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Lilly

The Story of Nebuchadnezzar Nebuchadnezzarsson in Life and in Death

By Halldór Laxness

Translated by Axel Eyberg and John Watkins

I gave the man this name just so that people would take notice of the story and think to themselves, "Ah, this must be an amusing story!" Otherwise I might have let it suffice to call him N. N., although neither of these names was used at the funeral which was held in connection with his demise. The truth is that I have either forgotten what his name was or have never really known it for certain. But what does it matter? For as you notice there is another name behind that one, and this first name is really much more important, as we shall see when we have finished the story.

It is really a very long story. Indeed, it is so tremendously long that when I start thinking about it, I am often shocked at how long it is.... And yet it began with one of the shortest melodies I have ever heard. In fact it could hardly be called a melody. It was rather a fragment of a melody, the latter half of a short melody, and the biggest part of it was a single concluding note. And that one note was so long drawn out that from any consideration of reasonable proportion one could rightly have imagined it to be the end of a great symphony by one of the better known composers. Thus with the higher art in mind I have passed this

fragment of melody on to an acquaintance of mine who aspires to become a master composer. He may use it in a symphony when he has attained sufficient stature and when the world has begun to take an interest in those melodies which have their origin in the respiratory organs of the people of Snaefellsnes.*

Now we shall hear the story.

It happened when I was a student and lived in a basement in Reykjavik, in a wretched little hole separated only by a thin partition from the furnace room. One winter I noticed that this melody was always being sung, especially late in the evening after the fire had been banked for the night. It was repeated over and over again, in a dull hoarse voice like a wavy and woolly line. And on the last note it was as though the singer had forgotten to take a breath, so that finally the note died out and silence followed automatically as if the singer had died at the same time as the tone. Time passed, and nothing more was heard from him. But in a little while a kind of mumbling became audible, and this mumbling struggled hard to become musical notes, with long pauses in between, and it was obvious that the melody continued to live on in the singer's breast, although the voice was hoarse and cracked and the tones came to grief on the vocal chords. Yet it never happened that the singer did not ultimately find himself again in this short melody with that long note, which, as has been mentioned before, is destined to become a great symphony.

Thus did he sing for me in the stillness, night after night, as the winter passed, and when I began to investigate the source of this evening song I discovered that it was the man who looked after the furnace. As midnight approached he went away.

One evening I went into the little nook where the furnace stood. The embers glowed red in the darkness behind the half-open furnace door. And in front of the furnace sat Nebuchadnezzar Nebuchadnezzarsson, almost invisible in the darkness, and sang.

"Good evening," said I.

"Good evening," came the answer from the darkness in an old, hoarse voice.

"It's warm here," said I.

"I'm leaving," said he.

"Isn't this your room?" I asked.

"No," he answered.

* Large peninsula to the northwest of Reykjavik.

"Oh, isn't it?" I said. "But still I've often heard you singing here in the evenings."

"I'm leaving," he said apologetically and got up.

"Oh, please don't go on my account. I just dropped in to see you because I've so often heard you sing."

"I don't sing," said he.

"But I've often heard you," I protested.

"No," he said. "I've never been able to sing."

"I've learned the melody," I said.

But he merely muttered something to himself and tried to slip out through the door behind me.

"Don't let me disturb you," I said.

"It's bedtime," he said and left.

One time in frost and snow I was shown a piano case behind some privies down by the shore. There lived Nebuchadnezzar Nebuchadnezzarsson. Perhaps the man gets his inclination for music from living in a piano box, I thought.

A few evenings passed in silence.

But as time went on he forgot me again and began to sing as before the same fragment of a melody with the same long note that died away. Then I went in to him again.

"Good evening," said I.

"Good evening," said he.

"You're singing," said I.

"No," said he.

"Where did you learn this melody?" I asked.

"Melody? That's no melody."

"But you're always singing one tune."

"I don't sing," he said. "I've never been able to sing."

"You hum," I protested.

Then he said: "I used to long to be able to sing at one time. But that's past. I never even think of it now. I just sit here in front of the furnace sometimes when I have finished banking the fire. But now I'm leaving."

"Where are you from?" I asked.

"From the West," he answered.

"Where in the West?"

"From Olafsvik."

"Is that a good place?"

"The sea is as rough at Olafsvik as elsewhere," said he.

"Do you have relatives in the West?"

"They're dead."

"What did you do in the West?"

"What did I do? I didn't do much of anything. I did whatever came along, sometimes on sea, sometimes on land. All depending on what came along."

"Why did you come to Reykjavik?"

He was silent for a long time and finally replied: "It's all over and done with the West long ago. It's all over in the West."

"You were undoubtedly right in coming to Reykjavik," I said. "In my opinion Reykjavik is a much nicer place to live in than anywhere else in the country."

He was silent for a long time and sat there on a box in front of the furnace. This time there was a light in the little furnace room, so he looked straight down at the holes in the toes of his boots.

"During my first night here in Reykjavik I slept in the cemetery," he said.

"Did you really?" I exclaimed, and added in order to cheer him up, "There are many who have had to be content to sleep more than one night in the cemetery."

"Yes," said he.

His cheeks were grimy and he had a gray beard that did not look as if it had been brushed.

"Your shoes are in bad shape," I said.

"Not too bad," he said. "I found them down in Vatnsmyri* the year before last. Somebody must have forgotten them in the peat bog."

He stood up and took down his hat which was hanging on a nail behind the furnace. It was one of those derbies which businessmen wear while they are new, but which are generally thrown into the ash can when a rent appears between the crown and the brim or when some child has stuck a knife through the top.

"May I see your hat?" I said.

The hole in the top was big enough for a child's fist.

"Your hat's getting pretty old," I said, looking up at the ceiling through the hole. "But it has obviously been a good hat in its day."

I handed him back his hat. He took it and he too looked through the hole.

"It's not everybody that can read the Lord's Prayer through his hat," he said with a grimace. He had only one tooth.

* Name of a bog near town.

Then the long-awaited spring came. It is never more tempting to hang out of the window and look at everything that goes on in the street, especially the most trivial things, than in the spring when one is studying for examinations. At such a time one reads into what goes on in the street various significant meanings.

On moving day a new family moved into one of the apartments on the middle floor of the house. I had somehow or other become aware of it, but of course it was no concern of mine. It was a man and his wife. They had one daughter, she might have been eight years old. Her name was Lilly, and I guessed from her appearance that the couple were out-of-town people because she had braids; they were blonde braids, and she wore homemade woolen stockings. The little girl played with the other children in the yard outside my window. Her mother was terribly fond of her and leaned out of her window on the second floor most of the day directing the girl like a regiment with resolute commands:

"Look out for the car! Look out for the drunk man! Look out for the dog! Lilly! Lilly! Look out for the police!"

This was at the time when there were still old stone fences made of ordinary field stones between the lots in the town, and on the other side of the street there was one of these fences with a small green field behind it. But this was a rather quiet street, and on the fence sat Nebuchadnezzar Nebuchadnezzarsson in the blue spring sunshine watching the children play in the yard. Admiration shone from his grimy face through the unkempt beard. But as the day passed, the children grew tired and went home for a bite to eat. Lilly was left alone in the yard playing hop-scotch all by herself, and then Nebuchadnezzar Nebuchadnezzarsson called:

"Lilly."

But she pretended not to hear and kept on hopping on one foot as if she were extremely interested in winning the game, and then Nebuchadnezzar Nebuchadnezzarsson called again:

"Lilly, my dear!"

But she still pretended not to hear and only after a little while did she look up to the window to see whether her mother was still there, but her mother had gone out into the kitchen to cook.

"Hasn't little Lilly got anything to say to the old man Nebuchadnezzar Nebuchadnezzarsson today?" he asked from the fence. And he drew up out of his pocket a little paper bag which he had kept hidden all this time. At this the little girl walked straight across the street, a bit skeptically, with her hands behind her back,

and looked down into his paper bag. Then she looked up at the window. There were raisins, if you please, in the bag. She still acted as if she were not surprised at this and had little or no interest in it. But it wound up with both of them sitting on the fence munching raisins, she ten to his one. At first she dangled her legs shyly and looked critically at his unkempt beard. Then she went on playing hop-scotch on the street in front of him. Her mother called down from the window and told her to come in for supper, but she came back in a little while because she knew there was still something left in the bag.

Thus the spring passed, and before long Lilly was no longer skeptical of Nebuchadnezzar Nebuchadnezzarsson but ran to meet him when she saw him coming, dived into his pocket, and found for herself the bag of raisins. And sometimes in the evening they sat for a long time on the fence, and I felt sure the old man was telling the little girl stories, because she listened so attentively to what he was saying.

"Are they some relatives of yours, these people?" I asked, meaning the little girl's parents.

"They're from the West," he said.

"Then you know something about them?"

"Yes," he said. "That is Lilly."

I couldn't quite make the man out. He seemed to me rather strange, but I didn't worry about that. It was no concern of mine. I had other things to think about. And even if I had discovered that these people were not from the West at all, but from the East, I shouldn't have felt like arguing about it with the old fellow.

"He was just about twenty," I heard him say, "and they had always known each other. She was just a few months younger. He offered to build her a little house next to the brook, with a tiny lawn and a vegetable patch as was then the custom. At that time he was fishing for shares with the late Gudmundur, skipper of the *Hope*, and he was doing well. But he never could sing. Her name was Lilly."

"And then what?" asked the little girl.

But I had no time to eavesdrop any longer and thought to myself, "He's just telling her some old story from the West."

In the autumn, I came back from the North, and one day as I was chatting with some friends on a streetcorner, I noticed a man standing staring at me a short distance away. He waited for me to say good-bye to them, and when I had done so he overtook me

and stretched out his dirty hand and said, "Nebuchadnezzar Nebuchadnezzarsson."

"What's new?" I asked.

"Nothing," he answered.

"Was there something you wanted?"

"No," he said. "I just wanted to see whether you'd recognize me."

"Of course," I said. "And what's more, I still know your melody. How's your little girl friend?"

"They've taken away my old-age pension," he said, "that was thirty crowns."

"Why?"

"That fellow Joseph said I was using it to buy raisins. But you must know a lot about the law."

"Who is that fellow Joseph?"

"He's a relative of mine. He sometimes helps me out with a little fish or something."

"Look here," I said, "You ought to go to the mayor about that," because I didn't have time.

"I don't know," said he. "It doesn't make much difference. I may perhaps be able to get a house this winter."

"A house?"

"Yes, like last year."

"Aren't you going to look after the furnace in the same house you had last year anymore?"

"No," said he. "It's all up with everything in that house. It's all up with that house."

"How's that?"

"Oh, I don't know," he said.

"Good-bye," said I.

"Good-bye, sir," said he. "And thanks for your kindness."

He lifted his hat.

I did not see him again to take any notice of him until many years later. I was then a medical student. He was carried into the morgue covered by a sheet, and I recognized him although he had been cleaned up. I had no feeling for him beyond that which one has for dead men who have been outcasts of society, and it was not until after the funeral held in connection with his demise that I noticed the congruity in his life and death. This was a man who did not owe anything. He was found dead in a box. Nobody really knew his name or where he came from, much less what had been the aim of his life. Even on this dissection day I could not

remember the melody he had sung. One thing was certain: he was carved up with scientific precision, and we scrutinized his insides with more attention than he had ever been looked at from the outside in all his life.

But why should I be telling about this here? It is long since I lost interest in medical science and turned to other subjects. But as so many years have gone by since then, I shall confess that a little fraud was practiced upon him in the name of science. As a matter of fact, his bones were removed and polished. His skeleton is now used for scientific observations—I shall not say where—the rest of his corpse was discarded. This was a scientific secret and conspiracy and we put gravel in the coffin. One of the group took care of that, and we followed him to the grave, a few of us medical students, in order to prevent anybody from taking a peek at the corpse at the last moment. We carried the coffin into the church and out again.

It was indeed a day of appalling irony, the shortest day of the year. It was just two days before Christmas, on the day of Saint Thorlak. The funeral was hurriedly held before it was quite daylight, and what made it extraordinary was the circumstance that the church was draped in black ceremonial crepe, because at noon on this very same day one of the most distinguished consuls general in the city was to be buried. As has been said, Nebuchadnezzar Nebuchadnezzarsson was squeezed in on account of the effrontery of the cemetery officials, who proclaimed that, because the Christmas celebrations were so near at hand, this man would have to be buried today or never. And it was a downright scandal that such a measly funeral should be held with the church hung in mourning.

A northeaster was blowing and we hustled the coffin in through a shower of hail. Our chief worry was that the bottom might fall out and the gravel spill down on the church floor in the midst of all this solemnity and sorrow. And when we got halfway up the aisle I became so agitated by the creaking of the shoddy coffin that I could not help scolding the silly fool who had been charged with "laying out" the gravel. Besides, the weight of the coffin was practically crushing us. We sat down in the front pew as if we were some sort of relatives of the deceased, and the pastor hurried in from the vestry looking rather shamefaced, as was to be expected, over this misuse of the mourning draperies. God help us if the consul's family should get word of it! the expression on his face seemed to be saying. He delivered the brief funeral sermon

he had held the week before over an insignificant woman from out of town like a shot. As might be expected, he tripped up time and again when he was supposed to say "our late beloved brother" and it was written in the sermon "our beloved sister." Once he even blurted out that "this late beloved sister of ours was sorely lamented by her surviving husband and her children in another part of the country." I was deathly afraid that somebody would notice this nonsense and looked back over my shoulder into the church. But the funeral procession, aside from the undertaker, consisted solely of one old woman, deaf I hoped, who sat far back in the church, and I tried to console myself with the idea that she had come in only to get out of the hail and that she had otherwise no interest in who was being buried.

But when we had carried the coffin out again and the hearse had begun to crawl away, who should make as if to follow to the cemetery but this old woman with her black Sunday shawl around her wrinkled face and her blue striped apron. So I and two others saw nothing else for it but to trudge along behind to keep an eye on things and if necessary to prevent the old woman from raising a rumpus at the cemetery. For indeed we did not feel at ease about this funeral until the grave had been filled in. Finally, however, my two companions wearied of this wandering, and slipped off into the Café Uppsalin, and it fell upon me to keep watch on the funeral procession all the way. So we tramped along behind the coffin, this old woman and I, with the pastor and the undertaker both in high silk hats.

After the grave had been filled in and the pastor and the undertaker had gone, the old woman stood there still, looking at the earth in the hail storm. I lingered at the gate of the cemetery, but she did not come, so I turned back to the grave again.

"What are you waiting for, my dear woman?" I asked. "Did you know this man?"

She looked at me half in fear and when she finally tried to answer, her face contorted with pain, her lips trembled, and the corners of her mouth dropped, so that I could see she had lost her teeth. And her old red eyes filled with tears. I have described somewhere else how unpleasant it is to see old people cry.

"Don't cry, my dear woman," I said. "He is with God."

"Yes," she said and dried her tears with the corner of her apron.

"You ought to go home before you get a chill," I said, because I did not want the woman to hang around there any longer.

We walked together through the cemetery.

"Who are you?" I asked.

"I come from the West," she said.

"You are not from Olafsvik?"

"Yes."

"Then you knew him of course."

"Yes, we were of the same age. Then I married in the South. I lived for forty years in Keflavik."

"What is your name?"

"My name is Lilly."

"Is your husband living?"

"No, he died long ago."

"Do you have any children?"

"Oh, I've brought thirteen of them into this world," answered the woman with such a resigned note in her voice that I understood at once that she must have at least sixty grandchildren.

"There are many strange things," I said. "He was always lonely."

She trudged along silently at my side over the grave mounds and I hardly expected that she would answer me further; a new storm was on its way across Skerjafjord. So I prepared to take leave of her at the gate of the cemetery and took off my hat.

"Good-bye," I said.

She stretched out to me her old, bony hand and looking straight at me, the only partaker in her grief, she said, "I too was always lonely."

And then her face again got out of control and again she raised the corner of her apron to her eyes and turned away.

And here ends the story of Nebuchadnezzar Nebuchadnezzarsson, who spent only one night in the cemetery.

Flow — Winged Crocodile

A Pair / Actions Are Erased /
Appear

Leslie Scalapino

chax
tucson
2010

for Michael McClure and Amy Evans McClure

Flow—*Winged Crocodile* is a play in two acts separated by a pause in darkness. The tone of the play is light comedy for a charge of combustion by the performers who are sprightly seeming to push on any balance accruing there (where they are in it) until it spills over (as if the performers are in reference to an imaginary line) vomiting outside by it being inside (as if inside and outside is in them, and in us, the viewers). Directions may say that an actor "says gorgeous puking." This is to be done by their enacting their words as if words are 'the gorgeous outside.' As such the actors are elegant, never shouting or gross.

FLOW — WINGED CROCODILE

ACT I

The three performers who speak are young women, the play demonstrating simultaneous conflict and serene balance between the left and the right side of a person's brain: **LEFT-SIDE OF THE BRAIN** and **RIGHT-SIDE OF THE BRAIN** are questioned by and in conversation with **TANYA**.

LEFT-SIDE OF THE BRAIN (L) is a young woman wearing a black slinky dress. **RIGHT-SIDE OF THE BRAIN** is a young woman wearing a colorful dress of purple, red, green. **TANYA** is a young woman dressed to imitate the appearance of Patty Hearst in the photos of her in the bank heist with the SLA: she wears jeans, a beret, maybe a partial Patty-Hearst mask, and carries a toy AK47.

