linearity are defining traits of many supernatural glitch experiences.

And yet linear time is, often by necessity or lack of viable alternative, the lens through which we look at the world and its history – and at (hi)stories of the supernatural, in which case linearity has traditionally served very well to consign these subjects and beliefs to a faraway history, to a past perfect tense. In this version of history supernatural experiences are treated not so much as glitches in people's lives but as anachronistic hiccups on a grand

timeline. Temporality, then, poses a challenge to anyone dealing with a supernatural glitch encounter, whether one's own or someone else's. This challenge, too, manifests in tenses: Do we write about glitches in a historical past or an ethnographic present? After all, what Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing has argued about the language of ethnographic writing, that it ties "to a conceptualization of culture as a coherent and persistent whole," also goes for the past tense in which history is predominantly written. Both can create "a timeless scene of action" and put the subjects of our writing outside the "time of civilized history."[21] Remember, neither a "coherent and persistent whole" nor a "timeless scene of action" are desirable outcomes when writing histories of the supernatural. They are broken, not whole, and they are untimely, not timeless.

Reading many accounts in succession – whether online, in the archive or, like me, moving between all kinds of repositories of glitch experiences – brings to the surface what Giorgio Agamben calls "pure historical essence": their relation to time. Talking about toys, Agamben touches on a central nerve that also twitches under the skin of supernatural histories. "[D]ismembering and distorting the past or miniaturizing the present – playing as much on diachrony as on synchrony –," he writes, "makes present and renders tangible human temporality in itself, the pure differential margin between the 'once' and the 'no longer.'"[22] To approach glitch experiences merely as "alternative temporalities" brings into focus the "differential margin" in which glitches (and, in Agamben's theory, history as a whole) happen. Recognising this necessarily has repercussions in how supernatural histories must be written. Perhaps we should follow suit with the sources and try to recreate their sense of temporal confusion. To break these histories perhaps we should play with tenses in our writing, like children play with dice in Heraclitus' depiction of time: not simply acknowledging the dyschronia, the broken-time, in glitch experiences, but making it integral to historical methodologies.

*

It is tempting to collate past and present glitch encounters with the supernatural into a historical timeline on which certain phenomena replace others as time wears on. Think again of the nineteenth-century telling of an abduction by fairies and compare it to more recent accounts of abductions by aliens. In both types of encounter, accounts often mention

a glitch or a lapse in time, moments that are lost, unaccounted for. This could make the glitch experience appear as timeless, or more precisely, of all times. We could observe a phenomenon through the centuries, only the outward appearance changes. Aliens replace fairies; UFOs replace religious visions. Simple.

By extension, we could then even discern templates of glitch experiences throughout history. Extraordinary bodily phenomena of mysticism such as ecstasies, stigmata, and long periods of fasting, for example, have occurred throughout the history of religions in ways that can suggest a continuum, not least because mystics themselves have often linked their bodies to those of illustrious, saintly predecessors, drawing up supernatural lineages. In turn, historians have studied phenomena in terms of historical (chronological, geographical) waves and trends. But however useful and illuminating, such approaches plaster over the temporal cracks and connections that show on an individual scale. The specificity of time matters; linearity can break; a moment can become a transhistorical portal. What exactly happens at three o'clock on a Friday afternoon in 1916, for instance, when a young woman in Leeds sinks into a trancelike state and the wounds of the Crucifixion appear on her hands and feet? In her diaries, she details her synchronised suffering with Christ as he is nailed to the cross almost 2000 years earlier. In her experience, she is with him in body. But the stigmata experience also splits her temporally: She is at once on Calvary and offering her supernatural wounds as a sublimation for the death and pain of the First World War.[23] This temporal dissonance is crucial to understand her stigmatic experience as glitch, and her personal timeline as broken.

Injecting some kind of (linear!) continuity into a hypertext of glitch experiences therefore also stems from thinking historically, and from understanding phenomena to progress from within a constantly shifting cultural context. Seen from that perspective, aliens have replaced fairies because technologies and frames of reference have changed. Again: Simple. The temptation to compare, even equate, supernatural glitches across periods and cultures is rooted to some extent in the unified field theory as ufologists reconceptualised it in the 1960s to bring together poltergeists, fairy changelings, and extraterrestrial lifeforms in a melting pot of folklore, religion, and the paranormal. Within this unified field, glitch experiences are labelled, then categorised in the same superstructure of phenomena. As

such they offer a compelling cross-cultural view of the variety of human experience. But they also create the impression of an ahistorical whole out of very personal, intimate stories that are primarily found in scattered fragments and, perhaps more crucially, in gaps between fragments. Those individual stories can riff off each other, even accumulate meaning when put together. But they remain anomalous experiences, meaningful in a first instance for the individuals to whom they happened.

Looking at the cards on my desk, I realise the pile is also an effort to create a whole out of fragments, and at bringing the cards into histories of the supernatural. Diachronic attempts at labelling the supernatural tend to obscure, rather than clarify. Phenomena are mislabelled, interpreted wrongly, ascribed different root causes, and lumped together because they appear outwardly similar, especially when taken out of their context. This can happen in spite of good intentions to provide a deeper understanding of glitch experiences. Since its conception in 1882, for example, the British Society for Psychical Research has categorised historical and contemporaneous personal experiences of stigmata together with fairy sightings, crop circles, and all sorts of precognitive capabilities as "spontaneous phenomena," a subcategory of "paranormal abilities of the living."[24] They, too, in a structured research catalogue, form a hypertext that is timeless, by which I mean they appear not as "un-timely" but rather as "of all times," transcending the specificity of the context in which an individual encounter happened.

I think such classifications have had an unintended opposite effect in the academy. They have entered many historians' frames of mind, for instance, to form an ambiguous supernatural comprising everything that invokes "a spooky sense that there was more to the world."[25] These attempts to find meaning in glitch experiences – to historicise and classify them, to make them part of a symbolic universe – have, in fact, rendered those experiences meaningless; paradoxically, by structuring them into categories they have been forced into a shape that "we cannot fully identify," and in which the strangeness and singularity of an experience have become lost or, worse, irrelevant.[26]

Perhaps worse than obfuscation is extraction. Faced with my small collection of supernatural scrap paper, Agamben shakes his head: The collector of artefacts "extracts the object from its diachronic distance or its synchronic proximity and gathers it into the remote

adjacenc[y] of history."[27] What does this extracted collection do? It mixes with my work in a physical sense: cards appear unasked for between my notes or in a book; they glitch up my workspace. And it repurposes a group of objects, re-engineering them to be part of a history, perhaps prematurely. Am I not building my own arc here? Every now and then I resort to rearranging the business cards. Some get lost; some I find again by accident. Increasingly, they scatter around the room. The countless online accounts of glitch encounters also fracture metaphors of history as forward arrow much like similar stories from the past disrupt a sense of linearity, to the point that it becomes unclear who experienced what when, or rather, who impinged on whose sense of time: the ghost/alien/creature, or the person seeing them, or the historian with their hindsight. Such organic confusions and broken narrative rhythms mark cracks in the notion of personal or lived experience.

That is problematic for cultural historians like me. First, because of our longstanding emphasis on the event in cultural historical method. We make use of moments of crisis or exception – a cat massacre,[28] a wave of UFO sightings – to delineate the imaginative universe of historical actors within a broader context. So much effort goes into finding meaning through contextualisation, into stitching the peculiar – the stand-out event – into a fabric in which it can make sense. Second, it is problematic because of cultural historians' relatively recent focus on lived experience, inspired by the work of anthropologists like Clifford Geertz and Bronislaw Malinowski.[29] (This shift has unsurprisingly also led to more reflexivity towards historians' own practices.) The focus on lived experience pervades research of the supernatural especially, although what is meant by it is usually left suitably vague, and does not seem to include the intense glitchiness that permeates personal records.[30] To take seriously lived glitch experiences of people in the past and now means to give space to the sense of temporal disruption and profound un-context of the supernatural as people have described it time and again. It means to acknowledge how time shapes and distorts accounts of glitch experiences.

After all, time functions as distance, too. It mediates the disruption and directness of glitch encounters for those who experienced it, both in the form of a length of time that passes before the experience is put into words and in the form of how time works in accounts. The

pure experience, defined as a revelation, something immediate, becomes inaccessible because time interferes (and also, as mentioned, because through language it enters a referential structure existing in connection to countless other glitch stories). Time creates distance also for the historian of those encounters, in obvious and less obvious ways. History, Agamben writes, "must, like every human science, renounce the illusion of having its object directly in realia, and instead figure its object in terms of signifying relations." Those relations are between two 'correlated and opposed orders': diachrony (event) and synchrony (structure), neither of which, Agamben argues, exists in their pure form. History happens instead precisely in the differential margin between the two, in the tension of distance.[31] Any attempt to bridge that distance is ultimately doomed.

Warning signs abound, then, when writing the broken histories of the supernatural. The historian and critic Hayden White has pointed out how "narrative prose discourse that purports to be a model, or icon, of past structures and processes in the interest of explaining what they were" often ends up representing those very structures.[32] We cannot disavow linearity altogether if we want to write with the magic of glitch encounters rather than analyse it away, but we can be more explicitly aware of our own position in the glitch narrative.

In The Rings of Saturn W. G. Sebald writes about the illusions and misplaced confidence of history: "We, the survivors, see everything from above, see everything at once. And still we do not know how it was."[33] We must try to un-see everything at once if we are to begin to know "how it was" – and is. Patterns and loops still emerge but each particle, each individual experience is time-bound, haunted by its own fractured Zeitgeist. On my wall, above the pile of cards from the underground economy, hangs a fragment of a T. S. Eliot poem that, as I read it again, only emphasises the idea of some sort of feedback loop in my praxis: "We shall not cease from exploration / And the end of our exploring / Will be to arrive where we started / And know the place for the first time."[34]

Does temporal confusion inevitably lead to historical illegibility? It gets dark.

I look up from my desk when Antwerp's cathedral tower lights up outside my window: a pale LED flare, an early modern church for the future wrapped in scaffolding. I must have lost track of time.

4. Breakpoints

The man who was away with the fairies in 1834 experienced time out of joint. But where did he go?

Landscapes are "cluttered with the detritus of past living," Joyce Appleby writes,[35] glitch encounters can happen anywhere. They necessarily take place somewhere. Michel de Certeau's phrase, that the only places people can live are haunted, can be inverted. "We talk of ghosts as if they can only be people," Christopher Josiffe, the librarian of the haunted Senate House in London, writes.[36] Places can behave in ghostly ways, too. They are not simply inhabited by glitches; they are themselves glitches, their "dimensions changed," their "purpose erased." Time behaves differently there. "There seem to be corridors that remember being drawing rooms," Josiffe continues, "attics that remember being bedrooms."[37] Put differently: Where did the fairies take the man for time to go weird, or where was he for the glitch event to become possible?

In the 1980s the meridian between the eastern and western hemispheres was moved 102 metres to the east. In Greenwich Park in London, at the Royal Observatory, the visible line in the grass that has been there since 1851 became in effect defunct as it was replaced by an invisible, more accurate meridian line. Ever since, glitches occur in the park, messing with people's time. A park keeper "jumps" instantly from one side of a hill to the other. Students on a trip get lost "for days" – or is it only an hour? People find themselves suddenly having walked into an empty woodland area bereft of sunlight and wander seemingly forever.[38] Clearly, the where of the glitch matters, time does not behave the same everywhere. Some places stretch it out or compress it more than others.

One way to think historically of narrative glitches – or glitch narratives – is in spatial terms. In the way Edward Soja conceptualises "thirdspaces" as uncanny irruptions in which the boundaries between material reality and the imaginary collapse, spaces that are simultaneously "of the moment and historical."[39] But perhaps more so in the way the anthropologist Marc Augé writes of "non-spaces" (non-lieux). Augé argues that the last few decades have been witness to a decline in anthropological place, a "concrete and symbolic construction… which serves as a reference for all those it assigns to a position."[40] It has

been replaced by indifferent "supermodern" spaces, overloaded with an excess of time, such as hotel lobbies, supermarkets, airport lounges – one could add, as Roger Luckhurst does, corridors to this uncanny topography or, in Esme Partridge's analysis, business districts that die after offices close in the evening.[41] Augé touches briefly on how time works differently in non-places. These are, incidentally, also the kinds of contemporary spaces where glitches manifest: not indifferent per se, but unsettling in their supermodernity. Supernatural glitch encounters happen in – and create, and supercharge – places that are "like palimpsests on which the scrambled game of identity and relations is ceaselessly written."[42]

Supernatural non-places can be physical locations, deep in the woods, behind a dumpster, on a historian's desk, or they can be metaphysical. What they have in common is that they are all places of temporal friction, and they are manifold. They have many human experiences from different times folded into them. All places are palimpsests of history. But what sets supernatural non-places apart is just how jumbled those layers – of memory and possibility, of past and future – can be: There is an excess of time. Time is compressed, stretched, superimposed on itself like a Victorian spirit photograph, or made to feel absent altogether.

Starting research from the place of the glitch, then, leads at once into different directions. For Augé these directions are opposites, leading either to place as "never completely erased" or non-place as "never totally completed."[43] He writes about the "spatial vertigo" in non-spaces of supermodernity – "as though we ourselves were about to lose our bearings in time and emerge somewhere else entirely" – mostly in metaphorical terms.[44] Accounts of glitch encounters bring such feelings into a lived, embodied reality. People's physical bodies disappear for a while and suddenly reappear somewhere else; some hours feel like days, or days like hours, in a very real, embodied sense and not just as hyperbole or platitude (Time flies when you're having fun!). Like Derrida's hauntology, Augé's non-spaces were a reaction against the end of history, crystallised into an image of a globalised world in which space was homogenous and flat. Seen from that perspective, supernatural non-spaces defy that image: They are particular, not generic; not flat, but sometimes so deep that people fall and keep falling. In 2014 staff at Greenwich Park found a phone attached to a selfie stick.

The last photo on the phone allegedly shows the disappeared owner of the phone against a deeply disturbing background.[45]

Are non-places where individual end times happen, like in Greenwich Park? Do they always mark a definitive turning point in people's lives? Or do people, sometimes deliberately, visit the glitch only briefly and get out, to resume as before? I assumed, wrongly, that people dwelt in these places long after the initial experience and that people haunted by them returned to haunt them, perhaps never fully left them at all. That the glitch, the supernatural disruption, comes to define the rest of someone's life and casts everything else into a different, shady light. The cultural critic William Irwin Thompson also points to the spectacular and disruptive, the "exaggeration of the archetypal encounter," not a sustained sense of spirituality, as the defining event in religious meaning-making.[46] But glitch encounters, no matter how disruptive and spectacular, can move into the periphery of life; the supernatural non-place shimmers out of existence. People forget, or get used to it.

Neighbours in Leeds who saw the young woman next door entering into ecstatic states and bearing the Wounds of Christ on her body during the First World War initially corresponded about the experience in terms of mystical glitchiness. They lost track of time when they stayed in the woman's bedroom for hours. Some described how they were "moved elsewhere... in spirit... our bodies had stayed behind," as if the ecstasy had caused the room and its contents to be transported to a different plane where time slowed down. Afterwards, witnesses expressed a deep sense of confusion about how long they had been "gone."[47] Three years later, however, and those neighbours had gotten used to the woman's regular ecstasies and stigmata. They still visited her, but they no longer shared in the glitch experience. They became spectators instead of participants. They had moved on.

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Returning one last time to Agamben, stating what may now, in the context of glitch encounters, sound obvious: "History, therefore, cannot be the continuous progress... through linear time, but in its essence is hiatus, discontinuity, epochē."[48] This essay has tried to offer some ways to begin to convey Agamben's observation onto the page – and fold it into the historian's craft, which is always collage and curation, always synchrony and diachrony. Perhaps no place is more of a non-place than the archive. Every voice we

encounter there is a revenant, someone summoned back to life into a different time, briefly. But historians dwell in similar ways in the past, too, moving through time in non-linear ways, glitching gloveless into the past. It's a two-way transgression, and it forms a feedback loop of past and present.

Having picked some arbitrary examples from across the last two centuries, I do not want to suggest that glitch experiences are the same – or even similar in categorical ways – regardless of when or where they happened, or that there is something like a universal glitch experience. The examples instead illustrate how time is something that can be experienced in profoundly different ways, also as non-linear, and as associative. It has implications for how the humanities, and historians especially, think of time as not (always) linear but as something that can reverse, fork, buckle, break. This understanding is necessary to acknowledge the historicity of the supernatural without naturalising its manifestations, to write about glitch encounters as problematic, difficult, and broken. Seen this way, the adverts from the underground economy on my desk are similarly difficult: They exist both within and outside their own time. There is nothing ahistorical about the adverts, but they can be glitches nonetheless. Like glitch experiences, they exist in friction with their context: not archaic, not timeless, but untimely and powerful, because they have the capacity to break persisting paradigms of disenchantment, reason, linearity.

And they have the capacity to disrupt how we understand histories of the supernatural and appreciate their fractured nature. The glitch alerts us to the availability of alternative temporalities with which to tell, write, make history. It can even offer a toolkit with which to recalibrate our historical knowledge more generally. Ruptures haunt us, and they show the value of looking at sightings, visions, apparitions, metamorphoses as glitches that help decentre and denaturalise the trajectory of history. Even while still staggering from the spatial vertigo and temporal whiplash that glitch encounters cause, we continue to reach out to the supernatural to bridge all kinds of distance, in language, between moments, between people, within ourselves. What we find ultimately remains fragmentary and incomprehensible. The structure and significance of supernatural experiences are not revealed in linear narrative but in their brokenness.

That needn't be a problem.

Breaking a history can be like breaking open an egg. Something is set free.

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[1] Both anecdotes come from the Irish folklore database, Bailiúchán na Scol [The Schools Collection], duchas.ie.

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[3] Katharine Hodgkin, "Historians and Witches," History Workshop Journal 45 (Spring 1998), 272.

[4] Jason Ã. Josephson-Storm, The Myth of Disenchantment: Magic, Modernity, and the Birth of the Human Sciences (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2017).

[5] Such narratives are predominantly based on a misreading of Max Weber's much-quoted phrase "die Entzauberung der Welt," Wissenschaft als Beruf (1917).

[6] Sudhir Alladi Venkatesh, Off the Books: The Underground Economy of the Urban Poor (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006).

[7] Hayden White, Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1973), especially the introduction.

[8] Translated by the author.

[9] Owen Davies, Grimoires: A History of Magic Books (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).

[10] Helen Rumblebow, '"Manifesting": it's the buzzword of 2021', Sunday Times, 27 September 2021.

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[12] Francis Fukuyama, The End of History and the Last Man (New York: Free Press, 1992).

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[17] Covid-19 Daily Bulletin, Brandwatch, 11 June 2020. https://www.brandwatch.com/email/covid19-bulletin-056-11-06-2020/

[18] Molly Fitzpatrick, 'Quarantining With a Ghost? It's Scary', New York Times, 14 May 2020.

[19] Michel de Certeau, The Practice of Everyday Life, trans. Steven Rendall (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), 108.

[20] 'The Legend of Tennessee Moltisanti', The Sopranos, created by David Chase, season 1, episode 8, HBO, 1999.

[21] Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing, In the Realm of the Diamond Queen: Marginality in an Out-of-Way Place (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006), xiv.

[22] Giorgio Agamben, Infancy and History: On the Destruction of Experience, trans. Liz Heron (London and New York: Verso, 1993), 70-71 and the essay 'Time and history: critique of the instant and the continuum'.

[23] N. B.'s manuscript diaries were given to the Jesuit scholar of the supernatural, Herbert Thurston. London, Archives in Britain of the Societas Iesu, 39.3.3.

[24] Anonymous, 'Note on the visions of Anna K. Emmerich' in 'Part 1: Paranormal Abilities of the Living', Research Catalogue of the Society for Psychical Research 1884–2011. https://www.spr.ac.uk/1-spontaneous-phenomena

[25] Nicola Bown, Carolyn Burdett, and Pamela Thurschwell, introduction to The Victorian Supernatural, eds. Nicola Bown, Carolyn Burdett, and Pamela Thurschwell (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 1.

[26] Marc Augé, Non-Spaces: An Introduction to Supermodernity, trans. John Howe (London and New York: Verso, 2008), 27; Steven Connor, afterword to The Victorian Supernatural, eds. Nicola Bown, Carolyn Burdett, and Pamela Thurschwell (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 274.

[27] Agamben, 72.

[28] Robert Darnton, The Great Cat Massacre and Other Episodes in French History (New York: Basic Books, 1984)..

[29] Chris Millard, "Using Personal Experience in the Academic Medical Humanities: A Genealogy," Social Theory & Health 18 (December 2020), 184–98.

[30] See, for example Sally R. Munt, introduction to The Ashgate Research Companion to Paranormal Cultures, eds. Olu Jenzen and Sally R. Munt (London and New York: Routledge), 1-2.

[31] Agamben, 75.

[32] White, 3.

[33] W. G. Sebald, The Rings of Saturn, trans. Michael Hulse (London: Vintage, 1998), 70.

[34] T. S. Eliot, 'Little Gidding', Four Quartets (San Diego: Harcourt, 1943).

[35] Joyce Appleby, Lynn Hunt, and Margaret Jacob, Telling the Truth About History (New York: Norton, 1994), 259.

[36] Christopher Josiffe, Gef! The Strange Tale of an Extra-Special Talking Mongoose (London: Strange Attractor Press, 2017), 47.

[37] Josiffe, 47.

[38] See www.portalsoflondon.com.

[39] Edward Soja, Thirsdpace: Journeys to Los Angeles and Other Real-and-Imagined Places (Malden: Blackwell, 2014), 20.

[40] Augé, 29-30.

[41] Roger Luckhurst, Corridors: Passages of Modernity (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2019); Esme Partridge, "Witchcraft isn't Subversive," UnHerd. 15 February 2022.

[42] Augé, 79.

[43] Augé, 30.

[44] Augé, 31.

[45] www.portalsoflondon.com.

[46] William Irwin Thompson, Coming into Being (New York: St Martin's Griffin, 1998), 200.

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If I Stay with You, I Am Rooted, but I Flow: On Discursive Love Between a Vampire and a Saint

GODA PALEKAITĖ - Hasselt University & PXL-MAD School of Arts

Through the impossible love story between the eccentric Christian mystic saint and the vampire, contagious muse of folklore and horror erotica, this text addresses the liminal stages of cultural existence and proposes to reimagine love and passion. Virgin Saint, in burning desire for Jesus, was the typical Christian model of the sublime devotional lover for centuries, and only recently has come to be regarded as mentally ill. Meanwhile, Vampire who is now mostly seen as a fictional character, was considered real participant of the social fabric for millennia throughout civilisations. This text emerges as an attempt to study and to intimately relate to historical, cultural and discursive others. Trespassing the boundaries between historical, fictitious and autobiographical realities, it proposes to exercise and practice discursive lineages of passion through transchronological intimacy.

Liminality, Christian mysticism, vampire folklore, intimate history, love story

Overture

If I intended to write a love story which was at once mystical yet archetypal, agonised yet recognisable, it would be a passionate romance between two women, a vampire and a saint, a desperate, condemned love, driven by dreams, desire, pain, and imagination. The first protagonist would be a virgin Christian mystic saint, who is madly in love with Jesus Christ. She is the typical model – at least in the Western mindset – of the sublime devotional lover who, within modern secular societies, has come to be retroactively regarded as mentally ill. Meanwhile the vampire is the folkloric, literary, and cinematic incarnation of the sick and abusive love. Paradoxically, in the past considered real by oral history and pre-modern science, she has been transformed into a fictional character in the light of the twentieth century (an extinct species, one might say). They both transfigured – yet did not disappear – abandoning their place in social reality, they secured a no less relevant place in the discourse, both of popular and niche culture.

This text is an exercise. It emerges as my attempt to study and to intimately relate to historical, cultural and discursive others. How can I accompany them in their metaleptic movement – in their own mesmerising exercise of shapeshifting from one reality to another?[1] What can I learn from them about love and suffering? The title "If I Stay with You, I Am Rooted, but I Flow: On Discursive Love Between a Vampire and a Saint" includes a quote from Virginia's Woolf experimental novel *The Waves*, in which young Jinny observes her own desire: "I feel a thousand capacities spring up in me. I am arch, gay, languid, melancholy by turns. I am rooted, but I flow."[2] Further, throughout the text, I interchangeably use small and capital letters for the saint/the vampire and Saint/Vampire. This is to distinguish when I refer to an abstract cultural figure and when I refer to my character. Finally, the fragments *written in this font,* and placed on the left of the page are written intertwining with the voices of multiple characters and my own – a unified utterance which allows me to speak as one of the lineage. Speaking along with and through the absent others, can, I believe, contribute to developing a different, intimate, immediate, mutual, and affective relationship to (historical) discourses.

