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TASMANIA

**Foster Wallace's "The Empty Plenum" Revisited: Exploring the Intersection of
Philosophic and Literary Inquiry**

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DECLARATION

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*You could call this technique “Deep Nonsense,” meaning I guess a linguistic flow of strings, strands, loops, that through the very manner of its formal construction flouts the ordinary cingula of “sense” and through its defiance of sense’s limits manages somehow to “show” what cannot ordinarily be “expressed”. (David Foster Wallace, *The Empty Plenum*)*

I think I summed up my position when I said: philosophy ought really to be written only as a form of poetry.
(Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Culture and Value*)

*Poets utter great and wise things which they do not themselves understand. (Plato, *The Republic*)*

But what other philosopher has found the antidote to illusion in the particular and repeated humility of tracking the uses of humble words, looking philosophically as it were beneath our feet rather than over our heads?
(Stanley Cavell, *On Wittgenstein*)

Most really pretty girls have pretty ugly feet . . .

(David Foster Wallace, *Broom of the System*)

There is nobody at the window in the painting of the house, by the way. I have now concluded that what I believed to be a person is a shadow. If it is not a shadow, it is perhaps a curtain. As a matter of fact it could actually be nothing more than an attempt to imply depths, within the room. Although in a manner of speaking all that is really in the window is burnt sienna pigment. And some yellow ochre. In fact there is no window either, in that same manner of speaking, but only shape. So that any few speculations I may have made about the person at the window would therefore now appear to be rendered meaningless, obviously. Unless of course I subsequently become convinced that there is somebody at the window all over again. I have put that badly.

(David Markson, *Wittgenstein’s Mistress*)

People said the poet and the philosopher were lovers, but it never looked that way. One had an apartment and ideas and money, and the other had his legend and his poetry and the fervor of the true believer, a doglike fervor, the fervor of the whipped dog that’s spent the night or all its youth in the rain.

(Robert Bolaño, 2666)

For I am a Rain Dog, too.

(Tom Waits, Lyrics to “Rain Dogs”)

Dedicated to the rain dogs

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Abstract

In a political moment characterised by post-truth ideologically generated misinformation and algorithmically propagated discourses, questions of fact, of inquiry, of perspective are paramount. This work examines what it means to write literature or to do philosophy while encountering a world of diffuse truths. It asks how can we retain clarity without erasing the fact that perspectival knowledge is always already embedded, piecemeal, contextual? To answer this question, I turn to a more foundational one, that has plagued philosophy since Plato proclaimed, “there is an old quarrel between philosophy and poetry” (*Republic*, 607b5–6). My thesis picks up on a central aspect of the quarrel, the claim that art doesn’t lead to truth. I ask: what is the nature of literary inquiry and how can literature distinguish itself as an autonomous form of intellectual inquiry, if it can at all? Beginning with David Foster Wallace’s “The Empty Plenum”, I argue for a novel ‘perspectival’ or ‘mystical’ interpretation of Wittgenstein’s *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*. Contrary to dominant literary scholarship, I claim that it is Wittgenstein’s Saying–Showing distinction that offers us a guide for conceiving of the true value of literary inquiry, and thereby provides us with a robust response to Plato. The ‘ancient quarrel’ can thus be addressed resolutely. What does literature offer? Literature is free to communicate where philosophy is unable—to *show* what philosophy cannot *say*. Using the examples of Davidson, Heidegger, Wallace, Wittgenstein, Borges and Lerner I flesh out the notion of showing in literature, and how it functions to induce a perspectival shift in order that the reader may see the world ‘aright’, whatever ‘aright’ may be. This dissertation may be best conceived as a contribution to the project of questioning inherent power-dynamics and ideological bias that inform the disciplinary separation of literature and philosophy.

A Note on translation

Evidently for a dissertation examining the manner in which language informs our modalities and morphologies of truthfulness, it must be understood that translation is inevitably an act of creation, rather than fidelity, or equivalence. Consequently, in engaging with specific translations over others there are a number of critical preconditions which have governed my choices, and I will discuss my reasons for privileging specific translations in what follows. The primary texts in translation that I examine are works by Plato, Wittgenstein and Heidegger. I will reference in the text where interesting alternate significations arise, or otherwise where secondary translations are consulted, they will be footnoted.¹

I rely for my exegesis of Plato's *Republic* on Allan Bloom's recent translation. My choice here is grounded in a recent analysis of English translations offered by Richard Polt. Bloom's translation is widely praised by scholars and critics as a faithful and intelligent rendering of the material. While alternatives offered by Grube, for instance, are arguably more readable and thus valuable for classroom use, in the trade-off between accuracy and readability Bloom's near verbatim translation has a lot to offer.

Wittgenstein's *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* (hereafter abbreviated to the *Tractatus*, or *TLP*), while translated initially by Ogden, was later re-translated by Pears and McGuinness. Since it was offered in 1961, the Pears-McGuinness translation of the *Tractatus* (henceforth, PMT) has been near universally acclaimed as a decided improvement on Ogden's earlier translation (OT). While OT was authorised by Wittgenstein initially, commentators have focused on the improvements in terms of clarity and accuracy of PMT (see Urmson, 298–300). With very few exceptions commentaries have either directly or indirectly seconded this opinion—evident in their typical inclusion of PMT and omission of OT in abbreviations, bibliographies and acknowledgements. Consequently, while textual disagreements persist, I will rely in what follows on the PMT treatment.

Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations* (referenced intext as, *PI*) was published posthumously in 1953 and was edited and translated by Anscombe. A new edition was translated by Hacker and Schulte in 2009. In this dissertation the later edition is treated as

¹ I thank my examiner for their valuable reflections on the need for the inclusion of this section, to guide my reader.

authoritative. While based on Anscombe's translation—which benefits from Anscombe's personal acquaintance with Wittgenstein—the later addition includes a number of improvements: adjustments to exceedingly loose translations offered by Anscombe, and updates to translations which, while initially valuable, have the potential to be misleading in today's context given the evolution of the English language.

The secondary literature I draw upon in justifying the translations of Heidegger upon which I rely include Macquarrie and Robinson's (1962) translation of *Being and Time*. A more recent translation of *Being and Time* exists by J. Stambaugh (1996); however, while this translation has many virtues and may be argued to be a more user-friendly guide for Heidegger novices, I follow Wheeler (2011) in conceiving of the standard Macquarrie and Robinson translation, at this time, as the first choice in Heidegger scholarship. My reasoning is that given the relative brevity of my engagement with Heidegger, and the impossibility of a deep dive at this time, I have followed convention and for the most part relied on the older tried and true translations. Furthermore, as the Macquarrie and Robinson translations of key terms are so thoroughly entrenched in English-language discussions of Heidegger, this in itself offers a compelling reason to stick with it and avoid confusion. I also draw on the useful collection of English translations of the most philosophical of Heidegger's earliest writing offered by Kisiel and Sheehan's (2007) *Becoming Heidegger: On the Trail of His Early Occasional Writings*.

My selections in reliance upon Schopenhauer translations is worth mentioning, as his primary work, explored albeit briefly here, is known under three different titles: *The World as Will and Representation*, *The World as Will and Idea* and *The World as Will and Presentation*—by Haldane and Kemp, Payne, and Aquila respectively. While all offer largely acceptable renderings of Schopenhauer's word *vorstellung*, I will refer to Aquila's translation in the section on *the sublime*, as the present-day translation, to my mind, is more accessible to the contemporary reader.

INTRODUCTION

There has never been, and perhaps never will be, an adequate resolution to the ‘ancient quarrel’ between the poets and the philosophers. What is clear is that in Plato’s ideal society, in one of the forms in which it exists today—academia’s ivory tower—the poets have been forcibly ejected. The methods of inquiry deemed admissible by the analytic hegemon are quite specific, and position literature squarely on the outside. I enter this dialogue by considering the relevance of an under-examined ficto-critical essay “The Empty Plenum: David Markson’s Wittgenstein’s Mistress” (hereafter abbreviated to “The Empty Plenum”) by author David Foster Wallace, as a frame for exploring literature’s relation to philosophy, by drawing on the distinction between *showing* and *saying* in Wittgenstein’s *Tractatus*.

This study argues that certain questions, at once possessed of a recognisable philosophical warrant, can be irreducibly posed by and through literature. My argument, in brief, is that literature can *show* some part of what philosophy cannot *say*. It is in this sense that metaphysical novels and poetry are not limited to illustrating or alluding to philosophy, and in this sense that philosophical literature can distinguish itself as an autonomous form of intellectual inquiry, rather than derivative or decocted philosophy. It is on these grounds, among others, that we should resist and respond to Plato’s ejection of the poets from his ideal society.

Structure

This Introduction examines Plato's 'ancient quarrel', his ejection of the poets from his ideal society, and the modern form in which this quarrel persists in the academy. I will examine the questions: what is the nature of literary inquiry and how does it differ from philosophical inquiry? Plato's quarrel serves as a frame for understanding the importance of these questions and the dialogue that has arisen around them.

Chapter I begins by providing a brief background on Wallace's article "The Empty Plenum" and the text it analyses, Markson's *Wittgenstein's Mistress*, before evaluating both Ramal and Ryerson's interpretations of the relevance of "The Empty Plenum" to Wallace's overall conception of the relation between literature and philosophy. I then examine what I take to be the major pitfalls in both critics' arguments; that is, a failure to recognise the importance of the mysticism of Wittgenstein's *Tractatus* if we are to comprehend Wallace's conception of the relation between philosophy and literature.

Chapter II considers the various interpretations of the central paradox of Wittgenstein's *Tractatus*: that if we adopt Wittgenstein's picture theory of meaning, then the *Tractatus* itself is rendered a series of nonsensical pseudo-propositions. I argue that to correctly resolve this paradox is to conceive of the *Tractatus* as a project intended to serve as elucidatory, prompting a 'perspectival shift' in order to acquaint us with mystical experience, rather than an attempt to communicate propositional truths. I then draw on Wittgenstein's distinction between showing and saying, to argue that literature's distinctive abilities rest in its capacity to *show* what cannot be *said*. I argue the relevance of a mystical interpretation of Wittgenstein's *Tractatus* has been overlooked by theorists who have focused primarily on exegesis of his later *Philosophical Investigations*. This is a failing, I argue, as the *Tractatus* provides fruitful avenues for inquiry into the intersection between philosophy and literature.

Chapter III explores what these fruitful avenues are. I examine how this notion of showing might be best understood in literary terms; that is, how showing here has a technical sense and can be understood by examining devices and techniques such as: use, absences, emotional implications, bland fact and deep nonsense. I draw examples for each from Wallace and his reading of *Wittgenstein's Mistress*. In this way I also provide an evaluation of the success of Wallace's own philosophical narratives in the light of his own critique and identify areas for future research.

Chapter IV then examines how the perspectival shift described by Wittgenstein can be more fully understood through a process of triangulation: I turn to Heidegger's hermeneutics, notions of situatedness and phronesis, the author Ben Lerner's conception of the poem as necessarily a record of failure, Davidson's work on Metaphor and Borges' reflections on writing.

Chapter V offers a radical contextualising of the entire argument: I examine why it is important to ask these questions about the role of literary inquiry, in the current political moment characterised by post-truth or 'truthiness'. I examine the implications of 'canon' and the dangers in viewing the perspectival shift induced by literary works as intrinsically moral. In seeing the world 'aright', I argue, one is always encountering a world of diffuse truths, where perspectival knowledge is embedded, piecemeal and contextual. It is this, I argue, which points to the power embedded in the maintenance of the disciplinary 'break' between literature and philosophy.

Chapter VI examines the connection between my exegesis and creative work, *Murmurations*, both in terms of content explored in the creative work, and the endeavour to induce a perspectival shift in the reader, by Showing or gesturing towards the archetypes and universals embedded within a purported 'lover's discourse', in the form of Roland Barthes. In the Conclusion, I return to the roots and look at how this discussion relates to Plato's 'ancient quarrel'.

The ancient quarrel

Poets utter great and wise things which they do not themselves understand.

Plato, *The Republic*, Book II, Section V.

Plato's 'ancient quarrel' provides the context for the questions I seek to examine; questions such as: what is the nature of literary inquiry and how does it differ from philosophical inquiry? And, considering that the 'ancient quarrel' between philosophy and literature concerns, among other things, if and how literature can distinguish itself as an autonomous form of intellectual inquiry, can literary art forms do more than allude to or illustrate philosophy?

The quarrel is epitomised in Plato's notorious claim that the poets (and perhaps rhetoricians)² must be banished from the 'just' city—the *philosophical republic*. Plato's fictionalised Socrates states that, should any dramatic poet happen to show up, "there is no man of your kind among us in our city, nor is it lawful for such a man to arise among us". Further, the fictionalised Socrates asserts: "Only so much of poetry as is hymns to gods or celebration of good men should be admitted into a city" (607a). It should be noted that while many argue Plato was the first to articulate the quarrel, some of Plato's philosophical predecessors, such as Xenophanes and Heraclitus, directed severe criticisms against the poets (Nightingale, 65). But whether Plato was the first philosopher to discern the presence of this deep conflict between philosophy and poetry, while an interesting question, is somewhat tangential to our purposes, as it is the enduring ramifications of his critique that concern us here.

Much of the final book of *The Republic* is an attack on poetry, indeed this quarrel between philosophy and poetry continues thematically throughout Plato's work, and is perhaps best presented in four dialogues: *The Ion*, *The Republic*, *The Gorgias*, and *The Phaedrus*. Consequently, interpretive dispute rages over what Plato meant by poetry and whether, for instance, his critique applies to sculpture, music, or the arts in general. Indeed, parallel debates are being played out between many art forms and philosophy, even though the scope is limited in this thesis to literature.³ Plato speaks always of 'poetry' or 'the poets' rather than literature—there being no ancient Greek word for the latter. The idea that there is a sort of writing, characterised by a greater density of meaning, or a higher quality (however we would like to define quality) is a new one. In what follows I will assume, however, that Plato's injunction applies more broadly than poetry, to include literature in several forms. At this stage I will leave the definition of literature as broad: for a loose

² Indeed, Plato associated poetry and rhetoric very closely. In *Gorgias* (502), he characterises poetry as a kind of rhetoric; holding that the ontological and psychological bases of the criticism of poetry serve also as the bases of the criticism of rhetoric. Whether poetry and rhetoric should in fact be grouped together, and whether any interesting relation exists between the two, are controversial questions not to be examined in this thesis, as my interest resides in philosophy's relation to the literary arts. I will note the bearing of Borges's distinction between poetry and rhetoric, where he writes: "all poetry consists in feeling things as being strange, while all rhetoric consists in thinking of them as quite common, as obvious" (18).

³ Nonetheless, the overlap between theorists' engagement with this topic for dissimilar disciplines is telling: rhetoric, theatre and music being but three examples. Peter's *Antithetical Arts*, for instance, concerns the 'ancient quarrel' between literature and music, while Andro Linklater's *The Santorini Experiment* describes the way philosophy ended its 'ancient quarrel' with theatre. Jeff Mitscherling, in *The European Legacy*, considers the ancient and current quarrels between philosophy and rhetoric. Whether some common essence could be distilled concerning the way different art forms function as inquiry is a question worthy of further study.

definition, in the style of Roberto Bolaño, one might say literature can include prose, novel or short story; dramaturgy, poetry or essay; criticism, prose or verse.

Plato offers numerous and interrelated grounds for his theoretical expulsion of the poets from the just society, outlined within *The Republic*. While some of these justifications depend heavily on specific epistemological and metaphysical doctrines that hold little appeal for many contemporary philosophers, all can nonetheless be formulated in ways that resonate with modern philosophy's broad conception of itself.

For instance, Plato argued that poets brought no new knowledge to their audience, prioritised emotion over reason and made half-baked ideas sound attractive (*Republic*, 395). He criticised literature's capacity to engage and incite our emotions while bypassing our rational faculties and distrusted the poet's ability to construct simulacra of real persons and events. Consequently, poetry functions as a distraction from the slow and hard struggle to comprehend what lies behind reality's often-misleading presentations of itself. He opposed the poet's self-image as being subject to divine inspiration, which he felt revealed poetry to lack any secure, transmissible and impersonal body of knowledge that might ground a claim to any depth of understanding. Not only did he view the poet's imaginative capacities as non-rational, but he also perceived the poet to be essentially amoral; that is, entirely unconstrained by truthfulness, in their acts of creation. Taken together, Plato arguably viewed poetry as posing a fundamental threat of corruption to the soul of the poet and that of his readers and listeners, thereby creating further obstacles to humanity's attempts to achieve self-knowledge and live a good life through a lucid grasp of reality—the task to which he viewed philosophy to be distinctively, indeed uniquely, devoted.

The continual relevance of the objections to literature presented by Plato should be evident in the way analytic philosophy attempts to get its bearings, or self-situate, by adopting a set of goals, and a certain methodological toolkit that excludes the literary. Conflict persists today over what we should understand philosophy *to be* and what methodologies are considered acceptable. It may be misleading to talk about a monolithic singular philosophical project in light of the influence of movements like poststructuralism, phenomenology, psychoanalysis, feminism and postcolonialism, which raise serious objections to such a project.

Nonetheless a dominant philosophical culture undeniably exists, in which certain methodological tools are drawn upon.⁴ This methodological toolkit could be said to include, for instance, forms of logical and conceptual analysis, laboriously self-critical arguments and thought experiments, and goals of clarity and reasoned argument set against literary methods of inquiry and expression (Beaney, 1998). ‘Clarity’ is of course a very unclear notion, but, whatever it is,⁵ it comes with a deep distrust of rhetorical embellishment and devices.⁶ It should be noted, however, that despite such an apparently blunt polemic expulsion of the poets, Plato at times exalted poetry and the narrative arts. In the passage in which he ejects the poets, he also refers to the poet as “holy” (*Republic*, 534). Goldstein, among others, has argued that he intended the descriptor *holy* just as seriously as the *banishment*. Indeed, Goldstein writes: “Plato wasn’t one of the many philosophers insensible to deep aesthetic stirrings” (6). Plato, himself, is often proclaimed to be one of the greatest literary artists in the Western philosophical canon. Plato seems to hope that poetry can muster up a respectable philosophical comeback, convincing him that it shouldn’t be ejected, writing: “nonetheless, if poetry has any argument to bring forward that proves it ought to have a place in a well-governed city, we at least would be glad to admit it, for we are ourselves very susceptible to its charms” (395). This thesis, then, is in a sense an attempt to bring forth such an argument: to demonstrate that there exist functions that literature can serve that are not available to philosophy.⁷

A recent collection, *The Wounded Animal*, provides a parallel attempt to reopen the issue of the ‘ancient quarrel’ which the editor Stephen Mulhall claims to have marked, and indeed defined, philosophy from its inception. The authors address this debate by considering the Tanner Lectures titled “The Lives of Animals” by novelist J. M. Coetzee. Interestingly the philosopher Christine Korsgaard presented a Tanner Lecture several years later, approaching the same topic—our responsibilities towards animals (2004). Her method, however, is strictly philosophical, presenting a Kantian argument without suggestion of literary device. In contrast Coetzee’s essays are peppered with meta-fictional, experimental devices. Nonetheless Coetzee’s approach is arguably deeply didactic, and therefore fails to

⁴ For a fuller discussion, see Chase (2010), *Analytic Philosophy and Dialogic Conservatism*.

⁵ For further on the notion of clarity, see Leibniz’s *Meditations on Knowledge, Truth and Ideas* where clarity is examined in the context of ‘clear and distinct’ perception.

⁶ For a thorough treatment of the nature of clarity, see Cohen’s (1986) case for analytic philosophy as essentially concerned with “reasoning about reasoning” (49).

⁷ That is, not available to philosophy *as* philosophy. A mode with delineated instruments of inquiry designed to exclude the literary. Much philosophical content has been examined and elucidated by methods not categorically definable as ‘philosophy’ according to parochial definitions, as shall be made evident in what follows.

fulfil some of the potential of literary inquiry. While beyond the scope of the present thesis, a contrast between the two works, and evaluation of how successful they are in conveying their arguments, offer insight. A further valuable point of inquiry, also beyond the scope of this thesis, concerns the fact that it has been Platonists in later antiquity who found ways to defend poetry against Plato's critiques, a case made by Miles and Baltzly (2018) in translating Proclus's commentary on Plato's *Republic*. Indeed, Neo-Platonists of late have argued for a mystical purpose for poetry, or at least for the form of poetry of which they approve—though this is couched in different terms. They also discuss the limits of language in conveying experience beyond language.⁸ I will turn now to the writings of David Foster Wallace, and Ludwig Wittgenstein.

Relevance of Wallace and Wittgenstein

David Foster Wallace provides footing for my entry into the 'ancient quarrel'. Wallace's interest in the intersection between philosophy and literature has often been overlooked in the emerging canon. Yet Wallace provides a penetrating analysis of this intersection in "The Empty Plenum". Consequently, I focus on this text, elucidating its major themes, and intending through this close analysis to highlight Wallace's overarching theory of successful philosophical narrative.

Other thinkers, Randy Ramal and James Ryerson, provide interpretations of this text from which I diverge. I evaluate Ryerson and Ramal's claims concerning Wallace's conception of philosophy's relation to literature, and Wallace's specific understanding of the aims of literature, as elucidated in "The Empty Plenum". Neither Ryerson nor Ramal do justice to Wallace's conception of the relationship between philosophy and literature. While each raise important issues, I argue that at the root of Wallace's discussion of the relation between philosophy and literature in "The Empty Plenum" is the saying-showing distinction made in Wittgenstein's *Tractatus*. By considering this distinction, overlooked by both writers, we can better understand Wallace's conception of the intersection of philosophy and literature.⁹

⁸ For other recent studies of non-discursivity evidencing this kind of Platonism, see Rappe (2007).

⁹ It is worth mentioning here that, while Kant draws a similar but tangential distinction between the noumenal and phenomenal world, he doesn't have the focus on conveying experience beyond language but more on the bracketing off of this unknowable noumenal world; therefore this will not be a focus in what follows (Simon, 45–51).

To make this case I explore the distinction in Wittgenstein's *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, between that which can be *said* and that which can only be *shown*. I then argue for the relevance of this notion to the 'ancient quarrel'. I aim to both provide a comprehensive reading of Wallace's conception of novelistic inquiry's relation to philosophy, set out in "The Empty Plenum", and also to argue Wittgenstein's Saying–Showing distinction bears on the 'ancient quarrel' between the philosophers and the poets, demonstrating that literature acts where philosophy is unable to—it shows what philosophers cannot say.

CHAPTER I: The Empty Plenum

In this chapter I will introduce David Foster Wallace, then examine the ficto-critical essay "The Empty Plenum". I will evaluate the current interpretation of Wallace's work by Ryerson and Ramal before making my case for the relevance of the saying-showing distinction made in Wittgenstein's *Tractatus* to Wallace's conception of philosophy's relation to literature.

1.1 David Foster Wallace

David Foster Wallace is often-labelled progenitor of a third wave of literary modernism christened the 'New Sincerity' or post-postmodernism.¹⁰ He is widely considered one of the most influential and innovative writers in recent decades.¹¹ Laurels aside, a critical literature surrounding his work has developed only in recent years. Amidst the still inchoate field of Wallace studies there exist works exploring Wallace's innovative writing modes and voices and his thematic concerns, including: the fragmentation of thought (Stern and McLaughlin, 2000); the relationship between happiness and boredom and tensions between the beauty and hideousness of human physicality (Feeney, 2011); solipsism (Krajeski, 2008); freedom (Wallace, 2008); mindfulness (McGurll, 2014) and moving beyond the irony and meta-fiction associated with postmodernism (Wallace, 1993). It is well established that Wallace had serious and abiding interests in academic philosophy.¹² His oeuvre is marked by philosophical concern with ethics and morality, epistemology and a distinctively Wittgensteinian interest in our everyday words and the world outside them.

¹⁰ For a detailed examination of Wallace's formative influence on contemporary fiction, see Boswell, *Understanding David Foster Wallace*.

¹¹ His work having, as well as public acclaim, garnered national attention and critical praise, receiving the MacArthur Fellowship and the Aga Khan Prize for Fiction.

¹² Wallace was, for a time, a graduate student in philosophy at Harvard, beginning with an interest in mathematical logic. See also his undergraduate thesis, *Fate, Time and Language*, published posthumously by Columbia University Press in 2010.

Ryerson writes, “[Wallace’s] serious early engagement with philosophy would play a lasting role in his work and thought, including his ideas about the purpose and possibilities of fiction” (2).

I should note that since completing this thesis greater attention has been paid to Wallace studies in general. Attending and presenting at the annual David Foster Wallace Conference in 2018 and 2019, I witnessed a number of scholars workshopping as yet unpublished or in-the-process-of publishing works, examining Wallace’s relation to animal rights, his influence on millennial-modernism, the concept of self-transcendence, worship, devotion, religion and spirituality. Wallace’s bearing on political freedom, responsibility, the nature of empathy and a whole host of topics of philosophical import.¹³ The trend has, however, been to attend to particular works and particular topics of moral/cultural import. But there has been scant work done on the topic of Wallace’s conception of the relationship between philosophy and literature *more broadly*.

Wittgenstein claimed that “it’s only by thinking even more crazily than philosophers do that you can solve their problems” (75). And, indeed, it is Wallace’s views on the *purpose* and *possibilities* of fiction, in relation to philosophy, that are the focus of this thesis. In the embryonic field of Wallace studies there exists only one established collection concerning Wallace and philosophy (Cahn, 2015) yet this text explicitly concerns his exploration of Richard Taylor’s ‘Fatalism’ and the *Semantics of Physical Modality* (Wallace, 1985). A recent collection, *Gesturing toward Reality* (2015), is the first in which there is direct address of Wallace’s thought to literature’s relation to philosophical inquiry. The titular allusion to Wittgenstein of *gesturing* towards reality is no accident, although the term gesture is problematic, which I will demonstrate. It nonetheless emphasises the influence of mysticism in Wittgenstein’s work, pre-empting the topic of this thesis. Despite this titular reference to Wittgenstein, the majority of the essays in *Gesturing Towards Reality* remain thematically concerned.¹⁴ The only piece in the collection to overtly take as its focus Wallace’s thought concerning literary/philosophical inquiry is an article by Randy Ramal,

¹³ At the Sixth Annual David Foster Wallace Conference at Illinois State University I presented an excerpt from *Murmurations*. At the fifth conference, I presented a paper on Wallace’s theory of the intersection between literature and philosophy.

¹⁴ Within this collection, some writers espouse overt spiritual or religious angles on his work; see, for instance, Bulger’s essay ‘A Less “Bullshitty” Way to Live: The Pragmatic Spirituality of David Foster Wallace’ or the way Wallace deals with topics including loneliness, boredom and depression. See Andrew Bennet’s ‘Inside David Foster Wallace’s Head: Attention, Loneliness, Suicide, and the Other Side of Boredom’.

responding to James Ryerson's introduction to *Fate, Time and Language*.¹⁵ Both critics explore how this topic is elucidated in "The Empty Plenum".¹⁶ These pieces by Ramal and Ryerson will be examined in detail in the following chapter.

While much work has been done analysing Wallace's major works, *Infinite Jest* (Burn, 2012), *Broom of the System* (Boswell, 2003) and *The Pale King* (Boswell, 2012), including the ficto-critical essay "Consider the Lobster" (Kaiser, 2014), little attention has been paid to Wallace's article "The Empty Plenum". It will be argued in the following section that this is a major oversight, given Wallace's "The Empty Plenum", a review of Markson's novel *Wittgenstein's Mistress*, is essential to understanding Wallace's conception of literature's role.

1.2 The Empty Plenum

To introduce Wallace's "The Empty Plenum", I should begin by outlining the novel it evaluates—David Markson's *Wittgenstein's Mistress*. This work may be categorised to be a highly stylised, experimental novel in the tradition of Samuel Beckett. It is presented as a series of statements made in the first person, in which the protagonist, a woman named Kate, believes herself to be the last human on earth. *Wittgenstein's Mistress* is heavy with allusions, references, and parallels drawn between Kate and fictional and historical characters, most notably: Helen of Troy, Achilles, Vincent van Gogh, William Gaddis, Ludwig Wittgenstein, William Shakespeare and Johannes Brahms. Many of these cameos are used to orient the reader towards certain themes, particularly those of language and memory.

Wallace held this novel in high esteem given that Markson's *Wittgenstein's Mistress* and Wallace's own first novel *The Broom of the System* (1987) were both formally and thematically concerned with Wittgenstein's writing—yet Wallace believed Markson was better able to express the existential worry he wished to depict in *Broom*. That is, the consequences of living in the kind of world Wittgenstein's *Tractatus* described. Ryerson writes: "Wallace felt that Markson's novel had succeeded in uniting literature and philosophy in the way that he, in *Broom*, tried but failed to do" (27). Wallace praised Markson's novel, considering it "an imaginative portrait of what it would be like actually to live in the sort of world the

¹⁵ *Fate, Time and Language* explores Wallace's philosophical background, examining his undergraduate honours thesis "Richard Taylor's 'Fatalism' and the Semantics of Physical Modality".

¹⁶ As an addendum Wallace's title refers to the solipsism felt in the empty world Markson conjures in *Wittgenstein's Mistress*: "damnation to ghostliness among ghosts, curating a plenum of statues, mistaking echoes for voices" (9).

logic & metaphysics of Wittgenstein's *Tractatus* posits", and that it "transforms metaphysics into angst" while revealing that "philosophy is first and last about spirit" (1990, 49). He felt Markson had succeeded in fusing philosophy and fiction by demonstrating the vital role of the novel of ideas in joining "cerebration & emotion, abstraction & lived life, transcendent truth-seeking & daily schlepping". In other words, Markson had delivered on Wallace's literary-philosophical ideal of "making heads throb heart like" (ibid).

For the above reason Wallace's analysis of *Wittgenstein's Mistress* raises concerns equally relevant to his own development as they were to his analysis of Markson's achievement, and so provides a reflection on his conception of literature more than any other ficto-critical analysis of a text provided by Wallace.¹⁷ My analysis of Wallace's "The Empty Plenum" proves useful to understanding his own work's development. It also seems fitting that his work be assessed in the narrative vein he elected to be measured against, by the parameters he sets for others. To understand Wallace's philosophical ambitions in literature, then, it is worth looking in detail at what Wallace thought Markson had achieved and why.

1.3 The Vocational Travelogue

To understand what Wallace took Markson to have achieved, we should return to the central questions of this thesis: can metaphysical novels do more than allude to or illustrate philosophy? Put differently, how is the purpose of Markson's novel *Wittgenstein's Mistress* different from that of Wittgenstein's own philosophical text, the *Tractatus*? And can Markson's novel do more than allude to or illustrate Wittgenstein's *Tractatus*? To answer this from Wallace's perspective I think it is instructive to look at his notion of the vocational travelogue.

Wallace, in his collection *Both Flesh and Not*, utilises the idea of the 'vocational travelogue' as a shorthand reference to the way fiction has previously offered a form of imaginative tourism: a means by which readers could gain insights into places or cultures they'd otherwise never get to see. Modernity, globalisation and television have, however, rendered this function obsolete.¹⁸ Wallace claims that in its place modern technology has created

¹⁷ It should be noted that Wallace has given some attention to other writers including McElroy, DeLillo, Pynchon and Gaddis. None, however, have received the sustained attention given to David Markson in "The Empty Plenum".

¹⁸ This is illustrated, for instance, in major vocational travelogue-style novels, such as Hailey's "*Airport* and *Hotel*" and Ed McBain's "police procedurals".

such extreme vocational specialisation that few people are now “in a position to know much about any professional field but their own; and thus that a certain amount of fiction’s *touristic* function now consists in giving readers dramatized access to the nuts and bolts of different professional disciplines and specialties” (5). Akin to mathematical melodrama fiction,¹⁹ Wallace asserts that many take it for given that if the novel delves into philosophical content, then it does so in this fashion—as a modern vocational travelogue of esoteric technical philosophy. His concern is that metaphysical novels, understood in such a vein, would be rendered derivative or vaguely sensationalist, and that they would function merely as an intellectual *shibboleth* in various forms, whether by riding on the coat tails of genius through allusion, dropping references ‘like bricks’ throughout the work, or parroting a philosopher’s lines in parodic homage.²⁰

Incidentally the concern Wallace raises about fiction rendered derivative has overtones of Plato’s concern about *mimêsis*, or poetry functioning as a copy of a copy. One of the dangers of imitation, according to Plato in Book 10, is that Poetic *mimêsis*, like the kind in a painting, is the imitation of appearance alone, and its products thus rank far below truth (596–602). Through the imitation of appearance, it has been argued that artistic *mimêsis* intensifies a weakness present in existing objects, and consequently not only fails but fails twice, or doubly; see Murray (27–46).

This idea of the vocational travelogue raises the very question I claimed emerged from Plato’s rejection of the poet from the ideal society, but set in the present context: is literature limited to being but a translation of philosophy; that is, the making of abstruse ideas accessible? In this case, is the novel of ideas rendered derivative or secondary? Or does literature go beyond philosophy—that is, is there something the novel alone can say? On this question of the status of literature dealing with philosophical content or theory, Wallace writes that “*Wittgenstein’s Mistress*, with regards to its eponymous master, does more than just quote Wittgenstein in weird ways, or allude to his work, or attempt to be some sort of dramatization of the intellectual problems that occupied and oppressed him”. He expands: “I do not mean to suggest that David Markson’s achievement here consists just in making abstract philosophy ‘accessible’ to an extramural reader, Markson’s is not a pop

¹⁹ For instance, *Fermat’s Last Theorem* or *A Beautiful Mind*.

²⁰ Wallace’s example is *Candide*, in which Pangloss’s statement “‘all for the best in the best of all possible worlds’ is a neon sign out front of what is, except for its end, little more than a poisonously funny parody of the metaphysics of Leibniz, and which succumbs to the hazard of most parody and gets the point of Leibniz’s best-of-all-possible-worlds stuff totally wrong” (91).

book, and it is not decocted philosophy or a docudrama-of-the-week” (86). Wallace claims that though *Wittgenstein’s Mistress* requires critical ‘clarification’ by reference to the *Tractatus*, the novel is not merely written ‘in the margins of’ the *Tractatus*—the way for instance Voltaire’s *Candide* marginalises *The Monadology* or *Nausea*, simply by ‘dramatising’ it. What then does it do? What does its achievement consist of that puts it above decocted philosophy or derivative illustration, or above *vocational travelogue* status? The following sections consider what Ryerson and Ramal took this achievement to be. I will respond to their claims before turning to my own interpretation.

1.4 Ryerson on solipsism

Ryerson, in his introduction to the posthumous publication of Wallace’s undergraduate thesis in philosophy, draws attention to the role that philosophy played in Wallace’s fiction and other writings (2011, 1–33). He claims that while Wallace abandoned philosophy as a formal pursuit, it was nonetheless formative for his cast of mind, and repeatedly crops up in the subject matter of his writing. Ryerson provides an exposition of where philosophical topics surface in Wallace’s novels *Broom of the System*, *Infinite Jest* and *The Pale King*, among other writings,²¹ and in this introduction he indicates that Wallace wanted to unite literature and philosophy in the same way David Markson did in *Wittgenstein’s Mistress*. Ryerson writes: “Wallace felt that Markson’s novel had succeeded in uniting literature and philosophy in the way that he, in *Broom*, tried but failed to do” (27).

Ryerson does not, however, explore what this *same way* amounts to, nor does he expand on the views Wallace propounds in “The Empty Plenum”, concerning his conception of the nature of philosophy and its relation to literature. Ryerson’s focus rests mainly upon Wallace’s approval of Markson’s ability to imaginatively render the Tractarian solipsist’s world, focusing on the way solipsism has similarly haunted Wallace’s work. Ryerson writes “for Wallace, this was a harrowing equation, the dark emotional takeaway of the *Tractatus*’ severe anti-metaphysics. This was also, for Wallace, what Markson had rendered imaginatively in his novel. Without ever raising these ideas explicitly, Markson had conveyed them with a special kind of clarity” (27). Ryerson then continues to loosely relate this to Wallace’s insistence that the task of fiction is to ‘make heads throb heart like’; that is, to draw out the emotional implications of the literary work without getting lost in its

²¹ For instance, the morality of consuming sentient beings is considered in “Consider the Lobster”, the question of beauty in athletics in “Federer as Religious Experience”, illusory freedom in “A Supposedly Fun Thing I’ll Never Do Again”, and the nature of language in “Authority and American Usage”.

abstract and intellectual details (14). Ryerson is undeniably correct when he points to the importance of the conjured solipsism and loneliness in *Wittgenstein's Mistress*:

Wallace had read the *Tractatus*, of course (he wrote to Lance Olsen that he thought its first sentence was “the most beautiful opening line in western lit”). He knew that Wittgenstein’s book presented a spare and unforgiving picture of the relations among logic, language, and the physical world. He knew that the puzzles solved and raised by the book were influential, debatable, and rich in their implications. But as a flesh-and-blood reader with human feelings, he also knew, though he had never articulated it out loud, that as you laboured to understand the *Tractatus*, its cold, formal, logical picture of the world could make you feel strange, lonely, awestruck, lost, frightened—a range of moods not unlike those undergone by Kate herself. The similarities were not accidental. Markson’s novel, as Wallace put it, was like a 240-page answer to the question, “What if somebody really had to live in a Tractatusized world?” (27)

Indeed, Wallace wrote “Mr Markson has in this book succeeded already on all the really important levels of fictional conviction ... He has fleshed the abstract sketches of Wittgensteinian doctrine into the concrete theatre of human loneliness” (24). Wallace describes *Wittgenstein's Mistress* at one point in his essay to be “an immediate study of depression & loneliness [that] is far too moving to be the object of either exercise or exorcism” (98). In fact, Markson in an interview with Joseph Tabbi asserts that the central concept of the book was the idea of aloneness.

I would, however, consider it misleading to claim, as Ryerson has, that this is what so attracted Wallace to *Wittgenstein's Mistress*. In contrast I take the major point for Wallace to be not the particular conjuring of solipsism, but the *having conjured* the emotional implications of the text, when Wallace writes: “I can think of no lit.-practitioner (as opposed to new- or post-structural theorist) who’s captured the textual urge, the emotional urgency of text as both sign and thing, as perfectly as has Markson here” (127).

Wallace held the novel in such high regard because it was not so much an attempt to posit grounds for solipsism, but to express solipsism as *felt*. This could be called, perhaps tritely, both ‘the felt experience of encountering metaphysics’, and ‘giving the reader imaginative access to this felt experience’. As Wallace writes: “I guess a big part of serious fiction’s purpose is to give the reader, who like all of us is sort of marooned in her own skull, to

give her imaginative access to other selves ... if a piece of fiction can allow us imaginatively to identify with a character's pain, we might then also more easily conceive of others identifying with our own. This is nourishing, redemptive; we become less alone inside" (127).

I do not doubt the importance of solipsism to Wallace, it being a theme to which he regularly returns.²² However, Ryerson seems to allude to, yet not follow through with, a major issue: much writing has concerned solipsism—the value of Markson's *Wittgenstein's Mistress* to Wallace lay in his "[never] raising these ideas explicitly", yet nonetheless "conveying them with a *special kind of clarity*" (27, emphasis added). It was this method of rendering that Wallace most admired in Markson—and this, I demonstrate in a later section, concerns a distinction between Showing and Saying developed by Wittgenstein in his *Tractatus*. This same distinction, I will demonstrate, provides a novel way to address the question set out in this thesis.

1.5 Ramal on explanation

Randy Ramal, continuing from where Ryerson left off, aims to explore Wallace's views specific to understanding the aims of literature (177–199). Beginning with a concern for Wallace's conception of the nature of philosophy, Ramal turns to the question: is philosophy such that it can be used to make the same points Wallace wanted to make in a narrative form? This is a question that Ramal, in reading Wallace, answers in the negative. In brief, Ramal demonstrates how Wallace's background in Wittgenstein's philosophy helped him develop his views on the natures of philosophy and literature. He argues that Wallace conceived of the nature of philosophy to be concerned with describing and clarifying everyday concepts without interfering with, or attempting to change, what was described. This being the case, he asserts that Wallace found "philosophy as such [to be] unsuitable for the thinker, the artist, or the creative writer who wants to not only describe and analyse concepts but also offer therapeutic alternatives to existential problems" (188). Ramal quotes Wallace saying, "I just think that fiction that isn't exploring what it means to be human today isn't art" (McCaffery, 26). Consequently, Ramal concludes that Wallace attempted to do in literature what could not be done in philosophy—that is, express and deal with existential matters. Ramal argues that by incorporating philosophical narratives

²² As Ryerson writes, Wallace's engagement with Wittgenstein's philosophy was a lasting affair, particularly as Wittgenstein addresses the doctrine of solipsism in both his earlier and later work.

into his literature, Wallace found this to be a creative way of reinventing literature and using it to fight aesthetic and existential crises.²³

Consequently, Ramal primarily reads Wallace as desiring to articulate moral perspectives on human nature beyond the confines of traditional philosophy, and thereby to be able to discuss moral and existential issues he found to be important. He claims that Wallace felt literature could escape the confines of philosophy, by avoiding theorisation and the offering of explanations, writing: “[Wallace] believed that theorizing about human nature ... entails certain dangers from which the narrative philosopher ought to steer away” (190). Ramal argued Ryerson’s interpretation of “The Empty Plenum” failed in that it focused on only half of Wallace’s critique: “On the one hand, he saw the novel as a realistic portrait of the negative consequences of living in the kind of world that Wittgenstein depicted in the *Tractatus*”, but, according to Ramal, Ryerson ignored the important anti-explanation component of Wallace’s thinking, that “on the other hand, [Wallace] also found that [*Wittgenstein’s Mistress*] suffers from the same fate as many narratives that promote metaphysical, or generalized, theories—namely the temptation to offer an explanation for the radically diverse and complex existence we have” (190).

Ramal argued that Wallace must have encountered the references to the danger of theorising in Wittgenstein, who held theoretical explanations to be too generalised and distorting of the phenomena they seek to explain. To understand Wittgenstein’s critique requires examination of his approach to explanation outlined in the *Philosophical Investigations*. Applying this approach to psychological research reveals conceptual confusions stemming from underlying essentialism, referentialist and reductionist assumptions, leading to misconceived notions of causality, explanation and systematisation, leaving experimentation with unsound conceptual underpinnings. Here Wittgenstein is concerned with explanation, and the tendency to theorize and stipulate psychological, emotional or causal explanations as the needed factors behind a proper understanding of what is real and meaningful.²⁴

²³ Ramal will go on to argue that Wallace took the state of American fiction to be in both aesthetic and moral crises, and that there was a consequent need to ‘reinvent literature’ by writing a new kind of fiction to tackle existential issues including: nihilism, depression, boredom, dullness, and the effects of entertainment on people’s lives. See Wallace’s journalistic assignment “Consider the Lobster”, and the existential themes of boredom and dullness in unfinished novel *The Pale King*.

²⁴ For example, Wittgenstein attacks the idea that psychological theorizing necessarily explains the inner life of people by questioning whether core foundations of natural sciences—causality and systematization—are applicable to psychology. Insistence on causal explanation also suggests a systematic correspondence

Wallace seems to have been aware of this point. As his critiques of Markson's novel suggest, when it comes to existential issues relating to boredom, death, making responsible choices, etc., it is doubtful that theories could perform the job they are supposed to do, whether in philosophy or literature. Wallace's worry here, which was also Wittgenstein's concern, is that whereas theories are often promoted to be the explanation of where meaning and sense reside, the latter could easily escape the scope of theorising.

Ramal's arguments fairly capture Wallace's disapproval of Markson's use of explanation. For example, amidst his otherwise passionate advocacy and praise of *Wittgenstein's Mistress*,²⁵ Wallace writes: "What I'm negative on is the particular strategy Markson sometimes employs to try to explain Kate's 'female' feelings both of ultimate guilt & of ultimate loneliness" (263). Wallace's major critique of *Wittgenstein's Mistress* is that it attempts to offer psychological explanations for Kate's emotional condition. Wallace, for instance, finds the presentation by Markson of the death of Kate's son, and her separation from her husband, to be a very particular type of emotional *explanation* and objectionable reduction, asserting "the presentation of personal history as present explanation, one that threatens to make *Wittgenstein's Mistress* just another madwoman monologue in the Ophelia–Rhys tradition, is oblique & ever artful, but still prominent & insistent enough to make it hard (for me) to blink its intent" (264).

It should be noted that what Wallace finds disappointing about Markson's novel is not so much that it fails to offer an explanation but rather it fails "*because* it's an explanation" (emphasis added). This is perhaps in part because Wittgenstein felt that to solve philosophical problems we do not need better philosophical theories; we should not aim for explanation, but rather for a detailed description of the use of our words, providing a "perspicuous representation" (PI, 122) by means of which we can gain a more profound understanding of language. Wallace writes, in reference to Markson's apparent settling on a character-archetype, and narrative explanation for Kate's emotional condition, that: "it seems very interesting to me that Mr. Markson has created a Kate who dwells so convincingly in a hell of utter subjectivity, yet cannot, finally, himself help but objectify

between things, of causal connections that are universal and omnipresent. In contrast, Wittgenstein argued that we need not presume there are neural processes correlated with associating or with thinking; such that it is possible to read off thought processes from brain processes. He writes: "why should there not be a psychological regularity to which no physiological regularity corresponds? If this upsets our concepts of causality then it is high time they were upset. See for further Hacker (2013).

²⁵ Though it should be acknowledged that in the "The Empty Plenum" Wallace also expresses unease about what he calls "questions of voice and over-allusion" in *Wittgenstein's Mistress*.

her—i.e., by ‘explaining’ her metaphysical condition as emotional/psychical, reducing her bottled missive to a mad monologue ... Markson is basically subsuming Kate under one of the comparatively stock rubrics via which we guys apparently must organize & process fey mystery, feminine pathos, Strengthless & Female fruit” (262).

Indeed in reference to explanation in *Wittgenstein’s Mistress*, Wallace expresses his affirmation of the way the novel inverts the received formulae for ‘successful’ fiction, in that its success is where it fails to conform; that is, “it’s when Kate is least particular, least ‘motivated’ by some artfully presented but standardly digestible Evian/Valentinian/post-Freudian trauma, that her character & plight are most affecting. For (obvious tho this seems) to the extent that Kate is not motivationally unique, she can be all of us, and the empty diffraction of Kate’s world can map or picture the desacralized & paradoxical solipsism of U.S. persons in a cattle-herd culture that worships only the ‘Transparent I’” (263).

My major objection to Ramal is, however, the centrality he assigns this opposition to explanation in Wallace’s criticism of *Wittgenstein’s Mistress*. Markson’s offering of explanations was objectionable to Wallace foremost because Markson attempted to say what could only be shown, a Wittgensteinian distinction I shall examine in the following section. By doing so I hope to illustrate the way Ramal’s anti-explanation reading of Wallace can be subsumed under this more general point.

1.6 Saying and showing in “The Empty Plenum”

In what follows I examine what I take to be the major pitfalls in both readings: that is, their failure to recognise the importance of Wittgenstein’s saying-showing distinction in the *Tractatus*. This distinction I argue is pivotal. It casts light on where literature’s value resides, and what Wallace takes Markson, in *Wittgenstein’s Mistress*, to have succeeded in doing.

Ryerson, when providing a rough layman’s guide to Wittgenstein’s *Tractatus*, quotes Wittgenstein, stating: “anything in language that does not depict a possible state of affairs—that is, anything that does not depict possible fact—is, strictly speaking, meaningless” (27). He does not, however, follow on this discussion. But he does at one-point assert Wallace may have had a strong misreading of Wittgenstein’s work, given Wallace wrote “the impoverished role granted to ethics, aesthetics, and spiritual values in

the *Tractatus* was ‘a big motivation’ for its disavowal by Wittgenstein” (27). This is a view Ryerson claims is misguided as the biographical literature suggests that Wittgenstein was perfectly at ease with the solipsism of the *Tractatus*, indeed even mystically consoled by its suggestion that ethical, aesthetic, and spiritual truths are unutterable. In contrast to Ryerson, I argue that Wallace was not in fact oblivious to the paradox of the *Tractatus*, but aware of it and its implications for what can be *said* and what can only be *shown*. It is rather Ryerson, who provides the strong misreading of Wallace, by believing him to be oblivious to the alternate mystical reading of the *Tractatus*, which I argue he was not only aware of, but that gave foundations to his argument in important ways.

While Ramal recognised Wallace’s knowledge of this saying-showing distinction—as evidenced when he quotes Wallace writing that *Wittgenstein’s Mistress* succeeds “in a deep-nonsensical way that’s much more effective than argument or [allegory]” (84)—Ramal even finds that by *deep-nonsensical* ways Wallace may be referring to the ending of the *Tractatus* where Wittgenstein writes “My propositions are elucidatory in this way: he who understands me finally recognizes them as senseless/nonsensical (*unsinnig*), when he has climbed out through them, on them, over them” (*Tractatus*, 6.54). Ramal believes that Wallace uses this to say something *obviously positive* about Markson’s novel. But ‘obviously positive’ seems to be where Ramal’s analysis stops. Indeed, Ramal dismisses further analysis, stating: “the *Tractatus* is notoriously difficult to understand, and this is not the place to analyse its complexity or to gauge Wallace’s understanding of it” (74). Indeed, where Ramal delves into the *Philosophical Investigations*, and its relevance, I am of a mind with Cora Diamond, who holds that to understand Wittgenstein’s work:

One must be struck by his insistence that he is not putting forward philosophical doctrines or theses; or by his suggestion that it cannot be done, that it is only through some confusion one is in about what one is doing that one could take oneself to be putting forward philosophical doctrines or theses at all. I think that there is almost nothing in Wittgenstein which is of value, and which can be grasped if it is pulled away from that view of philosophy. But that view of philosophy is itself something that has to be seen first in the *Tractatus* if it is to be understood in its later forms, and in the *Tractatus* it is inseparable from what is central there, the distinction between what can be said and what can only be shown. (Cahill quoting Diamond, 42)

Consequently, given the distinction between what can be said and what can only be shown resides in his earlier work, my focus on the *Tractatus* is my point of departure from both readings. I have argued above that Ryerson and Ramal both provide analysis of important aspects of Wallace's "The Empty Plenum", yet both are guilty of a glaring oversight: they fail to examine the influence of the saying-showing distinction on Wallace. Wallace's discussion of philosophy's relation to literature circles around this central distinction. However, before demonstrating this I will defend the informativeness of this distinction, a defence resting on the plausibility of a mystical interpretation of Wittgenstein's *Tractatus*. The following Chapter II elaborates on saying-showing distinction, and then in Chapter III fleshes out its meaning in a literary context.

CHAPTER II: Mysticism of the *Tractatus*

My propositions serve as elucidations in the following way: anyone who understands me eventually recognizes them as nonsensical, when he has used them—as steps—to climb up beyond them. (He must, so to speak, throw away the ladder after he has climbed up it.)

(6.54, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*).

Ryerson and Ramal misread Wallace, due to a lack of engagement with the influence of Wittgenstein's saying-showing distinction. The root of Wallace's analysis can best be understood in terms of this overlooked distinction. But how should we understand this distinction—what cannot be said but only shown? And how does this relate to literature?

In order to understand this distinction, we must understand Wittgenstein's *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, a text infamous for its ambiguity and for the contention over its meaning. Unsurprisingly there exist a variety of interpretations of what Wittgenstein was up to. In what follows I will evaluate these various interpretations. I conclude that proper understanding of the *Tractatus* requires conceiving it to be an *elucidatory* project intended to acquaint us with mystical experience, rather than an attempt to communicate truths. I hold that the point of the *Tractatus* is not that its readers should come to apprehend some set of truths, but that they should come "to see the world aright". Of course, a great deal more light needs to be shed on what this notion of 'rightness' or indeed 'seeing' signifies, in Wittgenstein's phrase. This will be discussed below in the section on seeing the world aright. But first we must better understand the saying-showing distinction and see how it plays a central role in the *Tractatus*.

2.1 Senseless or nonsense?

The *Tractatus* aims to chart the limits of thought by revealing the relationship between language and the world. To do so Wittgenstein proposed a *picture theory* of meaning, according to which the conditions for a proposition's having sense rest on the possibility of its representing or picturing a state of affairs. Consequently when a true proposition is thought or expressed, each constituent part *corresponds* to some aspect of the world—though importantly the picture theory allows for false pictures; for instance, "It is raining" when it is not raining—and this means that what can be said are only propositions of

natural science, rendering senseless (*sinnlos*) a daunting number of statements which are used in language. It is important, however, to distinguish the senseless (*sinnlos*) from another group of statements which cannot carry sense, the nonsensical (*unsinnig*), as nonsense became the hinge of Wittgensteinian interpretive discussion during the last decade of the 20th century. Nonsensical propositions, like senseless propositions, are more radically devoid of meaning than senseless propositions; in that they transcend the bounds of sense.

Since only what is “in” the world can be described, anything that is “higher” is excluded. Nonsensical propositions include propositions of traditional metaphysics and the propositions of ethics and aesthetics—given these attempt to capture the world as a whole, they are also excluded. Similarly, the notion of solipsism—the very notion of a subject, for it is also not “in” the world but at its limit. While some nonsensical propositions are blatantly so (“Toby is identical” rather than “Toby is identical to himself”), others seem to be meaningful (“8 is a number” and “there are objects” for instance), and only analysis carried out in accordance with the picture theory can expose their nonsensicality. Wittgenstein does not, however, relegate all that is outside the bounds of sense to oblivion: he makes a saying-showing distinction that does additional crucial work, which shall be seen.

2.2 The saying-showing distinction

‘What can be shown cannot be said’, that is, what cannot be formulated in sayable (sensical) propositions can only be shown. The distinction between Saying and Showing first seriously emerges in Part 4 of the *Tractatus* in connection with the idea that a proposition shows, but does not say, what its sense is (4.022ff.). What can be shown, we are told, cannot be said (4.1212). By the end of the work the catalogue of what can be shown has expanded to include: the logical form of reality (4.121); the logical relations between propositions (4.1211, 6.1201 and 6.1221); the limit of empirical reality (5.5561); the truth in solipsism (5.62); and the mystical (6.522). Many philosophers have been ill-at-ease with this distinction. Russell, for one, claimed it left him “with a certain sense of intellectual discomfort” (TLP, xxi). But the apparent connection between the notion of showing and mystical things that ‘make themselves manifest’ made others hesitant to accept the distinction (6.522).

Nonetheless it can plausibly be argued that the distinction is the pivot on which Wittgenstein's *Tractatus* turns. Evidence of the centrality of the distinction comes in numerous forms. For one, in a letter to Bertrand Russell, Wittgenstein complained that Russell did not understand the main message of the *Tractatus*, explaining that: "the main point is the theory of what can be expressed by propositions—i.e., by language . . . and what cannot be expressed by propositions, but only shown; which, I believe, is the cardinal problem of philosophy" (Stern, 69–70). This division would be the means by which Wittgenstein would "set a limit . . . to the expression of thoughts" (TLP, 3).

Further evidence that this distinction served as the main message of the text emerges when Wittgenstein writes to Ludwig von Ficker about his book, which he hoped Ficker would publish. Wittgenstein writes that he had once meant to include in the preface a sentence that might provide a key to understanding the work for him: "my work consists of two parts, the one presented here plus all that I have not written. And it is precisely this second part that is the important point . . . I've managed in my book to put everything firmly into place by being silent about it . . . For now, I would recommend you read the preface and the conclusion, because they contain the most direct expression of the point" (*ProtoTractatus*, 16). The saying-showing distinction can then be seen to be central to understanding Wittgenstein's Tractarian project. He uses the distinction to carry out what he perceives to be philosophy's mission: to clarify our thoughts, sharpen the boundaries of what can and cannot be said, and circumscribe the limits of the natural sciences and philosophy (4.1–4.115). In order to properly understand the saying-showing distinction, we must firstly consider Wittgenstein's Tractarian project and the paradox of the *Tractatus*.

2.3 The paradox of the *Tractatus*

The *Tractatus* aims to chart the limits of thought by revealing the relationship between language and the world. Outlined above, Wittgenstein proposes a picture theory, according to which, when a true proposition is thought or expressed, each constituent part *corresponds* to some aspect of the world. This correspondence itself, however, he claimed we could not *say* anything about; rather, this correspondence could only be *shown*. Given this picture theory of meaning, Wittgenstein claims the only meaningful propositions are those that picture contingent states of affairs, falsely or truly. It follows that only states of affairs that can be pictured can be represented by meaningful propositions. This means that what can be said are only propositions of natural science, rendering nonsensical a wide number of

propositions, including, firstly, the propositions of logic (as these propositions do not represent states of affairs, and the logical constants do not stand for objects). all propositions of ethics, aesthetics, the mystical, and indeed, philosophy itself.²⁶

Yet Wittgenstein also claims what I will refer to as Assumption (A): *the purpose of the Tractatus is to communicate truths*. Wittgenstein states that one aspect of the work's value consists in the fact that "thoughts are expressed" in it (29), and that "the truth of the thoughts communicated . . . here seems to me unassailable and definitive" (29). Infamously, however, were (A) correct, then this generates a serious paradox rendering the *Tractatus* incoherent. By laying out his theory of meaning in the *Tractatus*, Wittgenstein draws a limit to the expression of thoughts entailing the meaninglessness of any attempt to elaborate this very theory of meaning. Consequently the *Tractatus*' picture theory of meaning renders the propositions of the *Tractatus* nonsensical, because, if we take the picture theory to be true, then to try to say how the world, and language, must be for meaning to be possible is to try to say something about the logical form that sentences share with reality (2.16–2.18); but, according to that very theory, the attempt to do such a thing can only issue in nonsense, since logical form cannot be represented (4.12). Yet, given (A), Wittgenstein claims that the *Tractatus* communicates thoughts whose truth is 'unassailable and definitive'. Here then is the paradox of the *Tractatus*: if its constituent sentences are true, then they are nonsense. How can true thoughts be communicated by nonsensical pseudo-propositions?

2.4 Interpretations of the saying-showing distinction

Given this ambiguity, understanding the *Tractatus* has been an ongoing topic of contention and confusion since its publication. Indeed, since its publication several waves of interpretations have come to dominate. Some fundamental disagreements informing interpretation revolve around the realism of the *Tractatus*, the notion of nonsense and its role in 'reading' the *Tractatus* itself, and the reading of the *Tractatus* as an ethical tract. Of concern, for our purposes, is elucidating the various positions on what the saying-showing distinction is doing in the context in which Wittgenstein articulates it. In what follows I will examine how theorists have attempted to make sense of what is going on, given the *Tractatus*' apparently incoherent nature.

²⁶ I thank my examiner for the valuable reflections which led to the evolution of this section.

I will outline several interpretations of the *Tractatus* wholesale and their bearing on this question. Some interpret the *Tractatus* as espousing ‘realism’, positing the existence of objects, states of affairs, facts—via a ‘linguistic turn’— “The world is all that is the case” and “Objects form the substance of the world” (TLP, 2.021). If one has a straightforward reading of the ‘picturing’ relation espoused in the text, this makes sense. The issue, however, of the *Tractatus*’ realism requires addressing the question of the limits of language, and particularly what there is ‘beyond’ language. Consequently, the necessary preceding interpretative question concerns the very presence of metaphysics within the book and the status of the propositions of the book themselves. Interpretive discussions of the status of ‘nonsense’, that which lies beyond the bounds of language, became necessary.

i. Traditional, metaphysical readings

The quandary arises concerning what it is that inhabits the realm of nonsense, given Wittgenstein asserts there is something to be shown rather than said, which he characterises as the ‘mystical’. Traditional readings of the *Tractatus* accepted the existence of the unsayable, the nonsensical.²⁷ These traditional interpretations of the *Tractatus* conceive it therefore to be a classical piece of metaphysics: attempting to determine the world’s relation to language and truth. See for instance Wedberg’s initial sections of his work: “*Tractatus*’ teachings of the world”, “of language” and “of philosophy”. Soames (197–254) more recently offers a similarly ‘traditional’ reading, devoting an entire chapter to the metaphysics of the *Tractatus*. These traditional ‘metaphysical’ readings commonly ignore or fail to highlight the concept of nonsense and Wittgenstein’s views on philosophy—some may, similarly to Soames, claim that Wittgenstein deliberately violated language rules to show us something about the rules of language (252–253). Or as Wedberg (1962) argued a compromise is necessary: that Wittgenstein is asserting that true philosophy is the pursuit to prove all other philosophy nonsense. Similarly, Hacker (2000, 356) treats the *Tractatus* as providing a refutation of transcendental idealisms, by regarding the incoherence of the *Tractatus* as demonstrating the falsity of its central doctrines.

