

CONFIGURING CRISIS: WRITING, MADNESS, AND THE MIDDLE VOICE

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## ABSTRACT

By investigating the discursive rules of hermeneutics and diagnosis, this study seeks to problematize particular presuppositions—most notably the presupposition of sense—of the modern disciplinary hermeneutic context.

Following Barthes's consideration of the Greek *modus* of the middle voice as a useful notion in conceptualizing the modern scene of writing, the study advances itself toward conceptualizing a configuration of the modern reading scene in its middle-voiced permutation. In such a scene, the moment a reading attempts to read itself from without its parameters, it arrives at a spatial and temporal crisis (from the Greek *krín-ein*; to decide) between its action and the place (of not sense and not not sense) which exceeds the parameters delimiting the action of reading itself, but which nevertheless conditions its possibility. The grammar of this crisis is the middle voice; its condition, in the context of this study, is configured as madness. Madness is thus configured as a function of interrogation, reading and diagnosis.

At the nucleus of the modern reading scene itself, this thesis opens with an introduction of the terms *middle voice*, *crisis* and *madness*, and then offers a consideration of three permutations of reading: Chapter Two, Chapter Three and the space between. Chapter Two considers a fictional representation of writing in the middle voice through a reading of Nabokov's *Lolita*, a text of fiction in the form of a "mad writer's" diary, whose historical reception has been marked by acts of appropriative censorship and clinical diagnosis. Chapter Three considers a permutation of the middle-voiced reading through a reading of Gertrude Stein's lectures on writing. This consideration is framed by fragments from the writing of Maurice Blanchot, connecting reading (as conceived by Stein) to madness, figuring the convergence of reading and madness in writing. The Interchapter, between chapters Two and Three, is an aporetic space entitled "Madness Itself." By allowing a brief and partial view of the modern clinical psychiatric setting, and by calling into question the parameters of the surrounding "chapters" themselves, this section seeks to perform, structurally and thematically, a moment of crisis recalling the middle voice.

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*For EM*

## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION: The Non-Question

*The first schizophrenic evidence is that the  
surface has split open. (Deleuze, Logic 86)*

“Suppose there were no questions what would the answer be?,” Gertrude Stein asked a group of bewildered journalists during her American lecture tour (1934), and then proceeded to answer their questions with patience, cooperation, and good humor.<sup>1</sup> Suppose there were no beginning, what would the end be? This study works its way around permutations of Stein’s anti-rhetorical question in order to problematize (and thus call into question) the confrontation between a reading, or a disciplinary hermeneutic framework, and the impossible place, spatial and temporal, which exceeds the parameters of that framework, but which nevertheless conditions its possibility. The study thereby seeks to problematize a certain mode of interrogation by calling into question some features of the interrogative domain itself. Suppose there were no questions, what would the answer be? The answer would be the question? But suppose there were no questions. By questioning itself, by questioning the presupposition of a normative demarcation separating question from answer in the first place, the anti-rhetorical question cancels itself out, only to begin again, ad infinitum. In the context of this analysis, the question that acts upon itself, at the moment of its reflexive action, confronts the limitation of its own constitutive order, for it cannot interrogate itself from without its purview, cannot



see what it does not see, cannot observe the limits of its observation from without those limits, and at any given moment, cannot access a given space which exceeds the regulatory domain of questions and figures as a shifting blind spot in the act of interrogation itself. The question enacts a confrontation between its normative conceptual boundary and the space beyond—the not question and not not question, not answer and not not answer—the space that cannot be configured by the very terms which define the order of questioning itself.