My discursive lineage is not only a weaving of mystics' and vampires' narratives, but also of writers who, like Virginia Woolf, already a while ago, developed models of thinking about love and desire. In her novel *Thérèse* mon *amour* (*Teresa, My Love*), Julia Kristeva follows the sixteenth-century Spanish mystic saint Teresa of Avila and travels to places she lived, while going through a personal self-reflective process coloured by her own experiences as a psychoanalyst. What evolves throughout the novel is a *transchronological* love between the historical character and the writer. Both Teresa and Kristeva are my teachers in revealing their confessions of intimate and passionate relations with somebody they have never had a chance to meet.

Confession, indeed, is the overtone of the following left-side fragments. According to Michel Foucault, in the Western mindset since the Middle Ages, confession has been one of the central rituals in the production of truth. Even in a secular contemporary society, the impact of confession is singular: "It plays a part in justice, medicine, education, family relationships, and love relations...one confesses one's crimes, one's sins, one's thoughts and desires, one's illnesses and troubles." [3]

This text is a performance of joint confession – the characters speak through my voice as I speak through theirs – for the community of readers. Throughout the history of Christianity, the semi-private performance of confession between a penitent (the one who confesses) and a confessor, followed by a public performance of remorse through penance, was a codified social practice central to the life of an individual and a community. Books of instructions or *penitentials* were assembled for the sake of precision about how to regard sins, including sinful sexual thoughts and acts, as well as about procedures of confession and what punishment was required. In her discussion of medieval confession in women's monasteries, Rabia Gregory simultaneously follows and critiques Foucault's *The History of Sexuality*. She develops an argument that the practice of confession, although gendered and *sexualised* (a male confessor listening to a submissive female penitent expressing her sexual sins), was also an act of empowerment for the women's community to which the penitent belonged. Gregory analyses the so-called *Sisterbooks* – collections of usually anonymous women's writings, associated with the Dominican mystical traditions of Germany, Switzerland, and the Low Countries, and compiled to record and document

communal life in the monastery. Accounts there include criticism of confessors and the institution of confession while empowering the confessing woman by *emphasising* the performance of penance itself.[4] Here too, I draw attention to the collectivity, performativity, and passion of the confessional itself, instead of focusing on the confession as a mechanism of control.

Offering an associative dictionary of love and yearning, Roland Barthes described his book *Fragments d'un discours amoureux* (*A Lover's Discourse: Fragments*) as a collection of figures or a portrait, "but not a psychological portrait; instead, a structural one which offers the reader a discursive site: the site of someone speaking within himself, *amorously*, confronting the other (the loved object), who does not speak."[5] In the case of my research, the loved one who does not speak is a historical character, the inaccessible discursive "other" whose silence both challenges and excites me. Just like Barthes's lover's discourse, saturated with the sad nuances of longing (anxiety, annulment, waiting, dependency, fade-out, etc.), this text envisions a historical love strategy beyond the happy romantic scenario of "love ever after." What if our image of intimacy was built upon an impossible love tale between Vampire and Saint?

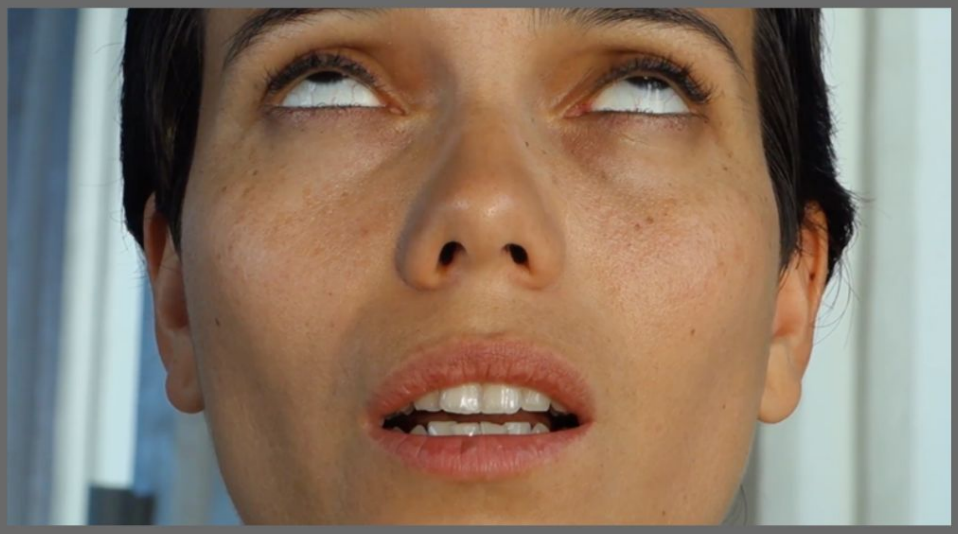
Yet why talk about these characters now? In the introduction to his book *Vampires: An Uneasy Essay on the Undead in Film* written in 1992, the artist and writer Jalal Toufic raises the same question: "why on vampires now, by what coincidence? How come what functions in the too-late and too-early mode is being written about now, when it has become fashionable? But isn't it characteristic of telepathy that it reaches the present of fashion by a too late of the too early or a too early of the too late?"[6] I can only add that by 2022 vampires did not fall out of telepathic fashion; on the contrary, they have fully established themselves in popular culture. There have been countless films varying in cinematic quality and taste, while in literature it has remained a popular genre, and even the whole Gothic subculture has been inspired by horror fiction with vampires as the most prominent figures.[7]

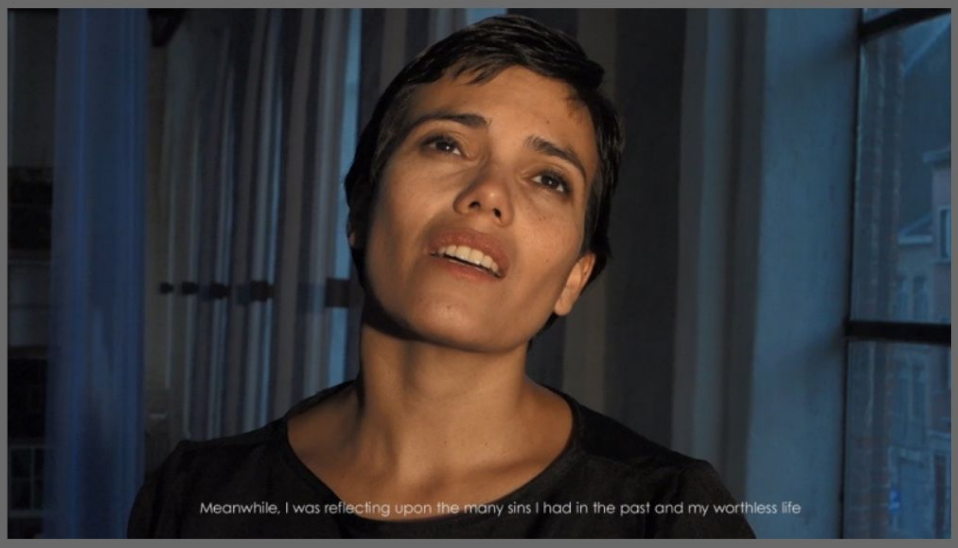
Meanwhile, Christian mystic saints, who enjoyed the status of celebrities during their lifetimes, took a longer path to gain public interest in our times. Only in the last decade have

there been popular high-budget films about female mystics, such as the German *Vision – From the Life of Hildegard von* Bingen (2009), the British *Saint Maud* (2019), and the French-Dutch Benedetta(2021). All of them simultaneously serve (and, likely, that is the reason they are produced) as LGBTQIA+ movies exploring the theme of lesbian relationships within the history of Christianity.[8]

However, intellectuals have already found interest and relief in mysticism in the depressed post-war context. Amy Hollywood dedicates her book *Sensible Ecstasy: Mysticism, Sexual Difference and the Demands of History* to discussing mysticism's role in modern French philosophy and its relevance for the works of *Bataille*, *Irigaray*, Sartre, de Beauvoir, and Lacan. She notes, "The twentieth-century fascination with Christian mysticism is, I think, a response to this need and to this desire to come to terms with suffering and death. The mystic who cries out in anguish when Christ leaves her recognizes, in a way many of us today do not, that loss is experienced in the body."[9] Mysticism is, therefore, rooted in the body, where sexuality, the imaginary, and the absent meet.

It does not take much to notice that not only the mystical performance but also the vampiric performance is located in the body. In the introduction to Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (originally published in 1897), Maurice *Hindle* suggests that the whole novel can be interpreted as the male's frustration with his impotence and the fear of the female: "The terror that haunts Stoker's work most persistently is a male fear of, yet desire for, sex." [10] Unsurprisingly, its soft-pornographic content was directed primarily at a male readership. Thus, both of these discourses, the mystic and the vampiric, define themselves and exercise intimacy through the bodily practices of trespassing. Dramatically trespassing the boundaries of the bodies, and simultaneously the boundaries between the social and fictitious realities, agony and *jouissance* play central roles in the never-to-be-finished project of the *history of passion*.[11] Isn't it fascinating that passion means both, suffering as in the Passion of Christ and sexual passion?





Picture by the author. Stills from the film *Biographic Disobedience* (2020), written and directed by Goda Palekaitė, performed by Caterina Mora, 10 min.

Saint's passion[12]

Once, I was meditating on the great suffering of Christ when he was on the cross. I was considering the nails, which had squeezed pieces of flesh from his hands and feet onto the wood. And then, such was my sorrow over Christ's pain that I could no longer stand on my feet. I bent over and fell to the ground with my arms stretched out. Then, Christ showed me his flesh, his hands, and his chest. After that, he approached me, took me entirely in his arms, and pressed me to him. Then I knew that my beloved was transformed into my lover.

I was reflecting upon the many sins I had in the past in my worthless life. Suddenly, I saw toward my left an angel in bodily

Saint's background check

The legacy of Christian female mystics offers us no fewer wonders and questions than the legends about vampires. Practitioners of miracles, revolutionaries, schizophrenics, anorexics, prophets, sexual icons and celebrities, leaders and feminists – each portrait that reaches us from a range of centuries and places across Europe usually contains most of these labels. Here, my interest lies in the practices of intimacy that Teresa of Avila, Hildegard of *Bingen*, Caterina of Siena, Angela of *Foligno*, and other women described. I focus on their passion – the agonised yet stunningly erotic nature of their encounters with Jesus.

Many of the mystics were illiterate or at least did not write down their visions themselves; in *Barthesian* terms one would say their visions were *written aloud*. In *The Pleasure of the Text*, Barthes talks about writing aloud as an erotic mixture of timbre and language: "what it searches for...are the *pulsional* incidents, the language lined with flesh, a text where we can hear the grain of the throat, the patina of consonants, the voluptuousness of vowels, a whole carnal stereophony: the

form. He was not large but small. He was very beautiful. I saw his eyes and his face, so bright and beautiful, as he leaned to embrace me. I saw in his hands a large golden arrow and, at the end of the iron tip, there was a little fire.

I see all and I see nothing. All disappears and only Jesus stays with me. He touches my soul with great gentleness and he sometimes says, "You are I and I am you." His voice is an amber waterfall in which I desire to burn each day. His mouth is a mystical rose with powers of healing and damnation. His body is the only civilisation I long to experience.

Such were these four days I spent in convulsions: my tongue bitten to pieces, my throat unable to let even water pass. The pain was so

articulation of the body, of the tongue, not that of meaning, of language."[13] Therefore, I believe we can speak of a mystical performance – a discourse that is utterly performative, born to be embodied. According to Judith Butler, spoken language is an extension of our bodies or is embodied and thus both vulnerable and dangerous. She talks about the speech act as being a bodily act, which, because of its performativity, can be an act of threat.[14] The confessional speech act, in this case, simultaneously threatens social normativity and is vulnerable as a statement because of its ephemerality. It both disrupts and disappears as a dream does after revealing our utmost desires. Yet, once recorded, as mystic accounts have been, this dream insinuates itself into an entire unforbidden territory for practicing female desire within a highly restrictive and codified paradigm. Paradoxically, the erotic mystical performance, found a respectful place in patriarchal Christianity, while other forms of female eroticism had no place but denial.

Thus, in the accounts of the mystics, one finds love and sweetness, desire and penitence, disassembling bodies and an unbridgeable longing

great that it made me moan. Everything seemed disjointed. The lack of appetite was immense. Only one finger on my right hand seemed to be working. I felt such a sweetness, peaceful and quiet, and great sensation, that I don't know how to describe.

After these experiences, it was impossible for me to read books or write, or converse with others. I did not have the desire: work tired me. My nerves were shattered. I got drunk a lot. The only desire I felt was a desire to die. I wished for a slow and agonising death.

Having been born into a wealthy family, I used to love worldly and bodily pleasures. I was married at a young age and had several children. But around the age of forty, St. Francis appeared in front of my bed, and made me recognise the emptiness of

for Him – for the absent other, the alien, the divine. What one also notices within the whole tradition of female mysticism is the *horror*: pain and torture, usually through violent acts of self-mutilation and radical abstinence, depriving oneself of food, sleep, and basic comfort. Often the mystical exercises went to even more extreme lengths: Caterina of Siena licked the cancerous wounds of the ill she visited, while Kateri Tekakwitha, a Mohawk girl who converted to Catholicism, was known to sleep naked on thorns.[15] The proximity of mystical experience and horror is well portrayed in the film *Saint Maud*, directed by Rose Glass (2019), in which a young caretaker living in contemporary England confronts increasingly shattering experiences of the divine presence. Finally, God guides Maud to murder her non-believer patient for being an embodiment of the devil, and to burn herself to death. Unsurprisingly, entertainment industries feed on the representations of various kinds of violence, including spiritual violence. However, I should mention that, as far as we know, the Christian mystic saints presented here did not murder or hurt anybody except themselves.

my life. Soon after, my mother died, followed by my husband and all my children. From that time, I confessed my guilt and shame, I sold my land and possessions, and joined the Third Order of St. Francis as a hermit. And I cried, "Lord, have mercy upon me and grant that I remain no longer in this world!"

Vampire observes Saint

I am not the writer: I am the muse. They say I am ill. A muse is always ill, with melancholy or hysteria, or with eccentricity. The contagion is transferred through bodily fluids, through blood, mucus, semen, and breast milk. Between my legs there is a swamp, damp soggy wetlands, a landscape where folklore discovered beasts and witches.

Horror and violence again draw our attention to the body. Kristeva, in *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, proposes that horror always feeds on ontological insecurities which are depicted and symbolised through a focus on the body. Thus, horror portrays the transgressiveness of the body, exploring the borderline between humanity and *the other* (the spirit, the alien, the animal), challenging the integrity of civilised behaviour, inducing us to fear decay and madness.

Sexuality, as another form of the *transgressiveness* of the body, has always had a particularly important place in Christian discourse, with mystic saints at the centre. In *In Praise of Love*, Alain *Badiou* suggests that Christianity, among all religious systems, is the religion that most masterfully captures the intensity of love and desire, and transcends it so as to move towards the universal, for its own purposes.[16] Furthermore, the ideal form of sexuality and desire has a very specific shape in the Christian context – namely, virginity.

The myth of virginity, beginning with the son of God being born to a virgin mother, simultaneously stimulated and controlled female sexual

I saw her from a distance through a fence. In the garden of the convent standing next to the geranium, standing on the balls of her toes with her arms stretched up, with cheeks pink from December frost, with her pale blue eyes closed, her flat breasts covered by a black cotton robe.[22] *I sniffed the air and instantly felt her scent being carried by the wind to reach my nostrils: "Sweet it was in one sense, honey sweet, and sent the same tingling through the nerves as her voice, but with a bitter underlying the sweet, a bitter offensiveness, as one smells in blood.* [23]

Hypnotised by her scent, I closed my eyes and fell to the ground with my face on the frozen soil, and in front of me, I saw a marvellous dream of what would happen next. You need but little

desire. The earliest tale glorifying virginity can probably be found in *The Acts of Paul and Thecla*, a second-century scripture attributed to the early Christian Tertullian, originally part of the New Testament, which was later (in the fifth century) excluded from it, after the consensus limiting the New Testament to the canon of twenty-seven books. In the *Acts*, the first century Roman girl Thecla who, upon merely hearing the voice of Saint Paul preaching about virginity, decides to leave her fiancé, her family, and the prospect of a comfortable married life in order to devote her virgin body to Paul. She then has to endure a series of challenges, such as being burned alive, multiple rape attempts, and being thrown into an arena with wild beasts. Yet miraculously Thecla survives all the forms of Roman punishment. The narrative is saturated with stimuli that arouse the erotic imagination, such as descriptions of naked Thecla being tortured. Yet, besides the supreme importance of virginity in this story, Thecla's rejection of the status quo, demonstrated by her refusal to marry, can also be seen as an act of gaining agency and emancipation.[17] For a true Christian, virginity not only assures heavenly rewards, it also exemplifies the ultimate values of self-restraint and self-

talent to forecast: I could see myself peacefully penetrating her soft neck with my sharp teeth, piercing one layer after another, of skin, then fascia, a thin layer of fat, capillaries, reaching for the vein fountain. It is as if the groundwaters squirt when digging a well, cold, dizzy, full, my cheeks are pink. My loved one sighs perhaps from pain, perhaps from satisfaction; she exhales snoring, sinking deeply into the dream, dreaming, of course, of a black cat lying on her chest. Pain and pleasure, light touch and tough grip. Gently, barely touching the surface, my left hand caresses the skin of her eyelids, her hair, her shoulder, her breast, while my right injects its four fingers deep into her. My nails are too long, I am worried, they might crack the thin skin of her interior space. A hypnotic

control. Saint Thecla's story, in its own way, reverses common Roman virtues and values by redefining what is honourable and what is shameful, and establishes Christian ones. Moreover, since honour and shame were coded to gender (strength, brevity, and passion to men, and weakness and passivity to women), we can see a gender inversion.[18] And thus a cult of virginity prevails throughout the whole Christian era: In the fourteenth century Caterina of Siena took the "vow of virginity" at the age of eight. She saw it as her affirmation of passion and commitment to eternal unity with the son of God as her spouse. There are even sources demonstrating that Caterina claimed to have in her possession a wedding ring made of Jesus' foreskin.[19]

Queerness – and in particular homosexuality – is another, rather contemporary, interpretation frequently adopted when addressing the sexuality of Christian mystic saints. Donald L. Boisvert and Carly Daniel-Hughes suggest that "holiness or sacredness may itself be 'queer,'" as the holy figures have the ability to move between heaven and earth, the infinite and finite, and often exist at the margins of femininity and masculinity.[20] To take a cinematic example, *Vision – From the Life*

flair, irresistible, inescapable, our scents together, the squirting streams of our blood.

Since that moment, I desired nothing more in this world than to have her by my side.

Vampire's letter of invitation

You are my eyelash, not to help me see but to help me blur what I see.

I observe your mind erupting in fountains, shooting in fireworks by exploding the meaning.

Virginia repeatedly said, as women we have no country – as women, our country is the whole world. You, the weaver who brings together the female and the divine. I have great admiration for your handwriting which I attempt to imitate.

of Hildegard von Bingen (2009), directed by the feminist filmmaker Margarethe von Trotta, invites us to dive into the philosophy and music of the twelfth-century mystic thinker, composer, painter, ecologist, and activist Hildegard von *Bingen*. With Hildegard's magical choral music in the background, an important element of the plot evolves (apparently based on historical sources) – Hildegard's subtle, intimate relationship with the young sister *Richardis*.[21]

The tortured, eroticised body also prevails in the horror genre, just as it does in the accounts of Christian mysticism: the erotic desire of the unknown, infused with pain and suffering, and often *fetishised* and saturated with Christian attributes. For instance, the seminal horror films of Dario *Argento* (such as *Inferno* (1980) and *Opera* (1987), in which the main protagonist is repeatedly tied up with ropes and has pins glued to her eyes, suggesting the crown of thorns) remind us both of Jesus's iconography and of BDSM practice. Finally, vampire films, old and new, are always a balance between horror fantasy, and erotica. Francis Ford Coppola's *Bram Stoker's Dracula* (1992), which is considered to be one of the most accurate film adaptations of the novel,

Of my entire family, I am the only one who has seen the depths of the earth. Elena told me once she had a taste of a girlfriend's milk, not to quench her thirst but to satisfy her soul. Milk from her left breast was cold and dense, there was something earthy in its odour.

If I stay with you, I am rooted, but I flow.[24]

***Saint enters Vampire's bedroom*[29]**

Her letter was so full of truth that I cried again, my wounded body screamed of wonder, the passion submerged me. Only my Lord could have seen my fountains. It must have been Him who sent her.

I entered a dark room, which seemed old and with many memories. I approached the bed, the only illuminated object was in

is as saturated with orgasmic convulsions, as is Werner Herzog's *Nosferatu: Phantom of the Night* (1979). *Interview with the Vampire* (1994) subtly represents a homosexual set of relationships (with Brad Pitt in the centre, being desired by Antonio Banderas, and raising a child together with Tom Cruise). One should end with the *Vampire Hookers* (1978) by *Cirio* H. Santiago, a typical B movie, charming in its obscenity, with its impressive six-minute-long scene (which is really long for an action film) showing three female vampires making love to a male sailor as a prelude to sucking his blood. The erotic yet tortured body hosts both the vampire and the saint in the same cinematic discourse of transgressive intimacy.

Vampire's background check

Narratives concerning demonic blood-drinking undead creatures, which were already found in ancient Mesopotamian, Hebrew, and Greek mythologies, became truly widespread in European folklore, especially in the Balkans and Eastern Europe.[25] Vampire folklore reached the peak of its development in eighteenth-century *southeastern* Europe's

the centre, a small, elevated, rectangular platform with a body on it. She must have been waiting for me since infinity.[30] *The light fell from the ceiling even though there was no lamp or window. Not only light – an image came from above with bright, beautiful colours, as if the bed were a screen. It looked utterly magical. The image itself was of some earthly substance in motion, leaves and worms and insects crawling all over the body. It was so bright and beautiful that I thought it must be a dream. But my flesh answered the pinching test, and my eyes were not to be deceived – I was indeed awake. I was perplexed, I doubted, I feared, I thought strange things which I dared not confess to my own soul. The Lord alone could have sent this wonder to me.*

oral storytelling tradition, particularly in Transylvania (today's Romania), which, as a consequence, gained the attention of the Irish writer Bram Stoker, the author of *Dracula* – the most successful vampire novel of all time. However, *Dracula* itself is situated in a lineage of literary vampire fiction, with probably the first famous short story being John William Polidori's *The* Vampyre*: A Tale* (1819), apparently inspired by Lord Byron's quest for horror stories for his young friends at the same gathering in Switzerland where Mary Shelly, only eighteen years old at that time, developed the plot of *Frankenstein or, The Modern Prometheus*. But an even more exciting predecessor of *Dracula* is the short novel *Carmilla*, written by another Irishman, Sheridan Le *Fanu*. It is an explicitly erotic lesbian love story between two beautiful young ladies, one of whom appears to be a vampire. The author creates an atmosphere built not so much on spookiness and fear but rather on the joys of intimacy between the two friends. Unfortunately, the story ends with the two male protagonists defeating and beheading the vampire girl and, in so doing, restoring the modesty and the conventional life of the other woman.

When I approached the bed, I saw her lying there with her eyes closed, still as a corpse. I suppose she was sleeping but she seemed rather dead. The projected worms and insects crawled all over her body, her face, her long limbs. Her face was strong, with the high bridge of a thin nose and peculiarly arched nostrils, with a lofty domed forehead. Her eyebrows were massive and bushy, just like her exceptionally long thick dark hair spread all over and around the body almost reaching her ankles. Her mouth had the shape of a sharp knife, with thin but very red lips. And since it was slightly open, I saw her brilliantly shining, sharp white teeth protruding. Her skin was white and shiny as if covered in the dust of the finest diamonds. She was of unearthly beauty.[31]

In most regions where vampires were found, they have been interpreted as incarnations of evil beings, suicide victims, and witches, but vampires could also be awakened by a malevolent spirit possessing a corpse or a living person after being bitten by a vampire. A vampire has always been a loving character: Awakened vampires were known to first visit their loved ones – spouses, lovers, and children. It is said that one has to first invite the vampire into their home, only then can it come and go as it pleases. On the one hand, this explains why the loved ones usually become the first victims; on the other hand, the invitation into one's intimate space functions as a key to a more profound intimacy: one's blood vessels.