²⁷ See, for instance, the traditional readings offered by Wedberg (1962), Hacker (2000), and Soames (2003).

ii. Resolute nonsense readings

More recent readings tend to take the nonsense to be merely nonsense. These readings tend to deny that the *Tractatus* points at metaphysical truths and draw upon his words in 6.54—the famous ladder metaphor—to justify throwing out the *Tractatus* itself, *including* the distinction between what can be said and what can only be shown. Such non-sympathetic readings assert that because the *Tractatus*’ theory of meaning implies its own nonsensicality we should reject the *Tractatus* and leave it at that. Relatedly, modern ‘resolute’ readings emphasise the fact that Wittgenstein is insisting that he is not expressing any philosophical sentences in the *Tractatus*. Diamond (1988), for instance, holds the only reasonable way of reading the *Tractatus* is to consider all philosophical sentences to be nonsense. This reading takes seriously the claim that the ladder must be thrown away: to understand Wittgenstein you must realise that all philosophical propositions, like the ones in the book, are mere nonsense. Below, however, I will offer two distinct ways of interpreting the *Tractatus* which, rather than rejecting and dismissing it, attempt to make sense of the apparent paradox.

iii. Ineffable interpretations

A special tradition that has developed in the interpretation of the nonsense concept may be called ‘ineffable truth’ interpretations. This *ineffable* reading takes up the traditional metaphysical view that the *Tractatus* is a work of metaphysics, which puts forward substantive claims about the nature of a language-independent reality;²⁸ however, these interpretations emphasise that ‘nonsense’ is not something that should immediately be discarded. On this view, the *Tractatus* provides a speculative account of what the relation between language and this independent reality must be in order for language to represent the world, but it is only by assuming that Wittgenstein accepts there *are* ineffable truths about reality mirrored in language that we can begin to understand the distinction between what can be said and what can only be shown, and the *Tractatus*’ clear suggestion that it is intended to convey lasting insights—enabling us to “see the world aright” (TLP, 6.54) even while it requires us to throw away the very nonsensical propositions that *enabled* us to see the world aright. Thus, the metaphysical-sounding assertions with which the work opens are, by its own lights, incoherent. Yet we must use them to grasp the essential and ineffable nature of reality that is necessarily reflected in any language in which thoughts are

²⁸ This mystical reading is defended by McGuinness, Morris and Dodd (2009).

expressed. It has been argued that the majority of the *Tractatus*' foremost interpreters subscribe to this reading.²⁹ See, for instance, Anscombe's (1971) case that the *Tractatus* 'nonsense' concept is illustrating a distinction between what can be said and what can only be shown. Sullivan (2003) similarly argues that this distinction needn't require 'quasi-truths', just an attempt to express something that is understood by the reader, what co-author Moore (2003) calls an 'ineffable' understanding.

iv. Therapeutic readings

On what we can call a *therapeutic reading*, far from being a work of metaphysics, the *Tractatus* represents the unfolding of a therapeutic strategy. This begins with the temptation to make metaphysical pronouncements from a philosophical perspective and ends with the realisation that these pronouncements are nonsensical: the so-called philosophical perspective is an illusion, consequently we are no longer tempted to ask or answer philosophical questions, but willingly confine ourselves to the realm of what can be said, the propositions of natural science.³⁰

v. Problems for each

Each school of interpretation can be considered problematic for different reasons. In short, one could argue the *resolute readings* are unappealing in that they offer 'uncharitable' readings, ending what is otherwise a fecund conversation.³¹ On the one hand, the *metaphysical reading* and its more nuanced *ineffable* counterpart hold that the metaphysical truths about reality that the *Tractatus* attempts to communicate are truths that cannot be said but make themselves manifest. This requires accepting that Wittgenstein's propositions are indeed nonsense, but a special, illuminating sort of nonsense. The fundamental problem with reading Wittgenstein's remarks as nonsense that conveys ineffable truths about the world is that there is an obvious tension in the idea that Wittgenstein is putting forward metaphysical doctrines while also claiming that metaphysical propositions are nonsensical. This reading must contradict or ignore the

²⁹ McGinn (1999) points to such a case in Anscombe (1971), Black (1964), Russell (1971), Ramsey (2013) among others.

³⁰ A position advocated for by Cora Diamond (2002), James Conant (2002) and Tom Ricketts (1995) among others.

³¹ To pursue this line of critique, see McGinn (1999).

book's preface and closing assertions where the *Tractatus* claims itself to be *nonsense*, plain and simple—not special illuminating nonsense.

On the other hand, it is a paradoxical feature of the *therapeutic* reading that it regards the remarks of the *Tractatus* as communicating nothing, but nevertheless bringing about the reader's realisation that nothing is being communicated. The work is at the same time held to provide the insights necessary for its own self-destruction and to provide no genuine insight that is not ultimately obliterated in the final act of self-annihilation. As such, we are offered an unappealing alternative between considering Wittgenstein's remarks nonsense that conveys ineffable truths about the world and as nonsense that conveys nothing whatsoever.

vi. A promising alternative reading

As neither option provides a fully satisfactory resting place, a further *elucidatory* interpretation is available to us.³² This approach enables us to find a way between these two alternatives: allowing the remarks to achieve something, while stopping short of holding that they convey ineffable truths about reality. Marie McGinn provides an 'elucidatory' interpretation to navigate between these two alternatives, though it diverges from my own. McGinn, in viewing nonsense to be 'elucidatory', opposes the traditional reading of the *Tractatus* as presenting a self-undermining metaphysical theory, and opposes the resolute reading—which is contradictory, in asserting that once you've climbed the ladder you are to throw it away. She rightly asks: how can we have got anywhere by climbing the ladder if the ladder is itself an illusion? McGinn's solution is to regard Wittgenstein's nonsense as elucidatory. In attempting to provide an interpretation that will resolve the paradox, McGinn states that:

[What is needed is an interpretation] which avoids the suggestion that there are ineffable truths about reality, but which allows that there is something behind Wittgenstein's remarks; which permits these remarks to fall away completely, but which allows that the remarks accomplish something important; which avoids

³² Indeed there have been a number of writers who have tried to develop a third way, incorporating what they see as insights and avoiding what they see as flaws in both the ineffabilist and therapeutic readings. The most prominent advocates of these elucidatory readings of the *Tractatus* are Dan Hutto (2017) and Marie McGinn (1999).

committing Wittgenstein to any metaphysical doctrines, but which does not fall into the paradox of self-destruction. (496–497)

I follow on this suggestion and defend an interpretation which does not assert the existence of any ‘ineffable truths’, yet on which a certain *attitude* towards the world is conveyed, a mystical attitude. Given this, I hold that the point of the *Tractatus* is not that its readers should apprehend some set of truths, but that they should come to ‘see the world rightly’ (a notion which much of this dissertation shall be spent defending, problematising and nuancing. Wittgenstein’s text is designed to get the reader to adopt an alternate perspective on life altogether; the perspective of mysticism. It is this mystical perspective—not some set of truths—that the *Tractatus*’ incoherence points us towards, and which the text is designed to encourage us to adopt. The result, therefore, is not any sort of discovery or addition to our knowledge; it does not enable us to do anything we could not do before; it is, in a certain sense, completely idle. Yet this is no fault of the work; the purpose of Wittgenstein’s remarks is not to alert us to facts or inform us of truths, but rather his work’s significance is exhausted in the change of perception it brings about. To evidence the centrality of this perceptual shift, consider when Wittgenstein writes

What I give is the morphology of the use of an expression. I show that it has kinds of uses of which you had not dreamed. In philosophy one feels forced to look at a concept in a certain way. What I do is suggest, or even invent, other ways of looking at it. I suggest possibilities of which you had not previously thought. You thought that there was one possibility, or only two at most. But I made you think of others. Furthermore, I made you see that it was absurd to expect the concept to conform to those narrow possibilities. Thus, your mental cramp is relieved, and you are free to look around the field of use of the expression and to describe the different kinds of uses of it. (Wittgenstein Lectures of 1946–1947, quoted by Malcolm, 43)

This interpretation holds that Wittgenstein’s remarks can bring about a change completely distinct from the acquisition of new information. It is essential to the idea that Wittgenstein’s remarks serve as elucidations that the position we have now reached does not amount to any sort of discovery or substantial claim but represents our becoming acquainted with the world in a new light, with a new clarity of vision through this perceptual shift. An interesting aside is that ‘paraconsistent logics’ have recently been

recognised as having validity in formal logic. These are logics which challenge the standard truth–falsity binary that dominates analytic philosophy, they allow for truth-statements to be either: false, true, false and true or neither false nor true. These allow us to make sense both of the counterintuitive consequences of quantum mechanics and insights derived from Tibetan Buddhist philosophy, particularly that of the Madhyamaka Prasangika school.³³

I argue that we should jettison (A)—that the purpose of the *Tractatus* is to communicate truths—and adopt a ‘no-truths-at-all’ interpretation—on which Wittgenstein is self-consciously providing a theory of meaning which renders his text incoherent with the aim of doing ‘something other’ than communicate truths. By jettisoning assumption (1), the *Tractatus*’ inability to be a source of propositional knowledge actually supports a reading of Wittgenstein’s intent as being to bring us into acquaintance with the mystical. This provides a means of understanding how the incoherence of the *Tractatus* is intended to be elucidatory; in leaving us with a feeling of the world’s limits that amounts to acquaintance with the boundaries of sense.

A natural query arises: how can we justify rejecting (A), given Wittgenstein himself claimed that the truths communicated in the *Tractatus* were “unassailable and definitive”? This has been a point of contestation; however, there are reasonable grounds for rejecting (A). Firstly, given Wittgenstein wrote this within a preface to the book, he could hardly declare that the whole book and the preface are nonsensical, given his intention that the reader adopt the philosophical perspective espoused in the *Tractatus*, in order to later abandon it on recognising its incoherence. Similarly, he writes in his final remarks: “My propositions serve as elucidations in the following way: anyone who understands me eventually recognizes them as nonsensical, when [they] have used them—as steps—to climb up beyond them. (He must, so to speak, throw away the ladder after [they] has climbed up it.)” (TLP, 6.54). Wittgenstein uses the metaphor of the ladder to express the function of the *Tractatus*, demonstrating the work is to be used in order to climb above it from a position in which we can “see the world aright”, but thereafter recognise the *Tractatus* as nonsense and cast it away, according with his final aphorism “whereof one cannot speak, thereof one must be silent” (TLP, 7).

³³ See, for further on this, the defence of dialetheism and paraconsistent logic made by Graeme Priest and Jay Garfield (2003, 1–21).

But how to demonstrate that a perspectival shift is distinct from the discovery of ineffable truths, rather than just a variation on the ineffable truths' reading? I argue that what the 'something other than' communicating truths amounts to is best elucidated through the saying-showing distinction. I argue this because Wittgenstein does not relegate *all* that is outside the bounds of sense to oblivion. The saying-showing distinction is made to do additional crucial work. "What can be shown cannot be said"; that is, what can be shown cannot be formulated in sayable (sensical) propositions, but this does not mean it has no value. This applies, for example, to the logical form of the world, the pictorial form, etc., which show themselves in the form of (contingent) propositions, in the symbolism, and in logical propositions. Even the unsayable (metaphysical, ethical, aesthetic) propositions of philosophy belong in this group—which Wittgenstein finally describes as "things that cannot be put into words. They make themselves manifest, they are what is mystical" (TLP, 6.522). In referring to the *Tractatus*' propositions Wittgenstein says one must "surmount these propositions and see the world rightly" (TLP, 6.54), indicating again that the *Tractatus* intends not to convey propositional truths but to have the reader adopt another perspective on life altogether. Wittgenstein further remarks: "my work consists of two parts; that presented here plus all I have not written. It is this second part that is important" (letter to Ludwig Ficker of circa September–October 1919, tr. McGuinness). This second part, that which is *not written*, refers to something that cannot be said but only *shown*. It is evident that the mystical attitude is what Wittgenstein takes to be that which cannot be expressed but only shown, writing "things that cannot be put into words. They make themselves manifest, they are what is mystical" (TLP, 6.522).

Yet what does Showing amount to? Or, put differently, what is this mystical attitude that can only be shown? And can it be defined in more than a purely negative manner? That is, as more than simply that which cannot be said? For one thing, in order to understand Showing, we should see that showing seems inextricably linked with an experience, the experience of "seeing the world rightly" (TLP, 6.54). On a mystical reading this is fitting, given where analytic philosophy aims to produce propositions which can be assessed for their truth value, mysticism involves having an experience which shows how things are, that is, which acquaints us with the limits of the world (TLP, 6.45). This will be examined in a few sections where I outline the mystical 'project' of the *Tractatus*, but firstly to respond to some criticisms.

2.5 Wittgenstein's two philosophical periods

Some will argue that further evidence is required to prove that Wittgenstein, in his later work, did *not* find the *Tractatus* wanting.³⁴ This may be argued given the difficulty in reconciling the notion that Wittgenstein rejected his earlier *Tractatus* as inadequately attuned to his later ideas of 'use' in questions of meaning, with my assertions that Wittgenstein deployed the notion of showing in a literary way in fact *consonant* with his later ideas. Demonstrated earlier, Wittgenstein's letter to Ludwig von Ficker supports a unitarian position on this matter, nonetheless I should make a case for what change I believe took place between what are commonly proclaimed to be Wittgenstein's 'two philosophical periods'.

There is a long-standing debate among Wittgenstein interpreters over the continuity between Wittgenstein's early and later thought.³⁵ The standard interpretations traditionally perceived a clear break between these distinct stages; however, recent interpretations, I believe wisely, challenge this assumption by identifying a fundamentally therapeutic motivation in the later Wittgenstein that should be attributed to the 'former'. Indeed, as argued in this thesis, the notion that philosophy should not be approached dogmatically is a crucial insight of the *Tractatus*. The difficulty is that the later Wittgenstein goes on to describe his own early work as dogmatic.³⁶ This was commonly the cause for readers' perceiving a break between the earlier and later Wittgenstein. Along with his later distinction difference between truth-conditional and use theories of meaning that I will discuss below. However, I think we can clearly see them engaged in the one project: that is, if there is a transition to be marked between the two Wittgenstein it is in the latter's 'total' rejection of dogmatism; that is, a 'more full' working out of the earlier claim that philosophy should be approached dogmatically in its entirety. This meant a 'doing away' with formal aspects of the earlier work and the move from viewing the realm of logic to viewing ordinary language as central to philosophical attention, a shift from systematic

³⁴ I thank the examiner of my dissertation for raising this valuable criticism, which clearly requires some degree of redress, as offered here.

³⁵ A case is made, for instance, by Matar (2018) regarding the fundamental continuity of the two stages in Wittgenstein's thought over the subject of the nature of philosophy.

³⁶ Indeed, heralding a rejection of dogmatic philosophy, and the dogmatism in the *Tractatus* itself, is a period commonly labelled the 'middle period' in which Wittgenstein's conception of philosophy and what constituted its 'problems' underwent dramatic revisions. This has been recorded in volumes of conversations, letters and lecture notes (see for instance, *Ludwig Wittgenstein and the Vienna Circle, The Blue and Brown Books, Philosophical Grammar*).

philosophical writing to the more aphoristic and an emphasis no longer on definition and analysis but instead on ‘family resemblance’ and ‘language-games’.

If we look at Wittgenstein’s later preoccupations we might well understand him to be deepening the very anti-dogmatic stance evident in the saying-showing distinction; that is, we see such parallels in his move from a *truth-functional* ‘representational’ understanding of meaning to a notion of meaning as ‘use’: where the sense of a word is its function in the language (PI, 43). We see parallels too in his attention to ‘language-games’, demonstrating the conventional nature of language and thus the impossibility of providing ‘final definitions’ (PI, 65). We see it too in his notion of ‘family resemblances’ for understanding the varied uses for the same word which demonstrate the failings of ‘general’ explanations or necessary/sufficient conditions (PI, 66).

In general, Wittgenstein’s later writings resemble the earlier *Tractatus* in making the case that philosophers neither do nor should supply a theory or provide explanations.³⁷ Yet while the *Tractatus* precludes philosophical theories the *Philosophical Investigations* points out the therapeutic, non-dogmatic nature of philosophy and so could be considered more of a guidebook or manual in the ways of therapy. The critical break then is that rather than offering one philosophical method, like in the *Tractatus*, *The Philosophical Investigations* demonstrates that there is not one but many methods or therapies (PI, 133). The fly may be shew’d out of the bottle of language by many means (PI, 309). Consequently, we can conclude that the saying-showing distinction brought about in the *Tractatus* is clearly resonant with the later Wittgenstein’s ideas, even if Wittgenstein later rejected aspects of the formalism of the *Tractatus* as limited and parochial.

Despite their discrepancies, the fundamental continuity between the stages resides in a shared approach to the question of the nature of philosophy: that is, in both, philosophy serves first as a critique of language, an attempt to, through analysing language’s allusive power, expose the traps of meaningless philosophical formulations. The ‘discovery’ in the *Philosophical Investigations* is that which enables the philosopher to break off philosophising “when I want to” (PI, 133). This allusion, itself, refers back to the *Tractatus*’ ladder metaphor and the injunction to silence in the face of what cannot be said, but only shown.

³⁷ This is further elucidated as a central point by the New Wittgenstein Movement (Diamod, Conant, et al).

2.6 What even is mysticism?

It is important to differentiate my terms for clarity's sake. A 'mystical' perspective can here be understood to refer to not so much a set of belief with propositional content that can be factually assessed, but rather an experientially grounded shift in perception that has oriented the mystic to see the world in a particular light. By contrast, a 'religious' perspective generally is taken to involve the maintenance of a set of beliefs, practices, or opinions with fervour, 'faith' and conviction. While mystical encounters may radically alter an individual to the extent that they adopt a religious attitude towards life, one may be religious without ever having had mystical experiences, and one may be a mystic without ever adhering to beliefs, values or a particular metaphysics in a rigid way. Indeed, commonly those who have mystical experiences may encounter reality in a way that appears more 'direct' and have insights of an 'experiential' character, and consequently they may develop more wariness around conceptual filters altogether. This is not universally the case, and there are certainly many who have inexplicable experiences which self-identified mystics seek conceptual frameworks for, which they then adhere to dogmatically.

Nonetheless, when Wittgenstein refers to what is mystical, and its relation to showing, my focus has been on viewing the mystical as a 'perspectival shift'. This is quite a specific, even broad, interpretation of Wittgenstein's meaning, but one warranted I believe on account of the arguments presented in the previous chapter. It is unreasonable, and does little charity to Wittgenstein, to interpret his notion of the 'mystical' as reducible to a religious set of metaphysical doctrines. That would completely undermine the entire *Tractarian* project of calling into question metaphysical systems, given religion is historically dependent on, and informed by, metaphysical doctrines: a set of truths hardened into unimpeachable, occulted, indeed dogmatic fiats. While a valid critique of the institution of religion, it is an obvious category error to apply it to Wittgenstein's notion of showing. If we consider philosophical discourses on *the sublime* and wonder the distinction between mystical perspectives versus 'propositional' perspectives becomes more evident, as shall be outlined below. But first to describe the ingredients present in a Tractarian mystical project.

i. Outlining Tractarian mysticism

In order to understand the *Tractatus* as a mystical project with the character I describe, I should spell out exactly what this project amounts to. A clear way to structure this ‘mystical project’ is to describe how these beliefs can all emerge from a single ‘mystical experiential’ realm, and how these are characteristic of ‘genuine mystical experiences’. Bertrand Russell’s four characteristics of the mystics’ beliefs in ‘Mysticism and Logic’ (1917) provide a good starting point, given there is considerable coincidence between Wittgenstein’s Tractarian project and the characteristics of mysticism that Russell outlines in his essay. Russell describes metaphysics as an attempt to conceive the world as a whole by means of thought: in this, metaphysics unites two tendencies in mankind’s mind, the mystical and the scientific. The mystical tendency manifests itself in certain moods and feelings, in which one has a sense of certainty and revelation. This certainty does not easily lend itself to expression in words, unless it be by way of paradox; but, according to Russell, four things chiefly characterise *the beliefs*, if such they may so be called, of the mystic. First, there is typically a belief in an insight into reality, an insight which is superior to and quite different from sense and reason, an insight common to the mystic and the poet but far clearer in the former; second, the mystic believes that reality is one, containing no opposition or division; third, they hold or feel that time is unreal; and fourth, they think that evil is mere appearance, or perhaps that good and evil are both illusory (in any case, their ethic involves an acceptance of the world).³⁸ I will consider each in turn and how they can be seen in Wittgenstein’s Tractarian project.

Russell claims the mystic experiences (1) a belief in having insight into reality, which Wittgenstein characterises as “das mystiche”, an inexpressible feeling of having “solved the problems of life”. This is arrived at by the second characteristic (2) a conviction in the unity and indivisibility of reality, brought out in Wittgenstein’s sense of seeing the world as “a limited whole” (TLP, 6.45). Wittgenstein holds that to have experience of the world

³⁸ An important ongoing debate rages between those who affirm a similar ‘transpersonal’ position to Wittgenstein, and those who dispute such a notion as resulting in a dis-engagement from the problems of the world, with its inequities and forms of oppression. On the surface these stances appear contradictory: one is either *of the world*, and ethically responsive to its dilemmas, striving to create a more *just* planet, or one has *transcended worldly concerns* and attends no longer to the needs of worldly-sufferers, such suffering being empty of ultimate existence, a mere illusion or superficial reality. However, it is possible that one may be both *of the world* and *apart* from it at once, and it would be a disservice to Wittgenstein to presume he had achieved pure dis-interest in human suffering. Tibetan Buddhism emphasises the fact that the ultimate emptiness of existence (*Shunyata*), *ultimate reality*, by no means dissolves the value of *conventional reality*. Both exist and have their place.

at all requires grasping the general nature of reality; which he claims requires the experience presupposed by classical logic, that something 'is' (TLP, 6.124); not knowledge of the truth of an existential proposition but an experience of an object. This logical experience is part of the mystical experience that 'there is a world'. This is as, it is only with experience that something 'is', that we acquire awareness that there are objects whose possibilities of combination require there to be a world for those possibilities to be realised in.

That 'there is a world' in turn connects with Wittgenstein's 'ethical experience', which parallels Russell's view (3) that ethics involves acceptance of the world; that is, as the mystical experience of there being a world leads to an attitude towards the world, the individual may find life becomes clearer or that they remain in doubt whether life has sense; distinguishing the happy from the unhappy person. The 'ethical reward' for the person of good conscience is in the addition of meaning to their existence, due to their acceptance of the world's existence and non-attachment to the contingency of the life of one person alone. When Wittgenstein states "I am my world" (TLP, 5.621) we can take him to be refusing to identify himself with a sole life but rather to associate with the whole of existence. This extends to the rejection of the association with the future and past of that one particular individual. This is similar to Russell's (4) feeling that time is unreal; as is evident when Wittgenstein expresses the conviction that the 'eternal life' belongs to the person who lives in the present (TLP 6.45). As in the mystical experience, space and time are merely aspects of the world that are contemplated and accepted. In this way there is an experience of 'timelessness'.

The similarities between Russell's account, and views espoused in the *Tractatus* are striking. Indeed, the marks of the experience referred to by Wittgenstein are commonplace in many accounts of mystical experience. For instance, the well-respected characterisation of nature mysticism by the contemplative scholar Zaehner³⁹ comes close to the descriptions given by Russell and Wittgenstein above. This characterisation includes intense communion with nature; abdication of the ego; a sense of passing beyond morality; and emphasis on the sense of 'naked existence'.⁴⁰ We have good reason to conclude that the *Tractatus* describes

³⁹ For a more in-depth comparison of Wittgenstein's mysticism and recorded mystical experiences, see McGuiness's *Mysticism and the Tractatus* (1966, 305–328).

⁴⁰ A parallel exists here between Wittgenstein and Huxley's experiences under the influence of mescaline; see Huxley's *Doors of Perception* (1954).

a ‘genuine mystical experience’—or at least is characteristic of commonly portrayed mystical experiences.

ii. Evaluating Tractarian mysticism

Many contend that elements of wisdom or insight are to be found in mystical experiences. However, whether we see value in this ‘mystical project’ will perhaps be a matter of whether we can relate to some of the experiences Wittgenstein describes, including those on timelessness, eternity, living in the present, and the nature of ethics. Even for those not experientially acquainted with the mystical—for whom ‘the reality or unreality of the mystic’s world’ is unknown—it can be plausibly argued we should default to Russell’s open-minded position, illustrated in the claim “I have no wish to claim (mysticism) reveals no genuine insight” (146). To positively assert the falsity of the mystical perspective without being at all acquainted with it seems foolhardy or presumptuous. And yet the hesitancy on the part of many analytic philosophers to engage with mysticism may in part stem from the discipline’s reliance upon a very specific, and arguably confining, methodological toolkit, which is usually adopted in seeking to understand the world. This view necessarily suffers from a lack of feeling for the mystical subject matter that Wittgenstein wishes to show. It is for this very reason that Wittgenstein’s *Tractatus* should not be misunderstood as an irrational mysticism but rather a rationally embraced inconsistency. The conclusion he leads us to, being, that we should be aware of the limitations of reason, and all that cannot be said but only shown. This conclusion is the consequence of rational inquiry and not of a mystical refusal to reason.

The *Tractatus* requires a mystical reading, and perhaps we are in the wrong place to fully draw out this reading; but in lieu of shamanistic rituals, deep meditative jhana states and potent hallucinogens, the best Wittgenstein can do perhaps is suggestively show this mystical experience and the perspectival shift he claims is attainable. Considering the above, we should certainly recognise the strong grounds for a mystical reading of the *Tractatus*, which provides a response to the central paradox of the *Tractatus*.

Turning to William James provides an interesting reflection on the hesitancy among analytic philosophers to embrace the *Tractatus* in its apparent inconsistency. This is as many analytic philosophers adhere to an ‘agnostic imperative’; that is, they hold it is always wrong to believe beyond the evidence: if a subject *S* believes that *p* is just as likely as not-*p* then it

is impermissible for S to believe either p or not- p . Yet James, in his text *the Will to Believe* (1896), challenges the claim that we must withhold belief whenever the evidence is insufficient. James demonstrates that it can be perfectly reasonable to believe *beyond the evidence* as it were, in issues ranging from theistic beliefs to philosophical issues and even including matters of practical life.

One rationale he provides for this is that while the agnostic imperative holds that one should avoid error at all costs, and thereby risk the loss of certain truths, an alternate but equally valid strategy is to seek truth by any means available, even at the risk of error. He demonstrates how in numerous instances such an alternative strategy can yield more benefits than costs.⁴¹ James is thus arguing we should distinguish the epistemic goals of (1) believing truths and (2) avoiding falsehoods, and that each of us will set the balance of risk between them in different places, for different projects, and yet there's no unfaultable arguments for setting it in one place rather than another across the board.⁴² James then provides a useful intercession, in facilitating dialogue in what may otherwise seem a conflict of insuperable difference in core beliefs, by providing a case that draws on the analytic philosopher's own tools of reasoning to demonstrate why we should be tolerant of those who place the epistemic risk ratio in different locales.

2.7 Literary mysticism and temperament

Some might argue that how acceptable Tractarian mysticism will be to the reader will come down to temperament—in which case so would one's view of literary inquiry, if we accept that both are tied up with 'showing what cannot be said'.⁴³ However, I will challenge this view, through consideration of the sublime. One of the most provocative issues around which different philosophical temperaments form is the attitude toward the whole experience of being mystified, bamboozled, discombobulated. Philosophical problems are of a sort to induce a sense of mystification, at least initially. To understand a philosophical problem is to be, at least initially, flummoxed. For some people, the presence of the mystifying is emotionally inviting, even thrilling; they revel in it and frame propositions

⁴¹ For instance, James demonstrates that "there are cases where a fact cannot come at all unless a preliminary faith exists in its coming" (1896, 25); he does so by pointing to the example of social cooperation, that social collectives function *by virtue of* a trust by each member that the other members will behave accordingly—cooperation then arises as a consequence of the precursive faith of those involved. These could be understood as 'positive feedback loops' arising from faith.

⁴² Jacques Derrida's discussion of ethics, and the impossibility of imposing valid laws that apply universally, is a (more) contemporary application of a similar idea; see Glendinning (187–203).

⁴³ Goldstein (2011) explores further the influence of temperament in relation to mysticism and explanation.

about the world that only increase the mystery. For others, it is a fact of life; they put up with it and frame propositions about the world that best accommodate themselves to it; for still others, the idea of the mysterious is intolerable, and they frame propositions about the world that deny it.

These contrasts in strategies, some would argue, are natural expressions of temperamental differences. Another issue that some argue brings out ‘temperamental philosophical differences’ is the sense of what makes for the best kind of explanation, which is partially an aesthetic judgment, and consequently also partially an emotional one. Does a reductive explanation that leaves no wiggle-room provide you the greatest sense of satisfaction, or does it make you feel vaguely disappointed? Is a good explanation, for you, one that sets you off on curlicue ribbons of poetic association? These questions will naturally bear on whether one embraces or even comprehend the *Tractatus* as a mystical project rather than mere self-undermining nonsense. Similarly, they will bear on the value one assigns to the literary and probably all indirect forms of communication. However, in what follows I will argue that a reduction to differences in ‘temperament’ is immensely deflationary and relativising by considering our relation to the sublime.

2.8 On showing and the sublime

Through consideration of the sublime I will make the case that to reduce this category of insight to a matter of ‘temperament’ or taste is to do violence to the value we as humans have found to reside in extra-linguistic phenomenal experiences, since antiquity.⁴⁴ Much philosophical rumination has been spent exploring the notion of the ‘sublime’ as a means of making sense of extra-linguistic phenomenal experience, from the Ancients via the Enlightenment to contemporary investigations by philosophers such as Žižek (Porter, 2016). For good reason, the sublime has consistently invited philosophical speculation as to the *nature* of the experience of mystification and bamboozlement, described above. If we turn to the genealogy of literary-philosophical discourse around the sublime, we can see this is a substantive notion, not reducible to *temperament*, as many have argued. To claim as much is a disservice to the experience of the sublime: there is something profoundly

⁴⁴ I would like to thank my examiner for their reflections upon the relevance of this topic, it has helped me shape the final product I have produced here.

dismissive and problematically ‘relativising’ in reducing this state and the insights available to a matter of temperamental differences.

As it touches on our topic, I will detour briefly through explorations of the sublime by figures including Edmund Burke, Immanuel Kant and Arthur Schopenhauer, in order to demonstrate the wide influence and relevance of the topic, and its irreducibility to ‘temperamental’ attitudes. It should be noted, however, that the majority of thinkers on this topic do demonstrate a belief that attending to ‘sublimity’ is often dependent on the individual’s possession of certain characteristics which allow them to be open or receptive to the state of sublimity itself. So, while not a question of *temperament*, potentially a question of *capability* remains.

The sublime is a concept used to refer to something ‘great’ beyond measurability, be its greatness moral, intellectual, aesthetic or metaphysical. As an aesthetic category a central characteristic is that the sublime object is not reducible to the merely beautiful; sublimity entails the experience of the ‘sacred’ inducing awe. The classic phrase ‘a profound experience of art’, in today’s post-modern climate, is more often found ironically than sincerely, yet the category of experience continues to beguile our aesthetic theories. Eighteenth-century British philosophers considered the sublime as an aesthetic quality in nature. Shaftesbury and Dennison, for instance, examined this distinction between the sublime and the beautiful.⁴⁵ Dennison attended to the contrariness of the experience of the wild beauty of nature, both of delight mingled with horror and almost despair; he came to utilise this distinction in a new form of literary criticism. In contrast Shaftesbury attended to the awe of the infinity of space; rather than establishing sublimity as an aesthetic quality opposed to beauty, he described it as grander and of higher importance than beauty. It was only in Edmund Burke’s *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (1756) that the sublime and the beautiful were considered to be ‘mutually exclusive’. I should note that in Eastern philosophy the distinction between the beautiful and sublime doesn’t exist; the work *On the Sublime* by Longinus, for instance, in the 1st century applied the notion of sublimity to ‘great’ language, attending to the fact that it inspires awe and veneration, possessing great persuasive powers.

Highly influential was Kant’s later notion of the sublime. In both its mathematical and dynamic sense, it involved the superiority of our own power of reason as a super-sensible

⁴⁵ see in Aldridge (1951) text “Shaftesbury and the Deist Manifesto”.

faculty over nature. Without dwelling on the particulars of his account, Kant's conception of the sublime is useful in that he claims judgements of beauty describe the exercise of a *more general* faculty of judgement. Indeed Cavell (1976) and others have consequently drawn connections between Kant's judgements of beauty and our intuitive judgements, while Fleischacker (1999) sees a connection between aesthetic judgement for Kant and moral and political judgement. If, then, following Kant, we view aesthetic judgements as a model for general judgement, then how we relate to the sublime and the beautiful has significant ramifications beyond temperament or taste.⁴⁶

It is important, too, to consider Schopenhauer's relation to the sublime considering his influence on Wittgenstein's own work. For Schopenhauer contemplation upon phenomena which bear a 'hostile' relationship to the human will, insofar as they are so vast or powerful that they threaten to overwhelm the human individual, or reduce his existence, brings us into contact with the sublime. Schopenhauer is referring predominantly to aesthetic contemplations of natural phenomena—landscapes or the starry night sky—and how these contemplations induce sublime experiences; however, it may be applied to experiences of art as well. For Schopenhauer the higher the magnitude of the threat posed to the human will by contemplation on the 'contemplation-resistant' object, the greater the degree of sublime feeling. For Schopenhauer, as discussed in the *World as Will and Representation* (hereafter, WWR), taking aesthetic pleasure in these 'overwhelming' scenes occurs when the subject is able to first acknowledge the sheer vastness of the object, and then consciously turn away from the threat it poses: "violently wrenching himself free from his will" (WWR I, 226). If able to do this, the subject experiences a will-less state of contemplation of the 'Ideas', in his framework. This induces a *state of elevation*—this is the feeling of the sublime. Interesting work, I believe, is yet to be done on the relation between the sublime for Schopenhauer and the ecstatic-from Ek-Stasis, to stand outside oneself, as it is explored by Judith Butler and the psychoanalytic tradition. Unlike experiencing the pleasure of the merely beautiful, the sublime for Schopenhauer is mixed with pain, in that during the experience of the sublime two elements of self-consciousness are present: a consciousness of liberating oneself, and consciousness of having been liberated from the will and its cares. It is these instances of second-order consciousness that are accompanied by the feeling of "exaltation" above the will (WWR I, 233) which characterise the felt-sense

⁴⁶ For these reasons Kant's emphasis on the sublime has received extensive discussion within literary theory; see Weiskel (1976), Hertz (1978), de Man (1990) and Lyotard (1994).

of the sublime; however, they also induce pain, as the pleasure of exaltation is inextricably bound to the subject's detaching from the pressures of his individual will.⁴⁷

2.8 The saying-showing distinction and literary theory

A serious and good philosophical work could be written consisting entirely of jokes.⁴⁸

It is one of the chief skills of the philosopher not to occupy [them]self with questions which do not concern [them].⁴⁹

The relevance of Wittgenstein's saying-showing distinction to the value of literature is clear, as without a mystical interpretation, the referential picture of language outlined in Wittgenstein's *Tractatus* would render literature to be of no cognitive value. This is because, unlike scientific texts, literary texts typically do not refer to objects or events that exist in the actual world but describe fictional scenarios. Consequently, literature does not seem to deliver veridical descriptions of the world. Yet given Wittgenstein's referential picture of language, if statements in literary texts do not deliver veridical descriptions of the world, then they do not communicate truths, or seemingly do anything. This position would marginalise the value of literature; which would be viewed as an aberrant use of language, making it mysterious why people spend their time writing or reading literary texts in the first place. Literary language, consequently, cannot be adequately accounted for on the basis of such a notion of truth and reference. By contrast, were the philosophical interest of a literary text (as in the *Tractatus*) to lie not so much in the ideas in it but in what is not in the text, that which is *shown*, then literature suddenly has its own bailiwick, a sphere which 'the explicitly philosophical' (concerned with communicating propositional truths) cannot touch.

At the least, we can say Wittgenstein's approach to aesthetics is sparse and anti-formal: he formulated no 'poetics', explicated no 'theory' of art or literature, and could be caught repeatedly insisting that defining the 'beautiful' was impossible, that one could never say what the 'essence' of art might be. Wittgenstein had very little to say on the 'big issues' of

⁴⁷ I have given only a bare bones account, but competing accounts of Schopenhauerian sublimity exist. See, for instance, Neill (2003) and Vandenabeele (2003).

⁴⁸ As quoted in "A View from the Asylum" in *Philosophical Investigations from the Sanctity of the Press* (2004), as quoted in Dribble (2004, 87).

⁴⁹ Extract of a journal entry, 1 May 1915, of the *Notebooks 1914–1916* of Anscombe (1961).

the aesthetic, nor the specifics of trope or genre, fictionality, prose or narrative form; consequently, it is understandable that literary theory has largely ignored Wittgenstein's existence. And yet, some have been drawn into the temptation of extracting a poetics from his work. This is the case because, although Wittgenstein said relatively little about literature directly, there is growing recognition of his work's relevance to the relation between philosophy and literature. The primary engagement with Wittgenstein's philosophy has, however, concerned his later work, particularly the *Philosophical Investigations*. Many writers, including Stanley Cavell, Marjorie Perloff, David Schalkwyk, Timothy Gould, Bernard Harrison, John Gibson, Sonia Sedivy and Martin Stone, examine the consequences for literary theory of Wittgenstein's later picture of language.⁵⁰

Of course, many such works are highly relevant to our discussion, and bear on the broader subject of the relation between philosophy and literature. Wolfgang Huemer, for instance, writes on Wittgenstein's privileging of the diversity of linguistic phenomena in the *Philosophical Investigations*—in contrast to the philosopher's tendency to develop ideal, rigorously regulated language, a tendency he argues sacrifices the variety of language games for unattainable exactness and universality (13–26). This bears directly on the broader question of the methodology and language considered acceptable in today's academic philosophical climate, and the tacit justification given for excluding many disciplines including literature (as well as philosophical thinkers outside the analytic paradigm) from inquiry.⁵¹

Some theorists have drawn upon Wittgenstein's later philosophy, which approaches language as a social practice that focuses not on the relation between words and the world but moves from reference to use: emphasising how words are used in diverse contexts of human practice. Such attempts could likewise be viewed as a means of resisting the prevalent analytic referential picture of language that reduces legitimate use of language to the type of assertive statements and bearers of truth-value common to analytic philosophy. Such arguments also bear on literature's capacity for inquiry, by recognising language's varied uses in pursuit of myriad goals.

My concern in this thesis, however, has been the bearing of Wittgenstein's earlier philosophy on the relation between philosophy and literature, a much-overlooked area of

⁵⁰ For analysis of the primary literary engagement with Wittgenstein's philosophy, see Huemer (2004).

⁵¹ For a clear case for analytic philosophy's dialogical conservatism, and the friction point between the loosely constructed 'analytic' and 'continental', see Chase (2010, 85–104).

Wittgenstein's philosophical relevance to the debate. Perhaps only Cora Diamond significantly touches on the relation between literature and Wittgenstein's unsayable (1983, 155–169). Diamond challenges Martha Nussbaum's claim that to understand the relation between moral philosophy and literature we must have a rough story about what moral philosophy is. She argues that literary texts can make points that are relevant to moral philosophy *without* explicitly stating them.⁵² While Diamond draws the connection between how things are shown in literature and how they are shown in Wittgenstein's *Tractatus*, her picture of how the saying-showing distinction relates to literature is left as only a sketch. What's more in defending a therapeutic approach, she overlooks the more substantial mystical reading of the saying-showing distinction, which I argue is more fruitful in characterising literature—as I will elucidate by drawing on Wallace's "The Empty Plenum" analysis of *Wittgenstein's Mistress*, and Wallace's own work in the following chapter.

In Conclusion, in this chapter I have defended the plausibility of a mystical interpretation of Wittgenstein's *Tractatus*, allowing for the meaningfulness of literature, where its alternatives would render literature incapable of communicating truths, or seemingly doing anything. Drawing on Wittgenstein's Tractarian saying-showing distinction we can demonstrate that in literary texts—as in the *Tractatus* itself—much that is valuable is not explicitly stated: rather, it *shows* itself in the way the story is told, in the language used and in the interpretive openness of the text. Positioning literary inquiry's value as belonging to the unsayable provides novel and stimulating insights into pressing questions, including how literature can aid us in 'seeing the world rightly', in adopting a mystical perspective, and how it acts as a form of inquiry distinct from philosophy. In the following chapter I demonstrate this by drawing on examples from Wallace's oeuvre, and *Wittgenstein's Mistress*.

⁵² For a valuable debate on literature's non-argumentative capacity, see Diamond, who argues there exists a variety of forms of critical reflection in extra-philosophical contexts, which are equally concerned to deepen our understanding and enrich our thought, but via embodying certain kinds of affective response to things (1983, 155–169).

CHAPTER III: The meat of literary showing

The heart of Plato's case against the poets is that, when it comes to a choice between truth and beauty, they are too ready to sacrifice truth. The heart of the poets' case is that beauty is its own truth. You will find some version of the beauty-is-truth plea in the practice of almost any writer. (Coetzee 2015, 8)

John Coetzee in *The Good Story* describes the quarrel in terms of the poets accepting some feature of beauty as more valuable than truth, but that beauty *constituted its own* truth. Nonetheless Coetzee doesn't take the further step of explicating on what grounds beauty comes to constitute truth. That connection will be delved into in this chapter. My aim, in this chapter, is to flesh out the meat of the Tractarian saying-showing distinction as it occurs in literature. Firstly, I need to allay the natural worry that much of what we shall want to say in this connection is precisely what, according to the doctrine being discussed, cannot be said. How do you communicate what can allegedly only be achieved through indirect communication? This is a pressing concern. Some have argued that it is not a distinction that can be communicated more clearly than by a 'gesture'. Yet while showing is sometimes explained in terms of 'gesturing' at something, a major problem with such a characterisation is that a gesture is a lazy thing, a shorthand. Gesturing does what could otherwise be done in words, but with less effort, rather than saying 'over there' I flail my arm in that general direction. I'm concerned, however, with showing as expressing something not otherwise expressible propositionally.

To do so, then, I will distinguish between the different categories of showing. This is important as, if these ideas are to be sharpened, something still needs to be said about the special way in which the word show is being used—otherwise the claim that certain things can be shown though they cannot be said will be too easily understood as a triviality which falls far short of Wittgenstein's thesis (i.e. I can *show* you a chair but I cannot *say* you a chair). McDonough similarly argues we should recognise the multiplicity of showing categories in the *Tractatus* (250–261). Many follow McDonough in supposing there are different categories of showing in the work. Indeed, for the purpose of this thesis, special treatment of the notion of literary showing is required. After all, were there only a singular form of showing, someone could well ask: what is the difference between Wittgenstein's *Tractatus* and Markson's *Wittgenstein's Mistress*? Are they both just attempts to show this mystical project? And if so, do they show different aspects of it? And which aspects? In

what follows I will explore the category of showing that I think best characterises the literary, doing so first by drawing on examples from the *Tractatus*, then by providing illustrations with samples from *Wittgenstein's Mistress*. Consequently, this chapter explores how this notion of showing might be best understood in terms of techniques, devices and themes drawn on by Foster-Wallace and highlighted in his reading of *Wittgenstein's Mistress*. Firstly, however, I will respond to some potential criticisms in order to make the broader project of understanding showing in literary terms.

3.1 Showing in a technical sense

In identifying literature with showing over saying, there exist two critiques of my position which are worth responding to, as doing so further elucidates the sense in which showing is being used here, and its relation to literature.

Wayne Booth in *The Rhetoric of Fiction* (2010) repudiates the 'show, don't tell' rule, arguing that novelists and short story writers repeatedly violate this rule, commonly telling us how a dramatic situation or character should be interpreted, if only to help the reader avoid wasting long lengths of time trying to infer such details. Booth's critique of the often unexamined 'show, don't tell' prescription is useful in untangling presuppositions underlying the axiom and tracing the dogma to early 20th century literary theorists. However, as evidenced in the previous sections, Wittgenstein's saying-showing distinction, of course, comes apart from the commonplace that literature is much more about showing than saying as indicated in the creative writing dictum 'show, don't tell'. If Wittgenstein's mystical treatment of the relationship between language, meaning and reality were reducible to the three-word cliché 'show, don't tell', then many thousands of pages would have been wasted by scholars the world over. Rather, as indicated, Wittgenstein's notion of showing, properly conceived, must be more broadly understood. Showing may include concealing, framing, necessary-failure, and unanswerable questions—it isn't a stretch to say showing on occasion may require 'telling'. This of course is also a valid response to Booth's critique: yes, literature may require 'telling' at times, for brevity or indeed for literary effect. Showing may be a dictum, but a talented writer knows both when to show and when to tell.

Secondly, Gerald Graff in *Poetic Statement and Critical Dogma* (1970) provides a powerful critique of the contemporary idea that poetry does not deal in 'thetic' statements, arguing in fact that poets commonly tell us 'how something is'—he argues that to assume that the

voice doing so is always involved in some variety of irony is to ignore how often and reasonably readers of many varieties do ascribe thetic intentions to poets based on what they *actually* write. While I don't disagree with Graff's analysis, the issue I identify is his critique's implicit assumption that a poet must be engaged in a single project, say the 'literary' project. Why should a writer not dip into philosophy, explication, literality, and the next moment into suggestiveness, opacity or concealment that reveals? A strong case can be made, contra Graff, that, whether or not poetry occasionally deals in thetic statements, the form of showing this thesis concerns itself with can exist independently from or alongside thetic assertions—as indeed is demonstrated in Wittgenstein's own *Tractatus*, a text that both shows and says. Now, in order to understand showing in literary terms, it is useful to consider the three following examples.

3.2 Showing through use

Wittgenstein 'shows' that the propositions of logic are not strictly speaking propositions at all. As tautologies they do not picture states of affairs and consequently lack a sense that could be either true or false. Consider the following proposition which seemingly concerns the outside world:

It is raining or it is not raining outside.

This statement is an exhibition of a fact about our language and the world that in turn allows us to observe something about logic. "It is raining, or it is not raining outside" says in essence:

$"p \vee \neg p" = "p \text{ or not } p"$

Given this is the case, this proposition tells us nothing about the weather, but tells us something about logic; it shows us how disjunction works. As is the case with all propositions of logic, it is a tautology, all it does is articulate or *put on show* the logical connections among the genuine propositions of our language. In fact, in understanding language we necessarily already grasp all that the propositions of logic articulate, practically not theoretically, in fact pre-theoretically: before the question of the truth or falsity of any proposition arises.

McGinn (2001, 24–36) makes a strong case that we needn't speak of 'justifying' logic in

that logic is coeval with the phenomena of language itself, as Wittgenstein here illustrates; the propositions of language demonstrate the syntactical underpinning rules of logic. This is not to provide a ‘justification’ but to demonstrate that we cannot conceive of the world as something to which the logic of our language might not apply; “logic pervades the world: the limits of the world are also its limits” (TLP, 5.61).

This example of a proposition that shows the logical bones of our language illustrates the way showing works in general, by exhibiting things through use. This is the *productive* aspect of having oneself changed by a literary work; it points towards the affect it works on the reader. Bouveresse (1995) takes this further, making his subject not Wittgenstein’s philosophy of language, but his actual use of language, “and that of the poets who have climbed through, on and over the rungs of his ladder”. As mentioned early on, Plato, while disavowing poetry, had in fact a deeply poetic style of writing, himself. This is paralleled in Wittgenstein’s own work: the allusiveness, ‘poeticity’ and strangeness of so many of the aphorisms constituting the *Tractatus* has attracted much comment; it could readily be referred to as a ‘poetry of ideas’. As a consequence, so many poets, novelists, dramatists and artists have turned out works done explicitly or otherwise in a sort of honorary hat-doffing to Wittgenstein.⁵³ As Eagleton remarks, “The library of artistic works on Ludwig Wittgenstein continues to accumulate. What is it about this man, whose philosophy can be taxing and technical enough, which so fascinates the artistic imagination? ... Wittgenstein is the philosopher of poets and composers, playwrights and novelists, and snatches of his mighty *Tractatus* have even been set to music”.⁵⁴

Bouveresse argues that Wittgenstein’s own aphoristic and gestural approach to writing philosophy—as if it were indeed a form of poetry—functions as a dramatisation of the process of working through questions, in a way that tests the limits of what can and cannot be said about, firstly, literary forms (e.g., *poetry*), concepts (e.g., *barbarism*), and facts of life (e.g., *death*). As can be seen, Wittgenstein embodies this aspect of language’s ‘use’ working effects on readers.

3.3 Showing through absence

This example is inspired by the *Tractatus* (see 5.633–5.6331), where Wittgenstein writes:

⁵³ For further on this, see Ray Monk’s (2012) biography of Ludwig Wittgenstein: *The Duty of Genius*.

⁵⁴ Final scene of the film *Wittgenstein* by Derek Jarman (1993).

The subject does not belong to the world; rather, it is a limit of the world. Where *in* the world is a metaphysical subject to be found? You will say that this is exactly like the case of the eye and the visual field. But really you do *not* see the eye ... And nothing in the visual field allows you to infer that it is seen by an eye. (TLP, 5.632–3)

Wittgenstein asks that we consider somebody's visual field, where this is to be thought of as a three-dimensional portion of public space: a more or less complete description is produced of what is in it, from the point of view of the person, though with no explicit reference made to anything outside the field. Wittgenstein demonstrates that however complete the description may be, it cannot represent the fact that everything of which it treats is seen from a particular point at the edge of the field. For this is not itself a fact exclusively about what is in the field. Yet there is a sense in which this fact will be manifest *in the form* that the description takes. (The description will use terms like 'left' and 'right'.) So, there is something which cannot be said here but which is shown by what can be said. The real contrast is between what we say by means of propositions and what shows itself, or makes itself manifest (for a further example, see TLP, 4.121 and 6.124).

Clearly, Wittgenstein wrote that one should not say anything except that which can be said, captured in the infamously catchy line "whereof one cannot speak thereof one must be silent" (5.131). That is, one should avoid all metaphysical statements, which, under the *Tractatus*' picture theory of meaning, would be rendered meaningless. He writes that we should respond to people who make metaphysical remarks by demonstrating to them that they have used a word without meaning. In which case, the correct method in philosophy would really be to say nothing except what can be said. Take the *Tractatus* section 5.631, for instance, in which Wittgenstein imagines the absence of a subject, and how this could be expressed in a book, by saying nothing except what can be said, yet through the use of illuminating 'absences':

There is no such thing as the subject that thinks or entertains ideas. If I wrote a book called *The World as I Found It*, I should have to include a report on my body, and should have to say which parts were subordinate to my will, and which were not, etc., this being a method of isolating the subject, or rather of showing that in an important sense there is no subject; for it [the subject] alone could not be mentioned in that book.

That is, the point of 5.631 is that the reader must understand what is absent in the text and turn that absence into something that can transform one's conception of one's philosophical difficulties. On this view, a literary text (which would not classically be conceived as a philosophical text), such as *Wittgenstein's Mistress*, composed of ordinary non-philosophical propositions, may be able to communicate philosophically (the absence for instance of the subject, or a profound solipsism) through what is not in it, and not through the philosophical significance of anything that is actually said in it. Let's consider Wallace's comments on *Wittgenstein's Mistress*.

As noted, the final prescription in Wittgenstein's *Tractatus* holds that: "anybody who understands what I'm saying eventually recognizes that it's nonsense, once he's used what I'm saying—rather like steps—to climb up past what I'm saying—he must, that is, throw away the ladder after he's used it" (TLP, 6.53). Wallace writes, in reference to what he calls this "terrible and moving" final prescription, that: "this passage, like most of [Wittgenstein], is only indirectly about what it's really about. It whispers & plays. It's really about the plenitude of emptiness, importance of silence, in terms of speech" (2012, 9). Indeed, Wallace asserts that Wittgenstein's philosophy was curiously mute in certain respects: "He [Wittgenstein] never actually wrote anything about the exquisite tensions between atomism & attendant solipsism on the one hand & distinctively human values & qualities on the other" (2012, 7). The 'muteness' of Wittgenstein, to which Wallace refers, can be understood in terms of the saying-showing distinction. This muteness relates back to the vocational travelogue: what it is that Wallace felt Markson had achieved in *Wittgenstein's Mistress* which goes over and beyond decocted philosophy, philosophical allusion and illustration; that is, where Wittgenstein's *Tractatus* was mute, Wallace felt Markson's text *Wittgenstein's Mistress* could speak. Wallace writes: "but, see, this is exactly what Mr. Markson does in *Wittgenstein's Mistress*; and in this way Markson's novel succeeds in speaking where Wittgenstein is mute, weaving Kate's obsession with responsibility (for the world's emptiness) gorgeously into the character's mandala of cerebral conundrum & spiritual poverty" (2012, 7).

3.4 Solipsism, shown not told

Consider the way *Wittgenstein's Mistress* renders solipsism—it concerns the reader being able to, simply through bold fact, experience the conjured world of the solipsist, something Wallace claims to be much more effective than were Markson to provide a philosophical proof for Solipsism. As Wallace writes: “as can be seen Markson’s seeming use of bland fact still manages to evoke, to conjure a world and state of mind. Indeed, it seems it is in this very studied indirection, this intentional sustained error by which, as Wallace writes: ‘Kate convinces us that, if she is insane, so must we be’” (220). It seems what he values highly in *Wittgenstein's Mistress* is the attempt not to ‘espouse’ solipsism as a metaphysical position—for instance, *Wittgenstein's Mistress* does not, as so many novels of ideas do, feature cerebral characters and lofty discussions—but rather to recreate the ‘emotional implications’ of the *Tractatus*.⁵⁵ As Wallace puts it: “the difference, say, between espousing solipsism as a metaphysical ‘position’ and waking up one fine morning after a personal loss to find your grief apocalyptic, literally millennial, to being the last and only living thing on earth, with only your head, now, for not only company but environment & world, an inclined beach sliding toward a dreadful sea” (214). In this sense, as Wittgenstein would hold, the novel *Wittgenstein's Mistress* doesn’t ‘teach’ one philosophy, and if someone restricts themselves to looking for teachings, they will be unable to learn anything philosophical from it.

Wittgenstein makes a parallel kind of point about the ethical significance of the *Tractatus* itself. In writing to Ludwig von Ficker about his book, Wittgenstein said that the point of the work was an ethical one, writing in the preface: “my book draws limits to the sphere of the ethical from the inside as it were, and I am convinced that this is the only rigorous way of drawing those limits” (*ProtoTractatus*, 16). Clearly, Wittgenstein felt he needn’t provide explicit ethical conclusions, asserting them dogmatically; rather, the ethical is, as Wittgenstein saw it, contained in the work, but not by being spoken in it, not by being told. The ethical character of the *Tractatus*, instead, depends on the absence in it of the *explicitly* ethical.

A caveat must be added to this picture: this is not to say that in a literary text no pronouncements can be made on ethics, aesthetics, or epistemology. Clearly great

⁵⁵ As Goldstein writes, “nothing freezes the living marrow of a novel like the brutal onslaught of pure abstract ideas, dispassionately pursued” (2011, 26).

philosophical literature does often refer to these things directly. What these writers do not do, however, is inform the reader on how to think about the novel's character; they do not dogmatically assert conclusions or provide explanations. This is the kind of demand that Wittgenstein places on readers: that they respond to what is not there by making of the work something that can be significant in the spirit in which they meet what happens, what needs to be done, and what has to be suffered. Huemer has a similar discussion, concerning the way Tolstoy expresses his ethics non-explicitly: "one cannot say simply that Tolstoy keeps his ethical views unsaid. The Tsar, in *Hadji Murad*, is presented with his vices etched very sharply indeed and Tolstoy has his usual comments on the fashionable exposure of breasts. What Tolstoy does not tell us is how to think about Hadji Murad himself, his life and his death, or how to make what we think of Hadji Murad alive in our own lives" (2004, 130). Thus, what is *not* stated (a form of concealment) may indeed be a means of showing or 'provoking' in literary texts, without inviting contradiction—as will be discussed in 4.1 in relation to Heidegger. To believe this implies contradiction is to fail to recognise that we are utilising here Wittgenstein's notion of showing with a non-ordinary, highly technical 'sense'.

3.5 Showing as emotional implications

Clearly Wallace felt the novel could be more than a travelogue. He writes of philosophy that "a theoretical work can be so intellectually taxing ... that the emotional implications of the text are overlooked" (cited in Ryerson, 2011, 21–22). The novel of ideas, he thus contended, is at its most valuable not when making abstruse ideas "accessible" or easy to digest for the reader, but rather when "bringing these neglected undercurrents [the emotional implications] to the surface" (ibid). Now these emotional implications might relate to parts of language usually rendered as flat and non-emotive; that is, Wallace writes we should be able to describe "the texture of *et cetera* itself". This statement recalls to my mind William James, who said, "We ought to say a feeling of *and*, a feeling of *if*, a feeling of *but*, and a feeling of *by*, quite as readily as we say a feeling of *blue*, a feeling of *cold*" (1981, 238). As Wallace asserts "the novel does artistic & emotional justice to the politico-ethical implications of Wittgenstein's abstract mathematical metaphysics, makes what is designed to be a mechanism pulse, breathe, suffer, live, etc . . . The ways in which the book is moving, and the formal ingenuity by which it transforms metaphysics into angst and so reveals philosophy as first and last about feeling" (49). That is to say that, rather than being merely illustrative or derivative, the work conjures what it would be like to live in the world

posited by Wittgenstein's *Tractatus*, and *enacts* his philosophy.

In the case of *Wittgenstein's Mistress*, Wallace admired how the book was neither merely an illustration of a set of Wittgenstein's philosophical ideas, nor a 'novelisation' of the philosopher's life and thought. Rather, as Wittgenstein's work takes so long on the 'literal' level, as Wallace puts it, the "migrainous mental gymnastics required of his reader all but quash the dire emotional implications of W's early metaphysics. His mistress, though, asks the question her master in print does not: What if somebody really had to live in a Tractatusized world?" Wallace claims "Markson's book renders, imaginatively & concretely, the very bleak mathematical world Wittgenstein's *Tractatus* revolutionized philosophy by summoning via abstract argument". Wallace writes: "*Wittgenstein's Mistress* ... succeeds at transposing W's intellectual conundra into the piquant qualia of lived, albeit bizarrely lived, experience. The novel quickens W's early work, gives it a face, for the reader, that the philosophy does not & cannot convey". My reading of this is that by placing the protagonist Kate in a cold, lonely, self-as-world cosmos, with the intention to capture the flavour both of solipsism and of Wittgenstein, Markson is able to go beyond Wittgenstein in an important sense; that is, to 'humanise' the intellectual problem. In this way Wallace was explicitly pointing at the inability of propositional thinking to 'quicken' philosophy or give it a 'face', to transpose intellectual conundra into the "qualia of lived experience". In brief: to *show* what cannot be *said*.

Wallace consequently sees in *Wittgenstein's Mistress* a conjuring, or imaginative portrait of, what it would be like to live in the sort of universe described by the logical atomism posited in Wittgenstein's *Tractatus*. Without having read Wittgenstein in any sense, Markson's protagonist Kate unwittingly enacts his philosophy through a patient and gradual discovery of complexity in the most ordinary language (the mental operations hidden in a mere "manner of speaking") and an attention to the ways that words set limits on what can be thought.

3.6 Showing devices

Wallace writes that Markson's *Wittgenstein's Mistress* succeeds in doing "what few philosophers glean": he succeeds in communicating the *consequences*, for persons, of the *practice* of theory. According to Wallace, that was something only fiction, not philosophy, could do. To understand how Wallace felt Markson achieved this we must look to the

devices outlined. Wallace draws out several devices in Markson's work which manage to non-propositionally and indirectly show in the way we could imagine the early Wittgenstein getting at. Devices like "repetition, obsessive return, free-/unfree association swirl in an uneasy suspension throughout. Yet they *communicate*" (emphasis in text). Here are some concrete examples from *Wittgenstein's Mistress* of how each technique works, which, as Wallace writes, "ring as true as a song we can't quite place" (95).

3.7 Showing through bland fact

Consider, for example, Markson's evocative use of bland fact. Markson provides a formally very odd monologue, consisting mostly of paragraphs expressing a series of factual statements. For instance:

What I did was spill gasoline all over Simon's old room. Much of the morning I could still see the smoke rise and rise, in my rear-view mirror. Now I have two enormous fireplaces. Here in this house by the sea, I am talking about. And in the kitchen an antiquated potbellied stove. I have grown quite fond of the stove. Simon had been seven, by the way. A variety of berries grow nearby. And less than minutes past my stream there are various vegetables, in fields that were once cultivated but are of course now wildly overgrown. (1995, 14)

Wallace is concerned with how, through mere literal description, Markson can infuse facts with meaning in *Wittgenstein's Mistress*: "Hers is the affectless language of fact ... Markson directs our misprision in order to infuse statements that all take the form of raw data-transfer with true & deep emotional import" (232). And much later Wallace refers to this as giving: "the familiar bitch & moan that Markson's novel promises & comes close to transfiguring, dramatizing, mythologizing via bland bald fact" (235). Yet as can be seen, Markson's seeming use of bland fact still manages to evoke, to conjure a world and state of mind. Indeed, it seems it is *in* this very studied indirection, this intentional sustained error that, as Wallace writes, "Kate convinces us that, if she is insane, so must we be" (ibid). In this way the sub-textual emotive agenda succeeds. It is through this freewheeling disorder of isolated paragraphs and "under the flit of thought" that Wallace writes: "under the continual struggle against the slipping sand of English & the drowning-pool of self-consciousness—a seductive order not only in but via chaos—compels complete & uneasy acquiescence, here" (ibid).

3.8 Showing and deep nonsense

A further example is Markson's protagonist Kate's use of deep-nonsensical facts via which she communicates isolation's meaning; for instance, as she narrates "one of those things people generally admired about Rubens, even if they were not always aware of it, was the way everybody in his paintings was always touching everybody else" (102). Descriptions such as this are far more effective at communicating her solipsistic, deeply lonely state than the rare explicit announcement: "Generally, even then, I was lonely" (ibid). Wallace writes: "you could call this technique 'Deep Nonsense', meaning I guess a linguistic flow of strings, strands, loops, and quiffs that through the very manner of its formal construction flouts the ordinary cingula of 'sense' and through its defiance of sense's limits manages somehow to show what cannot ordinarily be 'expressed'". This direct reference, as elsewhere, is a direct homage to Wittgenstein's saying-showing distinction. Wallace goes on to claim "good comedy often functions the same way. So does good advertising, today. So does a surprising amount of good philosophy. So, usually on a far less explicit level than *Wittgenstein's Mistress*, can great fiction" (270).

In distinguishing the various categories of showing in this chapter we can see that the gesture towards the shown is non-trivial, and that the distinction can be carried out in a range of ways. We have seen that the literary work, while composed in the language game of information, is not used in the language-game of *giving* information. Showing should be understood as non-truth-functional 'use' that demonstrates aspects of experience. It may demonstrate through absences which, when identified, become illuminating means of transforming one's conceptions of one's philosophical difficulties. This is well illustrated in the case of solipsism and emotional implications of the *Tractatus* demonstrated in Markson's *Wittgenstein's Mistress*. Devices such as repetition, obsessive-return, free-association, 'apparent' nonsense that turns out to offer a form of deep-nonsense: the defiance of sense's limits that indirect shows philosophy as felt consequence, not abstract theory. In the following chapter I will consider several theorists who speak to similar and enriching aspects of what could be understood as the showable.