A fourth performer, who never speaks, is a dancer, the **CROCODILE-MICHELIN-RHINO**, dressed in a sheer puffy grey suit like the Michelin man (not bulky thick, the suit allows the movement of her body to be seen); she has small green wings on her back as the winged crocodile, and a small grey horn on her forehead like a rhino. As rhino she charges, crumples, charges, somersaulting. Yet her dance is subtle, humorous, frenzied (that could be when slow). **CROCODILE-MICHELIN-RHINO** is apparently chaos and violence but in the course of her dance during the play she transforms that description: revealing that she is the body, pure kinetic daemonic motion that has no

language—but a manifestation equal to and alongside the left and right sides of the brain. She's a daemon, a highly skilled clown. I wrote the part for the dancer Molissa Fenley. The dancer dances to music by Joan Jeanrenaud, *Strange Toys*, tracks 2, 6, 7, and 10.

Where there are paired poems, the left side is read vertically first, then the right side read vertically. These are displayed in this manner to demonstrate on the page the left and right sides of the brain at once. Throughout the play the performers speak line breaks only as casual conversational phrasing never stilted. Although they recognize rhyme in their passages, that emphasis is as spoofing their own thoughts and actions as they're doing actions and speaking these. Sometimes they sound as if they are speaking inner shape, casual conversation, and reading doctrine given to them—all of these at once. When one speaks a phrase in quotation marks, she is quoting someone else and herself at the same time. The sound, as the syntax of the poems, is an interior/inner that's only heard (by the performers and by the audience) intuitively.

The set is a bedroom, completely ordinary except the furniture is very tall in relation to the people: a high bed on the audience's right side of stage (with a sign above stage that reads "RIGHT SIDE") and a tall tea table at the audience's left side of stage (with a sign above the stage reading "LEFT SIDE"). There are three very small children's chairs. The performers use these chairs both to sit in (they may sit in the small chairs at the tea table—which is too high for them to reach its top—as they're drinking from imaginary tea cups) and from which to climb onto the bed

and onto the tea table. The performers never look at the dancer (green-winged CROCODILE- MICHELIN-RHINO with one horn); they do not ever see her while she charges and crumples amongst them. Nor is the audience seeing the performers' imaginations either, as they speak of the hologram of winged CROCODILE-MICHELIN-RHINO: They don't create her as their imaginings, she is in a separate, simultaneous realm.

TANYA stands (audience's) center-left; LEFT-SIDE (L) stands stage left by tea table; RIGHT-SIDE (R) stands stage-right near the bed.

Winged CROCODILE-MICHELIN-RHINO runs in from the side and does a wild dance to music track 2, slowly, lightly charges (soft somersaulting), then crumples to knees, then charges. She ends her soft charging and crumpling before the others begin to speak. CROCODILE-MICHELIN-RHINO sits on floor, still. Music and dance end.

TANYA comes forward to center edge of stage. She stretches one arm as if it's just morning, the other arm cradling an AK47. She speaks to the audience, gesturing to either side of her to indicate L and R:

TANYA	the two parts
	of the brain
	equal at once
	race
	together always
	seemed
	in conflict
	or (oar) serene

Green-winged CROCODILE-MICHELIN-RHINO at LEFT-SIDE'S first words begins, without music, minimal movement suggesting she will charge, crumble; she does one somersault. L, R, and TANYA throughout the play do not ever look at the dancer.

L A hologram of MP
 shows her to be
 a winged crocodile
 dismembering people
 whirring into them as
 swimming in them in a
 different light also a
 charging rhino that kneeling
 gets up and butts others
 in a crowd with her horn.

*R stands in front of bed, looks at audience while speaking this as fast
rushing gorgeous puke:*

R As
 the winged crocodile
 that
 swims in blood
 the hologram shows
 her hating women x-
 cluding them from work
 or recognition which she
 determines to herself
 and her few pets men.

*TANYA moves to small child's chair and sits throughout CROCODILE-
MICHELIN-RHINO'S minimal movement without music. TANYA, not
noticing the latter, is hurling-immersing herself:*

TANYA She screams
 at the women
 massed like
 birds

"You (wade) walk
behind the men
the men,"
she screams "are
who enjoy
(mine) this"

L (looks up, irrelevantly)

Employed
from
being
a pet
high
expire
fill
place
of others.

There's no action

*TANYA begins sipping from imaginary tea cup. CROCODILE-
MICHELIN-RHINO dances to music track #6, comes up to an
imaginary line in front as if it is barring her, and dances there, then is
drawn backwards and forward charging again. Dance and music end.*

L still standing in front of tea table gazing at R as consumed in seeing:

L Everything
is consumed
a few plates are laid out
and she gobbles at every one
in the room.

R on the floor
her pets
and she leading them
are given everything
a dog and pony show.

TANYA

“one
is seamless
whole
winged crocodile
(hologram) thinks
but mechanical games
see by not being one”
MP thinks
“but one person created
is inside and outside
two/too”
outside person
thinks.

R using small chair gets up and stands on the bed speaks to L rushing flow:

22

as such emptied games
as hierarchy in it
self—present being one's
self is incorrect dis
Elision fields dained—games
(this is said sententiously) "empty as self is (always)."

R on bed and L by tea table speak to each other as if the two sides of the brain alter each other now:

L Each exists
on a plain empty as all
linked to each other
produce
alter
flow continually.

R When, on medicine,
O.D.ed, an accident,
the characteristic
of the brain
became
clear
that it is
recurrence
to recycle
and recycle in one
(person).

L using small chair gets up on tea table, runs around on it as if she's trying to find a comfortable spot on the table the way a dog digs in its

bed to soften a spot, she finds such a spot with her feet and stands there, nonchalantly speaking her subject unrelated to running on the table:

L For her, though—games
 are (empty)
 tradition of that game
 as such
 is hierarchy/higher
 than anyone changing
 it—they're excluded
 and nothing

CROCODILE-MICHELIN-RHINO rushes in, somersaulting. Stands doing minimal motions without music.

L standing on tea table vomiting the invisible outside:

L Except for herself
 “women”—she says
 can't change their
 hierarchy and “only”
 —may be anything—
 by speaking/doing men's
 these ideas in their mode”
 fixing a single way

R standing on bed vomiting the invisible outside:

R While
 the nation (is) to be
 may be led by the waiting in the wings
 Barbie doll with horns

she's
who says they're of/the people, while
have always said/
are saying give the rich/huge
tax breaks wildly not of the
people

L casually reorients herself to find a different comfortable spot on tea table:

L So—where were we—?
 seeing

TANYA seated in child's chair at tea table gets up from chair and cranes her neck:

TANYA the two parts
 of the brain
 equal at once
 race
 see opposite alter
 a
 (the same) thing they
 see.

R tests spots on the bed as if she is getting her sea-legs:

R The man
 de mand
 ing racism—his
 asserting his
 view

by/and in meeting in
public saying *my*
observing
his being being that—
is 'I'm
immature Rebel
Without a Cause.'

TANYA Say that happened—!?
 —as if 'So what' or
 —"I don't believe you"

CROCODILE-MICHELIN-RHINO runs off stage.

*TANYA gets up on the bed goes to the head of it,
further end from audience, other end from R.*

*L ignores R and speaks as if the behavior of the man she's describing
is an event that happened to herself, reversing him in the terms of his
own senses—so she's saying utter freedom:*

L My seeming to him thwarting his
 authority (my just discovering this) as
 he's scorning that *there is present-being-free*
 —at all—my sense there is (that)—by
 there being no authority then
 (in 'present' or in 'being')

*TANYA ignores both L and R; she is either explaining the same man's
behavior or appropriating the event as her own. She's standing at the
head of the bed, further from the audience than R who is at the end
of the bed—TANYA picks up a pillow and says the rushing motion:*

He scorns that

present-is-being-only-no-authority-then

when there's no authority

even by every thin being at once

there

—and connecting—in—and producing

the gorge/ space, movement

firmament-movement

TANYA steps down from bed

L steps down from table, speaks passionately unified (as the continual double, the pair, of opposites):

L The man
de mand
s authority
 there being it
has contempt for
 there's
(no)
present-being-free
(is)
by no-authority *then*

*R standing on bed on shaky sea-legs speaks happy
as if carried on a flood:*

R While
the nation (is) to be
may be led by the waiting in the wings

	Barbie doll with horns
	she's
They all look	who says they're off/the people, while
off into the audience	have always said/
	are saying give the rich/huge
	tax breaks wildly not of the
	people.

R, L, and TANYA stop looking at audience. Then CROCODILE-MICHELIN-RHINO comes in from behind them: as if charging, crumples charges throughout their exchange:

L Actions have
 structure
 apparent
 ly
 not as a whole later?

TANYA gets up on tea table, runs around on it feeling with her feet for a soft spot, as a dog paws its bed; she settles on a spot and standing on it says as if they're gorgeous unified labor:

TANYA While games are nothing 'inner'
 because set rules?
 the nation (is) to be led
 by the Barbie doll with horns
 who says she's/they're
 the people, while saying
 they've always said
 "give the rich huge tax breaks"
 and they'll want to put some in/
 back—bilk everyone for the people

open fools
what is the Barbie doll with horns
thinking?

CROCODILE-MICHELIN-RHINO stands amidst scene doing minimal movement without music. L, standing beside tea table looks up at Tanya, says gorgeous puking:

L A winged crocodile
 guts—in their face
 the foreigners—in their country
 who'd
 been—now dead—occupied
 wade in sewage—not fixed yet
 (not repaired by Haliburton)
 —while the woman also rhino
 in hologram
 kneels charges crumples charges

*CROCODILE-MICHELIN-RHINO stands still amidst them.
R, L, and TANYA are matching each other, cheerfully grandly modestly
vying, as if on a line of speaking and attention, they call to each other
while standing separate from one another:*

R saying the men her pets big
 names have to be added, she
 cancels others/society is obliterated
 in cronyism
 everything has to have big names

L, standing next to tea table, realizes:

L I think we should obliterate
 society—and then—it will begin

TANYA, standing on tea table, comments dryly:

TANYA I don't believe that any more

L bursts racing:

L Barbie doll with horns
 has no senses touch and
 taste buds?
 s rule of law the men
 cronies put in office
 however incompetent skim
 off
 the whole are power

R, standing on bed, lifts off racing:

R A hologram of
 the winged crocodile
 who swims
 eating the legs of the
 foreigners we've caught
 and fleeced for oil bombs
 go off in hotel
 frequented by whole govt

*R and L speak to each other the sensation of having burst, equal,
racing:*

L the two
 coincide at
 ban

books the Barbie
doll with horns
tries to—and to
fire the librarian for
not banning them—and
MP bans the books
if not written by men pets
list of books that's hierarchy.

R what is 'inner'
is 'outside' making
'inside' outside of outside
not itself when inside
 outside inside
that's the *inside outside*
is the most troublesome,
the present.

*Winged CROCODILE-MICHELIN-RHINO RHINO dances to music
track 7. Dance and music end. She sits on floor at back center of
stage wagging/swaying her head to herself:*

L, standing beside tea table, gorgeous puking, to R:

L I needed to change the way
I used to see—I was using
a line—as if horizon—to see
any event hold to the line in space
 or separate on it
 separating from it?
Submitting all events
 to this line
 to float

to see them
ultimately
this didn't work—or rest in space.

TANYA, standing on tea table, gorgeous puking, to audience:

TANYA MP comes to the line
she
(sings softly)
who only transgresses space
Barbie doll with horns and
hologram of MP as winged crocodile
and as rhino at once
butts the crowd with her horn, charges
ahead of Barbie doll with horns
in the outside (in society).

*CROCODILE-MICHELIN-RHINO, who has been limply light sack seated
on floor, does one soft lumpy beautiful somersault in TANYA'S speech.*

*L sits down in one of the small children's chairs next to tea table; she's
swallowing bitter bile:*

L Asking the man
—in the black robes—
for advice, he said
“The trouble with you is
you mix seeing
with your *being/seeing*
so, be seeing then—is what is
—you do that
Whereas I don't,” he says. “I separate these.”

R, standing on bed, searches for words —addressing L—she mimes oaring:

R To view every appearance—/all appearances—
 before, these/coming to outside-horizon line/or/
 swimming on it (oar)—
 in (as *his*) tradition-authority—(I can't say this)—
 (it's hard to articulate *this*)—:
 there's no seeing being *then*—ever.

L, still sitting in child's chair, says with pure innocence addressing R:

L They wouldn't get started

 He has his tradition-authority—pre
 formed thought of his—as the end
 /beginning for anyone—only.

*TANYA, still standing on tea table, in sincere innocence utters to audience
the center of the dilemma:*

TANYA while—in *his*—
 no present ever
 or being,
 there'd be *description*
 outside—of it/one outside
 being described:
 rather than one ever being.

 That's why
 I'm
 in terror
 the two parts
 when
 seeing— other

L still seated in small chair — to R:

L pick up the
 back structure
 he thinks (imposes)
 present being is
 tradition too (outside's
 not free). As such,
 we're being only tradition
 which
 he sees as only authority

R begins to happily jump on bed — to L:

R this is
 back structure
 because it's bothering me
 as mine
 it isn't behind, driving
 the war

 is it?

TANYA, standing on tea table, answers R:

TANYA Yes everything —
 here

Tanya pauses then utters, quizzically:

Tanya I don't know why

 people smoke

when it hurts them

R gets down from bed, stands on child's chair, speaks as if she doesn't know the word "genitals":

R lying Dionysus
 sprawled basking
 his chest and geni
 tals spread out on him

TANYA swoons standing:

TANYA	Supposing he's gentle too? having by senses invented love too—has?
-------	--

CROCODILE-MICHELIN-RHINO rolls and thrashes on the floor, starts before L speaks.

L seated beside R, both in children's chairs utter to everyone the outside as gorgeous puke:

L The dog and pony show
 is brought to town
 —everywhere—in each/town—
 and each time
 is presented—by her as the only
 thing there is—if the new's

a product—why should they
care?

R So the Barbie doll with horns
 keeps jabbing the opposing can
 didate with how *his* former religious
 leader is a fanatic while in *her*
 religion everyone thrashes seized by the
 god and asserting our boys go to
 push out demons
 his war for him their having spoken to
 him.

L asks the air, vaguely:

L Dionysus?

TANYA answers L sternly:

TANYA No!
 Keep up.

CROCODILE-MICHELIN-RHINO is still.

L stands up beside tea table and speaks in simple passion to audience:

L O.D.ed with
 medicine
 a painkiller,
 an accident,
 I was trapped in endless recurrence.

CROCODILE-MICHELIN-RHINO, beginning at "seeing," comes forwarding one rush somersaulting flipping effortlessly. Then throughout L's speech, she does very minimal movement without music:

seeing
the brain recycles
whatever trash
is put into it.
It has nothing either in it
self or outside

the brain can only make
through this trash outside events
one is in endless actions
of them in it

L continues:

suffering terribly in
—there being only—
hallucinations—in endless
pain physical-mind passages
—I was in the campaigns

sometimes the brain's recycling
is broken through
in this state
of recurrence my brain
sometimes
broke through to dreams—in me

the brain
breaks through to

TANYA the whole
 state
 de (di)
 regulated
 goes
 —state of bliss
 —two

R standing on bed, comments dryly:

R There's a flaw
 in this—
 other—
 endless—
 numbers of actions
 —do
 enter.

TANYA and R in bliss:

TANYA The con
 can

 di
 date
 condition of lies
 always
 day
 separated by night

R All
 the
 time
 enters

TANYA sardonic spoofs the world's confusion, pushes the words out on a line in the air:

TANYA

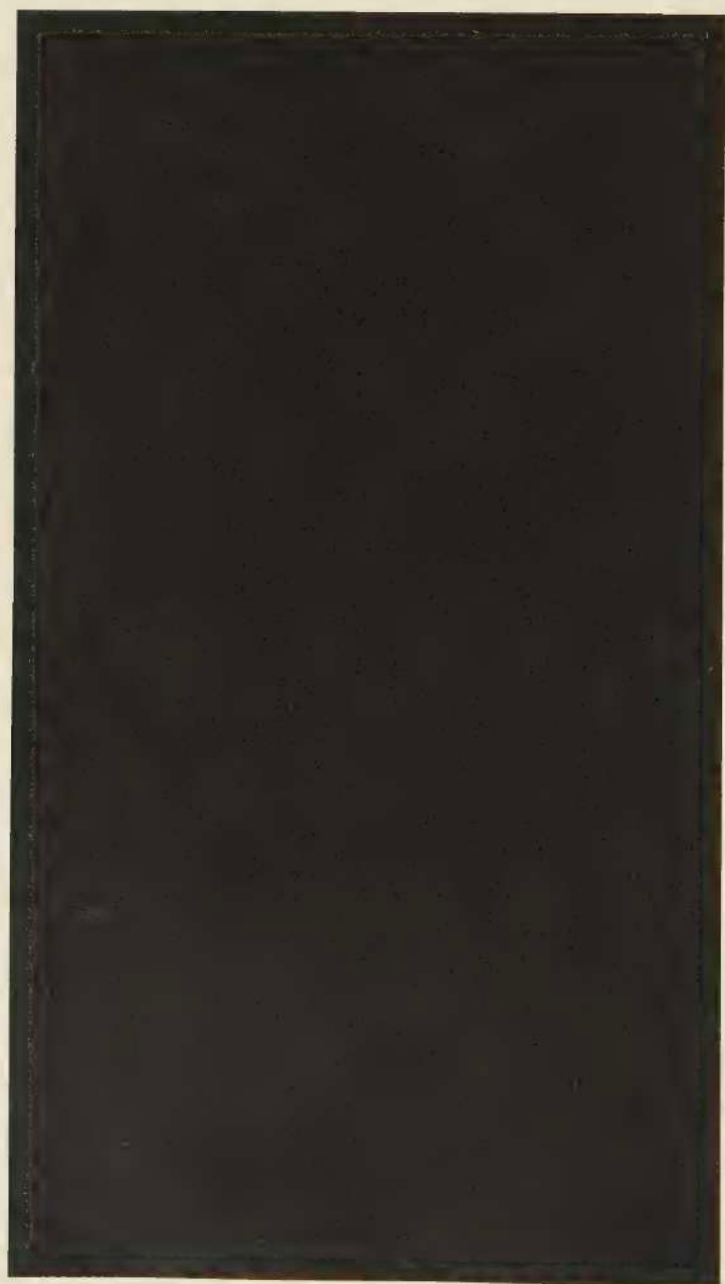
in one
news
paper the stories
have no
organization—first
it's the mafia
has the country—then
health
here

emphatic

*L ignores TANYA, speaks
ecstatically to audience:*

The crowd weeping
with joy—entranced
there is change

END OF ACT I



THE TRAINS

ACT II

The Trains is ACT 2 of *Flow—Winged Crocodile*. ACT 2 follows after a pause in darkness. The set and costumes are the same as in ACT 1 except that CROCODILE-MICHELIN-RHINO over her sheer grey puffy Michelin suit with one grey horn on her forehead and green wings, twice also appears in a black robe, the second time discarding it while dancing.