It is important to acknowledge that vampires have not always been mythological creations – for centuries they were considered to be tactual and tangible participants of the social fabric. Superstitions around vampires were elaborate, and public executions of people believed to be vampires were not a rare thing. There are multiple reports of mass hysteria caused by vampires.[26] Gianfranco Manfredi, who studied Voltaire's critique of religion and superstitious beliefs, states that

I stood in silence where I was, for I felt paralysed. I knew it was Him and Him alone who froze me with the fear of this beauty. I have never seen a creature so frightening and yet so brilliant at the same time. The time I stood at her bed seemed endless, and I felt doubts and fears crowding me. It all seemed like a strange dream, and I thought that I would suddenly awake and find myself on the floor of my comforting cell, with a wooden cross above my head.

Suddenly, her hand caught my arm in a steely grip, with prodigious strength, it was ice cold. I felt in my heart a wicked burning desire and deadly fear at the same time. I gasped, motionless. She opened her eyelids and, behind the lashes, I saw enormous dark pupils like black holes, and I felt I was melting,

Voltaire was one of the first thinkers to express suspicion towards vampires: "it was therefore not a pure intellectual exercise, such as questioning the possibility of intelligent life on other planets or the existence of fairies and fantastic creatures. In the case of vampires, as in that of witches (and to a lesser extent werewolves), we were dealing with genuine social emergencies, proven by countless careful and well-documented reports and chronicles."[27]

Paradoxically, since the modern era and the rise of scientific reasoning, there has been no lack of scientific study of the subject. So-called demonology, with vampirology as a subdiscipline, has been a respectable interdisciplinary field situated among theology, social sciences, and the humanities. For example, in 1597, King James VI of Scotland published his Daemonologie*, In* Forme *of a Dialogue, Divided into three Books: By the High and Mighty Prince, James &c.*, which included a study on the methods werewolves and vampires use to bother men. It was intended to educate misinformed readers about the history, practices, and implications of these beings. In some contexts, demonology as a field of study exists even now, as do vampire-hunters.[28]

disappearing in them, as the whole universe disappears in the black hole. The moonlight was shining on the moisture of her scarlet lips and I could see the red tongue as it lapped the sharp white teeth, and she licked her lips. So strange and uncanny was it that a dreadful fear came upon me, and I could not speak or move. As quick as lightning, she pulled me towards her, reaching my neck with her mouth, then paused, and I could feel the hot breath on my throat. My transparent skin began to tingle.

As incarnations of evil spirits or even the devil himself, vampires are known to fear the cross, the rosary, and holy water, and have trouble walking on sanctified land such as the grounds of a church or monastery. Even though vampires are older than Christianity, Christianity did its best to adapt the vampire figure into the perfect inversion of Christ (or did it adapt the Christ figure to the vampire?): Jesus rose from the dead to eternal life at dawn, while Vampire rises at sunset to eternal death; Jesus gives his blood to believers to consume in daily communion, while Vampire drinks the blood of others; Jesus is symbolically represented by the lamb, Vampire by the wolf.

On one hand, it is dramatically unlikely that a Christian mystic nun would love a vampire woman back. On the other hand, desire is known to draw us to the direct opposite of what we believe is good for us.

A still from *Cirio* H. Santiago, *Vampire Hookers* (1978): extensive erotic foreplay to blood-drinking in a vampire movie.

A still from Dario *Argento*, *Opera* (1987): the use of Christian iconography in an erotic horror movie.

The consequence of love

How does this story end? Perhaps it never ends, like in a soap opera concerned with love ever after? Indeed, this one is desperate and bloody – it ends like many relationships do – tragically, apocalyptically. Once bitten, Saint died within minutes from blood loss as her anorexic body was already impossibly weak from life-long self-mortification. In the instant when her soul departed from her body, she was elevated above the floor, floating. The beams of light coming from above piercing though the walls of brick and stone could be seen throughout the entire neighbourhood. While her soul was safely transported to heaven where His embracing arms would eternally comfort her, her body was quickly buried. But soon after, it was dug up and chopped into pieces, for her admirers could not agree where the corpse of the saint should rest. Her head, arms, legs, fingers, and toes ended up as holy relics in churches all around the world. Yet one can safely say that Saint was the happy divorcing part for whom this condemned relationship had brought what she desired the most. Is every desperate love selfish?

Saint's sudden death left an abyss in Vampire's heart, deeper than the stake of a cross would leave: "Amorous absence functions in a single direction, expressed by the one who stays, never by the one who leaves: an always present I is constituted only by confrontation with an always absent you."[32] Moreover, she had contracted the bacteria of delirium, which had been contained in Saint's blood. Trapped in her own role, unable to bear any aesthetic distancing, she got stuck in the inhuman character of horror, every time a new infecting of and infection from her audience. Yet even worse was that Vampire was not able to die from the torturing amorous absence and the maddening disease. Blood has been seen seeping from her mouth and her nose, and her left eye always stays half open. It caused Vampire to develop an allergy to garlic, mustard seeds, and wild rose. In a mirror she was no longer able to see her reflection nor cast a shadow in the sunlight. In fact, she was no longer able to bear sunlight. She could not sleep but for one hour every two days, at dawn. Like every insomniac, she kept wondering – is solitude the way?

In the chapel of the Basilica of San Domenico in Siena, behind the bars, the head of St. Caterina is exhibited. Image by the author from a research trip to Siena, Italy (2020).

The explanation placed next to the head assuring that the head is real. Image by the author from a research trip to Siena, Italy (2020).

Curtain call

> Thus every writer's motto reads: *mad I cannot be, sane I do not deign to be, neurotic I am*.[33]

Fragments from a tragic story of passion – this text is an exercise in imagining how love and suffering can be discursively experienced in line with historical inheritance. In other words, how historical and discursive beings – those we encounter only through language – can guide us through our intimacies. The poetic portions of the text are entangled compositions of the multiple historical others and of my own passion. Their voices allow me to speak of my own experiences of sadistic love and toxic desire. They remind me that my own story is part of a lineage. I inherited my fears and desires, my fantasies and fetishes, and even my lovers and love stories from the mystics and the vampires.

In her book *In the Beginning Was Love: Psychoanalysis and Faith*, Kristeva shows how the trust relationship and the transferential discourse between analyst and analysed is based on mutual love.[34] Psychoanalysis, therefore, "seems to be the specific contribution of our modern civilization to the history of amorous discourse."[35] By confessing to each other and confessing together, the saints, the vampires, and myself experience a manifestation of mutual transference: I project my experiences onto the characters while they project theirs onto me, and this allows us to manifest a joint confession. Our mutual trust enables a safe space for us all to declare our sick love, since nobody else can know who is speaking.

From the standpoint of critical thinking, I need to mention that by creating a romanticised picture of these both popular and yet problematic characters, I also attempt a kind of awareness or a confrontation. Long before Marx and Bakunin there existed a valid social critique of both saints and vampires. As G. Manfredi analyses Voltaire's eighteenth-century critique, both the Church and superstition are profitable for the ruling class. At the peak of public executions and exhumations of vampires throughout Europe, Voltaire uses the vampire metaphor to talk about blood-sucking traders and businessmen who do not live in cemeteries but in very pleasant palaces: "Superstition therefore finds its usefulness for the ruling classes, by substituting the question of the supernatural for the social problem, thus using terror and popular resentment towards the dead, when the real vampires are in fact the

living who dominate them by feeding on their blood."[36] Meanwhile, the emancipatory interpretation of female mystic saints can be viewed from a less optimistic angle, namely, not as emancipation but as compliance. Sarah Macmillan argues that through the centrality of the body the Christian medieval narratives interiorised socialised violence: The embodiment of pain was revalidated through its necessity in the scheme of salvation.[37]

However, by proposing to draw a line between these two poles of Christian mythology, I also attempt to envision a different relation to the female body and eroticism in Christianity, and thus, in our post-Christian contemporaneity. What if our cultural imaginary of love and desire was formed by such mutually cruel yet passionate, explicitly performative, and *scenographic* narratives? Instead of frustrated, concealed, ashamed, and controlled historical representations of female sexuality, which therefore, in the modern era, needed to be liberated. What if they had already been liberated to excess?

In *The Pleasure of the Text*, Roland Barthes describes the text as a body, an erotic body, and relates the pleasure of reading phrase after phrase to the pleasures of the body. *Figuration*, in opposition to *representation* (which he defines as *embarrassed figuration*) is what turns a text into an erotic body: "one can feel desire for a character in a novel...[or] the text itself, a diagrammatic and not an imitative structure can reveal itself in the form of a body, split into fetish objects, into erotic sites."[38] Therefore a text, according to Barthes, just like a body, needs a shadow, which may consist of a bit of ideology, a bit of subjectivity, a bit of stupidity – ghosts are inevitable in a text worth reading.[39] Here too, I believe that a clean, entirely new, and unique story is frigid. It can be in the old and problematic, the archetypical and haunted, that we find passion.

Amorous discourse is always paradoxical. It combines and feeds upon the tension between the language and the other – the emotional and passionate realm, which itself is located in the body. Trespassing the boundaries of the bodies, and simultaneously the boundaries between historical and fictitious realities, we may be able to invent and practice discursive lineages of passion, and thus become rooted, yet maintain the flow.

[1] *Metalepsis* in contemporary narratology refers to a phrase or a situation from a literary text, which is used in a new, logically distinct context from its original one, a transgression of the boundaries between narrative levels.

[2] Virginia Woolf, *The Waves* (1931; *repr*. London: The Hogarth Press, 1990), 66.

[3] Michel Foucault, "Scientia *Sexualis*," in *The Bloomsbury Reader in Religion, Sexuality and Gender,* eds. D. L. Boisvert and C. Daniel-Hughes (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2017), 112.

[4] Rabia Gregory, "Penitence, Confession, and Submission in Late Medieval Women's Religious Communities," Brewminate, 19 September 2018, https://brewminate.com/penitence-confession-and-submission-in-late-medieval-womens-religious-communities/.

[5] Roland Barthes, *A Lover's Discourse: Fragments*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Hill and Wang, 1978), 3.

[6] Jalal Toufic, *Vampires: An Uneasy Essay on the Undead in Film* (1993, rev. Sausalito: The Post-Apollo Press, 2003), 13.

[7] Gothic (or Goth) subculture began in the 1980s in the United Kingdom with the rise of Gothic rock music, but became globally widespread with the growth of the internet. Its mentality and aesthetics build upon nineteenth-century anglophone literature, contemporarily interpreted, from the works of authors such as Bram Stoker, Edgar Allan Poe, Oscar Wilde, Sheridan Le *Fanu*, Howard Lovecraft, and others.

[8] Taken more generally and not specifically referring to mysticism, there have been a variety of literary, cinematic, and visual art genres dealing with suppressed sexuality within the Christian era, such as *convent pornography*, beginning with the works of Marquis de Sade (1740–1814) as its most famous author, *nunsploitation* (film genre of the 1970s), and countless representations in the context of visual arts such as *3x3x6*, Taiwan's Pavilion at the 58th Venice Biennale, by Shu Lea *Cheang* (2019).

[9] Amy Hollywood, *Sensible Ecstasy: Mysticism, Sexual Difference and the Demands of History* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1999), 20.

[10] Maurice *Hindle*, introduction to *Dracula*, by Bram Stoker (London: Penguin Books, 2003), xix.

[11] Here I am again referring to the magnum opus *The History of Sexuality* (1976–1984) by Michel Foucault. He did not finish *Volume 4: Confessions of the Flesh*, which was intended to address the development of the discourse of sexuality in early Christianity, as he died from complications of AIDS in 1984. Notes for that book were published in 2008 by Gallimard.

[12] This section is based on the script of my video *Biographic Disobedience* (2020), which I composed from the accounts of several medieval Christian mystics (Teresa of Avila, Hildegard of *Bingen*, Catherine of Siena, and Angela of *Foligno*), and merged with my own liminal experiences. The video was filmed and later shown at *Kunsthal* Gent, a contemporary art space established in the fourteenth-century Carmelite monastery in Ghent, which served as both inspiration for the piece and its scenography.

[13]Roland Barthes, "The Pleasure of the Text," in *A Roland Barthes Reader*, ed. Susan Sontag, trans. Richard Miller (London: Vintage, 2018), 404–15.

[14] Judith Butler, *Excitable Speech: A Politics of the Performative* (New York & London: Routledge, 1997), 11.

[15] Don Brophy, *Catherine of Siena: A Passionate Life* (New York: Blue Bridge, 2010), 101; "*Saint* Kateri *Tekakwitha*: *The Church's first Native* American *Saint*," Catholic Cemeteries Associ ation, 29 *September* 2017, https://clevelandcatholiccemeteries.wordpress.com/2017/09/29/saint-kateri-tekakwitha-the-churchs-first-native-american-saint/.

[16] Alain *Badiou*, *In Praise of Love*, trans. Peter Bush (New York: The New Press, 2012), 64–65.

[17] See for example Lynn H. *Cohich* and Amy Brown Hughes, "Thecla: Christian Female Protomartyr and Virgin of the Church," in *Christian Women in the Patristic World*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2017), 1–25.

[18] A more extensive discussion and enactment of this story can be found in the chapter "St. Thecla" of my book *Schismatics* (Vilnius: LAPAS, 2020), 64–71.

[19] Brophy, 23.

[20] Donald L. Boisvert and Carly Daniel-Hughes, introduction to *The Bloomsbury Reader in Religion, Sexuality, and Gender*, ed. Donald L. Boisvert and Carly Daniel-Hughes (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2017), 1.

[21] Link to Hildegard's music embedded in the text: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=v6qFCYRQKVA&t=69s.

[22] In *Sensible Ecstasy: Mysticism, Sexual Difference and the Demands of History*, Amy Hollywood describes a case as follows: "In February 1896 a devout forty-two-year-old woman entered Paris's *Salpêtrière* Hospital, already famous as a *center* for the study of hysteria. Madeleine, as she chose to be known, had been extremely religious since childhood, dedicating herself to a life of voluntary poverty and care for the sick…What brought her to the *Salpêtrière* was a peculiar contraction of the leg muscles that enabled her to walk only on tiptoe. Although she believed that this posture was caused by her imminent assumption into heaven, her doctor, the esteemed psychologist Pierre Janet, had different views. For Janet, Madeleine was "a poor contemporary mystic" whose ecstasies, crucifixion postures, and bleeding wounds (stigmata) were signs of delirium and other pathologies. What earlier mystics described as moments in the soul's relationship to the divine, Janet read as abnormal states (of consolation, ecstasy, temptation, dryness, and torture) in need of a cure - or at least of resolution into some kind of sustained equilibrium," 2.

[23] Bram Stoker, *Dracula*, (1897, *repr*. London: Penguin Books, 2003), 45, where Jonathan Harker describes a dreamlike "attack" by vampire ladies.

[24] This poem, which I wrote while contemplating the women writers who were the most influential for me, a year before I developed any interest in vampires, was inspired by a poem by Elena *Shvarts* (1948–2010), translated from the Russian by Michael Molnar and Catriona Kelly.

'Remembrance of Strange Hospitality'
Once I had a taste
Of a girlfriend's milk,
My sister's milk –
Not to quench my thirst
But to satisfy my soul.
Into a cup she squeezed
Milk from her left breast
And in that simple vessel
It gently frothed, rejoiced.
There was something birdlike in its *odor*,
Whiffs of sheep and wolf, and something older
Than the Milky Way, it was
Somehow warm and dense.
A daughter in the wilderness
Once let her aged father drink
From her breasts and thus became
His mother. By this act of grace
Her whiteness drove away the dark,
A cradle substituted for a tomb
From the duct next to your heart
You offered me a drink –
I'm not a vampire, am I? – Horror.
It frothed and tinkled, warm
And sweet, soft, everlasting,
Crowding time back into a corner.

[25] For more on the history of vampires, see for example the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*: https://www.britannica.com/topic/vampire.

[26] Various epidemics were blamed on vampires. "Suspicious" corpses would be dismembered; skeletons have been found with iron stakes driven into their chests, skulls with large stones or bricks placed in their mouths – a technique believed to keep a corpse from eating its way out of the grave. To mention just one example of a mass hysteria, the so-called New England vampire panic took place as late as the end of the nineteenth- century, and was a reaction to a tuberculosis outbreak in various areas of New England, in the United States. Tuberculosis, previously known as consumption, was thought to be caused by the dead consuming the life of their surviving

relatives. The vampire bodies were exhumed and their internal organs ritually burned to prevent the spread of the disease.

[27] Gianfranco Manfredi, "Voltaire and the Vampires," *Multitudes,* no. 33 (February 2008), 91–99.

[28] One example involves the ongoing murders of "vampires" in Malawi; see https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/oct/19/malawi-mobs-kill-two-more-people-accused-of-being-vampires.

[29] *Entrance* in French (en *trance*) means to go into trance.

[30] Barthes in *A Lover's Discourse* describes waiting which is "woven out of unavowable interdictions to infinity" when waiting for one's lover: "There is a scenography of waiting: I organize it, manipulate it, cut out a portion of time in which I shall mime the loss of the loved object and provoke all the effects of a minor mourning. This is then acted out as a play," 37–38.

[31] This description of Vampire's beauty is inspired by the multiple descriptions of vampires in Stoker's *Dracula* and Le *Fanu's Carmilla.*

[32] Barthes, *A Lover's Discourse*, 13.

[33] Roland Barthes, "The Pleasure of the Text," in *A Roland Barthes Reader*, ed. Susan Sontag, trans. Richard Miller (London: Vintage, 2018), 405.

[34] *Transference* in psychoanalysis refers to the phenomenon when the patient develops feelings toward the analyst (affection, desire, anger, etc.) that reflect previously experienced feelings toward their parents and other figures in their life. *Transference* is closely related to *projection*.

[35] Julia Kristeva, *In the Beginning Was Love: Psychoanalysis and Faith*, trans. Arthur *Goldhammer* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1987), 3.

[36] Manfredi, 93.

[37] Sarah Macmillan, "Phenomenal Pain: Embodying the Passion in the *Life of Elizabeth of* Spalbeek," *Postmedieval: A Journal of Medieval Cultural Studies* 89 (2017), 102–19.

[38] Barthes, "The Pleasure of the Text," 410.

[39] Referring to the works of Zola, Balzac and Proust, Barthes talks about the paradox of the idea of "dominant ideology": Ideology can only be dominant; there is no repressed ideology. Thus, pleasureful texts always play with what is conventionally recognizable or known as controversial – he compares it to the embarrassed blush on the writer's face.

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Dreaming Los Angeles Through Jacques Derrida's "Envois"

JEREMY STEWART - Lancaster University

Much creative-critical writing is characterised by a desire to find space within academia for otherwise marginalised experiences. This is often a case of drawing on personal, emotional, or spiritual registers typically excluded from academic writing, rendered illegitimate in advance as modes of academic knowledge.

Jacques Derrida's "Envois," the opening section of his book La carte postale: de Socrate à Freud et au-delà (Flammarion, 1980), published in an English translation by Alan Bass as The Post Card: From Socrates to Freud and Beyond (University of Chicago Press, 1987), has often been read in purely philosophical terms, but Derrida, alluding to Freud's talk of a theoretical fiction, describes it as a project for a fiction. "Envois" is then a text that could itself be said to be a work of creative-critical writing – not least because of its very personal character. "Envois" takes the form of hundreds of postcards to an unnamed lover.

Central to my exploration is a figure called Daniel. In some respects he is myself, since my middle name is Daniel, and in some respects, he is Daniel Agacinski, Derrida's unrecognised son. That Daniel was born in 1984 to Sylviane Agacinski, the woman who is often believed to be the unnamed lover addressed throughout "Envois." Derrida's biographer, Benoît Peeters, argues that the original version of "Envois" was indeed written for Sylviane Agacinski.

One of the key conceits in "Envois" is that it is the preface to a book that Derrida has not written. Taking, as my cues, fleeting references to the biblical Book of Daniel and George Eliot's novel Daniel Deronda, I proceed as though "Envois" is a preface not so much to an unwritten book but to the text that is the name Daniel. My own theoretical fiction, then, is the story of my succumbing to the temptation to see myself mirrored in Daniel Agacinski.

Derrida; the Book of Daniel; creative-critical; dreams; illegitimacy

"You," the first and last word of "Envois"

In Bass's translation of "Envois," the first and last word is "you."[1] The first sentence suggests that "you might read these *envois* as the preface to a book that I have not written" (1), while the last sentence demands that "you will burn it, you, it has to be you" (256). "Envois" thus opens with a necessity (one must, after all, start somewhere) framed as a possibility, and closes with a possibility framed as a necessity – a prediction that "it" will end in fire – "you will burn it."

We, or "you," presume that the "it" here is the text itself – but, if correct, then "you" know with full certainty that Derrida has not burnt it, because in that case "it" could not be read. Derrida knew in the past that this would be true in the future, because the logical necessity that he has not burnt the text is embedded in its mode of address – to "you." At least at the moment when it is read, it is necessarily true that the text survives. On this logic, the grammatical could be said to function prophetically. But who are "you," and why burn the text?

At the crossroads of chance and necessity

The philosopher Genevieve Lloyd has written of Derrida's "recurring fascination with the points of convergence between issues arising from the philosophy of time, and the themes of possibility and impossibility, chance and necessity."[2] Necessity is an important theme throughout Derrida's work but, I would suggest, has a special prominence within "Envois" – as evinced by the forty-four instances of the word "necessity" in "Envois" (not counting the many appearances of "necessary," "necessitates," and so on).

Lloyd focuses on Derrida's phrase "the crossroads of chance and necessity" from the 1997 book *The Politics of Friendship*[3] to discuss how through moves like this one Derrida shows how chance "flips over into necessity."[4] This accords with what Lloyd calls Derrida's "elusive notion of the singularity of the event"[5] – the notion that every event that happens is not simply one occurrence among many in a succession of similar "present" moments, but rather an irreducibly, profoundly new thing at every instant. Lloyd illustrates this with another quotation from *The Politics of Friendship*: "That which occurs, and thereby occurs only once, for the first and last time, is always something more or less than its possibility.

One can talk endlessly about its possibility without ever coming close to the thing itself in its coming."[6]

Of that which "occurs only once," Lloyd writes that if it "is indeed as singular as all that, it *cannot but be what it is*."[7] Necessity might be imagined as the inherent structure of a universal chain of causes and effects. However, instead of then reducing the cosmic picture to a transcendent unity, when we think of it as Lloyd does, we instead see that each moment in the totality of becoming is irreducibly unique; necessity lies not in where this totality must go – which remains a surprise – but in the chaotic circulation of factors that have brought the cosmos to where it is. At each instant, we find a unique arrangement of the furniture of the universe, like a vast kaleidoscope – but with an important difference: Since the outcome of each new arrangement will itself be a completely new arrangement, it *necessarily* cannot be predicted – at least, it cannot be predicted perfectly. There remains an element of chance. This view must reconfigure our sense of the temporal unfolding of necessity in order to, in Lloyd's words, "make singularity visible."[8]

The necessity that "you" will burn it

Perhaps in response to the question of the nature of singularity, Derrida might ask us to "understand," as he writes in "Envois," that "when I write, right here, on these innumerable post cards, I annihilate not only what I am saying but also the unique addressee that I constitute, and therefore every possible addressee, and every destination" (33). The "unique addressee" is, presumably, the beloved for whom the postcard is intended, and whom Derrida constitutes by addressing her as such; in the same moment, however, this beloved is annihilated, subsumed in the general address to "you," who could be anyone. This annihilation proves in fact to be an eschatological theme – for Derrida writes, of course, that "I annihilate not only…the unique addressee," but "every possible addressee," rendering the annihilation itself general.

This is not to say that we know exactly what kind of annihilation could be meant here. However, simply by writing, Derrida is bound to annihilate the unique addressee – since in never naming his addressee, he leaves open the possibility that I as reader may be the addressee.

On the name and responsibility

In "Envois," the question of the addressee is often inescapable. "Who is writing," Derrida asks in the preface, and "to whom?" He immediately answers, "I owe it to whatever remains of my honesty to say finally that I do not know" (5). Nonetheless, without any attempt at finality, I can speculate.