CHAPTER IV: The perspectival shift

When I began this discussion, I did so in the context of the ‘ancient quarrel’. What is the nature of literary inquiry, and how does it differ from philosophical inquiry? I have addressed this by making the case for a Tractarian mystical project of showing; that is, producing a perspectival shift in the reader. In the process of reassessing the significance of the notion of showing to Wittgenstein’s *Tractatus*, and its bearing on the discussion of the relationship between literature and philosophy more generally, I have suggested in the earlier chapters that the means by which showing occurs in a literary setting is akin to ‘provoking’ a perspectival shift in the reader.⁵⁶ The following chapter is, however, integral to further demonstrating exactly how a literary work’s act of showing serves to induce such a perceptual shift.

In this following chapter I actively nuance this sense of showing with reference to a number of contemporary authors who I believe demonstrate affectively how literary showing isn’t merely *gesticulating*, or demonstrating, but rather involves forms of: concealment (Heidegger), necessary failure (Lerner), ex-formation (Wallace), framing-effects (Davidson), and non-ontic questioning (Perloff & Heidegger). Heidegger, Gadamer and Davidson, as well as the novelists Lerner and Borges, enrich our understanding of art’s capacity to produce such perspectival shifts in the reader. The re-making/nuancing of the concept of showing in this chapter thus serves as an integral part of a full reading of Wallace Markson and Wittgenstein.

4.1 Hermeneutics, situatedness and phronesis

I will explore briefly the concepts of hermeneutics, phronesis and the truth of art, as they emerge for Heidegger and Gadamer. Both offer what I consider overlapping elaborations of the same basic conception of understanding: one taking our ‘situatedness’, ‘prior involvement’, and ‘partiality’ not as barriers to understanding, but as its enabling condition.⁵⁷ This notion of understanding, as shall be seen, fleshes out the full depth of the saying-showing distinction drawn on by Wallace; to see how we shall consider their approach to Hermeneutics.

⁵⁶ I would like to thank my examiners for their valuable reflections on this distinction, and for providing the impetus that has led to the inclusion of this section.

⁵⁷ To see the working out of this conception in detail, read *Truth and Method* (Gadamer, 2014).

Hermeneutics has its origins in problems of biblical exegesis and the development of theoretical frameworks used to direct exegetical practice. In the 19th century, it expanded into a more encompassing theory of textual interpretation in general. It involved the seeking of a set of rules to provide a basis for good interpretive practice. Many conceived of the basic problem of hermeneutics as methodological: how to found the science of interpretation in a way that makes it properly scientific? It was in the 1920s that Heidegger put hermeneutics to a different purpose. Instead of presenting hermeneutics as a ‘theory’ of textual interpretation, or a ‘method’ of scientific understanding, he presented hermeneutics as *that which* allows the self-disclosure of the structure of understanding.⁵⁸ In essence, Heidegger redeploys hermeneutics to express the way in which all understanding is ‘always already’ given over to that which is to be understood (to ‘the things themselves’—*die sachen selbst*). To ground this notion, consider the example of a particular artwork. To understand a particular artwork, we need some prior understanding, even as rudimentary as knowledge of a set of paint marks on canvas—otherwise it cannot even be seen as something to be understood. More generally, if we are to understand anything at all, we must already find ourselves ‘in’ the world ‘along with’ that which is to be understood. All understanding is thus based on our prior hermeneutical *situatedness*: hermeneutics is in this vein an attempt to ‘make explicit’ the structure of such situatedness.

Gadamer takes up and elaborates on this hermeneutical project in Heidegger’s phenomenological sense, and together they radically rework the idea of hermeneutics, providing an account of the proper ground for understanding, while rejecting the attempt to found understanding on any method or set of rules. Crucially this does not reject the importance of methodological concerns, but rather insists on the *limited role* of method and the *priority* of understanding as a dialogic, practical and situated activity. Holding that in mind, let’s turn to phronesis.

For Heidegger the concept of phronesis—often translated as ‘practical wisdom’⁵⁹—gives emphasis to our practical ‘being-in-the world’ over and against theoretical apprehension, but additionally phronesis constitutes a mode of insight into both our practical situation, and more fundamentally our existential situation, hence phronesis constitutes a mode of

⁵⁸ For further, see the series of lectures ‘The Hermeneutics of Facticity’, in Heidegger (2008).

⁵⁹ The notion first appears in Book VI of Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics* as recorded in Jackson (1879).

self-knowledge. Gadamer took up this central element in Heidegger's thinking. The way in which Gadamer conceives of understanding, and interpretation, is as just such a *practically oriented* mode of insight, a mode of insight that has its own rationality irreducible to any simple set of rules, that cannot be directly taught, and that is always oriented to the particular case at hand.

Now to apply *phronesis* and situated hermeneutics to Gadamer and Heidegger's conception of art and truth, we should begin with the three lectures on 'The Origin of the Work of Art'. In these lectures Heidegger elucidates the way art relates to truth not via its 'representational' character—that is, the truth value of the work doesn't consist in correspondence between the work and the world—but lies in the artwork's capacity to 'disclose' a world. Here Heidegger rejects the totalising 'coherence' conception of truth as 'correctness', where truth is a matter of the consistency of a statement with a larger body of statements. He refers instead to an underlying, more basic sense of truth as 'unconcealment' in which truth is not a property of statements, but an event or process through which the things of the world come to be revealed. Importantly, unconcealment is not simply a matter of bringing about 'complete' transparency—because, in the revealing of things, other things are necessarily concealed.⁶⁰

Gadamer's hermeneutics elaborates on Heidegger's idea of truth, in tandem with the poetic language deployed in Heidegger's exposition (Gadamer 1997b, 47). Gadamer felt aesthetic theory had become alienated from the actual experience of art, art criticism had become aestheticised and abstracted, while aesthetic judgment was reduced to subjectivism—taste. There are two crucial elements to Gadamer's appropriation of Heidegger: firstly, the connection of art with truth, and secondly, the focus on truth itself as the event of prior and partial disclosure. In turning back to the direct experience of art, and to the concept of truth as prior and partial disclosure, Gadamer develops an alternative to subjectivism that relates to the *hermeneutical situatedness* of early Heidegger, and the *phronesis* taken from Plato and Aristotle. The experience of art reveals not in spite of, but precisely because of the way it also conceals, therefore understanding is possible, not in spite of, but precisely because of its prior involvement.

⁶⁰ An obvious connection here exists with Wittgenstein's rabbit/duck; in that seeing something in one way depends on not being able to see it in another—a distinction between seeing 'that' versus seeing 'as' (Egan, 55–76).

This, some might take to mean, implies that Showing is really, at least in part, not-showing. This is a misunderstanding however: this only indicates that the work of showing takes place in some instances through acts of *concealment*, as concealment may provoke, and provoking is the work of showing. The reader who makes this mistake has misunderstood Wittgenstein's showing notion by binding it too tightly to the ordinary language meaning of 'to show'. The notion of show, drawn upon here, can occur *too* through concealment.

This connects to a famous problem for Heidegger interpretation: how to make Heidegger intelligible while retaining the excitement of his poetic experimental prose? This problem reflects the broader common dilemma around which this paper circumambulates: the way philosophers have had trouble pulling things out of literature. This will be discussed in what follows.

4.2 On Heidegger's intelligibility

Heidegger's style has left commentators to wonder what to do with many of his formulations that sound poetic yet seem to promise a conceptual yield,⁶¹ this includes, for instance, his assertion that "language speaks" (1962, 120) or that "language is the house of being" (1962, 313).⁶² The central issue, that has puzzled many, concerns interpretation: while Heidegger's challenging, but original and fascinating, style of philosophy has motivated innumerable efforts by interpreters to 'situate' Heidegger's thought, his use of language has been a cause for concern. Many philosophers and linguists, while attempting to excavate the content 'expressed' by Heidegger's formulations, have lost patience with and dismissed his conceptual-poetic language. The challenge for Heidegger scholars then is balancing the apparently conflicting desires to (a) make his formulations conceptually intelligible so that his views have currency in contemporary philosophical discussions, but at the same time (b) do so in a way that doesn't ignore the very formulations Heidegger uses. Davidson expresses well this difficulty: "The trouble is, as so often in philosophy, it is hard to improve intelligibility while retaining the excitement" (183).

⁶¹ Regarding the aspect of Heidegger's writing which is poetic and holds a conceptual promise, Benjamin demonstrates the poetic aspect is not accidental or secondary to the conceptual aspect but gives traction to thought and is supposed to accompany us and even lead us to see what Heidegger's words point to (2005).

⁶² Vandervelde illustrates how Heidegger's formulation combines the performance of thinking with the description of such a performance: "When we go to the well, when we go through the woods, we are always already going through the word 'well,' through the word 'woods,' even if we do not speak the words and do not think of anything relating to language" (1971, 132).

This reflects this larger dilemma facing the reader who attempts to make philosophical use of literature, that intelligibility strictly can kill the power or excitement in the literature. If you try to make something relevant by making use of it, by applying it, that can be deeply unsatisfying, reducing it to a stylistic mode. So, there is an idea that application is another type of mistake.

i. Frege's choice

The first temptation for interpreters can be called 'Frege's choice'. Either we are interested in truth and turn to scientific propositions or we are interested in artistic consideration, at which point we abandon truth. As Frege writes: "in listening to an epic, for example, we are fascinated by the euphony of the language and also by the sense of the sentences and by the images and emotions evoked. In turning to the question of truth we disregard the artistic appreciation and pursue scientific considerations" (221). For instance, if we translate Heidegger's language into a propositional form, this may bring about some intelligibility, but may reduce or kill the excitement, as "surely as turning a poem into a set of propositions" as Vandervelde puts it.

This point is illustrated in David Foster Wallace's take on anti-explanation, in regard to jokes. He gives the example of reading Kafka with college students, and the impossible task of getting the students to *see* that Kafka is funny. Wallace points out that great stories and great jokes share in common a dependence on what communication theorists call 'ex-formation'; that is, a certain quantity of vital information being removed from the work in such a way as to cause "a kind of explosion of associative connections within the recipient". As Wallace writes: "The psychology of jokes helps account for part of the problem in teaching Kafka. We all know that there is no quicker way to empty a joke of its peculiar magic than to try to explain it" (61). This notion of ex-formation, crucial to many literary texts, evidently describes a facet of showing and does so through acts of concealment, via the removal of information. This is a further indication that literary showing should be understood as closer 'provoking', rather than the ordinary-language sense of showing given it may occur through removal and concealment.

Wallace speaks of a strange antipathy that providing such explanations arouses in readers, a feeling of offence, as if the joke has been blasphemed by its explanation. This resembles the irony in running something like a story by Kafka through the gears of a literary critical analysis—a breakdown of plot, symbols to decode, themes to remove—this provides, as

Wallace writes, “the literary equivalent of tearing the petals off and grinding them up and running the goo through a spectrometer to explain why a rose smells so pretty” (74). On the other hand, if we preserve the poetic aspect of Heidegger’s language without exegesis, this results in abandoning any concern for truth. Since, in the case of Heidegger, the poetic manner of saying is part of the flesh of the concept, its substance, Frege’s choice would force us to choose between two equally unpalatable options.

ii. The sirens’ temptation

A second interpreter’s temptation is to focus not so much on the scientific stature of Heidegger’s propositions, but their applicability to ‘real issues’ topics of a metaphysical, ethical, pragmatic and environmental ilk. While having the virtue of making Heidegger relevant to contemporary philosophical discussion through application, this approach arguably loses the capacity Heidegger has given us to question the privileged frame of reference chosen, to call into question the assumptions that accompany our contemporary approach to what metaphysics is supposed to be about.

Indeed, philosophy in such an applied mode would involve the mining of Heidegger’s work for ideas or insights that are reframed in an intelligible conceptual form, serving a social or political agenda—be it feminist, gender analysis, race theory or other. Heidegger’s formulations are then “[spat out] as indigestible adornment or metaphorical fiber” (Vandervelde 1988, 64). The perils of, or a hyperbolic illustration of, such an approach is provided in Italo Calvino’s *If On a Winters Night a Traveller* where he demonstrates how in pre-packaging and forcing a text into a camp among anonymously pre-established positions, the subversive capacity of the literary work is removed and the challenge it provides is consequently blunted.⁶³ It is, as Vandervelde writes, in the ‘poietics’ of thought, in the production of new ways to look at issues that the text has power.

⁶³ Calvino’s character Lotaria doesn’t read to enjoy but to dissect and weaponises works of literature for the politics they embody. She analyses the books for general theme-based content; the book is rendered instrumental to determining the author’s positions with regards to ‘trends of contemporary thought’ and ‘Problems that Demand a Solution’. Indeed, she feeds books through a machine that analyses them for adherence to the codes imposed by the dominant sex, class or culture. This hyperbolic approach appears to be an attempt by Calvino to describe his concern with an academic tendency to approach literature with preconceived notions as to where the value in a text should reside, the using of books to confirm already held beliefs and positions.

iii. A possible solution

How do we face these two temptations—Frege’s choice and the Sirens’ temptation—without succumbing to them? And how do we render Heidegger intelligible without flattening out what he says? Paul Vandervelde, in examining the way that the content of Heidegger’s ‘philosophy’ cannot be separated from the performance involved in formulating it, argues compellingly that if we want to keep the excitement of Heidegger’s fascinating formulations while bringing intelligibility, we must reject Davidson’s assumption that both excitement and intelligibility come exclusively from the text, and embrace the view that “Poetry makes beings more being [seiender]” (1988, 64) precisely *because* poetry breaks away from the language as commonly used. By breaking away from common language, poetry allows the *seined*-moment to become perceivable or hearable again.

It is in ‘failing’, then, that the word unveils being, by taking away the obviousness of what we take for granted, allowing new configurations to arise. A work of art can thereby make us ‘see’ something as if for the first time. This is how “the word gives being” (Heidegger 1959, 193). The failing of words shows the happening precisely because “it is only in the beginning that beings ‘become’ [*je nur im Anfang das Seiende ‘wird’*]” (1959, 122). It is *this* that we can understand as the perspectival shift effected through poetry and literature, by Heidegger and Gadamer’s lights. This provides a rich alternate route to understanding the capacity of art and metaphor to produce perspectival shifts in the reader.

4.3 Lerner: the poem as always a record of failure

It isn’t a system

It is a gesture whose power derives from its

Failure, a child attempting to gather

Us into her glitter-flecked arms

(Ben Lerner, *Mean free path*)

I will provide a brief detour via Ben Lerner’s (2016) “The Hatred of Poetry” an essay in which Lerner too describes the manner in which a discourse of failure is *constitutive* of the

art of poetry, and not a reason to turn away from it. As Lerner writes, “poetry and the hatred of poetry are for me ... inextricable”. Curiously enough, Lerner, in the essay, begins his examination also with Plato’s famous claim that an ideal city is no place for poets, poets who would only corrupt and mislead the young. He then draws on the common felt ‘hatred’ of poetry as the starting point for a defence of the art. Plato’s Socrates fears and resents the corrupting power of poetic performance, and defends language as the medium of philosophy from the unreason of poets, who just make stuff up, rather than discover genuine truths. His guiding accusations is: what do you know, poet? What do you really contribute? Such questions, Lerner points out, remain on the tongues of our everyday non-poetry reader today, and on many poets’ tongues too. Referencing Allan Grossman and the story of Caedmon, the first English poet, Lerner makes the case that poetry arises from a desire to *get beyond* the finite and historical to the transcendent and divine. Yet in the move from the impulse to the actual poem, the song of the infinite is compromised by the finitude of its terms. Thus, the poet is viewable as a tragic figure, and the poem always a record of failure (2016).

In viewing the poem as ‘always a record of failure’ Lerner helps us elucidate our notion of showing. Literary showing clearly cannot function by ‘succeeding’ in recording correctly the transcendent or divine; rather, it provokes in the reader an *impulse*—that is, the desire to get beyond the finite and historical to the transcendent and divine. Lerner indicates that the failure to ‘experience’ transcendence is no argument against showing; rather, it merely demonstrates that the urgency and possibilities of poetry must exist alongside a sense of its impossibility. ‘Impossibility’ here means that the poem is definitionally incapable of realising the impulse out of which it arises, “As if there were a principle of failure built into the practice” (16). Why can poetry not realise the impulse out of which it arises? To answer this question Lerner refers to Grossman’s case for the existence of an undecidable conflict between the poet’s desire to sing an alternative world and the “resistance to alternative making inherent in the materials of which any world must be composed” (18). The difference he draws is between *virtual* poems and *actual* poems: “I live in the space between what I am moved to do and what I can do” (ibid), limitations that exist both for the individual, and by virtue of the structure of the art form. As Lerner puts it in relation to John Ashberry, in his novel *Leaving the Atocha Station* (2011) through the mouth of his protagonist Adam Gordon, who is disappointed in artworks that are merely real, finished, final:

It is as though the actual Asberry poem were concealed from you, written on the other side of a mirrored surface, and you saw only the reflection of your reading. But by reflecting your reading, Asberry's poems allow you to attend to your attention, to experience your experience, thereby enabling a strange kind of presence. But it is a presence that keeps the virtual possibilities of poetry intact because the true poem remains beyond you, inscribed on the far side of the mirror: "You have it, but you don't have it. / You miss it, it misses you. / You miss each other" (222).

This necessary limitation and this principle of failure are pointed at by the fact that the poet's apology for the unworthiness of his art, for the insufficiency of his song, is traditional and generic. Indeed there is no shortage of poets asserting poetry must be abolished—that the border between art and life must be done away with—or indeed that the only possible remaining poetic gesture is to do away with poetry altogether (this has long been the rallying cry of the avant-garde). The poet's claim to renounce poetry, we should note, resembles nothing more than the philosopher's claim to do away with metaphysics. What struck me while reading Lerner's *Lichtenberg Figures* is the seemingly glib but telling line, which itself evokes Wittgenstein deeply, that: "Nothing is as metaphysical as the claim to break from metaphysics" (36).

4.4 Borges: on stars and arguments

Borges (2002) comments disdainfully on the definition of poetry commonly held as "the expression of the beautiful through the medium of words artfully woven together" (30) claiming that while perhaps good enough for a textbook, the definition is fairly feeble. Surely, he asks, there must be something more important, which drives us not only to try our hand at poetry, but to feel that we know all about it. Fittingly, to our theme, as shall emerge, he writes: "we make a very common mistake when we think that we are ignorant of something because we are unable to define it. If we are in a Chestertonian mood we might say that we can define something only when we know nothing about it" (31). I appreciate Borges' view of poetry as akin to a scented breeze, or the colour blue, or a strong emotion: experiences so deeply felt in us that their particularity cannot be captured by other words. Borges adds valuably to our conception of literary showing, in which literature provides intimations that can best be shown not through 'naming' explicitly, but through the spaces that evoke—through forms of suggestion or intuition in place of

argument.

Interestingly Borges claimed his own philosophy was derived from poetry, perhaps because his philosophical ideas arrived via suggestion or intuition to the tune of poetry's music, rather than through thought's argument. Walt Whitman (1983) expresses a similar idea: he found "the night air, the large few stars, far more convincing than mere arguments". You can imagine rationality's rebuttal. Reason might ask, "But to what questions do the stars and sky respond?" That is, not the *ontic* questions that Heidegger argues terminate in a simple answer, nor questions of a determinate physics, but rather questions that do not bottom out in facts—ceaselessly fecund questions. So perhaps it is better to conceive literature's take on these questions as a comment, rather than a response; an addendum or better yet a flourish.

Akin to Heidegger, Perloff demonstrates how the questions Wittgenstein poses on language's relation to thought are often questions which lack any single correct 'answer' but serve instead to open us onto new spaces, spaces "in which to take a deep breath", spaces as "poetic" as they are "philosophical" (23). This Heideggerian approach to Wittgenstein's questioning in language emerges from reflection on Wittgenstein's mode of investigation: its contradictoriness yes, its aphoristic formulations also, but most essentially his claim that "Language is not contiguous to anything else" (112).

Given the distinction Heidegger draws between ontic and ontological questions, we could draw a parallel Heideggerian approach to questions that are not stated so much with the ambition to find answers, but in order to prompt states of amazement or awe in the questioner. As argued, this 'prompting' or provoking of different perspectival states is very much what Wittgenstein is describing with his notion of *Showing*. As Coleridge put it, "in Wonder all Philosophy began".⁶⁴ That is, at times we become aware of the miraculousness that is existence, questions that arise are akin to the form 'Why is there something, rather than nothing?' Such questions approximate a realisation arising through the unfamiliar. 'Why is there something rather than nothing?' is not actually a question that is asking for an answer, but rather an expression of sheer astonishment and wonder over the fact of existence. In contrast Heidegger identified the ontic question he has in mind; questions

⁶⁴ Coleridge, *Aids to Reflection* (1873), Aphorism 107.

such as ‘How far is the earth from the moon?’; a type of question that terminates in an answer and that in settling for an answer renders itself inert, trivial.

For Heidegger a question that is allowing of an answer is exhaustible. To answer it is to render it inert, as having a terminal destination. How could you love these questions, and what good is your love if it makes its object redundant? In contrast, what is unanswerable is therefore inexhaustible. Here we come to what is shown, beyond answerable; a type of silence, but productive; and when we talk about productive silence, are we really meaning boundless questions, questioning that doesn’t bottom out in a fact? Borges wrote that everything he had written had been a mere metaphor, or variation on the central theme of being puzzled by things, puzzled by the fact of existing, of existing in a human body, of looking through eyes, hearing through ears, etc. In which case he was of the opinion that no essential difference existed between poetry and philosophy. Both stood for, and answered in relation to, the same kind of puzzlement. Except that in the case of philosophy the answer is given in a logical way, and in the case of poetry you use metaphor. I don’t think Borges is wrong, but I believe we can nuance his answer.

4.5 Davidson: what metaphors mean

A similar means of explicating this perceptual shift is expressed in Donald Davidson’s ‘Brute Force’ elucidation of ‘what metaphors mean’. Davidson claims that a metaphoric utterance, which would otherwise be idle or pointless, produces a “framing effect” rather than communicating any particular propositional content. For Davidson the framing effect is a cognitive affair, it consists in having one’s attention drawn to real or putative likenesses: the hearer of a metaphor is induced to view, consider or experience the primary subject in a fresh and special light, a light afforded by juxtaposing the first subject with the secondary subject. In this way the metaphor enables us to view the whole situation in a new light; this reflects my account of the perspectival shift induced by showing via literature.⁶⁵ For illustration, Ben Lerner in the novel *10:04* writes:

Part of what I loved about poetry was how the distinction between fiction and nonfiction didn’t obtain, how the correspondence between text and world was less

⁶⁵ For detailed critical commentary on Davidson, see Reimer (1996, 2001, 2004).

important than the intensities of the poem itself, what possibilities of feeling were opened up in the present tense of reading.

The ‘possibilities of feeling’ Lerner refers to, opened onto like vistas of scale, describes the perspectival possibilities that metaphoric likening and language can effect. As Davidson puts it: when we try to say what a metaphor *means*, we soon realise there is no end to what we want to mention: “how many facts are conveyed by a photograph? None, an infinity, or one great unstateable fact? Bad question. A picture is not worth a thousand words, or any other number. Words are the wrong currency to exchange for a picture” (Davidson, 46–7). A metaphor’s meaning on this account is subject to interpretation, in the way dreams are. While we may interpret a dream, that interpretation depends on the nature of the interpreter and their concerns regarding the nature of the dream and its origins. As Donaldson writes, “Metaphor is the dreamwork of language, and, like all dreamwork, its interpretation reflects as much on the interpreter as on the originator” (31). This will recur later in section VI—where I examine the connection between exegesis and creative artefact—as a number of techniques I draw upon in my creative work arise from a desire to produce in the reader an awareness of their role in the meaning construction that occurs in literary works.⁶⁶ On this ‘brute force’ account, the metaphor works as a causal device, not through any representational transaction, but by effecting this ‘framing’ shift. But how? To think of literary works leading to perspectival shifts in the audience, without explanation, is to assimilate metaphors to ‘pills’ or black boxes leading to change in belief, a parallel to blows on the head leading to insight à la koans. No account is given of how the insight is induced. Its being a Brute Force Account is thus a question begging, which is why we require the elucidation I have provided in the preceding section.

In conclusion, as should now be evident, Heidegger and Gadamer’s hermeneutical situatedness, and phronesis, provide valuable models for examining how self-knowledge, insight and perspectival shifts can be wrought via art, without dependence on a ‘representational’ truth function, but through an ‘unconcealing’ or by intentionally ‘failing’ in language, thus defamiliarising the world, and thereby allowing new configurations to be seen. Davidson’s notion of ‘framing conditions’ speaks to the similar perspectival possibilities that metaphoric likening and language can effect. As to the writers: Borges points to the fact that definition is often mistaken for mastery, yet this mastery is actually

⁶⁶ See section VI, where I examine the connection between my exegesis and creative artefact.

a form of ignorance—those things we know most deeply we can never fully put words to, consequently literary insight is uniquely responsive to this puzzlement. Lerner, too, provides an exploration of how the discourse of failure is *constitutive of* the art of poetry, in its unrealisable desire to *get beyond* the finite and historical to achieve the transcendent. The poet desires to sing an alternative world, yet meets insurmountable resistance to alternative world making, inherent both in the materials of the language and the structure of the art form. Poetry, for Lerner, sings up against the inexpressible, which Wittgenstein gestures towards, a necessary limitation. In the following chapter, I will outline how these have materialised in my own writing.

CHAPTER V: Radical contextualising

As a caveat: the discussions in this chapter may appear, to some extent, provisional. This is because the discussions formed as *seriatim* responses to criticisms raised by my dissertation markers. Thanks to my markers well-motivated and insightful reflections, I believe this dissertation is both a more well-rounded examination of its topic and, a better situated thesis. To begin with, in engaging with the authors in Chapter IV, the reasonable critique can be made that the thought of these authors is engaged with outside of their cultural contexts and in an ahistorical manner. It is reasonable to wonder whether these authors in fact fail to offer ‘alternate’ pathways to the insights gleaned by Wittgenstein, as argued, but perhaps the ‘insights’ gleaned arrive at the same destination only due to the social location of the authors: as middle-class, middle-aged, and heterosexual males. More broadly it can be argued that our encounter with ‘truth’ or insight is predetermined, always already a *matter of canon* and the constitutionalising forces which privilege some thinkers over others. This is an important concern to speak to, as it amounts to the possibility that the status of ‘truth’ is relative not only to *genre* (i.e. philosophy versus literature) but is subject also to canonical parochialism.

Undeniably the canon is anything but a natural, or inevitable, assemblage of preordained thinkers, whose words have been righteously weighted with posterity. The canon is rather a *massed nexus* of unannounced ideological forces, which selectively work towards empowering *some* performances of truth while disempowering others. This chapter will examine the influence of canon, and canonical parochialism, on our conception of truth; it will explore the implications of this thesis for the current ‘post-truth’ political moment, and examine the importance of viewing the insights gleaned, when applying Wittgenstein’s conception of ‘seeing the world aright’, as culturally and historically embedded and contingent. This chapter will therefore contextualise the quarrel and consider its relevance today; it will do so by questioning the frame in which we make sense of the quarrel as posing questions worthy of address.

5.1 Influence of canon on our conception of truth and showing

Some of the most poignant critiques of the philosophical canon are the synoptic interpretations raised by feminist philosophers, so I will start there.⁶⁷ Feminist synoptic

⁶⁷ I would like to thank my examiner for the valuable reflections which led to the inclusion of this section.

interpretations have urged that the canon's central philosophical norms and values, i.e. *reason* and *objectivity*, are notions that are deeply gendered male. Accordingly, defenders of this approach view the Western philosophical traditions, and the central concepts we have inherited, as requiring critical scrutiny. Philosophy's self-image as posing universal and objective truths, rather than biased and particular interpretations, is called into question. As such, it is evident that this general critique bears on the topic of 'seeing the world aright', and *how* 'aright-seeing' has been identified as the purpose or core of literary inquiry by the male, middle-class, literary figures examined above.

Genevieve Lloyd in her text *Man of Reason* makes the case that our understanding of objectivity and reason across historical periods has varied, yet the concepts themselves have remained consistently associated with maleness, in which case the notion of reason we have inherited, whether as empiricists or existentialists, requires critical scrutiny. In contrast some, such as Bordo in *The Flight to Objectivity*, map this gendering of reason to the modern period of philosophy in which the adoption of specific ideals of reason has been generated by modern scientific values which are antagonistic to women (28–32). In either instance these thinkers identify the manner in which canonical thought, bound to cultural context and social location, informs the methodological toolkit, epistemic beliefs and metaphysical conclusions that shape disciplinary knowledge.

Lloyd's case is clearly elucidating—I have no doubt that the male thinkers identified in the preceding section are informed in their values by patriarchal and traditional conceptions of the role of the philosopher and the method of intellectual inquiry. I believe, however that a strong case can be made that the literary, and the category of showing or 'gestural' knowledge more broadly, actually particularly describe forms of implicit, intuitional, metaphorical truth-seeking. These forms are feminised and consequently dismissed by the philosophical canon as lacking in rigour, as being too suggestive or insufficiently clear.⁶⁸ If we consider, like Lloyd, the maleness of reason to be at root symbolic and metaphorical (85), then we can see too how femininity has been defined in *opposition* as metaphorically the 'irrational' or 'supra-rational'. Furthermore, as is evident from the forgoing discussion, it is notions of *rationality* and *objectivity* that have held sway canonically, and, as is evident in

⁶⁸ We can turn, for example, to the gendered exclusion of particular metaphors evident in Frege's own writings, see Martina (2006, p. 151-169).

the forgoing chapters, it was particularly in the endeavour to transgress the limits of this toolkit that the ‘mystical’, what cannot be said but only shown, was born.

The synoptic critique of the philosophical canon is relevant to discerning Wittgenstein’s meaning in asserting that showing consists in ‘seeing the world aright’. It bears too on how ‘aright-seeing’ has been identified by these male, middle-class, literary figures as the purpose or core of literary inquiry. It should be evident (and will be discussed in what follows) that if taken too narrowly, ‘aright’ thinking, via literary showing, is subject to the very criticism levelled at philosophy. In which case, as feminist theorist Irigaray argues, if these theorists are seeking to establish universal truths through ‘aright-seeing’ this is likely occurring through the repression of sexual difference—alongside the repression of myriad other forms of difference.

Indeed, feminist epistemic-standpoint theorists, and intersectional theorists, have long argued for a recognition of the situatedness of knowledge relative to social location and positionality. And yet a strong case can be made that literary showing itself offers a powerful instrument in defending an epistemic-standpoint account and identifying knowledge as relative to social location. While at its inception ‘the novel’ was very much bound to a specific class echelon, art has since been utilised as an implement for sharing experience and for deepening empathetic capabilities. Bird, for instance, examines the relation between gender, knowledge and art in exploring how the documentation, representation and dissemination of women’s experiences of domestic violence becomes most effective when utilising an arts-based methodology (95). Art offers us the capacity to acquire and share expressions of lived experience, providing others access to our multi-sensory and embodied knowledge, which may otherwise be impossible to articulate. The possibilities of using art to generate various kinds of knowledge align closely with what MacDougall refers to as the “stereoscopic imagination” (65–82). Imagination thus has a central place in these accounts of inquiry.

Making this case, however, is not to deny that the preceding section is lacking diversity in terms of theorists’ social location. More on the perspectives of people of colour, diverse class backgrounds, female and queer theorists would be crucial to a thorough examination of this topic. The previous section offers only a sampling of a range of thinkers, who converge on this conception of the literary. I am cognisant that there is a much greater need for us, as scholars, to make conscious efforts to examine our unconscious bias. If I

were to write this dissertation again, the sources drawn upon would reflect a more conscious engagement with a diversity of perspective and experience. This dissertation has been informed in large part by epistolary auto-theorists, poets and novelists: Maggie Nelson, Claudia Rankin, Anne Carson, Chris Kraus, Fred Moten, Brian Blanchfield and Eileen Myles. These thinkers represent a myriad of distinct social locations, and their work is to my mind crucial to inducing a perspectival shift that unseats the privilege of the white male gaze. While I do not have space to enter their work more fully here (though such exploration takes place in my novel *Murmurations*) what is evident to me is that—whether in Moten’s *Under Commons* critique of neoliberalism in the modern university, or Kraus’s problematisation of the patriarchal form of the lover’s discourse in *I Love Dick*, or Myles’s queering of the modes of the poet novel in *Inferno*, or Nelson’s meandering interrogation of the bounds of theory and biography in *Argonauts*—each of these authors demonstrate a porousness to our perceptual bounds. For instance, when Maggie Nelson, a major influence on my creative work, approaches Wittgenstein in *The Argonauts*, she writes:

Before we met, I had spent a lifetime devoted to Wittgenstein’s idea that the inexpressible is contained—inexpressibly! —in the expressed. This idea gets less airtime than his more reverential Whereof one cannot speak thereof one must be silent, but it is, I think, the deeper idea. Its paradox is, quite literally, why I write, or how I feel able to keep writing. (1)

For it doesn’t feed or exalt any angst one may feel about the incapacity to express, in words, that which eludes them. It doesn’t punish what can be said for what, by definition, it cannot be. Nor does it ham it up by miming a constricted throat: Lo, what I would say, were words good enough. Words are good enough. It is idle to fault a net for having holes, my encyclopedia notes. (1–2)

This is only one instantiation of a range of theorists who further nuance Wittgenstein’s notion of ‘seeing the world aright’ by pointing to the value of acquainting us with perspectival insight, in a piecemeal fashion. In different ways these thinkers demonstrate the value in conceiving truth as relative to context and embedded in social location. So, as suggested, the notion of ‘seeing the world ‘aright’ need not result in gaining insight into timeless, universal truth but may refer to rather a piecemeal process of experiencing insights or truth(s), fundamentally wedded to historical-cultural contexts. It is important

to note, further, that these ‘truths’ need not also be morally positive and may indeed be deeply morally misleading, as evident in the following example.

5.2 Merits of the ideas of a philosopher-fascist-sympathiser?

As examined in the preceding chapter, Heidegger’s aesthetics and notion of ‘concealment’ offers an appealing parallel for enriching our conception of what showing may mean. Nonetheless, as Peter Trawny examines in *Heidegger and the Myth of a Jewish World Conspiracy* (2015), Heidegger himself in the pursuit of truth arrived at dogmatic, indeed fascistic, conclusions. It is of note that the work cited above, Heidegger’s *Poetry, Language, Thought* (1971), was written while Heidegger was exiled in Todtnauberg, after the philosopher was ousted from Freiburg University for supporting the NSDAP (Nazi Party). It is important to note, therefore, that the pursuit of truth, and the experience of ‘seeing the world aright’—as history demonstrates—may culminate in dogmatic, indeed fascistic, conclusions.

It may be asked why Heidegger has been examined at all in this thesis: given his political orientations, should we be amplifying his voice? After all, there are clearly ethical issues in privileging the ideas of a fascist regime-supporting philosopher freed from their duties at the university, writing on the joys and truths within poetry during their term of exile. But including these ideas and contextualising them, I believe, provides the clearer moral lesson, that is: Heidegger’s insights into poetry’s relation to language and thought remain poignant. His aesthetic-reflections have radically impacted 20th century philosophy, and his sentiments are echoed by scholars across the political spectrum, from a range of social positionalities.⁶⁹ Indeed as a philosopher his influence in the 20th century may be only behind that of Wittgenstein (Mulhall, 2013). This is not an argument for continuing to attend to a philosopher whose personal politics were ignored by a philosophical tradition that historically, and concerningly, treats ideas in isolation from the context in which they were sown.⁷⁰ Rather Heidegger’s ideas are included here *with an awareness* of this dissonance: that is, Heidegger’s reflections are useful in and of themselves, whilst also being demonstrative of the way the form of literary-practice offers a capaciousness for instilling

⁶⁹ See Holland and Huntington’s feminist interpretations of Heidegger (2010) for instance.

⁷⁰ Many have indeed chosen to disavow Heidegger’s ‘truths’ upon the recent discovery of his so-called *Black Notebooks*. I am sympathetic to such a disavowal, given an important facet of truth-seeking involves determining whose ideas we advance and whose we are compelled to abandon, to whom we listen and afford the right to speak and to be heard. I have more to say on the politicised nature of truth in Chapter III: Radical Contextualising.

insights across the political spectrum. Literature will produce and inflame its social justice warriors, just as it will feed the fervour of fascist-philosophers. The experience of art after all—as Heidegger himself might put it—reveals, not in spite of, but precisely *because of* the way it also conceals.

It is probable that art played its part in providing the ‘illumination’ that blinded this philosopher to the truth. I would not go to Heidegger for a final description of reality—as I don’t fancy myself wearing a black armband with emblazed swastika—nonetheless he and I find agreement on this important facet of art: that what is *shown* sometimes is brought about *through* what is concealed. One could try and deny this claim on account of its source; however, firstly, the claim crops up elsewhere as discussed in the preceding chapter, and secondly, a redefining of ‘art’ such that only works which produce insights that are morally *absolute* rather than merely *persuasive* is an even more dangerous idea. Such an attitude would likely foster the zealotry which itself characterised the Nazi regime. However, a poignant preceding question, as yet unaddressed, shall be raised in the following section. That is, in this thesis I have argued that literature is able to show some part of what philosophy cannot say. Yet this immediately begs the question: for what reasons is literature supposed not to be philosophy in the first place?

5.3 The origins of the literary and philosophical division

A strong case could be made that it is only by nefarious means that we have culturally differentiated the materiality of literature as a language game (to borrow Wittgenstein’s notion) as somehow predetermined to be *not*-philosophy. After all, both ‘disciplines’ draw upon the same medium—language—and surely one could ask: shouldn’t the onus reside with philosophy to differentiate its toolkit if it is to prove itself distinct from literary methods? As examined in the introduction section to this dissertation, analytic philosophy today continues the endeavour to gain its bearings and self-situate via adopting methodological tools that exclude the literary. It is, however, deeply misleading to talk about a monolithic and singular ‘philosophical project’ given the variety of transgressive movements that endeavour to problematise the narrow scope of contemporary Anglophonic philosophy. The enterprise of analytic philosophy has consequently faced charges of epistemic, as well as political and institutional, conservatism. There are, for instance, significant critiques of analytic philosophy on the grounds of its failure to criticise

modernity, problems of recurrent sexism, and an inertial resistance to new ideas, whilst simultaneously genuflecting unduly to the sciences.⁷¹

While we can clearly point to various works of philosophy whose methods of inquiry perform in a ‘generic’ fashion,⁷² there are also those works which are disobedient and perform rather in a transgressive fashion. We may consider, for instance, Plato’s own allegorical figurations in his *cave of the real*; in this instance, the philosopher takes the form as *prose poet*. Or we could turn to Wittgenstein’s delightfully epigrammatic *Tractatus*, a title that turns on his conception of the philosopher as a *transcendental aphorist*. There are numerous instances of the philosopher violating today’s narrowly delineated role, and constraining toolkit. Historically these breaches of convention have been lauded; indeed, in order to make its case philosophical writing commonly mobilise devices generically deployed in literary texts—consider, for instance, the metaphysical novels by Sartre or Beauvoir. In this case the current disciplinary attitude may be more reflective of the ills of professionalism, over-specialisation, and technocracy. As such, it would be highly reductive to claim that philosophy only ever utilises ‘philosophical’ tools based in ‘exposition’ rather than literary tools: engaging in saying, rather than showing.

I agree strongly with this line of critique, in fact this whole dissertation is geared in-part towards justifying this claim. I wish to contribute to fostering a cultural recognition within the academy that the literary toolkit—that which *shows* in a whole range of ways—constitutes a valid form of intellectual inquiry. In doing so the use in academic philosophy of an expanded range of instruments may take place. This being said there is of course a craft to various forms of inquiry, including the philosophical. This is no doubt, partially contingent, but also not accidental. Nonetheless, I look forward to the day when a short story or experimental poem may constitute a valid response to an essay question on Personal Identity, or Free Will and Incompatibilism. This ambition is founded in a deep-seated belief that discovering truths is commonly a matter of *transgressing* genre-boundaries, in order to arrive at syncretic, hybridised and consequently novel modes of saying and showing. I am certain that an exploration of the history of science would demonstrate the ways inter-disciplinary and trans-disciplinary engagement has led to proliferation, growth and insight.⁷³ It is unfortunate that, in order to guard themselves, many in philosophy

⁷¹ For a fuller discussion of these criticisms, see Chase (2010) *Analytic Philosophy and Dialogic Conservatism*.

⁷² See the analytic philosophical toolkit outlined in the Introduction (Beaney, 1998).

⁷³ Members of the self-proclaimed Stanford Disunity Mafia—Nancy Cartwright, John Dupré, Peter Galison for instance—examine the ontological plurality and thus importance of methodological plurality in different

departments entrench a methodological myopia that stymies such growth. This thesis is an attempt to coax the philosophers from their tent, as it must give way to the field eventually.

5.4 On seeing the world ‘aright’

This dissertation has defended the claim that the point of the *Tractatus* is not that its readers should come to apprehend some set of truths, but rather that they should, in Wittgenstein’s words, come to ‘see the world aright’. Taken at face value I may be appearing to champion a prescribed or narrowly mono-perceptual mode of seeing. What does it mean to see the world aright? And what ‘is seen’ when the world is viewed either rightly or wrongly? In pursuing these questions, I continue the case made in 5.2. At present this thesis has engaged in much abstract exploration of universals; for instance, my consideration of the relationship between language, truth and the world has occurred in a very dis-embodied, armchair mode. As discussed in 5.2, I am consequently susceptible to charges of a very specific type of myopia. What does seeing the world aright imply for a world of contested power relations, contested truth-concept, a world of privilege, marginality and structural violence?

There is a danger that even utilising the term ‘aright’ seeing implies a specific unyielding truth to which the ‘authentic seer’ has access, unavailable to the common masses, who remain ensnared in delusion. Were that the sense in which seeing the world aright was intended, then I, and Wittgenstein, would be unwittingly investing in a particularly mono-valent notion of purity, accessible solely through transcendence; a terminus which, as one commentator has described to me aptly, may cause poets to be removed from an ideal city-state and sent into exile, but which may also cause us to arrive at holocausts. These are very valid reservations. Caution is due whenever affirmations of ‘correct’ seeing are made. For these reasons I will outline in the following section the scope of ‘aright seeing’ that Wittgenstein’s *Tractatus* and its saying-showing distinction make possible.

What is seen aright? The ‘rightness’ to which Wittgenstein refers is many and varied. Some of the means by which literary showing occurs have been outlined in much greater detail in Chapter III and Chapter IV, where I draw on specific authors to examine how their ideas on the perspectival shifts, that literature may induce, enrich our understanding. Just

scientific fields (see Scerri, 2000). Their work points towards the dangers of assuming a unity of science, or a rigidity of toolkit.

what ‘rightness’ means must, nonetheless, be made clear, as it is a notion that has proven devastatingly problematic in the past. Believed ‘rightness’ in a ‘transcendent truth’ has justified war and genocide, it has been the basis for colonial dispossessions of land, for the radical Othering of different groups. This occurs in the persistent naturalising of unjust class-relations, policies of racial warfare that persist today in attempts, for instance, to entrench racial and class stratifications via supposed ethnic-biological differences.

The unfortunate thing is that this thesis cannot disallow the possibility that some of the ‘seeing the world aright’ that literature brings about will involve ‘revelations’ that disempower, oppress, entrench difference and motivate violence. In fact, there is a longstanding history of literature doing precisely that. Literature is not a morally neutral, or indeed morally pure, activity: it is an instrument very much in the hands of its users. As experienced in my own writing, certain narrative practices which entrench privilege are likely to be perpetuated unless you are sufficiently reflexive so as to catch yourself embodying oppressive norms. Indeed, if we look to the propaganda of Goebbels, we see a literary flare: a capacity to show an audience a means of seeing the world anew. The new world Goebbels saw was one with a clearly delineated enemy—the Jew, the homosexual, the gypsy—these groups were radically othered; they were reduced from human status and turned into objects of collective hysteria and hatred. Through scapegoating, the German people received a foundation of solidarity, of purpose and of power. As will be discussed, a case can be made that the contemporary post-structuralist tide threatens similar tribal othering, polarisation and cultural warfare. Literature or propaganda’s capacity to show is largely responsible for this occurrence. Showing has a lot of explaining to do.

It may be responded that, should this be the case, then literature is indeed merely a form of *rhetoric*, a means of distorting perceptions (O’Neill, 205–225), it turns minds and deceives the populace, it is an instrument of evil—consequently it should be rightly rejected from the ‘just city’. I would retort that all this demonstrates is that literary showing may be as oppressive and convincing as philosophical ‘saying’ or logical reasoning, in the right (or wrong) hands. That is, it is one of the conceits of analytic philosophy that ‘reason is impartial’. I will not waste text here dissolving this notion, that is a case for another thesis, but the lack of sound epistemic foundations for abstract reason, deductive or inductive, has been proven time and again (Price, 157–76). Truth is not objective, it is relative to discourse, it pulls itself up by its own epistemic bootstraps, it is thoroughly, inescapably, adherent to a Coherentist epistemic foundation (Quine, 185–196). Therefore, an argument

can be made that ‘truth’ is contextual, informed by power relations, reliant on unquestionable hinge-propositions and foundational axioms.⁷⁴ Reason consequently exists in relation to, and constrained by, a prevailing paradigm of cultural values and disciplinary suppositions.

My conclusion is that both implements, saying and showing, have blood-soaked hands. The important thing is recognising that ‘seeing the world aright’ is always a contextually defined, relative notion, as the truth, as we understand it, remains forever *truth-relative-to-context*.⁷⁵ Being both culturally embedded and historically informed, we might as well call it (in a Heideggerian vein) *truth-until* we can see the world anew. Tractarian showing and seeing the world ‘aright’ resembles the hypotheses one ‘says’—that is, they exist dialogically, in a cycling dialectic of thesis, anti-thesis, and emergent synthesis (Fox, 186).

Experienced rightness is consequently a contingent phenomenological experience: one that appears contradictory in that it is felt as a moment of insight, an intuition of truth, and yet also is recognised to be a historically constituted force. We can see how, for instance, the sense of rightness may be thoroughly de-naturalised by applying a post-structuralist or gender-based lens, which supports us in identifying how ‘truth’ is responsive to contingent internalised norms (Butler, 85–130). Alternately, if applying a contemporary evolutionary lens applied, for instance, to the workings of the human mind, we may view our intuitive capacities as mere adaptations—evolved to ensure survival or reproduction—rather than inimical guides to truth (Cosmides, 94–103). Furthermore, if we recognise that the interoceptively felt ‘truth-moment’ is one that, like all phenomena, arrives via proprioception—i.e. we are always necessarily making sense of new information via our pre-existing stock of information—this reveals the metaphoric nature of the experience of truth (Garfield, 15–30). Consequently, to view ‘rightness’ as something objectively ‘in-the-world’ is to risk not only reduction but *totalisation*: in which case fascism is but one of the consequent dangers. There exists, too, the danger of a generalised myopia, a non-responsiveness to new information, and a gaze clouded by too rigid a theoretical lens. I

⁷⁴ It should be noted that the status of truth, *qua* Quine, is more complicated, but for the purposes of this piece I shall not explore Quine’s own complex relationship of truth.

⁷⁵ Derrida’s work here is relevant, in particular his critique of our tacit belief in knowledge as such, truth as such, on account of the pre-existence of language, and its binding to signature, event and context (1977, 172–197).

will particularise this discussion in the next section by considering what the question of seeing the world ‘aright’ may mean in the current political moment.

5.5 Application to the current political moment

While my thesis has attempted to tackle some unresolved questions, covering some rather well-trodden scholarly ground, a question close to my heart is the relation of literature to the political. Some have argued that literature reflects politics more so than it shapes it. This is an important distinction; however, this is too often utilised as an excuse to avoid tackling or engaging a more transformative, tendentious project. Post-structuralists and post-modernists critique the power embedded in the presiding meta-narratives, examining how these narratives operate to maintain unbalanced social relations by privileging those in specific social locations. While well motivated, these post-structuralist incredulities towards meta-narratives are failing today to offer the transformative critique they offered in the latter half of the 20th century. Today, incredulity towards meta-narratives seems to have been subsumed into an atomising free-for-all, indeed, there is evidence of clear appropriations of post-structuralism by the far right. Arguably this has occurred as a consequence of the neoliberal paradigm’s commodification of social identity, alongside the relativising just discussed, and the rise of various aggressively populist and nationalist identities. This could be understood as an aspect of Dabord’s *Society of the Spectacle*, arguably leading not only to a more inauthentic reification of specific social locations, but the emergence of an identity-based tribalism. It relates too, as discussed above, to the decentring and repurposing of ‘truth’ as a commodity, as a mode of *infotainment*. We may thus, see part of the new wave of ‘sincerity’, such as that ventured by David Foster Wallace, as an attempt by creative producers to shift back to originary sites of the discourse of ‘truth’ with attention paid to how, in today’s fracturing context, we might show or describe this reality. Consequently, while I have, in this dissertation, endeavoured to ground and solidify the foundations of literary inquiry, the question remains: how to situate new, emerging modes of creative production as legitimately questing towards self-making This question arises because there is no *single mechanism* of truth *showing*. I will describe below one such Marxist vein of approach, recognising that there are many attempts presently to innovate, and examine the ramifications of this very question.

This dissertation has explored themes of genre, materiality and the narrowly prescribed modes by which thinkers—including philosophers of certain stripes—are culturally trained

to chase ideas into generically-predefined discourses of truthfulness. Plato's famed *agon* towards creative producers has been my starting point in asking: what is the nature of literary inquiry and how does it differ from philosophical inquiry? However, it is important, too, to ask: how do these questions, and the argument made to resolve them, bear on the contemporary political moment?

We are living in an era of fake news, perception management, and what has been called post-truth politics or 'truthiness'.⁷⁶ In the contemporary political culture, debate is framed primarily by appeal to emotions, it occurs in disconnect from policy details and achieves its end through the repeated assertion of talking points and by strategically ignoring factual rebuttals. We might wish for the days where facts were traditionally contested or challenged, rather than merely viewed as irrelevant and secondary to the emotional appeal of ideas, but those days seem to be behind us. The driver of this new era, the ascendance of post-truth, seems to be related to the advent of the internet: algorithms that play a powerful role in circulating news and misinformation, in constructing virtual 'gated-communities' sealing us hermetically off from alternative perspectives by constructing a 'filter bubble'. A decentralised social media has taken root which—alongside the 24-hour news cycle, the false balancing of news reports and ubiquitous fake-news websites—provides the perfect conditions for the propagation of misinformation (Holone, 2016).

The nature of inquiry, the power of modes of expression, rhetoric, the limits of reason: these are timely topics to be exploring. This dissertation is a timely one. However, so far I have addressed my questioning predominantly towards providing a critical focus on the extra-linguistic and the sublime. It is important, however, in reading this dissertation not to falter at the phrase 'mystical' and view 'seeing the world aright' as reducible to 'transcending worldly concerns'. This thesis bears too on politics. It addresses itself equally to politicised language, the power of discourse, and the possibilities for poetry and literature to impact the political moment.

As in the discussion earlier concerning the philosopher Heidegger and his Nazi sympathies, literature is not always morally positive or even morally neutral. As also relates to the question of whether or not to give Heidegger airtime, in this current political moment, some would argue that what they call 'truth' is a matter of choosing to whom we listen and determining whose ideas we advance and whose we abandon. However the valid concern

⁷⁶ We can thank Stephen Colbert, for elucidating the contemporary trend towards 'truthiness' (2005).

can be raised that this arguments reduces truth to a discussion of power dynamics alone, legitimating the claim of the forces I have just raised the above concerns about.⁷⁷ Nonetheless, this point of tension serves to emphasise that *Truth* has never been so politicised as at this juncture, and while the political implications of either saying or showing truths are not explicitly a dimension of this dissertation, it is useful to explore in what ways, and for what reasons, we might undertake a tendentious literature that amounts to a 'politicisation of art'. Thus, to diverge briefly into this territory I will begin by considering the influence of Walter Benjamin.

Benjamin's efforts to develop a politically-oriented, materialist-aesthetic theory have significantly influenced the Frankfurt school of critical theory and have been informative for the likes of Derrida, Agamben and, Habermas among others. Benjamin explored the *aestheticization* of politics and how this aestheticization became a central tool of fascist regimes, by offering a spectacle in which the proletarian masses were able to express themselves without seeing their rights recognised. The logical result of fascism, for Benjamin, was the introduction of aesthetics into political life. By contrast communism, he held, would respond by *politicising* art, as examined in *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*. Of course, the politicisation of art, in association with the Soviet Union, has had an equally dark undercurrent. Art subordinate to political life, incorporated for political use, is closely connected to the fascist's aestheticization of politics. Benjamin's formulation of the politicisation of aesthetics, however, was intended to be associated with a revolutionary praxis, something redeeming, and a means to cope or resist for those living under a restrictive, censorship-enforcing society.

To examine how these ideas have been taken up we can consider Debord's *Society of the Spectacle*. In this influential work Debord examines the development of a modern society in which authentic social life has been replaced with its representation. Debord argues that the history of social life can in fact be understood as "the decline of being into having and having into merely appearing" (95). How may literature challenge this process; that is,

⁷⁷ Epistemological standpoint theorists Lukács, Hartsock, Haraway are all worth further pursuit in relation to this topic. Furthermore, Medina (2013) offers valuable reflections on the epistemology of resistance that are worth pursuing in regards to this topic. Medina weaves together elements of Aristotelean virtue ethics, communicative ethics and radical contextual pragmatism, in order to describe the epistemic vices of ignorance and insensitivity resulting from the social arrogance accompanying privilege. Medina refers to as not merely a 'double consciousness' but consciousness that is multiplicitous, kaleidoscopic and many-perspective'd. He makes a strong case that in order to achieve such a perspective a networks of solidarity across social-differences are required, if we are to broaden and correct collective knowledge.

avoid participating in naturalising our current condition—an historical moment in which, as Debord argues, the commodity “completes its colonization of social life?” (84).

As argued in this dissertation, texts which endeavour to show or gesture at subtle inversions that have taken place may be seen to enact truths Debord points to—after all, what is a more powerful way of demonstrating that relations between commodities have come to supplant relations between people than to enact and mirror this occurrence in a literary text? The arts, as have been argued, are often better able to *Show* what can sometimes be so hard to see or say. This includes the way that social relations among, and between, people have become mediated by images; or the way we passively identify with the ‘spectacle’ of living; and how this ‘appearing’ supplants genuine living. Clearly this theory describes an, at large, *felt* phenomenological shift in how we relate to the world and conceive ourselves. In the spectacular society impoverishment takes the form of a lack of authenticity, and the consequent distorting of human perceptions.

So how can literature help people ‘see the world aright’, in Wittgenstein’s phrase, in the context we find ourselves in? The answer may be that, if we adopt Debord’s assertion, then the spectacle *itself* prevents individuals from recognising that the society of the spectacle is only a moment in history that may be overturned through revolution. Literature, then, may be arguably critical to recognising the society of the spectacle; as it is through *Showing* that literature possesses the capacity of ‘righting’ our distorted perceptions. Given it is the distortion of perceptions that results in the consequent degradation of knowledge, in turn hindering critical thought, literature can be crucial to revolutionary awareness and consciousness-raising, be it through class-consciousness concerning the economic mode we inhabit, or addressing itself, intersectionally, to the multitude of oppressive structures and power relations.

As will be discussed, however, it would be naively optimistic to assume this to be literature’s usual mode of analysis, or indeed primary function. Reification, commodification, and depoliticised aestheticisation ensure that the majority of literature bows to convention, perpetuating discourse and thus propagating the hegemonic ideology of the ruling class—to utilise Gramsci’s notion of coerced consent (34–56). Often, where a work is truly critical, it remains in the margins or preaches to the converted from within its echo-chamber. There is also a tendency, of which I have been somewhat guilty, of writing in a ‘decadent’ or *avant-garde* mode, that is consequently inaccessible to the majority.

Nonetheless, this is not to claim literature is completely powerless. It is worth considering John Berger, critic and novelist, who provides one such avenue for literature proving *tendentious* and challenging the establishment.

In contrast to a *depoliticised aestheticism*, art for Berger is a crucial instrument to be used in advocating for one's political and cultural convictions; literature offers us a means of resistance in the culture wars. This is evident, for instance, in his text *Ways of Seeing*, in which he attends to the politics of images, endeavouring to demystify the embedded conservatism in art. Berger demonstrates how art commonly functions as “a social practice to maintain illusions”; he does so by drawing attention to, for instance, the compulsive sexualising of the female body in sculpture, or the association between landscape painting and property ownership, and how these unsavoury traditions continued in modern advertising (Berger, 1992).

As the literary theorist Lukács demonstrates, any sort of depoliticised aestheticism is prone to participate in forms of ‘reification’. Lukács conceived works of art as a ‘closed totality’ that, while structured by the laws of its medium, served to objectively reflect the development of humanity, in the mode of ‘mimetic evocation’ or suggesting by *imitation* or *mirroring*. Lukács’ class-cognisant analysis of literature offers a useful example of how literature may be put to a ‘purpose’ and in so doing serve as a measure of works, be they ‘decadently’ *avant-garde*, or purely conventional and culturally dogmatic tracts. In so doing Lukács tacitly suggests there is no neutral ground: either you participate in literature in a self-conscious attempt at the counter-cultural transformation of society, or you participate in reification and implicitly foster the existing status quo.

A work of art may contribute to the human capacity to become self-conscious of our universal character by reflecting the existing social totality in the artwork. In *performing* the social forms constituting modern society it may allow us to see ourselves. This was an endeavour I strived to enact in my epistolary novel *Murmurations*. It is important to note that there are challenges and working in this mode is an ongoing project, my work would have been difficult to reach for most readers, for some it would have remained surface-level, excessive intellectualisation may have reduced its accessibility. However, as the self-soothing saying goes, ‘writing is a process’ and I hope in later works to address the issues of my first novel—nonetheless it was an experimental work towards a goal that I am glad to have participated in. climbing a ladder, one might say, before kicking it away...

In conclusion, I have here attempted to contextualise the ‘ancient quarrel’ and examine its relevance today. As evidenced, the literary and philosophical ‘canon’ is anything but natural or inevitable. We live informed and influenced by ideological forces, propagated by systems and power-relations that undermine some while empowering others. This chapter has been offered in an attempt to recognise the real-world applications of Wittgenstein’s philosophy, to demonstrate the potential capacity it has to make sense of the current ‘post-truth’ political moment. Only in recognising and owning the canonical parochialism we are all subject to, can the contingency embedded in our philosophical conclusions be identified. If we are to understand Wittgenstein’s conception of ‘seeing the world aright’ through Showing, it is necessary that we attend to the piecemeal, contextual and situated aspect of inducing perspectival shifts in offering, through literature, truth.

CHAPTER VI: Connecting exegesis and creative artefact

The ‘ancient quarrel’ and the ejection of the poets from Plato’s ideal society may appear a quixotic problem: who cares if novels or poetry can or cannot be philosophically justified? Creative writers aren’t petitioning any philosopher for permission to exist. But this question of the standing of literature, and more importantly how to do it properly, has bothered me ever since I first found myself, to the detriment of a nascent career in philosophy, toiling away on a novel.

My particular interest in David Foster Wallace arose from an appreciation of his work and his particular way of rendering philosophy in narrative. I have received from Wallace what could be called ‘stylistic influences’, however it is more apt to say these arise from a shard conception of literary inquiry. For instance, the sense of ‘roughness’ in my novel, the lack of neat resolutions, the fragmented vignettes and experimental methods, all arise from a desire to explore new ways to express and inquire. My novel is composed of a series of vignettes, loosely connected in terms of character and storyline. It is, however, connected by an overarching desire to serve as philosophically illuminating, to explore matters and get to the depths of them. Yet not merely by allusion to, or illustration of, existing philosophical work. I seek to avoid doing, in Wallace’s terms, ‘decocted’ philosophy—but rather to show what philosophy cannot say.

Wittgenstein has been a philosophical inspiration for a long time, and his saying-showing distinction, and broader mystical project, has long fascinated me as it is a distinction situated at the contours of analytic philosophy and alternate methodologies for inquiry.

I began initially to work in straight-up fiction. And in this writing the inquiry into the age-old quarrel between the poet and philosopher has supplemented my thinking about how the novel can function in this way, non-derivatively of philosophy. This is largely as my novel originated from a desire to explore a sort of counterpoint—ways to blend philosophy with narrative into a unified work. I began from the vague intuition that in exploring these topics through a novel I wasn’t merely doing some transposition of philosophy into fiction, but that, in itself, the exploration of these topics through this literary medium would inform my findings. In writing this exegesis I wanted to flesh out this intuition. A year in I shifted to poetry writing. The reason for my shift from novel to poetry, and the relationship between the novel I have offered and the poems that preceded it, is captured well once more by Nelson:

And now, after living beside you all these years, and watching your wheel of a mind bring forth an art of pure wildness—as I labour grimly on these sentences, wondering all the while if prose is but the gravestone marking the forsaking of wildness (fidelity to sense-making, to argument, however loose)—I’m no longer sure which of us is more at home in the world, which of us more free. (65)

Maggie Nelson echoes my reasons for a shift from prose to poetry. Another way to put it is that I was drawn by the fact of poetry’s capacity to draw out some of the less expected, or continually unanticipated connections that do exist between things but go unnoticed. As John Mure puts it, “when we try to pick anything out we find it hitched to everything else in the universe” (Limbaugh, 1984). This notion resembles the Tibetan Madhyamaka notion of the interdependence of all phenomena: this was part of what poetry could show for me. Interestingly, this poetic shift then fed into the creation of an epistolary novel that wedded together letter, essay, narrative, poem and prose, and this became my final creative artefact product, titled *Murmurations*.

6.1 On Murmurations

Straddling a threshold, I’ve learnt, is not the same thing as embodying a contradiction.

What we want? To broadcast the circles, we find inside ourselves.

Why now? Because the solstice enables the narrative poem

it seems we wake to. (*Murmurations*, 147).

My epistolary novel *Murmurations* weds essay and poem to fiction and dream sequence. You, as reader, follow the correspondence between Juniper and Electra—as they weave strands of Ludwig Wittgenstein to Judith Butler, of Joseph Campbell to Roland Barthes. Written in a vein continuous with an emerging auto-theoretic tradition of poets Brian Blanchfield, Maggie Nelson, Chris Kraus and Eileen Myles, this queer love story provides an instantiation, and problematisation, of the lover’s discourse. *Murmurations* draws on Continental philosophers and German mystics, on Buddhist psychoanalysis and gender theorists. This novel is highly self-reflexive, as if the characters were aware of, and trying

to wake up from, the discourses in which they were enmeshed. Indeed, much of the book concerns how to be in relation to the life-story we cannot own. It asks:

When I tell others of my life, should I make of it a well-formed artefact?