The anti-rhetorical question, in this study, enables a consideration of the action of disciplinary reading, with its presupposition of sense and order, at the moment the reading attempts to read itself, or to access a space that is inaccessible to it, but cannot, for the space exceeds the categorical markers delimiting the action of reading in the first place. The aim is not to deny the primacy of the hermeneutic process which, in Hans-Georg Gadamer's work, is not only the process through which subjects come to know or understand the world, but also the very process conditioning an understanding-through-language which constitutes everyday being in the world.<sup>2</sup> Rather, the aim is to problematize particular presuppositions of the hermeneutic process—principally the presupposition of sense—and to open up the relationship of the modern Western reader to her reading in a way which addresses the force of such a problematization. Elena Esposito's nuanced interrogation of hermeneutics and observation theory is relevant to such a critique, and is discussed in the final chapter of this study. Her consideration moves toward the claim that there is a need for theoretical instruments which have the capacity to deal with cases "in which the receiver gets something that could not be foreseen by the utterer" (617), and that "Hermeneutics does not seem able to offer such

instruments” (617). This study, in its initiation of a struggle with the hermeneutic framework, engages the circumstances leading to such a stipulation.

\* \* \*

*To open*: Suppose there were no writing, what would the reading be? The reading would be the writing? In “To Write: An Intransitive Verb?,” Roland Barthes reminds us that the grammatical category *diathesis*, or *voice* (active, passive, middle), “designates the way in which the subject of the verb is affected by the action; this is obvious for the passive; and yet linguists tell us that, in Indo-European at least, the diathetical opposition is not between active and passive but between active and middle” (*Rustle* 18). In the case of the active voice, the action is performed outside the subject, so that she herself is not affected by the action (e.g. I open something), but in the case of the middle voice, “by acting, the subject affects himself, he always remains inside the action, even if that action involves an object. Hence, the middle voice does not exclude transitivity” (18). The Hebrew verb *patach*, in its active form, means to begin, to open; in its middle form, *lehitpateach*, the verb means to open oneself, to develop, to grow, where the subject is both the agent and the patient of the action, and the action carries within it a continuous repetition, over time; the action is intransitive, but does not exclude transitivity. *Hitpatachti* means ‘I myself developed,’ absolutely, intransitively, but also transitively, for ‘I developed myself.’ I and myself are the subject and object, agent and patient, of this reflexive action. Barthes proposes that the middle voice “corresponds exactly to the modern state of the verb *to write*: to write is today to make oneself the

center of the action of speech, it is to affect writing by affecting oneself, to make action and affection coincide, to leave the *scriptor* inside the writing—not as a psychological subject but as agent of the action” (18). Thus, “in the modern verb of the middle voice *to write*, the subject is constituted as immediately contemporary with the writing, being effected and affected by it” (19).

Hayden White, with reference to Barthes’s proposition, notes that according to this construction of the modern verb *to write*, the writer writes [herself] in such a way that the action of writing cannot be separated from the writing subject who is at once the agent and the patient occupying the interior of the activity, existing as a writer only inside and at the time of the intransitive action itself (“Writing” 182). That the usage of the verb *to write* has become intransitive (where the writer no longer writes something, but writes, period) marks a shift which Barthes intuits to be a significant transformation in modern thought.<sup>3</sup> Hence, Foucault’s comment about the word ‘literature:’

the word is of recent date, as is, also, in our culture, the isolation of a particular language whose peculiar mode of being is ‘literary.’ This is because at the beginning of the nineteenth century [. . .] literature becomes more differentiated from the discourse of ideas, and encloses itself within a radical *intransitivity* [. . .] and becomes merely a manifestation of a language which has no other law than that of affirming—in opposition to all other forms of discourse—its own precipitous existence. (*Order of Things* 299-300)

What is primarily important for Barthes is not the intransitive usage of the verb *to write*, but rather its diathetical inflection. Citing the Proustian narrator as a prime example of the writer who exists through writing, Barthes situates the whole of modern literature as

an experimental project seeking to define the field of the writer in the same way that grammatical categories, such as *voice*, define the position of the subject. Modern literature, according to this conception, seeks “to establish a new position for the agent of writing in writing itself,” so that “The field of the writer is only writing itself, not as pure ‘form,’ conceived by an aesthetic of art for art’s sake, but much more radically as the only possible space of *the one who writes*” (20).