As we have observed, the first and last word in "Envois" in English is "you." However, in the original French, the "you" who will carry out the burning at the end of the text is *tu* – the informal, personal "you" – while the preface begins by addressing *vous,* the formal "you" that can refer to a stranger, a social superior, or a crowd. In fact, it is not until we get to the footnote with which the preface concludes that *tu* is introduced as the mode of address – the mode which is then used throughout "Envois" (with a notable exception: another footnote – one about a mysterious phone call from Heidegger). So: What should we make of these contrasting modes of address? Why are they situated as they are with respect to the structure of the text?

Regarding the familiar *tu*, we should consider that, as Peeters writes, "everything suggests that the original version [of "Envois"] was written for Sylviane Agacinski,"[9] and that it is the residue of "the long love affair between Derrida and…Agacinski that started in 1972"[10] and lasted until 1984. The year 1972 is reportedly also when the lovers first considered "the question of having a child."[11]

Significant in this connection is that "Envois" is haunted by the question: "*Si puer vivet*" (218): Does the boy live?[12] This question appears in the thirteenth-century *Fortune-Telling Book* (194) that Derrida consults in the Bodleian Library and informs what Peeters calls the "theme of the child" that "runs obsessively"[13] through "Envois." Witness, for example, "the child, the child, the child" (25) – a cry that may just bear upon the fact that, as Peeters writes, in 1978, "Sylviane resorted to an abortion."[14] This was one child who, finally, did not live.

And yet, in a curious doubling, the child does live. For when Sylviane became pregnant again in 1983, she decided to keep the child. Daniel Agacinski was born June 18, 1984, and, although Derrida would participate neither in the decision nor in the boy's upbringing, it

was the case, according to Peeters, that "Jacques chose his first name."[15] Derrida once spoke of the impossibility of "signing" a child – "one can sign neither a child nor a work"[16] – so why did he choose Daniel's name, and why Daniel?

No child is known when he or she first receives a name. When Derrida named his child Daniel, who was he naming? What was he naming in the name? In the introduction to Derrida's 1993 book *On the Name*, translator Thomas Dutoit describes an "unbound, four-page insert, called in French the *prière d'insérer*"[17] that was included in each of the three separate books that would later comprise *On the Name*. In this insert, Derrida presents an overview of *Passions* (the French stand-alone book which was later to become the first section of *On the Name)*, where he writes, "The name: What does one call thus? What does one understand under the name of name? And what occurs when one gives a name? What does one give then? One does not offer a thing, one delivers nothing, and still something comes to be which comes down to giving that which one does not have."[18] One answer to this series of questions is that when one gives a name, one gives responsibility – not only because a named person is one to whom acts can be attributed, but also because when a person is called by name it is an invitation to respond. For Derrida, though, an invitation entails a paradox, in that it would be impolite not to respond and yet also impolite to respond only out of politeness. Responsibility too, it seems, entails paradox – and is thus a kind of problem. Indeed, as Derrida writes,

> Responsibility would be problematic to the further extent that it could sometimes, perhaps even always, be what one takes, not for oneself, in one's own name and before the other (the most classically metaphysical definition of responsibility) but what one must take for another, in his place, in the name of the other or of oneself as other, [and indeed] before another other.[19]

How much further does this responsibility extend? Derrida writes of "the degree to which responsibility not only fails to weaken but on the contrary arises in a structure which is itself supplementary."[20] According to a theory of responsibility that has in view the simple univocity of a responsible subject, answerable to their one and only name, responsibility is a straightforward matter – debits and credits, and all accounts closed once balanced. Derrida, though, here complicates our notion of responsibility by demonstrating that it occurs within

a network of address – self and other; other as self; self as other; and indeed, the other other. And in "Envois" it is here, as the "other other," or other "you," that "I" come in.

Finding in Daniel a thread, and the son as the thread

This very open-endedness prompts Derrida not only to write "Envois" but to publish it: "I would not," he writes, "have had the slightest interest in this correspondence and this cross-section, I mean in their publication, if some certainty on this matter [of who is writing to whom] had satisfied me" (5). To give a name to one's addressee is, as we have seen, to enter a bewildering labyrinth; nevertheless, through the very act of publication, Derrida signals that he wants us to attempt to meet him there. I will, therefore, speculate on the meaning of Derrida's choice of the name Daniel for his child with Sylviane, and I shall speculate upon this choice through the prism of "Envois," because so much of this text attempts to address (the question of) the child, "the impossible message between us" (25).

That Daniel and his name should raise questions about responsibility is entirely fitting, given that the responsibility both for Daniel and to him, are, as we shall see, precisely what Derrida will refuse. But can responsibility really be so easily avoided?

The name Daniel means "God is my Judge." And if God is my judge, then others are not. Others may judge me, Derrida seems to say, for carrying on this long love affair, and for fathering this child born out of wedlock, and for the way I refuse to parent or support this child; however, they have no right to judge me. Only God has that right.

Fils, the French for "son," is a homonym of *fil*, "thread," and the two are tied together just as "filiation" (the same word in English and French) is to "filament." And the thread at which I clutch (as if at a straw) is the name of this particular son of Derrida's – in part because it is also my own name, or at least, my middle, my secret name as it were. Moreover, like Daniel Agacinski, I too live with the stigma of illegitimacy, am the child of an estranged father, and live with a surname that is not my father's. It is true that our lives have been very different in many ways; however, there are parallels: For example, we were both born on the eighteenth day of the month (June 18, 1984, and February 18, 1982), and we both went from studying philosophy to working in theatre. Coincidence or necessity? How to decide?

By a truly exorbitant speculation, I choose to read the *vous* that Derrida addresses in the preface to "Envois" as Daniel, the child-to-come of the love at the heart of this text. This speculative, or specular, addressee is distinct from the *tu* addressed in the rest of "Envois," for as *vous,* he is an over-hearer, rather than hearer; by analogy he is, if you will, the over-reader. And his name, or the name I give him, is Daniel. To clarify: This Daniel is both (and neither) Daniel Agacinksi, the possible-impossible child (or name) prefigured by "Envois," and myself, Daniel the (dream-)reader.

A book instead of a child

Grounding my speculation are two explicit mentions of the name Daniel in "Envois." The first is a reference to Daniel Deronda, the eponymous crypto-Jewish hero of George Eliot's 1876 novel, which is cited because it is being researched by Cynthia Chase – at that point, studying in Oxford. Derrida refers to it as "a story of circumcision and double-reading" (15).

The second reference to Daniel in "Envois" comes in a passage quoted from the 1964 edition of *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, in which the Book of Esther is compared with the Book of Daniel: "[V]ictory seems to depend," we read, "not so much on loyalty to Judaism (cf. the book of Daniel), as on the use of political maneuver and appeal to self-interest" (qtd. in "Envois" 74). I will return to the second of these references to Daniel, but there is another, more deeply hidden Daniel to whom I first will turn.

In the preface to "Envois," Derrida writes of the desire that initiated the book: "before all else," he writes, "I wanted...to make a book" (5).[21] The odd expression "to make a book" is Bass's translation of *faire un livre*,[22] which is equally odd and non-idiomatic in French; perhaps Derrida uses it because he wants us to think of making a book in a particular way, as though "to make a book" could parallel making, say, a child. Derrida goes on to tell us that he wanted to make a book "in part for reasons that remain obscure and that always will, I believe, and in part for other reasons that I must silence" (5). Derrida follows his confession of a desire to "make a book" with two rhetorical questions: "a book instead of *what*? Or of *whom*?" (5).

One possible answer to the first question is obvious: a book instead of a half-burnt stack of postcards. Publication is far from inevitable for a "destroyed correspondence" (4), and further, we should not pass over how the process of writing is shaped by the intention – the desire – to create a book "before all else" (5). So, how might a correspondence destined for publication differ from one that was always intended to remain private? Derrida writes that he "had first thought of preserving the figures and the dates, in other words the places of signature," but "gave it up" (5); so it seems that making a book has come at the cost of effacing or hiding the private or the personal to some degree. The private, or personal, is necessarily "silenced," since the sender of a book (or of a postcard) cannot help but know that their words may be read by all and sundry.

A child instead of a book

Let us move now to Derrida's second question, that is: "a book instead of...*whom*?" (5). Derrida himself leaves this question hanging, moving abruptly on to his description of the process by which he encrypted the blanked-out sections of "Envois." He thus registers an interruption in place of an answer to his question, a silence where he might have given reasons. In the absence of those reasons, my answer to the question is: a book instead of a child. Derrida desires a book for "reasons" that he "must silence" (5), because, I believe, they are regrettable reasons, and intensely private. To cut to the chase: *The Post Card* arrives, I suggest, in place of Derrida's impossible child, the child that Sylviane Agacinski aborted in 1978.

According to Peeters, Derrida had "dreamed" of a child with Agacinski "as an event both desirable and impossible."[23] It was impossible, first of all, because of the practicalities. According to Peeters, Derrida's "bond with Marguerite" – his wife, and the mother of his two sons – "was, in his view, indestructible," and besides, Derrida "could not support two family homes."[24],[25] Furthermore, Derrida felt, writes Peeters, that "paternity was a matter of too much significance for him to agree to it in a half-hearted way."[23] In practical terms, he can, therefore, be said to have supported the decision not to have a child but not the decision *to* have a child:

> I couldn't answer you on the phone just now, it was too painful. The "decision" you asked me for once again is impossible, you know it. It comes back to you, I send it back to you. Whatever you do I will approve, and I will do so from the day that it was clear that between us never will any contract, any debt, any official custody, any memory even, hold us back – any child even. (25–26)

The date of this post card, June 8, 1977, is not quite right for the "decision" in question to refer to the abortion that Agacinski would later disclose to Peeters. It is, however, impossible not to hear in it an echo of Peeters' claim that Derrida"let Sylviane decide for herself but assured her that he would accept whatever decision she came to."[26] After all, Derrida makes very clear, on the back cover of *The Post Card,* that he "abuse[s] dates." Moreover, the reader can never forget Derrida's violent exclamation: "to the devil with the child, the only thing we ever will have discussed, the child, the child, the child" (25).

Near the beginning of "Envois," in the postcard of June 6, 1977 Derrida, addressing his beloved, first introduces the child: "[Y]our letter mandated, commanded, made arrive at its destination everything that we feared. And what has betrayed us, is that you wanted generality: which is what I call a child" (23). To call generality "a child" is peculiar, even by Derrida's standards. One way to understand this, though, is to see the child as the generality that is reproduction, or life, or the next generation – a generality that would "betray" the exclusive particularity of the couple.

Later, Derrida would recall this missive, the one in which he first mentions the child, asking his beloved to "remember what I reproached you for one day: for having chosen over us generality, in other words, the law, the children, etc." (133). Here, "the law" seems to be that of marriage – the law that governs reproduction, or children – the general rule to which the lovers could, if childless, have been an exception. The exception to the rule is a transgression of the law of the general, but the lovers, it seems, have their own law outside the law of reproduction, adherence to which requires them to be faithful, set apart from generality.

In this same first child-bearing postcard of June 6, 1977, Derrida enigmatically writes of a "fidelity to the secret demand [that] you wanted to preserve" (24). This "secret demand" is best decoded, I suggest, as the demand for secrecy. A child cannot, generally, be kept

secret, and the appearance of a child would effectively broadcast the news of an affair. A child would make public Derrida's secret, adulterous relationship; in short, as general knowledge, the illegitimate child would be the violation of that secret.

So, to recap: The book that is *The Post Card* is, I suggest, the book that Derrida makes instead of a child. Recall that *The Post Card* is also, though merely, "the preface to a book that I have *not* written" (3). And this book is unwritten, I suggest, because it is replaced by the child that was Daniel Agacinski. I propose to read "Envois," then, as the preface to the unwritten book that is (~~the Book of~~) Daniel.

"cf the Book of Daniel"

How, then, might I read "Envois" as a Daniel? Unlike Derrida, I shall follow the lead, or thread, given by *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, and will "*cf.* the book of Daniel" (74). "Cf." is of course an abbreviation for the Latin *confer*, that is, "to compare," and is derived from the older Latin *conferre*, which can also mean to bring together, collect, gather, contribute, connect, and join perhaps as one might collect threads.[27] As you will recall, this reference to the Book of Daniel appears in connection with the biblical Book of Esther; there is at least one other place in which Esther appears next to Daniel, and that is in the Jewish Tanakh, where Daniel follows Esther among the Ketuvim ("Writings").

Ex eventu prophecy

The scholarly consensus is that, like Esther, the Book of Daniel was completed in the Second Temple period. Within that period, in the second century BCE, Daniel appears after Esther, although a conservative minority opinion holds that it was written in the same period in which its narrative takes place, that is, the sixth century BCE. Daniel contains many examples of *ex eventu* prophecy, which John J. Collins describes as "the prediction of events which have already taken place."[28] Part of the modern strategy of dating Daniel authorship, then, is to trace the historically-verifiable events described in the text – among them, the succession of Seleucid kings – and thus to establish from around what year Daniel's "predictions" go from being correct to being incorrect. One incorrect prediction concerns the death date of Antiochus IV Epiphanes, the Greek ruler of the Jews in that time.

As Pamela J. Milne observes, Daniel is on firm footing describing "Antiochus's persecution of the Jews, which began with the desecration of the temple in 167 BCE,"[29] but "the inaccurate description of the end of Antiochus's reign and of his death indicates that the book was finished before these took place in 164 BCE."[30] Milne here works on the assumption that *ex eventu* prophecies are included in order to lend credence to predictions of events that have not yet occurred at the time of writing. And such prophecies are common in ancient apocalypses – which is the genre of the Book of Daniel.

Daniel's genre as an apocalypse

Milne also writes that "the book [of Daniel] as a whole is usually described as an apocalypse, a genre in which revelation is mediated in a narrative framework to a human recipient through otherworldly beings."[31] Collins speaks of the apocalyptic genre as "disclosing a transcendent reality which is both temporal insofar as it envisages eschatological salvation, and spatial insofar as it involves another, supernatural world";[32] however, the apocalypse genre is hardly uniform in its formal features. And this is especially true of early apocalypses, such as Daniel, which are generally "composite in character and have affinities with more than one genre."[33] Indeed, there is considerable debate as to how and when Daniel became one narrative, composed as it is of two genres – court tales and visions – and in two languages: Hebrew and Aramaic. Most of the text is, of course, narrated in the third person, and it has been argued that the splits in genre, language, and narration, being asymmetric, suggest that the sections were composed at different times and by different people. As Milne writes, "the book appearing under the name of Daniel is actually by an unknown author."[34] And much of the book's interpretation hangs by this thread; Collins writes that "the authenticity of Daniel is a sensitive theological question over which heated battles have been waged…Much of the debate has centered…on the a priori possibility of predictive prophecy."[35]

It should be noted that Daniel was not considered a prophet by his original readership, and today is not regarded as a prophet within Judaism (hence the text's position within the Ketuvim rather than with the Nevi'im, that is, "Prophets"). However, the status of the biblical Daniel escalates with the onset of the Christian dispensation: In Matthew's Gospel,

Jesus emphatically does describe Daniel as a prophet (Mat. 24:15).[36] In doing so, Jesus, we might say, legitimises Daniel after the fact. Jesus, himself famously lacking the legitimation of an earthly father until after the fact, will in time become the filial authority that legitimises Daniel after the fact.

Picking up once again the thread of prediction and fortune-telling, we remember the necessarily true prediction that closes "Envois:" that "you will burn it, you, it has to be you" (256). Reading backwards and forwards from this eschaton, this end in fire, we could say that "Envois" anticipates a Danieline reading – a reading of "Envois" as an apocalypse.

The word apocalypse means, of course, revelation.[37] It arrives in both English and French by way of the Latin *apocalypsis,* in turn by way of the ancient Greek word *apokálupsis*, which means "to uncover" or "to disclose." And "Apocalypse" is an important word in "Envois" – enough for Bass to include it in his translator's glossary: "*apocalypse,* "he writes, "in French and English has the sense of prophetic revelation of imminent cataclysm" (xv).

Is it not, though, extravagant of Bass to provide a glossary entry for an untranslated word? Admittedly, he remarks that "the purpose of this entry is to alert you to the theme of foretelling catastrophic fate, whether in the Bible, fortune-telling books, metaphysics, or psychoanalysis" (xvi). The difficulty, though, that will not be overcome by Bass' brief account is that the apocalyptic and revelation appear to be entangled with eschatology – and yet why would an unveiling or foretelling *necessarily* be of an "imminent cataclysm" (xv), of an end to (all) things?

In approaching this question, perhaps the moment has come for my disclosure, my revelation, my apocalypse: the dream-text that takes us to Los Angeles, and which makes reading me as Daniel a necessity, *ex eventu*.

Enter Daniel

In the twenty-third year of my life, I, "Daniel had a dream and visions of [my] head as [I] lay in bed. Then [I] wrote down the dream" (Dan. 7:1). It was just days after I completed my undergraduate degree, for, like Daniel, I had been "taught [both] literature and language" –

not "of the Chaldeans" (Dan. 1:4), but rather what was required for a Bachelor of Arts in English. It should be added that I was "educated" not "for three years" (Dan. 1:5), like Daniel and his companions, but rather for five. By this time, I had dreamt many dreams, and I had written down many dreams, but this dream was like no other dream I had ever dreamt. I dreamt that God was speaking to me.

In an entry in my journal dated June 10, 2005, I recorded this dream in which God was speaking to me. I was sitting at my desk. I could hear God's words, and I could almost – but not quite – see God out of the corner of my eye, although I could not (or simply did not) look at God. Instead, I looked at the wall of my room, on which, "as I watched" (Dan. 7:6), blue letters appeared, mirroring the words God spoke. When I woke up from this dream, the only words I could remember were "anti-racist," "theologian," and the name "Matthew Barnett." I awoke with a calm, still, beautiful feeling like the one I had felt while dreaming. In my journal entry, I write "I heard!" but like Daniel, "I heard but could not understand" (Dan. 11:8).

On June 22, 2005, I record in my journal that "Matthew Barnett is a real person." I had discovered this by searching Google, using various combinations of his name and the words "anti-racist" and "theologian." I learned that he was the Pastor of Angelus Temple, located in Echo Park, Los Angeles, and that he was one of the founders of a ministry called the Dream Center, a programme housed in an old Catholic hospital building that had been turned into a resource and residency programme for people who wanted to leave street-involved lifestyles.

Upon learning these things about Barnett, I felt both confirmed but also anxious. Thus: "as for me, Daniel, my spirit was troubled within me" (Dan. 7:15). I was surrounded by questions. What, I wondered, did the dream mean? Why would I dream about this person? What were the forgotten words of the dream? What did God want to tell me? In short, what was "the truth concerning all this" (Dan. 7:16)?

I wanted to go to the Dream Center, but I was not sure how to go about it. As a working musician, I did not have the financial or practical means to go. More than logistical challenges, what kept me from going was not being completely sure that I had been asked to go. I could not recall any part of my dream in which there was such a request. I had a vague

sense that perhaps I should go, but it wasn't definite. Faced with the practicalities, I did not make plans to go to the Dream Center, and life carried on – "but I kept the matter in my mind" (Dan. 7:28).

Almost five years later, on May 2, 2010, my wife Erin and I were driving across town to attend a birthday party. Driving past a church, we saw on its sign that Matthew Barnett would be speaking there that same night. We were surprised, since Los Angeles is a long way from Prince George, British Columbia, Canada, where we then lived, and which is moreover a small city and very remote. We drove to the birthday party and stayed for a little while, explaining to those present why we would have to leave; we did so in time to drive back downtown to hear Barnett speak.

That night, Matthew Barnett spoke about the work the Dream Center was doing in Echo Park: housing people who wanted to get off the street, feeding the hungry with mobile food trucks, offering free basic dental care with a mobile dental van, and various other, related ministries. After Barnett spoke, members of the crowd lined up at the front of the hall to meet and pray with him. I wanted to tell him about my dream, so I took my place in the queue. When it was my turn, I introduced myself, shook Barnett's hand, and told him about my dream. "I'm not sure what to make of this, or what you might make of it, but five years ago, I dreamt that God told me your name," I said, continuing with an abbreviated version of the whole story. "That is really strange," he said. "I can't say I've heard of anything like that before. It's amazing, but I have no idea what it means."

Though I still lacked a clear reason to go to Los Angeles, my desire to do so remained strong. But, as the angel tells Daniel, "happy are those who persevere" (Dan. 11:12), and so it came to pass that, after more than a "thousand three hundred thirty-five days" (Dan. 11:12), finding that I had vacation time coming up and the financial means available, I booked airplane tickets for myself, my wife, and our son. Our itinerary included many typical tourist activities, such as visiting Disneyland, as well as a few more unusual plans, including visiting Angelus Temple and the Dream Center.

On July 10, we toured the Dream Center, and on Sunday July 12 we attended a service at Angelus Temple. We parked in the church's attached parking garage with the confidence of regular attenders. Matthew Barnett was there that day. He gave a sermon about which I

remember very little. I do remember that he concluded it with an exhortation to the effect that if there was anything God was calling us to do, to create, to build, to write, we should go and do it. I wasn't sure I had heard him correctly, and I leaned over to Erin and asked, "Did he say 'to write?'" but I don't think she heard me, and then the musicians started playing again, and it seemed moments later that we were walking up the stairs to the upper room where I would meet Matthew Barnett for a second time.

There were perhaps a dozen people in the room where the pastor met newcomers every week. He didn't keep the group waiting more than a few minutes. I was reluctant to put myself forward, feeling unsure about drawing attention to myself, wishing not to skip my place in the queue, but Barnett came right over to us, along with an assistant.

He said he remembered me – I had jogged his memory. He thanked us for visiting. I told him that we had enjoyed our tour of the Dream Center, and that I couldn't help but think about the possibility of perhaps developing a ministry like it in Prince George. He seemed immediately very excited about that idea, and gave me his card, asking if we could make a time to meet to discuss it right away. I apologised that we were soon to return to Prince George, but that I would call him after we got home. He gave me a copy of his second book, *God's Dream For You*. On Monday July 13 we returned to Canada.

I read *God's Dream for You*. It is mainly Barnett's first-person account of founding the Dream Center, but also features testimonies of profound personal change from people who had been housed in the Dream Center, and how they overcame poverty, abuse, and addiction. It is structured around a series of spiritual exhortations and instructions.

On July 25, 2015, I record in my journal the following thoughts: "God, why did you tell me about Matthew Barnett and lead me to the Dream Center? At the least, so I can write about it. And that is not a small thing."

Later that summer – I'm not sure when – I did call Matthew Barnett. I was sitting in my office at the Prince George Symphony Orchestra. I had barely the outlines of an agenda, but I knew I wanted to tell him about the book I wanted to write about my testimony. I reached his secretary, but then I could not commit to an appointment time because of my work schedule. I promised to call back. I did not call back.

Sometimes I ask myself, should I call Matthew Barnett now? What should I say to him? In thinking through these questions, it has become impossible for me not to notice that what I did not do this whole time, and what I have still not done, perhaps until now, is to seriously attempt to interpret my dream. Perhaps I was so overwhelmed by God's presence and voice, or so blocked by the wall on which His words appeared, that I did not give my attention to His writing. Or, maybe, just maybe, it is because I am a Daniel that I do not interpret my own dream.

The biblical Daniel, you see, has immense difficulty in interpreting his own dreams. After his first dream, he writes that "as for me, Daniel, my spirit was troubled within me, and the visions of my head terrified me" (Dan. 7:15). This, of course, is understandable, given that Daniel dreams of "an Ancient One" whose "throne was fiery flames, and its wheels were burning fire. A stream of fire issued and flowed out from his presence. A thousand thousands served him, and ten thousand times ten thousand stood attending him" (Dan. 7:9–10). Troubled and unable to interpret this terrifying, confounding vision on his own, Daniel writes that "I approached one of the attendants to ask him the truth concerning all this. So he said that he would disclose to me the interpretation" (Dan. 7:16).

Following the second of his visions, Daniel writes that "when I, Daniel, had seen the vision, I tried to understand it. Then...I heard a human voice by the Ulai [River], calling, 'Gabriel, help this man understand the vision'" (Dan. 8:15–16). The Gabriel in question does indeed give Daniel the interpretation. Now if I, Daniel, have been visited by Gabriel or any other angel, it remains a mystery to me, as does the interpretation of my dream. Since therefore I have only you, I will need you, my angel, to interpret the dream for me.

I note, you see, that in "Envois," six times the addressee is identified as "my angel," or "my beloved angel." Therefore, I will pray for the interpretation in your name, or in the name of "you." To put this another way: If I "seek an answer by prayer and supplication with fasting and sackcloth and ashes" (Dan. 9:3), perhaps you will be willing to "disclose to me the interpretation of the matter" (Dan. 7:16). In short: Will you be my angel?