When one says words or phrases in quotations, she is imitating both someone else and herself. They produce balance pushing this to spill over vomiting invisible outside.

PAUSE IN DARKNESS. THEN LIGHTS

CROCODILE-MICHELIN-RHINO waits in the wings unseen.

TANYA is standing on the bed looking like Patty Hearst. With one hand she holds a toy AK47, and with the other hand she appears to pull down an imaginary pull-string, that would be used to stop a train. TANYA appears to speak to herself in victorious shout:

TANYA WuWuWuWuWuWuWuWuWuWuWuWuWuWuWuWuWu
GoStop!

L in front of tea table looks over and notices TANYA. Observing TANYA, L speaks to herself:

Apparently she's both stopping it and urging it on with her cries.

L speaks to audience with pure joy:

new—the leader
counsels us—we
could/can have *hope*

for
having/we have
driven the corrupt
lying govt greed
y fueled by war causing
it—

out—the crowd weeps
with joy

R stands in front of the bed on the audience's right side of stage. She doesn't notice TANYA but responds to L's speech The Vote, speaking with pure innocent joy:

R The crowd weeping
 with joy—entranced
 there is change

L continues to speak to audience:

L The characteristic
 of the brain
 became
 clear
 recurrence
 to recycle
 and
 recycle in one,
 person.

R speaking blissfully to herself:

R No, I thought

 the two parts

of the brain
equal at once
race
together always
seemed
in conflict
or (oar) serene

R climbs up on bed in front of TANYA (who is on the bed) and jumps on it, her actions happy, her words puking the gorgeous bile:

R Recycle on the part of the man in
 black robes she's
 seeming to him thwarting his
 authority as
 he's scorning that *there is present being*
 free

scorns that
there are
ones who *are* being free
—at all/*is the* present free
at all/*is the* present
—but (on the contrary) that's seen
in reality

R explains her words/the previous passage:
present is seen, and as seen
and as present—*is* free

—the woman says—hit by a van
later (now) can say, See
the space unfolding the same
outside is

TANYA on bed opens her arms in the air, sardonic:

TANYA if there are—the
 marvels
it's one's brain
seeing—the outside of the
 outside?

R is helpful, happily explaining:

R line of pre-judgment
their judging—all are
 negative—there could be no
there without hope there's no action
 future—then that's found to be
 comforting by the negative inverse
 one
no moving away, or as future is
not there except as this view.

There, not as open
is future as or moving by
comforting one—by not being or forgiving.

L standing on tea table:

no one had this
view hope
of one as them ever before
they're a crowd having
joy by virtue
of that (*being a crowd*) at once

R standing on child's chair to L and TANYA:

R regardless
 of any future actions
 —is it

TANYA the brain recycling breaks through to
dream outside of only outside?

*L still standing on tea table in inexpressible pain as marvels, her
speaking staggered floating as if triggered by TANYA's words—speaks
to herself as if to everywhere:*

L Dream breaking through hallucinogen that was
 accidentally induced in me:

 the horses pour ing
on the crack that's where the billion-tiered
stairs/sides of the red mesa meet they're galloping
from the opening onto the crack midst the
vast ranges of other red mesa-gorges everywhere the
outside red billion-stairs in the middle of these l

walk on the crack all stairs meeting there I walk toward
the opening where the innumerable
horses come out galloping the stream of them in
passing me don't trample or touch me
'they won't hurt me' is thought.

L quietly:

L the brain
recycles—only—is
from
something happening
the outside
it
is nothing in itself?

R gets off bed and sits down in small child's chair by bed—to L:

R Another friend, of many years—no,
she's not "friend—ha!"—says "You
only bullied me—because you're a bully
I accepted
you [BLANK] speaking to me"
sardonic (beginning twenty-five years ago)

R continues, addresses herself:

The customs
of our/their commun
ity don't actually mirror
the law—ever—which she knew

/knows—yet then uses the law
to get everything away
from one as/in that—community
from it

the dense
light
winged box
to kill

L standing on tea table looks over at R sympathetically:

L Hit by a van—a different person—and
 from it—?
 unharmd miraculously—this one sees
 everything
 negatively reverses *there*
 will be no change

—anything
 spectator part of and in
 the—the—
 infinite space—from
 it?

*R, oblivious of L, goes on talking to herself; second passage begins with
its title:*

R Why didn't you say something then?

(when you're being bullied into being a friend?)

The Court Conceiving
not valuing—work of the humble—has
removed them from outside—that is—reversing
the *public space*

*L gets down from table using small child's chair, then as if changing
her mind or getting a fresh start she gets up again on the tea table:*

L the humble—all are—ruled
by the court to have rights
 of livelihood—in
public space—yet seeing them
on the sidewalks, the only *place*
their humble work
has the court ruled they're
 infringing public space
there
disrupting others' space charged
they're banned, they're removed
 from it?

*TANYA gets down from bed. R moves to small chair by tea table,
looks up at L, explains:*

R the court first ruled all
 have
the humble have rights of
work—in public space—outside—seeing
the humble on sidewalks to be
infringing public space the court bans them.

TANYA is jumping hopscotch on invisible lines near tea table:

TANYA Why is the court thinking
that—reversing
the public space
as others' space/being—seeing's infringing
—infringed by the humble
working—outside—is not value d?

*L could be talking about "the friend" or talking
about TANYA—L gestures vaguely yet in the midst
of wonders:*

L She negatively reverses
all stupid and low only corpse
float s ing
in iridescent limb

L—as a new idea—logic and wonder:

If
we're
stupid low
no
hierarchy
exists!

R gleefully gets up on small chair and stands on tea table, flaps her arms:

R birds
plant—flower—with no words

plant—flower—with no words

birds

appear.

(pauses as if waiting—she shrugs)

She doesn't believe in words.

CROCODILE-MICHELIN-RHINO enters somersaulting crumples charges crumples in her green-winged crocodile horned rhino dance. L, R, and TANYA do not ever notice her. They are not describing her ever but speak completely separately from her realm. Here they all raise their arms in the air as if lifting them to keep out of the way of someone vacuuming under them—as if to get out of the way of the CROCODILE-MICHELIN-RHINO whom they don't see. She dances to music track 10, then dance and music end.

L stands in front of the bed in flow and rush of speaking wonder—without seeing CROCODILE-MICHELIN-RHINO who's now standing still:

L Hologram of winged crocodile that's
charging rhino also—at once two
—swim in the iridescent limb

they have no senses—everyone

's low except accept the men pets
that only hierarchy—mine—

halving everything exists
 give the rich huge tax breaks
 the
 form of it (one) is before d void of being
 —is—rather than one ever being
 there

CROCODILE-MICHELIN-RHINO dances to music track 6.
LEFT-SIDE of the brain, RIGHT-SIDE of the brain, and TANYA keep
their arms up in the air throughout the CROCODILE-MICHELIN-RHI-
NO dance though they never notice her. L gets up on bed. TANYA not
only has her arms in the air, she pauses in a hop of hopscotch and
stands on one foot with the other foot held extended backwards as
if she is skating while she as Patty Hearst still holds her AK47. Dance
and music end. Then CROCODILE-MICHELIN-RHINO stands still in
their midst.

TANYA utters wonder as if that is logic of undoing pain of redefinition:

TANYA not in terms of one—rather than
 one ever being—is/was mold being
 redefined and redefined—by
 outside has interpreted one back to one
 self in the instant of the actions one is
 and/in
 (then, only) one's movements are separate
 from being

R answers TANYA, explaining:

R The physical body is separate, alongside, even in
 or because one's

hallucination standing the physical body is outside
others loved

in continual double of opposites, solitary free
center

one's physical body is
without language—has no language beside the left side
and the right side no other existence than alive
—not between them either.

TANYA continues in sincere innocence, without appearing to notice R:

Hell or physical bliss space
without words
as
if vomiting the
outside from one in
side
out iridescent one
place

L standing on bed:

L My friend
—hit by the van—
thinks it
's violent
though

R standing on tea table, simple in bliss—present:

R she would not need
 to
 try to be
 inside her motions
 do
 ing these—while doing so
 for
 there's no sense of that
 now —she is these.

*CROCODILE-MICHELIN-RHINO without music does one rush of the
rhino/crocodile charging, crumpling, somersaulting. Then she runs off
stage.*

*L climbs down from bed and begins walking around as if pearl-puking
mulls:*

L they mocked our gen

 eration the one again
 st war for
 justice—one rebel
 led, as if that were immature
 of us in living—seen as—by
 pundits who're blood leeches
(redundant) ours locked in struggle with
 the other
 side—as if only *our* stagnant fight
—now the new has passed to
 a different, free view not locked

in this shown
by The Vote, they're saying

(R gets down from tea table and says casually to L:)

R though our gen voted
the new in too

TANYA gets on bed, sits cross-leg on bed and fluffs up pillow around herself to get comfortable while she talks:

TANYA the actions one is /in
then (that one is *only*) are separate from one
—in them redefining one to one?—
one has fallen out of one's own
 is not in
motions (that) are one
—is that it (that's their/destroying one)?
 I don't remember—

This complex of actions/cycle is gone
—the pundits say—good!

L walking around says to audience, as if she is reading script she's been told to say at the same time as describing action she herself is in. Words are spoken in the way they are seen, in the order in which they appear, rather than altering pronunciation of the word by what it is later known to be:

L that is,
the pundits mock our gen

*L screws up her face wondering
as to the meaning of the words
“rebel” “ling”*

for rebel ling (he says)
—reveling?—
ours seen as locked in fight
only puny having been
against war etc in our eration
gen

L explains the words she’s just uttered:

Words are spoken in the way they are seen, in the order in
which they appear, rather than altering pronunciation of the
word by what it is later known to be.

TANYA says this with tender details:

TANYA gen
tle be outside
cycle
ing bicycle ing
they say—the new is—now

*R begins to hop hopscotch on invisible lines on the
floor while she says leeches as gorgeous puking:*

R pundits are
blood leeches (redundant) who
‘ve spent their lives packaging
others’ live actions to fit be falsified the same
mold/frame—corpse

TANYA asks L and R:

TANYA the two parts of the brain
being the outside’s

inside?

L answers, happy:

L The crowd
 weeps for joy as
 no one had this
 view hope
of one as them ever before
 they're a crowd having
 joy by virtue
 of that at once

R corroborates L, happy:

R regardless
of any future actions
—*is it*

L walking in circles speaks angrily to herself who is then the ventriloquist, who pukes the inside:

L man in black robes imitated by ventriloquist/moi:

“The trouble with you
you take what you do/
you see/
as what *it* is/
what (outside) *is* is being
(in/as—you also there)
and that as *then* (only)—it is
—whereas I *don’t*” he says
“I keep these separate.”

CROCODILE-MICHELIN-RHINO wearing flapping black robe reenters and does brief dance to music track 6, an abstracted sense of imitating man starving as attempting to eat at invisible plates on the floor but can't get food into his throat.

R gets back up onto bed, holds her arms up in the air as if to keep out of the way of a vacuum cleaner but never sees or looks in the direction of the dancing CROCODILE-MICHELIN-RHINO there. Dance and music end. R's gorgeous puking:

R dis/hell/bliss space
 without words
 as
 if vomiting the
 outside from the one in
 side
 out iridescent one.

TANYA sitting on bed holds her arms up to keep out of the way of the motion as if getting up as someone vacuums under one but never looks in the direction of, never sees, the CROCODILE-MICHELIN-RHINO who stands still:

TANYA but he can't get one bite
 in—or vomiting invisible outside

L sits in small child's chair looking benignly smiling out at audience, doesn't see CROCODILE-MICHELIN-RHINO:

L If we only exist in injury
 and

winged swim in bloody
iridescent limb
corpse—two
not stagnant
the two sides of the brain
(she cups ear) here outside—hear?—is
inside/one in infinite
relation the
inside outside then?

R wades around on bed with sea-legs yet coughs black bile. The performers never shout—except when TANYA shouts the train whistle:

R The Man in Black Robes
 coughs black bile
 He *thinks* the present—one's—
 should not be *what* one's doing

 —is—not *what* one's doing
 (doing/seeing/thinking) then!

 or ever!

L still sitting in small child's chair, sincerely embracing the absent friend:

 L Usually
 embracing generous and brave,

my friend—showing signs
of cynicism reverses negatively
 —hit by a van—she (and if)

all stupid and low
there is no base.

R standing on bed, encouraging L, implying the implications are favorable:

R Yet embracing generous and brave—
 indicates— she gestures openly as to open space
 a future?

TANYA who has been sitting on the bed gets off and stands on small child's chair says the black bile:

TANYA Look, that's *nothing!* supposedly not free
 another, a different friend—no, not
 friend—higher than one/them (that other says)
 as part of oneself being merely a bully one merely
 imagined (her a) friend, that one
 —hasn't been hit by a van—
 sees people low venal bullies *hates*
 them—appears to occur
 transformed (from)
 event of being next to/near/to the many
 those hers dying rending mortal rends

CROCODILE-MICHELIN-RHINO in black robes runs off stage.

R gets off bed, begins hopscotch, looks at TANYA, says dryly:

R Raves is "vision"
 supposedly not free hers
 gives it validity
 driven by hers
 dying mortal
s ity rends

TANYA standing on small child's chair explains to the air, staggering her words as if as such the words find out clarity. She announces the title, then speaks the vision:

TANYA

The Portal

the hypocrite who attacks all the
people as venal and murderers she's a god says
having suffered more than any people—
(their country) who're (their) dying amongst weeping
bombed—she— “all men will not exist in the future”
—The Causes: if any LOOK, they're “mean”—
she says—hates anyone with money so strips the coat
off any back and celebrating this rends mortal s
—to seize theirs—driven by hers/dying she for
(she's also) old—(rends) mortal s for/as the remainder
of—re-MOVES—her/their life rends starving being
rending
as such.

R explains to TANYA:

R The customs
of our/their commun
ity don't actually mirror
the law—ever—which she knew
/knows—yet then uses the law
to get everything away
from one as/in that—community
from it

the dense
light
winged box
to kill

CROCODILE-MICHELIN-RHINO runs in wearing black robes that flap open showing crocodile-rhino, comes forward fast in front of video of herself in same dance fast-forwarded at faster speed than danced in real-time. Music is track 7. Dance and music end. CROCODILE-MICHELIN-RHINO sits on floor center back.

R stands on one foot, the other leg held raised backward in
midst of hopscotch game speaks fast urgent flow facing in
other direction does not see CROCODILE-MICHELIN-RHINO;

R comes
forward at once fast forwards himself while he
stopping the mouths of others—tries to—eat
starving, illusion of only his 'get it in'
at the plates—but he can't—hologram of winged
crocodile at the time of charging same rhino
rhino's time crumples—can't get it down—
charges crumples dissolving

TANYA standing on child's chair pukes gorgeously with a perfectly normal expression—mimes oaring, at the word:

TANYA vomiting invisible outside:

don't have
stories
form/stories form

deregulation
corporate here oar
not illustrating
imitate motions exactly
only

*R still holding hopscotch position with one leg
raised held stationary as if she is skating:*

R Barbie doll with horns
 eats
 moose—
not illustrate her as friend in
outside halving it now only

*CROCODILE-MICHELIN-RHINO sits on floor, still. R gets up on and
stretches out over tea table lying propped on one elbow and thought-
fully reads an imaginary book:*

"You dwell upon yourself too much. That's the trouble. And
that produces a terrible fatigue." "But what else can anyone do,
don Juan?" "Seek and see the marvels all around you. You will get
tired of looking at yourself alone, and that fatigue will make you
deaf and blind to everything else."

*CROCODILE-MICHELIN-RHINO dances briefly to music track 2,
discards black robe while dancing; under it is her as green-winged
crocodile melded as hologram also of Michelin-man, a one-horned
grey rhino. She crumples and charges. Dance and music end.*

*L still sitting in child's chair chats in conversational,
hopeful tone:*

L our bloody iridescent
 limb
 at rhino's time that crumples
 charges is rolling winged crocodile
 in air

R lying on the tea table looks aside from her book, says mildly to L:

R You'd have to think
 what they/he/think/thinks is important

L looks up at R and addresses her emphatically:

L I've always constructed
 everything
 on the basis of what
 everyone
 thinks
 at once.