White, following Barthes, argues for a mode of representation characterized by what he calls a ‘middle voicedness,’ which would be suitable for the processing of historical events and experiences of the world which he identifies as “modernist” in nature. Such events usually lead to “anomalies, enigmas, and dead ends” (*Figural* 39) in the context of discussions featuring “a conception of discourse that owes too much to a realism that is inadequate” (39) in the face of occurrences which themselves belong to “an order of experience beyond (or prior to) that expressible in the kinds of opposition we are forced to draw (between agency and patiency, subjectivity and objectivity, literalness and figurativeness, fact and fiction, history and myth, and so forth) in any version of realism” (39). In his consideration of “literature as a mode of writing which abandons both the referential and poetic functions of language” (67), White conceptualizes writing in the context of modern experience, where one suddenly has to register, remember, or understand events which could not have occurred before the twentieth century; events, he writes, “whose nature, scope, and implications no prior age could even have imagined” (69). Included in these are the two world wars, rationalized genocidal projects (especially the German, in Europe, of six million Jews), the rise of technology and warfare, overwhelming population growths, pollution spreads, nuclear contamination,

consequential ecological threats, and so on. The individual experiencing these events, or their memory, or being affected by them, or attempting to understand or translate them, must necessarily deal with the ambiguity, even impenetrability, of their meaning. As White submits, the implication for our age is not that such events never happened (they not only happened, their effects are still happening), but that the interpretations of such events, of their meanings, defy prior conceptions of understanding and representing experience. White envisions the middle voiced conception of the modern verb *to write* as a mode of representation for an order of experience which obliterates the difference between agency and patiency, and which figures as an enigma or a dead end in the face of an interpretation which presupposes such a difference. The middle voice itself resounds in the Derridean notion of *differance* which Derrida describes as that which designates something “neither simply active nor simply passive” (*Speech* 137), which “cannot be thought of either as a passion or an action of a subject upon an object, as starting from an agent or from a patient, or on the basis of, or in view of, any of these terms” (137), so that “it announces or rather recalls something like the middle voice” (137). Derrida introduces *differance* as “strategically the theme most proper to think out [. . .] in what is most characteristic of our ‘epoch’” (135-6).

Both Barthes and White consider the middle voice as a grammatical category describing the relationship between an agent and an act, and as a figurative feature in the conceptualization of the relationship between the modern writer and her writing. What, however, of the correlative relationship between the reader and her reading? What shift in the modern event of reading corresponds to the shift occasioned in the modern event of writing? How, if at all, can the modern verb *to read* be conceptualized in the middle

voice? A middle voiced permutation of reading would entail a reading wherein the reader remains inside the action, effected and affected by her positionality, both as agent and patient of the action itself: *to read [oneself]*. To read in the middle voice would entail a reading of oneself reading, a reading of reading itself, inside and at the time of the action of reading. Anthony Giddens submits that “What is characteristic of modernity is not an embracing of the new for its own sake, but the presumption of wholesale reflexivity—which of course includes reflection upon the nature of reflection itself” (*Consequences* 39). As such, the modern social order entails a mode of interpretation where “All knowledge claims [. . .] are inherently circular” (176) and, therefore, involve what Giddens calls “the institutionalization of doubt” (176) as a new mode of organizing action and experience.<sup>4</sup>