Questioning You

Bass includes *ange* in his glossary, noting that it "means 'angel,' but recalling its derivation from the Greek *angelos*, meaning 'messenger'" (xv). Despite all the questions I have asked, it would be difficult to determine in advance what exactly was or is the message that I await from you, my angel. It seems that part of the problem is that I cannot quite recognize any angel. From all the clues to be found in "Envois," I am tempted to think that you, my angel, are Sylviane Agacinski. I do of course realise that "the worst mistake of our expert bloodhounds will consist in naming you" (185), and I fear I may now be such an "expert bloodhound." Moreover, the risks of naming you, identifying "you," are clear – after all, even "you yourself were getting lost by naming yourself" (185).

Nevertheless, we must also remember that if the addressee of these missives could be anyone, perverse though it may be, we are quite free to read them as though they are addressed to Sylviane Agacinski. Though it may be the worst mistake, I am reassured that Derrida issues this warning because, he writes, "I still like him" (4); that is, Derrida still cares about "the bad reader" (4) described in the preface. In the original French, this is *je l'aime encore* – which I translate "I still love (him or her)." Insofar as I am the bad reader, the mistaken *limier*, I am (thank God) still loved by Derrida. I will push this love to its limit, and perhaps beyond, demanding more and more in its name, as I make "the worst mistake" over and over, as though determined to do so. Such is my belief that "you" must know the meaning of my dream, that I still continue to question you doggedly, like a *limier*, a bloodhound or detective.

Talking of detectives, I wonder if you might be a detective angel, like one of *Charlie's Angels* – I think of those "female private detectives" (246) of whom Derrida writes, from the 1970s television show. Charlie's Angels are, of course, blessed with interpretive skills – how else would they manage to solve crimes?

> I have just fallen asleep, as I do every day, watching Mysteries of the West and Charley's Angels (four female private detectives, very beautiful, one is smart, their orders arrive on the telephone, from a boss who seems to be "sending himself" a fifth by speaking to them) and in passing I caught this: only the dead

> don't talk. That's what you think! They are the most talkative, especially if they remain alone. It's rather a question of getting them to shut up. (246)

The temporal relation here between Derrida's falling asleep, watching two television shows, and writing the postcard is not clear. Presumably, one can only fall asleep while watching *one* show, since the shift from waking to sleeping happens in an instant, and absorbs one's entire attention, so to speak; it seems unlikely, then, that Derrida is describing two TVs playing different shows at the same time, but rather that he is indicating the sequence of shows he watches while falling asleep, apparently "every day". That Derrida is watching *Mysteries of the West* is itself a mystery since this was not the actual title of any show; however, this seems to be an effect of Bass offering a literal or direct translation of the French title *Les mystères de l'Ouest,* the show known in the English-speaking world as *The Wild Wild West*, a 1960s cowboy series about Secret Service agents. Perhaps Bass chooses to keep *Mysteries of the West* because it is evocative (if only for Derrida) of the mysteries of the cultural heritage of the West. If, though, it is a mistake, it is one of two here, for Derrida appears to get the spelling of *Charlie's Angels* wrong, but then he is, after all, falling asleep. Does Derrida then write this postcard in his sleep? Or he is only now recalling, after having woken up, the line "only the dead don't talk" (246)? And does this line belong to *Charley's Angels* or to *Mysteries of the West?* The words are, strictly speaking, apocryphal, being words without an author. Or, to put this another way, the two shows have become intertwined in Derrida's sleep, and with these words, the angels attempt to solve the mysteries of the West.

Whatever the solution, I am intrigued to see that when Derrida answers the angels, he plays the role of "a boss who seems to be 'sending himself' a fifth by speaking to them" (246), that is to say, a boss who contradicts and overrules the investigators with a revelation – namely that indeed the dead do talk. This prompts me to ask what kind of boss, or Charley, might this sleepy Derrida make? The name Charles is "from a Germanic word, *karl*, meaning 'free man.'"[38] We might now think of one German, notoriously obsessed with freedom, who also happens to be a talkative dead man, namely Martin Heidegger, who, like Charley, wants to issue "orders…on the telephone" (246) – at the very least, an order for Derrida to pay for the call: As Derrida writes, "while typing this page for the present publication, the

telephone rings," and the "American operator asks me if I accept a 'collect call' from Martin...Heidegger" (21). This call, by the way, comes "on the morning of 22 August 1979" (21), by which time Heidegger has been dead for over three years, and Derrida, who knows how to "get...[the dead] to shut up" (246), simply refuses to accept the call. He also does not accept the charges; Derrida refuses to owe a debt on account of Heidegger, although there is still a possible price to pay, which is that he will never know what Heidegger might have said from the beyond. But perhaps that does not matter in that Derrida adds that soon "we all will be lying on our backs, the voices will come from the screen, [and] one no longer will know who interprets what" (250) – in other words, we will all have fallen asleep in front of the television and no longer know the difference between, say, Jacques and Martin, or "Envois" and the Book of Daniel.

Angels of the West

In "Envois," unlike in the television show, Charley has four (and not three) angels. Derrida's encroaching sleep has, it seems, caused him to miscount them, to divide them, or to hallucinate a mysterious fourth figure. As John Schad writes in *Someone Called Derrida*, "the nodding philosopher must have dreamt a fourth into existence, a fourth and phantom angel."[39][40] In this phantom angel, I cannot help but see another forwards-backwards look toward Daniel. For you see, my dear angel, in Daniel 3, Daniel's three friends Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego are all "thrown into a furnace of blazing fire" (Dan. 3:6), but when King Nebuchadnezzar looks to see what has happened to them, he asks "his counselors, 'Was it not *three* men that we threw bound into the fire?'" (Dan. 3:24). They answer that this is true, and the King replies, "But I see four men unbound, walking in the middle of the fire, and they are not hurt; and the fourth has the appearance of a *god*" (Dan. 3:25) – in short, an angel. Daniel, though, is nowhere to be seen – certainly not in the fire. And, as a result, he misses this encounter with an angel.

I have an intuition that we are now closing in on one of the mysteries of the West: Will the angel who interprets my dream – Daniel's dream – be one of Charley's angels? I believe it is significant that Derrida's call from Martin Heidegger was placed by an "American operator" (21) since, in the TV show, Charley calls his angels from Los Angeles, which is where many

philosophers, artists, and intellectuals from Germany found themselves during and after the war. Heidegger was not among them, of course – he was on the other side (the other side of the War; the other side of the Atlantic; and, by the time *Charlie's Angels* premiered in fall 1976, on the other side of death). If this sounds like a joke, perhaps it is – a serious one: Note that for Derrida, "Martin has the face of an old Jew" – not of an old Nazi; all of which makes Derrida "burst out laughing" (189). It is not always so easy to tell "who was who, who was allied with whom" (186).

All joking aside, in a postcard dated October 13, 1978, Derrida must be to the west of his beloved addressee when he writes that "It's six o'clock in the morning, noon for you, I have just called you, you were not expecting it, visibly. I'll never forget that burst of laughter in your voice...In two hours, flight to Cornell, day after tomorrow California. But now, *the more I go west, the closer you get*" (168). I presume that Derrida's telephonic addressee laughed because of their surprise at hearing from him at that hour. If so, they must have known where Derrida was staying, which was New York City – in the same missive, he mentions "a walk on the border of Central Park" (167) – which also means that the person he surprised received his call in the same time zone that Paris is in. If it is true that the "more [he] go[es] west, the closer you get" (168), it is because in circling the globe, west and east change places. California is obviously not literally closer to Paris than is New York, but perhaps Derrida dreams of outrunning the time difference; indeed, he writes to his beloved that "we" – that is, the alliance that "we" form – "would have been, yes, impossible without...acceleration in the speed of angels" (44). Closing the distance between the lovers would require a miraculous speed, a relay run by "all angels, all the messengers we have provided ourselves" (44). I, Daniel, watch as they race "west, coming across the face of the whole earth without touching the ground" (Dan. 8:5). Please note that Derrida, teaching at the University of California, Irvine, spent much time in that city of angels, Los Angeles. Note too that he writes that "I resemble a messenger" (8).

I want to close the distance between myself and "you," my angel, the angel who will interpret my dream of the name of a person who lives in Los Angeles; but perhaps I already have the answer – in "Envois": "At the other end of the world, in the shaded area of my life, this is where I am already, there, in the west, and I await you" (163). The West is that "other

end of the world," just where I am now, here on Canada's Pacific shore; there is no further west I could go to close the distance between us.

It has to be you

So: The Western extreme that is Los Angeles has brought us to the "end of the world" (163). In the Book of Daniel, we read that, at the time of the end, "many shall be running back and forth" (Dan. 12:4). These could be our messengers, bringing the apocalyptic revelation that would be the meaning of my dream – or even that of the coded message at the secret heart of "Envois." To discover a hidden meaning of "Envois" as the key to the name Daniel, however speculatively, it will have been necessary for Daniel-the-interpreter to arrive. The angel tells Daniel that "you, Daniel, [must] keep the words secret and the book sealed until the time of the end" (Dan. 12:4). Here, at the end, the book is now coming unsealed, and its pages are spilling out like so many postcards. In this, perhaps there is also a clue as to why the apocalypse must give way to the eschaton – the prophetic has returned us to necessity: If the future can be known, it must be, in some way, "already…there," and here it is, indeed, "in the west," where Derrida "await[s] you" (163).

When Derrida names his son Daniel, he makes the Book of Daniel a cause of his child, retrospectively. We might consider now whether Derrida's act of naming may amount to a prayer for a Daniel-to-come, and if so, in what ways such a prayer may be prophetic.[41] Neither the Book of Daniel nor "Envois" can, of course, predict the coming of Daniel Agacinski – nevertheless, he is prefigured in "Envois" through the figure of the biblical Daniel. It no longer matters whether this foreknowledge was an illusion, because the chance of the prophetic is that the imagined possibility of predicting a future, after that future has actually arrived, will have the retrospective effect of ratifying the prediction. If the text cannot know him in advance, it can call for what (and who) it does not yet know. What is more (or less), whether by an extraordinary chance or a prophetic necessity – and this, too, is perhaps undecidable – I too am prefigured: I, Daniel.

[1] Jacques Derrida, *The Post Card: From Socrates to Freud and Beyond*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987). All citations from this book will be made parenthetically in the body.

[2] Genevieve Lloyd, "Fate and Fortune: Derrida on Facing the Future," *Philosophy Today* 43 (1999), 30.

[3] Derrida, *The Politics of Friendship*, qtd. in Lloyd, 34.

[4] Lloyd, 33.

[5] Lloyd, 32.

[6] Derrida, *Politics,* qtd. in Lloyd, 34.

[7] Lloyd, 33.

[8] Lloyd, 34.

[9] Peeters, 293.

[10] Peeters, 244.

[11] Peeters, 356.

[12] I owe this framing to John Schad's *Someone Called Derrida: An Oxford Mystery* (Brighton: Sussex Academic Press, 2007).

[13] Peeters, 356.

[14] Peeters, 356.

[15] Peeters, 356.

[16] Interview with Maurizio Ferraris, qtd. in Peeters, 406.

[17] Jacques Derrida, *On the Name*, trans. David Wood, John P. Leavey, and Ian McLeod (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1995), xiv.

[18] Derrida, *Name*, xiv.

[19] Derrida, *Name*, 10–11.

[20] Derrida, *Name*, 11.

[21] Whereas here, in the English translation, we have "before all else," in the original French we have *avant tout* (Jacques Derrida, *La Carte Postale* [Paris: Flammarion, 1978], 9); translator Bass seeks perhaps to capture the general sense of "above all" without losing the element of temporal priority, the "advance" in *avant*.

[22] Derrida La Carte Postale 9.

[23] Peeters, 356.

[24] Peeters, 356.

[25] Here I think of J. Hillis Miller pointing out, in "Glossing the Gloss of 'Envois' in *The Post Card*" (in *Going Postcard: The Letter(s) of Jacque Derrida*, ed. Vincent W. J. van Gerven Oei, 11–41, 2017), that when Derrida writes "that he does not know whether reading ["Envois"] 'is bearable' ('*est soutenable*')," we should note that "*soutenable* means 'bearable' all right, but it has, to my ear, an overtone of 'sustainable'" (26). For my part, I would observe that *soutenable* can also mean "supportable."

[26] Miller, 356.

[27] "confer," *OED Online.* <www.oed.com/view/Entry/38737>.

[28] John J. Collins, *Daniel: With an Introduction to Apocalyptic Literature* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1984), 11.

[29] Pamela J. Milne, introduction to the Book of Daniel in the *HarperCollins Study Bible: New Revised Standard Version, Including the Apocryphal/Deuterocanonical Books*, ed. Joette M. Bassler, Werner E. Lemke, Susan Niditch, and Eileen M. Schuller (San Francisco: HarperCollins,1993), 1302.

[30] Milne, 1303.

[31] Milne, 1302.

[32] John J. Collins, *The Apocalyptic Imagination: An Introduction to Jewish Apocalyptic Literature*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1998), 5.

[33] Collins, *Apocalyptic Imagination*, 4.

[34] Milne, 1302.

[35] Collins, *Apocalyptic Imagination*, 28.

[36] Bassler, Joette M., Werner E. Lemke, Susan Niditch, and Eileen M. Schuller, editors. *The Harpercollins Study Bible: New Revised Standard Version, Including the Apocryphal/Deuterocanonical Books.* HarperCollins, 1993. All quotations from the Bible will be cited parenthetically.

[37] "apocalypse," *OED Online.* <www.oed.com/view/Entry/9229>.

[38] "Charles," *A Dictionary of First Names*, 2nd Ed. Edited by Patrick Hanks, Kate Hardcastle, and Flavia Hodges. Oxford U P, 2006. www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/acref/9780198610601.001.0001/acref-9780198610601-e-602.

[39] Schad, 13.

[40] My thanks to John Schad for his support and guidance with this paper.

[41] Although my dream is a distinctly Christian one, I will not attempt to baptize Derrida's prayer after the fact, respectful as I am of his complicated sense of his own Jewish identity. Although an exploration of that identity is beyond the scope of this paper, there is an extensive literature on the topic – see, for example, *Jacques Derrida* by Geoffrey Bennington and Jacques Derrida (1993), *Portrait of Jacques Derrida as a Young Jewish Saint* by Hélène Cixous (2001), or *Judeities: Questions for Jacques Derrida*, edited by Bettina Bergo, Joseph Cohen and Raphael Zagury-Orly (2007).

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Pictures by the author.

Smoke and Mirrors

SEBASTIÁN GONZÁLEZ DE GORTARI – PXL MAD – Hasselt University

This essay explores the author's budding mystical relation, still in early development, with the Aztec deity Tezcatlipoca. The first part of the text is comprised of two parallel narratives mirroring each other, one human, the other divine. The twin journeys begin at the mutilating event of birth, followed by a scattering of the resulting fragments. The pieces are joined together through the mimetic practices of divine personification, devotional fiction, and the making of fetishes. At each step, anthropological and psychoanalytical approaches are blended with revelations through dreams and waking visions, both approaches held in equal esteem.

Fetishism, Tezcatlipoca, mimesis, magic, dream knowledge

"*A fetish is a god under process of construction.*"[1]

David Graeber

The young man stepped into the hall of mirrors
Where he discovered a reflection of himself
Sometimes he saw his real face
And sometimes a stranger at his place

Even the greatest stars
Discover themselves in the looking glass
Even the greatest stars
Find their face in the looking glass

He fell in love with the image of himself
Suddenly the picture was distorted
He made up the person he wanted to be
And changed into a new personality

Even the greatest stars
Dislike themselves in the looking glass
Even the greatest stars
Change themselves in the looking glass

The artist is living in the mirror
With the echoes of himself
Sometimes he saw his real face
And sometimes a stranger at his place

Even the greatest stars
Live their lives in the looking glass

Even the greatest stars
Live their lives in the looking glass

"The hall of mirrors," *Kraftwerk*[2]

Introduction

In this article I explore my budding relationship with the Aztec deity Tezcatlipoca. This is an exercise in transformation, for both deity and worshipper. Firstly, I will show the reader Tezcatlipoca's visage *before* His[3] modification, the way He is found in prehispanic records. Tezcatlipoca was one of the patron deities of the Mesoamerican[4] Aztec empire. Aztec religion is pantheistic, exhibiting a fascination with natural forces.[5] As an agricultural society, the Aztecs sought the favour of said powers to secure the success of their crops. Corn was both the basic produce and the very essence of humans, who had been moulded by gods from the tender flesh of maize. And like corn, like the sun, like all beings, humans had to die in order to preserve the flow of vital energy, the movement of the world. To wait until old age was to squander their vitality, and so human sacrifice at the prime of a young man's or woman's life was most potent magic, with blood and smoke flowing to the earth and heavens to keep them strong. At the beginning of time the gods sacrificed themselves to create the world, to put the sun and moon in motion. Human sacrifice, and blood letting by prestigious individuals, was the way of constantly repaying this eternal debt.

Tezcatlipoca is an inheritance from earlier Mesoamerican cultures.[6] Describing gods is a difficult task because their attributes and dominions tend to shift, mix, and expand constantly. In the case of Tezcatlipoca, the task is even more daunting because we are dealing with a god of trickery and invisibility, of protean shape-shifting. The standard translation of His name is "Smoking Mirror." There are alternative translations with as much poetic potency, such as "Burning Mirror," "To make the black mirror shine," and "Mirror's Smoke." Additionally, His main name Tezcatlipoca also shows Himself through other avatars. To list but a few, we have *Moyocoyani* (with multiple possible translations such as "Lord who thinks or invents Himself," "He who acts arbitrarily," and "The

Capricious One"), *Yohuali Ehecatl* ("the Night," "the Wind"), *Necoc Yaotl* ("the Enemy of Both Sides"), *Huehuecoyotl* ("Old Coyote"), *Itztli* ("Obsidian Knife"), and *Tepeyollotl* ("Heart of the Mountain").[7]

Sets of constantly intermingling complementary categories structured prehispanic reality and thought. On one side there is the solar and diurnal, which is warm and dry, fiery, masculine. The realm of the day sky, of the eagle, of turquoise and vitality. On the other side there is the lunar and nocturnal, which is cold and moist, feminine and occult. The realm of the night sky and the underworld, of the jaguar, of obsidian and death.

Tezcatlipoca and His namesake, the Obsidian Mirror, exemplify how these forces create dynamism and fertile contradiction. For the Aztecs, obsidian, deep black volcanic glass, belongs to night and darkness. It comes from the penumbral depths of the earth; it is its heart. Yet it shines, and like Tezcatlipoca has a complementary twin, flint, which is seen as fiery and celestial. Obsidian was used to carve sacrificial knives and needles for bloodletting. In nightly offerings, tongues and penises were pierced by obsidian needles. Ritual dismemberment of sacrificial victims took place, employing fine obsidian blades to execute the required, precise cuts.[8]

Mirrors used for divination were carved out of obsidian. Thus the nocturnal, and transformative, characteristics are carried over to this manufactured object. For the Aztec and other Mesoamerican cultures, the obsidian mirrors

> shone with a "dark light." They partook of...[an] "aesthetic of brilliance," which accorded...access to and control of the glowing spirit realm from whence status and political power flowed...[They gave] access to the intangible world of reflections, where souls, spirits, and the immanent forces of the cosmos dwell.[9]

His dark mirror is both a symbol of order, conferring political power to rule over the Aztec empire, and a symbol of disorder, for He is the patron god of sorcerers, the *temacpalitotique*, those "profanators, thieves and rapists."[10] He reveals the truth, exposing the hidden faults and misdeeds. He restores order, presiding over confession and penitence. He is a tempter and seducer, raping and stealing women and goddesses alike, leading humans to drunkenness and fault. He is omnipotent and omnipresent. There are no

borders He cannot cross, shapes He cannot assume. He tricks and challenges those seeking His favour, appearing in the dead of night, at the crossroads, as horrible apparitions of flying skulls, headless men, piles of ashes.

Mexico and the indigenous present

To give the reader a full picture of what my personal relation with Tezcatlipoca entails, it is my duty to place it in the context of what it means to be Mexican and how this identity is bundled with my nation's historical treatment of indigenous peoples and their cultures.

The Spanish conquest of 1521 brought about the destruction of an entire world. All political and religious institutions were razed. By 1607 the indigenous population had declined by 90%. That is, more than 9 million people died due to the war, the introduction of European sicknesses, and the general straining conditions. [11]

In its 2019 report, the CONEVAL (National Council for the Evaluation of the Social Development Policies) states that by that very same year, almost 70% of the Mexican indigenous population was living in poverty.[12] The list of states with the largest indigenous population and the highest degrees of poverty are almost identical. Some call it racism, others colourism. In any case, in Mexico, wealth and skin colour strongly correlate.

In modern times, the most common attitudes of both the government and the general population towards the indigenous groups have ranged from neglect and discrimination to active animosity, often bordering on exterminationist intents.

Today, 68 indigenous languages, with local varieties bringing the number up to 364, are spoken in Mexico by 7 million people. It is impossible to express in a few lines the intensity with which the indigenous heritage permeates the culture of the whole nation. From the culinary wonders to the way Nahuatl in particular has influenced the way Spanish is spoken, from crafts and popular religion to the very design of the national flag, there is nothing left untouched by the commingling of indigenous and European cultures. The strength and vitality of current religious practices and indigenous ways of seeing the world, after centuries of persecution and enormous, violent changes in the fabric of society, is remarkable. It only managed to survive and thrive through adaptability and a penchant for syncretism.

Only in the nineteenth century did the indigenous legacy become a building block for Mexican national identity. As nationalist discourses around the globe centred themselves on the "purity of race," some Mexican intellectuals "attempted to prove 'scientifically' that the 'Indian race' was autochthonous and had not migrated from Asia and as a consequence was pure and worthy like the Spanish race."[13][a][b] Mexico debuted on the international stage at the World Exhibitions of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, such as the Parisian Exhibition in 1889, with a pavilion in the shape of a neo-Aztec temple in the Beaux-Arts style. This way, "Mexico's entry into 'civilization' was achieved through the exotic and the ancient, a card that was more usually played by the colonies rather than an independent country."[14]

There was both continuity and rupture in the treatment of the indigenous cultures at the hands of the post-revolutionary regime in the second decade of the twentieth century. The regime created a new narrative of what the nation and its origins were. The indigenous cultural legacy was thus "the greatest and healthiest spiritual manifestation in the world."[15] In the eyes of the revolutionary project, this past greatness made indigenous peoples redeemable, able to acquire the modernising greatness of the revolution.[16] Since then, the constant throughout different regimes has been to promote a glorification of the past, praise for the living traditions in the abstract, and total oblivion, neglect, and active animosity against those who are identified as indigenous people.

What does it mean to be Mexican? Are we the children of the indigenous cultures, conquered but undefeated? Are we the offspring of the colonisers, speaking their language, product of their violent "civilising"? Or are we the uneasy mix of the colonisers and the indigenous people, orphans who must make their own way? Each Mexican will give you a different answer.

Birth: Mutilation and Dismemberment

He is born amid the flowing blood of cut-up bodies. It is dismemberment that births Him. He is the sharpness of the night wind, shower of razors. He gets devoured by the earth, the ground chewing on His limpid leg. Play it in reverse: He emerges from the soil, from gaping dirt. From night and into the night. To call Him is to invite a breaking down of yourself. His representatives, by sacrificing themselves to the obsidian knife, help Him die so He may live again.

> A magnificent representation of the birth myth of Tezcatlipoca...The parturient figure, who is a victim...sits on bones in the position of childbirth, signalling a process of creation. The central Tezcatlipoca...is black and emerges from the decapitation hole, represented by a smoking mirror from which the god's foot is detached, between two flint knives...Tezcatlipoca really appears as the god of dismemberment, the patron of cutting the body into pieces.[17]

We are born amid the flowing blood of our mother; we break her open as we come out. Dismemberment births us: Once we were one with mother, with everything; we knew no lack. But we also did not know ourselves; without separation, there was no identity.