TANYA still standing on child's chair, sarcastically:

TANYA You just *thought*
 it was
 (what you think)
 (she says)
 "because you are a bully"
 ("you pushed me into [BLANK] speaking to")
 "into/knowing you
 even"

R stands up on tea table and holds position on one foot as if in hopscotch game. In quoted remarks, she's dryly imitating herself and others speaking at once:

R Obliterate society

and then—it will begin.

"That's just you."

"(Right.)" or

"(I don't believe that any more.)"

R scrambles off table top

L stands up from sitting in child's chair, stretches:

L because that's what it is
 the whole/hole
winged crocodile emerges from
 it at once.

TANYA sarcastic:

TANYA You think

CROCODILE-MICHELIN-RHINO dances to music track 7, somersaulting crumples charges crumples. Video of her in fast-forward crumple-charges is seen behind her. She races forward and then back and forward again in both images. Suddenly, the fast-forward image is slowed to be at the same timing as her real-time (now suddenly slow) dance (though maybe not at the same place in it). Music ends, video

continues in silence. CROCODILE-MICHELIN-RHINO is still

TANYA still standing on child's chair:

TANYA hierarchy is being outside only , exists

R standing on one foot on tea table speaks in gorgeous bile facing left, away from CROCODILE-MICHELIN-RHINO whom she never sees:

R Billows of the crumpling MP
is them
rhino in green-winged crocodile
hologram floats in limb
s of iridescent crowd s one
pressed into them

Video ends.

L, doing in-place stretching exercises, says casually:

L No matter how violent MR
 acts
bullying and hollering, harrowing
 crowd/me/so man
starving
trying to eat at the plates fast forwarding him
self to them embraces MR a man to take his place

R stamps working out the kinks from standing too long on one foot:

R Get it straight

TANYA urging R on to work out the kinks in her foot—as TANYA shouts enthusiastically, she stamps on the bed and holds up her arm to grip an imaginary pull-string, as if on a train:

TANYA Wu
 GoStop!
 GoStop!

TANYA they wave

(after TANYA says this they all wave at unseen others in audience—not at CROCODILE-MICHELIN-RHINO lying on floor whom they never see)

L gets up and stands on a child's chair speaks as man in black robes, ventriloquist, and herself at once, on flood:

L Ventriloquist for man in black robes speaks
 sometimes misspeaks/omits to program

Odile and Hour

I have contempt
 for people—he says—
 who're in desperation
 they're not there yet—
 in physical pain rhino

pauses, looks at empty spot—not at crocodile-Michelin-rhino who is lying on back center floor:

s our bloody iridescent limb

TANYA turns aside stamping her feet on the bed speaking to herself as some other's fury utters title:

The Portal

From standing on the child's chair, L embodying someone else gets up onto tea table with R:

L The man (black robes), unable to eat, starving, seek
 s control of people "I have contempt
 for people who are like this/other
 thing—they've come for advice
 —the one I'm saying," he says "so it's difficult
 to say it."—Not theirs— the winged crocodile eats the
 people's
 other's
 feet. They hang their feet in the water.

CROCODILE-MICHELIN-RHINO stands and runs off stage.

*R having been standing on one foot, puts both feet on tea table,
 speaking to herself:*

R (coming back to her senses)

I didn't mean "Obliterate society" in this way

though did intend vomiting invisible outside

 on the trains

*R gets down from tea table using child's chair. R stands on the chair. L
 stands on the tea table, embodies man in black robes unable to eat:*

L The Ones Who Come for Advice

I tell them

what they're

to think

they're doing
—to *do*—outside's action

—what it is
they can't see—for

if they *do*/it/are that's them

that's mixing the two
that's incorrect.

TANYA speaks casually as explanation; in altered tone, passage is different from before:

TANYA He thinks the present—one's—
should not be *what* one's doing
coughing bile, laughing—whatever
—*is*—not *what* one's doing
(doing/seeing/thinking) *then!*

L serenely turns on tea table:

L But seen in real space
compare to water-stream on mesas red gorges of stairs
the brain breaking through to dream
this sight/site is real place, space:

L The man—
lounging—on—lying on his—one elbow
is/was propped on
it in the vast green gold grass plain on
above/depth purple air gold mountains reverse
float above
him dark indigo purple separates by him
stretched beneath standing-horse in the gold grass by
beside the lying man
who is in the grass seen lying alone.

R steps down from child's chair and begins walking in circles that are the paradise:

71

If all
are low
birds
no
hierarchy
exists.

L The crowd
 weeps for joy as
 no one had this
 has view hope
of one as them ever before
 they're a crowd having
 joy by virtue
 that at once

 regardless
 of any future actions
 —is it

TANYA is doing stretches standing on the bed. She puffs:

TANYA the other
 as if she pushes
 in space too
 —imitates—
 outside
 exists
 two

L lying blissfully on tea table:

L If we only
 exist in
 —injury—
 —winged swim in bloody
 iridescent limb—
 corpse in it.

R as if imitating L—could be either mocking or sincere:

R “Not recycling
 breaks through
 to a dream
 as I’m walking
 toward them
 in (through) the horses
 they won’t hurt me
 in it”

L stands up on tea table, gives logical as passionate painful account staggered:

L Accidentally O.D.ed
 The Brain Recycled on
 a Hallucinogen Would sometimes
 Break Through To a Dream outside:

This dream occurred only once though

 the horses pour
 ing
 on the crack that’s where the billion-tiered
 stairs-sides of the red mesa meet they’re

others years later
here

TANYA The Trains

I wanted—to be
—a hobo—my boyfriend
—my to—hop the trains—we
will dress as men—for protection
I tell him/but he
says to me I don't think
you can pass—
—everything—(is)

R imitates herself by suddenly (after trying to remember how) resuming position of standing on one foot, the other leg held extended backward in air:

R the brain
recycles—only—is
 from
something happening
the outside
 it
is nothing in itself?

TANYA still sitting dangling her feet off the bed:

TANYA She doesn't believe in words

L while lying on tea table, as she's propped on one elbow—in the midst of speaking the man in the grass, she re-writes that space?

make the same frame
as before, stagnant
corrupt it
filling up the time.

Behind them on back wall a video of green-winged CROCODILE-MICHELIN-RHINO is being played in silence (during the following speeches), her dance in reverse, backwards faster than real time. Video stops before reversed image of dancing CROCODILE-MICHELIN-RHINO disappears.

R stands on both feet in front of tea table — says calmly:

R saying our gen
 in space
 just
 fight as if locked with others
immature but old—is gone—
didn't we want of that? war etc
 gone? our gen
eration —as if just seeing as that is
 automatic? engorged —is gone
 good!

TANYA stands on bed:

TANYA individuals seen in
 the crowd weep
 with joy—

TANYA is outside's gorgeous puking:

TANYA I rode horse back
the horse trying to scrape me off
its back through the tree

s whole forest standing
no longer

—having been—downed
in the hurricane
flaps invisible before us (horse
and I were) riding
the horse drags me through the
huge forest brushing me.

Looks
As if they don't believe me.

Video of winged CROCODILE-MICHELIN-RHINO in reverse stops.

*L gets up from lying position on tea table, stands on the table, utters
seeing and gorgeous puking space to the audience in it. She announc-
es the title, then speaks the vision:*

L

Two

We (two people) standing on a cliff in the sky on sea
two flying ahead
land/sing/stamp "Come on!" jetting cliff then as they
peer into sky to sing the others in—the others don't appear
—yet—the two take off ahead

—at once the green-blue-glittering migrating come in
while they dive and ascend equally into and from the black-
red they rose on flower-flow-plateau of black-red lava flower-flow
bed innumerable come flying in flower s into it equally
green-blue-glittering air-borne diving and ascending at once
the migrating Vs come in by the two people standing on cliff in
the sky on sea

*L gets down from tea table and walks to place in front of bed while
TANYA speaks standing on bed hurling quietly:*

TANYA The racing moon
 past
the trains pass
the yellow war ribbons all tied
 around trees
by the tracks

The people thought.

This was sentiment.

R begins to hop hither and thither:

R then very irritating

 People think too
that candidate, Barbie doll
with horns—just because she didn't win—
 is gone (when she isn't)

L A dear friend man having died the other
man says the center to be filled only by
close friends—but/and—he does not allow
 anyone to enter the center

R from hopping here and there gets up on tea table. R stretches across the tea table lying propped on one elbow and sees herself in gorgeous puke as of others:

TANYA gets down from bed and asks quietly:

L —Suddenly—
words would disappear
—not omitted even—re-MOVE
the words from the space *there*
the space *was/is* there

R draped on tea table, L and TANYA stand. They pause, are still, while—beginning at the word “suddenly”—CROCODILE-MICHELIN-RHINO runs in and begins dancing to music track 10 while video of green-winged CROCODILE-MICHELIN-RHINO dancing is being played fast in reverse. CROCODILE-MICHELIN-RHINO dances, then runs off stage. Video of dance in reverse plays with music until dancer on video disappears.

THE END

Karen Barad

What Is the Measure of Nothingness? Infinity, Virtuality, Justice

Nothingness. The void. An absence of matter. The blank page. Utter silence. No thing, no thought, no awareness. Complete ontological insensibility.

Shall we utter some words about nothingness? What is **there** to say? How to begin? How can anything be said about nothing without violating its very nature, perhaps even its conditions of possibility? Isn't any utterance about nothingness always already a performative breach of that which one means to address? Have we not already said too much simply in pronouncing its name?

Perhaps we should let the emptiness speak for itself.

At the very least, listening to nothing would seem to require exquisite attention to every subtle detail. Suppose we had a finely tuned, ultra-sensitive instrument that we could use to zoom in on and tune in to the nuances and subtleties of nothingness.¹ But what would it mean to zoom in on nothingness, to look and listen with ever-increasing sensitivity and acuity, to move to finer and finer scales of detail of . . . ? Alas, it is difficult to conceive how one would orient oneself regarding such a task. What defines scale in the void? What is the metric of emptiness? What is the measure of nothingness? How can we approach it?²

On the face of it, these questions seem vacuous, but there may be more here than meets the eye. Consider, first, setting up the condition for the experiment: we begin with a vacuum. Now, if a vacuum is the absence of everything, of all matter, how can we be sure that we have nothing at hand? We'll need to do a measurement to confirm this. We could shine a flashlight on the vacuum, or use some other probe, but that would introduce at least one photon (quantum of light) onto the scene, thereby destroying the very conditions we seek. Like turning up the light to see the darkness, this situation is reminiscent of the mutually exclusive conditions of im/possibility that are at issue in Niels Bohr's interpretation of quantum physics.

1 | Throughout the paper, I invoke, and sometimes mix, different modalities of sensing as a way of gesturing toward the multiplicity of possibilities for sensing the insensible, including the possibility of synesthetic expression and its detection. Scientific evidence of the stimulation of synesthetic experience through sensory deprivation is at least evocative in this context. See, for example, the review by Pegah Afra, Michael Funke, and Fumitsu Matsuo, "Acquired Auditory-Visual Synesthesia: A Window to Early Cross-Modal Sensory Interactions," *Psychology Research and Behavior Management* 2 (2009), pp. 31–37; and David Brang and V. S. Ramachandran, "Survival of the Synesthesia Gene: Why Do People Hear Colors and Taste Words?" *PLoS Biol* 9, no. 11: e1001205. doi:10.1371/journal.pbio.1001205.

2 | While I begin this essay with the idea of

Measurements, including practices such as zooming in or examining something with a probe, don't just happen (in the abstract)—they require specific measurement apparatuses. Measurements are agential practices, which are not simply revelatory but performative: they help constitute and are a constitutive part of what is being measured.³ In other words, measurements are *intra-actions* (not interactions): the agencies of observation are inseparable from that which is observed. Measurements are world-making: matter and meaning do not pre-exist, but rather are co-constituted via measurement intra-actions.

If the measurement intra-action plays a constitutive role in what is measured, then it matters how something is explored. In fact, this is born out empirically in experiments with matter (and energy): when electrons (or light) are measured using one kind of apparatus, they are waves; if they are measured in a complementary way, they are particles. Notice that what we're talking about here is not simply some object *reacting* differently to different probings but *being* differently. What is at issue is the very nature of nature. A quantum ontology deconstructs the classical one: there are no pre-existing individual objects with determinate boundaries and properties that precede some interaction, nor are there any concepts with determinate meanings that could be used

zooming in on nothingness, I don't want the reader to misunderstand and think that indeterminacy, or rather, the play of in/determinacies, is limited to the domain of the small. On the contrary, the play of indeterminacies is ontologically prior to notions of scale and, more generally, space and time. It's just that with current technologies they are more easily detected on relatively small scales.

3 | For a detailed discussion of measurement in quantum physics see Karen Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning* (Durham, N. C.: Duke University Press, 2007).

to describe their behavior; rather, determinate boundaries and properties of objects-within-phenomena, and determinate contingent meanings, are enacted through specific intra-actions, where *phenomena* are the ontological inseparability of intra-acting agencies. Measurements are material-discursive practices of mattering. And phenomena are contingent configurations of mattering. At the heart of quantum physics is an inherent ontological indeterminacy. This indeterminacy is only ever partially resolved in the materialization of specific phenomena: determinacy, as materially enacted in the very constitution of a phenomenon, always entails constitutive exclusions (that which must remain indeterminate). Now, it's one thing for *matter* to materialize differently according to different measurement practices, but is there some way in which the specificity of measurement practices matters if we're measuring the *void*, when the void is presumably nothing?

Complementarity.⁴ Contingency. Indeterminacy. Inseparability. Any attempt to say something, anything, even about nothing, and we find ourselves always already immersed in the play of quantum in/determinacy.

Questions of the nature of measurement—or, more broadly, intra-actions—are at the core of quantum physics. Intra-actions are practices of making a difference, of cutting together-apart, entangling-differentiating (one move) in the

4 | Bohr's notion of complementarity does not follow the colloquial usage. By "complementarity" he means simultaneously "mutually exclusive" and "mutually necessary."

making of phenomena. Phenomena—entanglements of matter/ing across spacetimes—are not in the world, but *of* the world. Importantly, intra-actions are not limited to human-based measurement practices. Indeed, the issues at stake in exploring the vacuum are not merely questions of human exploratory practices in the quest for knowledge, but are thought to be ontologically poignant matters that go to the very nature of matter itself.

When it comes to the quantum vacuum, as with all quantum phenomena, ontological indeterminacy (not epistemological uncertainty) is at the heart of (the) matter . . . and no matter. Indeed, is it not rather the very nature of existence that is at issue, or rather nonexistence, or rather the conditions of im/possibilities for non/existence? . . . Or maybe that's the very question the vacuum keeps asking itself. Maybe the ongoing questioning of itself is what generates, or rather *is*, the structure of nothingness. The vacuum is no doubt doing its own experiments with non/being.⁵

In/determinacy is not the state of a thing, but an unending dynamism. The play of in/determinacy accounts for the un/doings of no/thingness.

From the point of view of classical physics, the vacuum has no matter and no energy. But the quantum principle of ontological indeterminacy calls the existence of such a zero-energy, zero-matter state into question, or rather, makes

5 | In *Meeting the Universe Halfway* (see note 3), I argue that questions of epistemology are not separate from those of ontology. And knowing is not the sole prerogative of humans. In fact, I suggest a reworking of *knowing* (even as it applies to humans) in light of quantum physics. In any case, it is easy to see that “zooming in” is not a uniquely human activity. For example, the larvae of sunburst diving beetles come equipped with bifocal lenses. And light emitted from the sun, that is, photons of different frequencies, and other particles too, are capable of probing different length scales without any human assistance.

it into a question with no decidable answer. Not a settled matter, or rather, no matter. And if the energy of the vacuum is not determinately zero, it isn't determinately empty. In fact, this indeterminacy is responsible not only for the void not being nothing (while not being something), but it may in fact be the source of all that is, a womb that births existence. Birth and death are not the sole prerogative of the animate world. "Inanimate" beings also have finite lives. "Particles can be born and particles can die," explains one physicist. In fact, "it is a matter of birth, life, and death that requires the development of a new subject in physics, that of quantum field theory. . . . Quantum field theory is a response to the ephemeral nature of life."⁶

Quantum field theory (QFT) was invented in the 1920s, and its development continues to this day.⁷ It is a theory that combines insights from the classical field theory of electromagnetism (mid-nineteenth century), special relativity (1905), and quantum mechanics (1920s). QFT takes us to a deeper level of understanding of the quantum vacuum and its implications. According to QFT, the vacuum can't be determinately nothing because the indeterminacy principle allows for fluctuations of the quantum vacuum.⁸ How can we understand "vacuum fluctuations"? First, it is necessary to know a few things about what physicists mean by the notion of a field.

6 | A. Zee, *Quantum Field Theory in a Nutshell*, 2nd ed. (Princeton, N. J.: Princeton University Press, 2010 [orig. 2003]), pp. 3–4.

7 | See Silvan S. Schweber, *QED and the Men Who Made It* (Princeton, N. J.: Princeton University Press, 1994).

8 | That is, it allows for fluctuations around a value of zero for its energy.