John Mowitt, in *Text: The Genealogy of an Antidisciplinary Object*, engages an interrogation of disciplinary reason as a structural feature of the institutional organization of knowledge and experience. He charges that “the object of a discipline is not necessarily real, it is a regulative fiction that nonetheless *really* works to orient research within a particular field—research which may actually lead to interventions in the real that constitute reality as such” (27). By problematizing a particular *mode of questioning* employed in modern hermeneutic disciplinary contexts, this study addresses, among other things, the modern disciplinary crisis of which ‘interdisciplinarity’ is a model symptom. The practice of Interdisciplinary Studies, so prevalent in contemporary modern humanistic institutions of knowledge—and arguably prevalent within the confines of this study itself—is paradigmatic of radical reflexivity, for it reflects on the limitations of disciplinary reflection, seeking to supplement itself; it attempts to shift a familiar

disciplinary framework toward an additional, alien disciplinary object—an object heretofore unknown, or unintelligible, for it orients research in a foreign discipline—and vice versa (shifting a familiar object such that it orients research in a foreign disciplinary field), in a hermeneutically circular advancement toward the *disciplinization* of doubt.

If modern writing, as conceptualized by Barthes, seeks to establish a new position for the agent of writing in writing itself, so that the field of the writer is only writing and writing is the only possible space of *the one who writes*, then modern reading, in its middle voiced permutation, seeks to establish a new position for the agent of reading in reading itself, so that the field of the reader is only reading, and this field is always haunted by the *impossible* space of the one who reads—by the space beyond the constitutive parameters which circumscribe the field of reading and render it possible in the first place. The hermeneutic scene of reading, with its presuppositions of sense, order and comprehensibility, at the moment of its interrogation of the interrogative field, can only maintain its status as ‘reading’ through and inside the very normative domain it seeks to exceed. This regulatory domain of reading, already presupposing a categorical difference between inside and outside, sense and nonsense, meaning and nonmeaning, readability and unreadability, cannot access a place beyond its constitutive conceptual range, a place that is not outside and not inside, not sense and not not sense, a place that cannot be read or observed in view of, or on the basis of, any of these terms.

Presupposing the universal law of contradiction—that something cannot be both  $x$  and not  $x$ —the hermeneutic scene of reading can only question itself from within the confines of its presuppositions; it can only ask, *can* something be both  $x$  and not  $x$ ? It cannot answer, can something be *neither*? That which is not  $x$  and not not  $x$ , figuring as the

unmarked void beyond the confines of the hermeneutic scene of sense itself, is the very blind spot which the middle voiced reading, in its irremediable questioning of itself, does not see, but which conditions the possibility of its reading in the first place.

Elena Esposito reminds us that the origin of the expression, 'blind spot,' is in the neurophysiological discovery that the optical nerve is inserted into the retina in a zone devoid of any receiving cells, so that our visual field does not allow us to see what falls in that area, but this nevertheless conditions the possibility of vision in the first place. We of course do not see a dark or inaccessible spot within any given field of our vision; we do not see that we do not see, and the blind spot shifts with the shifting domain of vision itself. The claim that the hermeneutic scene of reading is accompanied by an inaccessible space which figures as the blind spot, and that such a space exceeds the parameters delimiting the action of reading itself, does not deny the possibility of reading—the reading does not see the blind spot which nevertheless conditions its possibility. Such a claim, however, leads to certain implications with regard to the modern reflexivity of the scene of reading, in the context of the middle voiced permutation of the action [itself]. In its questioning, the middle voiced reading seeks to observe the very condition of its possibility, seeks to see itself from without the scope of its observation or understanding, to understand the limit of its own limitation, and yet cannot seek to do so without the limitations or the parameters which condition its very mode of interrogation. The middle voiced reading, thus, always seeks to access that which, by definition, it cannot access. To read beyond reading itself, to enter the domain of the not readable and not unreadable, is impossible from within the confines of the action of reading. The middle voiced reading seeks to see that it does not see, and simultaneously comes up against the



realization that it cannot see what it does not see. Thus, to read in the middle voice entails reading the limitation of reading; the middle voiced permutation of reading encounters a temporal and spatial *moment* of inadequacy, a moment which renders the hermeneutic scene inadequate in the face of a space that can be neither seen nor comprehended in view of, or on the basis of, the presuppositions of visibility, comprehensibility and sense.