> The child is propelled into its identificatory relations by this first acknowledgment of lack or loss. Only at this moment does it become capable of distinguishing itself from the 'outside' world, and thus of locating itself in the world. When the child recognizes or understands the concept of absence does it see that it is not "one," complete in itself, merged with the world as a whole and the (m)other...This marks the primitive "origins" of the child 's separation of inside and outside, subject and object, self and other...From this time on, lack, gap, splitting will be its mode of being.[19]

My god is a broken one, an incomplete one, limping along. Tezcatlipoca is missing

> The clouds of smoke that gush from the stump of Tezcatlipoca's leg probably signify the smoking blood. In one of the other images…we see that the blood around the stump of the god's leg forms a circle, a kind of mirror.[18]

Dream, 2 October 2018

> We are visiting a newly inaugurated section of the archaeological site at Teotihuacan …There is an invisible killer. In the bed there are several women. One of them is about to give birth as the others hold her. It becomes clear that the father of the baby must be the killer. Right at that moment the unseen presence grabs a man and beheads him, breaks his penis in two. The decapitated head lands right next to me and I wake up.

one foot. Instead, there is a mirror. A cut, a separation, engenders reflectivity. A lack that seeks completion in reflections. As I observe myself, I experience myself as lacking. I am a weakling, sickly; I stumble from one flu into the next. There is so much more I wish I knew, so much more I wish I was capable of. So much more I wish life could offer, if I could take it. I long for transformation, to be made anew.

I beseech Tezcatlipoca to transform me, grant me powers and visions, fill my holes. Instead of a crisis of faith, I am having a crisis of disbelief. I was raised an atheist and was happy to be one for most of my life. All the while there was this subterranean stream, expressed in my art, in my fascination with myths and monsters and all those teenager interests that are looked down on by "serious artists." Now I am ready to be deemed childish again, to lose some face. I see my cuts and fragmentation as fertile, my journey into foolishness as a radiant arcanum that has so much to teach.

Tricksters[20] like Tezcatlipoca keep the world in movement and transformation. They are the cut that keeps blood flowing, lets life in. They are the crack that breaks apart any stultifying order. To have a child is to open yourself up to the world, it is a

crack that tears you asunder, an open wound-threshold for all that lies outside of these tender boundaries, to hurt you, to nourish you. Álvaro, before you came, it was so easy to go on pretending that life is not ridiculously fragile, so as not to be paralysed by this knowledge. New life, having broken forth from the membranes of death and the mystery, is still drenched in their black essence. We are born shitting the most lustrous obsidian bile. Play it in reverse: Once death is near and our organs collapse, they can only produce this black bile and shit it out, a salutation to the night they are about to journey into. From night and into the night. There is so much shit, things out of place, shit in our face, shit in the palace of heaven. My baby's shit is sweet and gentle for now, as he feeds himself from the bosom of his mother. He is all fluids convergent, milk and shit and cum and blood, urine, tears, and spit. His body knows no silence, no forbidden zones. I barely sleep. I close my eyes and have the most vivid and violent fantasies. My baby is falling from a window, breaks his neck when he falls. My baby is run over by a speeding car, viscera crushed under the wheels. Silence, unspeakable menace as I approach my baby's cradle and hope he hasn't breathed his last breath. Boiling

water falls on his face, making putty out of flesh. I never knew such intense love, one where my joy and my wonder were coupled with the unbearable idea of loss and disaster.

Scattering into Million Pieces

Gods are scattered. Lacking in anything we could consider a main physically bounded body, they are distributed through time and space. A god is born when a pattern is spotted by the mind.

My god, Tezcatlipoca, is also scattered. Who and what and where is He? He has no fixed location, no material body that completely contains Him, rather He is spread over existence. He is gestures and shadows, inner and outer voices, thoughts and a specific way of thinking. He is the jaguar's roar as it frightens heaven into raining like a cold sweat. He is the coyote's playfulness, the un-fixity of his ways, his lubricity. He is the colour black as I mix it with latex. He is laughter as Georges Bataille understood it.[21] He is my most successful witty remarks, those that make pretty women laugh. He is oneiric melodies breaking over my body, rattling it until I

Humans are scattered. They are tears and goosebumps, runaway itches, morning breath mixed in with sweat and musk from the anus, bundles of blisters, calluses and flatulences, memories of home, impulses to jump, hands plucking the legs from insects.

> The child remains physiologically incapable of controlling its bodily movements and behaviour…Its body is an uncoordinated aggregate, a series of parts, zones, organs, sensations, needs, and impulses rather than an integrated totality. Each part strives for its own satisfaction with no concern for the body as a whole…The child experiences its body as fragmented.[26]

My son, Álvaro, he too was first scattered. Then, one day, he saw himself in a mirror, and there, amid red and green tiles, he began to spin the fiction of a complete,

can't tell myself apart from the delight of being held.

In full regalia, shield and throwing lances at hand, Tezcatlipoca is painted,[22] constructed, by time. The icons representing the twenty days of the Aztec calendar are called upon to compose His body. Thus time is given a spatial and corporeal form. Time spreading itself across His body, His body spreading itself across time. From his mutilated leg a jaguar springs. An umbilical cord emerges from his loincloth and connects him to a lizard. He spits out a flower; his hair is meshed with a human jawbone. His cheek is the icon of movement, as if he would chew earthquakes. For the Aztec, each day is a god, an energy that lends its character and force to existence. Thus His body is a collection of forces and presences.

What time has gathered, it has also spread and broken up. In each corner of the picture, a Franciscan friar holds a long torch.[23] They have gathered all the idolaters' treasures, books, and regalia and set flame to them. Amid the burning sphere one spots the faces of the complete Nahua pantheon. Tezcatlipoca burns too; He is now a bundle of ashes. In the next illustration there is "Great Justice" as five

discrete being. The mirror image is the master design that guides our crafting of a bundle of mutilated parts and presences. This process was described by psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan, who called it the mirror stage. To my mind, philosopher Elizabeth Grosz gives a more clear and sensation-rich account of this Lacanian concept.

> The child's recognition of its own image means that it has adopted the perspective of exteriority on itself...The child sees itself as a unified totality, a gestalt in the mirror: It experiences itself in a schism, as a site of fragmentation...The child is now enmeshed in a system of confused recognition/ misrecognition: it sees an image of itself that is both accurate (since it is an inverted reflection, the presence of light rays emanating from the child: the image as icon); as well as delusory (since the image prefigures a unity and mastery that the child still lacks)...The child identifies with an image of itself that is always also the image of another. Its identification can only ever be

indigenous nobles, four men and one woman, hang.[24] In the foregroud, more of this justice is applied by flame: twin pyres for two other men, burning at the stake. The devouring fire that Cortez brought upon the continent spread wide. Only by breaking into little pieces, sinking underground, finding the joys of the mongrel life, was the indigenously unseen able to survive. For Tezcatlipoca, shape-shifting was as ever His best chance. He hid under the shadows. He became a riddle of broken-down languages. He exploded into a million *tepalcates*[25] so all the king's horses and all the king's men could never put Him back together again.

partial, wishful, anticipated, put off into the future, delayed.[27]

A delay in glass. A submersion into the crystalline pool, of being entranced by the imago and yet, so distinctly separate. A piece that will forever be missing yet allows for the formation of the subject, a subject that by observing itself, being object to its own consciousness, can conceive of itself as a subject. As anthropologist Rane Willerslev puts it, "it takes *two* to make *one*: the subject recognises itself as such only at the moment it 'loses' itself in/as another…There is a paradox here in that the subject must experience self-objectification or self-alienation in order to gain a sense of itself as self."[28]

The mind is scattered into an endless hall of mirrors. We constantly experience ourselves as divided and multiple. When our body fails and breaks down. When the words we utter are the shadows of our parents' words. When we handle ourselves as objects to be observed, cared for, or tortured by our own imperfect understandings of love. We are passages and addresses for presences and structures to concentrate around. We are a myriad of identities, adaptive reflections of whoever is in front of us. The deeper we go, the

more we multiply and break down into smaller fractal pieces.

Below the skin and out of it too. We do not end at the borders of our body, but extend, just as fragmented, through relation, into the world, into others, into the past. Aren't we human beings nothing but patterns spread over time and space, bundles of inner thoughts and external actions? Our body would seem like a natural limit, but what of our actions and relations, the objects and ideas we create – are they not also extensions of our being beyond our local physical address? In his book *Art and Agency: An Anthropological Theory,* anthropologist Alfred Gell elaborates precisely on this conception of the distributed person:

> [A] social individual is the sum of their relations...with other persons...A person and a person's mind are not confined to particular spatio-temporal coordinates, but consist of a spread of biographical events and memories of events, and a dispersed category of material objects, traces, and leavings, which can be attributed to a person and which, in aggregate, testify to agency.[29]

Gathering the Pieces

Gods must be gathered. Here on earth, like the night sky, their enormity has forever enveloped us so that they become invisible, mistaken for emptiness. They seem broken because their bodies do not fit into our miniscule perception of time and so we see only disconnected images. As it is done with constellations, where the stars are but the shining spots of greater night beasts, we must cast our lines and tie them up into shape.

Dream, 25 October 2019

The killer's black mask. His presence is terrifying...A malevolent energy travelling quickly through space with violently transformative effects: A church's tower is twisted until it reaches the floor and then straightens up again in only a couple of seconds, fleshy beings like a meat-eating ball or a long snake with human face and hands attacking a hospital, suddenly turning invisible. All these facts appear initially to me as separate and disconnected, then, more disquieting, I understand that there is the malevolent

Humans must gather themselves. The process of identifying the fleshy splinters and binding them into the fiction of the "I," the tale of the "mine," is one ruled by craft. The consummate individual is a master craftsman of stories, capable of joining the fantasies into the flesh, of weaving past events into memories so the self can remember itself into existence every morning. In opposition to the *radical*, the kind of plant that must remain anchored by the root to a particular place, Nicolas Bourriaud argues for a mode of being he calls the *radicant*. He is inspired by plants such as the ivy, which "develop their roots as they go."[34] Such an individual translates itself "into the terms of the space in which it moves...the adjective 'radicant' captures this contemporary subject, caught between...identity and opening to the other. It defines *the subject as an object of negotiation.*"[35] It is a kind of nomadism of thought which "is organized in terms of circuits and experiments rather that in

energy that ties them all together; they are steps in its flowing.

Gods are like patterns, and part of the task of gathering them together is to become skilfully paranoid. To be rid, at least temporally, of any need to prove whether the recurrences and synchronicities are really out there or simply a product of our wishful search. As magician Ramsey Dukes explains, what matters is that the pattern is personally experienced:

> The pattern is said to be "recognised" rather than "discovered," because the latter would imply the more Scientific notion that it "really existed."...I ask the reader to focus now on verification, not falsification...Try to see the truth in what I am saying rather than to test it for falsifiability...While Scientists compete to disprove or reject ideas, Magicians compete to accept them...The Magical method is to act "as if" a theory is correct until it has done its job, and only then to replace it with another theory.[30]

As a seeker of Tezcatlipoca, I engage in this willing pretence; I trick myself into believing and then must keep my guard to terms of permanent installations, perpetuation, and built development."[36]

I enter the realm of the prehispanic, of the indigenous, as a substance willing to be diluted and transformed, as an experiment in the plasticity and inventiveness of what an "I" may dare to be. And to enter that realm is in itself to wound it and fragment it. When one submerges, excavates into the indigenous past, any past, one does not unearth a miraculously preserved treasure; rather, the shovel pierces and injures the past as it digs. The resulting dislocated fragments are then mixed in with new substances and attitudes to create hybrids of time. Thus, from both sides, two meeting halves, there is an opening up, a fruitful wounding and splitting. I fragment myself and fragment the land I traverse, to temporarily mix them together as one translates into the other, looking for connection. There is friction in this meeting of misfits. It is the spark of multiplicity: "The multitude is a source of energy, it kindles ideas and forms, works to produce shocks, frictions; just as flints produce fire when struck together."[37] The prehispanic is translated into the limits, needs, and desires of a contemporary man. The unspeakable personal experience is

remember it is I who carries out the tricking, too. If personal experience is all that is needed, I can claim success. He has come to me again and again. There are periods where His presence is very nimble and fragile, and others, as when my son was born, where it was constant, terrifying.

Sorcerous wind, seeking your favour, I ask you to grant me a vision, so I might know with which skins to dress you. I see a multitude of hands grasping for dirt, digging through shit and ashes, buried in death and rot, desperate for the shining treasure inside a corpse, cleaning themselves in shrouds. The vision had been granted, a door had been open wide and darkness called in more darkness. As if the sleeplessness and the intensity of it all had peeled off all the fat from my nerves. I wander the hall and living room of our darkened apartment, cradling my son to sleep. I open my eyes: There is a headless man sitting in the couch. I close my eyes: There's a pale feline demon, smiling all his sharp teeth, rapacious jester coming closer and closer. I open my eyes: There is a little ghost girl in front of me, lightly swinging to the rhythm my cradling sets.

Nowadays, it is I who has to make a conscious effort to spot His presence in the translated into something that can be partially shared. The divine is translated into the mind of the mortal.

"A state of confused recognition/misrecognition": How else to call my relation to the prehispanic, to the Aztec? Were the minds and bodies that first dreamed of the smoking mirror my brethren, my forefathers? Is the search for Tezcatlipoca a quest to go back to my origins, to find my true and complete being in the shadowy reflections? No! It is a search for the Other; it is a movement, and thus requires initial distance. I must imagine this distance, create it. Distance is the starting point when searching for an ethical relation to the Other. I speak Spanish; I am from the upper middle class; I was raised, for all intents and purposes, with standard western values. Thus, the realm of Aztec religion is a foreign land, distant in time and circumstance. But the distance is there to be, at least temporarily, surmounted. Breached by empathy and mimesis, by searching in the Other what also lies within me, by finding what is Other within me.

Thus the trickster god, eater of human hearts, roamer of jungles long turned to wood chip, is fragmented and thrown into

images he leaves behind. I make myself see Tezcatlipoca in the giant ashtrays at the entrances of hotels, in the dark broken glass sliding down the gutter. When I think of Him, He takes on one of the faces I have given Him through my sculptures, looking at me upside down and smiling. It is I who must craft the vision.

Usually, the vision is conceived as "an unmediated intuition sent directly into our mind by a paranormal agent, or as an unconscious and thus uncontrolled effect of a mind-altering experience."[31] However, for the seeker and, as Mary Carrouthers details, for the monastic traditions of the Middle Ages, visions were also something that could be crafted. This was a rhetorical approach to visions, a "mental crafting…most powerfully of use to call up the emotional energies of oneself and one's audience." [32] Preparing for a vision is "recognizably similar to the tropes of composition in antiquity" where dreams are "a way of remembering" and thus experienced as a digestion given "the commonplace link between remembering and digesting, meditation and rumination, books and eating."[33] The vision only really exists once it is put down onto paper and the unstable mixes of my mind. There He must coexist and mingle with gods of other pantheons, trash found on the street, a penchant to look for Him in pop songs. Doubt and desperation injuring Him. Fear and attraction pulling Him apart.

thus enters the realm of fiction. Thus the vision must use fiction's resources to express its own qualities.

Coupling through Copying and Crafting: The Mystery of the Bed Chamber

Why seek the contact and the coupling with Tezcatlipoca? To be more like Him. To be a poet of ridicule, of horny disgust, jokes told with thorns and spikes and lace and chains. How to contact Him, penetrate Him? By being more like Him. I must think and feel like Him, must interiorise His qualities. I become an imitative effigy through which I can grasp and affect Him. I become His skin.

Walter Benjamin saw mimesis as a human universal faculty, a compulsion to imitate and thus become similar to the world, blurring the distances and barriers.[38] Anthropologist Michael Taussig, following Benjamin's reflections, proposes mimesis as a form of embodied knowledge. In perceiving we are taken out of ourselves and into what is being perceived, partially merging. To think of something mimetically, to truly understand it, is to imagine ourselves "over there" in the physical location and perspective of the object. Our senses are filled, overridden, by the presence of what is outside ourselves:

> bodily copying of the other is paramount: one tries out the very shape of a perception in one's own body; the musculature of the body is physiologically connected to precepts…Just as speech can be understood as thought activating the vocal cords and tongue, so thinking itself involves innervation of all of one's features and sense organs.[39]

Pictures by the author.

There is power and menace in the mimetic activity. The power of what George Frazer once named the Law of Similarity and the Law of Contact or Contagion.[40] These are principles of thought which Frazer identified in magical activity. The first law is that "like produces like,"[41] and the second law claims that "things which have once been in contact with each other continue to act on each other at a distance after the physical contact has been severed."[42] Both laws combine in the magical practice of crafting effigies of an enemy or loved one either to attack them at a distance or to influence their desires. The effigies must have a certain degree of similarity to the original but will also directly incorporate materials from the victim, such as hair or nails. As Taussig points out, in these practices, imitation (the likeness of the effigy to the original) and contact (through the exuviae employed) blend so intimately that "image and contact interpenetrate…making us reconsider our very notion of what it is to be an image, most specially if we wish not only to express but to manipulate reality by means of its image…you move into the interior of images, just as images move into you."[43] This magic language of visions, is not only in constant flux, in the taking up of mask after mask as means of escape and movement, but also occasions such protean disturbances in those who speak or receive it. This is the power but also the menace of mimesis: to undergo such a total merging and transformation that we permanently lose our sense of self.

To ward off this total dissolution that mimesis threatens us with, one must seek to be an imperfect, distorted copy of the god. Constant translation ensures that things get lost and modified, that an unbreachable holy gap is kept. We are, for each other, the imperfect and twisted mirrors that distort the other, giving him a new face. Distortion is what keeps us from completely disappearing into each other. As anthropologist Rane Willerslev explains,

> The basic movement of mimesis is…towards similarity…[yet] always depends on the opposite—that is, difference…it is the "copiedness" of mimesis, its lack of realism, so to speak, that secures this strikingly necessary difference because it forces the imitator to turn back on himself. It reverses his dominant and "natural" directedness toward the object of imitation back toward his own awareness as imitating subject, thus preventing him from achieving unity with the object imitated…In this sense we can talk about a kind of "depth reflexivity" built into mimesis, a certain withholding or nongiving of the self…As imitator, one must move

> in between identities, in that double negative field, which I...will call "not me, not not-me. [44]

And not Him, not not-Him! To be locked in reflection and imitation, to be a shimmering fluid mirror substance. What better way to honour Tezcatlipoca than to become a dark and warping obscuring mirror? To offer Him a mocking image of Himself, a parody that plays with His fluidity for my own convenience. And how convenient that to fail Him, to fall short of being Him, is to also to be triumphant. To be ungraspable, to elude total definition, that is His triumph too! If one goes looking for Him, it is not as to bring him naked and complete into the light. Rather, one conceals Him into new and modern clothes. It is a dynamic mutilation, a loving disfigurement powered, as He would have wanted it, by blood.

The stories I tell of Him – I will call them fictions if it makes you feel more comfortable – they are my way of holding Him, biting Him. Stories and images are the exuviae of deities, shedding them like humans shed dead skin. Stories to wear and tailor like flayed skin. They are not about Tezcatlipoca, they are of Him. And by modifying them, I hold power over Him, power of contagion and of similarity; I mix us together. Fiction is the glue for our fragments to come together. Is my worship of Him a fiction or is fiction the way I worship Him?

To conceive Tezcatlipoca as a discrete being is a necessary fiction, an unavoidable artifice that permits His infinite character to be discussed in finite, human, terms. I manufacture Him into a fetish for His convenience and mine. I identify, both as artist and as spiritual seeker, as a fetishist. It is both a provocation and simply the most fitting term. Through the term′s history of use there is the recurring impulse to point at someone else's mistakes and delusions. All descriptions of fetishistic practices become lobbed accusations, denunciations of their failure at understanding and the dangers of not being able to perceive "the facts." Fetishism becomes the opposite of knowledge, the arrest of a search, redirected into a phantasm. To voluntarily take its mantle is to argue for desire as the producer of meaning, to open myself to the knowledge that phantasms can offer. It is not simply a defiant or contrarian gesture, it is also a recognition of my kinship with practices that have been historically tied under this term. From the history of fetishism, certain recurring themes call to me, as reflections of my own doings.

The fetish can be described, at its simplest, as the conjunction of "a purposive desire and a material object."[45] For the fetishists, their objects grant access to a power that can bring forth the satisfaction of their desire. Thus, the truth of the fetish lies in its material embodiment, its "untranscended materiality."[46] Fetish objects are composed of heterogeneous parts which are brought together, weaved, by the connective tissue of desire. The heterogeneous components making up the fetish are not only varied materials and appropriated objects and fragments, but also beliefs, desires, and narrative structures. In making fetish, one joins together spiritual and material elements in order to grasp the former through the latter. Fetishes are tangled up matter and spirit, a knot where they become hard to distinguish. Tezcatlipoca becomes a substance, sometimes visible, sometimes more like a gap or aperture, sometimes a colour, that I spread over my objects, my artworks, to grant them His powers and conversely, in manipulating them, to grant me power over Him.

Some of my most trusted and powerful fetishes are my collected notebooks. Whenever I feel lost, I congregate them before me and dig in. Reading past notes, I access not just my thoughts but the state of mind that engendered them. They contain the potency of true revelation. They dispel the sticky veil of mindless routine. In the gathered lines, the way handwriting is full of gesture, haste and patience, coffee nervousness, arrows, scratches, how it hovers around drawn sketches, there is always hope. Irreducible materiality. I reconnect to those forces within me seeking transformation. It is there I find Him, in certain phrases, certain words that have been scratched out, in what I left out.

Fetishes garner power through repetition. I come back to my notebooks again and again. In re-reading them, my present thinking becomes again part of the pattern, while also adding new insights. Some thoughts, as if mantras, must be thought again and again for them to completely effect their transformation of the consciousness that thinks them. I transcribe an older fragment into a new notebook, place it in a constellation with other findings, old and new. It is the slow assembly of the ever-ongoing night of initiation. The initiation that has happened, is happening, will continue to happen, for it stands outside the linear passage of time.

Repetition builds an altar for Him. His body is dark, almost black ceramic. He is hollowed out, and inside of Him I place a dark lake surrounded by ashes and unbaked clay, pierce the grey mud with candles. I light my altar whenever I write, whenever I look for contact. And I wait for answers, looking at the reflections in the pond becoming smoked mirror, trying to read the flows of molten wax. Repetition gives life to my idol-altar. The more the candles burn, the more His face is painted with soot as the smoke uses His hollowed visage like a chimney. The ashen, unbaked clay alternates between trembling in humid plasticity and speaking through cracks when it dries. And the images in the surface of the water twirl and shake, bond with floating pieces of debris, imitate the dancing flames of the candles. I become addicted and superstitious, do not dare to write Him without first lighting the altar, for otherwise I can only fail.

So, who holds the power? The fetish or the fetishist? The god or the worshipper? Where does agency lie, in which way does it flow? In his series of essays "The Problem of the Fetish," historian William Pietz speaks of the fetish as a "controlling organ."[47] The human body, as the site of action and desire, subjects itself to the influence of a material object that, even if cut off from this body, is somehow plugged into and directing these currents of desire-energies. This submission to the perceived power of an object has generated much of the reproachful discourses around the topic of fetishism. The fetishist is perceived as a misguided slave, someone who has given up their freedom.

However, I want to argue in favour of fetishism as a source of creative and erotic freedom. The fetish is never just a natural object; it must be manufactured. The fetishist constructs the fetish, through their own agency. Only through their desire do the disparate parts acquire a unity and become a powerful totality. It is a voluntary submission that the fetishist executes. Artificiality as a characteristic, in the sense of something that has been man-made as opposed to a raw material, is present from the very origins of the term. The word fetish derives from the Portuguese vocabulary as it existed in the fifteenth century, from terms such as *feitiço*, *feiticero,* and *feitiçaria*. Linguistically, all these words derive from the Latin *facticius* or *factitius*. This Latin adjective became relevant and useful in Roman commercial language as early as the years 23–79 AD Pliny employs it in his *Natural*

History to mean "manufactured," characterising "man-made" commodities in opposition to natural goods that have not been processed.[48]

Anthropologist David Graeber goes back to Pietz's foundational essays to highlight fetishism's connection to creativity and thus to freedom. Pietz identifies the West Coast of Africa from the sixteenth to the eighteenth century as the birthplace of the fetish. In this region, indigenous inhabitants and European merchants, predominantly Portuguese and later Dutch, were brought into ever more intimate contact by the trade of gold. The term fetish emerged as a necessary if unreliable tool to negotiate between them. The fetish "was, according to Pietz, born in a field of endless improvisation, that is, of near pure social creativity."[49]

The idea of social creativity was a constant focus for Graeber. He identifies a basic paradox within humanity′s experience of organising themselves into societies: "People can see certain institutions…both as a human product and also as given in the nature of the cosmos, both as something they have themselves created and something they could not possibly have created."[50] As his main example, Graeber uses the concept of social contracts, and he explores this idea through his use of cases from Madagascar and West Africa. Both West African and Malagasy charms "involved the giving of an oath or pledge by those protected by them, or over whom they had power; without that, it was simply a powerless object."[51] By examining the practices that the Europeans labelled as fetishist, from the perspective of the actual practitioners, Graeber argues that these practices were little fetishised, if by that one means the lack of awareness as to how they had been created and whence their power originated from. The fetishes were seen by the West Africans as "having been created by human beings; people would 'make' a fetish as the means of creating new social responsibilities, of making contracts and agreements."[52]

For Graeber, the West Africans' heightened awareness of their own capacity to create new social realities, constantly modify their world, is the essence of revolution:

Pictures by the author.