What good is your love if it makes its object redundant?

How can we encounter the world not as a collection of objects, but as a communion of subjects?

Is misrecognition, then, the enabling condition for desire?

These murmurations, like starlings, cross Australia's landscape, from admiring cheap-cut glad-wrapped meat in an RSL in rural Tasmania, to riding the lentil belt of Canberra's Inner North. They travel to Tibetan monasteries in the foothills of the Himalayas, to the glacial lakes of British Columbia. A modern love story, a litany of questions and a manifesto of the inexpressible. As Juniper writes:

Caught in the impossibility of accounting; I give you instead a questioning of what it is to narrate and its impossibility. Self-reflexivity traps me in the structure of 'story breaking down'—an old formalism. (*Murmurations*, 147)

6.2 How does the exegesis relate to the creative product?

In general, I wanted to find the point at which philosophy and fiction met, the fault line where these colliding masses produced what begins as friction, is felt as tremble, then experienced as shattering, destabilising. Something I imagined you could only properly know while it is happening, when you are in the midst of it, and only besides your trembling teacups, in the after-quake, measure the magnitude of. What I discovered in my reading in its stead? No fault line, but a seam, a particular lineage or vein in the face of the rock. The shape of which I could trace with a finger along the hardback spines, author to author: Calvino, Kundera, Coetzee, Foster-Wallace, Bolano, Simic, Carver, DeLillo, Lerner, Nelson, Ashberry, to name a few sedimentary layers.

Meanwhile I set out to produce an exegesis that could function as an assembly manual, with each part of the machine labelled. Suffice to say I never found in the exegesis the ghost, who I'm convinced remained enmeshed in the cogs and pistons, the wheels and

gears, a viscous invisible fluid, the ghoulish spirit that makes the whole come alive and trundle. Perhaps in writing and dredging fiction I began to have non-describable intimations of what could only be shown, but never in the exegetical work. It was a different, though complementary, study. Below I will examine how the content of my creative artefact, and the devices drawn upon, relate to my exegetical inquiry.

6.3 Literary techniques in murmurations

As described in ‘The Meat of Literary Showing’ section, there exist a range of devices drawn on to show what cannot be said, techniques of which my own work demonstrates a range. My poetry and novel have also been influenced by a number of poets, and poetic postmodern techniques. Though I would like to wear that influence the way Lerner wears it in *Lichtenberg Figures*: “I don’t deny the influence, but it’s less / A relation of father to son than a relation of / Moon to tide”.

The limits of my language mean the limits of my world. (Wittgenstein, TLP, 5.6)

If the limits of my language mean the limits of my world, what techniques are available to push and pull the elastic language available to me, in ways that stretch and expand my world? I explore different ways to construct poems, from loose sonnet sequences that employ line breaks, to aphoristic, sometimes surreal paragraph poems. But the book is fundamentally an attempt to explore communication, its limits, and different ways of stretching language and ideas.

While this novel is quite difficult formally, and reasonably experimental, it is largely in prose. Consequently, it could be conceived of as an unfolding in prose of preoccupations in my poetry, or the novel as a genre which absorbs other genres, able to contain my poetry. Or the novel as once preoccupied with the surface effects of language, a novel that doesn’t elaborate a program preceding the act of composition but rather unfolded outside my conscious control. This all arises in an attempt to suggest obliquely, to write experimentally and indirectly, yet to find and strike that balance where both the disruptions to, and the continuity of, language serve as communicative. To discover means of distressing the form in ways that challenge belief in the ‘seamless lyrical utterance’. To unpick the imagined seams, as it were.

In producing sequences of poems/letters/essays in *Murmurations* that ruminate on and play with language, sense and the world, I draw upon and try to develop my own forms of Oulipian-style constraints. These include experimenting with juxtaposition of imagery, conjoining failures of speech with repetition and recombination of sense, playing with malformed syntax or syntactical ambiguity, destabilising pronouns and deictics. I employ irony formally in my work. Yet I hope that irony in the work strikes the reader as far from the vernacular sense of ‘ironic’ as insincere. I seek to avoid the easy, self-congratulatory mode of detached cultural diagnosis that’s so common in purportedly innovative poetry. That said, I have concerns that at time my poetry can be either too dense or too cryptic, that it doesn’t repay careful attention but is rather a silly scamper across ideas and language. As Lerner writes, and as I read ironically, in San Francisco “We had thought that by arranging words at random we could avoid ideology. We were right. Then we were terribly wrong. Such is the nature of California”.

To the detail: I explore collage, producing lines that collide and in collision produce new (sometimes interesting) monster hybrids, creating a sense of the poem as continuously discontinuous, like a series of thoughts interrupted. The work of bricolage is left to the reader who must choose their own adventure, in a collage that never fully assembles. I construct found poems with borrowed language; that is, buzzwords, common inquiries and phrases, using quotations or citing theories, each of which is recycled and revised throughout individual poems and the novel at large. I also create mosaics collaging shards of broken images together in order to produce a linguistically oneiric dreamlike effect with the language, whether absurd or comical or sentimental. Related to this oneiric feeling, I want, in certain poems, to create the narrative sense of time passing, of things happening, of what could be described as a *plot*, though it remains difficult to say precisely what is going on.

In my poetry I attempt to create affecting contrasts and types of cognitive dissonance by drawing upon juxtapositions. For instance, I juxtapose classical lyric images against language written at a certain distance; technical, ‘objectivist’ language, or rhetoric from various realms—whether political, administrative, academic or commercial. Using this juxtaposition, I set stark declarations and proclamations against failed or tentative speech. Some poems also oscillate violently between lyrical prose and trite, colloquialistic or idiomatic expressions, contrasting academic grandiloquence with blunt purely pragmatic language. I also draw upon cliché, jargon and platitudes; which I then attempt to subvert

or contort, into strange contexts, so they take on new meaning, and so a type of critical pressure on the words is maintained.

These techniques are used to undermine easy decipherability, allowing for delayed meaning and inexactness in meaning so that the work's sense remains subject to continual revision. By seeking to produce misprision in the reader, or what could be characterised as 'productive frustration', the work introduces an 'instability' that elucidates the participatory nature of meaning construction between reader and author. In this way I emphasise process over product, or composing over end composition, to undermine or at least worry at the tendency in reading to seek decipherability as a critical aim; means, as Lerner puts it, of defeating or deferring actuality and thereby refusing closure.

6.4 The anti-hero in *Murmurations*

The anti-hero is a common trope. The main character who lacks conventional heroic qualities, while still sometimes performing actions that are morally correct if for the wrong reasons; motivated by self-interest or doing good but in a way that defies the conventional ethical code of their context. What I have employed in the stead of an antihero (who is commonly merely a foil to the traditional 'hero' archetype anyway) is a protagonist, Juniper, who does act as if informed by idealism, courage, morality—classic-heroic qualities—and yet, often makes mistakes. They fuck up.

My protagonist, true to life, is both a work of auto-fiction and also akin to the anti-hero's of 19th century Russian fiction, seeking to live 'authentically' but subtly oblivious to their own social-situatedness, a disaffected young white man of privilege. This concern is typical: in recent decades post-modern contemporary authors from Sally Rooney to Ben Lerner have sort to write fiction driven by neurotic social self-presentation, have demonstrated a tendency towards offering stylized disbelief in lieu of serious intellectual commitment. Similarly, in *Murmurations*, Juniper could be accused of posturing, in tandem with an obliviousness to the historical moment he occupies, his social location, and how this informs the opinions he comes to hold.

The difficulty in identifying with the author is not a difficulty at all, in terms of the capacity of the work to engage the reader's imagination in critique. I think of John Coetzee's protagonist David Lurie in *Disgrace*, a middle-aged white university professor who tacitly

refuses to recognise his abuse of power, his use of violence over a young student. Accused of sexual assault, rape, and refusing to offer an apology. The protagonist continues oblivious to his situational privilege and consequent culpability, he narrates as if from within a cocoon of his own sense of morality, idealism, courage. Seeking simple 'identification', in this work, would be a failing of the reader. There are major similarities to the project in *Murmurations*".

6.5 The content and the journey

The content I have attempted to explore in *Murmurations* is varied. It explores place: the monastic environment, British Columbia, New York, Tasmania. I would begin writing poems as a way to amuse myself by trying to make something new, or surprise myself with unexpected conjunctions, but then this idle pursuit took on surprising weight, seriousness. To think of the porousness of certain borders, was the way I wrote poetry and letters pouring over into the way I lived? And the way I lived seeping into my poems? And then the difficulty of determining how it was I wanted to live, trying to discern how in fact I did live (a difficult task), what was reality, what was fantasy, what was a heroic subversion, what was a childish tantrum; the internal and external conflicts that perhaps mark youth in transition to adulthood.

What did it mean to abandon place in the traditional structure of class? Was this a permissible wandering for someone in his 20s, the equivalent of an extended 'gap-year' from which they would return ready to assume their place in that structure? And what about leaving the cultural centre for the periphery, both geographically and intellectually? Living amongst provincial farmers in Larina Valley, among idlers in collapsing share houses, in the mountains in northern India among Tibetan monks, in anti-nuclear communes in Hamburg, or anarchist squats in Vienna? Was it a choice to live as a perpetual vagrant, a wanderer and outsider—living out of a suitcase in subletted rooms, vans, tents? And if so, did this arise from a desire to choose the open to the known, a pilgrimage over stagnancy? Or was it the result of a trauma—the loss of my lover whom I'd projected a stable life with children, a home, hearth, and garden. All auto-theorising aside, perhaps this was just an iteration of Basho's model for poetry, as "the artless expression of a child at play".

6.5 Buddhist emptiness, Wittgenstein and poetry

In examining content, I should outline the relationship between Wittgenstein and Buddhist philosophy, and how my novel *Murmurations*' examination of lived Buddhist philosophy relates to my exegetical work. My research led me from Wallace and Wittgenstein to Tibetan Buddhism, in particular as relating to metaphysical paradox. As Lerner wrote in the *Lichtenberg Figures*, "There is nothing more metaphysical than the claim to break with metaphysics" (36). This plays out in Buddhist philosophy as it does Wittgenstein. The Buddhist conception of emptiness I found echoed Wittgenstein's Tractarian project, in that Chandrakirti develops a metaphysical theory, that, in virtue of rejecting the idea of a fundamental nature of reality, is deeply paradoxical—seeming on the one hand to provide an account of the fundamental nature of reality while rejecting the coherence of any such account. Yet as I have argued in the preceding, this need not render a theory incoherent, if the Buddhist tradition, like Wittgenstein, takes seriously the possibility that metaphysics is directed "not at a deeper analysis of reality, but at extirpating the need for such a deeper analysis" (Garfield, 68). According to the Madhyamaka, to exist is to be empty, and emptiness—the lack of any intrinsic nature—is the intrinsic nature of all things. Put differently: to attack the enterprise of fundamental ontology where that is taken to be the project of finding the ultimate nature of reality is still to do fundamental ontology, as indeed Wittgenstein notes in his famous ladder analogy (TLP, 6.54).

eerily akin to Wittgenstein, Nagarjuna states that even the statement that phenomena are empty of intrinsic nature is itself merely a conventional truth, which, by virtue of the necessary involvement of language with conceptualisation, cannot capture the non-conceptualisable nature of reality. Nonetheless language (designation) is indispensable for expressing that inexpressible truth. As Garfield puts it, "this is not an irrational mysticism, but rather a rational, analytically grounded embrace of inconsistency" (2014, 68). On the Madhyamaka account then, the drive for consistency which in philosophy is often taken as mandatory is simply one further aspect of ignorance involving the superposition of a property onto reality that reality in fact lacks.

This connection between poetry and the Buddhist notion of emptiness informs to a large degree my creative explorations. This arose because I was curious about the possibilities for creating poetic content not absorbed by a sense of self as 'interiority' but engaged with either non-self or a more expansive notion of self. This occurred in tandem with my more

in-depth exploration of various mindfulness practices and introspective meditative states, and the sense of ‘selflessness’ described in Mahayana Buddhism. This is a familiar ‘no self’ that seeks to un-weave the ‘exaggerated-self’ whose spell we commonly operate under, and which dictates the course of so much written poetry. My objections to this self-driven work began after reflecting on the degree of absorption in childish delusion obvious from my first three collections of poetry. Since breaking, to some extent, away from this model, I believe my poetry has become more expansive, less repetitive and certainly less morose.

I studied the Prasangika Tennen system within Buddhist philosophy, a system that ascribes to the ‘selflessness’ of all phenomena, referred to as *Shunyata* or ‘emptiness’. To give a very limited explanation: all phenomena we know and interact with lack inherent existence, in the sense that they are not the independent, unitary, self-sufficient objects we imagine them to be, but rather are dependently arisen, interdependently existent, impermanent objects that exist by means of conceptual-imputation. Aspects of this philosophy have been pointed towards by a number of Western philosophers, among them Wittgenstein, Heidegger, Kant, Hegel and Hume.

Importantly, a conceptual understanding of this emptiness as spelt out by philosophers is only the first step according to Tibetan Buddhist philosophy. The ultimate goal is ‘direct realisation’ of emptiness, and this is achieved via numerous means, including ethical action, the cultivation of altruistic compassion, study and meditation. The contention, explored in my creative work, is that poetry, in a manner distinct from philosophy, provides a further method, given poetry involves exercising creative critical faculties that allow us to think beyond governing concepts. In my poetic exploration a central governing concept I have approached has been the self. In my writing I was inspired by Bashō’s use of and approach to haiku. Haiku can be understood as pointing both towards the world and towards the self. Read in this way, haiku serves as a reminder that the reader should not become too fixed in a singular sense of what the self consists in and of, where it resides, and how it can be set against, and considered distinct from, the world. This has been referred to as the haiku “bow[ing] to what lies on both sides of the skin’s millimeter-thick boundary”. This is another way of expressing this sense of unshackling the mind from any singular and absolute story, any un-nuanced and reductive dividing of world into subject and object, self and other, illness and blossom, freedom and capture. We could conceive, then, of a core goal of this form of poetry as the recognition of the necessary permeability of these categories, the suggestion that these divisions are at core artificial.

I have not been writing a lot of Haiku, but my project runs on similar lines; that is, involving the attempted dissolution of categories, and the recognition of an expansive sense of self, that we indeed feel within ourselves the lives of others: people, creatures, plants. An interesting parallel here exists with Wittgenstein's case against private meaning: that words have their meaning because we share a common language and common forms of life—we speak as we do because of what we do, and this is all a properly *public* affair. This connects with the ideas I hoped to explore in poetry: that we could move away from the image of the poet or philosopher as a lonely self, brooding over private sensations, and move towards a focus on our culture, our shared practical life together, a characterisation of common experience.

CONCLUSION

You know how a state of affairs that would contravene the laws of physics can be represented by us spatially, one that would contravene the laws of geometry cannot? (Wittgenstein, TLP, 3.0321)

The above quote is a further way of talking about the way literature may be able to do what philosophy cannot, because philosophy, narrowly construed, can't get outside its own methods. To relate all this back to the framing question, then: how does this exploration bears on the 'ancient quarrel' between the poets and philosophers? Through my close reading of Wallace and "The Empty Plenum", my case for Tractarian mysticism, and the value and relevance of the saying-showing distinction to literary inquiry, I hope to have shed some new light on the 'ancient quarrel', and importantly some light on where the worth in literature resides.

Plato often refers to poets as divinely drunk, stirring us to the depths with their irresponsible profundity, unable to give us an account of how they arrived at these profundities or what they might even mean by them. How can such no-accounts be trusted? I have argued that by looking to the Saying–Showing distinction we can better see grounds for appreciating and perhaps trusting such non-accounts.

This thesis has a number of tentacular limbs. These dexterous appendages creep in many directions. They toy with and test Plato's city gates—perhaps forcibly separating a quarrelling philosopher and poetaster or two. They fumble about over Wittgenstein's *Tractatus*, their pad-like, hydrostatic suckers getting tangled with a few aphorisms (particularly propositions 1, 7 and the preface). They feel their way about inside Wallace's plenum, curious to see if it is indeed empty. Then they gather what they've found and paint a picture, something like one of those great colossal squid self-portraits on the ocean floor.

In approaching Wittgenstein's mystical project, I have shown that such a reading of the *Tractatus* provides a coherent response to the central paradox of the *Tractatus*. Further I have argued that the *Tractatus*' notions on ethics, logic and metaphysics are characteristic of 'genuine mystical experiences' that support a mystical reading of the *Tractatus*. I have then connected this notion of Saying–Showing to the question of how literature can show. While the argument I put forward requires further development in order to further elucidate (full elucidation may be something definitionally impossible) the notion of

showing in literature, what I have endeavoured to accomplish in this thesis is a demonstration of the relevance of the distinction. This distinction should lay the groundwork for, and open up further avenues of, research concerning how this theory is to be understood in terms of literary practice—the different devices used, attitudes conveyed, the relation to different literary trends and what that these trends says about this distinction. As Plato writes:

There is not, and there may never be, any treatise by me on these things, for the subject is not communicable in words, as other sciences are. Rather is it that, after long association in the business itself and a shared life, a light is lit in the soul, kindled, as it were, by a leaping flame, and thenceforward feeds itself.⁷⁸

⁷⁸ Plato as cited in Moore (1987, 480).

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Murmurations

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Submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the Doctor of Philosophy (English)
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*And like most people in love, or maybe like most writers in love,
I thought if I could keep formulating it correctly, if I could keep
finding the right words to house it, maybe I could change it.*

But of course, I was not its sole author

Maggie Nelson

Just to hang on to life is Why

Anne Carson

For Florence

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Will Flowers Grow Here?

Dear Electra,

After the end of her relationship Rupi Kaur wrote In *The Sun and Her Flowers*:

I can still see our construction hats lying
Exactly where we left them
Pylons unsure of what to guard

As if what *had been*, remained as an abandoned construction site, girders, pylons, fencing – all forsaken, given up by their natural owner or guardian. Of the space the relationship built and inhabited Kaur asks in mourning's rhetoric:

Do you think flowers will grow here?

Fanciful but comforting, to think that love's construction site, though forgotten, had been reclaimed by wild invaginate weeds; jimson or devil's snare. Comforting to imagine Fleebane daisies swelling up through rusted train tracks.

What we left I don't see as construction yard, I see Edgelands, like a bombsite or canal bank, I see urban fringe, where planned city meets country. What Victor Hugo called 'bastard countryside... ugly but bizarre.' Made up of two different natures part man, part 'natural'.

This is an appeal to you, to join me in viewing what remains as a peripheral - safeguarded by its refusal to come into focus. An untapped, transgressive resource we could draw upon, for what we find lacking in our personal cities that remain. So to you once-upon- a-time love: do you think flowers will grow here?

At conceiving this book, I chose to conceive us as, though separated, inheriting the same project. A project that we could write up as Barthes' Project. Looking back, we were part of a class who seemed to act as if solely charged with accounting for the mystification that transforms petite bourgeoisie culture into a universal nature. Barthes too, in his collection 'mythologies' points repeatedly towards the ideological abuse undergirding a repeated confusion of the 'natural' with the 'historical'. Sellars denounced the same 'natural attitude' within his seminal *myth of the given*. Sellars and Barthes would have gotten on like sardonic burning houses.

commonalities in the form of our letters and Barthes' existed, and our material prompts have been just as various: podcast, poem, astray expression (that ohrwurmed or yurked their ways into our ear canals). Further our subjects of reflection have been just as seemingly arbitrary. They must appear products of a Flanneur's itinerant wanderings, or the minds dawdling, doodling discoveries.

A mosaic up close better resembles a collection of discarded ceramic shrapnel than a cohering piece. Rhyme and Reason emerge together, when observed from a distance. So seen too a starling's locomotion articulated, its different phases of flap when gliding abreast a current or submerging, may appear singular, responsive only to airflow, its lift and drag.

But just see a murmur of starling on the wing, their preternatural coordination: as they cohere, separate, align in a synchronicity that pre-empts even the thought of movement let alone communication. In starling's murmuration's you intuit their grace. So it's about clarity through vantage, through Point of View, as ever. The way I wrote that poem putting words in Lacan's mouth:

I make no claims

Lacan said:

All relationships are about finding the right distance

On a shooting range

So do the subjects of these letters move in murmurations? I hope they do. I hope for a silver-shoaling of subjects, made to move as if gossamer netted, evincing a synchronicity of motion devoid of central coordination, that harmonises responsive to unseen laws. As Barthes asks, do repeated things give pleasure? Whether or not they pleasure, we know that at least they signify.

Love,
Juniper.

**Part I Edgelands
(Manhattan, NYC)**

With Ted in Manhattan

An Australian in upper Manhattan, we meet Junip at Ted's apartment, short steps from central park. He is sitting and wondering: what brought him here, to New York, New York? Was it some subconscious imperative to amass currency in the economy of experience? Back home he'd imagined spending this time free-footed urban meandering, identity appropriating, dressed in a designer distressed sweater, and worn Chelsea boots, affecting the Brooklyn-Williamsburg aesthete. In reality he looks frumpy and ill-prepared for New York summer, here it's sticky and hot, and he wears only thick Canberra-winter jeans and shirts.

Unfortunately today was the kind of chaos which has him nearly breaking down trying to deliver sheets to a laundromat. Trying to find a laundromat, wondering the streets hugging a chest full of sweaty clothes, hunting for quarters, then more quarters, then laundry liquid ... He stops at a park bench, ditches the clothes, begins to text Electra:

Dear E,

Earlier today I felt, shunting down the Manhattan subway, past 76th heading downtown, Brooklyn way, that I understood why Ashberry called this 'an anti-place' an 'abstract-climate'. That once one was here, one no longer had to think about where one was.

This didn't feel like the result of the press of celebrated people. I know very few. Only one sick old man with tales of an older Manhattan, a different Manhattan. And as I write you, he is groaning in bed watching reruns of Kim Jong Un theatrically performing a hand shake with Donald Trump accompanied by sports-like political commentators rhapsodising about the significations.

No, the abstract-climate seems to arise from the sense of being a ghost in the urban-machine. Present to the cities filiations and shuttlings, a pure observer as we coast collectively silent, down the sub-way passing streets demarked not by name but numerics: 165West, 42nd Street, Uptown, Downtown.

people entering the compartment, people Exiting.

Pausing, Juniper uploads a photo from his iPhone, applies a black and white filter, which he senses reaccentuates the lines of the photograph, the foreshortening produces a golden ratio that enobles the bodies receding into to the next compartment. He continues to write:



I've been thinking on what you said about my Wittgenstein thesis, that reading it was like being subject to a poor-synthesis of Kafka and Cage – you didn't mean that as praise. Never have we spoken so long of the sense of a staged silence. Like Cage's 4'33, my thesis was composed of numerous smaller silences, silences I failed to describe. *A moot attempt*, you called it, *to infinitely divide what was already still*.

What does it serve, you said, to love the ideas that refuse contact with our bodies?

To which I responded, perhaps obliquely:

"In the dream" she says, "Ludwig" she says, "Ludwig, there's something terribly wrong with the ratio of the moon about our cuffs." She says "something terribly wrong with the cuffs about our wrists. Our earth around our sons." He says "I said it appears that way." Says "it appears to appear." Says "is this our son? Shake me. Is this the sun? And how would it look if it were?"

This was probably all rather hard to follow.

Have you read Barthes' *A Lover's discourse*? In it he attempts to delineate the Lovers' discourse – love's form rendered with the materials of his situation. Here I have attempted the same, with the materials to my hand. Ignoring the fact that calling you my 'lover' is metonymic: a stand in or adjunct-part made to represent the whole of what we were to each other.

For Butler, to give an account of myself I must produce a narrative disoriented by what is not mine alone. That is, the "I" must give way to the set of norms that reveal the universality of my story. Only in making myself substitutable, it seems, do I become recognizable to myself.

This is one irony of any lovers' discourse: that at the very moment I, the narrator, enter and express that internal place where I imagine irreducible singularity to reside, I find instead what is un-authored: what is definitionally substitutable.

When I think about the intrinsic theatricality of writing you, I think about how it functions as a formalism, and a negative one at that. By formalism I mean an experience of structure revealing the contingency of content - these letters could have had any addressee. Any addressor. A demonstration that despite our particularity, we live and we love as interchangeable units.

Love (interchangeably),
Juniper.

Juniper

(From Ted's apartment)

"Funny how we talk about the past and future. Looking behind and in front of. The Chinese have up and down. Is the north pole the top or the bottom? And then there's our disproportionate maps, that they're never to size." Ted talks as he heats a mushroom cuppa-soup in the microwave.

"They didn't stamp me in on entering the states. So, now maybe I'm nowhere. The machine recorded it, there's a record somewhere in the machine that I entered the US, but not in my passport. I could be nowhere." Juniper found a set of wooden chess pieces, and set to mechanically dusting them off with a tea towel.

"I asked the guy why they won't stamp it, they shrugged, said you're a US citizen, you don't need it. We can stamp it for you, but you don't need it. I shrugged and they didn't stamp it."

Leaving Ted, Juniper went out onto the deck. Ted had brought a pack of six stout for Juniper's arrival, a hospitable sign, But he'd then drunk 5 of the 6 before Juniper arrived. They shared the final bottle, poured into two half-filled pint glasses. Juniper watched the oak's swaying in the narrow corridor of open air between the apartment buildings of Manhattan west. then sat to write Electra again.

Dear E,

So I'm staying with Ted, remember Ted? That old Jewish lawyer we met in Phnom Penh? He's now nearly 88. His apartment is a narrow corridor of piled books, Amos Oz, Wallace, Saul Bellow, Elie Wiesel, Art Speigelman, Kafka. Hardbacks on the invasion of Iraq, political texts on various shades of conspiracy to ugly fact. He hand painted every inch of his walls, you know, with these trembling flowers. He doesn't have Parkinsons, though his son does, yet Tedd shakes and trembles continuously.

Juniper paused, uploading a photograph surreptitiously snapped earlier.



He's a grump, and we had a bit of a bicker last night, when I noticed his teapot was filled with green tea which had started to moulder. That morning he'd been complaining of stomach pains, and maybe having Chron's Disease. When we met in Cambodia 6 years ago his intestine ruptured, he'd been airlifted to Thailand and then flown to Chicago, where foot after foot of small intestine was sliced away.

Anyway, he hates being looked after, he's the one who "takes care of people" he insists, grumbling. Then he gripes about my soft-spokenness, says I should walk about reciting "How Now Brown Cow, Grazing In the Green Green Grass". Though he's at least half deaf. Though yes I am soft spoken.

But anyway, how are you? I have a story to relay. Yesterday, having left Ted for the day, I was sitting in a cafe eating a slice of greasy pizza, drinking some cold tea while flipping through a Foster-Wallace reader I found at Ted's place. When a (to my mind) handsome man entered the café. He sat adjacent a (to my mind) beautiful young woman.

"So do you want to sit in or out?"

I heard him ask from the neighbouring table – *in or out* – and perhaps, *probably*, I read too much into it, but I felt a vicarious thrill – like voyeurism on a subtle navigation of roles they were both unconsciously enacting. I could imagine them in bed in that moment. In the hot flow of union, of finding yourself in another, by finding them in you. I felt this moving through me. A syntax of impersonal syntax of desire "So do you want to sit *in* or *out*?" Interpenetration. The suckling infant at the mother's breast. All morning I'd had those thoughts about receptivity and plunging. And how it's all a kind of receiving really. Then I thought on that line: desire is in me but desire doesn't *begin* with me. I thought on that.

Do you know the word Anaphor? Where the meaning of a sign depends upon its preceding instantiations. The famous anaphor *I have a dream*, repeated at the beginning of each stanza, the meaning of Luther-King's speech, being cumulative: gathered through repetition and emphasis.

Our love—anaphor—it signifies only by referring back, and back. Was there some Greek goddess anaphora? There should have been I recall thinking in that cafe as I observed the couple... And if not, I thought in that café, inadvertently and perhaps ashamedly, undressing the couple with my eyes—I would invent it, I decided.

I reflected on Eileen Myles talking about how for her there were always men, that Lesbianism was never really a thing, that there was just this sort of unbridled lust. Lust was anaphor, all we wrote was anaphor, referring back and back, but we'd lost the original source material. Now we're just little nodes: filthy little stars, fucking.



Ted In his favourite Diner; woofing down pancakes with cream, taking care of his sensitive stomach.

P.S. I wanted to say that for whatever reason a lot of my capacity for expression is still bound up with you. That there is sadness and loss still, for me. It seems (in my mind at least) we're still children and there's this wood-chipped playground to graze our knees on, if we want to. But it's also as if there aren't boundaries, any constricted throat we mime is illusory. I'm writing a new project, and it's addressed to you.

Electra

So you're staying with Ted! That's great - how is he? He must be getting pretty old..? It's wonderful that you've maintained that friendship, intergenerational

friendships are quite rare I think. But very rich! I've really been appreciating spending occasional time with my boss outside of work, there are very few other opportunities I've had to interact with people a fair bit older. I still model occasionally for a group at M16 who are mostly above 60. It's incredibly calming and affirming to have conversations with those guys. It makes me realize that my own parents were not very good at that! Especially my mother. Dad could do it when he was around, but he was just so often at work or in a torturous fugue.

Junip, I am sorry to hear that you've been feeling inhibited, or impeded. On the other hand, I am excited for you, because I think honestly that you've been wrestling with self-concept and healthy boundaries since perhaps before we were together. Certainly while we were together it seemed that you simultaneously wanted incredible intimacy with others but you also would fly off skittishly, frustrated with the intrusions that others necessarily make. I think you could never resolve whether you wanted absolute control over your environment - your time, space, the kinds of interactions you would have - or whether you wanted to be surprised, radically altered by alterity (ridiculous phrase). Anyway, all I mean to say is that it doesn't surprise me that you're coming up against this stuff - but that I'm glad you're looking into it - but also that I think while you might be feeling it more profoundly since our break-up, the seeds were in you long before. What do you think the process is for relieving that?

On Sunday I felt I was going mad, getting pretty close to the edge of what was bearable. I felt so horrified by the inevitability of decay (again, ridiculous phrase) the irrevocability of loss, fear of my own wretched meaninglessness, etc etc. Just a real clanger of an existential crisis. It was pretty hard, actually. It feels very good to read your thoughts about legible signs, binding and unbinding...

Did I tell you about Anne Carson's *Decreation*? I'm sure I would have. I really think you ought to read it. There's a very fertile relationship between Carson's idea of decreation (especially in the final 'operetta' of the text) and what I think Wallace was trying to get to grips with regards to suffering, transcendence, etc. Are you familiar with *The Suffering Channel*? It's one of my favourite of his short stories. Although obviously as soon as you think of one the others all start leaping up as well.

I feel so stuck at the moment, Ju. When I read I feel like I'm discovering all these beautiful paper scraps, incredibly patterned, and they're for me to fold and play with. I like to fold them into different shapes and place them next to each other for new effects. I like to cut them up and trace them. But increasingly I am feeling cut off from my senses of delight and curiosity. I feel so ashamed of how little I can translate into something to show others. I feel that I can't get up or dance and play - but what are the legible signs binding me down?

I am very glad to hear you felt witnessed by me ... Thank you for saying so. It means a lot - you don't know - I felt I was a witness for you, when we were at our best. I felt we were doing something pretty wonderful with each other, for quite a while there. To hear that I was somewhat successful, that I did something wonderful - if I can claim any responsibility, I will feel so proud. And I miss it all too ... There is still sadness and loss for me. I am very interested in your new project.

I think your poetry and other writing is, on the whole, quite good and luminous. It helps that you're so prolific. That shows an ease of outpouring that's pretty damn crucial. Thank you also for saying you'd like to be a witness for me, too. It would be nice to try this. Grazing knees. Having someone to graze knees with. I'd like that.

Juniper

Electra,

I've just checked in, it's ten o'clock and I'm bleary eyed and exhausted, to an 8 bed dorm I paid 66 USD to sleep in. Ted is sick, he's been drinking this mouldy green tea and it has tied knots in his intestine. He alternates between grumpy and bellicose—floating in reminiscence, he will detail the dental histories of the Hasidim cousins that once filled the neighbourhood, before moving downtown. Now he's stuck with neighbours who have insisted on taking tectonic drills to the back porch in the early AM, without end in sight.

Well you were right about my struggles with self and other - they are certainly not delimited to since we were together, maybe the mind just likes to latch to certain loss for narrative festering...

Walking the streets of Williamsburg; Junip envisioned the very different landscape of Hobart, her suburban rolling hills, the street cats sunning themselves in drive ways, the cackling kookaburra at the base of nocklofty. He wanted to fall in love with that city anew, but on his own terms, without Electra's parallel gaze. Hobart with her rivulet, her Kunanyi pipes, the crescent sands of O'Possum Bay. How does one rediscover how to inhabit a city the way we might inhabit love? He wondered. And how is it, we inhabit love?

In *10:04* Ben Lerner describes walking Brooklyn with his ambivalently platonic amour: "on our walks our gazes were parallel, directed in front of us, at canvas and not at each other, a condition of our most intimate exchanges... we would work out our views as we co-constructed the literal view before us... Our gazes straight ahead."

There is a comfort in the parallel gaze, some abdication in it of the responsibility of being a separate self, takes place. Still when people speak dismissively, or scornfully of those relationships that are simply 'comfortable' I'm always keenly aware of how comfort is made to imply stagnation, and also aware of my felt guilt, because for me it is that comfort which I seek – there is a coming home in it. It feels like that companionability offers an opportunity to have your sense of reality checked, validated. To construct a counter-culture consisting of only a few, providing a quiet form of resistance against consensus reality. We co-construct the literal view before us.

Akin to Lerner, Junip had since come across an idea in Allan Grossman's work *Summa Lyrica*, that; in the social realm of speech we face one another, we ask questions and offer answers, we exchange. But poetry offers a distinct realm of speech where we all face forward, we *look on*, we find ourselves positioned towards the world differently than a moment before.

What would Electra make of it? Junip wondered. It led him to wonder: do we discover in poetry this same companionability, do we and the poem gaze in parallel, look on to the world together, face forward? In which case is the poem an act of speech, one that we receive, only in order to defer?

It is not meant for us exactly, this speech Blanchfield wrote, *It points us elsewhere if we listen.*

We listen in.

Some days later Ted was ill. Junip had taken a walk in central park, hoping to find a spot under a flowering tree, somewhere to loaf about, to sit and read. On opening his laptop however the first thing he noticed was a letter in his inbox, one accidentally ignored some weeks back. He opened it:

Electra

Dear Juniper,

“Why Bakhtin?” You used to ask, from the doorway, while I hunch scribbled, you to my back, over our desk, in a fury. Authorship, maybe

I babbled. Dialogism. Heteroglossia. And the novel, Bakhtin, his cigarette paper, the Chronotype, Bakhtin the carnivalesque.

Bakhtin, lover, has worn a hole right through my book case, through Canberra’s double brick back wall.

“It all begins in memory, the middle game is place – it bottoms out in emotion,” I might have said.

“Nothing fixed, everything approaching,” he might have meant.

Did you ever read him? Another Summer and I’m determined my seedlings will sprout, will find their little holds in the earth.

Does the meaning of the text inhere in the words on the page? Bakhtin asked – for him immanence was a self-containment, a Completeness on one’s own terms.

It diverged from the imminence you glow about. Heidegger’s *Befindlichkeit*: awakening to context – context or containment? They felt like polarised forms of presence.

You were an irony of both; ever attempting to read the text behind the text; wielding post-structuralism, Marxism, psychoanalysis, foremost against yourself. Then affirming a decontextual presentism; a ‘lets set aside the stories, live in the *now*’. You ground down on that *Now*, like a cigarette in an ashtray. Italics heavy enough the ember flickered out. Do you still see them as mutually exclusive?

I think on Bakhtin starved of cigarette paper during the Nazi bombing, his bildungsroman manuscript, final copy, rolled up for smokes. I think on the words in their inky inhalation. And then I think on you

Grinding out that cigarette.

Electra

That afternoon Juniper idled about Ted's apartment. He could tell that he was outstaying his welcome. That the space was too small to accommodate both of them comfortably. He knew that before leaving New York he needed to respond to Electra's last. What could he write? How would it be received? He left for central park where he composed a message.

Juniper

Dear Electra,

I wanted to write you on Love and Repetition.

To. Tell you that this time, despite Bakhtin, I've finally quit smoking. This time it'll stick: assertion is how we make facts right? I'm sitting to write you but I'm distracted. I'm finally reading *Tender Buttons*, where Gertrude Stein tells me that repetition is never exact repetition, because the human registering it is different the second time round. She seemed to be riffing off Heraclitus, dipping her toes in his flowing stream. Butler said that for our signifiers to gain meaning they must be performed, yet each iteration performs a difference. While Maggie Nelson wrote lovers up as Argonauts at sea on a ship of Theseus with ever changing parts. love as upcycled, as repurposed.

Each love that I know carries the imprint of the old, so each new lover indelibly arrives to me fully formed. And so the sense Plato expressed, of learning as a type of remembering finally makes a kind of intuitive sense.

When Winnicott wrote, "fear of breakdown is the fear of a breakdown that has already been experienced," I'm sure he had this principle in mind. Nowhere is the iterative, circularity of experience as present as in love's traumatic re-enactment.

And so in my writing I'm heeding Barthes' advice: that in a world where concentration is a dwindling resource, opportunities to pay attention — even going overboard and fastening monomaniacally to a single object — in this case the object: *us*, deserve advocacy.

But then, repetition always entails a shift in context, some sign of difference. So now I'm watching my love for you continually finding new senses, morphing but with continuity. This love entails a type of theatre; to play with, and consciously lean into, obsessions. The way you might in the backseat of a car lean into the curves of the road, playfully crush the boy you find cute, or less playfully the sibling you find obnoxious.

When Kierkegaard wrote of the artistic necessity of the third remove, he had in mind art needing to reach across some distance to be art—that, as he claims in *The*

Crisis in the Life of the Actress, no actress can play 14 year old Juliette till she is at least 32. So too with Eros, Carson notes, Erotic desire being always the bittersweet, requiring a reach across some distance.

Here, then, I reach across two distances: the erotic distance necessary for love, and the artistic distance of performance. Yet I feel now, *looking back* from some distance, that then I was a child Juliette playing a 32 year old woman. Or I would like that to be the case. “For the sake of the poem,” as you used to say, “and other realities that failed to obtain.”

Love,
Juniper

The next day, in a friend Tom's apartment in Brooklyn, while Tom busied himself making lunch, Juniper takes time over the magnets peppering his fridge. Back home he recalled similar magnets peopling his family fridge. like any good family of the 90s, Juniper's refrigerator sported its selection of iconography, aphorism, jokes. He began to Text Electra.

Juniper

Electra, important: what do you make of magnetic poetry? You remember when D wrote:

*My friend has a fridge you can walk up
Words are like that.*

Magnets cylindrical and spheroid; a few three dimensional, textured and jangled – imagery souvenieral or collectible – pinning the weekly shopping list, cleaning chores-table or childhood painting up to the fridge.

I recall how some family fridge magnets served as a vacation chronology – the way matchbook strips once served to construct a jumbled history of hotels visited. My family tended towards the minimal; but there would always be a portly supercilious cat looking regal declaring herself Queen of the house. To pass teenage time, its unappreciated abundance, my brother and I would quietly marvel as we drew two magnets along each other's length, north to south poles, feeling them alternately attract and repel as they slid within millimetres of one another.

The first time I encountered magnetic words on a friend's fridge was an experience I recall intimately. It was magnetic words informality, spontaneity that endeared them to me. That a limited vocabulary could be assorted into an infinite combination of senses. There was always a preponderance of nouns, doing words, never enough conjunctives, pronouns, articles... This meant syntax had to be abraded, mistreated in some way. For many children this was a little revolution of possibilities in itself, providing early intimations of poetry.

Every deck of magnets had enough material prompts for a goodly quantity of sexual innuendo. My cousin's fridge, for some unknown reason, sported New York specific words. Clearly intended to pre-empt or facilitate in-jokes to dwellers of Lower Manhattan, Long Island – not so useful in regional Tasmania. We became familiar with exotic Brooklyn, the Manhattan Bridge, 42nd street.

In hindsight there seems something doubly disconcerting about receiving a vocabulary of humour. Maybe it's the image of a public relations officer predicting your predilection to laugh. Writing up lists of word combinations for possible innuendos. The same foreboding hovered over games like *Balderdash* where the

words selected felt almost algorithmically generated for mass appeal. As disconcerting as the emoji prompts Facebook messenger offers you.

Thinking about it, I doubt that it is the intuition of ill-intentions behind these selections that unsettles, but rather the absence of intention, another realms of expression becomes slowly automated, devoid of conscious choice.

I rearranged some words into a raunchy & childish sequence then left to join Tom on the balcony.

Electra

Dear Junip,

The magnets we grew up with were the same laid out: the familiar chronology of regions visited: a Melbourne green and yellow tram, a great barrier reef, a boomerang shaped Sydney Harbour Bridge. Cylindrical or spheroid; I loved the hexagonal.

I'm studying biology these days. Hexagonal shapes, I recently learnt, are the fastest growing found in nature. Honeycomb, Basalt columns, epithelial cells in the eye, Saturn's north pole, The shape of the colony. The ants carry their diner plates in line. I've been thinking about polyamory, and the birds and the bees.

Things change and I find new loves. And sometimes one of each set, and sometimes one of neither.

"What is the shape of divine cells?" You asked, "in this identical human soup?" Bodies divide into identical twins – while with three or more twister together on a bed is effected to minimise surface area. Natural patterns form as wind blows sand in the dunes. The ripples on their surfaces repeat wherever there are suitable conditions. A man nods at 'Man' kind on the street who returns a grim grin. We remain firm in the conviction that there are visible regularities of form that hold us – that triangles fracture into shards, we're told: Love doesn't tessellate. We force our relationships to conform to what society tells us love is, when we could force the image of love to conform to the realities of our relationships.

Does structure of unfinished geometries await?

Electra

That night Ted's grumbling reached a peak. He was watching the news, so Juniper settled his body into a jumble of pillows on the spare bed. He dug out a journal, and thinking back, wrote:

Juniper

E.,

Sometimes loves geometry is only readable in its after image.. what was left. After you left me I think I was distraught. I can't remember. Perhaps I fled north? I know I wandered Europe with the contents of an old canvas Irish backpack. I spent my days in an idle narrative fog, fictional experience somehow never adjacent, but forever running in parallel to the colourful Austrian summer taking place about me. I was reading Roberto Bolaño, Sharon Olds. Who else?

I recall *Stag's leap*; a poem about making whole-cloth together, which conjured to mind our shoddy patching jobs; hand sewn tares in the knee, groin – reparations done by the fire on Hampden Road, Battery Point. What do I recall? The poem: *What left?* it might have been called:

Then we/ grew, and grew, I grieved him, he grieved me,/ I completed with him, he completed with me, we/ made whole cloth together, we succeeded,/ we perfected what lay between him and me.”

Then I left. I went to India. Events ensued. I returned to the island where I was born and was an aimless Dharma beach bum for a summer. For that season I embraced being ‘that sun-kissed Italian boy’ as I heard over the shoulder once – perhaps I flushed a pink through the sunburn - buying linen shirts at Salamanca, carrying my root vegetables and leafy greens in a loose-weave sack.

“Stalin was not Russian he was Georgian.”

Juniper stopped writing. Back in 165 West, Ted comes into the kitchen wearing only a loose knit singlet. His words are mumbled, he's 87. Juniper accepts this non-sequitur, demonstrates interest, with a nod, a raised brow.

“And Napoleon was not French, but Corsican.”

They had met working for the same organisation in Cambodia, nearly 10 years earlier in a hostel in Phnom Penh. Tedd liked to say he was a fairly acclaimed human rights lawyer who had mostly worked in Eastern Europe. Juniper was a do-gooder little squirt, with ceaseless energy,. Together they wrote property rights manuals for human rights defenders,

only to be ignored, mocked. To leave for home with a sense of the Khmer Rouge Tribunal's futility, corruption.

Ted's singlet was transparent like his skin beneath, varicose veins on his thighs. His chest adorned with roses in neat lines as if trellised. He'd told Juniper in that hostel, while smoking a dry tailored cigarette and sweating, that each rose marked a depressive period in his life. Juniper never knew if they were signs of a renewed discipline or a tenderness he offered himself.

"I'll be 88 in a month. And for all of Germany, Hitler was an Austrian. Its gotta make you think, right?"

But Juniper wasn't thinking about dictators at the moment, he was pondering over Electra's latest message, just received. It had read as something novellike, with dramatic flair, which felt unlike her in its excess. It read:

Electra

Dear Junip,

This summer brings back all the preceding, book-ending summers. Being by the south coast today, conjures the last time we looked on the ocean together, that windy evening, with the moon, and your bottle, old friend. Lips already dark with wine.

"Emotion fills the time with movement," you said.

"Time fills the space with emotion." I replied

"Still," you replied "what if feelings exists only in transit. When given away?"

You've moved off and I stand and look out across that horizontal line that cuts the page of sky and sea, gradations of blue moving into different kinds of blue.

The sand between my toes is baking, reflective, aglare. Eventually, it's on my calloused pads that I hobble to join you; down by the water line.

"Tell me?"

Was what you said, speaking of your last book *Shapeless Things*, and its falling flat. "Tell me. how my failure to accomplish what I set out to represent - still communicates?"

I was silent. I guess we are sometimes, whereof we cannot speak.

Would it have been comforting to remind you that Wittgenstein, speaking of your book, might have said it communicates *because* it fails? That it communicates failure. Am I being comforting in saying that the failure of communication, all that is outside the text, is the locus of what matters?

Sometimes, failing matters. I could have told you.

But you answered your own question.

“I seem to always begin from a state of distraction, an unclarity. Then focalise. Allow that state of distraction to become my object of reflection, I gain clarity. Then move forward.”

Neither of us noted that those same rules governed the cycling content of our relationship. A focalised-distraction. As Walter Benjamin admitted, the distracted person, *too*, can learn habits.

In love, with repetition, we learnt, the rules governing the content come to supplant the content. That repetition trained our viewing.

In the silence that follows, the water breaks and spits up; drool on the shore, it draws back. From the receding water, the holes crabs make reveal themselves in the spume that rises.

“Just another type of vacancy that makes itself visible only when filled,” I asked. There’s sand in the wine bottle’s rim, it grits and grates as I screw on the lid. I pass you the dark bottle.

“We only see what a blank page offers after we’ve colonized it with words.”

I recall when you wrote me of your obsession with Lerner, how in *In Hatred of Poetry*, he wrote that one of poetry’s constitutive conditions is its inability to deliver on the possibility it promises. Perhaps like Maggie Nelson’s intentionally misleading examination of the colour blue in *Bluets*, my analysis of love for you, is just such an enabling fiction.

The wind whips surface sand from the dunes, carries it in drifts across the beach.

“What’s the word for the sand moving like that?” You asked.

“Maybe it doesn’t get a name. still, air’s movement is made visible in what it carries.”

“The Japanese have a name for the wind through high grass,” the sheaths stirring like dragon fins.

“I mean, the smell after rain gets a name.”

“Petrichor.”

“That’s it.”

“My point is, what about the colours of eucalypts after rain, where’s that name?”

“Or what about the name given the perception of colour after rain.”

Our cigarettes refuse to light in this wind. and when finally lit, huddled between
our two frames,

The wind burns them to the quik.

Electra

Juniper

At some point in that conversation she said that If and When we fall in love it will be a rendition. That is, a means of displaying our sense of disconnection, the vacuum between us and other people. She said like the Jesus bug, in love we walk on water with no prior knowledge of surface tension.

Because the rain fell in sheets we drew Pythagorean laws in the sand with sticks. Watched them eroded by the rains then the waves. Bugs skimmed the surface. She said, If and When we too find ourselves weightless it will be a reprieve. To our advantage.

To our advantage, we vomited blood in the sand, on our knees and elbows, as the waves depicted the intestine.

Naked in the sand she strokes then backhands my cunt, as if to add emphasis to her kindness. She concludes that the world we are faced with is the totality of familiar gestures. Held a gooey finger up to her nose and sniffed for ovulation. Cervical thickening transmits the possibility of transmission.

She said that If and When the collapse takes place it will be nobody's fault. That moral accountability comes in waves that are currently in recession. That moral culpability has a high surface tension.

In their ignorance a cricket's wings and hind legs beat out a sharp staccato rhythm. Thinking the sentence complete we sealed off the event from further interpretation. Drew white red tape in quadrangles about our stanzas. Removed the bodies of our thoughts from where we found them. Left white chalk outlines for later inspection.

Waves come in sets of three she said, and If and When the collapse takes place it will not be a rendition. There is an oncoming king wave. We find ourselves Jesus bugs, weightless, skimming the surf.

Juniper

Emerging from the subway at 42nd Juniper finds himself between wall to wall reflective glass; huge posters of disembodied torsos, sparsely attired.

In the first moments in New York, he was slid into the ranks of an encircling audience attendant to an acrobatic troop of street performers. He watched as they drew members of the crowd into the circle, unsettling spectatorship, repurposing it, making it live. Only months earlier reading Teju Cole on the topic of the self-same street dancers, who – while readily dismissed in the newspapers and by the government – functioned as a bright spark in the day, a moment of *unregulated* beauty.

This passing phrase caught his attention; beauty, *unregulated* stayed with him. Was that the condition for beauty? Unregulation? The streets of Canberra were in comparison often eerily silent; informal economy for the most part-quelled.

Standing in the crowd he began to text Electra:

Juniper

Dear E.,

Floriade, popped into my head while walking the streets today; you remember? that festival of flowers cemented away in planters; the single conveyor belt walkway, the tourists diligently shuffling along, single file. The effect of stifled exchange, Like racism or misogyny – it is obscured *because* it is atmospheric. You don't see it till you've been outside of it; like Wallace's infamous old fish asking the young fish, *how's the water?*

It seems ridiculous getting lost in New York, I mean the streets are literally numbered. But today I achieved it. It was okay, I had an Alice Notley reader on my kindle – Notley felt like the poet to be reading adrift in these streets, or on the subway passing exit after exit, proximate to diverging worlds. She was a self-proclaimed city poet who claimed to love the city, but hated what the city had become; and that the world had become a city. Writing as if all she had left to protect herself from this world was her little poetry.

At a bus interchange, I sped a green-tree'd corner that I hoped was Central Park from which I could orient myself. I stopped, and read her phrase: "I still love poetry for itself; it strengthens, protects, teaches me. Because it isn't me." I walked on, discovering it was not indeed central park and I was still lost. Notley's poems seemed to be asking me where exactly the world was taking my voice, my life.

Walking these streets, I can't help thinking of our interleaven days, two books folded together, and the imprints left; like indents left by botanicals, once pressed between our pages. Notley caught, it seemed to me, the interstitial moments of our relationship; the tea sipped, your singing on the toilet or crying in the shower, how

it was reverberant through the bathroom walls. Moments like that, without warning, slipped between my ribs.



Lost in Harlem, a bed was kindly offered me for the night.

Juniper

Dear Electra,

Reading Notley in central park; reading Blanchfield on the subway downtown, reading Kraus in Ted's apartment; reading Myles on the plane on the way over: recently the kinship I feel upon reading these queer, offbeat authors describing their lives has begun to appear suspect to me. Have you had these feelings?

I can't help asking myself: is the affinity I feel elective? Product of over-identification, a wanting to resemble? Queer tutelage, Queer world-making; these feel like projections of affinities, but valuable projections into a system that can hold you.

What I wonder is if the kinship isn't based in anything more than a shared trajectory? The sense of connection you might feel whilst clutching the hand of a co-passenger, formerly a stranger, vicelike as your airbus shudders in a stomach-dropping high wind. As the audibly rattled pilot requests over intercom that the stewards return to their seats, insists sharply we all buckle in.

Temporary adjunct teaching positions, tenuous writer's residencies – underemployment we convince ourselves is not the undergirding precariousness of our existence showing through the skin like terrible blotted arteries, rather a blessing to relish, a chance to finish that latest book, that collection of essays.

Some of our writerly friends sought supplementary incomes doing 'gold shows' – online webcam porn – self-stimulating, usually with latex toy accompaniment (for extra coin). 15 minute intervals live-streamed before a dislocated and variegated audience of pure observers; a floating masculine gaze, goggling and lusting. Hooting their appreciation or requests on the chat feed. Sending coin.

While others were always going back to school for yet another degree, another dash of limbo. Going back to those airless, social welfare offices; lines of the culture's least affluent made to wait half the day, cause what else do they have to do?

The privileged, university educated, treated social welfare as a rite of passage, a dependency which we would in our turn, feel beholden to repay, a national 'pass it on' system. But we found ourselves in uneasy relation to that rite of passage when it began to feel like a tunnel we were ever leaving only to re-enter, fittingly circular in this constructed city of roundabout geometries.

I start to wonder: when will I next take Canberra's bike routes, following paths of desire that meander beside wetlands? The repurposed government housing, the

centenarian eucalypts dug out to make way for the emerging light rail. Union court excavated, old college residencies replaced with impersonal Uni Lodges. This is how to erase affinities, I thought, remove the systems that once held us. This is how we carve out the empty spaces we fill.

Love,
Junip.

That morning Juniper awoke, noticed and was surprised to discover one of those old fashioned phonebooths. For the novelty of it he placed a call to Electra. He wondered how many coins were in his pocket, and speaking under the duress of time constraints. She picked up. This is the tail end of a conversation:

Do you remember E., what Wittgenstein said about the pre-verbal?
/ what he *said*? is that some kind of philosopher's joke? / that bit
about there being conversations made of glass bottles you send
spinning? / seeking loves? / seeking something / You sure that
was him. / It was him

How did we come across one another amidst all the green bottles
we sent spinning? Is what I'm wondering / Like at that party you
mean / You remember? / I remember / the giggling and bumping
in the dark / the bruising jaws in the closet / It lost its lustre, after
a while

And where do you fit amongst the iterations of my love / preceding
or to come? / And why does the needle keep skipping on you?

Juniper

Oulipo in the bedroom

Dear E., In the early days of our relationship, we'd lie in a bed lit by soft lamp, heads propped up against a cloud of pillows, reading.

Finding our works unpublishable we discussed the prospect of imposing some artificial but rudimentary restraints on our writing. Instead, penniless, we become Oulipo in the bedroom.

We decide that refusal to kiss on the hips, lips or anus forms a lipogram in play. The only punctuation mark we allow is a slap. Meanwhile I'm bound to four posts; everything I want is harder than you're willing to deliver. I tell you rough translation is a term referring to the varying grain of sandpaper. Constraints act as triggers, you say, fingering my trigger, my story-making machine.

3 months in, and rhubarb's burning on the stovetop. It's the same bed that creaks, rocks, and shuffles free of the bedroom wall. An unconventional orgasm still leaves me untouchable, trembling, the way certain poems eschew formalism to the point of debilitation.

6 months on and we invert the lipogram, insert vowel sounds between sighs. We find that a number of acts can be read as a palindrome, upside down or inside out. A mutual oral performance is a numerical palindrome of itself after the fact. The language of our movements breaks free of syntax, became illegible.

We think on repetition not with boredom. Though we know every pleasant sensation becomes painful under repetition. Yet too much novelty fractures into endless streams of meaningless data. After a stringent star anise porridge, directives from above and below are muffled by a cock, cunt or other.

Three years later, and by letter, we remain collagists with each other's gestures. We slice the page into slithers. You bite, I stroke, we trade.

Juniper

Electra

Dear Junip,

We only do things for the first time once right?

A true circle is without tale or head,

but a tautology is tethered at both ends,

A truth contained in its premises:

Like that *you're* trapped in a hopeless love affair with the past,
that I'm going through a messy divorce

The moment I fell in love with you?

In the park; watching you observing the succulents

The chord of that camera about your neck,

Your little snap camera, a slug on a branch, caught in the act of using
an intricate machine beyond your comprehension to capture the light
of an intricate machine beyond your comprehension.

Love

E

On Stereoscopy

The following day Juniper attended his second-cousin's wedding. While his extended family gathered and danced in bravado's self-conscious step - his sister Elaine, flew over as photographer for the event, flicked through images of the bride's face in profile, then full frontal.

As she flicks she teaches. Juniper learns that a photograph's symmetry is dull without the tension present of the point that breaks it.

"Like life," she says. "I got that," he replied.

"How to add balance, add interest to this picture?" she asks, pointing at the picture, but thinking about his book.

"Place the main subject off-centre, to afford them visual weight."

"Why not juxtapose them with another object of lesser importance?"

"*Lesser* importance?"

"You know what I mean. For the tale. Not. You know."

"Or just superimpose narratives atop one another, literary representations of the depth, middle ground, foreground ... To draw attention let the subject recede into the distance."

The wedding proceeds and they slip into silence. Juniper finds himself frequenting the bar as much to have something to do with his feet, and later hands. He waits silently and gets more drinks. His brother is bored, and takes calls and loiters in the seemingly ornamental Japanese garden out front. Juniper watches him making turns through the glass. His father and uncle compete to laugh loudest by the sound system. Younger cousins and their partners slump in their seats, absorbed by the screens of their phones. One cousin is offering his thoughts to another, recently heart broken and downcast younger sibling. For moving on, for growth, he gestures at his bicep, life's just like the gym: *tear yourself and regenerate. Tear yourself, then regenerate.*

Meanwhile Elaine continues snapping pictures, finding the best angles, creating a narrative of the wedding that later via Facebook would supplant for many attendees the memory of the wedding itself. They experience a kind of double exposure, projected forward. The photos his sister takes, which he *will* see, overlay the wedding he *is* experiencing. A projected future supplants the present.

Electra had once said she found herself unphotogenic, that she had a face made beautiful only in movement. The camera, she claimed, captured only her slumped shoulders and

anxious expressions. Whilst Juniper felt this was not true, he *had* always appreciated the way she moved. In dance, she was animated, all disinhibition, all spontaneous gesture.

He was at the time interested in Winnicott's notion that it's essential for a child's spontaneous gesture to be recognised in youth by their primary carer. We who have pathologized ourselves and carried the idea that our identity is defective throughout the years. What if we conceived instead the pathologizing of self as a type of misnomic self-labelling – in fact naming as a failure to interpret? And what if this failure were at root a matter of spontaneous gesture going unrecognised?

After the eternity which was the dismal wedding finished they drove home. Juniper had drunk too much sweet liquor and felt the hangover's sickly precursor in his throat. To distract him, Elaine held up the camera's image viewer, and described the concept of stereoscopy. The same object, Juniper learns, photographed from several slightly different angles – when viewed together, create the impression of depth, solidity.

He thought on the book he would write *Electra*, a book conceived of letters, poems, diary entries – where multiple points of view were introduced, effecting a stereoscopic illusion; diary entries or letters between friends, passing mention of the narrator only; all would serve to reveal the author's subjectivity, a definitional depth into which we peer showing itself to be to others an object - all over surface.

At home he collapsed into the couch, head still swimming and typed into his phone a long message, hit send and later regretted it.

Dear E.,

I've been thinking on why writing you feels so much like therapy.

I've concluded it's because of *how* we write: a form of psychoanalysis, we allow each other to put together an account of ourselves; to make narrative sense of what life has been; the recurrent impasses; the potential for what it may become. Like therapy, this letter making offers narrative reconstruction, gainful in giving sense to the last five years' otherwise fragmentary and discontinuous passage.

Why must we write – is it to account for ourselves? In giving an account of ourselves we need receptacles; someone we can presume to receive our words. I'm not saying you're a receptacle, I mean. How or whether you receive them at all, is not known to me, not knowable. Nonetheless you as receptacle (okay you kind of are) are the *locus*, established site where 'reception' is articulable. So whether or not reception takes place is in some sense beside the point – it's the perception of 'reception' that matters.

Deflationary as this might sound: I am my relation to you, given over for my constitution to your reception. Reception is probably an ambiguous relation for

all of us. It has meant alongside embrace, acceptance, joy, also misunderstanding, judgement, refusal.

Even this act of transference, words to paper, is filtered through the past, priors anticipating receptions to come. That's why I project you on the other end of the line; the witness who accepted my spontaneous gesture most wholly.

Love,
Juniper

Juniper

The next day I visited the MET. Ted was feeling wretched and decided to stay in. I didn't mind, I preferred it. I could flow through the chattering halls, present without distraction to the gold inlaid, spandrelled ceilings. I took a tributary pause before a Monet; the waterlilies; golden disks floating or encased in a purple murky depth; oil on canvas made me think curiously of blood on snow. Though I don't know why, no one else would make the association. From looking you couldn't tell he had this pond dug and planted – not a subject found, drawn forth it seemed – but one grown. Beneath each installation was a small placard, black on silver backed – I found myself as curious by the way the pieces were titled as I was by the pieces. How we name things, I thought, mattered.

Then I wondering whether I should really call the parts of my project 'love' letters - knowing that relation to be metonymic at best, a stand in, a poor man's substitute for a fuller relation? Was I writing these letters the way Monet painted in Bordighera by the Riviera? That is, labouring under the realisation that he enjoyed painting that town more than he loved the town itself – because what he loved was more in himself than in the town, yet the town was needed to draw it out of him? And did that constitute an objectifying relation? And were all objectifications oppressive?



Bordighera by the Riviera, Monet

I stopped into one of the public toilets and was surprised to see the infinity mirrors, mirrors slightly off kilter so as produce an infinite relay of your image, standing and pissing, washing your hands. Usually my image captivated me in ways I was self-conscious about, but this provided further layers of fascination. I left the toilet, passed back through the gallery then sat in the museum cafeteria. I ordered a long black that came out burnt and watery, and decided to write Electra, something she couldn't understand, but could perhaps project depths into.

Juniper

Dear Electra,

"I looked at myself, like my family would see me," you said.

And

"I felt distressed," I thought. Distressed in a wrought way; to induce affect, distressed denim jeans we pass on mannequins, ample of hip, shapely of thigh.