A *field* is something that has a physical quantity associated with every point in spacetime.⁹ Let's consider a very simple example of a field: an infinite drumhead that can be assigned a time-varying displacement value at each point in space. If the drumhead is not vibrating, then it is completely flat and has the same value everywhere—let's call this the zero value, corresponding to no displacement. If a drummer now taps the drumhead, it vibrates, and waves of energy flow outward from where it is tapped. In this case, the field values vary in space and time as the displacement wave moves across the surface. Thus far we have a classical field theory, with a perfectly still drumhead representing the classical vacuum (or zero-energy state), and a vibrating drumhead representing a non-zero-energy state. Now we add quantum physics. Quantizing the field means that only certain discrete vibrational states exist. (If you're not used to thinking about different vibrational modes of a drum, it may be easier to visualize a stringed instrument with only a discrete set of standing waves, or harmonics, possible.) Now we add special relativity, in particular, the insight that matter and energy are equivalent ($E = mc^2$). Since vibrations of the field carry energy, and only a discrete set of energy states can exist, and a mass value can be assigned to each energy state, then we can see that a field vibrating at a particular frequency or energy is

9 | For example, the specific pattern made by iron filings lining up in the presence of a magnet can be understood as the marks of a specific magnetic field configuration.

equivalent to the existence of particles of matter with a particular mass. This correspondence between quantum particles and quantized fields is the cornerstone of QFT.

Now let's return to our question: what is a vacuum fluctuation? Using the drum example, the quantum vacuum would correspond to a state where the average value of the displacements is zero everywhere, that is, there's no drummer tapping the drum. And yet the stillness of the drumhead is not assured, or rather, there is no determinate fact of the matter as to whether or not the drumhead is perfectly still, even in the absence of all external disturbances, including drumming. In other words, vacuum fluctuations are the indeterminate vibrations of the vacuum or zero-energy state.

Putting this point in the complementary language of particles rather than fields, we can understand vacuum fluctuations in terms of the existence of virtual particles: *virtual particles are quanta of the vacuum fluctuations*. That is, *virtual particles are quantized indeterminacies-in-action*. Admittedly, this is difficult to imagine, even more so than the account that is usually given. According to the usual lore, virtual particles are very short-lived entities that come into and out of existence so quickly that they can't be detected, and hence are not real, not in the same sense as actual particles. But this way of putting it entails the wrong temporality and ontol-

ogy. *Virtuality* is not a speedy return, a popping into and out of existence with great rapidity, but rather *the indeterminacy of being/nonbeing, a ghostly non/existence*. In other words, the common portrayal of quantum vacuum fluctuations as an arena of covert virtual activity—particle-antiparticle pairs rapidly coming into and out of existence, getting away with something for nothing if only it happens fast enough that we can't know about it, that is, that we can't actually count any divergences from pure nothingness, like a banker playing fast and loose with accounts, taking money out and paying it back before anyone notices anything missing from the ledger—is of questionable validity. The void is not a financial wheeler-dealer, an ethically questionable, shadowy character.¹⁰ Rather, the void is a spectral realm with a ghostly existence. Not even nothing can be free of ghosts.¹¹ Virtual particles do not traffic in a metaphysics of presence. They do not exist in space and time. They are ghostly non/existences that teeter on the edge of the infinitely thin blade between being and nonbeing. They speak of indeterminacy. Or rather, no determinate words are spoken by the vacuum, only a speaking silence that is neither silence nor speech, but the conditions of im/possibility for non/existence. There are an infinite number of im/possibilities, but not everything is possible. The vacuum isn't empty, but neither is there anything in it. Hence, we

10 | The story that so often gets told about the existence of virtual particles is that it is a direct result of Heisenberg's uncertainty principle. But the energy-time "uncertainty" (*sic*) principle is far from a settled issue. Notably, recent research supports the interpretation of this relation in terms of indeterminacy rather than uncertainty. That is, what is at issue is "objective [ontological] indeterminacy" (Paul Busch), not epistemological uncertainty. See, for example, Paul Busch, "The Time-Energy Uncertainty Relation," in *Time in Quantum Mechanics*, ed. Juan Gonzalo Muga, Rafael Sala Mayato, and Iñigo L. Egusquiza, 2nd ed. (Berlin: Springer, 2008 [orig. 2002]). See also Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway* (see note 3), for a detailed account of the differences in interpretation marked by questions of uncertainty (Heisenberg) versus indeterminacy (Bohr).

can see that indeterminacy is key not only to the existence of matter but also to its non-existence, or rather, it is the key to the play of non/existence.

Virtual particles are not in the void but of the void. They are on the razor edge of non/being. The void is a lively tension, a desiring orientation toward being/becoming. The vacuum is flush with yearning, bursting with innumerable imaginings of what could be. The quiet cacophony of different frequencies, pitches, tempos, melodies, noises, pentatonic scales, cries, blasts, sirens, sighs, syncopations, quarter tones, allegros, ragas, bebops, hip-hops, whimpers, whines, screams, are threaded through the silence, ready to erupt, but simultaneously crosscut by a disruption, dissipating, dispersing the would-be sound into non/being, an indeterminate symphony of voices. The blank page teeming with the desires of would-be traces of every symbol, equation, word, book, library, punctuation mark, vowel, diagram, scribble, inscription, graphic, letter, ink-blot, as they yearn toward expression. A jubilation of emptiness.

Don't for a minute think that there are no material effects of yearning and imagining. Virtual particles are experimenting with the im/possibilities of non/being, but that doesn't mean they aren't real, on the contrary. Consider this recent headline: "It's Confirmed: Matter

11 | For materialist readings of Derrida's "hauntology" (as opposed to "ontology"), see Karen Barad, "Quantum Entanglements and Hauntological Relations of Inheritance: Discontinuities, SpaceTime Enfoldings, and Justice-to-Come," *Derrida Today* 3, no. 2 (2010), pp. 240–68; Vicki Kirby, *Quantum Anthropologies: Life at Large* (Durham, N. C.: Duke University Press, 2011); and Astrid Schrader, "Responding to *Pfisteria piscicida* (the Fish Killer): Phantomatic Ontologies, Indeterminacy, and Responsibility in Toxic Microbiology," *Social Studies of Science* 40, no. 2 (April 2010), pp. 275–306.

Is Merely Vacuum Fluctuations.”¹² The article explains that most of the mass of protons and neutrons (which constitute the nucleus and therefore the bulk of an atom) is due not to its constituent particles (the quarks), which only account for 1 percent of its mass, but rather to contributions from virtual particles. Let’s try to understand this better. Consider an individual particle. According to classical physics, a particle can stand on its own. We simply place a particle in the void—a Democritean delight. But according to QFT, a physical particle, even a (presumably) structureless point particle like an electron, does not simply reside in the vacuum as an independent entity, but rather is inseparable from the vacuum. The electron is a structureless point particle “dressed” with its intra-actions with virtual particles: it intra-acts with itself (and with other particles) through the mediated exchange of virtual particles. (For example, an electron may intra-act with itself through the exchange of a virtual photon, or some other virtual particle, and that virtual particle may further engage in other virtual intra-actions, and so on.) Not every intra-action is possible, but the number of possibilities is infinite. In fact, the energy-mass of this infinite number of virtual intra-actions makes an infinite contribution to the mass of the electron. But how can this be when the mass of a physical electron is clearly finite (indeed, it’s pretty

12 | Stephen Battersby, *New Scientist*, November 20, 2008. www.newscientist.com/article/dn16095-its-confirmed-matter-is-merely-vacuum-fluctuations.html (accessed February 2012).

darn small from our perspective)? The explanation physicists give is that the lone (“bare”) point particle’s contribution is infinite as well (infinitely negative due to the negative charge of the electron), and when the two infinities (that of the bare electron and that of the vacuum self-energy) are properly added together, the sum is a finite number, and not just any finite number but the one that matches the empirical value of the mass of the electron!¹³ In other words, an electron is not just “itself” but includes a “cloud” of an indeterminate number of virtual particles. All this may seem like a far-fetched story, but it turns out that vacuum fluctuations have direct measurable consequences (e.g., Lamb shift, Casimir effect, the anomalous magnetic moment of the electron).¹⁴

So even the smallest bits of matter are an enormous multitude. Each “individual” is made up of all possible histories of virtual intra-actions with all Others. Indeterminacy is an un/doing of identity that unsettles the very foundations of non/being. Together with Derrida we might then say: “identity . . . can only affirm itself as identity to itself by opening itself to the hospitality of a difference from itself or of a difference with itself. Condition of the self, such a difference *from* and *with* itself would then be its very thing . . . the stranger at home.”¹⁵ Individuals are infinitely indebted to all Others, where indebtedness is not about a debt that follows or results

13 | It may help to remember that not all infinities are the same size. For example, the number of real numbers (an uncountably infinite set) is larger than the number of integers (a countably infinite set).

14 | Wikipedia has relatively accessible explanations of these phenomena.

15 | Jacques Derrida, *Aporias* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1993), p. 10.

from a trans/action, but rather, a debt that is the condition of possibility of giving/receiving.

Ontological indeterminacy, a radical openness, an infinity of possibilities, is at the core of mattering. How strange that indeterminacy, in its infinite openness, is the condition for the possibility of all structures in their dynamically reconfiguring in/stabilities. Matter in its iterative materialization is a dynamic play of in/determinacy. Matter is never a settled matter. It is always already radically open. Closure can't be secured when the conditions of im/possibilities and lived indeterminacies are integral, not supplementary, to what matter is.

Nothingness is not absence, but the infinite plentitude of openness. Infinities are not mere mathematical idealizations, but incarnate marks of in/determinacy. Infinities are a constitutive part of all material "finites," or perhaps more aptly, "af/finites" (*affinities*, from the Latin, "related to or bordering on; connection, relationship"). Representation has confessed its shortcomings throughout history: unable to convey even the palest shadow of the Infinite, it has resigned itself to incompetence in dealing with the transcendent, cursing our finitude. But if we listen carefully, we can hear the whispered murmurings of infinity immanent in even the smallest details. Infinity is the ongoing material reconfiguring of nothingness; and finity is not its flattened and foreshortened projection on a

cave wall, but an infinite richness. The idea of finitude as lack is lacking. The presumed lack of ability of the finite to hold the infinite in its finite manifestation seems empirically unfounded, and cuts short the infinite agential resources of undecidability/indeterminacy that are always already at play. Infinity and nothingness are not the termination points defining a line. Infinity and nothingness are infinitely threaded through one another so that every infinitesimal bit of one always already contains the other. The possibilities for justice-to-come reside in every morsel of finitude.

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Here is Octavia Butler, the third of the women represented by stories in this volume. I have never met her, but I would certainly like to, for she is described to me as a large and impressive woman over six feet tall—and I like to admire statuesque women.

There's a queer double image of science fiction, by the way. To some people who don't read science fiction there is the feeling, I suspect, that the field is made up simply of a collection of stories in which writers predict the technological wonders of tomorrow. This insistence on "prediction" comes up whenever I am interviewed. I am constantly being asked to talk about the future, and a disquietingly large number of questions begin with "What do you predict for...?" It could be anything. The most recent question of the sort was, "What do you predict for the future of Philadelphia?"

On the other hand, there are also people who, through a surfeit of disaster movies, think of science fiction (which they call "sci-fi"—spit, spit) as a litany of terrible destructiveness. I guess that would be best epitomized by Harlan Ellison's favorite title for such things: "The Monster That Ate Cleveland."

Actually, science fiction is committed neither to marvels nor to disasters. It deals with possible situations. It tries to draw a rational and self-consistent society, different from ours, which may be better, even much better, than our society; or worse, even much worse; or better in some respects and worse in others. The point of the story, then, is how people live and react in such societies.

Naturally, trouble makes for greater drama than does happiness, and it asks more in the way of human response. Therefore, science fiction (like all forms of literature) is more likely to deal with discomfort than with comfort. Furthermore, it must be granted that given the direction in which our society is now moving, we seem much more likely to end in the soup than to be swimming in the cream.

But what counts, as always, is the way a story is written, and Octavia draws a picture of an all-but-destroyed society that is so vivid that you will find yourself living in it. And, oddly enough, she manages to end with a ray of hope that you will find yourself accepting gladly.

—Isaac Asimov

Speech Sounds

Octavia E. Butler

There was trouble aboard the Washington Boulevard bus. Rye had expected trouble sooner or later in her journey. She had put off going until loneliness and hopelessness drove her out. She believed she might have one group of relatives left

alive—a brother and his two children twenty miles away in Pasadena. That was a day's journey one-way, if she were lucky. The unexpected arrival of the bus as she left her Virginia Road home had seemed to be a piece of luck—until the trouble began.

Two young men were involved in a disagreement of some kind, or, more likely, a misunderstanding. They stood in the aisle, grunting and gesturing at each other, each in his own uncertain T stance as the bus lurched over the potholes. The driver seemed to be putting some effort into keeping them off balance. Still, their gestures stopped just short of contact—mock punches, hand games of intimidation to replace lost curses.

People watched the pair, then looked at one another and made small anxious sounds. Two children whimpered.

Rye sat a few feet behind the disputants and across from the back door. She watched the two carefully, knowing the fight would begin when someone's nerve broke or someone's hand slipped or someone came to the end of his limited ability to communicate. These things could happen anytime.

One of them happened as the bus hit an especially large pothole and one man, tall, thin, and sneering, was thrown into his shorter opponent.

Instantly, the shorter man drove his left fist into the disintegrating sneer. He hammered his larger opponent as though he neither had nor needed any weapon other than his left fist. He hit quickly enough, hard enough to batter his opponent down before the taller man could regain his balance or hit back even once.

People screamed or squawked in fear. Those nearby scrambled to get out of the way. Three more young men roared in excitement and gestured wildly. Then, somehow, a second dispute broke out between two of these three—probably because one inadvertently touched or hit the other.

As the second fight scattered frightened passengers, a woman shook the driver's shoulder and grunted as she gestured toward the fighting.

The driver grunted back through bared teeth. Frightened, the woman drew away.

Rye, knowing the methods of bus drivers, braced herself and held on to the crossbar of the seat in front of her. When the driver hit the brakes, she was ready and the combatants were not. They fell over seats and onto screaming passengers, creating even more confusion. At least one more fight started.

The instant the bus came to a full stop, Rye was on her feet, pushing the back door. At the second push, it opened and she jumped out, holding her pack in one arm. Several other passengers followed, but some stayed on the bus. Buses were so rare and irregular now, people rode when they could, no matter what. There might not be another bus today—or tomorrow. People started walking, and if they saw a bus they flagged it down. People making intercity trips like Rye's from Los Angeles to Pasadena made plans to camp out, or risked seeking shelter with locals who might rob or murder them.

The bus did not move, but Rye moved away from it. She intended to wait until the trouble was over and get on again, but if there was shooting, she wanted the protection of a tree. Thus, she was near the curb when a battered blue Ford on the other side of the street made a U-turn and pulled up in front of the bus. Cars were rare these days—as rare as a severe shortage of fuel and of relatively unimpaired mechanics could make them. Cars that still ran were as likely to be used as weapons as they were to serve as transportation. Thus, when the driver of the Ford beckoned to Rye, she moved away warily. The driver got out—a big man, young, neatly bearded with dark, thick hair. He wore a long overcoat and a look of wariness that matched Rye's. She stood several feet from him, waiting to see what he would do. He looked at the bus, now rocking with the combat inside, then at the small cluster of passengers who had gotten off. Finally he looked at Rye again.

She returned his gaze, very much aware of the old forty-five automatic her jacket concealed. She watched his hands.

He pointed with his left hand toward the bus. The dark-tinted windows prevented him from seeing what was happening inside.

His use of the left hand interested Rye more than his obvious question. Left-handed people tended to be less impaired, more reasonable and comprehending, less driven by frustration, confusion, and anger.

She imitated his gesture, pointing toward the bus with her own left hand, then punching the air with both fists.

The man took off his coat revealing a Los Angeles Police Department uniform complete with baton and service revolver.

Rye took another step back from him. There was no more LAPD, no more *any* large organization, governmental or private. There were neighborhood patrols and armed individuals. That was all.

The man took something from his coat pocket, then threw the coat into the car. Then he gestured Rye back, back toward the rear of the bus. He had something made of plastic in his hand. Rye did not understand what he wanted until he went to the rear door of the bus and beckoned her to stand there. She obeyed mainly out of curiosity. Cop or not, maybe he could do something to stop the stupid fighting.

He walked around the front of the bus, to the street side where the driver's window was open. There, she thought she saw him throw something into the bus. She was still trying to peer through the tinted glass when people began stumbling out the rear door, choking and weeping. Gas.

Rye caught an old woman who would have fallen, lifted two little children down when they were in danger of being knocked down and trampled. She could see the bearded man helping people at the front door. She caught a thin old man shoved out by one of the combatants. Staggered by the old man's weight, she was barely able to get out of the way as the last of the young men pushed his way out. This one, bleeding from nose and mouth, stumbled into another and they grappled blindly, still sobbing from the gas.

The bearded man helped the bus driver out through the front door, though the driver did not seem to appreciate his help. For a moment, Rye thought there would be another fight. The bearded man stepped back and watched the driver gesture threateningly, watched him shout in wordless anger.

The bearded man stood still, made no sound, refused to respond to clearly obscene gestures. The least impaired people tended to do this—stand back unless they were physically threatened and let those with less control scream and jump around. It was as though they felt it beneath them to be as touchy as the less comprehending. This was an attitude of superiority and that was the way people like the bus driver perceived it. Such "superiority" was frequently punished by beatings, even by death. Rye had had close calls of her own. As a result, she never went unarmed. And in this world where the only likely common language was body language, being armed was often enough. She had rarely had to draw her gun or even display it.