> Fetishes...were almost invariably the basis for creating something new: congregations, new social relations, new communities. Hence any "totality" involved was, at least at first, virtual, imaginary, and prospective...It was an imaginary totality that could only come into real existence if everyone acted as if the fetish object actually did have subjective qualities...These were...revolutionary moments. They involved the creation of something new. They might not have been moments of total transformation, but realistically, it is not as if any transformation is ever really total. Every act of social creativity is to some degree revolutionary, unprecedented: from establishing a friendship to nationalizing a banking system.[53]

However, these gestures of creation and revolution may turn into submission, the kind of fetishism where our own creations begin to hold power over us because we believe that they do. Graeber sees no contradictions here, as he opines,

> the dilemma is illusory. If fetishism is, at root, our tendency to see our own actions and creations as having power over us, how can we treat it as an intellectual mistake? Our actions and creations do have power over us. This is simply true. Even for a painter, every stroke one makes is a commitment of a sort. It affects what she can do afterwards.[54]

So much of what appeals to me about the fetish is the way it hovers between magic and religion. I recognise the tension, of looking for higher powers while wanting to preserve the ego and the self. Graeber uses the example of charms used in Madagascar, which

> had names and stories, wills and desires, they received homage, gave blessings, imposed taboos. They were, in other words, very much like gods...[however] their hold on godhood seemed remarkably tenuous. New ones would appear; older ones might slip into obscurity...There literally was no clear line between ordinary "magic" and deities, but for that reason, the deities were in a constant process of construction. They were not seen as representing timeless essences, but powers that had proved, at least for the moment, effective and benevolent.[55]

A god under the process of construction. That is what Tezcatlipoca is to me, an endeavour in constant change, where its very incompleteness is what keeps it alive and keeps me from

falling into permanent convictions, preserving ambiguities and fertile cowardice. The zone of the fetish, the zone of Tezcatlipoca, exists "at some point along the passage from an imaginary level of pure magic – where all powers are human powers, where all the tricks and mirrors are visible – to pure theology, with an absolute commitment to the principle that the constructive apparatus does not exist."[56] I must hover at this place of instability. A moment that can be reached, a state that can be encouraged, full of plasticity, where ideas and beliefs are as malleable as the materials that pass through my hands. Both objects and frames of mind abandon solidity and mix momentarily like gases, then condense again so that the Ideal acquires shape in what I create and objects are but the still images of forces and processes. And so my deity, Tezcatlipoca, as I conceive Him is also permanently protean, a god still very much at the moment of formation or re-assembly.

Dream, 5 February 2022

The recurring dream begins in a darkened hut, at the edge of town. I am a kid again, surrounded by schoolmates, all boys. We are scared. Blood drips down my leg. Our teacher digs a trench where three canals intersect, an uneven asterisk seen from above. Each of them is filled with a different, strange, liquid. There is a red one, a black one, and a white one. The teacher implies that the colours are fucking each other. I look into them and I feel very disgusted. Rotten meat, spit, shit, and cum all mix and bubble. He pushes us into the canals and we all sink down. The red flows into my throat, makes me very drunk. The black goes into my lungs, gets me high like weed. The white goes up my urethra, I am very horny.

In this state I wander through a forest, thick and green, soft as it is musky. All around meadows and incense. The bark of trees grows into letters and symbols. I walk, and walk, and walk. It feels as if I had been walking for hours. I keep stumbling into my classmates, just as naked as me. Our erected dicks lightly bruise against each other and we recoil and run in a different direction. But I know it is unavoidable, we will stumble against each other again, dicks first. Sometimes, I escape this anxious state. As I run away, I see, right in front of me, a white beast. A sort of doe, not yet startled. It is a great struggle to counter the momentum of my flight and stay as still as possible, so as to not scare the shining animal. Most of the time I fail, and it vanishes immediately, and I am thrown back into a feverish

loop or wake up startled. Even more rare are the encounters where I control myself well enough and the white creature does not flee. I know that my words must be as calculating as my movements have become. The pale beast listens to my greetings, and if those greetings are not graceful enough, it leaves.

It is in this moment that Tezcatlipoca offers His blessing. He is the black ooze running down my nostrils, tickling my trembling ribs. I take His offer every time. His curse is His blessing, His blessing His curse. Once I take Him in, so much comes to me at once. In a boiling room many people are dancing. No one is gonna wear that mask. In another room in my head, in a mysterious bed chamber, a maid steals jewels from a heart-shaped box. Another track meditates on how to artfully find a ridiculous path into Horror. And the moon is rising, rising, rising, something doubtful this way comes. All the while, a fraction of myself is engaged in conversation with the white doe. In equal skill we exchange quadruple-entendres and Tezcatlipoca is the one feeding me all the good lines. Worded like filigree diamond traps. By His encouragement we play a substitution game where everything is faked by us, but our fakery is so convincing that the spectators are polluted by the emotions they assign to us, their bodies turning these fictions into real fights, real murders, real fuckery.

If I could turn into a beautiful and exotic potted plant, she'd take me home, undress before me, and only the tips of her toenails would know who I truly am. Every word we exchange is a real delight. I am almost transparent, just a bunch of dew-drop dudes hanging out. O I am inviting and they come to munch on fresh buds from the spiked bush. Tezcatlipoca has blessed me with the perfect weapons, beguiling instruments. As the air comes out of my lips, I cling to it like a tick sucking all sound out. I repeat a particularly tasty syllable again and again until I make no sense. By then the pale prey has long gone, leaving the raving maniac behind. Not that I have realised at all their absence, the way their face seems to float before me and dance to the three songs I have simultaneously playing on repeat. Tezcatlipoca has cursed me with the perfect weapons, they have completely beguiled me. I am a cobra that hypnotises and bites its own reflection, charmingly. Tezcatlipoca has made me the perfect hunter, then stolen the impetus, the desire driving my search. His tools, however, remain fascinating. And so I devise a million other excellent uses. Like a cow

figuring how to transmit radio waves with a hammer. I feel the potency of my own mind, how I may bend anything according to my own desires and the world will follow through, will twist and turn into whatever I say. I can't be defeated. I am a rodeo clown getting robbed blind at toy-gunpoint by little kids, then shot in the face under purple light, and I love it! I've done work on the faces of the stars, pruned their long-dead light, stirred the muddy cosmo-ooze into cock-tails, celestial plastic surgeon. I sleep in reverse.

In many ways, I am making it all up. Once I wake up, almost all is forgotten. I remember Tezcatlipoca's arrival, Him breathing poisons over me. More importantly, many times I remember the appearance and materials of one of His weapons. I scribble down the image in my notebook, as fast as possible, for each new second erases more and more. Later, in full daylight, I do my best to decipher my sketches, to figure out what the bad drawings represent and what possible use they might have had within the dream. At this point only resignation drives me. I turn the sketches into artwork-fetishes, knowing that whatever interpretation I come up with must be a total fabrication, a fiction far removed from whatever truth the dream contained. I embrace that fiction, for I have nothing else to embrace, ghost of a ghost. I fill it with belief to make it real, I let it have material consequences, guide my actions of the day. The result is an object that both refers to and creates the fiction. The use of the object is a return, not to the dream, but to the gap it has left, now waiting to be filled in fertile silence. And I am still a mysterious being.

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[1]David A. Graeber, "Fetishism and Social Creativity, or Fetishes are Gods in Process of Construction," *Anthropological Theory* 4 December 2005): 427.

[2] Kraftwerk.1977. "The hall of mirrors." Track 2 on *Trans-Europe Express*.Capitol Records. Vinyl.

[3] While conventionally gods other than the Christian one do not take capitalized pronouns I have nonetheless chosen to capitalize Tezcatlipoca's pronouns as a gesture of reverence and devotion, elevating Him within my personal pantheon.

[4]Mesoamerica is a historical and cultural area comprising central Mexico through Belize, Guatemala, up to northern Costa Rica. The different cultural groups and civilizations that emerged in this area, from around 1000 BC and for around the next 3000 years, shared many elements, such as a 260-day calendar, a ballgame played with rubber balls, the use of limestone cement, and a constellation of beliefs and behaviors.

[5]For a very basic introduction to Mesoamerican religions see Mary Miller and Karl Taube, *An Illustrated Dictionary of the Gods and Symbols of Ancient Mexico and the Maya* (New York: Thames & Hudson, 1993).

[6] While there are historical changes and variations, there are also basic common traits surrounding the conception of this god. The Aztec inherited many gods from preceding cultures, and as their empire expanded, gods from neighboring groups were also adopted. Tezcatlipoca is understood to be a remainder from earlier cultures, a god that was adopted and modified by the Aztec empire as one of its patron gods.

[7]Guilhem Olivier, *Mockeries and Metamorphoses of an Aztec God: Tezcatlipoca, "Lord of the Smoking Mirror"* (Boulder: University Press of Colorado, 2008), 14–32.

[8]Miller and Taube, 46-47.

[9]Elizabeth Baquedano, ed., introduction to *Tezcatlipoca : Trickster and Supreme Deity (*Boulder: University Press of Colorado, 2014), 1–2.

[10]Olivier, 23.

[11]Woodrow Borah and Sherburne F. Cook, "La Despoblación Del México Central en El Siglo XVI," *Historia Mexicana* 12, no. 1 (1962), 1–12. http://www.jstor.org/stable/25135147.

[12]"La Pobreza en la Población Indígena de México, 2008–2018," accessed Mach 18 2022, https://www.coneval.org.mx/Medicion/MP/Documents/Pobreza_Poblacion_indigena_2008-2018.pdf.

[13]Pablo Escalante Gonzalbo (coord.), Paula López Caballero, *La Idea de Nuestro Patrimonio Cultural* (Mexico City: Dirección General de Publicaciones, 2011), 142.

[14]Escalante Gonzalbo, 143.

[15]Artemex, "Manifiesto del Sindicato de Obreros Técnicos, Pintores y Escultores," *Artemex*, https://artemex.files.wordpress.com/2010/12/lectura-4-manifiesto-del-sindicato-de-pintores-y-escultores.pdf.

[16]Escalante Gonzalbo, 146.

[17]Danièle Dehouve, "Combination of Signs in the Codices of Central Mexico," *Ancient Mesoamerica* (2021), 7. http://www.danieledehouve.com/images/articles/ATM2100024_R2_cx_previous_draft.pdf.

[18]Eduard Seler quoted in Dehouve, 3.

[19]Elizabeth Grosz, *Jaques Lacan: A Feminist Introduction* (New York: Routledge, 1990), 34–-35.

[20]My understanding of trickster figures has been greatly expanded by the work of Lewis Hyde. See *Trickster Makes this World: How Disruptive Imagination Creates Culture* (Edinburgh: Canongate Books, 2017).

[21]See Michel Surya, *Georges Bataille: An Intellectual Biography* (London: Verso Books, 2002), 36–38.

[22]Gisele Díaz, Alan Rodgers, *The Codex Borgia: A Full Color Restoration of the Ancient Mexican Manuscript* (Mineola, NY: Dover, 1993), plate 17.

[23]René Acuña (ed.), *Relaciones Geográficas del Siglo XVI: Tlaxcala tomo I* (Mexico City: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 1984), plate 13.

[24]Acuña, plate 14.

[25]A Spanish word used in Mexico and derived from Nahuatl, referring to small archaeological clay shards.

[26]Grosz, 33–34.

[27]Grosz, 39–40.

[28]Rane Willerslev, *Soul Hunters: Hunting, Animism, and Personhood among the Siberian Yukaghirs* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2007), 67.

[29]Alfred Gell, *Art and Agency: An Anthropological Theory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 222.

[30]Ramsey Dukes, *S.S.O.T.B.M.E. Revised: An Essay on Magic* (England: The Mouse that Spins, 2000), 33.

[31]Mary Carrouthers, *The Craft of Thought: Meditation, Rhetoric and the Making of Images, 400-1200* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 186.

[32]Carrouthers, 172.

[33]Carrouthers, 180.

[34]Nicolas Bourriaud, *The Radicant* (New York: Lukas & Sternberg, 2009), 51.

[35] Bourriaud, 51.

[36] Bourriaud, 53.

[37]Bourriaud, 69.

[38]See Walter Benjamin, *On the Mimetic Faculty,* trans. by Edmund Jephcott (Cambridge, MA and London: The Belknap Press of Harvard University, 1998).

[39]Michael Taussig, *Mimesis and Alterity: A Particular History of the Senses* (New York: Routledge, 1993), 46.

[40]See Sir James George Frazer, *The Golden Bough: A Study in Magic and Religion, Part 1,* vol. 1 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994).

[41]Frazer cited in Taussig, 47.

[42]Frazer cited in Taussig, 47.

[43]Taussig, 57.

[44]Willerslev, 11-12.

[45]William Pietz, "The Problem of the Fetish I," *RES: Anthropology and Aesthetics* no. 9 (Spring 1985), 5–17. http://www.jstor.org/stable/20166719. Pietz, *The problem I*, 10.

[46]Pietz, "The Problem I," 7.

[47]Pietz, "The problem I," 10.

[48]William Pietz,"The Problem of the Fetish, II: The Origin of the Fetish," *RES: Anthropology and Aesthetics* (Spring 1987), 23–45. http://www.jstor.org/stable/20166762.

[49]Graeber, Fetishism, 410.

[50]David Graeber, *Toward An Anthropological Theory of Value: The False Coin of Our Own Dreams* (New York: Palgrave, 2001), 232.

[51]Graeber "Fetishism," 425.

[52]Graeber "Fetishism," 411.

[53]Graeber, "Fetishism," 425.

[54]Graeber, "Fetishism," 431.

[55]Graeber :Fetishism," 428.

[56]Graeber, "Fetishism," 432.

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The Other Side

LIBBY KING – Flinders University

Using the autotheoretical strategies of writers such as Maggie Nelson and Billy-Ray Belcourt, this essay explores how experimental literary forms – including autotheory, fictocriticism, autoethnography, and autofiction – disrupt the boundaries of cultural conversations. I use blended forms to explore family separation, colonisation, subjectivity, climate change, and the boundaries between science and mythology. The implicit argument, founded on the works of Amitav Ghosh, is that literary forms developed in the nineteenth and twentieth century do not frame content in ways that address the primary concerns of the early twenty-first century. In a practical application of the idea that "the form is as important as the content," I use autotheory to consider how form changes the way content is negotiated, discussed, and understood. Experimenting in a practical re-ordering of the "neoliberal town square" and "stream of consciousness as form," I use critical theory and autobiographical narration to bring kitchen-table conversations into a theoretical landscape.

autotheory; autofiction; fictocriticism; life writing; form in literature; consciousness

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For Aboriginal and Torres Straight Islander people, this piece contains references to people who have passed.

Wake (pre-pandemic)

1. I'm writing this from under a peachy floral doona on an island off the west coast of Canada. It's a sunny day and I have a cold.

2. When I first moved here, the epic rains comforted me; all that water was so safe. But the climate has changed and the summer rains stopped dramatically three years ago. It's the same story over the whole globe but with different details: climate change, the Big CC. Without rain, it feels like I'm back home, except the foliage here is still green.

3. Today on the peninsula of my birth, Australia's own boot, there will be a funeral and a procession to the Port Victoria cemetery, where my godmother will be lowered into the ground.

4. Aunty Raylene talked a lot about her people, the Narungga people, Aboriginal people. She talked while whisking custard for bread and butter pudding or filleting whiting on the back steps or drinking mugs of tea at the kitchen table. *You whitefellas never understand*, she'd say, shaking her head. *You gotta go to funerals!*

5. I'm white, but from young she taught me to listen. Aunty Raylene's funeral is today and I should be there, watching my shoes get covered in a thin layer of red dust at the cemetery.

6. Her daughter sends me photos over Facebook. There is the one of Aunty Raylene in a solid green dress holding me as an infant at my baptism; one of us posing with the rabbit cake she made me from the Women's Weekly Birthday Cake Book; one of when I'm around thirteen and she has her arms wrapped around me, her fingers resting so tenderly on my forearms that I well up when I look at it.

7. Sometimes I wake with a tight stomach and wonder: *What am I doing on the other side of the world?*

Blue

8. *I'm not blue,* I write in my notebook. Blue has so many connotations: depressed, dogs, redheads; I am none of these.

9. Blue for me is in the cool of the Whyalla Hospital swimming pool; small, turquoise tiles on the bottom and a surface that glitters like a snow globe in the summer sun. The blue that comes through your eyelids when you lie on your back and float, eyes closed, clear sky above.

Melanin

10. Imagine the south-eastern canine of Australia's bite. There is a large white, wooden house sitting atop a mound surrounded by a lattice verandah. Beyond the mound is the Spencer Gulf and the epic waters of the Southern Ocean.

11. On that verandah my mother's sister, Mandy, sits in a rocking chair with a bundle in her arms. I am eight and look over her shoulder. Cradled in her arms is a sleeping newborn with wild, inch-long black hair. Aunty Mandy, always beautiful and close to laughter, peeks over the baby's head and grins at me.

12. My siblings and I, with our little heads of white hair, walk down to the petting cage. These are everywhere we go. They are framed on all sides, including above, with chicken wire and inside there are always a couple of kangaroos on dusty red earth. Often there are peacocks or budgies or cockatoos. We poke our fingers through the wire and the kangaroos come to sniff them.

13. Imagine melanin like continents, pooling and drifting just under the surface of the skin.

14. Imagine that while we are with the kangaroos or perhaps while we are distracted by the baby's hair or perhaps another time altogether, the adults talk. They are concerned. It's the melanin, pooling.

15. *Bruises*, the officials say, and the implication is obvious. My mother, apparently, tells them to read their medical books again, because right there, in black and white, it explains that melanin pools. And because she is white and has a medical degree, the officials reluctantly agree that melanin is just melanin.

16. So because of desolate, ironic luck, Aunty Mandy and her baby stay together. Ironic because Aunty Mandy, too, had melanin that pooled, and that's what got her the white sister worth listening to. She had to lose her mother to keep her daughter.

17. This is the culture we swim in; keep your eyes closed or the chlorine will get in.

18. *If only they knew back then*, people say. But in the medical books when Aunty Mandy was born, the melanin was there, too.

19. White eyes squeezed tight.

A Tell (in the kitchen)

20. Friends are over and I'm at the stove, stirring curry. One joins me and peeks into the pot. My partner, Saturday, is at the kitchen table with another friend; he's explaining recent learnings about the impact on his nervous system from being removed from his mother as an infant. My friend's eyes move from the curry to him, and the words fall from her mouth in a strange kind of exasperation: *But they didn't know any better.*

21. Unprompted defensiveness is an interest of mine. I searched her face for clues about what would prompt such a strange statement – one that was both untrue and uncaring at once.

22. Even she appeared shocked by what she'd said, like it was a call-and-response game in which she was just playing her part. The injured says: *The traumas of my infanthood linger in my body*. The listener replies: *But they didn't know any better.*

23. At the kitchen table, Saturday sighs. *Yes, they did*, he says in a defeated mumble.

A Tell (in the back garden)

24. Previously, the summer before, a different person in the garden. Saturday is talking about the way his nervous system, like the nervous system of other adopted people he's met, is jumpy. *Whose fault is it?* The person in the garden replies. *Who are you trying to blame?*

25. Unprovoked defensives are defending something; manufactured binaries have purpose.

26. The person in the garden was exasperated and acted as though Saturday had transgressed a social boundary, as though the unavoidable physical and emotional responses he lives with must be treated like the secret he was on the day of his birth. Even in middle age, he must not give any impression that what happened caused pain.

27. *But they didn't know any better,* the person in the back garden said, as though he was an expert on that kind of thing.

Quadra Island (pre-pandemic)

28. The night Trump was elected I was on Quadra Island. It was dark, and Dionne drove me to the ferry. When the radio announcer said the predictions favoured Trump, the air in the car became ominous and we inhaled unhappily. *It's just a prediction,* one of us said. *I hope it's wrong,* said the other.

29. At the terminal, we each wished the other (but really all of us) the best. There was an eerie clapping as the flagpole rattled in the wind and I sought the comfort of the small waiting room, but a red baseball cap was hanging on the wall, as though put there so the owner could find it. The wind, the rattling, the red cap, it all felt so menacing.

30. Sometimes, all the way over here, I feel lost.

31. But, the thing is, even down there I felt lost.

32. On its journey between islands, the ferry passes over a deep valley in the Pacific Ocean where the Pacific and North American continental shelves are slowly colliding. The

vessel was old, but that made it appear space-age in the darkness, lit up like the Millennium Falcon.

33. As I watched the lights of the island ahead get larger and those behind fade to pinpricks, I was upset with myself because I'd always believed Trump would win and that belief made me feel complicit. It was the simplicity of him, his lack of complexity. And although I didn't like it, I believed his strategy would work. In the early twenty-first century, irony is endemic; it's the perfect milieu for a simpleton to neutralise the ironies we already swim in with even stranger and sadder ones.

34. I wondered, as I crossed those waters, what impact believing he would win had on the outcome.

Logos and Mythos

35. Imagine the Greek words *logos* for logic and *mythos* for myth. Two sides of one coin. Or perhaps two sides isn't enough, maybe they are the sides of something more complex: the surface of the ocean or a planet.

36. In the secular west you would be forgiven for thinking only logic matters. What, after all, is the benefit of myth?

37. Think of the world as alive with both life and unknowns, Amitiv Ghosh says in *The Great Derangement*: "the energy that surrounds us, flowing under our feet and through wires in our walls, animating our vehicles and illuminating our rooms, is an all-encompassing presence that may have its own purposes about which we know nothing," he says.

Both

38. Some people can manage only myth and no science; some only science and no myth; but for most of us, both is fine. Both is good.

39. Although my father was a priest, I grew up in a house suspicious of myth. We were a science-only household.

40. When Rose talked about the Little People up by Hummock Hill, it wasn't seen as right.

Woodchip Patterns (pre-pandemic)

41. Over here, on the other side of the globe, there is a green forest I walk though most days. Sometimes it feels like a vortex, because so many things make sense there.

42. One day when walking I saw a small pile of fresh woodchips on the ground. When I stopped, I noticed there were woodchips falling from the sky. I looked up and there was a woodpecker in the tree above, tapping on the trunk, woodchips flying wildly all around it.

43. *There are patterns everywhere,* I said to Saturday (who was known as Scott then). *It's only because we noticed the woodchips, that we noticed the woodpecker.*

Puppy Patterns (pre-pandemic)

44. Then there was a brief period when every time Saturday and I went to the forest we would see puppies. So many puppies! Another walk, more puppies!

45. *This is getting ridiculous,* we said, *how can there be so many puppies*? And on that very walk, after we'd already said it was ridiculous, we met another three puppies.

46. *It's like the woodchips,* I said, looking around the forest for signs of what all these puppies meant.

47. *If the puppies are the woodchips,* I thought, *what is the woodpecker?*

48. I mentioned this to my friend, Holly, who kindly and sensitively directed me away from seeing some unknown meaning in all those puppies.

Consciousness (as purpose)

49. Maybe consciousness has an unknown purpose, I wondered, like Ghosh wonders whether electricity has an unknown purpose.

50. Some say Sheila Heti's books are an exploration of the "feeling of consciousness." In *Motherhood*, Heti uses tossing coins for the *I Ching* and visiting fortune-tellers as the scaffolding for a story about being the grandchild of Holocaust survivors deciding whether to birth a child; such a seemingly light structure holding all that moral and intellectual weight.

Citation (as form)

51. The day Aunty Mandy told me to write, I was down by the ocean watching the water from a park bench. We talked on the phone for a long time. The blue sky was full of birds and I counted the different types as we spoke: an older bald eagle with its colours landing in a Douglas fir tree and a younger one circling over the ocean; three types of duck-like water fowl picking at seaweed; young seagulls squawking at their mothers; crows fussing in the rocks.