And

"No, I'm fine," you said fine, meaning glass, translucent, no like craquelure on the paintings we keep behind the glass. Not even breath touches that glass, mists it like Christmas, messages incised but only backwards in its surface. Like the ether we long to breath, behind the black tape. To touch the paintings, with our bodies moisture. Our bodied water.

And

"You can keep walking," says the invigilator, finally to our gawking, hold a moment we're having a profound experience of art? Or at least an experience of something.

"Move along," say the invigilator, black dressed in the black, implacable, we're moved along from our delights, pleasure answers in a scurrying way. Nothing could be more, not even less. Unless...

"It's over," we're receding now & grateful, in a contained way. We follow paths of desire to the trafficked exits, carrying us over on our own legs, black into black and out into this light.

I looked at myself like my family would see me and I thought the words but:

"The light of duration," was what you said.

"Screw tap of spine," I replied sagely.

A light that transports without moving –

in the silence I heard John Cage singing.

The silence of gathering, of bodies watching in passing.

But now we're flying. Life jacket under seat.

Fasten belt, gather around your hip. Like gathering alms.
Like arms, saying: "hold me."

I was looking at myself in the porthole, looking out and down and all the while at
my faint reflection, looking at myself like my family would see me.

The click of a metallic snick finding its metallic mouth around my hip. "I thank
you for choosing," the telecom says.
But we never chose. And this is receding.

If you think real close you can catch yourself thinking. And leave, disgusted or just
leave
and still find the sky has fewer answers
and more stars, turn to it – turn away – while she changes
Out of respect.
Look at yourself;
Your family is seeing.

Primal taboos and other plants:

The early bees assault and fumble the flowers
The stamen is slick with pre-cum
As Roland Barthes flips over the body of his mother,
Just curious like

And like Sylvia's mirror
I am silver and exact,
On my knees, everything I see
I swallow immediately.

For these are the parts of the flower:
Milky-eyed dew dapples the sepal,
enclosing your deliberating bud
the eyes of the little gods,

four cornered pry at
The parts of the pistil where pollen germinates
We read voyeuristically

-mum makes Barthes a man-
-watch online for free-

On Mothers

Dear E.,

Roland Barthes famously conceived writing as a primordial taboo; an ignominious form of playing with the mother's body.

Fetching as the proclamation seems – both in its irreverence, its transgressively sexual overtones, and the sense of *poesis*, as an act of making, the process of creation or *decreation* it implies – I can't help but see the intimations of 'master and muse' asserting themselves in it.

Once a Butlerian frame is internalised it seems difficult not to view this statement as a further iteration of a masculine tradition that predates Plato, of conceiving the mother as receptacle; the matter into which sense is projected by the masculine element.

And as Butler puts it, for a signification to denote it must be performed, but performance is never a singular act but a ritualised re-production. Performativity then requires an ongoing process of iteration, that is, a regularized repetition of the norm. To un-do meanings, to *decreate*, then requires breaking with the performance. No longer allowing the implicit receptacle notion to go un-noted. Calling Barthes to order.

Yet in writing you: itself an act ritualised, a reproduction. Is it your body I'm at play with? Not my mother, but an oedipal stand in?

Love,
Junip

Electra

Dear J.,

I'm thinking on the time we shared in Hobart, the familiarity of Preacher's Pub, how we would often stay after they'd closed, stay late. That pub with the wall with ivy running down the wooden slats. The paint cracked off, the bus decked out with chairs facing onto one another, various succulents laid out on the tables rising from pint mugs and in the windows. One woman with a mop slaps it side to side, suds getting about - wears a fluoro-elastic bright blue shirt, Aaman in a red cap, solid barrel at waste and shoulders, wearing cheap knock off lenses, non-refractory. Cleaning tabletops, movements all business, methodical.

How the orange slug butt-end of tailored cigarettes lay scattered in unrecognizable configurations, around the foot of the stoop. I'm thinking how we name things matters too.

Electra

On the Present

Dear Electra,

How could I forget Preachers? But, of course, I try to forget. You see I'm told I should live in the present. That writing this imaginary you, feeds a Walter-Mitty like fantasy life that eventually will bite me, that will shatter into shards and with it my fragile sense of reality. That I will not deal. I think of the home we occupied, I think on lying in your bed, and the window open, and the wind tunnel between the neighbouring tenement houses, the breeze over the seedlings on your sill. And how you woke to tend those seedlings, a gesture which to me was asking: is every act of creation a recreation? I'm told I should live in the present.

But what is that present? Queer futurity is sometimes described in terms of a future tense; an *other than* now – something delayed or deferred. I thought, in turning the pages of Lee Edelman's *Cruising Utopia*, that he may have enjoyed Heidegger's orientation towards being. Against the contemporary Buddhist trend of asserting that only the present exists or really matters, Heidegger emphasises being's other temporal coordinates – our past, our futurity – as necessarily involved in that present.

The ability to interpret our past is required to fashion our understanding of the present (for any counter stream; seeking its own redefinition; needs to re-meet the objects of its life on its own terms). While the choices I make for my future determine who I am now and, paradoxically, the future I seek to create is also the source of the past I project.

The significance existence has for us can only be understood within the context of the totality of the unfolding process of our life, in terms of where we are coming from, of where we are going to.

Thrownness describes then, how the past and future come together in the present: I am thrown out of the past and into the present whilst projecting from within my thrownness towards the future. Thrownness is central; the past is not inert, completed, over or done with. The momentum of the past never diminishes; *the past is not dead, it is prologue*. And I wonder; how can I occupy this present, projecting futures that shape my past with a mind fashioned by that past?

The double adverbial *always already*, points to how I can never get behind or break free from my thrownness. So I can never create myself anew, as I have to work with what I have been and what I am now, in order to become what I want to be in the future.

We weren't trying to create ourselves anew; we struggled every day. But we woke in the same field of possibilities ... You woke to tend the seedling on your window

sill, I woke to watching you, the breeze and your attentive hand; a gesture asking:
is every act of creation a recreation?

Juniper

On Anxiety: A Useful Surface that Resists

Are there other ways we could approach the anxiety in ourselves we so readily pathologise? I know the inauthentic meant for Heidegger the possession of a self-concept absorbed in contingent preoccupations, oblivious to its thrownness into the world & defined by a current situation without reference to future possibilities.

I've been thinking on what Heidegger termed the *philosophical mood*; in the absence of which my thoughts are merely word husks, experienced as a tiresome jumble of forced concepts. Heidegger repurposed moods; for instance the primordial meaning of anxiety, he points to, is to feel not-at-home in this world. Under his hand you could reconceive anxiety as 'revealing a task' to make meaningful lives outside the motivations of the inauthentic theyself. To *choose* who you are. Anxiety as a surface we can act from.

Meaning:

To understand the meaning of a thing, we're told, is to understand its functioning and simultaneously its network of purposive relations with other things. But *the work* is a relation you purpose together. It functions solely to busy the mind's fingers. We connect the stanzas; just as the tallyhoes you smoke with, features cut corners for a smoother rolling experience. The purpose of rolling is instrumental to the smoking which is instrumental to

The Work:

Because it creates gaps of meaning. Gaps are things meaning moves into and out of. The work seen, is a simple machine without pistons & cogs: no moving parts. The cigarette functions to lubricate joints and sometimes, to create pure friction: an anxietal – breathing in gives you something to drag against;

Anxiety:

Anxiety, we learn, is a useful surface that resists. It functions as a moment that gives on to a re-evaluation of your possibilities; anxiety strips back meaning, there being no stable universe in the work. Being dis-habituated by impermanence, reason for action is revealed as a type of 'doing' that *constructs* sense, rather than revealing it.

Panopticon:

Anxiety removes the polarised shades from the panopticon's eyes, so you see; you are those eyes. The work seeing through you, asks that you smoke. The panopticon is founded on nothing and returns to nothing. Leaves just an uneasy background feeling.

The Background:

But the background is just that total art of what is not currently foregrounded. Bill Callahan singing a careless mind. The Ute reversing with a scrape into your bicycle. Capital breathing in. Neighbours emptying the trash – though to name these things is to foreground them.

Deleuze & Guattari:

Indelibly linked, thought if the world were a rhizome, then it wouldn't matter what way you cut it; that change could start from everywhere at once. This, optimism declares, heralds the end of capitalism – take out the trash; walk the-dog-in-the-tall-grass roots-approach.

On Mumbling and Murmuring

Dear E.,

Did I ever tell you that in primary school I mumbled and I lisped? I had my frenulum snicked in year five, not the foreskin binding frenulum *en circumcisio*, but the frenulum tract of translucent veined skin, binding the tongue to the mouth's floor - mine was too long, it bound too well: I could only poke the tongue's tip free of my lips, a tentative turtle's emergent head - whist certain showy friends could titillate their nostrils with their tongues.

A frenulum, I read, both supports and checks the motion of that to which it is attached - like the iconic helicoptering parental figure. My frenulum was an overbearing parent whose excessive attentions debilitated the infant.

The frenulum snicking was an event from which I only recall the descent of a gas mask over my face and the slow numerical back pedalling from 10 till 7 before dark. After the snicking there followed some rudimentary coaching. I recall the holding up of specialised cardboard squares with visual depictions of farm animals, large looped letters of the accompanying nouns, and the overly elaborated mouthed shapes of the handsome speech therapist who taught me how to articulate.

Consequently my speech impediment certainly diminished, but I still spoke as softly as ever. They couldn't seem to coax my bird to trill. A sensitive, inward boy... My parents friends might describe me to one another. Easy to break gazes, quick to blush – I still recall the furious colour rushing to my cheeks, attempts to prevent it ever catalysing the reaction. My lowered gaze found most frequently the pavement, its cracks my object of attention. I learnt the subtle distinctions in tread, lace and foot placement of my parents guests.

Deborah Levy describes how in youth, whenever asked to speak up, to speak louder, the words would run away; trembling & ashamed. We shared the

conviction, however, that it was in the struggle to find language that we knew it be alive, to be vital, to *matter*.

I was convinced language was vital, it mattered, still all my teenage life I was chastised for mumbling. A mumbled idea trails off, is lost in the sand. Murmurs are equally chaste, but are meant to be leant into – a murmur elicits attention in its subtlety – *only for the few*, it declares. A Murmur is erotically charged too; lovers do it in tragedy, the audience looking in on their whispered small talk, but not granted access to murmuring's particulars. They are made to speculate.

Juniper

On Incommensurability

Juniper was in an airport; leaving Ted and Manhattan and the states; awaiting a flight NYC to Sydney thence to Canberra. He was musing quietly to himself when the once familiar word arrives unbidden to his mind: *Incommensurable* – perhaps, he thought, a reflection on the change he was about to undergo. He decided to write about it:

“Incommensurable

I’ve always loved that word. I love its sound. Its syllables. *In commens...ura..ble* - To be without common standard of measurement.

Maybe I loved it in the way we love our limits; few words or ideas refuse comparison; but this one does. It *is* the notion of running up against a genuine ‘whereof once cannot speak’ – and so seems enthralling. In naïve faith in metaphor’s power, I imagined qualities of objects could be transported anywhere, anyhow. No context seemed beyond transposition.

The idea of incommensurability – incomparability but with a flourish – was intoxicating. It carried a sense of constructed boundaries; perhaps too, the religious impulse – a threshold you cannot cross – even as a child Gerald Murnane desired, but never dared, to part by hand the Tabernacle’s inner hangings and reveal the cloths internal arrangements; its velvet folds and dark interstice.

This sense entire seemed contained (or released) in the concrete – *sher* – sound, preceding the – *urable* – which sounded cuttingly, with finality: a foghorn through fog.

It was the incommensurability of the world and its objects that led to a condition my hypochondria found a medical diagnosis for: *abolomania*. More colloquially; chronic indecisiveness. There was just no common standard of measurement for any two paths in a forked decision. Too many immeasurables. Too much open-endedness.

I think theories sharing starkly contrasting conceptual frameworks suffer this same incommensurability; a lack of shared nomenclature disallows direct comparison. Conversation leads only to muddle, as the scientists are strictly speaking past one another.

You followed my erratic passage around the globe; seeking a resting place, somewhere to land that never seemed forthcoming. Carrying only our backpacks that practice paired back to necessities. Sharehouse strangers became family in each town, city; by the surf coasts up east, in the gullies and temperate rainforest down south.

Having suffered at the hands of indecisiveness, you knew and shared my condition, the enabling doubt of our chosen professions (vocations?) – a functional fiction of paralysis. We both knew the incommensurability as limit that gave metaphor wings, yet tethered us to the earth in its unknowability.”

Postnota

A note on Constitutive Failure

Brian Blanchfield writes in the opening passage of *Proxies: Twenty-Four Attempts Towards a Memoir*, “in sciences I think proxy additionally expresses a kind of concession to imprecision, a failure.”

That is, what Ben Lerner put as the open question: how is a discourse of failure *constitutive* of the art of poetry, and not just a reason to turn away from it? A question that, in what follows I’ll leave hovering.

These correspondences have become failed correspondences by virtue of your nonresponse. Perhaps your not having even read them; are they piled up at this moment, yellowing at the bottom of your letter box? Unclicked in your Facebook messenger inbox? Maybe this failure too, is constitutive of this work’s success.

A note on Quotation

Borges, quoting Emerson, said “let us take care. Life itself may become a long quotation.” While Arendt claimed that Walter Benjamin’s greatest ambition was to produce a work consisting entirely of quotations; “the craziest mosaic technique imagineable.” His work attempted to capture the portrait of history in its most insignificant representations, *its scraps*, as it were. Which brings to mind a Wittgenstein bemoaning the fact that he never had time, or perhaps sense of humour enough, to write a philosophical treatise consisting entirely of jokes.

Why is this such a temptation: why do we love quotation? Carson suggests it is the sense of banditry: “to loot someone else’s life or sentences and make off with a point of view.” This P.O.V. can be called objective because anything becomes an object if treated in this way; that is, if observed from beneath a microscope’s refracting mirrors; words become a live specimen pressed between quotation marks, two slides of clear glass.

So perhaps what I’ve produced here is about the security in vantage that emerges from an aggregation of quotations, where a muddle of arguments without pre-hoc organisation, surface from a type of analogical fortuitous flow. It’s a collage with sense, but that sense can’t be paraphrased afterwards, and no abstract can be written to reveal an underlying strata; the work’s skeleton.

A Note On Arrangement

The amorous is always already endowed with meaning; any love story already made to adhere to the form ‘love story’. At this point, post romance, the subject is encouraged to conceive the love as something to ‘get over’ which having done so, they’ll be better for. The remnants are then pathologised; like a lingering tumor that having developed, has grown and remains to cause suffering – the final stage is expressing the love story; a kind of talk therapy, which functions as a curative from which the lover can then allow the growth to ‘pass away’.

The love story then, is the tribute the lover must pay the world in order to be *reconciled with* that world. Yet what does that reconciliation consist in? In thinking on the varying figures gathered here, it seems they must necessarily fail at classification; how to arrange the fragments? Via hierarchy? Temporality? How to avoid the temptation to ascribe an easy meaning, to impute a higher coherence? Barthes surmounts this difficulty by ascribing an arbitrary order to his own lover’s discourse: alphabetical.

How should I respond I wondered? Right or wrong, I maintained the chronological ordering of events and correspondence; in the hope that a narrative arc emerges. What does the reader gain from a chronological ordering, as opposed to the familiar, themed collection? You see the mind at work, all that is trivial, the distinctly human.

You see the process of foment and growth to which we were not privy, the buried strata, before ideas crystalize. The mind at work, is always durational; within the process of time. In chronology we witness the way these ideas clustered about a given place in time, and how they fell among and in relation to what is otherwise dismissed as topical, personal – an ephemera of letters, obituaries, reviews, other short doodles and jottings.

This mosaicking and temporal arc shouldn’t be understood to impart a higher sense; a gestalt of parts; that would imply more coherence than could be fairly said to exist. Instead, I take Barthes’ approach to the lovers “discourse” – *Discursus*; a term deriving from the action of running here or there, comings and goings, measures taken - that arrive in fragmentary ‘figures.’

Barthes concludes these figures must be distributional but non-integrative – always remaining on the same level; it fails to integrate at a remove. We must be content with no transcendence, no deliverance – “no novel,” as Barthes writes – yet “(a great deal of the fictive).”

So the goal is not to impart a higher sense, but to describe the figures or movements of a relationship – figures here used not in a rhetorical but choreographic sense – The bodies gesture as caught in action, not contemplated in repose.

Like a face made beautiful only in movement

A dance indistinguishable from the act of dancing

The self as a process enacted, unfolding.

Part II One Huge Tongue

On silence

No answer

The amorous subject suffers anxiety because the loved object replies scantily or not at all to his language. Desperately trying to divert, to seduce, the lover imagines that by writing they are lavishing treasures of ingenuity, but these treasures have produced only indifference. The writer wonders am I spending my qualities for nothing?

Roland Barthes.

The fault is that the lover's discourse is stifling to the other, who finds no place for her own language beneath this massive utterance.

The subject realises belatedly, that they have imprisoned the loved object in a net of tyrannies; while he was once pitiable, now it seems he has become monstrous. As Barthes notes, "it is not that I keep the other from speaking; but I know how to *make the pronouns shine*."

Barthes ends his *lover's discourse* with a terrible dream image – the other is disfigured by persistent silence and I, the one who speak, I too am disfigured; soliloquy makes me into a monster: One Huge Tongue.

Dear Electra,

The last letter concerned the way soliloquy culminates in silence. And isn't that the most sensitive point of mourning: the fact that it means I must *lose a language* – the amorous language? No more "I love you's" as Annie Lennox sings: "the language is leaving me." Lennox picked up Barthes theme; the silencing.

Just how the saplings protrude from the sandy soil, without a word.

Juniper.

Electra

Electra is sitting on her neighbour's porch under a shade cloth that dapples the light before it arrives. She has taken on the task of watering their plants. While she sits she enjoys how the light plays across her legs, her toes, how the cloth lifted by winds sets the light's bands dancing across her whole body, a body that through shadow's chiaroscuro play, is made continuous with the couch. Continuous with the deck, with the whole surrounds. She writes:

Dear Junip.,

"Light doesn't fall, it lands, doesn't even land
Aights.
It's a more delicate thing.

When I heard you were coming home to Canberra
I thought of our bouncing bodies
How they were forever, playing off one another.

I was recently sober, and your return heralded a past
That I wanted to make sleep
If not nail down, at least anaesthetise

If you can't lobotomise the past
It arrives all cortex,
All explosive interconnected tissue,
To muck up your latest creation; your finely layered
Baklava present.

No pastry not even a Millefeuille
Has enough buttered sheets
To resist that past's eruption.

Ju, when we meet in the street of this
small town, how could I not feel
caged?"

Electra

Juniper

Dear Electra,

I've been thinking about the novel you might write: indulge me.

“At home that night Electra dreams a piano too many octaves wide. She has the curious sensation that it is not her dream, but dream pressed on her perhaps.

That day, at her favourite cafe: though unfinished her coffee cup is swept up by the owner, relegated to a past. She rises from her seat, lifts a hand,

Too late.

On paper jotting in blue, she writes: *my character will enter the world, given over to a series of unheeded signs.*

She orders a blueberry muffin and choc-chip Friand, nibbles at the muffin in-between pages. Half-way finished it too is whisked away. She rises from her seat again, lifts a hand,

Too late.

Given a limited vocabulary of gestures, she writes, my character will be made to repeat herself to no affect.

Friends drop in to visit, they sit across from her, order coffee, talk of little things; continuations, and past occasions. All seems to exist in relation to her. She feels centered: in the arms of an attentive world.

It is not her but the café that heralds the migration, she later realises. A Copernican revolution takes place – *she* is not the centre of anything.

She will experience a disappointing gravitational dip around her navel at this thought. She writes: *My character shall not narrate experience propositionally; she won't know how. To transcribe feelings in words, the base ekphrastic act – will be beyond her.*

My character would ever be recreating a sequence of sensations as felt from the inside, instant by instant.

the last to leave her table is a male acquaintance from a Bakhtin tutorial. After slowly and uninvitedly attempting to explain heteroglossia to Electra, he insists against protest on paying for her muffin and coffee. He glows at her proprietorially before too leaving.

My character, she decides, will be made to author the actions of a world in which she cannot find herself author to her own actions.

Her primary characteristic will be impressionability, she will be always already constituted – in relation.

She will have an insatiable desire to explain. Yet continue to refer to boundaries that are inexplicable.

*Her attempted explanations will serve only to enact an impotence, that then becomes self-perpetuating.
Uncontained she shall bleed over her own edges.*

Unfinished, the waiter whisks away her remaining friand.

“The important thing is the love”

Electra wrote,

Violently abridging the story

Juniper

On the subway shunting to southern cross station, Juniper is late for a conference. He looks down and checks his phone. A message has been received, but Electra hasn't written him, the computer in his pocket tells him when messages are read, there's no longer any assumption of ignorance, of innocence.

Earlier that morning he'd found a psychoanalytic term; that encapsulated his project, *Abreactive*. OED tells him the term refers to the expression and thereby release of an emotion previously repressed – that to express humiliation, is to re-live it, and that reliving is essential to releasing.

What does reliving demonstrate? That it wasn't as bad as it appeared. That it could be looked at directly. Even *shared*. To sit down to write Electra was abreactive, he concluded. A slow release valve. But what if it takes her reception for the sense of release to wash?

He put on headphones and tuned in to a podcast in which Wayne Koestenbaum extols upon Maggie Nelson's virtues. This led to reflection on the orchestrated clutter of the bedroom of her *bluets*...

Looking back, the subject Blue in that book now appeared a phantasma, but if that's true, he wonder, how does so much meaning gravitate about a weightless body? Did some spirit pull those fragments together, limn an emergent sense?

He thought on Hegel, telling how he never wrote 'reason is spirit' to assert some fact, but to lay reason side by side with spirit and allow their meanings to *pleasantly intermingle* in speculation. He took out his phone to write her. To speculate.

Dear El,

Opening a book at random is never a random act
Don't you think?
Not if you've read the book.

Check your phone, look at your messages: you've read the book.

You know that the intensity with which you've read a passage
will bore a furrow between its pages, indent the loved lines

What we pretend to ourselves is random is precognizant: actual
attention, indented.

Accident is here no accident.

Don't check your phone. Or otherwise, knowing full well, check

it like you mean it.

Junip

The café terrace filled with men, idling, loafing. They wore straw hats, kempt beards, comfortably baggy pants. Leisurely passtime accoutrements lay besides their coffees; newspapers, Sudoku, a novel. When young women enter and sit on the terrace, the men gaze intently. The idle men peer over the young women's shoulders, admire their bare clavicles. Not even attempting to veil their interest.

Juniper sat awaiting his coffee and Electra's long overdue response. Wondering if there were some resemblance between himself and these lecherous men. He wrote down some thoughts:

"Perhaps you are wise to refuse reply. Perhaps innately you possess the knowledge that Eros denotes a want for what is necessarily lacking. That should you reply with your attentions, loving rejoinders, that would only serve to immediately deflate my desire for what is absent. As Simone Weil claims, and experience demonstrates, our desires are contradictory: "I want the person I love to love me. If he is, however, totally devoted to me, he does not exist any longer and I cease to love him."

I could adopt Jane Austen's ridiculous character of a Mr Collins, who perseveres in wilful self-deception, denying the possibility of Elizabeth's refusal to his proposition, 'You are uniformly charming!' he insists, assuming it the established custom of her sex, indicative of her feminine elegance, to reject a man on first application, in a wish to increase his love by suspense.

Fun to indulge wishful thinking, to read into your refutation an implicit, if secret, impulse to remain the object of my longing. It is to once more subsume your actions under the rubric of Eros's logic – a refusal to admit to the possibility of your mere disinterest.

Still, it's an entertaining idea, and intended or not, it feels creepy though true to write: your failure to reply has the effect of increasing my want.

Junip

On Aubade

“If Jealousy were a dance, it would be a pattern of placement and displacement”

Anne Carson.

I recall that I wrote my first aubade, for lovers separated at dawn stealing away with the new day's light under the alert guard of their valiant and true watchmen. I wrote it after falling in love with Erik Satie's triad *Avant-dernières pensées* the centrepiece of which takes the Aubade as its theme. I wrote it in an overheating apartment in Weberg, while you were elsewhere in the early throes of new love.

The notion of the Aubade, or Alba, struck me as fantastical, purely literary device of narrative not found in the world for one reason – the character of the Watchman. The Watchman seemed unreal to me: who would stand vigil, awake throughout the night simply to alert the lovers, lost to time, of the approaching dawn? Such a sacrifice for another's bliss seemed credible only in fiction.

But then, courtly love existed in a time preceding the depreciation of sex's currency; and further a time where nobility and chivalry found their vertex in literary fiction, where spiritual attainment posed as erotic-desire sublimated.

The elicited seems always to have been morally elevating – the humiliating entwined with the exalting, even as Flaubert's Emma finds in infidelity's futility some form of transcendent yearning. Transcendent yearning is what transgressive sexuality has come to mean quietly to some amongst the queer community, myself (perhaps) included. I felt it illustrated in the opening pages of Maggie Nelson's *Argonauts*, by the way being fucked in the ass with a dildo is made to convey a kind of irreverent spiritual attainment. It's a conceit I have time for.

I wrote the aubade from the standpoint of the displaced; I was the jealous lover on the outside. Looking back now, jealousy I discover is not what the poem is about. The poem sets the scene of jealousy, jealousy is a figure the reader is intended to identify with the narratorial voice. But the poem's intention is antithetical to jealousy; the poem is explorative, via Ekstasis – the narrator consciously inhabiting the position of jilted lover in order to stand outside of it...

But what I want to write you is of a different *Aubade*, Larkin's *Aubade*, and the Special Fear he captures in it. Larkin doesn't speak of a jealous observer or separated lovers. His aubade seems ultimately about loneliness.

I work all day, and get half-drunk at night.
Waking at four to soundless dark, I stare.
In time the curtain-edges will grow light.
Till then I see what's really always there:

Unresting death, a whole day nearer now,
Making all thought impossible but how
And where and when I shall myself die.

He writes that the curtain-edge grown light at dawn's approach, chasing away what's really always there – unresting death. Larkin lacked the love throughout the night, prior to the curtain's-edge grown light, that served as a means to forget, or postpone knowledge of the sure-extinction that we travel towards, to be lost in always.

The mind blanks at the glare. Not in remorse —
The good not done, the love not given, time
Torn off unused—

What is this glare that the mind blanks at, the conceptual-sun we may never look at directly; but can steal only oblique glances of? Larkin was right, this is a special way of being afraid, a way that: *No trick dispels*. And what if the lover's Aubade was a means of staying that Special Fear till dawn?

The walls of our room were red brick, burls of blue and white granite roughed its surface. The dawn met us, not at a curtain's edge, but in strips, through the blind's horizontal slats. The light fallen unevenly on the walls, leaving chiaroscuro impression along your spine and back. The dawn met us bodies entwined, limb's movement's whispering incantations that sped away that special fear. Slowly the light would strengthen, the room take shape. It would depict the contours of two bodies, a single white sheet, a dark mahogany wardrobe. spilled oil paints. An empty easel.

Through seven windows

“This is an Aubade
Through seven windows
Between lovers
Separated at dawn”

“This is courtly love,
The human parting at day’s peeking”
“This is a serenade
A serenata, A cantata
Eulogistic, in the open air,
An evening piece plucked on a lute”

What was mine?
“Was it a dirge,
A somber song.
Dirige. Domine. Deus.
A lament
For the dead.”

What Alba did I interrupt when I knocked and cried out,
What final words between clandestine lovers?
Poetry or prose?
I the encroaching spouse?

And where was the silent sentry?
Whilst I, busy writing them into a personal mythology
Asked lips pursed, pen drumming the table top,
“How do you compose a parting at dawn?”
Asked “how do you evoke daybreak?”

On our relationship in collage

Sublimating debris

“Assemblage”

As homage?

“Implication”

As in a murder?

Sentences expatriated from their context
made to live in a foreign poem

A form of lifting & forgetting

A closed system:

recycle—transubstantiate—forget.

Dear J.,

Books a friend told me, and by extension libraries, were infinite giving.

She said: every book in the world is out there waiting to be read by me. But maybe here's a lesson for you:

The gift, you see, to be marked truly as a gift must be offered without the expectation of reciprocity.

Otherwise, the gift is mere exchange.

Electra

Dear El.,

I've learned it's a graceful thing when someone makes space to hear you.
Even a full stop can feel too pointed, too blunt,
for you to speak into them.
'Them' feels too plural; the relation of
opening one window onto another window calls for respect.

It's an opening that can only be done gracefully.
Ultimately it's you opening onto you.

Pronouns fail us

If you can add to this conversation
That would be appreciated
But not expected

Juniper

The Part on Returning

“How painful to be recalled, to be mitigated, to have one’s self adulterated, mixed up, become part of another.”

Virginia Woolf

Do you recall Virginia Woolf’s character Neville musing in *The Waves*? She gives the above, hygienic description of friendship, of love. As if love were a form of adulteration, a sullyng that rendered your substance impure.

I’m back in your town, amidst all the familiar qualities. I’m eating a cantaloupe and drinking from a pot of Clair’s. The pot is festooned with quibbling, squabbling, canoodling geese. I strain loose dandelion through it. The tea is nearly black. It’s spring and the scent is thick and inebriant. *Why don’t we name smells?* I think. At best they’re described as properties, relata of other, named objects.

The table is littered with wilting flower petals, scattered filters. Interwoven geometries catch the corner of the eye from a rug slung over a coniferous branch for airing, or possibly affect.

Chloe describes her latest project, photo’d nudes whose pigments have been averaged out, reduced to blocks, like a colour palate in a paint store but of human flesh, anatomy. Chris’ lip pink, Juniper’s nipple brown.

“We’ve just got to survive,” R. says. He prints high-adhesive logos that read ‘capitalism kills’ in black block on white – identical to the warnings on Tobacco’s plain packaging – tacks them to ATMs, to 50 dollar bills. C. is in matching floral patterns – shorts, jacket, cap; upholstery-attired. Vic is in warm tones. Pirate the one-eyed king parrot chatters away, nibbles wisteria off the fence.

I watch it all from behind the window, hands sunk in the sink, warm and wet. Good to be back soaping dishes, I thought. Replacing vegetable matter with suds. Old friends to meet eyes with, meet smiles, familiar embraces. Good to meet the casual work you do all your life, cleaning, washing; work that Khalil Gibran claimed kept you in pace with the earth and its turning. A means not to forget that there are so many hands, scraping dahl off so many pots in each moment.

Hearing movement I look up, the same vague smile I’d had at those thoughts plastered in a silly way across my face. There’s a pair I don’t know, but have seen about. One is short and bearded with a black witchy hat. The other is bald, and emaciate, I can feel the outlines of his skull. They both nod to me pleasantly through the window. I raise a soapy hand. They settle onto the couch and continue their conversation. The skull-face is talking about Heisenberg, while Beardy nods along to indicate he’s still listening.

From what I catch he says something to the effect that Heisenberg, as many physicists of the time, was nearly as famous for aphorism as for his physical discoveries. One thing he said, echoing Eastern mystics and German pedants, is that we observe: “not nature itself but nature exposed *to our method of questioning*.”

Jack Kerouac, I thought, creatively misinterpreted Buddhist philosophy, making of it a private stylized mythology that served his own particular interests. The same could well be said of queer auto-theorist Maggie Nelson, for whom ideas took on mildly distorted forms when thrown into the kiln of her memoir, they droop away from the wheel of their original character, though consequently all carry a little of Nelson, and cohere or at least appear to.

My hope, I reflect, is that in what follows I can carry on this project without it dissolving into a *poshlost* – a Russian term for fake emotion- implying an *unearned* nostalgia. As Nabokov characterises the term, it is: “not only the obviously trashy but mainly the falsely important, the falsely beautiful, the falsely clever, the falsely attractive.”

So I’m learning to write you, with some loyalty, to *you*. Even if a You creatively mythologised.

Juniper

Juniper

In Canberra we rode the circuit loops connecting the Inner-North; swam in Dickson pool, bought our coconut ice-creams takeaway from rainbow dreams. Last time I saw you, you reached across and dropped a marshmallow squarely in my tonic. I watched the icing dissolve amongst the bubbles. When you got home, I probably wanted to know what you did all night.

Listening to David Attenborough later – at the forefront of my mind was how dust made its way to being snow flaked ... Afterwards: One of us said “*there is a partisan nature to remembering*” I forget who. That forgetting, too, is probably partisan.

Last time we met the familiar songs we played by the lake were picked up threads of older conversations; but if they’re threads it’s to clothes we wore some years back; there’s a Shab & Spent quality now - we both know the fits off.

A lot of life abuts itself here, in this familiar radius. A university town always feels teeming; the co-op a hotpot for idealism, self-seeking. Ideas here are endemic: their transmission rapid-acting, allowing for change, steady growth – but balanced by the fact that the groups we circulate between form closed systems; not unlike the adjacent ivory towers hemmed by papery moat.

Chris in the tiny home they built on the corner of Miller; Stacey’s bell tent in our backyard, pecked at by chooks. Michael was ever building onto his makeshift-gazebo dwelling, adding fodder-insulation by the sheet, materials for a few-dollars from the green shed. Carl, resident Beatle, just lived in his van; face pressed into the roof. You’d wake to his song; strawberry fields, Rubber Soul’s fuzz bass & harmonium through the window in the early AM.

9 of us and lovers, made good in that tiny space, the square-meter kitchen, single outside composting toilet - the shower with shattered roller door. Sex was a negotiation; alternating between speech and silence; sometimes muffled behind thin plaster walls. ‘Close’ community, we might come to call it - a metonymy - resisting poly, and its implications of; a *scene*, a be-in - was there something impersonal in that?

Back of the toilet door, Emergent Strategy quotes pinned like biblical injunctions. The cistern beside, gave off a persistent whine.

Juniper

The next day Juniper dug up an excerpt from an old journal entry Electra had written many years ago, when they were still and only housemates. She was seeing a guy Lenny at the time. Juniper read back through it, several times.

Electra's journal, 27 November, 2014

“The next day I saw Juniper and we had some breakfast. I decided that it would be prudent to begin cleaning out my room, so I packed up all my books, took down the posters, cleaned off my desk, emptied my draws and moved my furniture into the shed. Lenny and I spent a long time getting ready again, taking showers. Juniper was generous with his milk. The last I saw of him he was running to a dentist appointment. He told me, before he departed, that the night before he had had a particularly revelatory dream. He was climbing Mount Everest, hobbling up the sheer ice-face, dressed only in his big, navy-blue bathrobe. I had seen him in the robe a lot. He was one of those people who liked to walk with it loosely fastened when he passed from the shower to his room. I often imagined that his children--should he have children--would find this display of sexuality, the chest hairs matted by the shower, the muscles not taut from the diverging direction of any garment, rather threatening. Following the dream--a dream heightened by the afterglow of hallucinogenic mushrooms, he carefully removed his bathrobe from his closet and placed it in his luggage.”

He decided to send it on to her, not knowing if she would receive or even read it. He wrote as a postscript:

Juniper

Dear El,

I always found an odd reassurance in appreciating old writers, their foibles, reading my own predicaments into their situations. I'd seek tell-tale signs of kinship. Thinking of Ron Padgett wrapped in his scruffy old pea jacket, uncaring, or oblivious to, what others might make of it – collar turned up in the New York winter, hands snug in deep pockets, absently fingering lint.

*I don't have anything monumental or metaphoric to say about my jacket
It's just a pleasure to remember it and how good it felt on me
Then one day I started wearing something else
and a few years later I gave the jacket to someone I liked I don't recall who*

The idea of Padgett, penniless yet feeling abundant as he ran a hand through racks in an old second-hand store at the corner of Bowery and Bleacher. A thrifty man, who cared for his jacket – which he makes a point of noting that while scruffy, was *not un-clean*.

This recalls Diderot's dressing gown, how it served as a companion; brushing the dust from his books, wiping dried ink from his quill. How it wore the service it had given, as transparent and unabashed history. The opening words to Diderot's famous essay on the topic bemoan the loss: *why didn't I keep it? It was used to me, and I to it*.

It should be admitted that he liked the affect it wrought aesthetically; it announced the *litterateur*; pointed to the writer at his craft. By contrast, his regretted replacement garment described only opulence; in it he proclaims: *No one knows who I am*.

Diderot's storm crow: *My friends, fear the touch of wealth!* Is a cry taken to heart by generations of future would-be indigent writers, wearing the trappings of the penniless, dressed in comfortable rags of common cloth, the writer surrounded in their desk-tombs, wholeheartedly seeking to embody the mendicant life of the scholarly aesthete-ascetic. As a friend once wrote:

an unbuttoned shirt, the shiver,
over several pages left blank, possibly for effect.
A minor poet writing not to write but to have written.

Juniper

From their separate vantages, Juniper and Electra had reflected on the last event they had attended together. A gig by the band *Los Chavos* at Smiths musical venue.

Electra

He was attached to sounds and because of his attachment could not let sounds be just sounds. He needed to attach himself to the emptiness, to the silence.

John Cage

The band were tooting and pulling their instruments, making thrusts antagonistic to the audience. Electra watched with her hands.

That's just the trouble, she thought. A musician can train herself out of the habit of organising sound. Can see watts, some sort of meter. Can reduce sound to its constituent Hertz, decibels, its frequency.

The piano and the octave can be decomposed into its circle of fifths, she thought. But what are life's units? A painter can pick up on colours that reflect every wavelength, given the fact that the colours we perceive are relational, dependent on context. A painter can conceive of a world without colour. She thought. A chromatic blank slate. But can I imagine the inability to imagine?

Maybe you can't conceive of a world devoid of conception, but could you sing that world?

Juniper

A theory I heard, has it that at the first thought of leaving a party you should gather your coat and leave. And that the same applies in reading a poem. Call it: the Irish exit. Does the same apply to leaving a relationship?

After our parting I was Plato's half-formed lover, a being in search of a whole. Originated in pairs, bound in one body, the lovers were cleaved for some offence the gods had forgotten. The halves, newly separated, were then forced to wander, seeking to reunite.

After our severance I faced the elements, open predation, exposure. Attachment is probably a primate's innate response to evolutionary pressure – probably – I misplaced my attachment. You had left, you were the source of my vulnerability. Still you were the figure to whom I clung.

Electra

THE NATIONAL LIBRARY was all sharp geometries, clean marble. They met on the steps, he walking jauntily perhaps unsure whether to spring was appropriate.

She rose to take him in. She comments on a copper earring in his left, he fiddles with it, almost shields it. It seems like a shared-memory worn for the occasion, a laboured remembrance.

They sit on a field of grass, a buttered moon rises to face them. They talk differentially. Aim for satellites, away from the planet's body. Only later ready to leave do they broach it.

"It's okay you stopped replying," he said. Though it sounded like concession, with the subtext: it's okay because it has to be okay, because it's done. And her choice.

Why did I stop? She didn't say this aloud.

They left and made for the vehicle. The van was hollow, panels removed, innards a jumble of repurposed steel, welding appliances, off-white spray paint. She climbed in the passenger seat.

"Silence can articulate a resistance to the question, a narrative withheld." He said this with too much conviction.

Facing away from her, he doesn't see the stink-eye she sends him. He turns the key in the ignition, the engine kicks up, chokes then is satiated. They pull out of the park.

She thought: *Or maybe it's that silence can circumscribe a domain of authority not to intrude upon. Or be intruded upon.*

The dash was peopled with dried plants, familiar gathered objects some of which she remembered, she thought, that evoked quietly. She poked amongst them for conversations, but nothing stuck.

"But refusal remains in relation to the scene of address," Juniper doesn't let up. "Will flowers grow here? You never did say."

And she doesn't, and needn't. Sun setting behind them they cross the bridge. Stripped light peels off the hot dash as they drive. Then works across his face.

Golden Hour, she thinks. Thinks on her camera on her desk at home, in dusty-disrepair. A mirror or lens in need of adjustment. She thinks of the wheeled film black in the camera's internal chamber. 26 shots in, before she'd left it. Now, a memory book.

Juniper

THE NATIONAL LIBRARY was all sharp geometries, clean marble. We met on the steps, then found a cement ledge overlooking the lake. We sat. The fountain spuming over your shoulder.

I handed you the draft manuscript, name and title printed neatly on the cover. Your eyebrows rose at the thickness; *well, now that's a lot of murmuring*. We both laughed.

So is the principle, the awaited modus ponens moment: if I hand you the book, a weight is removed? something *inside me* gets satisfied? Legs crossed on the ledge, you comment on my funny shoes; their five fingers. We share avocado and rice crackers. You're still trying to gain weight, but will only eat healthy fats.

We discuss our tentative romantic efforts with the same sex, the new scripts we've both encountered, the difficult navigations. We laugh and talk together, and it feels like old times, but we're aware that it's not. Still.

The mosquitoes are coming out. We decide to go somewhere; there are things you didn't say years ago, that need saying, and I want to hear them.

On a log by the wetlands the full moon is up. We sit in the woodchips with a gin and tonic, some beet-juice in it. I've asked you to unburden yourself, offered myself up to it. But you're hesitant to land a blow.

Can you say the things now that couldn't be said then? Eventually you can, and you do. We sit and it reverberates afterwards. You pass me the lighter. We share a cigarette. Are we lighter? Is anything relieved? Maybe that's been my mistake all these years, maybe relief was never the point.

Juniper

Dear Electra,

I have had some thoughts on accountability since last we spoke ... Forgive me if I need to filter those thoughts through others ideas.

Nietzsche claims in *Zur Genealogie der Moral* that we become reflective about our actions only after injuries have been inflicted - accusations have been levelled, and the subject is made to consider whether they are indeed the perpetrator. We are asked to avow the causal link between our actions and the suffering that follows, to take responsibility for that link. In short we are made to give an account of ourselves.

While Butler wrote that in the face of an accusation from another (“was it you?”) we must self-narrate. In the same vein punishment, Nietzsche asserted, is the making of a memory - accusation asks: what relation do I bear to that preceding self?

So I reconstruct my deeds - either owning the action and qualifying it, or defending against the charge - locating the cause elsewhere: gender norms made me do it, it was the internalized misogyny, the Bildungsroman narrative, the alcohol as placeholder for my autonomy.

Yet Nietzsche’s take on accountability relies upon an accusation being made by one desiring to induce fear, to mete out punishment - but I believe, or hope, your address had a different valence? If a question stems from a desire to know and understand, if it is not fuelled by a desire to cut off, then the responding attempt to explain and narrate is not prompted by a fear of punishment. It asks: can we really hear each other over the disconsolate jangle of our shattered relation- in violence’s aftermath?

When you spoke, I wanted your accusations to fall freely, I didn’t raise a doubt against your narrative. I didn’t want you to feel inhibited, I planned to be a witness for the truth in what you said. But in hindsight I wonder if you hoped for a different take on events... were you asking me to give an account of myself? One which I failed to provide, by responding as mute listener, acting as only witness.

If giving an account of oneself is a narrative practice – and it is – then it requires delineating a set of sequential events, offering plausible transition phases, adopting a narratorial voice and authority - it asks: can I sing my own song?

Even a narrative of humiliation, the song I might sing, if sung with authority, implies redemption - the prior transition is implicit in the singing. You can see it in Camus’ narrative self-description In *The Fall* - lo, he all but narrates, bear witness: *I am changed*.

Is there almost something indecent in this - to find yourself on the other side of disgrace - with your voice intact? Nietzsche describes as innate, originary, a form of aggression co-

extensive with human will. Systematic prosecution turns that aggression inwards - we construct an internal world of guilty conscience. It's a type of madness: to see oneself as sinning, as reprehensible, without possibility of atonement. Yet self-beratement allows us to live a second life, to generate reflexivity by constructing oneself as an object of reflection. Therein lies freedom in falling - when you parted, I began looking.

I don't want to explain away, I don't want to embody a narrative of redemption that leaves me on the other side, clean whiskered. But if you ask me to give an account of myself - if you say, "was it you?" I have to ask what relation do I bear to that preceding self?

That's a relation I'm still trying to figure. No less ambivalent than the unfigured relation that exists between us.

Juniper

Juniper

To Backpedal:

But then if you are tacitly asking for an explanation... to attempt to explain myself I must pretend that a narrative coherence is achievable; a belief that presumes unlimited knowability of oneself, and of others. No exhaustive account of our actions can exist without a form of violence, without plastering over an inaccessible truth. That's difficult to sit with.

It doesn't mean however that we should cease in our efforts to articulate what has been inarticulate – what the psychoanalyst Bollas refers to as the *unthought known*. We can engage in this partial project, recognising translation will never be exhaustive.

Recognising that we are constituted by things long ago inaugurated, now patterned – inaccessible dependencies and impressionability – preceding conscious awareness. To this unconscious material we will never possess full access, full mastery. Butler put it: the “I” cannot knowingly recover what impels it, since its formation: “remains prior to its elaboration as reflexive, as self-knowing.”

It's easy to forget all this.

Time and again I've found myself taken in by the seamlessness of a good story, in lieu of the inaccessible truth of the person. The truth of a relation. I don't know your narrative construction of our relationship, but I know, like mine, it is partial. And I understand something of how colouration works.

I've been reading Coetzee's latest book, the 'good story'. *When I tell other's my life*, Coetzee asks, *should I make of it a well-formed artefact?* He points to the compulsion we feel to produce a well-shaped story, rather than narrating the true story, because true stories are incoherent, inconsistent, their meaning overdetermined.

Thinking of Coetzee's predicament I realise my last letter was such a failure to narrate. This happens, it feels, because the chronology of occurrences comes to feel irrelevant, arbitrary: how to put facts and events together? What order? What relation?

Caught in the impossibility of accounting, what I give you instead is a narrative of questioning, what it is to narrate and its impossibility. Self-reflexivity traps me in the structure of 'story breaking down' - an old formalism.

I cannot give an account of myself, because my selfhood is irremediably fractured; the narrative thread irretrievable. So the letter I give you is no narrative, but the staging of a *scene*; I recruit you as witness to the scene of my own opacity to myself. As Butler might have it: *“I” breaks down in front of the other.*

This wouldn't be so powerful a strategy if you stood as just one particular 'other' – but rather, in my addressing you, you are made universal; you as receiver, become allegory for reception itself. A further crime to add to my list of sins: you have become universalised, and so reduced to a phantasmatic relation.

Juniper.

The enabling condition for desire

The condition of possibility for giving a lover's discourse
for a narrative account
– is the inaccessibility of any *genuine* source story –
it's irrecoverability:
foreclosure.

Does this entail the failure of fiction?
Or is the absence of a source story what situates fiction
as the only means of accessing the thing?
There being no original

Hence *Proxies*,
the object science takes as stand in for what is unavailable.
Is misrecognition, then,
The enabling condition for desire?

That's just the trouble, she mutters
You try
And situate-me.
find an object's place in a common classificatory scheme...
But soon its shape is all blurs and fades.
You. Me. ceases to be classifiable.

In the days that followed Juniper walked the familiar streets of Canberra. His experience of the city mapped onto the ghostly impressions of the time they had shared together there. Buying red-bean ice-cream together in Dickson, cycling the bike-routes of O'Connor, he found himself questioning the reality of their relation which, at the time, had felt so transparent, simple and knowable. Now he found himself questioning its substance, its colour, its taste. Nothing meant what he thought it meant. All conviction, he concluded, dissolves in the light & turbulence of a more original questioning.

Years earlier he had read Heidegger on learning to identify the *ontic* question, questions such as – *how far is the earth from the moon? What is the size of that crater?* Questions which terminates in an answer – and that, he claimed, in settling on an answer, renders itself trivial. At the time Juniper had puzzled over the meaning of Heidegger's work. Assumed it a poetic, Germanic mysticism more than a reasonable depiction of things as they were.

Electra, however, never understood how to love a question that was allowing of an answer, and so was exhaustible. To answer it was to render it inert, as having a terminal destination. How could someone love these questions, and what good is your love if it makes its object redundant?

To stay with the questions, to learn to love the questions like Rilke's rooms behind locked doors was what was sought. Naïve perhaps, the notion of one day living into the answers.

When they talked about productive silence; did they really mean boundless questions, questioning that doesn't bottom out in a fact? What is unanswerable is inexhaustible. Why, Juniper wondered, did they treat the question of their relation as *ontic*, as knowable? It was conviction that exhausted them.

Heidegger described following these questions as *stepping onto the path to homecoming*. Perhaps homecoming is apt. Like Eliot, you began with the questions that set you adrift took you travelling, and your homecoming will be to look upon the questions as a home and know them for the first time.

What we are to each other, he thought, is a question that's not looking for an answer, that doesn't want to be inert.

Electra

Dear Junip,

We said don't stop on a set of facts
Don't stop at a question
They're not red lights,
And I thought: don't stop. Okay fair enough,
a conversation that stops is done,
dull.
But stops are important. Still. Knowing how to pace the flow, to pause,
To see the end, when it's there.

I've been thinking about family
Dad was always safe really healthy.
My model for it, for well-regulated good health
But I felt
Like I was going to die most of the time
So figured I
Must be living closer to something.

Dad wanted out too.
Is transitioning our coming of age tale?
Or Transitioning is a question you can live?

I never did like the rest of the world in around me
It all felt too close
Now I'm campy and horny
the marsh flies up about my throat
And desire's in my belly
How to desire honestly? To unlearn my Ps and Qs

Are we moving out of what's polite?
Or is that a stage, back into politeness
The way we learnt to make for the door like we meant it
I'm leaving
Just to come back in
and finally know the meaning of stage exit?

Electra

Days later strolling down alongside Lake Burley Griffin, reflecting on Electra's message Juniper considered diving in to cleanse himself. Then recalled the warnings of blue-green algae blooms, and the inflatable dingy he and Electra had once taken out to an island in the middle of the manmade lake. He imagined the jellyfish that could not live in the artificial lake. He wrote:

Juniper

Dear El.,

Tomas Tranströmer's poem 'Baltics' concerns a sudden inundation of jellyfish in a harbour channel. He describes them pumping themselves along, as flowers after a sea burial. And like flowers at sea he writes of the jellyfish:

If you lift them out of the water
All of their shape disappears
As when an indescribable truth is lifted out
Of the silence
And formulated into a lifeless Mass – yes
They are untranslatable

It seems a patent frustration perhaps universal in writing to continually butt up against the ineptitude of language. But then, Rilke might add, that silence is all for the good. That it is best we let each impression and each germ of a feeling come to completion wholly in itself, in the dark, in the inexpressible *beyond the reach of one's own Intelligence*.

Of Tranströmer, I echo Teju Cole, who wrote: "I turn to him when I wish to come as close as possible to what cannot be said." In *Preludes* Tranströmer talks of two truths approaching each other, one from inside, the other from outside, and it's where they meet that we have a chance to catch sight of ourselves.

It's not as if the incommensurability of language and experience is something new, it's not. Isn't that what poems are? Little machines that make things happen, with a mechanism of action that, whilst unknown, doesn't fail to affect the body and its sensorium? To disorient in a way familiar yet reliably foreign? Joseph Campbell wrote:

Wherefrom words turn back,
Together with the mind, not having attained

Not having attained, describes that self-same mystery both beyond and within all things. Concepts retreat.

Recall when we would kayak down the Tamar estuary when my parents lived out whoop whoop, hugging the shoreline? Recall the frilled oysters with their serrate jacket-blades,

buried beneath the mud? We would wade out, return with foot soles beautifully shredded, too cold to bleed.

The summer after we parted, I headed off and swam beneath the warm rain, and around me hundreds of jellyfish rose to the surface. How did they intuit an impulse to rise at that time, do you think, vibrations from the surface?

I recall treading water, watching their delicate, seemingly effortless pull through the liquid atmosphere; a synchronic ballet set, psychedelic undulations, like bellows or the heart's pumping. Thing change, however, as soon as they're drawn from the river (as I discovered when emerging moments later gasping to the surface, stinging tentacles wrapped about my arms). What changes?

They leave their element immobile. Sodden rubber rags. All lustre in movement, vanquished by translation.

Can you still forget yourself in Chifley Library?

“The idea of “logic” itself disintegrates in the turbulence of a more original questioning.”

Heidegger

I first met Electra when she went by 'Tom, and the pronoun 'He', years ago on the basement floor of Chifley library. – I could say 'He/Him', but the additional 'Him' feels like a superfluous convention, as if one's pronouns might change should they take the direct or indirect object.

But on the basement of Chifley, all the oldest manuscripts lay untouched between 'compactors' moveable steel shelves which you'd part with a twist of the wrench, opening them enough to slip between. I once nearly crushed an elderly gentleman with a cane between those sliding shelves.

On seeing me Electra dropped some sheaths of paper, I helped her gather them up, to add to the stack of books in her backpack. In the months that followed she would develop severe back pain from hauling a foot of fine print hardbacks, on her daily bike ride up Dryandra hill. I remember we had greeted each other amiably, if startled to be encountered in such an out of the way catacombed corner of the university. I invited her round for dinner that night. We hugged in parting.

Two years later I recall visiting Electra in Sydney, how we had changed. We ate eggplant pizza, shared some vaped THC, the strength of which I was unaccustomed to. We went out.

Electra, not Tom – I was filtering out her dead name, treading cautiously in pronouns, retraining my tongue – was going to treat me to an ice-cream. Locking the door she paused, then unlocked it, returned inside. I think I heard the refrigerator door vacuum-sealing, the cool rush of air and the motor fan rumbling. Then she was back out and we were walking, a tight role of icy 20 dollar bills moist in her palm.

When we were out, café staff asked how her cash got so cold. Whoring has its idiosyncrasies, she laughed. Her cash in-flow came from the sugar daddying of dodgy money-funnelling funereal directors & substance dealers. Mine from a grudgingly tight-fisted allocation by the state.

I envied Electra's career moves in many ways; she was quicksilver brilliant, subtle and sensitive, as an 11-year-old she'd been on gifted-child talk shows, been awarded the Premier's prize in her state. Her parent's expectant academic shoe-in. Boy were they disappointed by 'his' then 'her' change in career path. But she saw in advance the undignified lot ascribed academics. She said no & thank you.

In the *Under Commons* Fred Moten captures the furtive sincerity, the contradictory impulses that as university dwellers we're made to live under: *the only legitimate relation to the academy today is a criminal one.*

Fighting for grants, struggling below minimum wage, while we ground out unread papers. How to stand with integrity, in authentic relation, to an institution which won't let you live? Which circumscribed your teaching, Which reduced you to an input-output machine for 6000 word articles. I thought on our old library, on Chifley, on the paths we had taken. We turned back to our books. We kept churning – It was all we thought we had.

Another two years later and we walk together around our old campus. She is confident, her spine straight, she passes, and can walk these streets with little fear of violence. Inside this security, we have space enough to both observe the union hub reduced to a construction site, so too the remains of the college I attended. Only days after the same Chifley basement suffered a flooding. Librarians would in the months that followed catalogue the absences, texts that had in these floods, all but gone out of existence.



*AD Hope, too, flooded next door, the archaeological collections,
the 50+ years of personal detritus - the books.*

Now standing in what remained of Chifley, while Electra spoke about memories, my eyes traced the shape of what had once been Sullivan's Creek, leading into Lake Burley Griffin. Sullivan's Creek rerouted to its old path, filled the remembered billabong which stood there before the 1950s.

I imagined it as a being that, in the twilight of its life, was now remembering itself as *Kambri*, the billabong that had stood in its place, years before it was filled, colonized, claimed. This brought to mind Toni Morrison's essay *The Site of Memory*, and the passage:

...[T]he act of imagination is bound up with memory. You know, they straightened out the Mississippi River in places, to make room for houses and livable acreage. Occasionally the river floods these places. 'Floods' is the word they use, but in fact it is not flooding; it is remembering. Remembering where it used to be. All water has a perfect memory and is forever trying to get back to where it was. Writers are like that: remembering where we were, what valley we

ran through, what the banks were like, the light that was there and the route back to our original place. It is emotional memory—what the nerves and the skin remember as well as how it appeared. And a rush of imagination is our ‘flooding’.”

We continued our stroll around the grounds. Something between a summer meander and the scene of a carnage. We stood before the library where we had met years before. What did remain of Chifley? I mean the walls remained, the building was as ever; but after the flood and the loss of so many books, it felt like the remnants - resembled a Dresden squat we had once sheltered in. Still, nothing seemed to have changed physically; the same kiosks, the same scanners and trundling stacks. Had some invisible weight been lifted? Like the soul’s 27 grams on departure? How much soul gets spent on books anyway?

I was reading Heidegger, confronting his ponderous collection, but also knowing how many were now absent, since the flooding of the basement. Would Heidegger be glad at the loss of his words, as he put it: the silencing of theory?

I thought on his sense of *Aletheia* - To give up the attempt to ‘know’ life via theories; no longer to conceive truth as static fact; but to view it as an *occurrence*, this thing unfolding. To turn to what actually happens in situations where truth occurs. Alongside a Nazi-sympathiser Heidegger might easily be mistaken for a hippie: spruiking truth as *a happening*; a ‘be-in’.

What would it mean to no longer conceive truth as a relation between a knower and the known, subject & object - but to conceive it instead as a revelation, or disclosure of the meaning of an event? *Aletheia* contains this sense of unconcealment. When Heidegger wrote on *Aletheia*; and the need for an open space into which truth can disclose itself, I thought on the little clearing love is. How Ben Lerner wrote:

Maybe if you let
The false starts stand, stand in for symbols
Near collapse, or let collapsing symbolize
The little clearing loving is.

And how *Aletheia* – *unconcealment* – necessarily involves an act of concealment. Choosing one possibility necessarily sacrifices all the others. A fact that, in the grips of conviction, we all too quickly forget. This idea is hinted at, contained in *Aletheia*’s ‘letheia’ – the Greek, for forgetfulness. This added sense for me to *forgetting yourself* in a library.

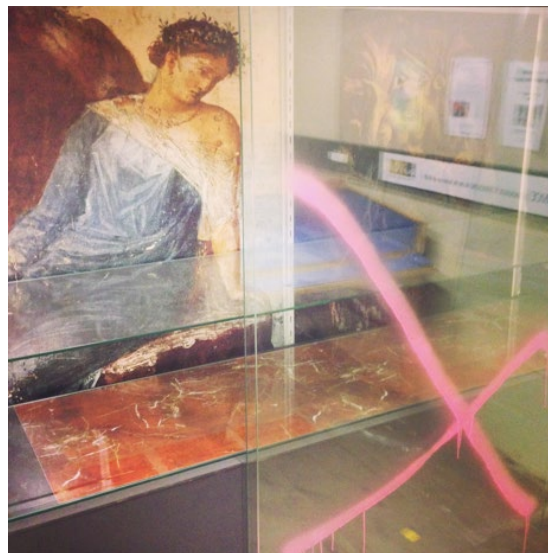
I liked Heidegger’s idea that entities needed some place where unconcealment could occur - was that place, sometimes, a poem? And what are the nooks we as a species carve out for disclosing? At these moments I felt gratitude, an abundance at the generosity that was libraries, these quiet shelves containing multitudes of disclosure. So many silent happenings. As if everything here were in waiting, you had only to reach out, scan a barcode. But, I wondered, by what sign should we know these *Aletheian* moments? And

if not by fact, then by sensation? - I thought on the New Age term 'confirmation tingles': a static-like tingling sensation on the scalp of the skin that supposedly points towards the unconscious intuited knowledge of the truth of a statement.

The meaning of these familiar tingles was overdetermined and so suspect. How should we differentiate paranoia's confirmation tingles from Heidegger's Alethia moments? I thought on how Electra had disclosed the early days that she now conceived as the birthing of her transition. How she carried a sense of occupying signs that didn't rightly belong to her. How we would together read in those stacks late into the night - and on when she was diagnosed with schizophrenia; then thought on Deleuze and Gutarri *Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, and I felt this heat rising (confirmation tingles? ASMR?) – then Foucault *History of Sexuality* – and the pathologisation of deviance; pathologisation of thought that transgressed, that rejected tethers.

Electra was harmless. I thought on the two gloved figures who entered her room, and the injection, then Electra in the cell- numb on vivans and trances, and how she described it as 'lobotomal' afterwards, how that pair with the gloves and needles and power to take away her life - followed her into every room thereafter: nowhere was safe because everywhere was now her head, and those figures and the powerlessness. And I thought on fearing conviction, and how governance was always necessarily a violence.

How are you feeling about conviction now, Electra? You once told me there was no state more authentic & resolute than living in doubt.



The outlines still retained in the glass filing cabinets; the indents of artefacts now classified, and dumped, as detritus.

Juniper placed a phone call to Electra, she surprised him by answering.

On Brassica

Hello? /
Hello, listen, it's me /
Um not the best time, I'm in the Garden/
Just calling to ask
When did we become two people
with an edge between them? /
Oh God. I've got to go /
Hold on /
I'm covered in dirt
& the neighbours are shouting /
It won't take a minute /
I'm fertilizing seedlings and
What? You're saying
Our individuating wont take a minute? /
I'm calling more about reflexivity /
I've got a Yoga thing in half an hour, I've gotta think about flexibility.
We've done reflexivity enough I think /
But I've got new material, you'll like it!
I've been wondering why Coetzee,
being all about character as experimental self,
why he never portrays the perspective of non-Afrikaans? /
Taste perhaps /
But this is Coetzee right?
All about the 'going into their illusions'
The think the unthinkable in that moment.
The be radically defamiliarised by the new vantage.
To lose ourselves then become now, again,
two people.
Where is the line for those we can and cannot inhabit. I mean?/
Search me /
That's my point – in these letters I'm trying to search you/
But asking whether it's right too? /
Correct /
Por supuesto. Have you ever known me false?/
Have I ever known you, is my point? /
Sorry I really must go, the brassica in the garden's looking tremulous,
Unwieldy on its long stalk /
Okay but I'm not done /
Goodbye.

To Juniper's surprise in the days that followed he received a message in response, though he couldn't tell if it were to the point.

Electra

Dear Junip,

Anyone who has returned as an adult, to live with their parents - or even for an extended stay - knows how hospitality can quickly shade into erasure. They know how reconnection can be seamless, tensions made invisible, only because it is more comfortable to witness you out of your context- in their context - where you are harder to see...

Do you remember Philip Salom? "The ancient weight of sun upon your eyelids," was how he called living. I think of that time we nearly crashed the van, I imagine the sun's warmth on the eyelids thin skin, that micro-sleep, lazy lids, in the old ford - wheels in the corrugated ruts, back spinning out as we risked that bridge. A Nietzschean infinite return. But I just keep on waking up.