The bearded man's revolver was on constant display. Apparently that was enough for the bus driver. The driver spat in disgust, glared at the bearded man for a moment longer, then strode back to his gas-filled bus. He stared at it for a moment, clearly wanting to get in, but the gas was still too strong. Of the windows, only his tiny driver's window actually opened. The front door was open, but the rear door would not stay open unless someone held it. Of course, the air conditioning had failed long ago. The bus would take some time to clear. It was the driver's property, his livelihood. He had pasted old magazine pictures of items he would accept as fare on its sides. Then he would use what he collected to feed his family or to trade. If his bus did not run, he did not eat. On the other hand, if the inside of his bus was torn apart by senseless fighting, he would not eat very well either. He was apparently unable to perceive this. All he could see was that it would be some time before he could use his bus again. He shook his fist at the bearded man and shouted. There seemed to be words in his shout, but Rye could not understand them. She did not know whether this was his fault or hers. She had heard so little coherent human speech for the past three years, she was no longer certain how well she recognized it, no longer certain of the degree of her own impairment.

The bearded man sighed. He glanced toward his car, then beckoned to Rye. He was ready to leave, but he wanted something from her first. No. No, he wanted her to leave with him. Risk getting into his car when, in spite of his uniform, law and order were nothing— not even words any longer.

She shook her head in a universally understood negative, but the man continued to beckon.

She waved him away. He was doing what the less-impaired rarely did—drawing potentially negative attention to another of his kind. People from the bus had begun to look at her.

One of the men who had been fighting tapped another on the arm, then pointed from the bearded man to Rye, and finally held up the first two fingers of his right hand as though giving two-thirds of a Boy Scout salute. The gesture was very quick,

its meaning obvious even at a distance. She had been grouped with the bearded man. Now what?

The man who had made the gesture started toward her.

She had no idea what he intended, but she stood her ground. The man was half a foot taller than she was and perhaps ten years younger. She did not imagine she could outrun him. Nor did she expect anyone to help her if she needed help. The people around her were all strangers.

She gestured once—a clear indication to the man to stop. She did not intend to repeat the gesture. Fortunately, the man obeyed. He gestured obscenely and several other men laughed. Loss of verbal language had spawned a whole new set of obscene gestures. The man, with stark simplicity, had accused her of sex with the bearded man and had suggested she accommodate the other men present—beginning with him.

Rye watched him wearily. People might very well stand by and watch if he tried to rape her. They would also stand and watch her shoot him. Would he push things that far?

He did not. After a series of obscene gestures that brought him no closer to her, he turned contemptuously and walked away.

And the bearded man still waited. He had removed his service revolver, holster and all. He beckoned again, both hands empty. No doubt his gun was in the car and within easy reach, but his taking it off impressed her. Maybe he was all right. Maybe he was just alone. She had been alone herself for three years. The illness had stripped her, killing her children one by one, killing her husband, her sister, her parents...

The illness, if it was an illness, had cut even the living off from one another. As it swept over the country, people hardly had time to lay blame on the Soviets (though they were falling silent along with the rest of the world), on a new virus, a new pollutant, radiation, divine retribution... The illness was stroke-swift in the way it cut people down and stroke-like in some of its effects. But it was highly specific.

Language was always lost or severely impaired. It was never regained. Often there was also paralysis, intellectual impairment, death.

Rye walked toward the bearded man, ignoring the whistling and applauding of two of the young men and their thumbs-up signs to the bearded man. If he had smiled at them or acknowledged them in any way, she would almost certainly have changed her mind. If she had let herself think of the possible deadly consequences of getting into a stranger's car, she would have changed her mind. Instead, she thought of the man who lived across the street from her. He rarely washed since his bout with the illness. And he had gotten into the habit of urinating wherever he happened to be. He had two women already—one tending each of his large gardens. They put up with him in exchange for his protection. He had made it clear that he wanted Rye to become his third woman.

She got into the car and the bearded man shut the door. She watched as he

walked around to the driver's door—watched for his sake because his gun was on the seat beside her. And the bus driver and a pair of young men had come a few steps closer. They did nothing, though, until the bearded man was in the car. Then one of them threw a rock. Others followed his example, and as the car drove away, several rocks bounced off harmlessly.

When the bus was some distance behind them, Rye wiped sweat from her forehead and longed to relax. The bus would have taken her more than halfway to Pasadena. She would have had only ten miles to walk. She wondered how far she would have to walk now—and wondered if walking a long distance would be her only problem.

At Figueroa and Washington where the bus normally made a left turn, the bearded man stopped, looked at her, and indicated that she should choose a direction. When she directed him left and he actually turned left, she began to relax. If he was willing to go where she directed, perhaps he was safe.

As they passed blocks of burned, abandoned buildings, empty lots, and wrecked or stripped cars, he slipped a gold chain over his head and handed it to her. The pendant attached to it was a smooth, glassy, black rock. Obsidian. His name might be Rock or Peter or Black, but she decided to think of him as Obsidian. Even her sometimes useless memory would retain a name like Obsidian.

She handed him her own name symbol—a pin in the shape of a large golden stalk of wheat. She had bought it long before the illness and the silence began. Now she wore it, thinking it was as close as she was likely to come to Rye. People like Obsidian who had not known her before probably thought of her as Wheat. Not that it mattered. She would never hear her name spoken again.

Obsidian handed her pin back to her. He caught her hand as she reached for it and rubbed his thumb over her calluses.

He stopped at First Street and asked which way again. Then, after turning right as she had indicated, he parked near the Music Center. There, he took a folded paper from the dashboard and unfolded it. Rye recognized it as a street map, though the writing on it meant nothing to her. He flattened the map, took her hand again, and put her index finger on one spot. He touched her, touched himself, pointed toward the floor. In effect, "We are here." She knew he wanted to know where she was going. She wanted to tell him, but she shook her head sadly. She had lost reading and writing. That was her most serious impairment and her most painful. She had taught history at UCLA. She had done freelance writing. Now she could not even read her own manuscripts. She had a houseful of books that she could neither read nor bring herself to use as fuel. And she had a memory that would not bring back to her much of what she had read before.

She stared at the map, trying to calculate. She had been born in Pasadena, had lived for fifteen years in Los Angeles. Now she was near L.A. Civic Center. She knew the relative positions of the two cities, knew streets, directions, even knew to stay away from freeways which might be blocked by wrecked cars and destroyed overpasses. She ought to know how to point out Pasadena even though she could

not recognize the word.

Hesitantly, she placed her hand over a pale orange patch in the upper right corner of the map. That should be right. Pasadena.

Obsidian lifted her hand and looked under it, then folded the map and put it back on the dashboard. He could read, she realized belatedly. He could probably write, too. Abruptly, she hated him— deep, bitter hatred. What did literacy mean to him—a grown man who played cops and robbers? But he was literate and she was not. She never would be. She felt sick to her stomach with hatred, frustration, and jealousy. And only a few inches from her hand was a loaded gun.

She held herself still, staring at him, almost seeing his blood. But her rage crested and ebbed and she did nothing.

Obsidian reached for her hand with hesitant familiarity. She looked at him. Her face had already revealed too much. No person still living in what was left of human society could fail to recognize that expression, that jealousy.

She closed her eyes wearily, drew a deep breath. She had experienced longing for the past, hatred of the present, growing hopelessness, purposelessness, but she had never experienced such a powerful urge to kill another person. She had left her home, finally, because she had come near to killing herself. She had found no reason to stay alive. Perhaps that was why she had gotten into Obsidian's car. She had never before done such a thing.

He touched her mouth and made chatter motions with thumb and fingers. Could she speak?

She nodded and watched his milder envy come and go. Now both had admitted what it was not safe to admit, and there had been no violence. He tapped his mouth and forehead and shook his head. He did not speak or comprehend spoken language. The illness had played with them, taking away, she suspected, what each valued most.

She plucked at his sleeve, wondering why he had decided on his own to keep the LAPD alive with what he had left. He was sane enough otherwise. Why wasn't he at home raising corn, rabbits, and children? But she did not know how to ask. Then he put his hand on her thigh and she had another question to deal with.

She shook her head. Disease, pregnancy, helpless, solitary agony... no.

He massaged her thigh gently and smiled in obvious disbelief.

No one had touched her for three years. She had not wanted anyone to touch her. What kind of world was this to chance bringing a child into even if the father were willing to stay and help raise it? It was too bad, though. Obsidian could not know how attractive he was to her— young, probably younger than she was, clean, asking for what he wanted rather than demanding it. But none of that mattered. What were a few moments of pleasure measured against a lifetime of consequences?

He pulled her closer to him and for a moment she let herself enjoy the closeness. He smelled good— male and good. She pulled away reluctantly.

He sighed, reached toward the glove compartment. She stiffened, not knowing what to expect, but all he took out was a small box. The writing on it meant nothing to her. She did not understand until he broke the seal, opened the box, and took out a condom. He looked at her and she first looked away in surprise. Then she giggled. She could not remember when she had last giggled.

He grinned, gestured toward the backseat, and she laughed aloud. Even in her teens, she had disliked backseats of cars. But she looked around at the empty streets and ruined buildings, then she got out and into the backseat. He let her put the condom on him, then seemed surprised at her eagerness.

Sometime later, they sat together, covered by his coat, unwilling to become clothed near-strangers again just yet. He made rock-the-baby gestures and looked questioningly at her.

She swallowed, shook her head. She did not know how to tell him her children were dead.

He took her hand and drew a cross in it with his index finger, then made his baby-rocking gesture again.

She nodded, held up three fingers, then turned away, trying to shut out a sudden flood of memories. She had told herself that the children growing up now were to be pitied. They would run through the downtown canyons with no real memory of what the buildings had been or even how they had come to be. Today's children gathered books as well as wood to be burned as fuel. They ran through the streets chasing one another and hooting like chimpanzees. They had no future. They were now all they would ever be.

He put his hand on her shoulder and she turned suddenly, fumbling for his small box, then urging him to make love to her again. He could give her forgetfulness and pleasure. Until now, nothing had been able to do that. Until now, every day had brought her closer to the time when she would do what she had left home to avoid doing: putting her gun in her mouth and pulling the trigger.

She asked Obsidian if he would come home with her, stay with her.

He looked surprised and pleased once he understood. But he did not answer at once. Finally he shook his head as she had feared he might. He was probably having too much fun playing cops and robbers and picking up women.

She dressed in silent disappointment, unable to feel any anger toward him. Perhaps he already had a wife and a home. That was likely. The illness had been harder on men than on women—had killed more men, had left male survivors more severely impaired. Men like Obsidian were rare. Women either settled for less or stayed alone. If they found an Obsidian, they did what they could to keep him. Rye suspected he had someone younger, prettier keeping him.

He touched her while she was strapping her gun on and asked with a complicated series of gestures whether it was loaded.

She nodded grimly.

He patted her arm.

She asked once more if he would come home with her, this time using a different series of gestures. He had seemed hesitant. Perhaps he could be courted.

He got out and into the front seat without responding.

She took her place in front again, watching him. Now he plucked at his uniform and looked at her. She thought she was being asked something, but did not know what it was.

He took off his badge, tapped it with one finger, then tapped his chest. Of course.

She took the badge from his hand and pinned her wheat stalk to it. If playing cops and robbers was his only insanity, let him play. She would take him, uniform and all. It occurred to her that she might eventually lose him to someone he would meet as he had met her. But she would have him for a while.

He took the street map down again, tapped it, pointed vaguely northeast toward Pasadena, then looked at her.

She shrugged, tapped his shoulder, then her own, and held up her index and second fingers tight together, just to be sure.

He grasped the two fingers and nodded. He was with her.

She took the map from him and threw it onto the dashboard. She pointed back southwest—back toward home. Now she did not have to go to Pasadena. Now she could go on having a brother there and two nephews—three right-handed males. Now she did not have to find out for certain whether she was as alone as she feared. Now she was not alone.

Obsidian took Hill Street south, then Washington west, and she leaned back, wondering what it would be like to have someone again. With what she had scavenged, what she had preserved, and what she grew, there was easily enough food for them. There was certainly room enough in a four-bedroom house. He could move his possessions in. Best of all, the animal across the street would pull back and possibly not force her to kill him.

Obsidian had drawn her closer to him and she had put her head on his shoulder when suddenly he braked hard, almost throwing her off the seat. Out of the corner of her eye, she saw that someone had run across the street in front of the car. One car on the street and someone had to run in front of it.

Straightening up, Rye saw that the runner was a woman, fleeing from an old frame house to a boarded-up storefront. She ran silently, but the man who followed her a moment later shouted what sounded like garbled words as he ran. He had something in his hand. Not a gun. A knife, perhaps.

The woman tried a door, found it locked, looked around desperately, finally snatched up a fragment of glass broken from the storefront window. With this she turned to face her pursuer. Rye thought she would be more likely to cut her own hand than to hurt anyone else with the glass.

Obsidian jumped from the car, shouting. It was the first time Rye had heard his voice—deep and hoarse from disuse. He made the same sound over and over the way some speechless people did, "Da, da, da!"

Rye got out of the car as Obsidian ran toward the couple. He had drawn his gun. Fearful, she drew her own and released the safety. She looked around to see who else might be attracted to the scene. She saw the man glance at Obsidian, then suddenly lunge at the woman. The woman jabbed his face with her glass, but he caught her arm and managed to stab her twice before Obsidian shot him.

The man doubled, then toppled, clutching his abdomen. Obsidian shouted, then gestured Rye over to help the woman.

Rye moved to the woman's side, remembering that she had little more than bandages and antiseptic in her pack. But the woman was beyond help. She had been stabbed with a long, slender boning knife.

She touched Obsidian to let him know the woman was dead. He had bent to check the wounded man who lay still and also seemed dead. But as Obsidian looked around to see what Rye wanted, the man opened his eyes. Face contorted, he seized Obsidian's just-holstered revolver and fired. The bullet caught Obsidian in the temple and he collapsed.

It happened just that simply, just that fast. An instant later, Rye shot the wounded man as he was turning the gun on her.

And Rye was alone—with three corpses.

She knelt beside Obsidian, dry-eyed, frowning, trying to understand why everything had suddenly changed. Obsidian was gone. He had died and left her—like everyone else.

Two very small children came out of the house from which the man and woman had run—a boy and girl perhaps three years old. Holding hands, they crossed the street toward Rye. They stared at her, then edged past her and went to the dead woman. The girl shook the woman's arm as though trying to wake her.

This was too much. Rye got up, feeling sick to her stomach with grief and anger. If the children began to cry, she thought she would vomit.

They were on their own, those two kids. They were old enough to scavenge. She did not need any more grief. She did not need a stranger's children who would grow up to be hairless chimps.

She went back to the car. She could drive home, at least. She remembered how to drive.

The thought that Obsidian should be buried occurred to her before she reached the car, and she did vomit.

She had found and lost the man so quickly. It was as though she had been snatched from comfort and security and given a sudden, inexplicable beating. Her head would not clear. She could not think.

Somehow, she made herself go back to him, look at him. She found herself on her knees beside him with no memory of having knelt. She stroked his face, his beard. One of the children made a noise and she looked at them, at the woman who was probably their mother. The children looked back at her, obviously frightened. Perhaps it was their fear that reached her finally.

She had been about to drive away and leave them. She had almost done it, almost left two toddlers to die. Surely there had been enough dying. She would have to take the children home with her. She would not be able to live with any other decision. She looked around for a place to bury three bodies. Or two. She wondered if the murderer were the children's father. Before the silence, the police had always said some of the most dangerous calls they went out on were domestic disturbance calls. Obsidian should have known that—not that the knowledge would have kept him in the car. It would not have held her back either. She could not have watched the woman murdered and done nothing.

She dragged Obsidian toward the car. She had nothing to dig with her, and no one to guard for her while she dug. Better to take the bodies with her and bury them next to her husband and her children. Obsidian would come home with her after all.

When she had gotten him onto the floor in the back, she returned for the woman. The little girl, thin, dirty, solemn, stood up and unknowingly gave Rye a gift. As Rye began to drag the woman by her arms, the little girl screamed, "No!"

Rye dropped the woman and stared at the girl.

"No!" the girl repeated. She came to stand beside the woman. "Go away!" she told Rye.

"Don't talk," the little boy said to her. There was no blurring or confusing of sounds. Both children had spoken and Rye had understood. They boy looked at the dead murderer and moved further from him. He took the girl's hand. "Be quiet," he whispered.

Fluent speech! Had the woman died because she could talk and had taught her children to talk? Had she been killed by a husband's festering anger or by a stranger's jealous rage? And the children... they must have been born after the silence. Had the disease run its course, then? Or were these children simply immune? Certainly they had had time to fall sick and silent. Rye's mind leaped ahead. What if children of three or fewer years were safe and able to learn language? What if all they needed were teachers? Teachers and protectors.

Rye glanced at the dead murderer. To her shame, she thought she could understand some of the passions that must have driven him, whoever he was. Anger, frustration, hopelessness, insane jealousy... how many more of him were there—people willing to destroy what they could not have?

Obsidian had been the protector, had chosen that role for who knew what reason. Perhaps putting on an obsolete uniform and patrolling the empty streets had been what he did instead of putting a gun into his mouth. And now that there was something worth protecting, he was gone.

The Composition of the Cell

for Kit Robinson

- 1.1 It is the writer's object to supply.
- 1.10 Words are emitted by the rock to the eye.
- 2.11 The soft world is between rocks.
- 2.12 The person of which I speak is between clocks.
- 3.1 Exploration takes extra words.
- 3.3 They anticipate an immoderate time and place.
- 3.4 Reality moves around making objects appear as if they belong where they are.
- 4.2 Exactly!
- 5.7 The clouds pour shape and stability into the myopic intervals.
- 5.8 Those between seeing and believing.
- 5.9 Individualism requires an individual which disbelieves.
- 6.10 And commiserating sunlight.
- 7.1 Nature as hypotenuse.
- 8.3 Zukofsky says, "Emphasize detail 130 times over—or there will be no poetic..."
- 9.10 ... increments (like difference, longevity, velocity).
- 10.12 There is absolutely no catharsis.
- 11.7 The catharsis in its supervisorial near-future capacity darkens and unregenerate darkens.
- 12.1 I carry my thoughts in an ocular bucket.
- 12.2 Space accumulates in a far larger tub.
- 13.1 Dreams are perfect—it's illogical to think there could be mistakes anywhere in them.
- 13.4 Not unless you could say the psyche itself is a mistake.
- 13.5 I pose a question and immediately the psyche pops up.
- 13.6 Not something one would naturally name Patricia or Josh.