\* \* \*

*To develop:* Suppose there were no reason, what would the madness be? In its consideration of the middle voice as a useful notion in conceptualizing the reflexive modern hermeneutic scene of reading, this study advances itself toward conceptualizing a configuration of the reading scene in its middle voiced permutation, to suggest that at the moment it attempts to read itself, the hermeneutic reading arrives at a *crisis* between its action and the space which exceeds the parameters of such action. The grammar of this crisis, or its *diathetical* inflection, is the middle voice; its condition, in the context of this study, will be configured as *madness*.

The term *diathesis*, in its grammatical usage, designates the voice of the verb; in its medical usage, diathesis is “a permanent condition of the body which renders it liable to certain special diseases or affections; a constitutional predisposition or tendency (*OED*).<sup>5</sup> Grammatically, a disposition; medically, a predisposition. The diathetical inflection of the verb *to read*, in its middle form, both precedes and exceeds the action of reading, where the reader affects reading by affecting herself inside the action, so that

action and affection coincide. To read in the middle voice, as conceptualized thus far, is to render the reading liable to a certain constitutional crisis between itself and the place which exceeds the action of reading; between the reading itself with its presupposition of sense, and the space that at any given moment is not sense and not not sense, and cannot be configured on such terms. *Crisis*, a term derived from the Greek verb *krin-ein* (to decide), or *krísij* (discrimination, decision), is defined as “*Patrol.* The point in the progress of a disease when an important development or change takes place which is decisive of recovery or death; the turning point of a disease for better or worse; also applied to any marked or sudden variation occurring in the progress of a disease and to the phenomena accompanying it” (*OED*); and “transf. and fig. A vitally important or decisive stage in the progress of anything; a turning-point” (*OED*). Crisis, here, is the turning point in the progress of decision itself, a turning toward its own impossibility, toward the death of the decision, in reading.

“At the heart of the psychoses there is a dead end,” writes Lacan (*Psychoses* 192), while Deleuze submits that “The first schizophrenic evidence is that the surface has split open” (*Logic* 86). In the context of this study, madness is the condition of crisis at the instance reading or interpretation attempts to read itself from without the parameters of its possibility, and hence encounters the aporetic space inaccessible to it, marking a fissure in the hermeneutic scene and rendering any decision of reading, at that moment, impossible. Madness occurs at the moment interrogation seeks to call into question the adequacy of the interrogative domain itself, seeking to suppose there were no questions, and simultaneously presupposing the domain of the answerable, asking, from within the parameters of the question, what would the answer be? Madness, as such, is a function of

interrogation, of reading, of diagnosis, of interpretation, in the face of that which is inaccessible to reading. In his consideration of the word *madness*, Maurice Blanchot proposes that “Madness would thus be a word in perpetual incongruence with itself and interrogative throughout, such that it would put into question its possibility and, through it, the possibility of the language that would admit it, thus would put interrogation itself into question” (*Step 45*).

In the context of the clinical mode of inquiry, to configure the most extreme permutation of madness itself (psychosis or schizophrenia) as a crisis of interrogation or interpretation, at the moment the reflexive diagnostic question encounters a space which exceeds the parameters of diagnosis and becomes inaccessible to diagnostic interpretation itself, is not to discount the experience of the subject of diagnosis or the event of, or the condition of, her suffering. A consideration of madness on these terms, moreover, does not accomplish, nor does it seek to, an absolute repudiation, invalidation or disabling of the diagnostic mode of inquiry altogether. Rather, this consideration seeks to problematize particular presuppositions of such a mode of inquiry, presuppositions which condition the possibility of inquiry itself, and at the same time condition a blind spot whereby the inquiry cannot observe itself from without the parameters of its observation, and must take into account a space that is inaccessible at any given moment, shifting in accordance with the diagnostic movement itself. To figure psychosis as a middle voiced permutation of diagnostic interpretation, is not to deny the condition of the subject of diagnosis, but rather to affirm that “The more narrowly we examine actual language, the sharper becomes the conflict between it and our requirement” (Wittgenstein 107).