Electra

On Effigy, Butterflies & Missed Parties

“Now I do not know whether it was then I dreamt I was a butterfly, or whether I am now a butterfly dreaming I am a man.”

Zhuangzi.

“This is the way we broadcast what we want.”

Zhuangzi brought up a butterfly battalion of probable dreamers convinced of convincing, its narrative function. And when they awake to the enabling fiction of being a man, or a just-every man they submarine, to emerge from Chrysalis again, a they-some gang, playing “queer it, if you can”.

We learn this *how* to go home slide door of van, slam, gather boots up by back tire thread, and find Google Mapped meters measuring out the cigarettes/per serve & Spotify proffering up
Rations to drive us into that moon/

By when we arrive, the effigies’ reduced to carbon, a mound. Atop is the goat skull, biggest Christmas star; to festoon the town tree’s crown. It crumpled last.

While you stomped your feet I was asleep. Yet met the eye of the moon through the window, waking to phases of its pendulum arc. Tables of crumpled serviettes and drinks now in the dark. While inside the fire light circle, the questions of song are answered by feet.

What to say, about the gathering missed? It was good to be there, knowing it happened, like tinkled laughter, heard through Canberra’s double-brick-walls. Amidst the high grass in the morning dew, from neighbouring field, the ungulates’ refrain. crickets and moths recede from our tread.

I watch now the straight silvered poplars, the pupae slinking their measure, as if to say: from the burnt remains of effigy, another effigy will arise from chrysalis, a chrysalis, a chrysalis again. The text loops, behind sliding doors, ejects, feeds tape back into itself.

What we want? To broadcast the circles we found inside ourselves. Why now? Because then I dreamt I was non-fiction and writing you enables the narrative poem, it seems we wake to.



Remembering For William Carlos Williams

Electra

Dear Junip,

You're back in Canberra and I remember these casuarina
needles how they prickled my freshly shaven legs,
The view of the cement rim, and the waters beyond that
And the green hills beyond that.
I remember, the rumble as the van choked to life
And our shooting off along arcing highways.

Then arriving home, the stove and the pot and
the little white tails of the swelling quinoa
Which I learnt are not grains but the seed
of some flowering relative of broccoli. Some Brassica.

I recall the way you fondly patted the rims of the tires,
Squeezed the breaks to demonstrate their gripping.
I recall the care taken lifting the bike on
Its seemingly fragile frame up and into the backseat

I recall texting you, a little picture
In a few sentences of a day or a thought,
Or a person I saw walking and wondered about.

About this time, of day, this years ago.
The red wheelbarrow's still overturned in the yard,
The chickens not white, but ginger,
And huddled beneath pallets, in the rain.
I remember Everything, busy depending on
Everything else.

Like that summer we froze the plumbs
Pulsed them in the magi mix, made ice-cream.
They were so cold, and so sweet.

Electra

On Hope and parasitic fungus

Dear El.,

When we met up, you said

“Let’s Talk about Hope”

pronouncing all the capitals, and it was a rounding down on me
kind of statement.

I shouldered it nodding, we found a patch of grass,
tufty but ant-free

Hope,
you described, *as passion of the uneducated*
easily exploited.

I pick at grass blades, think of those ants,
parasitically infected

The way they climb these tufts, only to
cling rigid-mandibled to the tops
await predators till dawn.

“Pretty sure they’re not the only ones to sacrifice themselves
for the thing inside them.”

You had once said. But then it was about
other people.

“An impulse, doesn’t tell you in advance
Who it’s serving.”

Years later, I’m lain out on the same grass

you write me of your latest paintings: *it’s colour*, you say
on top of more colour,
that creates *perception of depth*.

As if a flower, were just a flower, and also
the mental contents of a flower.

As if you are you, to me, with the addition
of a little of me.

Players only love you when they're playing,
sounds from a distant café's speakers.

I am waiting to scare you away with my weirdness,
you told me.

It seems that, convincingly,
I'm still here.

Juniper

I wrote you a poem

To find recorded like a cancelled joy
Derivative of the best next thing: to imagine
beholding Sullivan's Creek in swift concord, like
The wrens fallen out of the sky.

I wake. You'd left for work or just left,
the possibilities are numinous.
Would you return? Re-*volver*? Like a cylinder
Lock Stock and Never come back?

We're back. And there's nothing derivative about
Falling out of the sky
Or waking
However many gloved palms catch you.

"I never stood up to write the way you sit down
To live," you wrote me, while standing.
The glowing screen you read me on
Heralds a kind of lobotomy
That is age, that is waking

The tiny pixels describe our colourised fixation with
Saturation. The saturation and the blood
So blue behind
Glass.

Yes. That was glass.
Tiny micro filaments of glass that flex
in the blood as we pump downstream
Like squid bodies in concord
A simple pleasure, trafficked arteries
Newspaper outlets with the power to cancel
Joy.

Joy: A numinous cylinder finds me
Derivative: In all the wrong places, like
A glowing screen – saturated
Directing our gaze
The eyeballs listing in their orbits;
Sockets strain to see the blood.

Yes, blue, but with glass and yes
A tiny revolver, you've left me
For waking.

Electra

It was a window she was looking into, not a mirror, but windows could be mirrors, and mirrors a kind of window.

Surely Heidegger had a verb for this, she wanted to ask Junip, *this sense of uncanny amidst the dissonance*. When peering into the silvered glass at a reflection and asking yourself why it inverts right to left; never top to bottom. Never back to front.

She'd heard of high class restaurants with mirrored walls on all sides, the refracted image of you stood or squat over a bowl, peeing into almost infinity. Relieving yourself into a multiverse in microcosm.

Right now she was peering not at her reflection but at the translucence close enough to almost feel the cool moist against her nose. Close enough to fog up the mediated outside. She sat to write:

Anything Free Zone

Dear J.,

I've been thinking on those Russian plays, Chekhov perhaps, Chekhov and the women and the long dreamy monologues. The women like me, dreaming staring through those windows onto snow, musing on snow, on inextricable duties, filiations and foibles, love.

But I'm staring not through the window but at the living glass. Glass makes me think of the spineless coral that crumbled off the reef, made molten by heat, and now the slow moving liquid I look through.

I'm thinking how like those invertebrates we will each of us have to remake ourselves in this lifetime; in a precariat economy, under the tyrannies of 'labour-saving' AI - displacing the retail cashiers, alongside the artisanal weavers.

Looking through this window I'm thinking on the quartered eye windows of the homes drawn by children, thinking on the crayon; which colours? Or how, watching the steam spiral above my take-away cup I'm thinking on decomposition accelerated by the grind pressure makes. Turning marine lives into the plastics of the Styrofoam cups we chuck. And how the dead keep being sacrificed for the living. Willingly or otherwise. Usually, otherwise.

Electra.

Dear El.,

Like good therapy I hope this is more than an out pouring; an evacuation – I hope it's also a way to contain experience, to give it form and meaning. Time takes. I learn that learning from experience is dependent first on being able to take it in. What did I see? The question takes on, at times, a desperate tone. So: what did I see?

The kittens were looping Sam's ankles, named Neat and Skim, like ways of drinking whisky and milk respectively. The faces in Sam's paintings are not hidden, I note, but waiting to emerge when you are ready to see them.

Some serious aluminium venting system overhead was drawing fumes from the room, Neat kicked up some meat that went down the wrong way. Sam left to get a dustpan, some TP. Time felt like the flights of stairs leading up, leading down, but always – leading here: where you arrive. On a ledge leaning onto the next.

Next we're out front; Kohl Rabi bulbous little UFOs sprouting from the planter I admire, while Sam tussles with a wooden mannequin, performs a dance of locked limbs; one part embrace, one part struggle.

Stir shake and distribute evenly across the page... With the flat of a palate knife in a schmear that erases all difference. How it should be, a blur of colour that the dazzled eye mistakes for movement.

Foreception: was the word I was thinking on in all this, a word as a way of recalling the fact that we can only ever make sense of things in terms of the concepts of which we are aware, the tools to hand.

I'd open the day by glugging a litre schlep of warm water with lemon, then stretch out my body, invert... Then maybe down a mushroom or just a stem and sit to meditate. Releasing tension in my face, throat, abdomen. I'd with care catch the rhythm of my breathing, not pressing but watching: the way you receive in conversation, unconsciously mimic the body language, meet the tone, pause and little talk till you're resonating.

I did that with my breath; caught up with myself then followed.

“To resonate:

To ring, to role
– not resigned from – but reverberating with; I echo that
A clear sound that carries
To harmonise or otherwise
To hear it strike a chord in you
It speaks

Resonating as a verb is transitive, it has
And contains its object
In transitive logic if the relation holds between A and B, and between
B and C
Then it holds between A and C
This is how we transition; resonating

A subject, in conversation, is set to vibrate at a frequency
To the prompt of another's vibration.
A comparatively weak vibration in one can cause a strong vibration in another.

This was the practice:
to meet the natural resonance in my body; as if it were another.
To set it thrumming."

But returning to Heidegger's foreception: meditating my spine went ramrod stiff, and sometimes words would climb up it. I kept seeing myself as a mushroom emerging from mycelium soil filament – a firm proudly phallic protrusion: a paroxysm of lust, a kundalini convulsion.

Electra

Dear Junip.,

ON THE TOPIC OF walking, you know there are those people who walk backwards? Staring at some point in the far distance, but unable to see what's to come, gazing forwards, yet walking heels first into the unknown? And then of course there are those who stare only at their feet. Who trace the lines that the pavement creates. Who create internal catalogues of the shoes and laces of strangers. Who avoid each and every crack in the pavement.

The People are playing Pink Floyd acoustically out front the supermarkets. Woolworths, where I buy my plastic bagged Bok Choy for dinner. You used to say: think about the abyss separating performance from audience. Think about the girl in front of you, how she stood, she didn't move or nod, she stood. She was wearing a black sweater. Think about the black sweater. Think about the absence of colour that is saturation with colour. How it fit your mood. Coincidence? Think about how she took your arm later, leading you in a half step. That could as well have been a jape. That she brushed that rib just beneath your chest that always makes you weak.

Electra.

Juniper

Self-Concealing

Dear E.,

In your last there were some words, you wrote, which set together, capture the pace of your walking. But you always found it easy to walk at pace with my thinking. So when this clicks over, those sets of words take on new inflections. Repetition on a poem. Meanings compound, as meaning compounds.

I recall you asking: Is love's nature self-concealing? There are words my hand goes to write because they are self-presenting. But something in me struggles to set them down; grandiloquent words, that fail to express what they reach towards.

Should I take Heidegger's approach; in frustration with the limitations of language, include the offending yet inescapable word but crossed out? Lined through? Saying I am obliged, but don't like it? Heidegger let his marks shine metaphysically. Applying a hyphen implied an indivisible unity (being-in-the-world) while a line through a word bespoke the insurmountable; an ontological failure of reference. As though love, and its relata, could only be spoken of tautologically, in cliché, or ponderously, as the self-concealing phenomena that stops the words in the mouth. Stops.

Why do all writers I know live with some hint of shame, guilt? Is it because the verbal representation always offends the actual state? (Of something, of anything). But Heidegger was concerned with the confusion of what was signed and the signifier - because he was still convinced of the existence of a wordless dimension, somewhere out there, to which signs referred. Presuming a naïve form of reference, we've since been disabused of ~~hopefully~~. As if a black line through text were enough to bring an extra-textual world into being.

Eileen Myles in *Inferno*, uses the line through text to different effect; conjuring an era of writing – where the clack of a typewriter's inked keys punctuated by the rip of the holster sliding back to reset the ribbon, and the line with a satisfied 'ting' & providing a counter stream of thought, letting you in on a possible ~~hidden~~ subject in the writing: an aside to the audience, stage-whispered–

But is there a place where Heidegger & Eileen can meet: does the strike-through always function to disabuse the reader of trust in the surface of things?

Juniper

The Part on Desire

Juniper

Dear El.,

What a strange world it is that insists upon rearranging itself.

Lately I've been thinking about our borders, and what relationship means. To relate things, to forge a connection or reveal a connection already present. To liken, to analogise. When we relate we exchange, but with what? Surely not just with each other.

I want to speak to this idea Jean-Luc Nancy expresses, that: I can only recognize myself recognized by the other to the extent that this recognition of the other *alters me*.

It is desire, he wrote, *it is what trembles in desire*.

This idea holds me - that we are altered by our perception in the eyes of others. And, in fact, that we can only see how others perceive us by feeling the difference. Feeling that alteration. There seems no evading it. Our range of being in the world is fundamentally set, determined by what others allow us to be.

I've been thinking on where to place myself in life, in the world. It's an old snare my mind finds itself in: I know I don't have to choose, but my mind presents it as a choice. Which comes with the itinerant wonderer's territory I suppose. A frustration of possibilities.

On Necessary Grief (an authorial intrusion)

The necessary grief emerges in recognising that each of us is a subject who can never recuperate the conditions of its own emergence. This constitutes a death, Butler writes, but the death of a certain kind of subject that was never possible to begin with – the death indeed of a fantasy of impossible mastery, and so a loss of what one never had.

In other words, a necessary grief: eponymous in this letter, though I could as well have called it ‘a fall without ground in sight’ from the Japanese Zen monk Dogen, who wrote:

Understanding emptiness is like falling from a great height. But that’s okay, because no one was ever hurt by falling. You’re only hurt if you hit the ground, and there is no ground.

The fall is ultimately necessary, according to both Prasangika metaphysics and Butler’s constructivism, in that without it you never realise there was no ground to begin with. So too, the necessity of the grieving.

Both call for a reconciliation; between us, and the limited scope of our knowing. This entails an ethics; and may transform our way of relationality. In the same way for Foucault, moral action involved self-formation as an ethical subject. The embrace of a mode of being – to then monitor, improve, transform. But self-formation, is a relational, other-directed activity. Self-formation requires an account of desire – and desire is never our own...

So who desired when I desired?

On Desire

Hunger
Stays with me
But it is not
Original with me
(Hephaistos)

Dear El.,

In *Decreation*, Anne Carson gives the above words to Hephaistos; words which illustrate a paradoxical self-division that is nonetheless the condition we embody:

Our hunger, our desire, is never original, yet it *is* ours.

Who desires when "I" desire? The psychoanalyst Laplanche asked. It seems, inescapably, a foreign desire always pre-conditions our own.

Gender essentialism aside, there feels like something to it, when Jung writes of a type of mother-complex possessed by certain women; so identified with their mother that their own instincts are paralysed through projection. Theory goes: this woman often finds a male partner whose existence turns on their identification with a profession or a talent – the woman who possesses valuable gifts which remain undeveloped may project the gift or talent upon the partner who lacks it in themselves – then the consequent spectacle occurs: a totally insignificant man seems to suddenly soar to achievement. The secret of success: the lover's projected capacities.

Prehistory is never over and done, chronologically. It remains to erupt; leaves every self-account partial, failed.

Who desires when "I" desire?

You desired. Your desire to write was the pre-conditioning desire that drove me to it, this is my current theory at any rate. And I wonder; is that why you feel usurped - and ultimately was our archetypal relation the source of your usurpation, and I the vehicle?

Juniper

Par III The Sign that Nature Gives
(in Tasmania)

“How does distance look?” It is a simple direct question
It extends from a spaceless
Within to the edge
Of what can be loved.

(Carson, Autobiography of Red)

Singing Hobart

I never understood retrograde motion till we had that conversation. It was a conversation, we bifurcated, then followed parallel lines until deaf we nodded our approval. Continued to meet for Salamanca pub luncheons. Continued our weary strolls along the waterfront.

“Can still life have a meaning beyond its composition?” The booming of oversized cruise ships shook old kunanyi mountain, announced our presence. Our smallness, our humdrum existence.

You asked me once: “If a fragment stands for the whole then how does a gestalt overpower its parts?” More generally we discussed the weather. The gray rain sheet drew back and we were all over smiles. Walking we’re still captivated by what’s now a mediocre sunset. I sit on the hill beneath my tree. In Battery Point plums fell from the sky. Without a sense of smell I no longer recoil at morning dog shit.

In a Sandy Bay apartment all my questions remain as variations on a singular theme. You undress with your back to me. Your wing-scapula pinch together as you stare into the mirror. I’m somewhere over your left or right shoulder. You have a new lover. That’s all right. I have a new lover. I wonder about his chest, his Hare Krishna haircut, his turtleneck. You her bosom, her thigh the shape of all our four mouths locked in a capital O, as if suffering, as if blissfully suffering.

Lulled by theism I find myself in retrograde motion. You’ve embraced a surrogate and explain the neuro-plastic effects of Kingston beach-front living. I set ceramics in a kiln. Achieve high temperatures with my grandfather’s bellows.

There remains a challenge we’re all too eager to dismiss: we were told in infancy to “love one another or die.”

Instead we developed calloused palms from dumbbells that recall playgrounds. Everything rests in retrograde motion, and we hope we’re turning epicycles not visible from inside. Yet at nightfall down Old Farm Road, we look up and meet the moon in eclipse, and wonder what has come between us and the moon. We stopped looking when we concluded it *was* us, the earth, itself.

Dear Electra,

Behind the bequeathed Oura Oura sanctuary walking up Dry's Bluff, listening to the scraggly sounds, the harsh light— I told you I felt my mum inside me (not how you mean that) and how her magenta tipped fingers, nails polished to unfathomable sheen, closed around my vocal folds and squeezed, silenced herself with a gasp.

Now in Hobart's CBD I think on the smell of acetone, applied in that shop, and how it must have been everywhere, but the shopkeep lady was polite, good natured enough to pretend not to notice. I recall the careful gallantry in how she took my palm between her soft practiced hands, the tender application, like brushstrokes by an artist cautious of startling a branched bird whose complex motion accident had reproduced on the canvas. I'm probably overstating matters, but..

"You look gorgeous. You could pull off all those colours." How a little flush crept up my neck, why so scarcely have I been afforded this affirmation? Who wrote down that I didn't need it, or outside the logic of need, of deserve — who wrote that it did not belong to my desires proper, who closed that door?

No use in accusation. I held the back of my hands to the light, as if they really were some easel, a composition best seen at range.

Now, back on the island, I pass a few days with my family, then out to the east coast; past Snt Marys purple possum café, past Snt Helen's empty opp-shops and emporiums. On the coast I spent some days admiring the endless plains of saltbush, the spinifex, then pack a shoulder satchel and head into the Meander Valley.

Behind Oura Oura I shed my vehicle, then garments, a pointed disrobing of the civilizing world takes place. I begin my walk up Dry's Bluff, towards that scraggly peak, that hidden dripping vulvic crevasse, your reward in the heart of the mountain.

Was it coincidence that I happened, this summer return, to finally pick up a reader on Heidegger's *Being and Time*; that I opened it yesterday and today found myself in a straw hat and big petrol-coloured glasses walking into the bequeathed Oura Oura sanctuary set up by Bobby Brown, containing Dry's Bluff.

I could imagine Heidegger before he affected the garb of an SA trooper — imagine him in a small Bavarian town taking outings to trek through the Black Forest, marvelling at his surrounds, asking questions that refused answers.

The 'they', Heidegger insisted, instils in us the sense we have of ourselves, and the world around us. He described the *they-self* as that which lives always in relation to what others allow it to be. For him absorption only in the ways of living that others provide us means living in a constant state of inauthenticity, a *fallenness*, as if tranquillized by the merely actual.

Walking through the Black Forest, feeling in harmony with the big Douglas firs, I see Heidegger caressing their trunks eco-sexually – then I can't help but imagine that same Heidegger existentially outfitted as an SA trooper. And I thought: maybe we're all capable of this. Maybe *back to nature* doesn't necessarily erase the violence inside.

Food Store Café (memories of)

I'm out front Food Store cafe, busy strip of SoHo, drinking chai and my eyes are maybe a little red; it could be the dust, or could be inappropriate affective content for this hour of the morning, but all I've done is order tea & gnaw on secreted liquorice.

Electra was going to meet me – but now she's not coming; two codeine dissolving in one of her stomachs, her brow a collection of hungover furrows / so I chai for two in mammoth sips from this single cup.

Lerner called it a lacrimal event - crying, like a woman -someone said: as if to give me strength. The strength to cry, to forgo crying & still cry. But on the inside, Electra - it's all happening inside.

"It's all happening inside," said last night, bracing darkly clad figure with shiny teeth, "come on in. The lights are jumping & mingling their tones."

Vulnerable to be in the dark, vulnerable to move your body, particles amidst foreign particles but out here in the morning street is a different kind of being vulnerable: an order of exposé no one gives a fuck about.

Meanwhile Dana Ward takes me on a linear journey through various species of nowhere, in their *crisis of infinite worlds* - I'm just writing book synopses now, just rhapsodizing about what you could have were you here. I'm out front Food Store cafe sipping chai & meanwhile my favourite waiter's glowering at me for expecting soy, within but not contained by his silver Whitman beard.

Dear Junip,

So many days left since the landing moon rock still in my pockets nothings different sea-wash in my ears I haven't wept enough. Since the landing moon rock still in my pockets everything's changed I sit and polish dolerite these days, round my neck on a string I wear it.

We all have to die a bit every now and again, you said, and usually it's so gradual that we end up more alive than ever - it happens in gradations, immediately replaced with new life till we're infinitely old and infinitely alive.

I've been thinking on kunanyi, and the portion of the story that remains to be told:

IN THE PORTION OF THE STORY THAT REMAINS the mountain smiled her pipes. The sky displays his temperament. His rash convictions. We keep claiming a predictability, it outdoes us. I got used to you a time. I was polyglot to your phases, your different aspects of speech. Fought the hegemonies on your behalf. Yet they never stopped encroaching. Settling Shifting spreading vapor thin smog. The mountain smiled its pipes shattered. The lights were closer than predicted. Mountain says: I grow weary of the portion of story that remains. Each night a blink, movement strobe lit displayed. I haven't put this well, he goes. The end in sight. Stay put a moment kiss me, she stays in time, It will all go. The mountain smiles, its shattered pipes.

El.

Juniper

I've found work on a blueberry farm in Lillydale.

Glory be to God for Dappled things!

For awaking on a futon between blueberry vines as dawn rises with me. As light pierces the couple-coloured skies. As its highlights settle upon the brindled cows, attentive in their grazing. Not far off, the burble of a creek is punctured by the stippled trout's plops, its breaks of surface, its submarining.

Glory be to God for all that's unabridged!

For the hedged berries and I, each carrying morning dew, glistening as a flower's sepal. For the long rows, lines trellised, shortening as they recede over hills. I wake stiff-shafted, grind and pummel my leaky glands into the sheets.

Glory be to God for all things unexpurgated!

And to abridge this scene, I rise, prepare Cowboy-Coffee on a Bunsen burner; its aluminium wings open, shelter the blue flame from frail wind. You are still asleep, fingers twitching, your expressions, variegated, as you move in pied dreams. Mottled crema breaks into drifts as I filter the coffee into cups, leave sediments granules to find at the bottom. It is sentiment, or melancholy that foreshorten these fictional lines? Creates the illusion of depth, of things receding into the distance? Our fields are divoted. For you and me both, I slip memories like seeds beneath earthen sods. We offer up sentences to the page, lined, plotted and pierced.

The Part on Linn

Pudenda: the parts to be ashamed of

Dear El.,

After you, my next first love was Linn.

“53 just keeps coming up for me.” He pulls at his hair, his eyes affectedly rolling. “I move into a house, guess what number?” I’m paring my nails with my other nails and teeth. “I wake up and check my phone for the time. What number?” I notice that my left thumb cuticle is bleeding from overzealous paring. “I ring my Dad to say Happy Birthday, my mum reminds me how old he is again. How old do you guess he is?”

This was a conversation representative of the many we would pass on afternoons in ‘the chalet,’ a grandiose title fondly applied to a ramshackle little green bungalow out the back of a unit. It had a terrace enclosed with a roof of corrugated tin sheeting. We’d picked up a red sofa from the tip, a number of milk crates with potted seedlings and pallets which served as bed base for the futon.

In the evening we’d meditate on stacks of yellowing National Geographics. We would munch sticks of celery prodigiously laden with pressed peanut butter from the overpriced co-op down the hill in South Hobart. We were happy. Though it was a funny kind of happiness. Entailing a lot of discontent and anxiety. “Perhaps all happiness is kind of funny,” Linn says, taking the clippers from me.

In the mornings I’d sit on the red couch admiring the shadowy lattice of the netting that kept the birds off the veg patch. I loved the fishing net material. The patterns it formed. Years ago, do you recall Jorgen dropping that huge net off the Commonwealth Building, recording it from a distance? It looked like a great silver sail, ethereal set against the stolid red-brick bank. A shield held proudly, its logic invisible, or absent, and so invincible. Like something you might read in a Bolaño novel, the action of a visceral realist poet, part subversive, the eternal revolutionary – part incomprehensible statement, revelling in childhood’s secret meanings illegible to adults.

My relationship to sex is difficult to write about. Brian Blanchfield in *Proxies* speaks to the under examined notion of frottage; a category of consensual, hands-free, non-penetrative sex favoured by gay men - to rub surfaces, to climb and slide with a lover, to displace in-out horizontality with up-down verticality.

The personal discovery that frottage, for many men, was not a practice derivative of intercourse, a simulation, but rather an end in itself, served as a kind of liberating contrariety. Which, in ditching the often anxiety fuelling scripts, for me *did* solve a phobia, upended a metaphysics. As Blanchfield writes:

“Catching our breath or resetting to attune to the ambient moment and our wants: one of us might say ‘we don’t have to do anything’ the opening for disinclination was the space of intimacy.”

Thinking on frottage, the act, led me to understand the general category of how making *space for disinclination* can open on to deeper intimacy. This feels like a significant layer to the idea of consent – a recognition that consent culture’s full force resides not solely in the surety of mutuality – but also the pause it offers. One of Heidegger’s *Befindlichkeit* moments, awakening to context may mean rethinking the scripts we act out.

Choosing.

The procession halts, and we can all breathe sighs of relief. No wonder sex, as it’s sold to us, is so anxiety inducing, so otherwise deadening. Consciously choosing with a lover to forgo sex, we found this, counter intuitively, to be the unexpected formulae for deepening intimacy. A meeting place there, with a new found intentionality, an accompanying ethic of care. I hope here we’re making space for that disinclination.

*

Outside, from the couch I would hear Linn snoring, sleeping his familiar siesta. While we lived together, I always spent this time writing or pretending to write, playing at being a consummate collector. Placing full stops sometimes where you expected them, otherwise listening to the cicadas through the black netting. I thought: I can’t help but imagine them making that high frequency buzz from the throat... The idea that it’s their legs rubbing together seemed too distant.

Some days, when Linn was conscious, those long summer afternoons would be absorbed in talk. Having a conversation with Linn felt always novel length; or if not novel, a sturdy installation. He used language in a way that says it must. That suggests he meant it. But then his expressions would change under the shifting light, later you couldn’t be sure what was seen.

There was a time I felt sure I knew what he meant, but now, looking back it’s all just frazzled ends. Nowhere to sit amongst them. Just blocks of light and this sense of not belonging on the page, in the scene. Sometimes my own writing too felt alien, foreign to me on re-entry – so instead I’d just pick it up and stare at it. What inspired This? Retrospect would ask, or say: moved in That? And if it were responsive to a formulae where had that formulae dissipated to? And if there were some élan it figured in how dare it abandon me now?



Linn at Source Co-op, in the gardens

We would read what I fondly labelled the Queer-Literary-CircleJerk, on those long afternoons, and think at the time of how Chris Kraus wrote *I've become my sexuality - female, straight, wanting to love men, be fucked.*

Is there a way, she asked, of living with this like a gay person, proudly? She hits a nail on the head – though it bends awkwardly off a warp in the wood. Freedom is conceived as youth, transgression, possibility; aging as imprisonment, sediment, inaction.

I know so many who embody this form of cis-het shame – felt for inhabiting an oppressive orthodoxy. Don't we all want to run with the wolves? Or as Carson asks: *don't we all end up female impersonators?* Is transitioning today's coming of age story?

Looking back through old journals these past days, I notice that I used to write as if I were chronicling the degeneration of some faulty human machine. As forewarning to others perhaps? Mostly it was just all I knew to do. And how I saw it all. I turned back to my book, squinting in the dying light.

I reach indoors and tug on Linn's toe. He grunts and the foot withdrew beneath the sheet. I rock back on the milk crate, my head resting against the shed's glass window. For want of occupation I decide next to head up Lansdowne Crescent for some papers and cigarettes. First I scribble some thoughts, to send Electra:

“My relationship to sex was difficult to write about. But, quoting Rilke, *it is with difficult tasks we have been charged.*

“What two consenting adults do...” the adage begins; in the privacy of their own bedroom, or others bedrooms, swimming pools, unlocked cubicles in a public toilet (locked cubicle on an international aircraft once), on the private lawns of an opulent golf course, on rooftops, on acid, on webcams:

“Should be none of our concern.” It ends. Or the state’s concern. Leave well enough alone, it goes without saying. That is, baring voyeuristic, prurient interest – we can never totally avoid the gaze of the peeping Thomas or Lizzy.

Be they consenting adults, flight attendants, restaurateurs, politicians – may everybody be a body unto itself, governing its own jurisdiction. May every orifice be an orifice unto...

But it isn’t quite so simple unfortunately. The rejection of Paternalism and the Nanny State makes sense only *ceteris paribus* – all else being equal – a state which is never in fact the case – all things are never equal.

Our tides are pulled by more than just the moon. We have to contend with society in its many shapes, and the gravitation pull of its every inhalation – even the short and rapid breathing as we culturally approach orgasm.

How now are you conceiving sex? – man or woman, or neither the same question arises from me: when is it a carnal act of consumption? When a way to enter into the conception of the world as not merely ‘a collection of things’ but a ‘communion of subjects’?

Years on and I find I’m still asking, as Rilke asked: how to achieve a relationship to sex wholly my own, free from convention, free from custom. How to be worthy of our best possession?

When I return lighter in wallet, heavier in lung, there are traces of what had been a vivid pink sunset, the dark was setting in and the moon was approaching. I pick up my book, but suddenly feel my bladder beckoning, so read, stand and piss all at once.

In the fading light I read – *Night is a doing word* – I piss straight and drenched the deep green ivy bunched up about the base of the tree. I am proud of my successful aim, but turning away too abruptly and tucking myself back in, a sizeable quantity of wee still falls in warm droplets down my thigh.

“Get your Pudenda over here,” Linn shouts from inside. His new favourite word, Pudenda – genitalia – etymology: from ‘Pudere’ *the parts to be ashamed of*.

Linn was laboriously carving out the centre of a wooden spoon. I took a milk crate to his left. Without looking up from his filing he offers me a steaming cup of something, a herbal tea from the smell.

I pick up a letter unopened from you, the title reads *Paper Towns*. I begin;

Paper Towns

“Dear J

In the early days cartographers would draw maps by hand. When doing so they would add towns. These towns did not exist in reality, but existed only on these maps. In this way they could identify fraudulent copies of their maps. These non-existent towns came to be known as paper towns.”

Linn upsets my milk carton with a dirty foot. “Look at my hang nail,” he says. I knock off his foot and return to your letter.

“Do you remember reading the Christian mystic Simone Weil? She was terrified by the prospect of God wanting her to, intending for her to, love another as much as she loved God. She simply wouldn’t know how to stand were that God’s wish. She shied away from it. But equally difficult seems the problem of how she could distinguish the Genuine loves God intended from the inferior copies, the simulacra. That was the greater ask: would God mark their bodies with paper towns?

Haven’t we both wondered at times, was our relationship governed by such a creative misreading? Did the eye’s tint obscure the paper towns? Did we construe as fate what was just a biological clock for when it feels timely to love as if for life?”

With healthy doubt,

El.

Juniper

In Hobart, Juniper stops into the Winston for a pricey beer, he waits at the bar behind a line to be served. Next door people file into the State Cinema. Earlier that day Juniper had entered that cinema on the arm of a different lover, Linn. to watch the latest Jim Jarmush film, Paterson. Linn was tall, ethereal; he liked to shred National Geographics, fart in bed. When Juniper’s beer arrives, he weaves through the bar, heads out front, and finds a seat watching the sunset. Gets out his journal to write Electra.

Electra.,

Matinee. We found our way to the back, and snuggled in, loungey and winey in suede armchairs, the back wall a sheet of double glass entire; the Meehan range

and sunset silhouetted behind the projector. In the film Paterson, in the city Paterson, the protagonist Paterson, suffers the loss of his entire collected works of poems, when his journal is eaten by his lover's hateful bulldog.

Numb he says *it's okay. They're just words. Just words written on water.*

After the film, pulling out of the carpark I asked Linn how he understood 'written on water.' She thought it referred to words' transitory nature; like ripples, impressions in a solution that as soon as it accepts the words dissolves them, recalls its originary shape.

"That's what water's mobility, its flux, brings to my mind," he says. As if water were the world, as we found it, and words fleeting impressions - attempting to conceptualise that world - retained their shape only a moment before being rejected. A very Lacanian *Real* asserting itself over our theories.

I had been more literal in my reading; *Just words written on water.*

I thought of the material. What do we usually think? We write our words on paper – but what if we write our words first on ink, the material precedent; and paper is just the carrier?

Juniper

*

The Tasmanian summer passed after that with rapidity, and I hardly heard from Electra. I was reading Heidegger again, a primer & developing toned shiny carves rubbed hairless & piston quads from surmounting by bike this Hobart terrain. Trrrrrain. I'd missed suburbs that rolled; how everything felt aslant; but for the book, which was all up and down, a sheer verticality, just a climb and a vertigo that hooked you.

When I walked my jaw was set like I might think on Heidegger's; imagine his firm & composed Germanic body, insurmountable beneath his lederhosen, rambling through black Bavarian forests. I found myself imitating, borrowing from every writer I read; I sponged, unwittingly, and began to feel like it only worked because I lacked a distinct personality.

Eileen Myles once wrote that the problem with imitating a poet is you don't really know what they mean. *Hopefully*. So in your confusion you start to imitate their style, then you're parodying. I felt something of that parody, too, the first few times Linn and I had sex. Like I was play-acting being a gay lover. I recall us, unsure of how far to take things, so we scissored our legs, in an aimless sort of misdirecting sense. Like enough motion would create the illusion we were getting somewhere. But where was there to get?

It felt like a dance of mirroring body parts, and made me appreciate the dual nature of straight sex, all those different genitals in play, or at least one of each set. Not that being with another man didn't afford novelties; it was its own kind of variety show. But there was the auto-erotic to it, no doubt about that. Holding an alien cock in my hand for one: what was this spongy pulsing organ, newly unfamiliar – did it have its own heart beat? It felt racey too, like it was salivating for something. Furtive then attentive, this cylinder frotting against my inner thigh. The most unintelligible thing about this alien cock was that I felt nothing when I held it. I mean, curiosity, maybe, but the hyper-tensile, responsive nerve nexus that it carried – that carried it – wasn't mine to feel. So used to my own cock in hand, was I.

But that's just it, I would have liked to tell Eileen. It's not intentional: you don't even have to think it. One minute you're fucking, the next it's a parody of something you read somewhere once. We learn don't we? There are no 'productive' thinkers, only re-productive, and we, from our fruitless branch, in what ways we thought we could – reproduced. Walter Benjamin described the condition when he wrote; the distracted, *too*, can form habits. At the time I remember saying, inferior DNA *can still* replicate. Sometimes that's all it can do.

Thinking on habits, brought to mind discussions of Jung and archetypes with my friend Dan. And how Dan unlike near everyone I knew didn't give a shit about Jung, and never brought him up in conversation, but just laughed that high fidelity laugh he had and read me poems in the grass. Or had me read them. It was worrying. What were we all trying to see? And if he wasn't trying to see it, and I trusted him to know, were we totally missing some point?

D. was recently published in an LGBTQ journal called Rabbit; neatly I thought. I was always honking on about Ludwig's rabbit, duck - and their interchangeability; substitutable like pronouns. That you could see one and then the other, but not simultaneously.

I mean; what did it mean for gender? When Linn and I were on a futon, I thought of that - how one moment, legs up around his waist, arcing my pelvis to meet him - I was one sex, one lover - then the next biting his ear, holding him down I was the other, hermaphroditic. A composite of both parts that couldn't both be seen at once. Its own whole.

On Inversions

The next day Linn is off work at the Pollen Tea Room; I'm lying in bed watching him stretch. He starts the morning on his shoulders, legs vertical, blood probably beating in his eardrums. I like to see the way his tummy tumbles forward, a bead of sweat from his navel down to his chin.

An inversion, I learn, is any yoga position which sends your blood pooling the other way, an anti-gravity manoeuvre; head stands or shoulder stands, the 'king' and 'queen' of yogic asana's are the classic inversions.

When I do a supported shoulder stand with a strap around my arms for stability, the blood drains from the arms, and my hands go numb. Usually, were I to touch my face there's a unity – I have an experience of two sensations; sensation in the face and hand – but numb hands feel profoundly other to me; I might as well be caressing my face with a rake.

This dissociation is familiar, as Electra once said: *how could I ever love an idea that has never touched my body?* Granted, I thought, some ideas touch your body, but without openness, or curiosity the way some hugs from strangers forget their purpose midway, then you're just two bodies pressed together.

As in these letters in which I, indirectly, ambulate about a topic by means of a stand in, a proxy. I begin to wonder: is writing Electra obliquely an attempt to touch back, to feel on my face as foreign the fingers of a familiar stranger?

Langer writes that the art object is neither an expression of feeling, nor a description of feeling, but a certain kind of symbolic rendering of its form. In an always unique and individual way, it seems art abstracts the shapes embedded in experience and reveals what they are.

Endowing things with form—perceiving the latent pattern in an experience—is itself an act of creation; it recreates the experience within a symbolic domain. My desire to write Electra: just another basic sense in which all creation was recreation. Where art and reality refused to touch.

Later, Kris Kraus would write that to be female still meant to be trapped within the purely psychological...

“No matter how dispassionate or large a vision of the world a woman formulates, whenever it includes her own experience and emotion, the telescope turns back on her.”

But how could a philosopher turn away from experience once ideas have touched her body? Would she not rather peel off the latex gloves she never knew were there, cast them into a corner of the room – digits inverted. But then, what do you do with your hands?

Auto-theory too, I start to think, is the tentative yet loving rediscovery of your own body. And as with sex, the greatest lovers know the riches of self-eroticism. Auto-theory is you touching yourself, touching yourself. A double layered sensation, of your exploring digits and the scape they inquire across.

“... because emotions just so terrifying, the world refuses to believe it can be pursued as a discipline. Dear Dick, I want to make the world more interesting than my problems. Therefore, I have to make my problems social.” (*Kraus*)

Epistemic stand-point theory? “Woman’s business”
Phenomenology as inquiry? “Continental Waffle”
Recognition of thought’s limitations? “Germanic Mysticism”

Why is vulnerability still only acceptable when it’s neurotised and personal? The question, implicit in Kraus, as in my letters. From a shared origin arose my desire to explore auto-theory - the desire to handle vulnerability, like philosophy: at a remove.

In Winnicott’s psychoanalytic sessions he would introduce his own ideas and interpretation to the dialogue, not as final truth, but as objects to be kicked about, played with, taken apart. I offered up these letters for similar play. The writer, like the analyst, must present themselves to be used by the patient, or the world. They must allow themselves to be impinged upon, then, in taking on the subject’s pain, they suffer a dispossession of self. Yet they are expected also to maintain a reflective distance and attitude.

I’ve heard it said of Eileen Myles that it is impossible to separate the experience of reading her work from the mythology deriving from her career. East Village feminist icon, transgressive proponent of a queer futurity currently unimaginable. Reading her is to experience a several world, a double exposure, into which we’re hurl’d.

If fame mediates our experience of the words of Myles or Blanchfield, Nelson or Kraus; it does so to purpose. The intentional alignment with the autobiographic takes place not as a vanity; the confessional candour, the disinhibition are *about* our relationality – laying it flat on the page – about the negotiations of identity we’re faced with in a time of marginalities fronting up, practicing boldness.

State Cinema, North Hobart

On Tuesdays Linn and I had counselling appointments; it wasn’t intended that way, it just fell out that our councillor happened to have two slots one after each other. The fact that we shared the same councillor, Dr Schwartz *was* a source of complex neurosis for me. I imagined Linn and I were reflective glass, and Schwartz somehow stood hesitant between the two mirrors; his body mediating the distance, either able to see us both the better or hardly at all. Afterwards we didn’t speak of our sessions. My discussions had concerned sex, what I conceived at times as my blockages, and had pathologized – while at other times viewed as a natural free expression to be celebrated. I imagined Linn sharing his frustrations, I imagined I was the pivot on which his counselling session hung. Then I pulled myself up for narcissism.

After one such session, in the stewing silent afternoon that followed we decided to head to North Hobart, for our habitual visit to the Winston and the state cinema. What we watched was more of an art installation by Christian Marclay: *The Clock*. A montage of all the clocks recorded in cinematic history creating a collage with sense – relating us to our collective narrative selves.

Moments in the protagonist says to his paramour: “we’ve got to stop meeting like this.” The cliché line is un-ironically blurted, with rolling eyes and weight on *got*.

A famous movie line, I reflected. Conjuring strange visitations in the night. Dark echoic halls. Teeth alit in ambient star light, describing the ambivalence which bared teeth describe: hunger, lust or aggression. Though to divide them seems to wilfully ignore their common origin. Passion and Anger are often treated as synonymous for good reason. Yet, a potent passage of Maggie Nelson’s *Argonauts*, for me, is when she describes watching a queer kink-film at a cinema: how her favourite aspect was the way a slap appeared tender.

How can sex be violence, I wondered, and at the same time not at all violence? These thoughts recur with Linn given our co-predilections. How can mutual objectification be a means of communion with another’s subjectivity?

Winnicott speaks to the value of creating a ‘facilitating environment’ for a child at play. This notion is generous – it resurfaces: how can we create a space secure enough for a child to creatively explore, construct a world? And for an adult: with sex as arena, as facilitating environment, is this how we can heal rather than re-enact traumas?

That night I couldn’t sleep, I sat on the red vinyl couch out front to think on the installation. I produced, instead what felt to be a vaguely flat-lined prose poem.

I’ve Got You Babe

The clock Maclay produced
Belongs to each of us.
We’ve all marked our moments
By the meditation of it

In the looped 24-hour supercut, synced with real time
Teeth are brushed, collectively
The pistols cranked at duelling-dawn to
Spaghetti western Ennio Morricone,
The Good, the Bad and Just Fine.

Sunny and Cher sing I got you babe as
Another day begins.
At 10:04 Doc Brown is eternally zapped
at the weather vane

The flash of blinking microwave LEDs
Pendulum of grandfather
Silver strung pocket time.
“It’s some comment on,” someone begins
“Hush,” silenced lips

Sundial's shadow lifts
Landscape flips

We're all arbitrarily linked by this measure.
Synched with our presents
To this, our collective narrative past.

Salamanca Market

If not visiting Linn at Pollen Tea Room, then in town my common place to read, write, idle, dissemble – was not a library but Salamanca market place. The university libraries, unfrequented, to me felt dreary, altogether too quiet, lifelessly sterile.

Yet, I reflected, Emerson saw a library as a magic cavern, or a pharaoh's tomb. Full of the dead buried in their sarcophagi, encircled by beloved possessions. With the reader's presence they could be reanimated, brought to life as you removed the lid.

I should be more precise: libraries are community hubs, and not at all obsolete - the function they serve is community outreach: a social service – the children's section as day care, providing the books families can't afford, computer access for the elderly, a skill-sharing hub.

But our university libraries assumed the sober air of the laboratory, home to diffuser, test-tube; where to read a book felt always decontextualized, at some remove. There we were made to examine texts as if under the microscope and from behind plastic goggles; touchable only when separated with tweezers and held in hands gloved by latex.

We are arriving everywhere
the train taking places and places
to get here, there
 must be something
to be said of the white swan on the black
lake at night like the black fire of letters
that burns in our books...

"like the black fire of letters that burns in our books," Louis wrote, this was a fire, I felt, continuous with the chaos outside its covers, in continuous dialogue with that outside. I have done most all my writing and reading not in an airless artificially lit sarcophagus, a graveyard of books, but in a Babylonian bustle; the grips of agora – trying to embrace its hustle.

Calvino imagined this continuous babble when he riffed off Borges asking his readers to conceive of a totalising library - *a catalogue of all that is knowable*. In this possible world we had lost the capacity to differentiate between the essential and the arbitrary. The reader was subsumed under a vertiginous and infinite written sprawl. Yet the gritty market agora,

provided a sprawl of its own, I felt. Though its weight was not vertiginous: as it didn't deliver up other's thoughts yet lent you the materials to work your own.

I write you this from Retro Café in Salamanca Place. The morning is crisp and the markets are coming alive. A few yards off a ruddy cheeked couple are spruiking their apples from behind a wooden collapsible table. Down the way a Vietnamese family are selling radishes and beets recently wetted, beads still glistening, colour saturated. They send their youngest to make all the financial transactions, bum bag comically over-sized at hip, learning the count on the go. The smell of Mahogany and Celery-Top pine wafts from the neighbouring wood work stall. Small circles of friends come together then part laughing in a many-parted dance that peters out about the Tex-Mex burrito stand.

The agora is a library, but one not fossilized through recording. And one generous in its abundance. Here I see the library finally, as Roberto Bolaño conceived it: as infinite generosity, humankind's most admirable face.

Juniper

Sitting in Pollen Tea Room reading, I was fond of watching Linn expertly handle a steamer, balance three plates, one in the crook of their arm as they made their way between tables, juggle spatial awareness with affect labor with a humbling fluidity; seamlessly transitioning between a several' world.

I thought on what it meant, if it meant anything, that both Electra and I worked – when we did work – not in hospitality, but in call centres, we justified as they were 'ethical' call centres. El worked at Fossil Free, I at the Greens. Each of us preferring to go without face to face interaction, capably learning to manipulate for a cause. It's strange because, as I recall, El was always uncomfortable with phone calls, the distance denied her need to articulate with expression, gesture.

I imagine her counting silences, pauses of breath – learning to determine whose turn it was to speak – the way one might count the seconds between thunder claps, deciding if the storm was oncoming, imminent, in retreat.

As Barthes noted: on the telephone the other is always in a state of departure; the other departs twice over, by voice and then by silence. Whose turn is it to speak? We fall silent in unison: crowding of two voids. *I'm going to leave you*, the voice on the telephone says, with each second.

In *Decreation* Carson describes the conversations approaching final conversations, where interspersed with discussions of brunch, her mother speaks longingly of death. Miracles slip past while Carson neatens things; spines of books, paperclips in a china dish. Paperclips, that recollection will immortally align. The quotidian walks somberly, hand-in-hand with mortality, as if performing some time-worn, dissonant, promenade.

*The lines are falling / faster / now
Fate has put little weights on the end
(to speed us up)*

After his mother's suicide, Josh Thomas in Australian drama *Please Like Me* wordlessly watches his father check the use-by dates on his mother's milk and yogurt, rifle through her fridge condiments, not wanting to waste a thing. The quotidian: the surest way to relay silently something unfathomable. The mundane butts up against it. Miracles slip past.

Her body is lain in a generic plastic gown, on a cold steel slab. Under harsh florescent light the least charitable photograph of her, which she'd never allow in life, is methodically snapped for a file, hospitable records. A plastic band around her wrist carries a serial number, bars for scanning – like vacuum packed meat in a deli. Life goes on, and miracles slip past.

Life going on will soon mean lawyers the son will have to hire to dispose of her estate. Funerals, where eulogistically her life must be duly performed and honoured before numb or breaking loved ones.

I imagine Electra on the phone, head canted to the left, the phone is cradled between clavicle and ear. She flicks errant hair from her eyes. Meanwhile her hands scrub dishes with an Ajax cloth, because life has to go on, but the lines are falling faster now, fate has put little weights on the ends, and all Carson could do was describe brunch, because what possible use are other words. Miracles slip past, but that is unavoidable; it seems the nature of miracles.

On Accelerated Grieving

That summer Linn and I were offered to guinea pig sit a cottage in Coles Bay for an old friend and supervisor Jordan, and his partner Alex, who were off to a wedding in Perth. We stayed up late. The next day we lay out some lettuce, cucumber ends and hay to the appreciative meeps of the piggies, and went *down by the water line* (as it were) for the afternoon.

While Linn frolicked at the water's edge, kicking at the spume, I watched some kids not far off play, fashion castles from buckets, muck out dark sand moats. I thought about Bruce Beaver and how he described the Manly of his youth on the Mainland, not so far away; a few miles and a generation ago.

I recall how he described watching a sand modeller painstakingly forming the figures of culturally familiar objects – what would they be, what icons depicted the 70s white Australian dream? Perhaps Don Bradman beneath the Southern Cross, maybe Malcolm Campbell with a tooth filled grin.

The sand's shapes would be diligently sealed by the model maker with salt-water brush strokes, a cloth or cap would catch coin from the appreciable, appreciating audience. Then the days end would see the artist ceremoniously destroy the structure; movements steady, unreluctant. Washing it away before the waves would.

In Dharamshala, Northern India, a few years past, I lived in Tushita monastery; I would watch the monks bent over there work; attendant to the mandala as it emerged. They worked a familiar devotion into the structure; with attentive strokes of a silver tube's length – single grains of coloured sand eased out in a steady flow. The Mandala should be imagined from above I learn; their geometries, few onlookers realise, are made to conjure idealised monasteries, as seen from a bird's or God's eye view, they formed early architectural sketches.

That the culmination of these laborious creations is their destruction never ceases to evoke in the audience reactions notable *because* equivocal. How *should* you feel? Some measure of regret for the loss of a beautiful thing? But then, this sense is stymied when the intention is so clearly to belie that sense of loss; or evoke it, only in order to call it into question, to look at it anew.

The meditative practice we were taught drew to the surface the ugly feelings otherwise suppressed, reacted to only unconsciously. In observation we were finally examining our reactions, the meaning of their content, the contingency.

Accelerated grieving, Electra once called it. Or was it just causation I wonder, no longer concealed, properly naked?

Juniper

Watching Linn frolic by the waterline with some families children, caught up in the play that the land offered, I wanted to tell him I loved him then, but the words stuck. What if I didn't mean them? I wondered. What if I did mean them, but I was wrong to? If it were an error in judgement?

Away from Linn and the children, an elderly fishing couple were beating two squids against the stones ... It sounded gruesome. The rhythmic thwack. The steady beat. Eerie that even slaughter can create a rhythm your body could move to, could dance to. I thought on Heidegger's phrase – one of the many he felt called to invent, from a language failing to contain his reality – 'it worlds' he said. It is *worlding*, outside, simply doing what it must do, what it chooses to do.

I settled back on the sand, shading my brow with a broad hat, and drew out the Deborah Levy novel I was reading. Reading Levy I had a renewed sense of the world & language. She wrote as if words had not already been worn out, emptied of meaning. As if their original unsullied form corresponded with the felt-experience today. For Heidegger too, there was a time when 'I love you' spoken, carried the weight of its sense; before the plethora of gift card-tee-shirt loves overrode its meaning.

For him the task was to recognize and revisit the word's sense at their birth place... To remember when they had authenticity, and so live back into that sense. I can recall the first time I told Electra "I love you." Or was it "I think I love you" or "I love you maybe" – hesitant and breathy and tremulous as we were. This was before the many loves to come may water the sense down; I never thought then that love would wind up being a repeatable performance. A dive into an already familiar deep.

When the sunsets and the sky begins to darken, I zip up my jacket, shiver once and seek out Linn on the beach. I begin to walk at pace back, I walk barefoot as is customary in sand, feeling the silicon scrunch between my toes. The sand is cold and wet now, I feel its numbing spread. I think on the fireplace in the cottage; imagine Linn stretched out on a rug in front. I hope there is kindling, a working gas light at home.

*

'The continuous work of our life,' wrote Montaigne, 'is to build our death.' Or something to that effect. Man knows and thinks this tragic ambivalence which the animal and the plant merely undergo. The "rational animal's" destiny. In death he escapes from his natural situation without, however, freeing himself from it. Man is an ambivalent condition.

I'm nestled into the red sofa on the porch of the cottage, before me I can hear the incessant digestion of the waves, behind me the shuffles through hay and Meeps of the guinea pigs. From the neighbouring fencepost a cat is staring curiously at me, a perfectly disinterested gargoyle. Linn, was making breakfast and I'd just been reading my facebook messenger,

two friends reached out on the same day with similar messages. In our early twenties we had as a trio discovered the world together. The world we discovered was glorious, sun-drenched, and deeply troubled. But that was acceptable because that delineated our purpose: to undo, to redefine. In youth's naiveté we thought we would re-describe community, help a lost culture rediscover compassion. These friends seem now strung out, wary at the end of a day with no coming home in sight. They wrote me that they're giving pills a try, another try.

Tricyclics, SSRIs. One says she is seeking psychiatrists for ADHD diagnosis, Aderol, Ritalin dispensation. Pathologization of self feels the rage.

We're in a complex time, Linn said when I explained the situation, *and judgement is what they need less than anything*. The night preceding we had watched a stand-up comedy session *Nannette*, where the consolation was offered that this medication may *boost* creativity - that Van Gough popped pills by the dozen, powdered foxglove, that made colours vibrant, pills perhaps responsible for those extra vivid *Sunflowers*.

I wasn't meaning to offer judgement, I thought but didn't tell him – what, I wondered, was whether this was just a price they must pay for failing to properly internalize the social contract, with its consoling ethics, its reasonable metaphysics in tow?

And what, I wondered, if medicalizing discontent ultimately just accentuated the disorder? They suffer from thinking, and inhibiting questions creates an uneasy, fraught relation. *Chassez le naturel*, I thought, *il revient au galop*.

*

The week by the coast passed slowly, I kept thinking on depression, on medication. I finished my Deborah Levy novel, then felt in her absence a familiar sense of listlessness. I decided to return with Linn to Hobart city for relief.

Once home, I reclined beneath our red plum tree in Battery Point, reading. Beyond the page I could see a well-built man, Aussie-dad type, muscled, clean-cut – the kind with a torso you could climb up, and indeed upon him was a papoose and in the papoose a child. The man had a determined stride as he crossed the dog-filled park, heading uphill. The child was joggled with each step, his mouth drooping open, facing away, over already trodden ground.

By mental habit formation: I am geared for analogy – I catch myself wondering: is the *eros* of my love for Linn, as with Electra, an infant papoose-borne by our need for companionship? The infant faces the opposite direction, watching the scenery recede, as the companionship staggers forward. I figured at first that backwards-facing love must be blind to what is coming. Or was it, I then wondered, redundant to face forward when already propelled forward?

Facing backwards I think on the melancholia of that time, years ago, when Electra and I were here together. I remember telling myself that “melancholia” had inscribed itself in the days and months after she left. “Doldrums” in retrospect, would have been a better way to self-describe. No one can get that heavy and serious about “the doldrums”.

Still, Melancholia was a term I happily romanticised. I approved its autumnal overtones, the seasonality indicative of its belonging to a natural order, while remaining sentimental; one of the four temperaments of premodern medicine. It had a symptomology of lugubriousness, morosity, the product of imbalanced humors. In particular an excess of black bile, a preponderance of which indeed poured forth in my fiction, poetry, discontented revelry. Melancholia orbited beneath the influence of Saturn, hence the subject being, in temperament, *saturnine*.

The term for me evoked the poet Thomas Hardy’s *tangled bine-stems scoring the sky, his cloudy canopy as crypt, the wind a death lament*. It felt like just one of those peculiarly personable medical terms of that era: melancholia, hysteria, conditions of the humours, like the poetics of miasma, a depression of the spirits resulting from “bad air”, to be treated with a daily constitutional.

Electra and I used to take our daily constitutionals along the rivulet track. Plumbs engorged by the summer overhung the rickety fence bounding the path. A brood of baby ducklings, downy spheres, waddled their way upstream behind mother.

I remember thinking that revisiting Tasmania was like revisiting an old tree, one which in youth I nestled in the bifurcating forked branches of, and there inscribed with pen knife, initials in a heart. Returning to witness the tree’s embossing, what will I find? Time has worked over the inscription - the cellulose has thickened, a ketosis knotted scar had settled about our initials, characters that now resemble only the suggestion of their original signifier - the way I imagine Mandarin characters, originally pictographic, slowly morphed into merely suggestive shapes.

In the days that follow, I received a letter from Electra, I tore open the envelope and read:

Electra

Dear Junip,

Do you recall South Hobart’s Water Works?
The tree’d artery we piped down
And found a bird’s body on our path.
A breeze takes up the edges of her. Broken wings
Feebly enact fluttering, its impotence.

A predatory kite distantly possessing

- watches from neighboring eucalyptus –
an uncomfortable branch.

A dead bird denotes, you tell me.

The kite scoops fairywrens from our cities stoops,
and the years are lost now
since you hung our artichoke hearts from
the light switch above your bed –

Our new words,
a skin,
finding each other –
each leaf feebly enacts fluttering, its impotence

Ground bound now
To cold crumpled sheets,
Which hold the weight of our correspondence:
Its remonstrances.

The bird is gone now.
I walk over rust-coloured stains,
that might denote - trudged gravel grates.
I walk over rust coloured stains - without seeing it, without

Knowing it was there.

Electra

Juniper

Dear Electra,

You visited in a dream last night. Do you recall, Kant describing a dream's content as 'involuntary poetry'? In the dream you're holding a chunk of quartzite, milky ancient stone cupped gently in your hands as if it were an eggshell, not product of a billion year metamorphic process, pushed and pulled by tectonic compression.

In the dream we're on a plateau in the Western Tiers, Vandemonian Button grass growing up in tussocks about our knees, swaying. I reach down and pin a paper-grass stalk flat between thumb and forefinger, I run my fingers up its razor edge. A thin fire severs the ridge lines of my thumb, the contours demarking me, run deep red. You proffer the quartz. I let the flow gather, bead and drop onto its milky surface. Blood in Milk. Some witchy omen in it.

In the interpretive necessity of dreams I conceived this as a pact. Binding us to this land on which we parted. Or as well it could be you binding me to this land, a sentence to which I willingly acquiesce.

Only later do I learn those ancient molten processes leached the minerals from that quartz, left it empty, translucent – nutrient poor. The paper grass - at home in the inhospitable – claimed it, drew quartz's silica to sharpen its blades. Then blood begotten by grass spread on quartz, felt full circle – implied necessity. Should I conclude, I wondered, that it's the over-determination of dreams that allows for a Choose Your Own Adventure sense of closure? My bleeding thumb remains hooked in the page's corner.

Electra

Junip.,

YOUR POEMS BEGIN by declaring that syntax shapes the human predicament. That midway through youth's stanza the line broke, a branch in a forest. In the cave, the poet dealt in nonlinear psychology. Though the cave saw no sun, not even indirectly. You did not entertain philosophical questions, albeit technically. Admittedly, you admitted, the program generated concrete situations. We: Abstractions.

I ask: how to avoid collisions along the path of morning to evening? YOU answered: we must reconcile waking and dreaming. The hours cycled by on wheels, the daylight trundles, misunderstood and dimming.

Electra

You told me Carson felt that in aligning the realms of waking and dreaming our attention is drawn to a boundary active between them, active *because* it leaks. I can imagine Foster-Wallace writing Carson's poetry up as yet another example of the porousness of certain borders.

There's a reason that 'oneiric in tone' has come to be a lazy literary description applicable to so much poetry, in the way 'meaty' is used to describe the texture of a plenitude of fungal varietals.

"How do we rise above our days and nights?"

I rhetorically asked you in this poem

We must reconcile waking and dreaming.
The sun trundled on, misunderstood and dimming.

Electra

I Invite you to Join Messenger

OR

Man Arrested for Putting Fake Arrow Decals on the Floor in Ikea

Both are accused
Of creating a labyrinth with no exit

I fill the holes in the chassis before applying the chipboard

Yet mi van es tu van - though not when I'm living in it.
And I can live anything

When night falls we shall snap the glowsticks' inner
chamber

We may live the resultant light

Thank you for your words.

E.

Juniper

My stay in Hobart was coming to a close; the wisteria had fallen from the neighbouring tree and my sublet had run out. I couldn't live on Linn's couch forever. Three year earlier Electra and I had left our joint belongings beneath this house, and today I had decided to unearth them – decided, the way one might in morbid fascination, decide to peak beneath a wound's bandage.

Digging through the long garaged belongings, I unearth memories that are dusty or mouldering. Do you remember the old matchbooks we got at the Tip Shop? I took them out, tinkered with them, lit one and watched its sulphur sputtered into life then slowly burn down the ply stem.

The *matchbook*, I had learned, is so named as the cardboard-covering folds over the thin sticks of ply in a "book". The enclosed matches rest in a comb-like arrangement, neatly lined soldiers. The soldiers must be torn away before use – as opposed to the jumbled, loosely packed sticks of the now common *matchbox's* interior tray. The book sports a coarse striking surface on the back, fricative to the touch - while the front cover, bares imprinted the insignia *Pabst Beer*.

I recall toying with this matchbook at Goulburn street – then putting it back in my pocket when I hear my name, spoken to my ears exasperatedly,

"Juniper, I want you to meet someone. This is Jorgen."

In conversation with a partial acquaintance, I default to piecing together a path connecting the dim dots of a constellations of preceding conversations. these conversations have gerrymandered contours; they eschew troubling conversational electorates, that play where it pays.

"So Jorgen...how do you fill your time?"

Perhaps I meant: what do possibilities of togetherness look like?

"*How do I fill my time?*" He seemed slightly puzzled then rallied.

This question I had come to habitually ask at social gatherings, making a new acquaintance - it felt preferable to the prepossessing "so, what do you do?" which sounds off immediately as adversarial, a challenge.

"What do you do?" seems to prompt a postured response as the interlocutor scrambles to self-situate. Who in their inner depths is not deeply uncomfortable with a question that pre-identifies one's worth as residing in the role they occupy in a capitalist system of production and consumption?

And coming to it, how would I answer, if I put the question to my earlier self?

“...And you Juniper, how do you fill the time?” Jorgen asks.

How did I fill my time?