- 14.3 You may be hearing the social increase.
- 14.11 The urge to make copies is sociable, a very friendly use of technology.
- 15.5 Every place the imagination occurs replace it with the word "language."
- 16.5 In passing between these compounds, the mind will feel shocks of difference.
- 17.1 When I say "equals" I don't mean indifference but distance.
- 18.9 The lung is not the articulate organ of poetry.
- 19.10 I think, that is why I learned to talk.
- 20.11 It is a question of scale.
- 20.12 It is erotic when parts exceed their scale.
- 21.5 A drop of water is thrown off by the stove.
- 22.4 Love.
- 23.7 People see faces in everything.
- 24.4 My portrait is a bowl and I tap it with a spoon.
- 25.1 The world showed and it received worldwide attention.
- 26.1 I get mortally warmed up when I write the cold of poetry against the rocks on the ground.
- 27.3 Dotted, slab, cognition—these aren't pretty words (the imagination is watching itself).
- 28.8 I've thought that many times—myopia is psychosomatic.
- 28.12 So fate is convex, like an eyeball.
- 29.1 Improvisation slapped till the fresh rose came to face again.
- 30.1 I closed my mind in order to sleep with objectivity and modesty.
- 30.12 A person has deliberately to keep all that can be seen in.
- 31.7 Are words more often divided by music than music by words?
- 32.12 Two people cannot be bare at the same time because they have to exchange visibility.
- 33.5 Shelter and respite is not what's intended by exaggerated reality.
- 34.1 The psyche circulates.
- 34.7 I can say that I do not intend to be the end result of anything.

- 35.5 Words are unnaturally desired and saturated, as by perception of some eternal, never-ending, everyday task.
- 36.4 Interposed between the public and the sun.
- 37.1 Do you patrol? outside the self? around a body and the follicle in which it stands?
- 38.1 If reality is simply that which is accessible to reason when it folds over and it sticks up then sexuality is very optimistic, a very optimistic interest.
- 38.8 The reasonable outlook, knowledge.
- 38.9 It is based on acknowledgement in the end.
- 38.12 Of anything that is, there might be more.
- 39.5 This is bundled in the gulf between consciousness and fact.
- 40.5 Everything is subject to visibility.
- 41.7 One can't organize suction.
- 42.12 Repeatedly discontinuity lets us undo.
- 43.4 It's optimistic to xerox.
- 44.11 Need, it is just as warbling as punctuality.
- 45.1 A cell cannot boast stable achievements.
- 46.3 Jitters occur in the transfer of learning.
- 47.5 Humans learn by imitation (or sometimes counter-imitation, as with those who suffer sea-sickness).
- 48.6 Why can't I blue all the nameable causes of my material?
- 49.6 A writer singles out of any situation its grass.
- 50.4 Is green yellow plus something?
- 50.5 A person who had never seen a plant would not understand.
- 51.1 There is a slow and heavy yellow substitute for the dead of night.
- 52.6 And sound itself—a universal vocabulary of operative hums made by plants.
- 52.9 Out comes a perfect tongue.
- 52.11 It is unfortunately a hardly possible, candid pad.
- 53.1 This is my fortress consciousness, *that* is anxiety which has repeatedly claimed credit for it.

- 53.7 The time out of which I'll never drop is a skin.
- 54.4 A slowly gathering psychology augments the fun of writing.
- 55.10 But I've been singled out for this introspectively, a sail, a beast.
- 56.4 The proclivity of the tip of the head is to try to point to itself.
- 57.2 I *am* judging; the poem *could* be a unit of cognition poised within and a term in moral philosophy.
- 58.6 To omit mention of tickling, of moving water, of the intensely disagreeable shock when any sensations are interrupted, of the voluntary but innate tendency to move about, of the pleasures of a slow crescendo simply as such, and of mere distinctness would be a fault but of the eyes themselves.
- 59.4 Time is storage, with time's increase.
- 60.2 The person is gasping with explanation.
- 60.6 Many small movies being shown on the skin from many small projectors cause a tingling sensation and insomnia.
- 61.6 The space bent between us can be used for magnification (distance).
- 61.8 To the *n*th power (splendor) we can watch.
- 61.9 The impossibility of satisfying oneself is part of language.
- 62.3 Now what is love? It obliges you to say a few words.
- 63.4 It's snug to see an object that's obscured.
- 63.10 A wider, obdurate drop between a person and a rock.
- 64.1 When I get nervous I'm narrative.
- 65.11 Gull, obituary, urine, scope, batteries, watercress.
- 66.10 The middle.
- 67.9 Life after sleep—there too we have genitals and mental findings.
- 68.1 The bone of communication is hollow.
- 68.3 At the top of the mind, abstracted from its wild contents—there is your rational movement.
- 69.1 The poem is a correct metonym.
- 69.4 That stone (pointing to a stone) will tell of the theft sooner than I.
- 69.5 But again this is an imploding series, the skull in its soul in its skull, etc.
- 70.3 I cannot separate lucidity from undressing.

- 70.4 The body taken from the mind.
- 70.5 Where are your shoulders and your hands, your color, face, and, while I speak, your . . . everything?
- 70.6 The skin is the only possible means of keeping the different pieces together.
- 70.12 When you know what to do, it is ambition.
- 71.11 But one wants to know why emotion leads to ghosts in the first place.
- 72.11 Form or content?—this was never the real problem.
- 73.1 Rude infinite sense nursed on sex.
- 74.5 *Example 3*: “My mortal state, *knowing*, gives me no guarantee of what will happen.”

HOW PHENOMENA APPEAR TO UNFOLD

The subject of this talk (in which I will refer to works by Meredith Monk, Philip Whalen, Steve Benson, Norman Fischer, and Alice Notley) is how phenomena appear to unfold in the works mentioned, how one has or creates a sense of history, and therefore creates or seems to create events, or appears to be created by them.

The viewer of anything perceives order later on.

The forms of these works I'm mentioning are modes of awareness and devices of experimentation, the effect or 'function' of which is *not* to be determining order in advance and at the same time to be observing that one is nevertheless doing so.

This is related to the notion that "meaning separates you from reality" (Clark Coolidge).¹

The impression of history in Monk's *Quarry* is created by simultaneous occurrences, or an appearance of simultaneity, in a number of scenes or locations (viewed by the audience seated above looking down and alongside around a rectangular space, when the work was performed at La Mama theater). Minute daily events start up in these scenes together or consecutively: a group of women eating at a dinner table, an older couple elsewhere in a separate scene exchange shreds of smalltalk, a little girl performed by Meredith Monk lies in the center in bed as if the scenes around her were local viewed by and emanating from her mind; a maid with a broom moves straightening throughout occasionally sitting on a stool fiddling with the radio dials and listening to the radio with the little girl; a boy on a bicycle ringing his bell rides throughout, etc. There is a long early life. The work occurs in three scenes which unfold without a break: Lullaby, March and Requiem. The impression is created that specific individual, in the sense of unrelated, actions are *later* being controlled by dictators in the subsequent unfolding of World War II.

The numerous gestures and scenes of the Lullaby section are held together and at times swept into a motion, as if coming from the little girl in the bed; and from musical repetition such as holding a note, repetition of such dance movements as raising the hands, and triple repetition of phrases or syllables which are sung. There is created an impression of

¹ This essay was originally given as a talk at the Naropa Institute, July 1989, in a session titled "New Forms." This quote comes from a talk given in the same week by Clark Coolidge and Bernadette Mayer.

cause and effect which is not actual. For example, seated in their locations the people in the various separated spots swirl into the same twirling motion, which appears to 'cause' the next action of puffy clouds brought in carried on sticks by others and twirling carried as if swept through. The repetitions in the Lullaby section seem exact, peculiar as if 'life-like,' not 'controlled' in that they are insular (within its moment) as if within the cyclical rhythm of daily life through time; these gestures later appear, in the March section, to have been prior duplications of the later gestures of the dictators. Actions coming from minute specific spots which are not historical causes are later seen to be (in the present) swept in a movement whose apparent source of origination is the dictators. At the same time this impression is seen not to be actual.

For example: in the Lullaby section, the little girl and the maid listen to the radio over which there's a snatch of puppets' voices (children's program) as well as of Hitler-like shouting; in the subsequent dictator scene in the March section, clouds sweep through carried on sticks ushering in a red carpet rolled out on which the dictators strut. The contents of a dictator's conversation are Mickey Mouse, Minny Mouse and Goofy. Things occur before they are announced, thus transpiring from the future to the past. Such as: an attendant tastes food and drops dead from poison. Then "The Dictator's Evening Meal" is announced three time (i.e., after the event and mimicking the form of triple repetitions used in the previous Lullaby section).

Example of a sense of history: the impression of control is created by the overall dictator (performed by Ping Chong) standing or sitting outside or at the head of the rectangular space above, viewing the world (the audience is outside that world, viewing it and part of it). His shouts of echoing cries of war are followed by hand motions slightly duplicating the earlier hand motions of all the people, but now as if directing and drawing the world. He gets to the head of the space by walking down the red carpet of the dictators with nonchalant realistic motions amidst a scene in which everyone else, even those who are themselves dictators, move as if they were puppets. He walks through the subsequent scene of wild mass calisthenics-like military exercises and scenes of the world in war, as an observer with 'realistic' (i.e., appearing to be the source of origination) gestures.

The central scene, the culmination or explosion of energy, is that of Ping Chong's wild echoing shouts of war (followed, after a film, by the

scene in which there are calisthenics-military exercises, round-up of the Jews, bodies lying still in death). The film which separates these two violent scenes is silent except for the slight flapping and motion of the frame, i.e., of the motion picture camera which appears to be the source of origination. It is sending out the images from the middle of the work (the central act, titled March, of *Quarry*). A man who earlier ('unidentified') was snapping photographs of the different scenes, has become Ping Chong's aide in the shouting scene, standing silently behind the dictator. We now see who he really is, and (impression of what he really) was. We change our impression of him. The silent film shown after Ping Chong's scene shows figures in white crawling out of a quarry; the camera then sees closer in to bodies in white floating in water, some clinging to logs. Though the lens appears at that moment to be the source of origination sending out images, there are many such 'apparent' sources emanating from the particular scenes in their particular time frames.

As if there are holes all around from which reality is leaking through, and a stream occurring from future to past. The viewer sees the impression of history created, created by oneself though it's occurring outside.

This analysis of *Quarry* is difficult to visualize; but my focus here is literally perspective (how one sees locationally and spatially within the work). Seeing spatially within a *written* work is actively ordering reality. The reader is composing an order in a work. Whalen's 'method' or way of writing is a radical investigation of reality.

I intend the form of the following to be a revelation of his method—by him, as the form of what his work is doing. It is a 'talk' within a talk.

In commenting on Whalen's work, I will use as an example "Birthday Poem." Appearance of phenomena unfolding (how this seems to the viewer, both the speaker in the poem and the reader) is based on the 'physical' location of the viewer. How things appear may be seen from the person actually, that is, 'realistically' being inside locations commenting on the surroundings; or, thoughts or fantasies may occur springing up that will be realms or scenes taking place in themselves; or, ostensibly 'realistic' events may be supposedly (possibly 'actually') seen by the reader or speaker but seen to be 'outside' and really therefore called up thus seemingly created:

And winter just past. What do I see a hundred fish

Survived seventy miles of poisoned water, three million fishermen
Flash silver bug feed flip.

What do I see fish seller grabs a fly out of the air
No place to wipe his fingers

An impression of history is created from the specific, detailed minute scene. Which is not historical cause.

"Birthday Poem" was published in Whalen's selected poems, *Decompressions* (and in *Heavy Breathing*). In the introductory explanatory note to *Decompressions*, Whalen remarks that a poem is going to precede thinking; it is going to think itself, in addition to ripping the poet out of his head:

think of light wave/particle/bundles being slowly emitted in a pattern from the surface of somebody's face and traveling very slowly through space to mingle with the chemicals of a photographic film and slowly change them so that they in their turn remember the pattern and can reproduce it whenever called upon.

He quotes a passage from Stein's essay "Narration" citing the passage as a more exact expression of this conception:

If you exist any day you are not the same as any other day no nor any minute of the day because you have inside you being existing. Anybody who is existing and anybody really anybody is existing anybody really is that.

But anything happening well the inside and the outside are not the inside and the outside inside.

Let me do that again. The inside and the outside, the outside which is outside and the inside which is inside are not when they are inside and outside are not inside in short they are not existing, that is inside, and when the outside is entirely outside that is it is not at all inside then it is not at all inside and so it is not existing. Do you not see what a newspaper is and perhaps history.

Whalen's view that the poem precedes thinking is comparable to Meredith Monk's form: the specific locations which are entirely inside appear to give rise to the outside. This process is later seen to be the same as the outside.

"I did not have the idea Now today I'm going to manufacture this poem."

I asked Whalen a few questions about his writing process, recording our conversation on tape. (I will quote some of his responses. I have arranged them taking them out of the order in which I asked the questions.) He described his mode of composition as writing long-hand in a notebook, sometimes accompanying the writing with drawings. About structure:

The structure is made up to fit whatever suits me on the page. How it looks. Because you know for all practical purposes I never typed anything on the page; I always wrote everything long-hand and typed it later. It looks one way when it's written and another way when it's typed. If I don't like the way the linebreaks go I might change and other times not change it for anything. Certainly like Olson says, the typewriter has an influence on anything you write, but I got around that by always writing in long-hand. So I could write all over the page or around the edges of it.

He would look at the accumulated material in a notebook sometimes months after fragments were written, type the bits on separate pieces of paper, and put these on the floor to see what was there and what went together: "Sometimes on different days, on different months in a notebook. And then I'd look at these things and be typing it up out of a notebook and saw patterns in it all through and decided this part here was going to follow something else or not. And I can't explain. It was a poetical phrenzy."

Asked whether the accumulated material would sometimes go into different works, he answered affirmatively: "Some things arrive and they're done. You might make minor alterations. But they're done. Eight or fourteen lines. And that's the end of it. You can see that. And so that kind you can leave alone. Other times you have stuff that looks like it's not all there, and so you have to leave it and read it later."

It might be the circumstance of Donald Allen asking for a book. Whalen would look through his notebooks. He might find single objects and type those up:

And then you could see that there were fragments of something. And those fragments go down on the floor. And you find out that something you wrote last year and something you wrote five minutes ago are part of the same news. But it is always surprising to see that you have been doing this; that you have been through, over a space of time, been thinking about the same

thing, or writing in circles around something. And if you tie it all together, it makes up a thing.

If there appeared to be a spot that looked vacant in the poem after it was typed, he might write something right then to put in there. Other times, he would cut material. He went out on walks carrying a notebook. He tended to spend two or three hours in the morning in which he didn't do anything except sit with a blank piece of paper. The poem, for example, titled "Dream" (in *On Bear's Head*) was a rendition as exact as possible of an actual dream, as just that.

It was something I just *did*. It was exciting to keep on going to see what could happen, what I could come up with. Sometimes I would write something and I would just turn the page and forget it. And without thinking about it and write more stuff and maybe days later I might be thumbing through the stuff and wonder where did *that* come from? So, I don't know any more about it than that, except like I said in the seminar about Ted (Berrigan) I had the same experience of reading intensively and pretty soon your head gets all packed with material of all kinds and some of it leaks out into what *you're* working on in that the trivia comes out between *your* lines, or in quotes or whatever. And at that time, up until a few years ago anyway, I used to read you know quite extensively and for long periods of time and be always carrying a book around with me, of some kind or another. And in the last—say from 1986 or so—it's been more and more difficult to read. So I can't do that any more. It makes me very nervous that I can't read and it's very hard to write because if I'm not careful the lines start either crossing each other or dangling on the page. So I might be having to go into typing everything; and that prospect is not at all pleasant because I like the feeling of writing with the pen.

The mode of the work is not collage. It is an observation of fragments as they come up in a time period. "These long poems had to be put together literally on the floor, pasting and gluing."

"Birthday Poem" took two years to be completed; it was begun in Kyoto in 1967, continued in San Francisco and finished in Kyoto in 1969: "It would be in several notebooks. To get all of the material that I figured was going to be this thing after it was done. After I had it all there, and I looked at it all and I said Oh this is what there is there, that's a whole thing there, and it all connects together doesn't it." Asked about planning, whether there was a sense in advance of the completion or the shape of the poem: "I didn't know, not until I had it on the floor." "Birthday Poem" was

typed and considered or 'composed' at the end of two years; it existed, as it went along, only as its unexamined accumulation in the notebook.

The fragments of his poems are maintained as they were variously written in their time periods.

The writing as simply a mode of seeing what comes up in a time period is similar to the sense in *Quarry* of reality leaking through from all around in a present, and created from future to past. The poem thinks itself, being ahead of the person.

What occurs is in the middle of the work (within the line). "It has a thing inside the line the way the words go together. Rhythmical thing in the back of my mind somewhere and I'm very finicky about how the end of one word and beginning of another are going together."