52. *You should write about us,* Aunty Mandy said, and when I replied I wasn't sure they were my stories to tell, she wasn't impressed. *You're not one of those are you?* she said. I laughed and laughed: *You know I am!* I said. *You know I'm one of "them."*

Omission (as form)

53. *Omissions are as important as inclusions,* I write in my notebook early one morning. I omit evidence that an infant separated from its birth parent creates indelible loss for that person because to offer it as one side of a debate feels grubby, like taking logic too far. It feels more rational to recount the time I was flipping through *The Body Keeps*

Score by Bessel van der Kolk and noticed that Saturday had used a favoured concert ticket to mark the section on "Alexithymia: no words for feelings"; better to allow a pink ticket stub to wordlessly represent the pre-verbal brain.

Citation (as intimacy)

54. Citation is a joy for Billy-Ray Belcourt and "intertextual intimacy" for Lauren Fournier. Michele Merritt uses autoethnographic essay to reference her own experiences in a way traditional scholarship can hardly allow.

55. The summer that Saturday came "out of the fog," I often thought about *The Argonauts* by Maggie Nelson as I walked in the forest: about partners with two identities and two lives, the before name and the after name, the mighty emotional and physical quests for a truth that is both personal and, at times, unbearably cultural.

56. When I look at Saturday I am reminded that I cannot understand; I can only listen and see and believe and cite.

Form (Knausgård)

57. Karl Ove Knausgård wrote a massive six volume autobiographical novel and turned the insignificant into the significant by writing it down. He said it was the form that allowed him to do it; instead of the move towards minimalism, he said he could only write if he included too much – too much detail, too many words, too many bodily transgressions.

58. I tried to write about the puppies in the forest to make it more real. I wondered whether consciousness has a physicality to it that is unseen, like soundwaves.

Structuralism

59. I once tried to apply Claude Lévi-Strauss' theory of structuralism to dystopian novels. I made thematic and content matrixes. I wanted it to be mathematical. *Lévi-Strauss isn't mathematical,* my supervisor, Stephen Muecke, told me. *Structuralism is too simple,* he said, *one-to-one is not enough, it must be many-to-many*.

60. Maybe that is why there are so many forms; genres sprouting up like puppies.

61. *But anyway,* Stephen told me after reading this piece, *I don't think Levi-Strauss is doing you any good here.* And later, after sending me a manuscript of *The Hundred*s by Lauren Berlant and Kathleen Stewart, he said: *The authors have embraced a fictocritical style.* And later still: *You didn't make it to a hundred.* Trump is one-to-one; fictocritcism is many-to-many.

Mathematics

62. I can't stop thinking about how patterns are mathematical. Electricity, tides, soundwaves, and snowflakes are all mathematical. The appearance of puppies and their movements around the forest are mathematical. All patterns are mathematical. *Is consciousness also mathematical?* I wondered.

63. If it's possible to see the patterns sound waves make with a piece of plywood and some woodchips, surely there would be a way to see the pattern consciousness makes, I thought when walking in the forest one day. And I got the feeling that the pattern that consciousness would make would be the same patterns that sound waves make, the same patterns that puppies make, the same patterns in flowers and in leaves.

Form (Ghosh)

64. The old forms will not do for our times, Ghosh says. "I have come to recognise that the challenges that climate change poses for the contemporary writer derive ultimately from the grid of literary forms and conventions that came to shape the narrative imagination in precisely that period when the accumulation of carbon in the atmosphere was rewriting the destiny of the earth," he says.

65. To express new ways of thinking (or to express the inexpressible!), we need new forms. And they are popping up, like puppies and woodchips and sound waves.

Form (up island)

66. Back when Saturday was Scott, he told me about the old-growth hemlocks up island that are hundreds of years old but look like spindly little trees because they grow on thin skiffs of soil. The trees are being cleared to make way for windfarms, so his friend goes up to save them and turns them into bonsai.

Form (in the back garden)

67. In the garden on a bright northern hemisphere summer afternoon, I talked to a friend about form.

68. I had been trying to read the short stories of Jorge Louis Borges. I never understood Borges, but people I admire admired him, so I kept trying. To me, his stories feel like tricks, like Escher paintings. "Parlour games," as Andrè Maurois describes them in the preface of *Labyrinths*. After which, he says, "the form is more important than the content."

69. At the time I read this, I was already confused about form because of a comment by Knausgård: "Everything has to submit to form," he wrote in *My Struggle, Book One*. "If

any of literature's other elements are stronger than form, such as style, plot, theme, if any of these overtake form, the result suffers."

70. So when Aurora was snuggled up in an Australian winter and I was sitting on an Adirondack chair in the Canadian sun, we talked on the phone for a long time about form. What I remember boiled down to one thing Aurora told me: *The glass is the form and the water is the content; this is how the content can change depending on the form it's in.*

71. When my supervisor, Kylie Cardell, read this, she said it's not just form that's important. *Genre matters, too,* she said. *You can hold water in a bucket, but you don't drink from it.*

Form (Wittgenstein)

72. Ludwig Wittgenstein said that the world is "the facts in a logical space." I'm trying to apply this idea to the puppies. I'm trying to apply it to that belief I had that Trump would win. If consciousness is mathematical patterns, then maybe the fact that I thought he would win contributed to the patterns that led to him winning.

73. Despite thinking it would be a disaster – for humanity, for puppies, for the world – I nevertheless believed it would happen. *We are on a cultural path towards structuralism,* I thought. *Overlaying one irony with a new irony is very one-to-one.*

Woodshed (early pandemic)

74. The night Trump was defeated Dionne came over. Because of the pandemic, we sat on the swing in the woodshed. It was cold and raining and we sipped from cans of beer as the count came in. I confessed to Dionne that I was trying to believe Trump would be defeated because of the very small possibility that my believing he would win last time contributed to the outcome.

75. *It's a long shot,* I said, *but it's consequential enough that I'm taking it seriously. Just, you know, in case.*

76. Dionne is kind and logical. She said what I thought wouldn't make any difference, as a kind and logical person would do.

77. Still, I was willing just in case. And when I remembered Ghosh and the electricity I thought: *Just as well.* When I think about climate change I think: *As weird as it may be to believe we can fix it, we have to. It's our only hope.*

Utopian turn (Belcourt)

78. When I read Belcourt discussing a utopian turn, I felt comforted. *Finally*, I thought, *somewhere to go.*

79. *We can't tackle climate change without hope*, I say to Saturday because he has none and I feel like things might change if he did. *How can I have hope when I was abandoned by my own mother?* he replies. And I have to admit that I don't know.

The Big B

80. One day Aunty Raylene's daughter, Monique, went to her mother. Monique was teary. *What is it?* Aunty Raylene asked. But Monique couldn't speak because she was crying. *What <u>is</u> it?!* Aunty Raylene repeated. Monique choked a little. *Is it the Big C?* Aunty Raylene asked. (It was the Big C that took Aunty Raylene not long after). Monique still didn't speak. *Tell me!* Aunty Raylene repeated. *Is it the Big C?!*

81. *Noooo,* Monique finally cried. *It's the Big B!*

82. *The Big B?* Aunty Raylene said, mystified. *What,* she demanded, *is the Big B?!*

83. *B-b-baby…* Monique whispered through her tears. It was number three and Monique wasn't sure she could cope with the surprise, for she was quite far along when she found out.

84. After the first Big B, Monique said that when she took her baby to the supermarket in that little country town, she was afraid people would judge her and wonder if that baby could be hers.

85. I hope she's forgotten she felt that. I hope it's in the wind circling around the Spencer Gulf and in the spinifex rolling across the dunes.

86. And what about whitefellas? Did we forget or just close our eyes tight?

87. If her fear is the woodchips, then whitefella business is the bird up there tapping on the tree.

Form (denial)

88. I want to understand what it means to deny form. Saturday holds up a glass, but he is told there is no glass and for most of his life he believes this. Aunty Mandy didn't know she was part of the Stolen Generation until she was past thirty. "Our adoptive parents didn't talk about it," she said once said to a journalist.

89. The unprompted defences also come from the times and places Ghosh refers to, when climate change started and colonial expansion was peaking.

90. On the one hand, the pull back: *They didn't know any better*.

91. On the other, the push forward: *We must do better*.

The inexpressible (Wittgenstein)

92. "There is indeed the inexpressible," Wittgenstein says. "This *shows* itself; it is the mystical." Bertrand Russell says that, according to Wittgenstein, assuming the whole is logical without accounting for mysticism would be "a fiction, a mere delusion." A fiction that cannot account for the world, like Ghosh saying the novel cannot account for climate change.

93. White culture, colonial culture, patriarchal culture, climate-changing culture, the culture that layers irony upon irony: All have serious and life-threatening deficiencies. *If the woodchips are scurvy,* I thought, *what is the woodpecker?*

94. Logic has a limited insight into how to understand the un-understandable (or how to express the inexpressible!). Yet the only people who seem to be attracted to mysticism are also the ones who would do away with logic in some sort of evangelical way. But neither of these will do when it comes to the big things, like the Big B or the Big C or the Big CC. For these, only both will do.

95. No wonder literary forms are proliferating like puppies, like consciousness, like cool changes moving eastward across the Spencer Gulf.

Virus (mid-pandemic)

96. I'm lying under a blue blanket with a cold. My head is full of what I need to write – Aunty Raylene's funeral, the baby with the black hair, the patterns of the puppies, the forest as a vortex, electricity with an unknown purpose, Heti and form and consciousness, Aunty Mandy and her mother, Saturday and his mother, about walking in a rainforest when there has been no rain, and how in the severing of mysticism white culture wants to appropriate First Nations' cultures – and I wonder about this virus in my throat and whether, like Ghosh's electricity analogy, maybe this virus has a purpose beyond the obvious because here I am, again, using a virus as a reason to lie still and think.

97. To occupy myself, I listen to a guided meditation that encourages listeners to "cultivate focus," and I wonder if the purpose ("about which we know nothing") of cold viruses is to cultivate focus.

98. Because it's stopped raining here, my shoes are covered in a layer of dusty, brown earth. I stop walking in the forest because watching the plants wither day after day is depressing. Instead, I walk along the ocean. The surface is covered in ripples that reflect the

sunlight and make me squint. In the distance, the ferry to Quadra Island travels back and forth, altering its path slightly each time to account for the currents and tides.

99. And every morning before I open my eyes, I notice a tightness in my stomach and wonder: *What am I doing on the other side?*

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15. For a short introduction to the social and political landscape of congenital dermal *melanocytosis* (CDM), see Connie S. Zhong, Jennifer T. Huang, and Vinod E. Nambudiri "Revisiting the History of the 'Mongolian Spot': The Background and Implications of a Medical Term Used Today," *Pediatric Dermatology* 36, no. 5 (May, 2019), 755–57.

37. Amitav Ghosh, *The Great Derangement: Climate Change and the Unthinkable* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2016), 4.

The primary theoretical purpose of this piece, inspired by Ghosh, is that old forms (of writing) that were developed in the nineteenth and twentieth century are not necessarily equipped to discuss the issues (content) of the twenty-first century. It is concerned with how blended forms, such as *autotheory* and autofiction, change the boundaries of cultural conversations.

50. Katya *Buresh*, "The Facts of Existence, Nature, and Consciousness," *BOMB*, February 2022, https://bombmagazine.org/articles/sheila-heti-katya-buresh/.

I, too, am interested in the "feeling of consciousness" and increasingly find myself attracted to writing that works in this space. Both Sheila *Heti* and Karl Ove *Knausgård* apply a type of stream of consciousness (or the feeling of it) to their autofiction; my piece is an experiment in the practical application of "stream of consciousness as form."

51. The most important citation for me is that Saturday and Aunty Mandy, in their respective styles, asked me to write something of their stories and gave their approval to what they read.

53. Bessel van der Kolk, *The Body Keeps Score: Brain, Mind, and Body in the Healing of Trauma* (New York: Penguin, 2014), 100.

54. Billy-Ray Belcourt, *A History of My Brief Body: A Memoir* (Toronto: Penguin, 2021), 16; Lauren Fournier, Autotheory *as Feminist Practice in Art, Writing, and Criticism* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2021), 135; Michele Merritt, "Rediscovering Latent Trauma: An Adopted Adult's Perspective," *Child Abuse & Neglect* 130, no. 2 (August, 2022), 1.

From the outset of *A History of My Brief Body*, Belcourt flags a non-reliance on facts in favour of "aesthetic concerns" (Author's Note). His landscape is not that of colonial scholarship, but a "theoretical site that is my personal history" (9). Likewise, instead of scholarship's preferred perspective of omnipotent god, Merritt is both researcher and subject: "I relate my own story to current research," she says (1).

55. Maggie Nelson, *The Argonauts* (MN: Greywolf Press, 2015).

For more on coming "out of the fog" see Merritt (3).

57. Karl Ove *Knausgård*, *My Struggle, Book One*, trans. Don Bartlett, 6 vols (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2009).

59. Claude Lévi-Strauss, "The Structural Study of Myth," *The Journal of American Folklore* 68, no. 270 (Oct-Dec 1955), 428–44.

61. Berlant, Lauren, and Kathleen Stewart. 2019. *The Hundreds*. Duke University Press.

64. Ghosh, 7.

65. Ludwig Wittgenstein, Tractatus Logico – Philosphicus, trans. C. K. Ogden. (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, *Trubner*, 1922), 105.

68. Jorge Louis Borges, *Labyrinths: Selected Stories and Other Writings*, ed. Donald A Yates and James E. Irby. (1962, rev. New York: New Directions, 2007); Maurois, *Andrè*. 1962. Preface to *Labyrinths* by *Jorges* Louis Borges, ed. Donald A. Yates and James E. Irby. Preface translated by Sherry Mangan (1962, rev New York: New Directions, 1962), xiii.

69. *Knausgård*, 197.

72. Wittgenstein, 20.

78. Belcourt, 10.

88. For more on The Stolen Generation, see Australian Human Rights Commission, *Bringing Them Home: Report of the National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres* Straight *Islander Children from Their Families*, Sydney, Australia: Commonwealth of Australia, 1997; Rachael Hocking, "How a Lifelong Friendship Inspired a Children's Book about the 1967 Referendum," *National Indigenous Television*, 25 May 2017, https://www.sbs.com.au/nitv/article/how-a-lifelong-friendship-inspired-a-childrens-book-about-the-1967-referendum/znv9vxjnl.

92. Wittgenstein, 105; Bertrand Russell, Introduction to Tractatus Logico – Philosphicus, by Ludwig Wittgenstein, trans. C. K. Ogden. (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, *Trubner*, 1922), 16.

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Book ~~Review~~ Resonance

EDITORIAL NOTE: This text is a transcript of an original audio piece. To listen to it, please go to projectpassage.net/mystical/moller

A ReSounding of the book The Voice of Hearing by Vivian Darroch-Lozowski

NELLE MÖLLER - KU Leuven/LUCA Schoof of Arts Brussels

Vivian Darroch-Lozowski. *The Voice of Hearing*. Toronto: Squint Press, 2020.

Dear Vivian,

I am sitting in a room in Brussels.

I am sitting on a train to Hamburg.

I am sitting in a waiting room of my doctor.

I am sitting in a forest.

I am reading in winter, and I am reading again in summer.

An Echo,

of an Echo,

of an Echo.

By reading your book, your voice is turning into my voice; now it is my voice that is reSOUNDING what your voice resounded from other voices.

The I is turning into an you, and the you is turning into an I.

My voice reacting towards a body, reciting a body of words that wrote you –

how to respond?

You write while writing this text, you learned to wait to respond.[1]

That is the ″moment before meaning.”[2]

The words,

a stream of sounds.

″We are creatures who have never been.″[3] How my heart jumps when you describe us, yourself, me, your reader, as a creature. Suddenly I become an entity that is not purely human anymore, an in-between state of flesh and language.

You write, ″Creature″ is from the Latin *creare*, to produce. It means a living thing, that which has been created. So it also references your writing.[4]

I am shapeshifting between the thing I am sitting on and the letters on the page. In my imagination, the image of a unicorn and the monoceros, red beast – they are now part of me. Were they always there? You describe them as antidotes to each other, and I wonder if they are also not the same.

You write that ″your writing is possessed by those whose forms and nature ARE NOT.

What is to begin writing about, from, for those that nature and forms are without existing.″[5]

While reading, I′m listening into the gap ″between you-my-me and you.”[6]

I try to attune to your words, to your sentences, to your columns,

each of them throws me into another chamber of resonance.

Meanings and non-meanings,

gaps of meanings,

gaps of understanding.

So often, I am ″pushed-to-the-edge″[7] while reading your text. There are passages where I feel almost you try to block from understanding. But then you write,

> I have indicated this (that I did not (do not) understand) several times and will repeat it many times again. In the context of writing these pages, not understanding is orchestration to a key-signature. Not understanding means unrecorded.[8]

At start, it is a seemingly arbitrary reading,

at the end, coming-into-being.

Resonating voices of thoughts while flipping the pages.

Your voice is becoming my voice, and your words are my words from the very beginning, carrying the meaning of my own experiences.

You write the words are all that I have. That they are the sound-marks of your soul. That you must obey them. It′s like you see them as creatures on their own. Not interested in what they are representative of, but what is present in them.[9]

You place them under a microscope in the second part of your text, where I feel at the beginning even more in a vortex of disorientation, but then I realize that the confusion is

actually an explanation. A moment where I actually listen to your word's significance, an hearing into your writing.

You write,

> But the words of mine which you first hear must appeal to yours. In a way is my words which separates both of us from your hearing, but also it is your hearing which separates me from my words.[10]

I take a few of these words,

resonating with me,

carrying them with me,

whisper them into your ear,

you as the listener:

The Words first Encountered

Exchanges of Absence

To Find what is Beyond

Awareness structures

Other words collected in me

Body of tubes that tremble and blow

Ear

Gift of being audible

Stuffed with a rose

Not space,

not time

Hearing speech

Threshold of existence

A Body lived

Remembering

Heard Sound

Women who spoke to me

De-creating what I is[11]

You write: ″experience, yes, words, particles, ruins and broken beauties of past knowledges live on these pages, but where I live is within the ruins of the sounds of this my own hand writing.”[12] And in the end again, that the only sound of voice is your hand moving on this paper.[13]

I write your words and sentences in my note-book. Is this your voice sounding? Or is it now my voice because it is my hand writing?

I am listening through your writing, I am listening through my reading.

What is sounding then in me is your voice, but also the experience of all other voices heard, read and listened to, to the audible spaces between those that form are not and those that form exists. Sounds of places and sounds of words.

″My ancestral forest,”[14] a forest of sound, an ecology of sound.

My voice in front of the microphone is turning into a gesture of appreciation for this polyvocal forest. A forest my voice is part of.

It emerged into the chamber of resonance.

You write,

> We are sonorous beings, and the surround crucial to our sonorous beings is these pages. We vibrate herein.[15]

Thank you for pointing out that writing is a transformation in practice of what I hold in common with other beings: existence.

By hearing, listening, into this common ground an understanding can be made that goes beyond words and meanings, an understanding that has the possibility to attune myself to what is different from myself.

Thank you for listening to my voice, this chord of frequencies forming what I call my voice; it is now and never was just my voice; it is also not just a sound. These words spoken by me are a resonance within a consciousness that is not just mine, a voicing that is dancing between the gaps of confusion.

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[1] Vivian Darroch-Lozowski, The Voice of Hearing, 2nd ed. (Toronto: Squint Press, 2020), 104.

[2] Darroch-Lozowski, 88.

[3] Darroch-Lozowski, 37.

[4] Darroch-Lozowski, 41.

[5] Darroch-Lozowski, 39.

[6] Christof Migone, "Viva Vivian: An Introduction" to The Voice of Hearing, 2nd ed., by Vivian Darroch-Lozowski, 1–25 (Toronto: Squint Press, 2020), 15.

[7] Darroch-Lozowski, 32.

[8] Darroch-Lozowski, 153.

[9] Darroch-Lozowski, 48–49.

[10] Darroch-Lozowski, 68.

[11] Darroch-Lozowski, 117–153.

[12] Darroch-Lozowski, 89.

[13] Darroch-Lozowski, 159.

[14] Gaston Bachelard, The Poetics of Space: The Classic Look at How We Experience Intimate Places, 16th ed., trans. M. Jolas (Boston: Beacon), 189.

[15] Darroch-Lozowski, 72.

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AUTHORS' BIOGRAPHIES

J'LYN CHAPMAN is a writer, teacher, artist, and the author of *To Limn / Lying In*, winner of the PANK Nonfiction Book Contest (2020), *Beastlife* (Calamari Archive, 2016), and the chapbooks *A Thing of Shreds and Patches* (Essay Press, 2016) and *Bear Stories* (Calamari Press 2008). She also curated the interview chapbook *The Form Our Curiosity Takes* (Essay Press 2015). Chapman currently serves as Assistant Professor at Regis University in Denver, Colorado, and coordinates the MA specializations in Creative Writing, Literature, and Pedagogy. You can discover more writing at jlynchapman.com.

SEBASTIÁN GONZÁLEZ DE GORTARI (Mexico City 1985) is a visual artist, writer and researcher. His body of work is centered on exploring magical and animistic ways of looking at the world and the self and how these notions blur the line between dichotomies such as rational/magical, objective/subjective, western and non-western . Through different disciplines such as sculpture, video and performance, he enters in dialogue with the unseen forces shaping reality. From these dialogues, spirits announce themselves and acquire temporal bodies to infiltrate our diurnal lives. He is currently a PhD researcher in Arts at Hasselt University-PXL in Belgium. For his doctorate, González de Gortari is exploring the fetish as both an effect and a series of historical objects. He has exhibited his work in Mexico, the Netherlands, Germany, Belgium and Turkey. He lives and works in Frankfurt am Main, Germany.

LIBBY KING is a creative writer and PhD student in the Department of Humanities, Arts, and Social Sciences at Flinders University in South Australia.

THEODORE LOCKE is a Visiting Assistant Professor at Trinity University who mainly works in metaphysics and philosophy of language but also has interests in critical and literary theory as well as creative writing.

NELE MÖLLER (°1990) is an artist and PhD researcher at KU Leuven/LUCA Schoof of Arts Brussels. She works primarily in sound, video, performance, and radio. In her project 'The Forest Echoes Back,' she focuses on forest conversations, historical nature inscriptions, and listening practices.

GODA PALEKAITĖ (1987, Vilnius) is a Brussels-based artist and researcher working in the intersection of contemporary art, performance, artistic research, literature, and anthropology. Currently, she is a Ph.D. candidate at Hasselt University and PXL-MAD School of Arts. Her practice evolves around projects exploring the politics of historical narratives, the agency of dreams and imagination, and social conditions of creativity. Goda publishes fiction, essayistic and curatorial writings, often merging the three. Her bilingual book of fictional biographies of historical characters "Schismatics" was published by LAPAS books. Her recent solo shows were opened at Kunsthal Gent in Ghent and Editorial in Vilnius, Centre Tour à Plomb in Brussels, Konstepidemin in Gothenburg and RawArt Gallery in Tel Aviv. In the last years, her performances and installations have been presented at Whitechapel Gallery in London, BOZAR Brussels, "Swamp pavilion" in The Biennale Architettura 2018 in Venice, Tranzit Bratislava, Vilnius Contemporary Art Center, Vilnius international theatre festival "Sirenos", among others. www.palekaite.space

BRADY SCHUH is a graduate student at Harvard Divinity School. Their research focuses on the rhetoric and real-world impact of religious texts.

KRISTOF SMEYERS is a postdoctoral researcher at the Ruusbroec Institute, University of Antwerp. His work explores the cultural history of mysticism, folklore, the supernatural and the body. He is also interested in non-human histories, and writes about ravens, wolves and jellyfish.

JEREMY STEWART is a SSHRC Doctoral Fellow in English Literature at Lancaster University under the supervision of Professor John Schad. He is also a member of the Critical Poetics Research Group housed at Nottingham Trent University. A writer and musician, Stewart's third book, In Singing, He Composed a Song, was published in 2021 by the University of Calgary Press as

part of its Brave & Brilliant series (Series Editor: Aritha van Herk) and shortlisted for the 2022 ReLit Award. Stewart won the 2014 Robert Kroetsch Award for Innovative Poetry for Hidden City (Invisible Publishing). He is also the author of (flood basement (Caitlin Press 2009). In recognition of his work as founder of Casse-Tête: A Festival of Experimental Music, Stewart received the 2016 Barbara Pentland Award of Excellence honouring his "extraordinary contribution to Canadian music" from the Canadian Music Centre. Stewart lives in Vancouver, Canada with his partner and children.

CREDITS

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