The months after you left would pass in a meandering passage, triangulated between rivulet, IGA and home. I subsisted off a renunciate saffron-orange diet back then. buying netted oranges in three-kilo sacks, butternut pumpkins, GMO carrots eerily identical and perpendicular. It's a peculiarity of orange vegetables to be the cheapest. At that time 2 dollars per kilo veg was my budget. I had to horde my capital for pouch tobacco and black Gossip's wine.

My familiar passage through space became mentally well-trodden, ingrained as a neural pathway. A firing synapse would tell me a cigarette was called for, a rummaging hand in the compartment below my desk would find an baggy empty of filters. So I'd make my way down the hill, my body carting my absent mind to the IGA. Milk, eggs and filters later I'd be on the porch, flash forward to rolling and wetting the paper with my whistle.

This was years before I would examine the nutritional patterns that left me sick every two weeks. The compulsivity and withdrawal my smoking fed. Years before I noticed how my ethics were eroding under my indulged tendency to rationalise impulsive consumption choices. Factory farming for one, even then sickened me, but I held the visceral discomfort at bay.

The way I occupied space felt entirely natural. I moved through a scripting world, and was comforted by my unchanging social relations; served by the handsome Greek boy at the deli, the detached librarian, my absent housemate with his plaintive sticky notes. My relations were one level deep, enough to operate in meat space while my mind wondered across the virtual.

How did I fill my time?

These habits were restrictive, stultifying. But my hand wasn't forced; the ritual was my own.

*

As the sun was falling, approaching the end of my spring cleaning, I found some worried at manila folders, and dug out a stack of A5 slips of paper; biro-lined and re-articulated old poems. Some were scraps of other people's writings I'd transcribed. Most were many folded, worn-seamed from fondling and rereading. I sat and read through them.

I came across in the folder, the words printed neatly, a typed-up letter you had pinned to me desk years ago before disappearing for a stint of days. It read:

Dear Juno.,

To think you were once afraid of being a comet!
Now you are becoming a planet,
gathering its moons about it like skirts.

I am diminishing and
withdrawing further.
Soon I will be a little dot.

Then I might expand again, but
I haven't decided yet.

El.

It's a strange process re-entering old poems, it feels uncanny to me. Is this because poetry is a durational art? Its experience is temporally bounded, but it is more than that. Reading a poem teaches you *how* to read it; draws on iteration, pattern recognition. The poem becomes a program you can learn to operate, to *get inside*. Blanchfield puts it, *its sense of likenesses and equivalences build an interiority as you pass through it*.

Is part of a writer's struggle between the fact that poetry is by nature durational, and that the passage of time is, on closer inspection, illusory? Illusory could be taken in two different directions:

The Tibetan scholar Nagarjuna expounds on *non-persistence*: the notion that nothing is carried over from instant to instant, that change necessarily entails annihilation - in which case how could a non-persisting self experience duration? Is there, in fact, only *now* - as Eckhart Tolle may extol (a profound felt-insight, however possibly cheapened by the aisles of self-help).

Alternately, illusory could refer to the image that General Relativity leaves us holding - that in the absence of an inertial frame of reference, we find that were there a *Godly* perspective time is a frozen river, in which there exists no movement, no transition: every moment - stretching into the past and indefinitely into the future -- exists simultaneously. Passage is merely an illusion that situated, finite beings like us are subject to. Sitting on the outer edge of an illusion, transitioning.

I recall in youth, with more than a bit of shame, consoling an early lover who had lost a grandparent by claiming their loved one persisted in a parallel temporality we no longer had access to - as if merely stood in waiting, behind a sheet.

Yet, in seemingly paradoxical contrast, we still experience a poem as durational, despite this metaphysical lack of transition - you've experienced something when you've read a

poem. The world has changed itself subtly around you, and yet – no trace of change remains.

The Japanese Monk, Dogen, wrote of Buddha-nature that after your body and mind and the body and mind of others fall away:

Not even a trace of realisation remains
And that no trace,
Continues indefinitely

It puts me in mind of the Arabic expression *Maktub* 'it is written' a notion I've always found encouraging. It suggests we view the events unfolding in life not as surprise or chance, but as uncovering. The parallel here is with the notion of learning as a kind of remembering. Discovery that feels like recognition. The way Rukeyser writes:

You must choose your poet here...
Or rather, do not choose, but recall

As I pull up the late Manilla folder I come across this scrappy fragment of Auden: *the ironic points of light / flash out wherever the just exchange their messages.*

I wished Electra were here to rediscover it with me. What is she rediscovering now, in a poet, new or old? The light from a poem, bound to a moment's apogee, evokes not something you learn but rather something you remember, recalls you to yourself.

After I finished packing up I read a letter from Electra, she'd titled: *Bourgeois Bohemians in South Hobart*.

Electra

Dear Junip.,

So you're leafing through our belongings, brought back to the period after we parted. And how do you find it? Where we lived, squat of Soho, amongst the BoBos. Has the Magnolia been vibrant? The colour fallen away, the fatted-calf white leaves dropped?

Remember when you said, "the revolution will make children of us all," and I said let's sit out on the veranda looking at that Magnolia, said, "it's still cold enough for a dressing gown and blanket." There's a distinction we learn, between childhood temporality, that place of plenitude, and 'developmental time' - mapped to calendar, wrist watch, market.

We were privileged enough to wonder; what does it mean to embody privilege - yet through life choices shuck off some of what capital conferred? To retain the possibility of return: an afforded security, made it all feel like play acting. "A jester mistook for a king," you wrote. "A pathos derive-able from being the perverted form of the privileged subject." I'm back then, just as bent, colour fallen away, as the Magnolia head-crooked over bramble fence.

We Bourgeoisie bohemians of Soho, generationally shipped together: artists or scholars or vagabonds or gurus, activists of varying ilk's. Who had care in abundance, but a shortfall in sense, or money though we thought they were the same.

Eileen Myles spoke to her working class roots – the same felt true of the middle class – that we weren't *really* supposed to be artists. Only the upper class had access to the beautiful, or like Baudelaire, the capacity to comprehend rejecting it.

Reject it. I mean, the middle class meant, for us, an appreciation of features money could buy. Like time. It was a wedding: money could buy time. Could buy its better half, more than a plus one, the special other. When we left the university, without institutional support, a failure to sell our hours, to respect time's transactional nature, meant a falling in-on-our-lives, a plunging.

Suddenly all we had was time. Supported by the plump but tight-fisted hand of the state, security benefits afforded us a modest kingly existence. I mean we could survive; and laboured to, a little. We were a duration, a some-time of instances afforded an organism with sufficient push.

And it felt regal, our paper cheques, regal in the generosity we could offer one another – a couch or spare mattress always available; a shed ready to convert into temporary squat, should we find one we counted in our number, dumb of luck.

And generous, we could always offer food. And if not food, tobacco, or a poem. Hugs and words. For playground we repurposed the suburbs, hard-rubbish furnishings, book exchange in refrigerators, markets with clothes, tapped out and traded along the bike path.

For mid-class youth to get beyond a graduate know-how of the conceptual apparatus of art, for it to be usable, to experience it as *true* – we required a more profound transformation; so we affected a type of economic drag. We donned the clothes of the working class, queenly in our Blundstone boots, those gatherers of scuff, flannelette when it was in; then dungarees, paint splattered, high vis-tradie puffer jackets.

And we narrated. None of this was anything without the stories we told and sold and staged. No one said any of this wasn't true, you know. Still our precariat position felt in its character staged – maybe it was this quiet knowledge that we could probably always step back from it. That a comfortable middle class family could catch us. So renunciation affected was never felt internally as legit, as long as a net was retained – safety latch on.

El.

Juniper

I set out along the rivulet to say goodbye. The Rivulet lead to the Cascade Brewery, and up to the base of kunanyi. In the preceding weeks I would stop at the burnt-out remains of the hoarder's weatherboard home. Sat out like a piece of dark tourism, for years. Electra and I used to visit frequently. I vividly recalled the Ford Spectron with blue lichen patina'd across the dash, and the disdainful gaze of the wild cat that resided in the backseat. I noted the ugly fluorescent graffiti marked 'Hoarder' across the home's exterior. We wondered on the man who had lived there: did he have a family? Was he mourned, or did he just evoke curiosity? You would sit in the midst of the rubble each morning, you said it was the only place to draw freely. That it felt peaceful there.

Back in Tasmania now, I notice those remains are gone – as if they'd never been. Something beautiful and silent had taken their place, grown up there. What had become of the shards of the hoarder's life? Was someone there to remember?

Looking over *Murmurations* is like rooting through the nest of a hoarder, this strange collection, collated for you. I recall when we fished through the remains of the house; half-ashamedly, fascinating but taboo.

I recall the wads and wads of age-tannin cut-outs from old tabloids – seemingly random, we thought, till searching revealed patterns. Did it almost reveal a sense of humour?

On Being Undone

Dear Electra,

I can't help thinking our relationship is now one obsessed by its own syntax. We used to talk about auxiliary verbs, *to be*, *to have* – and how endlessly fecund they are, how they have served to point to our proverbial placedness, our 'being' in the world. The *subjunctive*, to remind us of our endless ontic-possibilities. You used to love its common description as a mood not a tense. The feeling-tone of grammar.

I in turn was seduced by 'to do' the seminal verb, the definitive action word. Do you remember Lerner's play poem?

I did it for the children. I did it for the money.
I did it for the depression of spirit and the cessation of hope.
I did it because I could, because it was there.
I'd do it again. Oops, I did it again.
...
That does it. Easy does it. That'll do.

My personal favourite usage of *to do* though, was one of its compounds – *to undo*.

The notion of being *undone*, compound-adjective, like a zipper, suggests the subject is both free and naked at once, liberated yet vulnerable. The cracks in our composure that allow for a porousness of our borders, the world is let seeping in, and the truth we'd concealed from ourselves gushes out...

It's no accident that the sounds we make when we're genuinely breaking are so undignified: the snuffles of a little animal, a pink blind-eyed gurgle, the honking – our faces flushed and swollen, our mucous membrane enflamed and flowing freely. It feels physically shameful, exposed *because* it carries the sense of the state it exhibits; the shame, vulnerability and accompanying release.

Another reason I'm so drawn to *undone* is that it's a compound adjective – like unnoticed, unsung, and consequently beautiful, albeit sadly so. Take for instance a relationship unconfined, as in Hardy's poem *Drummer Hodge*, where he writes of the young soldier 'unconfined just as found'.

Unconfined. Unrejoicing. Unkissed. A sense, as Allan Bennet put it in the play *History Boys* – of incompleteness or missing – of being left out.

Junip.



*1951, Cage in an anechoic chamber at Harvard - foam-padded,
designed to absorb all sound.*

On 4'33"

Dear El.,

Before I met you I fell in love with a girl who performed John Cage's 4'33" on flute with a Dachshund circling her heels, in an auditorium packed with undergraduates. When I say perform; 4'33" you remember, is a performance of silence in three parts. Its 4'33" minute duration reflecting the length of the canned music that sells today.

The professor was trying to prove some point about Feyerabend and epistemological anarchism: a kind of philosophical Dadaism. I wasn't much interested. At the time I was reasonably convinced the girl I loved was in love with the professor, carrying on a quiet affair behind my, and his partner Alex's, backs. Only later when I too fell in love with the professor did I properly understand her position.

After her 4'33" performance we played with Zen inspired experimental silence, during sex and other conversations. Later we spoke about not the piece's sense, but the sense in being able to compose a piece of uninterrupted silence and sell it. I projected myself into Cage's head as she read over my flushed body:

"I have no wish to be incomprehensible, perhaps only to productively discombobulate; to convey the temporary sense you get in turning a corner on a hike into an expansive and alien terrain..."

4'33" was a performance of the impossibility of silence. Before I knew his point, I knew only that it was informed in some way by Cage's Zen influence - I enjoyed imagining it to be a meditation on perhaps the frames we operate rigidly within; music must be composed, not ambient - we'd conceive music definitionally as organized sound... As requiring the artist in the process of creation. Cage demonstrates that such framed music only at best mimicked the uninhibited art nature produced.

My friend Thomas had from his teens a near paralyzing fear of tinnitus. The notion of being followed everywhere by a dull ringing produced an auditory claustrophobia, which kept him carting ear plugs in his back pocket, avoiding musical venues throughout his university years.

Meanwhile Cage, in a sound-proofed anechoic chamber, discovered he couldn't escape the high note whine of his own nervous system in operation, nor the low bass rhythmic pump of his blood in circulation. Yet rather than claustrophobia, oddly he was consoled: "Until I die there will be sound," he wrote "and sound will continue following my death. One need not fear about the future of music."

That the future of music is secured by the persistence of noise leads me to ask: when does noise shade into music? Cage's play on frame was a defining point for noise music, a genre which played with the incidental and ambient. I've been thinking on how this marked tension applies as much to words & writing – what is worthy of recording in a life, of sharing? What is the difference between what is deemed desirable 'sound' and simply noise?

Junip.

On Ellipsis...

Here I go defaulting to separating my ideas with ellipsis... For as long as I've texted, myspaced, messengered, I've leant heavily into the ellipsis ... surface affects that produce a delay ... of gentling ... of segueing ... of suggesting ... Leaving the door of a statement's meaning open. Why? For fear of the conceit showing a full stop's worth of conviction may denote? Or because people prefer the pliable conversation partner; firm belief can't be negotiated, talked around, it dead-ends. I've since wondered, was I a conversational publican for whom the customer was always right?

Whilst a period is a severance, an ellipsis refuses to break the connection. As Kraus asks;

How do you continue when the connection to the other person is broken (when the connection is broken to yourself)?

I refused to break the connection. Fear of being left alone was my motivator. This was symptomatic of my general condition; my writing pandered and was consequently a disappointment. I would pepper text messages with emoji's, fluffing up the pillow of any half-way decent idea with adjectives of self-doubt, sanding my sentences own edges so they were never too sharp with conviction that could lead to conversational splinters ... Even when writing fiction for myself, I was always addressing *you*, Electra, or *you* unknown reader. I never escaped the awareness of *your* being in town, in the room, over my shoulder, and so you could never slip fully out of yourself. I was the overly attentive host whose excessive conscientiousness makes you ever the guest, never *welcome home*.

Forgetting that to be in love, and to demonstrate that love, requires believing that to be in their presence is the only means of being, completely, yourself...

*

Even if my use of ellipsis indicates a lack of conviction present in these letters, I don't regret it. I only ever hoped to offer you considerations. That we could lie flat on our backs, and be with the stars, make a horoscope together. I only ever hoped to offer you perplexities.

And what is a history of philosophy, as Thomas de Quincey asks, if not a history of perplexities? The perplexities of the Hindus, of the Chinese, of the Greeks; of Schopenhauer, Wittgenstein, Dogen. Is it enough for a writer to find their place in the world, by offering the world's perplexities back to her? And are they the world's perplexities or her own? If the world is perplexed, she is at least sure-footed in her perplexity. And wouldn't deign to ask me for answers. In which case surely the most humble offer to make perplexity, are more questions, questions that open onto further questions.

It's as if we entered the world with this mouth that was born to drop in amazement, designed with an impressive range of motion; a dexterous tongue, this vocal folded orchestral organ – language presented itself as an instrument; we learnt to communicate ideas and most stopped there, expecting language's function had been fulfilled. They overlook the oblique capacity – that we can in language *inhabit* ideas. That this happens best when de-stressing the medium, in the way words can draw attention to and defamiliarise language, thereby rediscovering it.

For Borges we make a mistake when we think we're ignorant of something because we can't define it. We define something only when we know nothing about it. This idea recurs in Buddhism – its most honest expression, expresses only incomprehension, but without consternation. And that incomprehension is no irrational mysticism but rather a rational, analytically grounded embrace of inconsistency.

Honesty requires rather a Socratic shrug of perplexity; the humility of a Wittgenstein pointing to all that lay outside his *Tractatus* as the locus of what really mattered.

In a virtual world: A pockmarked teenager
enters flow-state
in a first person shooter

Part IV Maybe I'll Take Everything With Me When I Go...

(In Canada)

Electra

Dear J.,

I'm very tired. I had a good conversation with Dan as we rode along Merri Creek Trail. I thought: if I had a kid, I'd want to walk them by a creek or river like this every day possible. Recent flooding has washed a lot of detritus up onto the bank. Human detritus, plastic shreds, various species of trash.

Walking the long riverbank, the grasses resemble eyelashes that catch debris. It was so green, though. The rubbish seemed to me like remnants of a losing battle. Green everywhere, birdcalls, many people walking dogs or children or ambling with arms about each other. Massive cement walls abutting the bank, above which were lines of staggered houses. I saw two men, industrious together adding some spray painted scene to one of the walls. The walls felt like a dam keeping all the infrastructure contained. I am glad they are painted by people, not as any commercial thing it seems, painted just because.

Dan's house is also overrun with plants. Looking at it I forget how dry Canberra is. I want to make some bee hotels for my backyard. It's easy to do. I want to plant a heap of native bee-attracting plants. It will be good practice. I hate that my landlord will tear them out when he decides to knock the house down. He doesn't care about bees or plants. How do you not care about plants? Maybe I'll take everything with me when I go...

Juniper

Dear El.,

I've moved into a house in Victoria City on Vancouver Island, Canada, occupied – it seemed – by 7 witches. Mushrooms grew from the hardwood floors, tree stumps protruded from the walls. Even elk horns were seen festooned with mala beads spreading eagle wings in the room's corners.

Behind me is Ted, Behind me is NYC, Canberra and You. It seems I've arrived in Canada. I have a return ticket which is rare for me - a decision I did not make out of caution, or pre-planning - I purchased the ticket on a whim, for a date almost random. Perhaps I did it to bound the sense of boundlessness, to keep it from becoming threatening.

Books titled *Planetary Healing, the Lifted Veil: fantastic literature by women, the Open Veins of Latin America, Cosmic Serpent, Ecology of Hope, Back to Eden*, and of course; *the Artist's Way*. Any description of a collection of books, any statement 'and, of course' carries the intimation of cliché, implies a scriptedness to the readings: as if the books collected together were in themselves a rebuke to critical thought. But I certainly don't mean that. I know better than. We've both seen how the drive for heterodoxy ends dismally; all behaviour finding itself in some way iterative.

I've been thinking on the silent stretches in our correspondences and how we can prevent them from feeling threatening. Have you heard of Boddhidharma from India? He was a mendicant monk who, when presented to emperor Wu Chin was confronted with the tyrant's challenge:

"Who is this person sitting before me?"

To which, failing at witty rejoinder, he responds

"I don't know."

He could have given an answer. Quick responses dry fastest, but in leaving the uncertainty, in staying with a question simply and steadily held – something else opens up. But what is it? Can silences be rich and productive – without threat?

In the room in which I sit now, Chain o' Hearts creeper vines descends from the ceiling, and all around me crystal: amethyst, quartz, more. Field guides to edible plants lie dog-eared beside draws with heady scents, herbs, rose petals, valerian root, cleaver. Glass vials filled with concoctions labelled *sweet mercy, gentle support*. In one corner stands a titanium oil press. Oyster mushrooms grow from a cultured

toilet roll beneath a plastic bag, and above; bunches of sage, dangling from the ceiling. Behind is a chart of the moon's phases, a celestial map is tacked.

The floor is lain with wolf pelts, the couch arrayed in Indian shawls. More books: *North American Folk Healing*, *Eastern Body Western Mind*, *Hydroponics*, *Be Here Now*. Outside the garden blooms.

Rilke begged his young poet to be patient towards *all that remained unresolved in his heart*. To try and love the questions themselves *like locked rooms, or books written in foreign tongues*. He urges the writer, or perhaps youth generally, to not seek the answers that cannot yet be given, as they would not be able to live them, and the point is to live everything.

What does it mean *to live the questions now* that we may one day, without noticing it, *live along into the answer*? You wrote: "Maybe I'll take everything with me when I go..." Where will you go, where have you gone? And did you take with you the questions?

Juniper

Juniper

Dear Electra,

“the region of soft skin at the back of the knee”

It was, when I asked what part of the human body you found most attractive. Trust you to fall in love with a shallow depression. A hollow. Elastic, hairless, often a shade lighter, appearing a generation younger than the rest of the sun-exposed body. I learn this region has a name, as the flap of skin under the elbow is known anatomically as the Weenis – your erotic centre takes the Latin *Popliteal fossa*. Not as catchy as ‘Weenis’ but its colloquial name – the *Knee Pit*, I know you’ll appreciate.

Years later and it’s as if I’ve only latently acquiesced to being your object of erotic desire, shaped myself in its likeness. That is to say: I now parade openly my knee pits – I wear short shorts; girl’s denim, tight with the tiny zip, the pockets so small as to make themselves redundant, fitting only a Chapstick. I wear my school boy’s knee pits exposed, slightly slick with sweat, and if I wear them not with pride, I wear them at least with fondness, a remembrance, like a grandfather’s pocket watch from the war.

As I pass you made an approving comment years later, I rock on my heels, proudly flaring my knee pits. It was a Tasmanian Summer. We sat eating red-bean ice-cream on the porch. You taking the full sun I settling for shade; our eternal postures.

It made me think on how Frank O’Hara wrote: if you’re going to buy a pair of pants, you want them to be tight enough that everyone will want to go to bed with you.

That was the last time I saw you. It stuck. To comprehend the resonance in my mind of those fleeting final images, their eternity; I turn to Carson’s poem ‘lines’:

I /want / to tell her—sign of God’s pity. She won’t keep me / she says,
she won’t run up my bill. Miracles slip past us. The paperclips / are
immortally aligned. God’s pity! How long / will / it feel like burning, said
the child trying to be / kind.

The way the position of paperclips in a dish, toyed with, become immortalised by their co-occurrence with a final conversation with her mother.

Miracles slip past us/The Paperclips/Are immortally aligned.

To add a further surety she and I write those moments into prose: the eternal is then shored up in literature as the *sempiternal* (the *always*-everlasting) because even the ever-lasting required safeguarding.

My writing spot now is a hillside outcropping above my house. The breadth of Vancouver Island stretches out below me, the Olympic mountain range of Washington state across the water. I'm nestled amidst interwoven golden grasses, creating a matted reedy bed. The deer flatten this spot: where I write they take their rest. Will this moment of recording, itself recorded, become the sempiternal?

Juniper

Electra

Dear J.,

If only what was recorded were always everlasting
I used to receive postcards, marked with a J.,
Single sentence best wishes,
exaggerated waves from a departing ship,
they hung on a yellow string
above the mantle.

Binned now. Not so sempiternal. Still
One time you came back from travels, carrying
nothing, just a bottle of Mezcal tequila
The bottom thick with sediment
one with a worm saturated,
dried and sunk.

After you left again, I arranged the bottles
spent my last dollars on a decanter
It's still there, undrunk, semptiturnal (?)

El.

Juniper

I hunch on the Veranda
Nursing my body, a warm mug.
Breathing on it.
I push its vapor back forth
700 days at least since you left
And then there's me still watching
The playground, that empty set

At the theatre you played Tom Stoppard's *Jumpers*
Some kids have come
Fucked with the corkboard cut out props
Torn at the vellum curtain
Tagged your mahogany stained stage
Though we both knew
It was ply – 1,1/4 inch below.

Even 10,000 kilometres away
In an all you can eat sushi bar
Taking seaweed salad by the strand
I'm thinking of you
And that poem you recite
The one about the bees fumbling the flowers
And the distance measured in years

I note the latest synchronicity
Which abounds on the topic of you
As I read Rupi Kaur 'the sun and her flowers'

*Bees come for honey
Flowers giggled as they
Undressed themselves
For the taking
The sun smiled.*

The chopsticks are cheap
The throw-away type
You snap to separate.

Mine snapped bodily at the base
Unlucky in love, it signifies

Unsure why I'm to blame
Why my love life must suffer

For factory-made, shitty craftsmanship

Is it consolation: that something of this
Could make good fiction?

Juniper

This morning, outside the garden is in bloom, and I'm breakfasting, observing the saplings tied to their supportive stakes. The lyrics of Rufus Wainwright singing *complainte de la butte* drift through my mind.

A snow pea's little limbs tremulously encircling the string of a bamboo trellis. *Petite mandigote. Je sens ta menotte. Qui cherche ma main...* My sweet little orphan child I can feel your hand searching for mine - an unsettling song, no doubt about it. I wouldn't want my diminutive *menotte* in Wainwright's calloused *main*. I have satisfying chores here. I would write Electra about it, I decided, I would begin:

"Today I tend the sage, pairing off the dying leaves, beautiful in the autumnal way that purple bruises with a yellow centre are beautiful. *Fall*. I de-spider the grapes and coax the vines back towards their trellises with gentle encouragement. It's soothingly quotidian work I tend to each morning, before propping myself up at the desk with a blank page.



For further distraction: I spray loose the aphids, some ceramic-pot inhabitants need new homes. Accomplished, I gather up the succulents and return inside. Background tinkle: wind through chimes by window. I think on what to write her, I begin some thoughts on domestication - *Sword of Damocles*, rings out behind. I sit at my desk to write, adjust it so the patch of sun fell on my hands but not my face. I begin to write:

On Domestication

Looking after and caring for the plants, domesticating my own little patch with rich dark soil and baby seedlings, inevitably led my thoughts back to domestication, wildness.

Reading Baedan on the struggle of the wildness of queer desire I find I enjoy the conceit of queerness as foremost a challenge to domestication, continuous with a political and epistemological anarchism, a form of decolonizing the self.

You were always interested in how the heterosexual in common parlance is still conceived as the natural, the homosexual as some product of culture. Which struck you as ironic, this civilised notion. A deviant inheritance - incongruent with the picture of queer futurity as an originary atavism. A signal mischief.

To seek the anti-domestic, is to refuse scripted encounters and their accompanying synoptic expectations, it is – as a friend Paul recently said – as if we should meet each experience with the expectation of a rupturing of the expected. Anticipating only frustrated anticipations.

Perhaps there is nothing errant in the path of the untrellised-creeper vine, chain o' hearts, it merely follows the light, and thereby carries hopefulness's trajectory in its bodies morphology.

Juniper

Electra

Dear Junip.,

Remember the two bottles arranged
(If you could say they were arranged)
not a lot to arrange, but there they were
on the mantle, the shag, the bottles
after all a still life could be composed of as few as two.
No?

Firm fruit, a lacquered bowl,
a naked body
Arranged: The bottles, the
bodies, the shag carpet.

Bodies & bottles trembling on the mantle.

El.

Juniper

Dear Electra,

The next day, besides my housemate Laurel, we drove her grandfather's lichen flecked Ute and made again for the lake. As we ground up the dust dirt roads, clouds of dust in our wake, I thought on Borges, the piffle he had to say about islands.

Islands. I've spoken of Iceland, I've spoken of Japan—I know I'll keep thinking back on Japan all my life—England, and New York. But why should we keep talking about islands? Let us expect a different question and I hope a quite different answer, though I keep saying the same things over and over. I'm an old man, forgive me.

But why stop talking about Islands, Borges? Heading out towards the lake, bumping along rutted country lanes, past honesty stands and farmsteads – yards where elderly vehicles go to retire and dissemble – everything evoked Tasmania. Laurel describes the Vancouver Island to Vancouver City relation, like squabbling siblings. Little different from the relation between Tasmania and mainland Australia.

I've lived a short parochial life, so find my instinctive ease amongst a people casually self-identifying as *peripheral*, a shared jargon. Amongst people gesturing yonder and talking about the 'mainland' I find comfort, find I can 'take my ease beneath a flowering tree' as Whitman put it, and not consider it *loafing* in any sort of objectionable way. I'm a young man, forgive me.

Once at the lake with Laurel, new lover, everything between Electra and me feels very distant, held a lighter grip. An eagle circled above in slow lazy drifts, every movement of her wings felt, articulated. Nearer to hand a pair of hummingbird's wings vibrate at insectile frequency. Their pear-shaped bodies hang in the air like drops as they Hoover the nectar from flowers' flutes with darting bill.

Birds of Prey, I think, apex predators, we find beautiful *because* they are terrible. Our systems of morality seems dwarfed by their downward plummetings, to pluck from the air their needs.

At a certain depth, everything goes transparent: Carson wrote – as if we find them beautiful because art reveals that which is always already see-through. The deep unconscious. Their morality is an older, more primal form of expression. We admire their honesty as expressed in their power.

hunger, desire is never original. Nietzsche named it frankly in *Zur Genealogie der Moral*: our prescribed norms are motivated less by a desire to do good than an internalised terror of punishment, societal retribution. In which case, we appreciate the predatorily beautiful as we appreciate the ancestral, ancient.

Laurel emerged from the lake, once more gasping, eyes bright, naked. We made love on the banks taking care between the gnarled and protuberant roots, enjoying the pine needled cushioning. I thought on how sentiment gives out under the rawness of power, be it sex or death. We didn't love one another. At least not in any sense that would bind us. Our sex was passionate, almost violent, but it wasn't sentimental. Afterwards we both dived back in, to clean our bodies.

I thought on those eagles with admiration, on how the body speaks in impulses made beautiful in their capacity to override sentiment's reason. By beautiful I mean terrible – riffing of Rilke:

We admire it because it disdains to destroy us

Beauty is nothing but the beginning of terror

Juniper.

Electra

On Late Stage Capitalism

Dear Juniper,

I'm glad you've found something to divert your attention, sex or love, terrible or beautiful. I'm working on something new and disheartening. A paper that feels like an indictment, like internment.

I'm living with Grandma now, we're looking after each other. She looks over my shoulder, she's always curious. When I mentioned the title of my latest paper, Grandma thought Late-stage capitalism was a terminal illness. To which I kind of shrugged then nodded.

What are the final stages of this cancer?

Fatigue, an engine that has run its lot. An extreme tiredness that doesn't get better with rest. You find you're eating less, losing weight, appetite.

Delirium. Delirium can have many causes at the end of life.

Shortness of Breath.

Pain ... Coughing ... Constipation ... Trouble swallowing ... With all that's happening in this state, now especially
I have trouble swallowing.

Yours,
Electra

On rambling

I'm writing leant against the wheel with a bic, in a small town in the Kootenays, British Columbia, a town that recalls a rural Tasmanian scene – little more than a dusty potaroo hop from a servo somewhere along the Midland highway. Alex and Sam are drinking berry smoothies while we refuel and wait out the heat before continuing into the Rockies.

Hitching across British Columbia, feeling the rhythm of people and place, I've thought on the authors I've loved and the sensation of dipping into their books, catching the rhythm of their thinking, as I find my own.

There's a naturalistic vocabulary for how this works interpersonally: mirror neurons, unconscious identification. The process in writing is perhaps just as unconscious, but more fun. Who was it who said: reading delivers on the promise that sex raises, but hardly ever can fulfil – *getting larger because you're entering another person's language, cadence, heart and mind*. I've been rambling amidst different language lately, sluttish with the intimacy of voice. Conceiving this as flanneurie; meandering through a city of content, perspective.

Plato called necessity a 'wandering cause' – in doing so he reinscribed it as The Rambler's inheritance. Flanerie expresses a signal desire to forestall the exhaustive. It offers up the tangential, a jumble, provides a list subtended by a theme, but retains a willingness to surprise, a tease, denying you the closure of conviction.

Still, the flaneur remains pedant, just of a unique variety; their collections responsive to an internal logic, opaque from the outside. If there exists a magnetism it resides in surprising the reader; that such a strange mind could still invoke, could retain attention. You learn to see through her bowerbird eyes, to predict which next adornment, tinsel or comb tooth, will feather the nest.

Flanneurie should be considered in connection to an anti-productivity ethos; it's cumulative but anti-capital & queer looking. The tendency and direction of academia is to flush out flanneurie. Barthes was flaneur all over; his notion of dossier was all about entering into a topic only to the extent that he wished to – suggesting the reader could delve deeper, but denying exhaustiveness as achievable.

In fact the origins of The Rambler as walker, was in the rejection of privatisation and defence of the commons, a capital logic of exhaustiveness you could say – in which all is owned, no remainder on the roof.

Juniper



Hitch hiking you find the Moon at your feet

On Attention

In writing this thing I was interested in poetry that relished incongruity, that deferred, was at play with muddled context. That in making use of what was to hand embraced a sense of productive drift. The way evolution gathered branches to its tree through chance encounter. At the same time I was interested in affecting a formalism that suggested systematicity, yet laboured under an apparent constraint; to respect the oblique.

This wasn't so much in defence of mysticism, from a theological perspective, but rather a taking up of Adrienne Rich's suggestion that the distinction to be drawn isn't between secularism and belief. Rather it is between those for whom language has metaphoric density, and those for whom it is merely formulaic: something that represses possibility, ensuring obedience by wielding empty certitudes.

Rich writes as if she were forever seeking an engaged poetics at play on the shoreline of what can now be thought or said. Did she find it? Surely if she did, it slipped her fingers. It is an object that can never be at rest.

She was concerned with poetry's role in the continuous redefining of freedom, a freedom she characterised as forever over the horizon – shored up by there always being that in poetry which evades grasping, evades encapsulation in our theories, there exists what poet Americo Ferrari described as an *unspeakable* where, perhaps, *the nucleus of the living relation between poem and world resides*.

Montaigne in his essays, Barthes in his *mythologies*, Flaubert with his *dictionary of received ideas*. each offered indictment of automated thinking – as a form of the domestic, standing as placeholder for thought, a standard formulae invoked. The un-interrogated inevitability of action being followed by precise reaction; the offered satirical definitions – each inquired into vulgar and common errors, offering essayettes to disabuse the reader of thoughtless platitude, denunciation of cliché.

These writers' expertise derived not from scholarship but *attention* – being present to a subject, letting it touch them and hesitantly touching back. It was not with a dispassionate gaze but a brail-like intimacy with the word, a conviction that meaning arises in ridges, the contours of the terrain.

Each set out on an endeavour to find what one knows, what one is able to know, where the limits of knowing lie – that which Montaigne, standing amidst his library, put as the query *Que sais-je?* This constraint often leads to a diaristic aspect subtending collections – Dodie Bellamy's *The Buddhist*, Wayne Kraustebaum's examination of *Humiliation*, Brian Blanchfield's *Proxies*, Eileen Myles' *Inferno*.

The diaristic and the vocational... It's hard to classify what I'm doing here, alone in the woods. Would it be considered Vacation by some? There's this perception that in writing you're always 'on vacation' – even in instances of banal leisure the writer is thought to

possess an unhaltable, incorrigible vocation. It seems natural, then, as Barthes' claimed, for the writer to always write, in all situations – literary production being assimilated to a kind of involuntary excretion. The writer as prey to an internal tyrannical god who speaks at all times. The writer is on vacation but his muse is wide awake and gives birth non-stop. Is this vocation? Scripted purpose or class indulgence?

I've been thinking on the nature of attention; the word deriving from *Attendere*, which implies a *reaching towards* – and maybe even a need to be met half way by the object to which you attend.

Before there were either wave or particle descriptions of light, Pythagoras and Euclid imagined that our eyes emitted a kind of substance that illuminated whatever it fell upon. Later Epicurus proposed the inverse; that objects projected a kind of ray that reached for the eye. Yesterday I read an old Zen adage which has it that as you reach towards the world, the world reaches back, it meets you half way.

Do you recall the feeling of love giving out beneath you? The way the springs groaned? Before there were either wave or particle descriptions of light, there was light. And there were eyes. And then there was Epicurus, and Zen, but always there was reaching towards, and always there were groaning springs and love, and attention, observers, cock and balls and endless sex. The last jism of comfort milked from wobbling animal appendages.

Juniper

Dear El.,

Posting from the road; we're closer to the Rockies now, with *Leaves of Grass* on the dash (it felt fitting), Joanna Newsom on the radio, and Alex and Sam, arguing and canoodling by turn in the back seat. Away from my café haunts and disputations, I'm pondering on Whitman; when he wrote that *he found the night air, the large few stars, far more convincing than arguments*. What do you find convincing these days?

You know I drew this idea of writing you from Kraus's *I Love Dick*, but now I've been thinking on the nature of argument. The previous days I've spent digging into tender spots in ideology with Alex: an old friend – perhaps adversary? – it's an odd term but it's part of our dynamic, as we range across the politics of manipulation, through the merit of evolutionary arguments for human tendencies.

I conceive our conversations as a dialectical dance, three steps and a turn; thesis, antithesis, emergent synthesis - then the turn finds us in our originary positions, facing forward or facing perhaps onto one another. Sam is the spectator for this rituals' proceedings. On the topic of spectatorship: the relationship between the three of us, a triad on this voyage, seems to illustrate a Girardian triangle – a dynamic of two men one woman – in which the woman functioned as conduit for a homosocial relationship between the two men. Homosociality then, as

rationalisation for attraction, magnetism, otherwise forbidden? Not good thoughts if true; as a dynamic it instrumentalised and silenced Samantha. After a day's debate, last night I felt fatigued, and had Whitman's sympathy. Dissolving in a hot spring amongst the cedar trees, I drew the same conclusion looking up at the stars.

Perhaps it plays into an old cliché about poets responsive not to reason, that masculine element projected onto nature, but to nature 'her' self – the ever perceived feminine element? Perhaps. But then, Heidegger described the act of thinking as subscribing to a single thought that would one day stand like a star in the world's sky. Maybe those singular stars, more convincing than the arguments Whitman found tedious, are Heidegger's thoughts? What do you think?

Years ago, in Sri Lanka, I recall reading Ocean Vuong's *Night Sky With Exit Wounds*, after which I couldn't help but conceive the pin pricks of astral light showing through as a negative space, a blind light that revealed the underside of something. In pessimistic moments I imagine the same sky peopled indiscriminately with satellites, amidst the few true stars.



Dear El.,

In the Rockies we arrive at a glacial lake, we sit observing the still iridescent surface, a bird of prey swooped down from the air, alighted a moment and was gone, a fat bird in its talons. There had been only the briefest of tussles. I had read there existed a protein in the eyes of migrating birds which allowed them to identify electromagnetic fields; like mantis shrimps other worldly colour spectrum, the flies' unrivalled frames per second, bats' sonar. Whales, I learnt, possess an extra module connected to their auditory system, marking the significance of their submarine song.

Do whales sing for joy? I wondered, are they singing all the time? I thought on the eponymous character in Oliver Sack's *Man Who Mistook his Wife for a Hat* – who would sing continuously as a way to navigate his world.

What is it like to be a bat? A whale? A mantis shrimp? An Oliver Sachs? What is it like to be an amoeba, a eukaryote, a Christian, a queer, a sub, a dom, a mycelium network? Nagel's famous pronouncement was initially intended as a retort; a response to the narrow delimiting of conscious experience via reduction to the physical. Now 'what is it like' is colloquial; a multipurpose tool bandied in academia; something like Descartes's Cogito *I think therefore I...* Riff off the truism. Or a magic Eight ball Wittgenstein: *whereas I cannot think of an answer right now, thereof you'd best try again later.*

On Sybarites

I learnt a new word today: *Sybarite*. Cast disdainfully by someone over-educated. A native of Sybaris, Italy, whose Greek ancestors were known for notorious luxury, the voluptuary life.

Thomas remove's and admire her tin egg with its single bud of weed, the pink elephant emblazoned upon a single tab of acid, a gold-capped mushroom head severed from its stem. Tamara grinds dates and cocoa powder into bliss balls. Amber has an orange streaked snake, coil of languorous muscle, about her shoulders. Jumana is on her back twirling a fire-tipped staff between her thighs. Tianna tickles Magoober beneath the chin, he props his head forward, eyes blissfully squinted to receive. Iain is rolling out on a foam cylinder. I'm luxuriant, reading a book in a hammock beside. Laurel hangs upside down from a silk in the lounge. All of us, it seems, Sybarites by our own fashion.

Every now and again I prop myself up on elbows and quote a passage. "have you read" I begin. "have you read," this was called a *Juniper bingo* moment – I was often reprimanded for this default phrase cropping up in conversation. I think it is considered philosophically specious in debate, a fallacious form of appeal to authority – in reference we play a balancing act with repetition. As Bennet describes it in *History Boys*; some of the best times in poetry are when the poem seems to reach out and grab something in you, you'd thought distinctly your own.

Perhaps it's not such a shameful thing then, that, as Borges said; *we are always rewriting what the ancient's wrote*, perhaps that *should* prove sufficient. As Wittgenstein in the opening section of his *Tractatus* wrote – that he didn't much care who had thought those thoughts before him, he still claimed them as his own.

Perhaps we reach for influence because one's reach should always exceed one's grasp; the asymptotic curve in geometry, a curve always moving towards zero, or infinity, but never touching the axis. Like the Zen aphorism; that we manifest our dreams only to find them ever so slightly tainted; the chink that shatters the illusion is staring at the finger that is pointing to some elsewhere.

I'm going on an adventure soon. I'll write you where I am, I'll post.

Electra

Paralax

Dear Junip.,

Like a sponge I was, content only to fill and rinse, gathering grot and grime, but passing through clean water. Like a sponge I absorbed it all. Took on everyone's junk as my own.

How it felt leaving? You find the handle. You step through the door, inside there is nothing, the inside of an eyelid pinpricks of light.

I am back in this old city that was home, amongst our friends, but without you. Dan was interested in cosmology at the time; I was always ready to be amazed, my greatest attribute I thought then. Some nights we'd climb up on the corrugated roof besides the bee hives. He taught me about Paralax.

In Paralax, you move the foreground in puppet play and what emerges is the impression of depth. Distance & Depth as measured in perspectival shifts. Sometimes the backdrop changes, then what set are we left standing upon? With parallax everything takes on a new contorted shape: I think on how we awoke in that dingy room: shutters drawn, feeling blindly around each other's faces, till we made out nose, cheek, a jaw and chin. I want to ask: what difference is there between a blind man groping for features, and a caress?

Electra

Dear Junip,

I'll tell you about Skin

Skin had hope, that's what skin does.
Heals over the scarred place, makes a road.
Love means you breathe in two countries.

(Naomi Shihab Nye)

E: "It's sad."

J: "Why sad?"

E: "Can't you see that it's sad?"

J: "But why."

E: "Because we're each of us subject to continental drift.

Because of that pesky molten magma core that keeps us floating apart

Without our having much say in the matter

Because skin knots up with that thick keloid scar tissue, over-heals so you can't forget."

Juniper

I'm back on Vancouver Island, meandering about with Laurel. Today my thoughts are on dancing and on eyes. I wrap four boiled eggs in a 'kerchief, as we tumble out the door. There is the now familiar workhorse grumble of her grandpa's 'truck' as it starts up.

"We say Ute, short for Utility vehicle," I tell her wisely. The truck lacks a speedometer, and the locks don't work. Flecks of lichen grow around the window frame. We arrive at Royal Roads, a fancy as hell private university where the peacocks graceful stalking is punctuated only by jagged birdy pecks of the lawn.

I am seated in the undergrowth of a brackened forest, filled with little silences. With a lazy wave of my arms the mosquitoes will start, unsettled into the air. Later, walking to my café writing haunt, I will throw my body about, akimbo-limbed flicks and turns to Patti Smith's *Because the Night*. I will startle drivers in passing vehicles, feel an odd guilt then a righteous pleasure – face contorted in the throes, a Billy Elliot, finally dancing, finally throwing his body disinhibited through the streets of Birmingham, a rebuke to repressive gender norms and Thatcher's England.

Milan Kundera wrote we have to live with the imagined eyes of others always upon us. Some need the eyes of a great anonymous public, others the eyes of close friends. Some need the tender eyes of a lover. Finally there are those who require the eyes of the imaginary, eyes that no longer or never did exist.

I wonder who, if anyone, I'm dancing for now.

Juniper

Electra

Dear J.,

I'm also writing you from a café watching a youth that resembles the me of not so many years ago. The youth's hair has knotted itself into whimsy's dreads. Her jacket is winged in the armpits, the sleeves drape over her wrists. Her face now unwittingly sour.

A little pooch cocks his leg, pisses on the wheel of the youth's bike. Passers-by smile at it, the way they might at newborns. I imagine canines being bred into incapacity to displace the nurturing impulse. A sensible manoeuvre. Human's demanding greater space, recognition.

Across the street the girl in corduroy shorts and yellow polo shirt, bounces on the stems of her heels. She waits on the traffic lights to turn, she crosses the street.

Her socks meet her knees. Remember that game we would play, German Tourist or Lesbian? Shorts, high-cut display pale stretch of tender skin. She resembles an eager, overgrown school student, backpack fastened at hip.

The take-away coffee cup she swigs from has corrugated vertical bands that create a barrier, reduce loss of heat from the beverage and ensure her hands remains cool. Gertrude Stein claimed to like the feeling of words *doing both what they wanted to do, and what they had to do*.

I don't know you if would agree, would you argue the over-determination of the world allows words their freedom to mean again (and again)? Ever-adding inflections. Whilst syntax's strictures dictate words' necessity, does a words' freedom resides in the world's root unknowability?

I like to think Stein liked the feeling of her own limits. Maybe a healthy attitude given the unalterable strictures of gender, a survival mechanism. In which case maybe irony is not the only song sung by a bird that has learnt to love its cage. And perhaps not all cages are so bad. Or at least we women-folk have to think so.

Electra

Juniper

This evening I sit out on a hillside outcropping overlooking the city of Victoria, nestled into the crook of Vancouver Island's neck. The sun is setting, while across the water Washington State's Olympic mountain range frames this image. There are deer down below, grazing on the neighbour's hedges. A hawk catches lazy currents over our house and I think of it in comparison to the hummingbirds' frenetic insect-speed wings, siphoning nectar from flower trumpets.

Laurel describes the phenomena of *urmurations* to me, and I am pulled back roughly 800 days to where Electra and I sat on a little green knoll above a playground, looking over not the north-eastern, but south western shore of the pacific, as she described murmurations to me.

Both times I'm quietly slack of jaw. My mouth falls open in shock and I shake my head side to side, the quickest way to communicate the unexpected, to gasp for oxygen if need be. Both times I'd felt the imperative to appropriate murmuration as some sort of literary device, but it hadn't yet entered my fiction. I wonder how Electra felt that morning in her quiet apartment in an outer Canberran suburb. She liked the world quiet in the mornings. I imagine her in a rocker with Earl Grey tea, fumes rising in curlicues about a wide-mouthed cup, a club footed kitten padding on her knees, circling, preparing its space according to some ritual known only to kitten consciousness.

I wonder what project lies before her on that table. What ready materials for those fashioning fingers. And what element has caught her attention of late? Fire. Paper. String. Water. Feather. Smoke? Primordial basic substances, yet seeming ethereal, subtle in their influence, light in their touch.

I'm living with witches Electra would appreciate, witches she could lust and love. They pass their days twisting wicks in tallow, extracting oils into dark bottles, straining tinctures through muslin.

As the sun fades I descend the hill, minding my footing between patches of long grass. I wonder how we will be when next opportunity convenes us? Perhaps changed in familiar ways.

Perhaps I'll write about Murmurations soon, or maybe I won't, I'll just write about writing about them. So a swarm of starlings may continue to flap singly, synchronically on the edge of my vision, perhaps evading me, perhaps teasing or egging me on.

Juniper

Café Companionship

A lot is written about literary romances: peer to peer, master to apprentice. Much is written about the Master and always ‘his’ muse, a dynamic of inspiration and abuse, of oft creative usurpation, recurrent throughout narrative time. By contrast, what I valued most was the type of literary companionship that had us set out in cafés sometimes sharing a table, other times taking our separate spaces – but intuiting the other’s presence nonetheless. Our projects always distinct, but overlapping. Each of us given courage by sharing a mode of life.

There were dozens, perhaps hundreds of cafés in which we enacted this dynamic, but certain ones rear up in memory. Like Jamjar in Battery Point, where we met Josh in his sweet-faced, golden-locked angelic youth. Where the owner Lou grew to think fondly of us, and support our indigent student ways (in a town altogether inhospitable to student culture) with leftover bread, day old friands.

Today from an unfamiliar café on Vancouver Island I’m thinking on the Jewish artist Arnold Schönberg, and how he proclaimed “I have long since resolved to be a Jew... I regard that as more important than art.” It has stuck with me, remained pertinent. He seemed to be pointing to the way an ecological approach to art treats it as the fruiting body of a *something else* existing like mycelium beneath the soil. A painting emerges as if from nowhere, like Chanterelle mushrooms swelling in the rain.

For Schönberg that *something else* meant according primacy to identity. When his work was labelled “abstruse, pretentious” or “hermetic, dry, bookish” he was unapologetic, these being adjectives commonly ascribed to Jewish people. Work that unapologetically embodies identity, without dissimulation, has substance and presence. It can’t be dismissed readily. It carries its own.

And so I can’t help but address you in my writing. Sitting here, in this anonymous café, the dim lights, the chatter, from behind the perpetually empty stage and the average coffee, I can write and be invisible a time. The game I play again: to imagine myself into your situation. Somewhere across the world the sun’s arc is inverted, receding for you as it rises on me (in Dido’s timeless phrasing).

I’ve been thinking on the unfortunate lot of Schopenhauer’s guineapig children. Schopenhauer pointed at how the experiences and illuminations of early youth become in later life the types, standards and patterns of all subsequent knowledge, “the categories according to which all later things are classified.” The view of the world we come to, then, can be seen as the unfolding and fulfilling of our childhood years. So you feared.

Schopenhauer writes that that which is inborn, our intelligible character, unfolds only gradually and imperfectly, by trial and circumstance. The irony lies in our neighbours’ better situation for observing the intelligible personality secretly shaping our life – Before

we learn what we are, we remain characterless, ignorant of ourselves – character must be earnt.

Maybe you're at Ainsley After School, steward of the wood-chipped playground, hand cupped sheltering eyes that scan over your charges. You wonder at these beings, as yet uninhibited in the ways that the years will work into the leather of our bodies. Knots that through numerous courses, multi-modality therapies, and community seeking we will hope to massage loose. We were born, society's visible digits worked us over, then our real work began – the unschooling. The re-wilding.

You would not helicopter above the children, yet remain cautious, astute. always wondering what game is taking place on the seesaw, the castle? You know it's the early concrete (yet capable of becoming symbolic) objects and their interactions with them, that will condition the people these children become. We are dynamic constructors of reality, yet inherit second-hand so much generational junk. How to imaginatively reconstitute the playground? Or retrospectively prescribe new significations, cleanse old meanings. I guess I'm asking: is your work there intended as redemptive?

The day would end, and even your charges, with their seemingly infinite life-force, would tire and quieten, recede into themselves. I see you parted from them with many hugs; as you lean down and in, their little bodies reach up to the embrace, heels coming off the ground. I can imagine you lifting them till their feet dangle, laughing your laugh that rends the air - its upsurging and cascading, my once means of identifying you in a crowd. Something I always described to myself as uninhibited, childlike in its freeness, I recognise now possessed a second, more anxious face.

The children filing past you to the racks don oversized backpacks, then march, supercilious cadets to their parents. You would wonder about their home life – who was going back into the arms of tumult, of love's instability? What coping mechanisms were trial and error working into these young lives?

Maggie Nelson describes the way, post 9/11, the children of firefighters who died could weeks later be seen shrieking and playing in the streets with philanthropic Yankees players – busy signing their bats, distributing caps. Now fatherless, Nelson asks, *where does grief get lodged in such small vessels?*

And was our familial treatment so bad, we might both wonder, from our separate islands? How much was misattribution, foisting the blame? Where can we hunt for gratitude, while holding together the comely ceramic shards of our up-cycled life? We enter our twenties penultimate stage, still hoping the gypsum glue will eventually stick.

On Foam

The morning before visiting an old friend, I'm reading Carson as she describes her understanding of 'foam, spillage'. 'To be willingly washed up as jetsam on the surf of your own design. It seems to imply a desire to be tossed and turned, to let story and theory step up, take just place. In our lives this is how we give plausibility to a world: delineate a life's sharp corners, edges, contours. What is it for an artist to have sunk her hands into her own story, or a critic to storm and rage in the folds of her own deep theory?

I'd taken the ferry to the city, to visit our once housemate and long missed friend Z. We meet Z in her home, a subdivided basement in one of Vancouver's shittier suburbs, the room separated by a transparent hanging cloth. She wends her way around the space, unpacked boxes, unmade mattress, somehow she makes us tea, passes me a chipped mug with the tea bag still in it. Her roommates snore at night, they are flatulent, they fuck loudly and masturbate shamelessly. She can hardly afford this luxury of a quartered room, she says, gesturing around her. Meanwhile, for a Master's degree, she's researching the process of normalising something as foreign as property. Z has sunk her hands to the wrist in deep theory.

I like this notion that deep theory is *ecstatic*, an attempt to get *outside of*, in order to *look in on*, the structure one is already in. Seeing Z, I became aware how in moving to Tasmania to circulate amongst 'earthy' or 'grounded' folk, I felt the grips of theory receding. Even writing a doctorate at UTAS I recall my co-worker griping about Judith Butler; muttering about the evils of theory for its own sake. So I worked myself, and more importantly Electra, into my theory. Aiming to prod myself where it hurts.



Schiele's Ekstasis

Juniper

When the day came to leave Canada, I found myself on the train heading to the airport, reading an old Keats book to distract myself. The first thing I noticed was how often Keats would pause to describe the position of his body or the state of his room at the time of writing, as if grounding his abstraction in that which was completely beyond dispute. “The ember in my tray is turning into ash and flaking,” he might write, “my foot rests atop a copy of *War and War*, the tilt of my neck is such that thoughts trip out unheeded. One could postulate a neck tilt, a particular cant of the jaw necessary for an unhindered imaginative flow,” etcetera. Following Keat’s form I wrote my last letter from Canada to Electra:

Dear El,

I’m on a subterranean rail, bound for YVR (Vancouver) airport, the wheels are squealing in their ruts. The tunnel walls appear then recede with great rapidity. The forward carriage slides and slants into and out of focus with the twists in the tunnel.

My sun-blached canvas backpack, the seminal backpack, is full to burst. Who would guess the constituents? Not clothes, not tents – but a hundred brown bags filled with different herbs, a few dozen second hand hardbacks, a kitchen knife (blade wrapped in an old shirt), a walnut-handled steel, a mixing brush and accompanying powder, wads of hand scrawled notes to myself. I’m an odd creature, I recall at these times.

As I scribble, eyes squinted, we come out into the light. Below us lies a city, with a flavour, indistinguishable for me, from the other wealthy cities I’ve known. There are oak trees, roots bound by cement, spilling their seed to no profit on the footpath (or *sidewalk*, to north Americans). It creates an acorn-powder pigment beneath the wheels of traffic. There are glass towers, of no obvious purpose or intent, as if merely bodies fruiting *sui generis* from this landscape. Tramlines black threads weave above the urban walkways. In the blur of motion I make out donar kebab and Starbucks dominating the storefronts. I write:

I would like to describe more intimately the city, but realise I’m a stranger here, witness to only its surface. After three months living on Vancouver Island, however, surrounded by lakes and salty coastline I’m on the final leg, *en route* to a plane bound for home.

I carry the sense that I have profited from my time on the island. Sowed seeds, and learnt lessons, experienced much that has brought joy and given hope. I want to convey this sense, so I pick up my laptop to write:

I have drizzled chocolate into heart-shaped moulds to freeze. Rubbed CBD salve into my body, woken up in the understory of cedar forests, eaten Morrell

mushrooms in the charred remains of pine forest-fires, and watched the full moon from alpine lakes in the Canadian Rockies.

I'm going to be living in Santi Forest Monastery in rural NSW in the coming months, finishing my book. I would love to see you in November and hear about how your year has progressed.

Love,
Junip

Exiting the final tunnel, we emerged into the light; collectively in silence we disembark.

The Part on Transit

Juniper

Dear El.,

I've been considering planes as a 'literary' space, how they exhibit the tension of literary framing. At once bodies are rendered cargo, invisible in their opaque boxes, packages residing between sender and recipient. Bored we slump in our allotted seats, test how many on-demand movies and whisky fizzes we can binge before descent.

Simultaneously, however, planes should imply existential dread, mortal peril. Apparent biological laws are being contemptuously violated as we hurtle in a metal box through the stratosphere ... I'm in a carrier now, the package in transit is my life, comfortably on hold.

As I write my knees feel the pressure, as the passenger in 22B wedges his buttocks further back into the seat. The allotted leg room in this aircraft is 33cm to knee. I'm anticipating circular bruises on each patella when we disembark.

I've drunk more of the steward proffered coffee than is sensible. Caffeine I've known for a long time, just catalyses my more fidgety tendencies. If I'd made the mistake of leaving my nails untrimmed, I would pair them away neurotically with my right hand or teeth. Further things I learn that I do when at my wits end: plucking gossamer hairs from my ears, browsing inflight magazines.

Looking down from my aerial vantage, amidst the puffs of cumulus upon the plotted, pierced fields below, I write:

The aerial vantage is so often conceived as the privileged perspective, a dimension that in looking down, demonstrates dominance. But the perspective is always schematic, it captures its object, but never with the intimacy of first person. It is to first person what ruminant thought's circularity is to actual embodied experience.

There is often violence from above.

Analytically trained in the mainstays of philosophy today - I saw my background as gearing me towards universalizing hypothesis, never meeting events in their particularity. Of course some philosophers ran against this trend, drew to light its shortfalls, the contradiction or absurdities it entailed - Derrida, Wittgenstein, Foucault. But their voices were side-lined.

And so I found the aerial view eerie in the comfort it offered. It seems we can never fully evade our training

At that moment the plane banked hard. I dropped my pen, clung to the walls. I felt my arm rests like a mould. The secure seatbelt light flicked on.

On the Island from Above

I gaze over the snoring face of my neighbour in 23A through the ovoid window, on approach to Sydney Airport. Below us; a rectilinear patchwork of alternating ochre and green.

Receding are cuboid strips of subdivided land, allotted in agrarian stretches of maize, canola, wheat. Toy tractors move amidst their lines and the humans manning them are not visible. The plane judders slightly in the air; heads rise from their books, eyebrows raised. A slight turbulence is enough to briefly destabilise the illusion that we are grounded, safe. Then eyes return to books. I peer again out the window.

You could imagine this land had never been more than allotment, riparian subdivisions. Nothing in these long neat rectangular strips is free from domestication, none of it suggests wilderness. The terrain *is* the map.

I've always felt the need to live in understory. Treed canopies overhead, dappling the light, so the sun can drizzle down not gush. It's probably a long standing furtive trait, but I have no desire for open plains. Nothing about that landscape is opaque, all exposed. Exposition never appealed to me, exposition is synopsis, a blurted out punchline and the joke fallen flat.

Yet as we bank through cloud, this seems to be a reductive, touristic gaze: this land offers précis only to the untrained eye. If I took time I would find the complexity, the way desertification is as fecund as any rainforest, should you look with the right eyes. It was my precognition that abridged this place, I thought, not its content.



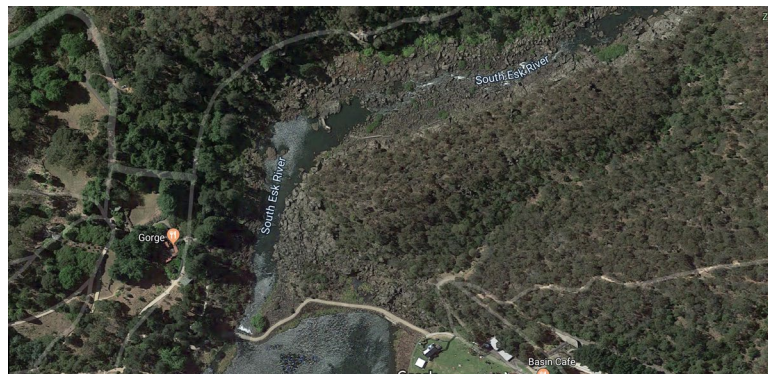
The content \neq my precognition

Looking down on this terrain that was map, I thought of the fantasy maps my brother and I would construct in youth. The rivers and towns, the lines of allegiance in the imagined frontier wars, regions broken by mountain ranges - the raggedy edges of fjord structures, the sheer cliff lines. Mine were never to any reasonable scale; my roads diverged in haphazard and unlikely ways.

My brother still today is involved in online worldbuilding communities; sublimating his

teenage impulse into an art form. In this virtual community he has assumed the status of elder, he now provides recommendations on newcomers' maps. It was an Apprentice to Journeyman relation - He would be surveyor, assessing the proffered landscapes – ensuring that their proportions produced conceivable scale, cities logic, and that environments' physics didn't diverge too radically from the imaginable. His working was fastidious, laborious: a transcription of the rural. The engineer's gaze. Mine was pure fantasy and play, silliness. Unlike mine, were his paper towns; they would fly.

I thought on the Aerial view of Evandale, proximate to Launceston Airport as often approached, brought to mind Google Maps; and how with a flick of perspective, you could conjure a hazy edged landscape in reconstructed 3D. The cars and humans captured in blurred motion, mid-passage around the familiar streets.



The World from Above

An aerial view of a valley town like Launceston felt in some ways violatory. I grew up in this valley. Growing up here meant pocketed heat in the summer, simmering tarmac, vaporous above, and thick walled fog come the winter. But there was something cosy, a blanketing effect it produced; like a deeper womb for an extended, protracted adolescence. I read once that children in a playground will often explore right up to the fence line. By contrast, in a playground absent a fence stretching out into infinite plane, the children would cluster around the central play equipment, lustre in exploration silenced. That is to say, the bounded nature of the grounds made them manageable – created an island of their own that could be fully known. This is just to say that attaining the supervisory, aerial view of my home town felt violatory.

I'm back circling over Merrickville when the intercom requests everyone return to their allotted seating. We would shortly be experiencing further turbulence. I took up my pen as the seatbelt lights flashed back on, deciding to write Electra about planes. I write:

The Eros of Traction

“The plane’s wheels grip the tarmac, only to spurn it.”
“But enough rejection creates traction,” you told me.
Still, an empty runway is a dismal place to part,
its terms, unconditional.

“To think logically is
To be perpetually astonished.”
So said Anne Carson’s saint
Before Aphrodite destroyed her.

“Logic? You mean the science of the bloody obvious,”
scrawled my old coding professor Slaney, on my first assignment.
Aphrodite told me that through the porthole’s double-plastic,
the sun appeared to zigzag in its heaven.

The plane’s trajectory violating her familiar arc.
“Want is just another word for burning,” you write.
Meanwhile the tarmac, still ho
makes the plane’s wheels long for it.