Asked whether he used a formal pattern of fugues, or his own pattern:

My own pattern. Not necessarily having to do with fugues, but it's interweaving of different strands of ideas or notes, sounds that come around and about and all make a strange harmony. Somehow the overall object has its own proportions and its own working parts inside but it's hard to see 'em I think. Some people do and they like it and others say Now why did you do that? And if they say that you're out of luck. It's like you can't explain a joke. You can't explain jazz. And you do it because it's fun, for the excitement of doing it.

Asked about the relation of the inside and the outside as articulated in the quote from Stein, Whalen commented on the passage:

how the inside is really inside and the outside is really outside. It's all about psychology and it has some connection also with the way Buddhist psychology looks at things; how you eventually find out the outside is really inside. How you're making the world you're making things; that your sense is hooked up to your perception, sense of hearing is connected to your ears and your ears are connected to sounds and it's all totally mixed up. You can't say there's something out there. It's all inside. I don't know that I really got into that so much in any of my work.

(The following is my interpretation). The speaker, the person writing the poem appears to be duplicating things, but these things are actually inside *him*. This is also true of others.

There is a long present-time early life. Which really means that the action, or apparent source of origination—in the poem, and possibly in the

sense of actual memory or life—is in the future.

Leads (via Hollywood) into strange Kyoto present memory
Flying every day for many months early morning B-17
(TOMORROW?)
My name was Dumbo then, leather skin high-altitude elephant,
dangling oxygen trunk
(TOMORROW EARLY)
pink hydraulic hairoil fluid
Ethyl-ester perfume airplane fuel for cigaret lighter
Oxygen for hangover
(A HOME IN THE ARMY)
Fall asleep reading Whitman Civil War riding in the greenhouse
high above the Chocolate Mountains
All one short enormous life
how possible went?
Shall I be late tomorrow?
(EARLY. SEVEN DAYS A WEEK.)
with Jeanette MacDonald's husband
(SMILIN' THROUGH)
for an airplane driver
How did I ever get here? Enormous possibilities all miscarried
Long impossible early life
bestowed becalmed bedizened
Lovely desert mornings early every day
Mornings early every flying day twenty-three years ago

That the action is early (is in the beginning) means the appearance of cause and effect, which is not actual.

Always volunteer; never perform. This is benevolence. This is correction of the Will. Ted Williams went and spit on the grass.

Go now and write properly.

The unfolding of the phenomena of the poem occurs as a stream of images, scenes, comments, and personages from history, radio, and the movies. The depiction (beginning on the tenth page of the poem, p. 62 of *Decompressions*) of the corruption and manipulation, killing and bamboozling on the part of governments, politicians and banks is preceded by the image of a thin membrane being pushed from inside beyond the breaking point. In the 'tyrant passages,' the creation of history, as the attachment to

and reflexion of others' opinions, is seen to be not actual. Addressing friends, Governments, and Policemen:

Take a hoop and roll it

I laugh at you; I die and live continually
Imagining I care for you, you care for me

Lies & fraud
Nothing's genuine except imagination who creates
Whether we will or no: for fun
For boredom. For nothing.
I chose to appear in this place, to come to your party
I do it on purpose, over and over again
I hate parties, I always have a good time
And it always takes hours for me to recover my sanity
I go there to reassure you that the world is impractical
Magic and lunacy, poetry spells and music

I don't even realize you don't understand that you don't need
The help that I imagine you need I imagine I bring

Imagining I (but that is only you:
All of us projections overlapping real transparent scene)
I must act right, I must intend right even when there's
No such thing as I or right I must choose correctly
Keep these muscles practising, always hit the right key
I can read the score perfectly well,
Nerves and coordination perfectly fine
Only a temporary case of mistaken identity
Claude Raines. Bette Davis. Herbert Marshall. Monty Woolley.
George Sanders. Edith Sitwell. Lionel Barrymore. Ethel Barrymore.

The passages which are the rendition of and diatribe on the power of government and tyrants are a culmination of resonance in the poem, in that an engagement with this is the direction in which the poem appears to have been moving (when one is reading those passages).

Whalen does not 'define' the writing. "Do you conceive of writing as being a meditation?"

No. No, no, no. It's a form of amusement, a form of excitement, a form of—it's just something that's fun to do; you just do it, or not. And it makes me very nervous not to be doing it.

You know a lot of the time I used to sit and make pictures in a notebook. I can dig up the notebooks that that stuff came out of and show you. Sometimes there'd be you know a few lines of something that eventually gets into print. And it's a mixture of things. And so if I just say it's raining today, I'm not going to copy that out on the typewriter. Unless I really feel that I have to somehow. It's very difficult to talk about because I don't *know* what I'm doing until after it's done' and then after it's done it's interesting or not. And that's all.

The mode of constructing by laying the pages on the floor is an 'objective' experiment. This is without any proposition that the writer is able to remove himself from the writing as a kind of objective camera-lens-like analysis of reality (a concept in writing which would actually be the opposite, constituting a hidden narrator).

Compare to the current view of 'radical questioning of subjectivity' as analysis in the writing which is (supposedly) thereby free of social construction; that is analysis (of subjectivity) which implies a critique of the conception of the unified subject. Yet as a concept of 'objectivity,' the view (the analysis) itself *constitutes* a unified subject.

Anyone's perception of cause and effect, and their ordering in the writing, is a conception of the unfolding of phenomena. It is oneself, and is the recreation and examination of that. There is no authority, no objectivity.

The mind is vacant containing trivia, memories, dreams, opinions. Asked whether part of the purpose in a poem is to get it, the 'trivia' and associations, out there to see what one is doing with it, Whalen replied:

Well, the thing is I'm not doing anything with it until it's on paper. And some of the stuff that gets on the paper I don't find interesting. Or it has no bounce to it or no rhythm to it. But certain things come up, like the line Louis remembered about "With your finger on the throttle and your foot upon the treadle of the clutch" how all those l and t and d sounds run together in such a funny way. It just happened; although that became a part of a much longer piece, but it was once a stray, almost a poem itself.

(My interpretation:). There is only something when it's written, when it's on paper. According to Whalen in the introduction, "By strict attention to (and application of) a version of logic and empiricism and the experimental method," we have created a luxurious life for a few who control the money machine. Whalen's process is a form of reverse empiricism. In his

writing, the 'causes of history' (of or in the poem) do not actually lie in the specific detailed scenes, thoughts, or words. Words, put out there, are vacant (in the sense of the mind getting rid of the words, as in the lines of the poem "The Best of It:" "Get the words out of my head / Lewis looked at me one day and yelled, / 'Look at your head. You got all those words in there! / Your head is full of words!' "). Scenes and words occur past the various 'culminations.' The following is one scene, viewed after the rendition of or diatribe on governments and tyrants. It is not the outcome of either that phenomena or of the diatribe. It (and the speaker) appear(s) to be 'free.'

A green hole in the distance
Green diamond, beryl, emerald.
Professors and students now appear in
Brilliant feathers, plumes, gems, enamels
(Black palm fronds)
Each one is different. What is it they are eating.
Word word word word word click.

Putting the words outside is related to the writing being ahead of or preceding the person.

The writing is a mode, not a system. 'Apparent' source(s) of origination in the writing are the individual locations or 'selves' and scenes, the future creating the past.² All these loci are "projections overlapping real transparent scene" like a motion picture camera which sends out images and also sees them. That 'real' transparent scene is constant movement *within* time: "Double-motion projection of streetcar (moving water moving along / steel tracks the moving bridge."

In the original performance of Steve Benson's work "Back" (included in *Reverse Order*), a xeroxed text was passed out to the audience. Benson 'read' it duplicating phrases from it and gradually beginning to diverge by commenting, extrapolating and interweaving with it to include the moment in which the event was occurring. The event was taped. The later

² When after writing this talk I described this sense in his writing and in Monk's work, Whalen appeared startled. He said, (Zen Master) "Dōgen said the future creates the past." Him not having been completely aware of this at the time of writing the poem—is an example of the future creating the past.

written text is a compilation including that event, which comments on itself as performance; the developing work is 'read' and changed in the process, so that it is literally *on* itself as in the moment of the speaker's and audience's concentration—on one separating from oneself and so from concentration to be right there next to 'experience.' The attention of the mind (of either the speaker's, or the reader's or listener's) in reading the text or during the performance, is neither in nor outside that experience. As described in a line from Benson's poem "Reverse Order," this is concentration "that slumbers at the edges of intention, too supple finally for either on or off." "Back" is a stream of associations and "translators" (which are the speaker, the different time frames and their context of events).

The writing is extended in sometimes very ordinary subject matter and surface in which divergence from the self (viewer or speaker) and concentration on that becomes apparent.

Benson's *Blue Book* is a collection of experimental works which are forms of improvisational dialogue—of the inside speaking to the inside to eventually perceive the inside and outside as the same.

The works in *Blue Book* are a series of devices; the title piece, "Blue Books," was composed by filling up fifty examination books, with the intention of writing in a don't-look back mode to see what would occur and without presuming any option of revision. Benson describes the open-ended, improvisational nature of the project as not insuring any particular quality of spontaneity or passion, self-consciousness or lack of that: "I only assumed that I didn't know what I would write, one moment (word, line, phrase, sentence) to the next, or one day (sitting, book) to the next." In regard to the risk of self-indulgence or failure, "I accepted this in a spirit of stubborn resistance to ideals of quality. I was impatient and dissatisfied with just about any criteria for valuing the work as 'finished,' and glad to feel that I could and would screw it up." The piece "Blue Books" is actually selections excerpted from the complete project.

He writes in that particular piece without stopping, to see what occurs. It is as if looking into a mirror and writing from that. The writing is the overlap—ostensibly the point of agreement or "point of no appearance":

you think—no perspective,
they say. We keep moving—trying
to head down that dividing line,
disappearing point—what's it

called? Point of no appearance,
yet it seems the crux of reality
seen with a one...Vanishing—
When you only have a one-vanishing-
point perspective, you need to
vanish straight, so you don't
radiate, and distribute annihilation
all over the place

The lens examining the lens, the mind examining the mind is the point
of no appearance. The writing device is viewed as the lens:

staying behind the function of its
lens, the will is positioned, revealing
its framing, holding ground, but no
moving, except that pushing out
through, the method so stationary
the instrument moving, arbitrarily
veering around, pushing, the earth
has no center any more against the
eyes' mind, the function of the
relation between the camera and
photographer's eye..

Distinctions of quality as to 'good' poetic form are broken down in
favor of this articulated function of observation of phenomena. Benson's
de-emphasis of an intention of 'art' in his notes to *Blue Book* implies a
critique of his own method; the effect of writing is not essence, but rather
the streams of things aligning in and out of consciousness. A conception
of essence is actually a fiction of dialogue:

but whether what I do is any better done
than anything or anybody else's doing of it
if there is or were an identity to be made
between projects, as, essence we're all doing
the same or one actual thing, I doubt it,
except surviving...

Form in writing does not define. One does not define 'innovation' in
advance. 'Innovation' is not a particular syntax.

Benson's introductory notes describe how he composed each of the
projects in the book. The descriptions are part of the works, as a means of

enabling the reader to duplicate the act or 'performance' of them. They are also separate, 'outside' the works. They precede and/or follow the works.

"The Town of He," for example, was composed by memorizing two pages each from five texts (including Thoreau's "Civil Disobedience," Huizinga's essay on Abelard, and Johnson's *Life of Swift*). The author spent two months memorizing and practicing recombining the material, and in performance spoke out from memory words, phrases and sentences of the texts as they occurred to him:

As in effect I was reading off my memory, the appearance was of a recitation; since I was choosing and often pausing in deliberation or patient vacancy, the sensation of an unforeseeable and unrepeatable presentation was palpable as well.

"The Town of He" is indicative of the conceptual nature of this body of work. This particular text as written may not be as interesting as the conception of it. His work is not its sound pattern, for example. The poem's interest is in the idea of an act which cannot be repeated. It is another form of the dialogue (in which the listener(s) is self and audience) as an act.

Blue Book is not examples of automatic writing. What's occurring is in its intention, its 'vision.'

Norman Fischer's *Turn Left In Order To Go Right* has passages of prose in which there is movement that throughout the extended work or book is contrapuntal to the interspersed, fairly short-lined poems. There appears to be a sweep of movement through the 'book,' as well as within the individual works. The reader or the speaker in it has the illusion of being within the individual increments (which do not appear to contain or to be change, as they tend to be mere observations or statements about people and events; as such they are the *abstractions* of events); at some point, without knowing when this has occurred, the viewer perceives being already outside of a stream of such increments, as if change has already taken place. The following is a description of this process, description of movement as such being the mode of the increments of the writing. The writing is not 'descriptive;' nothing is described. This passage is from "Poem for Bach's Three Hundredth Birthday," which Fischer describes in a note as having been composed in contrapuntal form:

The kids' lives do go on in a marvelous way despite all. There's a blind

energy there you have to marvel at, how they know exactly what they want (although of course they have no idea how to get it) from the very beginning, and how their little bodies stretch forward toward tomorrow, sensing, or maybe literally even smelling, destiny standing there in an overcoat reading a newspaper at the corner where the express bus stops. They are born with such a dramatic sense of definitiveness. They don't necessarily want to be here but something propels them forward in tremendous struggle they come inch by inch coursed along by some grand movement like the sea in a very clear direction out into the harshness.until bit by bit this elemental quality leaves them, or rather doesn't really leave them so much as get defined out; still there but unnoticed. And the word 'elemental' isn't it either, but rather points us in exactly the wrong direction. All the words, in fact, are the wrong ones: magical, and all we've got, but essentially wrong, because they point to something, when really there isn't anything.

The description of the movement is all that appears to be there. Akin to Benson's application of his writing as a lens, Fischer is using the very element of description, the warp of abstraction as the writing's means of sight. The matter of the work is ordinary, crucial experience (such as the death of one's parent). From the poem "For Your Own Good:"

But if I try to find myself it is impossible, because like a fingertip that cannot touch itself or a knife that cannot cut itself I cannot see myself I can only see an abstraction, glass, outside of which I am placed in thought, in language. I only imagine myself to continue. In actuality I must stop and recreate myself over again. Time doesn't go by I go by. I don't see anything, anything sees me. Before I arrive I'm already there. Before I leave I've already returned. The sentence writes itself, refracts itself and unwinds. So sentence is thus and for the sentence sight.

The capacity of the sentence to be "sight" is derived from it being vacant, from it not being skilled as artful 'composition' (as in the comment, "The trouble with us is we know exactly what we are doing. We are skilled and we cannot turn back."). This refers to the construction (i.e. prior description) of a society, world, a sense of an individual's life. The effect of an unrefined or apparently unedited, crude text which is doing a description of its process or movement is not being that.

Everything human beings stand for assumes conclusions and improvements, and we keep going over and over the text, replacing old parts with new, adjusting an idling screw, breaking off an old nut, sharpening up the teeth of the gears. That way we produce an activity whose hum resonates

precisely with a tone we've had in our head since the beginning, and we feel a positive sense of well being that is almost transcendent.

It doesn't matter if the sentence has 'sight:' The poem is not a product—it is not any *thing*. This is writing which is a form of speaking to oneself, to the one who's speaking—until it is neither: "Right through the spaces between the buttons on the shirt. Trees swish. Birds don't want to fly. Why is not an element of time. Time matters, is matter. Is organized like a lark, on a lark."

The form of Alice Notley's poem "White Phosphorus" is phrases and words in quotation marks, beside each other in stanzas; they are in quotes because it is what we say, it is a mask, it is outside, and yet it is also "center of senses," "center of, moment."

The 'context' is that of a brother actually having died from having been in the war in Vietnam. His death has occurred in the present long after that war. The context is the war. It is the moment "before we were born?"; after death; inside *this* moment; it is "seen through his eyes"; actual death; it is what people say, which is history.

"In this moment" "before" "anyone, ever" "died" "before we were born?"
"in this moment forever before" "before we went to a war"
"Before we died" "In this moment, now" "In this moment before, it is not before" "In this very moment" "where is it" "where we haven't died" "or died inside" "In this moment we haven't" "in this moment, no one" "in this moment, no one has ever, died" ("But I have been born") "in this moment" "where, where is it" "in moment" "who's here"
"Catch it catch it" "moment where we are" "merely as it is autonomous,"

The phrases are in the frames of their quotes. The moments or particles are autonomous, existing separately beside each other in the poem which is without a frame (without quotes).

(knowledge, so endless" "is nothing") "A war" "more news, more to know about, to know" "Excuse for anger" "indignation" "you can still keep your money" "know the terms of news" "terms" "Know what news knows"

"What words know" "Do words know?" "No they don't, only flesh knows only

soul knows" "in the words" "A mask is rigid" "on warm flesh on dreaming mind" "on fleshly mind" "rigid" "But my brother now is nature, pure nature" "however that be" "Or I have dreamed so" "Owl, not an albatross" "He's an owl," "not an albatross" "I have twice "dreamed that Al" "is an owl" "intricate with" "feathers" "texture of

The idea of history—which has been created by the "country," by "America," "soldiers," "us"—has become a form 'within' the context of the poem (it is its inside). It is our view of it. The 'form' has become an apparatus, a device for transforming actual life and death.

I am concerned in my own work with the sense that phenomena appear to unfold. (What is it or) how is it that the viewer sees the impression of history created, created by oneself though it's occurring outside?

Multiple perspective (in these works), in which the viewer and speaker are 'within' (being its inside) the work, allows reality to leak from many holes all around. As (spatially) infinity is all around one, it creates a perspective that is socially democratic, individual (in the sense of specific) and limitless.