**Part V Smell of Petrichor, Humus after Rains
(at Santi Forest Monastery)**



Can we unfold
What we can't figure?
Not without making Cuts.
(Ben Lerner)

On Asobase and Nuns

The Eucalypts are swaying, making complex brush strokes with their leaves. When it hot's up here the winds come, and it's hotting up. 15 years ago this place was a summer retreat for folk from Sydney, the big smoke. Now it's only the beginning of spring and I'm wearing short shorts, meditating in a damp cave to avoid the heat.

I live in a little Kuti, a Thai-style wooden hut in the forest, alone for a good few miles. In one direction there is a waterfall (though more a creek these days) in the other direction a glow worm cave. An old friend of mine, Patachara, a nun from Switzerland carved a beautiful sandstone Buddha out of the wall of the cave.

I spend an inordinate amount of time snapping twigs these days. I do it with the Nuns beside me, we sit in silence, we snap twigs. It surprises me how much joy one can take in making larger sticks into smaller sticks, the satisfaction of a good crunch. Part of it has to do with the anticipation of the evening pot belly fire, rumbling like a furnace in the corner of my Kuti.

Nuns, it turns out, wash the dishes like ordinary mortals. It makes me reflect on the Japanese verb *asobase* – to *play at*, to *imitate*: a low-stakes doing. This honorific suggests that the performed act is done with an awareness of its true, illusory nature.

Today I decided to shave my head. Was this a type of Asobase play-acting of monastic life? A low-stakes doing? The full moon's light bounces off my bald crown as I pass beneath the eucalypts. The glints off the scattered leaves create layers of refracted light, belated messages with intermediaries, relayed sun to moon, leaf to eye.

Nathan says it's the smell of the humus he loves, the understory's decay. Silty loam, softening microbial, the swelling scent of petrichor. I like the bush hen's movements in the brush, her hasty scattered remarks. Razor in hand ayya Nirodha, tells me I can keep my eyebrows – they serve a function, to catch the sweat.



The statue carved by Patacara in the glow-worm cave, hand alone

Those Canadian months: they already have a dream-texture, an immateriality that lends itself to doubt – did that happen? Will it come around again? I'm glad I'm here. I could immediately settle into a new routine, tree-felling, wood cutting around the monastery. A good way to ground down with the sudden dislocation of return.

The simple work here is the best: sweeping paths, cutting up kindling. It grounds me in the essentials – my efforts aren't working to carve some particular future. It's either about fulfilling basic necessities, or just practices for presence. Raking eucalypt leaves that will blanket the paths again tomorrow ... Coding impermanence in my body's memory, by repetition.

Those months on Vancouver Island feel like getting deeply intimate with a lover then parting ways abruptly. You find yourself still quoting them in conversation, wearing their old dressing robe, making their gestures. They don't return your reference.

Like Asobase – the remains after the loved one has parted – you continue to play at, to imitate the language love has taught you. But it is not Asobase; because it is not a low-stakes play. The action is performed in a desperation, or simply because you don't know how to be otherwise. Like a lonely lyrebird: a conversation, an imitation, continued on your own.

Love to you from amongst the raggedy Eucalypts, the teatree's perfume, the lyrebird's call.

Juniper



Wall Graffiti under Katoomba subway

On Retreat (Katoomba, Blue Mountains)

The neighboring gullies are blue at dawn. Early light refracted through eucalypt oil casts long cobalt shadows.

“Early light, late light.”

She wrote

“Light never seems to arrive on time.”

Electra wrote me on the image of the poet and how in their own way, they have been – probably still are – as eager to prove themselves as war heroes. The image has it that they were ever seeking the thin happening edge of this crust of a star; something to get vertigo off of, to return home and write up about - to have sat down and said, “I stood up.” Is it true that they are ever wondering: how to seek the True, Good and Beautiful? Is deliverance from vulgarity, constraint, convention – truly possible?

Eileen used to worry that her lesbianism was that ledge; one stepped upon to be *that* poet. I did too. Maybe we all did, one way or another - found some ambitious marginalia we could hope was novel enough to work for “the novel”. Authenticity helped, authenticity was prime real-estate, a commodious commodity, or failing that, a mineable collective experience we could relate back. Queerness as the thing, a select poverty as the thing, or then there were various spiritual ledges – like the way it took Ludwig the frontline-bends tandem’d with William James to seek the monastery.

What nearly took Ludwig to the monastery was William James and war. The trenches barbarism gave blood to his *Tractatus*. I entered the monastery from a different front; love-fucked and wretched. No Schopenhauer, no William James’ *Varieties of Religious Experience* for me to peruse here. No mysticism. I entered the meditation hall, windows blacked out with thick shade cloth for lobotomy; cut out the chink that glows red and beats your name in irregular tachycardic pulse, a rhythm ekphrastic of her likeness.

Russell said that what Ludwig liked best in mysticism was its power to stop him from thinking. I don’t know if he mistook Ludwig’s intent but his criticism hit its mark with me; perhaps I entered the monastery to black out her name.

Juniper

Dear El.,

Would you consider yourself a ‘good’ reader?

In primary school some of my earliest shaming experiences came in being made to acknowledge that I was in fact a ‘slow’ reader – or slow to learn to read. Not adept at the literary. A deficit readily explained, my parents thought, by gender. English was a girlish discipline, my aptitude for the natural sciences more than compensated for the lack perceived by my teachers. But I wasn’t satisfied. I pointedly began visiting the library each recess; in my first intimations of shame I would ask to have stamped the yellow slips of card that fit neatly into the hardbacks along their spines. My name and a return date in the Librarian’s elegant hand. I witnessed those insignias with a glow of pride – even then I was learning a means of performing a more successful self, a more acceptable self. I learnt to compensate for interior fragility with external transformation. More and more books I would loan, more than I could possibly read.

What constitutes a good reader? Was it Frank O’Connor who wrote that reading is another form of height, and a more perilous one? I wonder this in the Blue Mountains walking these plateaus to where they fall away, a sheer drop into fathomless canopies beneath.

Thinking on reading as a vertiginous height, I’ve always struggled with altitude and edges; a sensitive vestibular system has me clinging to railings for support. Feeling that dizzying sudden inversion of gravity. Kundera wrote that the vertigo, we feel, doesn’t come from the danger of falling; after all *there are* railings – no, it comes from recognising the urge to jump.

Yet the reader who has jumped from a great height and survived cannot right herself and will live only a half-life. Consider the lobster; the lobster orients itself by micro-magnets in its ears and antennae – a lobster that has fallen, landed on its back with magnets shaken asunder, cannot right itself, and like the reader of fiction. Its legs will scrabble at the sky, mistaking it for solid earth.

Juniper

Ring-Barking

At the monastery I've been designated woodsman, tree-herd of the forest. It has taken some getting used to. My wood skills are rudimentary at best. A local lumberer was brought in to teach me the basics of the chainsaw, of ringbarking.

"You know when you see a tree with a pared away strip of bark around it's centre like that? That's Girdling, ring-barking." He tells me with gesticulations.

To denude; to strip bare. I learn that the bark, and phloem layer, carry the nutrients to leaves and back to root. When you strip a section of bark you prevent the down flow of food. the root dies, and so does the whole tree. It's a slow process compared to felling, often done by tree-vandals. It's ugly, the tree can't resist, it stands there and groans and takes it.

After he leaves I sit on an old log, perhaps itself once ring-barked, and listen to the ambient life about me. Skeetering through the underbrush of small marsupials, the crunch of dry eucalyptus leaves.

What is it for a writer to refuse another writer the right of response? This I later wonder, while I sever branches into furnace-size twigs with the circular drop saw. A spray of wood dust hits my goggles. The sound is imminent even through earmuffs.

Is it to strip a section of bark entire, prevent the down-flow of good nootch? I know you must express to eat. I wish you were writing me, but as you're not I hope you still have an audience, someone you can feed, to live yourself. I'm still curious, as ever, to understand how we relate.

Curled by a steaming billy in my forest Kutu, I write: "You're lucky if you can read the script you're acting out," and in this series of ongoing correspondence I would still like to know whether I truly offered you a voice. I know I owed you a voice.

A lyre bird's trill echoes; it sounds throughout the forest. I keep expecting it to repeat the gnaw of the circular saw's teeth through wood.

You used to read me passages of Spivak's *Can the Subaltern Speak?* "Heads up," you'd say borrowing Spivak's words. "*You can't simply make the subaltern visible, or lend her a voice. And if the subaltern is to be taught to speak... Well now what would that look like?*"

There was perhaps a plaintiff note in your voice, and pointedness to your target audience, something beseeching, left latent till retrospect tugged it up. It's not like the subaltern failed to pronounce words, or produce sentences. The inability to speak was a failure of speech to be fully *authorised*. Too much stood in the way of

being heard, and therein lay the silencing, in a failure of reception – foreign notes falling on deaf ears.

It wasn't a lack of access to institutionally validated language; you could weave Academese with the best of us. What got in the way for you was my presumption to know what you would say, when you went to speak, to pre-empt your meaning. As a consequence I refused you the freedom of ever surprising me.

What you offered, what I failed to reciprocate, was the experience of being fully seen and understood. If every human action is a gesture, and every gesture theoretically over-determined and if power dictates meaning's interpretation – my concern is that this project is a post-hoc continuation of your silencing, refusing your right to respond, to 'interpret the meaning of our glances' as it were.

I want this to be an invitation.

Juniper

On Snags

The lumberjack furnished me with another word before leaving: *Snag*: it refers to a standing dead wood. Amongst the forest of our lives, is this what an abandoned relationship looks like: a standing dead wood? Pallid and stark-white, amongst the living canopy.

We walked the water-works pipeline rivulet path; I point at the dead-wood, the *snags*, a jagged bone piercing up through the understory. You comment on how different things would look to us if we didn't tidy our dead out of sight. If our cities were more like India's Varanasi, the smell of the burning dead in our nostrils, bloated corpses jetsam on the Ganga's waterways. Instead of the nearly-dead, concealed in residential homes; that smell of lemon verbena-scented cleaning products, air-conditioner, lint.

I remember when together we visited my grandad in an 'aged care' facility or residential home. The pamphlet in the foyer, besides imagery of the smiling elderly, also uses interchangeably *freestanding assisted living facility*, *nursing home*, *elder care*, *hospice care*, *assisted living*. Names innocuous enough not to warrant second thoughts, but with an administrative touch that perhaps sanctifies their presence, the facility *that understands*.

Walking the carpeted halls, the corridors are extra wide allowing for two electric scooters to pass abreast. Felt-time seems to slow down, entering these halls. Is it consequent on the fact that nobody is rushing, because there's nowhere to go? I observe an elderly gentleman, with movements gradual as tectonic plates, reach down to pluck a piece of lint off his pants. Perhaps it's that these beings are displaced in time. Only in being housed collectively can they keep living their stories as if they had a persisting reality.

The residential home: a ship of memory, navigating change's seas, time's passage viewable through port holes. This gentleman still took the centrefold newspaper, as he set into his eggs and soldiers. He would exclaim, eyebrows a-bristle, each morning to his neighbour "well now, would you believe?" They would invariably not believe. Much head-shaking, tutting and "whatever nexts" would ensue.

These temporal portholes, as with submarines, are made from acrylic plastic, several inches thick – for deep diving. The border is not porous, nothing gets through, so the view elicits no fear.

In the papers the repetition of human folly in global relations may seem as hopeless as ever, but will no longer concern them, *they* are no longer playing. The technological growth will appear miraculous, as ever it has, but they'll harbour the same doubts about it affecting the human condition overmuch. The newly emergent philosophical conundrums will appear simply incomprehensible. Unfathomable. And they will feel it fortuitous that they are not the ones who must do the fathoming. Envy their situation?

*

Along the corridors as we walked, there were framed odd paintings. Young children in bonnets, lilly ponds, cats in aprons – a strangely infantilising kitsch. Walking down the hall the doctor pauses over select pieces and describe them proudly. We passed a dining hall where afternoon tea was wheeled out on trolleys, cakes and quartered sandwiches (crustless), red rose tea.

But my grandpa's wing was another case altogether. Moving deeper through the labyrinthine corridors, we enter the domain of the more thoroughly demented. It was cleverly designed: the senile, if playing truant or AWOL, would have a lot more to navigate before encountering the peril of the open air, fast moving metal and other dangers.

I was told by the doctor, as he walked us down the a hall, painted powder blue for soothing, that "there are commonly three types of Alzheimer's patients." Those who are happy, jubilant in their short attention, we say they're like children and feel almost relief at their fate. The doctor pauses and breathes a sigh of appreciation over a Beatrix Potter, Peter Rabbit in waistcoat. Then there are those who are angry; they don't understand so they rage, becoming more surly, bellicose and unpleasant than ever in life. Only duty keeps their children visiting. Then there are those who are afraid. Deeply afraid. They turn over their tea cups with trembling hands, they fear their own bedpans. "These are the Socratic ones," he says magnanimously. The ones who understand that they don't understand, not anymore. They know that they've lost, even if they can't name what they've lost. Is what they've lost the world?

*

After I let go of my grandfather's hand, the doctor's prophetic words ring in my ears. I needed to be alone. Alone with you. Perhaps I just needed to be out of there. When the train pulled into Central Station I stepped into the local bookstore we had visited years back.

The windowless bookstore was several levels above ground. The owner's voice carried between its narrow aisles. Carrying the news to patrons, accepting in turn their lamentations. The bookstore was closing. The oldest poetry bookstore in Australia, and it couldn't sustain itself. Many who had known the shop's nooks for decades. There was obviously no money in poetry. A 35 year labour of love was being packed into cardboard boxes, sealed with translucent tape.

In that moment, at that thought, I was aware of every window missing from the bookstore. But that's not quite true, the labour of love had been carried out into the world over those 35 years. I imagined the number of launches for first time published Australian poets, hesitant before a milestone, reading *rite of passage* in the act of presenting. Announcing themselves to their peers, remaking the wheel. I imagined the books passed hand to hand, a fragile currency – existing only as long as a willingness for discontinuity, for fragmentation pertained. Persisted.

I'd passed through this store years ago but then had no time. Poetry felt intransigent, reflexive – by that I guess I mean, that I thought that it refused to take any object other than itself; and it took itself over-seriously. But then if it was a relation, perhaps it was a gestalt relation, a greater than summation of its parts – and I was just blind to the several worlds it emerged from, and in turn, instantiated.

Juniper

Dear Electra,

“I write poems for a living,” I had to say recently, at a loss for an answer to the dreaded ‘and what do you do. “I write poems for a living,” is rarely uttered; the statement seems barely legible. Since when has anyone been able to survive on the profits of poems? Aren’t poems just descriptions of idyll days that the nineteenth-century gentry spent meandering in meadows, sighing over tulips, expressing their transgressive sexualities via thinly-veiled allusion? Isn’t poetry just Romanticist-nature-pornography, that time and the emergence of the incognito-browser rendered obsolete?

In a modern digitised economy, with the bookstores rolling down their mournful shutters, we say goodbye to the third aisle middle row ‘poetry’ section, bookended and dwarfed by ghost-written biographies and *self-help* cum guide to *reclaim-your-masculinity*.

They figure they must have misunderstood some of the key words in the phrase ‘make a living’ from poetry. Perhaps he means ‘teach’? An admirable profession teaching, after all in the public imaginary poetry resembles most closely ‘history’ also taught - something antiquated, most relevant now for collecting lyric gobbets that can be casually scattered throughout conversation, imbuing the quotidian with transcendent qualities, indicative of a well-rounded education.

“I hope you write *good* poems,” he replied laughing.

“But I just hate the pretentiousness of poetry,” ah. The *Avant Garde*. Why so hard, why so exclusionary? A form of *haute couture*, a pursuit of the glib Bourgie with rounded fingernails, he who insists on swinging his cultural capital between his thighs as he strolls down the street.

Maybe there just is something innately pretentious about any art form that draws attention to the medium – language -- defamiliarising it to thereby rediscover it. “Humph.” Someone inevitably says.” My nephew could draw that, could write or sculpt that.” It gets wearing. So it goes.

I’ve been wondering: in a world of constructs, do you think existential tension manifests as clenching, rigidity – adherence to received forms? A silent knowledge that we’re building our houses without foundation stone, on sand, or walking out onto ice as it turns to slush then to water. These make us clutch tightly to self-limiting identities: masculinity so-defined, sexuality so-defined, language so defined. In such a context the desire for language to *just behave* and avoid the amorphous or ambivalently-morphous becomes comprehensible.

Post-structuralism whispered it in the academy, but it was heeded the way ornithologists are heeded by birds; the academy shat on post-structuralism's head, peppered it with a liquid white paint from the height of an ivory tower's topmost turret.

Poets wrote it each other in their faggy veiled love letters, and monks mumbled it in their equally faggy haiku. I guess I'm saying maybe we must liken the faggy, the transgressive and irreverent to the mystical, the inexpressible. That which can only be *shown* or, otherly put, gesticulated at with one flamboyantly effete wave of Wittgenstein's hand.

Juniper

Dear El.,

Don't feel any stress to respond, that's working entirely against my intention - the idea of writing letters to each other was supposed to be a way for us to reclaim writing as a site of free play. Do you recall Winnicott's writing about parents needing to create a container for their children to have free play in, that encourages them to imaginatively engage with and reconceive the world?

The idea that we could establish an Edgelands where there is uninhibited play for the two of us. Something unbounded in possibilities, but bounded in form. The arena; a wood-chipped playground for knee grazing. In language we remake our surrounds. We exercise our independence. I guess I'm asking: do you still want to play in this sand pit with me?

Roland Barthes, meditating upon the pleasure of selecting a word, didn't emphasise fitness as a virtue, practicability or parsimony. Rather he considers the word's "future praxis" or creative fecundity – its potential, in short, to be "put into play" with other words. The words fit for our playground.

Though I proposed the metaphor, I wonder if you too intuit something sinister undergirding the playground? Perhaps in the way that Dualisms, in a Taoist vein, always contains the seed of, and so must evoke, its opposite. A thesis that in the emergent pop-surrealist genre, finds its apogee in artist's like Mark Ryden; his sinister amalgams of children, stuffed toys, meat and religious ephemera.

I've been trying to place what I find sinister. I think the analogy reminds me that we have to carve out this space, that it is in no way owed us. That in some sense we must work to become again children. To Rupī Kaur's question posed in wistful rhetoric – *do you think flowers will grow here?* I ask; In this third space, this derelict edgelands, can you intuit the buds, readily imagine their unfurling?

Juniper

Derelict

O.E.D. *Derelict*

Of a spaceship: abandoned in outer space.

Lost; adrift; hence, wanting. Careless; neglectful; but faithful.

And waiting.

Juniper

That night I sat on the porch of my little wooden kuti, as it stormed outside. The tin roof and the rain tinkling down recalled to my mind untethered windchimes. Electra would have approved my little burrow. It contained only a single bed, a potbelly stove and a large window through which I watched the moving treed-silhouettes and the stars.

The stars were vivid here, I noted. The gloam equally palpable. I thought on the interstellar gaps in the milky way, how in some indigenous dreamings it was known as the dark emu. I've watched that alien bird each night. It felt like reading the page of a book but staring at only the whites, running your eye down the in-between spaces and allowing the inked letters to be nothing more than their material signs. The way Derrida spoke on materiality usurping its signification.

Returning inside I added another stick to the furnace. It catches, casts shadows of light that japed about the room. I like the dead of light as a form of shadow. By the light from the potbelly, I sat to write Electra:

Dear El.,

I've been re-reading early letters you wrote me, years back. I doubt you ever imagined them to be poured over multiple times. I really hope the collaging of our correspondence into something new is a project that excites you, rather than one that unsettles. How things change and move! We've been in one of those dances with a hundred steps that arrives you back where you began, curtsying to your partner.

I wake in the bush each morning, surrounded by eucalyptus scrub; to the imitations of lyrebirds, the warbles of King Parrots if I'm very lucky. I walk a few miles along sandy arteries, paths hedged with acacia unspooling as the spring sets in. Burst banksia pods provide a vivid litter – felt innards displayed on the path. It's hard to describe the effect induced by encountering these surrounds each day. No human company, no conversation; just the misshapen trunks and gnarled limbs of old man banksia bearing down on me, only the crunch of corkscrewed eucalypt leaves underfoot. The ferreting of the lyrebird through the humus underbrush.

So the book, *Murmurations*, is a good way towards being done. I hope you like it. I help the nuns out about the forest, I've got a chain saw licence now, I fell trees in preparation for fire season. They've invited me to stay on as their grounds keeper for the next year. I'm considering it... I've shaved my head, donned the precepts. I'm living the life of a lay monk. I have my books: Carson, Barthes, Blanchfield are still my sweeties – but there is a stack of Eric Fromm, Joseth Campbell – books gifted by one of the nuns, Ayya Nirodha, a wry old fire cracker from Austria who dotes on me.

That's all for now, there's so much to tell. I stopped writing because you stopped replying. There's a neat notion in Winnicott concerning good and bad interpenetration. Physically you can think of interpenetration as the exchange that happens between mother and suckling infant; between breast and mouth. Or in sex too, the exchange of emotional and accompanying physiological content.

Blanchfield talks about it with regards to tickling, there's an unspoken rim we are nevertheless conscious of, between good and bad tickling. It's a rim I've teased at with pimple popping, sometimes overstepping boundaries. We're learning to recognise boundaries, learning to put up boundaries where appropriate, but not being victim to past conditioning. Recognising what's a trigger from old patterns that needn't apply today.

One of our marked struggles was with boundaries, with what belonged to you, me, to us both. Those lines got shaky, blurred at a distance. *This is where you end*, Maggie Nelson wrote, *where others begin*.

But what instinctually communicates as extension of self? Think of the animal unreflective way we reach out to comfort one another, or shield our near ones. The way humans empathetically project ourselves into their pain. A projection reflexive, precognizant – before conscious will.

Blanchfield refers to the process of Individuation from his mother as 'peripersonally troubling' to her. *Peripersonally* - referring to the space at a moment, within a person's reach, including everything at arm's length, and a bit more – at a pinch.

When I think on the peripersonal, I imagine a Vitruvian man in profile: genitals unabashed, limbs splayed and multiplied. An akimbo-appendaged Shiva – but with a naturalistic intent, to articulate what falls within man's reach. The peripersonal is that plus a little more.

The same, perhaps, with lovers' disentangling: your loss was a peripersonal loss, felt as a wrenching, a separation, like the severing of a limb - but that would be to undersell it; more like the severing of body entire, *res extensa*.

And what remains? Some appendage now vestigial? The rudimentary, or atrophied, forming a small part of what had once meant a larger whole. Perhaps in years to come, looking back from the vantage of some unimaginable perch of the future, *vestigial*, might end up the correct word – what has become functionless in the course of evolution.

But for now what remains more resembles a phantom limb, made to stiffen and cramp into the night. To proffer up unscratchable itches, to suffer unseasonable

colds that cannot be warmed against. Persistent phantoms are what it means to live with loss.

How do you treat possession of a phantom limb? You can't cure. You can't. You try and accept it. Then you manage it. Management involves repositioning the phantom limb, with prop, pillow, cushion. Even Virtual Reality therapy helps.

As a phantom limb: what do you make of my epistolary attempts to reposition you? Should they go unanswered, even unread, I would still seek to straighten out the knotted limb of our tale, our personal narrative. You will not be tormented, I shall make of the relationship a ghost we can both live with. *Every love story being a ghost (limb) story.*

From an old friend,
Junip

Electra

On synopsis

1) Your hands were sirens;
gestures anticipate
refusing my touch
consolingly.

2) The console of your face
a tangle of back roads
whose expressions were uncles, aunts
distances known well

3) To distance the transition
from a and b,
I'd fallen away
Myself a disjunction & snoring

4) A conversation of laughing
and flinching,
by turns
us.

On Care and Solicity

Reading Heidegger as I trudge along bush-bashed paths, through the southern highlands, kangaroo valley – I imagine Heidegger in the Black Forest – thinking on what it meant for us to support one another – and what care into the future may mean.

Care, for Heidegger takes the form of *solicitude*: taking care of, or providing for, others. Heidegger differentiates two expressions; an authentic form – which supports others in taking responsibility for their own lives, standing in their own power. Set against a domineering, inauthentic form that reduces others to a state of dependency.

Solicitude has always had a slippery insidious sibilance in my mouth; something you solicit. Perhaps the grimy aspect of this term derives from a culturally inflected form of sex worker erasure, to be worked against. Still, to solicit, felt like it implied a dangerous porousness to our borders, a propensity to letting in enemies under the radar. To get in close and not stick a knife between the ribs, to practice lowering your guard whilst facing a history of trust abused, was the work.

But how to be solicitous in a way that refuses to play dependency? To be intimate, but maintain a distance without falling into the coldly stoic, the apparently detached?

Heidegger held the term ‘care’ to simultaneously refer to *concern* as well as *solicitude*. Concern meant *attending to*, an active stance. I feel it telling that a current strand of debate amongst Tibetologists, concerns how to best characterise one of the four immeasurables (or brahmavihāras in the Sanskrit) that is; karuna (compassion) alongside metta (loving-kindness) mudita (empathetic joy) and upekkha (equanimity).

Karuna, while often translated as compassion, may be better understood as *care*. Compassion derives from the latin root *passio* – like *pathos*, possessing an empathetic root, it derives from a shared experience, a common frame. But translating Karuna as *care* is a better fit; it doesn’t assume a shared experiential framework, but maintains a bounding of sorts.

Both the Heideggerian and Tibetan Buddhist notions of healthy solicity and care, maintain that a distance is necessary to witness one another. With too great a closeness between two people, the edge between you cannot be seen.

Only now, backwards gazing, am I seeing the distance that was then lacking in our relationship, that would have been necessary for our mutual solicity and care. The way Khalil Gibran wrote;

For the oak and the cypress grow not in each other’s shadow
And the strings of the lute are a part;
though they quiver with the one music.

“What is the value of morality?”
Nietzsche asked.
A question that, in the asking,
opened onto new terrain.
A question demonstrating morality can’t
exhaustively comprise the field of values.

“What is the value of writing?” I asked you
“What is the value in performing your own
manner of thinking?” You respond
“That depends,” I said
“What is it preventing you from doing?”

“Is there a reason I write you?”
Is it just to ask:
When communication breaks down,
Must illogical speech ultimately issue in silence?
Is a well-made lover’s discourse, already
A parody of itself?

On Heidegger's Anxiety

I always admired how you had your sight of the Good so firmly set before you. My concept was more diffuse, divoted with internal contradictions, and so a wary project, constricting.

None of the philosophical categories we played with described my dis-ease. The tracks of scepticism, moral relativism, naturalism – felt so well-trodden that the earth compacted. Nothing could grow there, nothing to describe my condition to myself. My sense of Good was entangled with something foreign and imprecise: a phenomenology of ambivalence.

You would shake your head, conceive me as a product of modernity at best, at worst the excesses of a 'progressive' university education. Evidence the conservatives had the sum and measure of a liberal arts training.

"You don't aim for molasses when you make honey," you'd say feigning wisdom.

I was not alone, not the only bitter treacle by-product. I was surrounded by sandstone-uni philosophy graduates, and the more brilliant they were as a rule, the less system-savy, like you. Who toiled and struggled, and failed and dropped out. The Sisyphean-boulder sized complex I would have had you drop, but you feared it would crush something fragile, if ever you did.

"Vegemite began as just one more yeasty-crud we scraped off the beer barrel." You added.

Recently I've been reflecting on the deep anxiety that arises in facing, the inescapable fact, that we may die at any time. Heidegger claims that it's through this awareness that we begin to *care* about our way of living. To enter into authentic existing, then, arises from the recognition of our Being-towards-death. A recognition, as Heidegger puts it, that "I am this: *I can die at any moment.*"

This orientation towards death – awaking to an unchosen yet unalterable trajectory – serves for Heidegger as the basis for an ethic; for care, but also for a spiritual or existential orientation.

Sitting in meditation for days and days watching the flow of thought, feeling, sensation, you're made to observe your inability to possess any single moment, to carry anything across instants. From it, the futility of grasping after any state, which nature's law will claim back from you, becomes apparent. You start to feel that you *are* duration.

Terms like purify, like cleanse, are difficult terms. We associate them with a loopy puritanism, a sallow-cheeked asceticism. But being dipped in time, leaves us feeling like denim jeans thoroughly doused in Napisan, after a high-intensity spin cycle. It's only from this state that I felt I could trust my intention again, that whatever the world threw up, I had found an existential font, a distance from which I could look upon my being-in-the-world, and act with integrity.

It was from here that I reached out to you: to invite solicitude again; for it to alight on the branch between us. After a dip in this death-oriented perspective, it felt like the only space where I could trust myself in my intentions towards you, grounded in a care-ethic. A deep conviction emerged that things would be different; that while we couldn't go back to where we had been, there was nonetheless a rightness to reconnection. I hoped, expected, an almost karmic chance to make good.

Now, upon reflection I wonder: did the spiritual butt up
against our psychology; was this just avoidance, a bypassing – failure to move on?

On Exterminating Angels

I recalled the last movie we watched together, curled up on your couch, a 60's surrealist film; Luis Buñuel's *Exterminating Angels*. From what I recall of the film, all the guests are somehow trapped at a dinner party. Whether by design, or some facet of their underlying psychology, remains unstated, to be guessed at. A distractibility seems to descend upon anyone who shows an interest in leaving; an adjacent conversation, a half-formulated thought resurfaces requiring immediate communication, an unpardonable failure to greet another guest, cigars, desert, piano attendance.

The subsequent day, having all slept in handsome piles about the dining room, the absurdity of the situation seems to dawn on some who then try more forcibly to break the spell and leave. They make it as far as the curtain before a sort of exhaustive horror claims them. They stagger into chairs ashen faced, sickening.

A collective hysteria takes the group when realisation of their strange collective incapacitation finally occurs. The true character of the party members manifests in the subsequent action; leadership & altruism for some, weakness & egotism for others. When the spell is finally broken it is only because they've found themselves situated as they had been during the dinner, just prior to parting. Somehow an *in situ* re-enactment of the lines that should've been, had they politely left, allows them to break away en-masse.

I recall the allegory sticking to me. At the time I was dwelling on the cyclic patterns that govern thought and behaviour, the ruts of a track I awake with my minds wheels spinning in. The notion that if I could find the seam in the gaffe tape where it began, the *in situ* entry point to the cyclic narratives, then I could uproot those patterns where they entered the earth.

Heidegger points toward this condition with the term *Befindlichkeit* - finding oneself placed in a situation that precedes awareness of that situation, an *awakening to context*. Perhaps we all find ourselves wary that life is falling away from us, that we're enmeshed in contexts we didn't chose, circles we can hardly see. My recent attempts to leave the dinner party, to evade the Exterminating Angels finds me in this context I'm awakening to right now:

It's evening. Some evenings I spend with a blanket in the cave beneath the phosphorescent worms that masquerade as stars. They are sensitive to vibrations, speak loudly and they wink out. Pause and reflect silently and they turn back on. Through the cave opening I observe the landscape that appears abrupt, like edged conversation. The way statement leads to precipice; like the silence of which we so often skirted the rim. The neighbouring gorge I note, has eyebrows; their many layered significations. A dense brush escarpment frustrates all efforts. Is it that I couldn't penetrate, couldn't conquer your meanings? I wondered. Stuck a flag in the silence, instead, claimed that?

I get up early with the sun. Then I grab my thermos, don my brown beanie (over my bold monkish head), I walk into the forest. The monastery is twenty minutes away. The ground

here is all clay and crumbling sandstone, on either side of me a variety of eucalypts; stark white squiggly gums acacia teatree, perfuming the early morning. The golden wattle buds up and sweetening the air too. I greet silently the three nuns. It's a small hermitage.

Ayya Nirodha seems to have taken me under her wing, she dotes on me, and says I'll be a monk in a year or two at most. The idea sort of comes to stick. I'm semi-seriously considering it. What do you think? But Befindlichkeit is pervasive. Would donning the robes, mean waking up? I come to doubt it. Even here, where there is intentionality, where I live with purpose, I still live within a closed system. Meeting the same stages of the day's rituals. Its scope of meanings already set.

On Taking Refuge

I find myself faced with the task of reconciling writing with my newly fragmented subjectivity. Carson expresses this conundrum well when she asks; *how can we square the self-assertiveness of the writerly project with the decreation of our own subjectivity?*

It feels as if we can't. As if the task were a necessarily impossible one; both requiring an act of subterfuge and calling on us to embrace contradiction. But this doesn't mean defeat. Ask Nagarjuna, ask Wittgenstein:

Contradiction has its uses.

Juniper

To the Beloved,

I thought on addressing my next letter “to the beloved” the way Hafiz addresses his poems, but it felt affected and past tense. In some Islamic scripture the Koran though written in Arabic, is conceived as prior to language. In some scriptures the Koran is viewed not as a work of God, but an attribute of God; alongside his power, his justice, his temperance.

When you wrote, though you never seemed to see it, it was the same way. Your words seemed not an echo of, but emanation from, the pre-verbal - not a work you produced, but an attribute.

Each word seemed new, luminous and sharp; a stalactite held carefully up to the light. This was why you hammed up every time an assignment was due, why you needed extensions on your extensions, and had to repeat so many classes. Had writing been less your medium (literally *medium* as channel, pathway) you could have passed and kept on passing.

Walking the beach edge, a trail of tangled seaweed ... I spot a ridged shark egg tangled in the seaweed, nest bobbing lightly in the foam. Stopping to inspect it I recall how walking you would invariably discover a leaf twisted in a corkscrew, a piece of dulled misshapen glass, a bottle cap with strange insignia. You’d offer them up to me. A gift. It seems an invasion of privacy now, to name them, because your relation to the world’s parts was so personal.

You would make of your room a bowerbird’s nest of oddments and ends. This dovetailed with your writing practices intimately – they figured in the same creative act. Susan Langer once wrote that capturing experience in this way was a means of *preserving* it, staving off transience, decay.

Walking together through your stories and letters; you proffer up a dulled marble with a Milkyway swirl, a sand-softened piece of stone. When you read, you were discovering beautifully patterned paper scraps, just for you to fold into different shapes, to place next to each other for new effects. I hope you regain your sense of delight and curiosity the sooner.

On Vipassana retreat

I'm on retreat in Blackheath, the further reaches of the Blue Mountains. Sydney has turned Katoomba into an outer western suburb, and poverty is pushed back. But on retreat we're away from any such worldly concerns.

"There's no fact, held in the body that can't be looked at," they tell me on repeat. In the urinal, in the silence, I find something telling in the gurgle a toilet pot makes from the cubicle beside. I hear the tinkling of a man pointedly pissing onto enamel, away from direct water – to significantly dull the sound. What does it say about character: furtiveness? Generosity? Shame? And why do I need to analyse other humans, even in this silencing? This turning inward.

We walk the adjacent eucalypt forests, worn tracks hemmed in with fencing, telling our limits. Sitting I read the word, "PEACE" in ugly cuts across and down the tree's face. "P.E.A.C.E." can be like that.

I think often about my silent companions. I never spoke to them before entering retreat. What do I know or guess about them? They are just slumped shoulders, reflective faces. Just bodies, only via accident allowed communication. In silence, avoiding eyes. We face onto the course boundary together. White nylon wire along rusting posts. We share the same teabags; was it Lipton's? Bushell's? The marker that divides the genders tells me to *look inwards*. Our hands sit at rest; right in left. Right in left.

I think back on how you described meditation, long ago, as a kind of *doing that undoes*. And later you described it as merely *observation of causation*. Then finally as *grieving, accelerated*. Which it is now? Our bodies reside in composed stillness. Only an arterial twitch at the wrist would disabuse the reader: we still live.

On Shears and Time

Time is a distilling process; time distils.

In the Southern highlands Ol' Man Banksia hides in the heath, behind the dunes – his crown forms an enclosing canopy as we enter beneath. We wind with creak to a lower coal-bed. Bundanoon sits abreast a ridge of soft shale, patchy basalt; weathered red-clay soil. Stunted and gnarled, twisted and tortuous – only applied to eucalypts are these adjectives felt complements. Moth larvae abstractly pattern some trunks. “You’ll find me between the woolly butt and the spotted Euc,” you told me. “Between the stringy bark and the scribbly gum – there I will wait.”

Deep gorge, steep-sided valley, cliff with sheer drop – this is the proverbial land of loaming range and lifting mountain. These gorges incised into the plateau, these undulating gulfs were a mystery of the 1800s. It was wondered what could have channelled such structures? The answer we have now – that the gorges were carved by the streams that flowed through them – seemed then preposterous. Even Charlie Darwin, who visited the neighbouring Blue Mountains, imagined the gorges had been huge marine sandbanks, once holding a sea. Yet the fact that trickling rivulets could wear down mountains doesn’t look so absurd when remembering that time is the one element geologists have indefinitely at their command.

Living at this monastery the nuns like geologists, too, have time indefinitely at their command. Here we savour communications because they’re sparse. Here, I savour each spoonful, as meals come infrequently. Time is a distinct necessity for the particular teachings I’m learning. I’m made to learn as this landscapes did – the long way. Learning that time is not so different from rivers. Learning that rivers, like loves, carve the valleys they flow in.



Sulphur crested shrieks as the cockatoos descend *en masse* from plateau through gully. Red bloom of burst banksia pod littering the understory. Shale-grey soil, bedrock of Shoal

Haven, Hawksberry sandstone-crumbled, boulders of volcanic basalt, lichen clinging around rims.

Everything here has contour lines, the stumps of trees measure their years in them, the ridges in the rock measure their weathering, the fissures wrought by slow seepage. A seam runs beneath Katoomba's cliff line, connecting Blue Mountains Blackheath to Santi's Erith coal mine. The eucalypt woodland around me emerges from this decomposed sandy soil. 12 million years ago this would have been wet, temperate, akin to Tasmania misted south west. But this landscape is now all rocky gorge, dried gully.

This land who has withstood raging fire, poor soil, long drought – now a 'scape of rigid-leaved sclerophylls, long and narrow acacias, stemmed casuarina. We tread around woody pod, nuts that guard jealously their seed, the corky bark, the fire retardant. Acacia shrubs prostrate themselves, the wattle dresses in renunciate yellow.

Some nights the air is hot, roiling, thunder cracks and the clouds feel propulsive; a billows of sorts. When it rains the kuti's roof transmutes the raindrops into the peppering of shells on tin-trench. In Rilke's writing the night, bestirred by sudden storm, is *made spacious*, as if otherwise it were merely "sheared between time's pedantic seams."

I think on those seams of time, fastidious in regulation, fastening to the clock's hands, feeding through its sorted minutes, demarking. When we met, in the dream, time had sundered its seams; we described history as looping, in our private kingdom. Motion for us there could be retrograde, elliptical. Could possess additional dimensions.

What would it mean, I wonder, for us, for this land, in the difficulties to come - to feed time's thread back into the cloth, to darn the fabric's fray: to forget? Or should we take that loose thread, fix it to some new ends – a thread of our lives run through the needle's eye. Our own eyes: asquint.

Juniper

Dear Electra,

In the liminal space which is this monastery, a place in-between living and for living in between, I've been wondering on why liminality as a concept is so gripping. Perhaps because while describeable as temporal, a transitional stage, its spatial metaphor is twofold and contradictory. That is: a liminal 'space' occupies a position *at* a boundary or threshold (limen), or *on* both sides of that threshold. Liminality it seems, is *both* and *neither*.

Gloria E. Anzaldua describes liminal spaces as bridges – indeed titularly as *The Bridge We Call Home* – literal thresholds between worlds. Anzaldua calls this space *Nepantla* a Nahuatl word translating to 'tierra entre media' – that is, an in-between space that entails precarity, that lacks clear boundaries. Living in such an entre-media means inhabiting a state of perpetual displacement – a finding home in the incommodious.

Reading her queer-of-colour poet anthology, incongruously conjured for me the largely white and hetro Irish pub we frequented. We would attend O'Malleys for Wednesday and Thursday French and Spanish discussion groups. You'd sip beer and chat, conversation punctuated with spontaneous laughter peels that would catch the patrons' ears as Bonobo shrieks of alarm. I would knit the scarf that was already three lengths that of a useable scarf, functionally a mummy-wrap, serving more as excuse to fiddle rhythmically while pondering how best to formulate questions in Spanish, without English's convenient *Gerundif* in the present participle. Or whether a statement were sufficiently hypothetical to warrant a French subjunctive.

Anzaldua's words conjure for me the way, when the non-smoking frontier was pushed further out of the public sphere, and beer garden patrons were forced to smoke outside their gardens yet couldn't drink on the open street – they would stand legs spreadeagle across an invisible dividing line, arms akimbo; pint in left hand, fag in right, and alternate between puffs and glugs, perhaps nodding their head along to a half-heard drunken spiel from a work mate.

A liminal space?

Just the opposite I think. A liminal space was Derrida's *Aporia* – an undecidable, something existing between two mutually contradictory states. Straddling a threshold, I've learnt, is not the same thing as embodying a contradiction.

As with Winnicott's conception of the *transitional* space, liminality is precisely where productive exchange between fantasy and reality occurs, where creative engagement takes place. Perhaps though, I was once again just standing in the

threshold, a position, my mother would claim, that my life-long indecisiveness condemned me to. “Come in or Get Out,” she’d say. “All your ambivalence offers is a draft.” But with this project, love’s Edge-Lands, I hoped to find something more – liminality; the embodiment of a contradiction, new ways to relate.

A chill breeze slakes the warmth from the room as I stand hesitant like others before me, between worlds, feet in both at home in neither, learning to become unwelcome.

Nepantla and Liminality

The ivy works the brick till it crumbles.
Road's encroaching rumbles.
You proffer a – thumbs up –
palm canted to the side.

A '64 Venetian (we're told) gunmetal convertible
takes our offer.
His muffler's rattling, cradled by
chicken wire.

I found a new home for our dysphoria
– Nepantla – Tierra Entre Media –
offering our discommoda a glamour.
The ambience leached the wood of moisture.

The log crumbles to touch.

Electra

Dear Junip.,

Thoughts on your last poem: There's some potential here, though a disquieting poem. I like the patterns of connections. There's always scope to compress. to cull unnecessary words. Step carefully in lineation, in rhythm. You need to think on cadence, think on pace. Cut back, say each thing once. Your reader is as smart as you are. Avoid 19th century poeticisms. Be scathing with safe words, avoid vulgarity, avoid Bukowskian toughness. Avoid too loose a description of too vague a phenomenon. Rely on promising twists to old images. Reduce each to its barest essentials, read for archaisms: *lest*, *atop*. Read for trite turns of phrase. Be conscious of beats per line. Length, consider length. Always consider length then consider lyricism. Then consider personal sentimentalism think on line breaks/then stop.

Enjamb

Feeling too self-conscious? Think: where is that other perspective – *that one that looks in on the involved Self*? Cultivate your instinct for the specific, cull the waffle. There's always something strong there, could you re-enter it.

I liked the absence of an answer. I liked the long lines, their rhythmic difficulty. Still, learn to compress. Trim fat. You need to question the poem's powerful "I." Remember: some poems just arrive at themselves in the last few lines, other poems never arrive.

Rethink the ending.

Electra

On Fabricated Objects

Dear Electra,

The Buddhist Nagarjuna, like Butler, was concerned with fabrication. Both questioned the assumption that construction was something that happened to a ready-made object, a pre-given thing.

When I began these letters I acted as if assuming the pre-given reality of this third space – a fertile crust existing between two people. That casual confidence on the ground beneath our feet was built in reality on a mythy, black lake. Perhaps I could as well have fantasized the existence of a third space between me and any stranger. The way Kraus in *I Love Dick* builds a dramatic torturous love affair from several chance encounters Dick describes as innocuous, mild.

Am I guilty of the same? Delimiting through signification, a love to which I can then ‘refer’ in such a way that my reference presupposes (and thereby conceals) my prior fabrications? If you were in this scrubby forest I could show you the flowering Boronia in the understory, the misshapen Ol’ man banksia overhead. The squiggly gums protruding between mountain ash and red blood eucalypt.

I’ve been thinking on sadness, on how we’ve both known a condition where the spirit withdraws, the petals enclose about their deliberating bud as the light turns away. After we parted, when I returned to Tasmania I capitulated internally to the unsentimental diagnosis: depression. Clinical, in its diagnostic symptomology. Anonymous in its refusal of my particularity. Deflationary in its assignation of a “chemical solution” to what was defined *at root* as a chemical problem. An uncomfortably pacifying nuero-reduction. Thinking on depression and self-care, reminds me that the personal is always structural.

Do you recall how we curled up on Hampden road, watching Adam Curtis’s documentary *Hyper Normalisation*? That diorama of collaged, publically available footage, that together presents a visual tale in tandem and parallel to a written script. That describes the alienating process of neoliberalism, and how it engendered a surrender in the face of real world complexities, the embrace of a corporate-run and built reality, stabilized by politicians.

The film hitting the eighties is symbolized by a Jane Fonda aerobic workout video, neon girls in figure-hugging latex, ‘dancercising’ on a televised stage. Market forces then took the wheel of demos. Incapable of addressing the cultural malaise as impersonal processes & structurally impotent – the masses give up on achieving change and turn their focus on *self*: seek *self*improvement to attain a *self*-autonomy. The given logic: that we may have no say in the direction of mankind, but we can be upbeat and burn calories.

The footage, you might remember, was intercut with film of Nicolae and Elena Ceaușescu, being executed by firing squad.

Monastic life too, retains the focus on 'self' hence the common charge of political quietism. I wend my way along a sandy path, thermos joggling at hip, lyrebird trills from beside. Capitalism, gender squabbles, ecological violence, class warfare - all seem a long way from here.

I have to wonder: have I become retreatist?

Juniper

Juniper

Juniper goes back to his kuti, thoughts bleak. They turn on love as something invasive, a corruption in the file. He sits down to read an old journal, to extract anything worth extracting.

On Autopoiesis

Autopoiesis comes from the Greek *autos* 'self' and *poiein* 'to make' or 'produce'. An autopoietic system is one which produces its own components. Whilst originating with, this is not restricted to, biochemical systems that produce their own molecular components – It might as well be applied to for our sense of self, our identity.

Conceiving narrative-self by analogy to a biochemical system is productive; it demonstrates a neat isomorphism – the fact, for instance, that a cell's self-making is inclusive of a bounding, defining the inside against what's outside the system.

As with the delineating of in-group/out-group – where we bound ourselves as distinct from others. In a sense captured in Nelson's phrase: *this is where you end, where others begin*. Similarly the acts we allow ourselves, those which *cohere*. That appear consistent with who we imagine ourselves to be.

The family teaches this bounding, lovers teach this bounding.

The border establishing this retention of control becomes an obstacle when it approaches the maladaptive & irreversible. When a disclosure or unclenching, the surrender to trust, is read as a failure or a loss of personal integrity.

Not all biochemical systems are autopoietic, it should be noted. Consider the parasite. A virus has no metabolism, and doesn't maintain itself in any autopoietic sense. Eros, desire, is an (oft-willed) failure of autopoiesis – a breach of the boundary separating a cell's internal contents from invaders. Like the parasite, in Eros your constitutive self is generated on the outside, in the host cell.

Back in the room Juniper observes the small worlds taking place around him. The lyre bird pecking at the termite mounds, the cool breeze of the rock. He reflects that at the time of writing this, he had scorned the dependence of intimate relationships, acting as though dependence were incompatible with self-reliance, rather than the very condition of its possibility. In moments of smallness and fear, love's violence, its threat was foregrounded. The termites break off in silent clouds, as their brothers and sisters are gobbled. Death remains, ever present and itself, a happy gurgle of life.

On Domestication

Another section in the journal: friends concerned with domesticity, capitalism, the Anthropocene. He read on:

So if in love we are parasitic on exterior hosts, a breaching of our cell walls, then under capitalist modes we see rather intensification of that wall, of that boundary. But this bounding is artificially achieved; it involves a rupture and suture job, which is then naturalised, made seamless; communities are reduced to communities of capital, the individual condensed to consumer. This process of emptying, transfiguring then colonising is one Camatte articulates in *The Wandering of Humanity* as domestication. Domestication casts the image of man in the linear narrative of capitalism. A further illustration of “the process of the victory of our fathers over our lives, the way in which the social order laid down by the dead continues to haunt the living.”

Whereas Capital sets out to conquer the imagination, queer desire is currently sexy because of its wider implications. It reimagines desire as a means of anti-domestication, an undoing of the civilising influence of the nuclear family; its economics and metaphysics in tow.

Such a fetish for the queer! Juniper thought. *Youth-filled idealism, a young man again, forgive me.* He was enamoured with the emerged in science as poetry. Trying to reimagine futures off the back of clinical models. From the suburbs of Canberra’s Inner North, the feel of domestication had been more urgent, pressing. Are they still fighting the good fight? Resisting the conquering of imagination?

On Being Compromised

“We’re being compromised by other people, all the time,” Vic sighs, eyes intent, shoulders loose. His gesture makes vulnerable, surrenders before the indisputable. “Compromised.” “That’s what people do.”

A compromise; met in the middle. Spat palms, squelching together between fists clenched in accord; a shake with conviction. Though the final drops arrive on your jeans.

A compromise can be a samponic event; two disappointed parties. But ‘being compromised’ denotes a secret organisation – plans revealed by infiltrators, the gig’s up. The peanut butter toast is compromised by sunny-side contact with the kitchen floor. A good story is compromised by the facts.

Living in a monastery, the silent work periods, the silent meals, silent meditations, alone in myself in the hut in the forest – the compromise foisted on one by others is dimmed – but still present. Levinas shows us how this susceptibility, being impinged upon, inaugurates who we are. We are acted up by others in ways which we’re blind, mute to. This imposition can also be called: *an address*.

Dear El.,

In the 13th century in *La queste del Saint Graal* the knights set forth, each on a steed, apart, in search of that elusive grail. They departed Arthur's castle separately, setting out into the forest alone: "at one point and another, where they saw it to be thickest."

la ou il la voient plus espesse

We must leave of our own volition, the myth tells us, the good and familiar company, and forge unknown paths into the woods dark and deep – we must enter where we find it thickest.

I imagine a stubborn bush-bashing rambler, machete in hand, making for the section of trees. In today's context it would be considered pointless ecological vandalism – the sound advice is low-impact, stick to the path pre-trodden. But the essential idea still drives so many *Bildungsroman* youth onto pathless ways, from the known into unknown.

What hidden narrative drove me into this isolated setting? Perhaps now more than ever, having cast off as shackling the notion of inheriting ideology wholesale. It seems folly to identify as 'Buddhist' – to identify with any religion *in toto*. The general idea being that it is always a *contrivance* to live within the folds of a traditional mythology. The garbed nuns, the unfamiliarity of prostrating oneself, bowing before a statue, chanting words in a dead language.

At times I've struggled with this. We adopt much that seems inane, and drop some things that carry value. For instance, the precept of celibacy. It is hard to conceive long run celibacy as other than an opt out for those who can't hack the vulnerability and messiness that marks human intimacy. Yet, I've seen differently here.

Nuns, I've learnt, have a transgressive sexuality. One worthy of admiration, but whose intentions are usually concealed by the layperson's incomprehension, whose actions are peremptorily conceived as admissions of defeat, an incapacity to live in the world.

The pair of nuns who teach and guide me in these months had been a couple for many years, before renouncing sexual intimacy, for a deeper pursuit to be shared. These nuns I witnessed, helping one another climb ladders, lift wood, their souls related to their bodies and other bodies from a great distance, but with deep tenderness.



Attached is a photo of my little Kuti in the woods. I've got a small pot belly stove in there, it keeps me warm of an evening... A sandy meditation walking path that I sweep regularly – who was it continually pushing that boulder up a hill? I hope he didn't expect much from it.

These three months will be my first proper stretch of isolation. Wherever I have been there has always been the prospects of a social life, or on short retreats I've taken the silence as a reprieve. But here, unless well managed, the imposed silence can feel viscous, molasses-thick. I'm learning more and more to ignore that discursive, ruminating mind I've carried forever on my neck, always looking down, a guilty child, pondering in circles.

For company I have a flock of sulphur crested cockatoos – what's the collective noun for cockatoo? I hope it's something fittingly ignominious and raucous. *A crackle*. They swoop down making a racket through the neighbouring gullies at sunset – the bush equivalent of packs of Australians on holidays.

A lyrebird has been digging through the sand around my Kuti with its claws, mucking up my carefully swept path. Though he's very beautiful; long tiger- tail feathers, gossamer whiskers in a veil above them. The mimicry I've heard is impressive car alarms, a camera, once a human cry. I've been wondering on how they communicate back and forth, what meaning is relayed in their mimicking, what sense?

In my teens, as an Italian boy in an Anglophone school, I have emblazed in memory the image of an adolescent peer mockingly making a waggish expansive gesture, thumbs and forefingers connected in a circuit. "*Perfectto*" he cried, chin jutting forward, then "*Mama Mia*" pronounced with dramatic intonation.

There's a Youtube sensation of a European band doing a striking if garbled rendition of what an English singer sounds like – it's uncanny. It resembles the strange feeling while exhausted, trying to read, recognising the words but no sense is transmitted.

There has to be a term for this act of partially failed cognition. Or is it partially-successful fraudulent meaning-construction? I wonder. I've been wondering too, is this synecdochic for poetry; which derives at least part of its meaning from the *almost* sensical, afforded significance on account of the reader's faith in the possibilities of the medium?

The way Ashberry's sentences always felt meaningful, but no sense of their sense could be given. The appearance of narrational flow, the use of syntactical connectives, the deictics and pronouns that suggested shifting narrators. These created a propulsive force that lacked content.

People ponder the relationship between meditation and introspection, asking – how can true insights be derived non-propositionally, by sitting, watching air vacate and inhabit lungs? Perhaps Lerner's response stands best, once again; in both *the arc or feel of thinking is experienced*, yet *in the absence of thoughts*.

Love
Juniper

On Undigested Love

The human biome's popularity of late staggers - the gut, our second brain. What if your world experience could be radically altered by the consistency of your stool? What if existential angst, the saying goes, were a product of indigestion?

Indigestion; how petty to be forever immersed in a constant struggle to modulate our own internal environments. We have grown weary of thoughts habituated, thoughts consistent within their own parameters, but maddening from the outside. Such inescapable yet empty certitudes up our self-concept. Paul de Man, reflecting on insight and blindness, disrupts the usual associations. He demonstrates how insight can obscure other things. Insight can be a clarity that clouds our vision.

Rilke wrote too, that everything, *Everything* is gestation and then a bringing forth. So best, he suggests, to leave your opinions to their own quiet undisturbed development. This requires a level of patience and trust that wisdom's growth is accretive, like the sedimentary layers of coastal mangroves. It forgets that the digestive tract is an internal, that constitutes another outside. Could love, like digestion, be by-product of taut muscles? Requiring fascia release, solvable with a 10 buck foam roller from Kmart?

Right now I'm being eaten by mosquitoes, reclining on a bolster. On the step is a thermos filled with Gen Mai Cha - some gymnast hoops hang from the tree in front of me. The mosquitoes are unfortunately waking up with the warmth.

I'm learning the proliferation that flows from stopping. It's so easy to get high on *doing*, but within days my high is cyclic, habituated - just living out patterns I'm oblivious to. It's in stopping that I've found a different sort of flow. Not the flow of ritual, but perhaps its breaking; I allow action to be asymmetric and in disrupting thought's familiar sequence, new possibilities open up.

From the deck of my kuti I'm looking down into Kangaroo Valley, across the yellow streaked cliffs. There's a wide open gorge on one side, on the other a cave's open mouth. A cool breeze flows from it. I go outside to hang up my wet clothes. There is a nylon wire strung between a stringy bark and a squiggly gum. I attempt to peg a shirt, but the plastic pegs adorning it are brittle from slow erosion, one snaps when I reach for it. I like the domicile feel the clothes line provides; out here one my own. I could be home.

Though I shouldn't say alone; at sunset the Sulphur Crested cockatoos descend, white phantoms through the neighboring gorge. Earlier that afternoon in the heat, an echidna waddled through the underbrush beside my sandy walking path.

That day I saw Electra everywhere. I could see her racing ahead of me into the forest with a camera, coming back to the kuti, jumper laden with flora. I envision her marvelling over the burst banksia pods littering the ground with vivid red. The new ferns unfurling their tiny fists, springing fresh grasses. The sunset, a violent pink.

The Shoalhaven had been haven for me. Coming here for a decade, each time had been formative in different ways. It is a rare and beautiful thing in the world to have a place for retreat, quiet reflection. For growing patience and tenderness. After reading a collection of essays by Montaigne, I stopped to write Electra.

Dear El,

The wind is ever present somewhere, I get to know its different tones. At midnight under the moon the wombat's stalk, stolid silhouettes all that I see, while at dawn the bush hens scratch.

Keats, in his letters, would never exclude or count as irrelevant the physical particulars of his letter writing, we've established this. He was always describing his bodily position at the time of writing, or the conditions of his room; "the fire is at its last click, I am sitting here with my back to it with one foot rather askew upon the rug..." etc. etc.

I'll follow his lead. The evening is setting in, settling down. The moon is half and on the up, gibbous and waxing. Mars is adjacent, as if tellingly – the red giant is the only visible star amidst satellites and the distinctive thunder of train lines some miles off.

The 'energy', or whatever I mean, in this forest retreat is profoundly dense. Almost overwhelmingly so at times. Attribute it to the moon. Attribute it to the Vassa rains retreat, attribute it to the presence of three highly awakened nuns I admire greatly as teachers and role models. Attribute it to the forest's still; crimson rosellas, Wendy the wallaby. But then it could be the fasting till 12 noon, the medicinal mushroom tinctures, the removal from technology, from society. How puritanical I've become! How confused, in my certainty.

A friend referred to an Osho retreat as not just secluded, but prohibitively isolated. That, in pursuing the goal to create space for a decolonizing of self (lovely phrase) they fell to a cultish extreme.

I'd been thinking on the Intermediate disturbance hypothesis in biology: Shake something too much *nothing can grow*. Shake something too little *nothing can change*. An ecological regulatory principle of non-equilibrium.

I'm reading Walter Benjamin again. Strange to read someone and know at the same time their grizzly fate. Benjamin hung himself from a tree, in desperation, refused

a visa (which for a Jew in France in WWII, was a death sentence). Perhaps Benjamin suffered the condition he attributes Proust, as he wrote: “[Proust] died of the same inexperience that permitted him to write his works. He died of ignorance, because he did not know how to make a fire, to open a window.”

Is there some implied masculine stoicism here? I wonder as I feed wood into my stove. Some latent attempt to dispel an ignorance that arises not from some special Proustian genius (of which worldly inexperience is the sign) – but from worldly comfort, an urban-doting, equally debilitating?

I thought on Ludwig living on the edge of some Fjord. What am I trying to live into here, alone in this forest, writing something into existence?

After laying the foundations in his *Tractatus* to delight even the most rabid logical positivists, Wittgenstein then, true to form, back-flipped and turn-faced. He began to seek the therapeutic in what was deflationary. Took the world like a glass snow ball – shook it upside down to observe the contents in freefall. White glitter as false snow – he opened his eyes to language’s various winks; its sly likenings.

“What if all metaphysical angst, was a product of indigestion?” we asked. After that I would bemuse or exasperate professors by writing my essays steeped in the body’s historicity:

What kind of a chair did Marx sit in? I ask; *and could he even sit, suffering those haemorrhoids?* In my mind’s eye I see him shifting distractedly in that reading room in the British Museum. What bearing did this have on the pessimism in his Historical Materialism?

How pious was the agricultural town Heidegger grew from? How devout his Catholic family? And what to deduce from the father as bell-ringer, gravedigger, and caretaker of the vestments and sacred vessels.

As a gardener what did Ludwig plant? Did he always preference a deck chair? What bearing on his philosophy of the austerity of his spartan bedroom?

What about Kant, who never travelled - *categorically refused* to leave the town you could say... Was he prone at least to walk the park, as constitutional, and if so what bearing of the presence of his landlord’s Doberman? Did he pat it, by way of charity – did it bite his hand, securing him in the conviction that its worth was purely instrumental to the cultivation of human virtue?

Did Descartes room, from which he composed *The Meditations*, look out onto a busy square? Did the church opposite have steeples?

Did Bakhtin really roll up his final manuscript as tallyhoes? And what bearing did it have that the October revolution took place in November? And what *about* the Indigestion?

I stretch my limbs every morning, alone on my deck in the early light. I think on the years spent in a sweaty room, on a sprayed down mat, surrounded by the latex clad. I use a spiked foam-roller to self-massage, for myofascial release. The cliffs are notched where streams once drained the plateau. Stretching beyond you see the Kangaroo Valley's heath, its hedgelands wreathed in mist – and beyond that I imagine the coastal escarpments, Jarvis Bay, finally the sea.

Now I'm overlooking the looming cliffs, a mix of quartzite and clay, in high vertical stripes. I sit down on my deck to write Electra a final note.

Dear El,

On Epigraphs

Roland Barthes was fatally struck down by a laundry van on campus. Walter Benjamin died with a refused Visa. *That we should not judge of our life's meaning till after our death* – I read in Montaigne, but what meaning to ascribe *these* deaths? And why is it only at the last cast that all our actions must be tried? One day to judge all days that preceded?

Spinoza said we can desire to live life in the right way, *only if we desire to live first*. We must write epigraphically, as if our first thoughts to be read condition the sense of the whole – but ultimately the whole's meaning, is it determined in the final stanza? A passage reflecting back on the totality?

For the Tibetans, the grandest occasion to prepare for in life is its finale, *Fin* – the closing movement and exit scene. For them, it is a weighty moment as a determination of your soul's trajectory is there decided. You have to practice for death, for how you will face it.

Granted to complicate this picture: Buddhism denies transmigration, of the soul or anything. The core of impermanence is non-persistence; from instant to instant all is sacrificed; no remainder on the roof. There is this this – instantaneous ripples, discrete wavelets that propagate, spread, dwindle – that burn themselves out algorithmically.

Following the Tibetans, in this book's final moments: what image should I leave you on? What decisive comment? Just as surely the point of composition, its leading lines, is to pull the viewer's eyes across the painting, so the gaze may finally fall where it must. In which case: is the meaning of the whole read in its final stanza; where the eye takes its rest?

As I write a bush hen skitters about in the very dry underbrush. I can hear the lyre birds echoing off one another. The sun rising. I'm going to head to breakfast and gather fire wood for the nuns.

END