In “Humanism and Hermeneutics,” Louis Sass, in favour of a hermeneutic approach to diagnostic psychology (as opposed to other methodologies, such as the quantitative, which ignore their own cultural and historical contexts), submits that “hermeneutics would encourage in the psychologist an ironic and self-critical, but by no means despairing, awareness of both the value and danger of presuppositions—and with this, a realization that though knowledge can never be value-free, it is not naive to seek truth” (Messer 263). This study does not seek to discount the hermeneutic approach in and of itself, but rather to problematize the presuppositions which condition its capacity for self-criticism in the first place, at the moment it attempts a reading of and beyond itself. Although it may not be naive to seek truth, it is equally not naive to suppose a space where there were no truth. Suppose there were no truth, what would the falsity be? It would be naive to suppose that the presupposition of truth—the presupposition of the distinction between truth and falsity—excludes the possibility of a space, outside of its own delimitation, which is not true and not not true, not false and not not false, and which cannot be understood in view of, or on the basis of, these terms. That is not to say that there is no such thing as truth; rather, it is to problematize the moment in which the hermeneutic reading seeks to reflect upon its own presupposition of truth, but can only do so from within the confines of its constitutive presupposition of truth. Such a problematization seeks to affirm that *if* the more narrowly we examine language, the sharper becomes the conflict between it and our requirement, then there is a need for theoretical tools which address this requirement. This analysis, from within conceptual confines of its own, does not offer such tools, does not decide, but rather articulates and

engages the moment of crisis, the turning point of the decision toward its own impossibility, in the domain of reading itself, in the domain of the action of reading in its middle form.

\* \* \*

That there is a relationship between madness, writing and reading in modern Western thought, is hardly new. Foucault, in *The Order of Things*, already grounds “the confrontation of poetry and madness in modern Western culture” as “the mark of a new experience of language and things” (49), while Shoshana Felman, in *Writing and Madness*, seeks to configure the point of convergence between writing madness and writing about it, within a paradoxical economy of reading the unreadable (as discussed in the next chapter of this study). In *Madness and Modernism*, Louis Sass seeks to trace the genealogy of schizophrenia in relation to modernist modes of representation, addressing clinical, philosophical and literary material in the context of modern sensibility in Western culture.

The configuration of madness in the present study must be distinguished from madness as configured in Sass’s study and others like it. Sass introduces the objective of his analysis as follows:

Let me emphasize at the outset that my purpose in this book will be to clarify rather than to evaluate or explain [. . .] My main goal is simply to reinterpret schizophrenia [. . .] to show, using the affinities with modernism, that much of

what has been passed off as primitive or deteriorated is far more complex and interesting—and self-aware—than is usually acknowledged (*Madness* 9)

His aim is to reconsider the predicament of the schizophrenic patient by interpreting the schizophrenic condition as a “heightening” instead of a “dimming” of awareness, and as an “alienation” not from the world, not from reason, but from one’s own “emotions, instincts and the body” (4).<sup>6</sup> It is this heightening of awareness and increased inclination to adopt a critical position toward modern social modes of existence, that Sass identifies as a condition common to both schizophrenia and the modernist mode of representation, where modernism stands for an aversion to conventional conceptions of the social world, conceptions owing to ideas of nineteenth-century realism and romanticism. In his investigation, Sass considers madness, or schizophrenia, as a condition of the patient, a condition endowed with certain characteristics in discourse which he identifies also in the condition of a modernist mode of representation and which, he argues, are indicative of a heightening in the level of intellectual function, a heightening in self-reflexivity:

Modernist art has been said to manifest certain off-putting characteristics that are reminiscent of schizophrenia: a quality of being hard to understand or feel... The relevant aspects of such art are, however, antithetical to notions of primitivity and of deficit or defect, for these art forms are characterized not so much by unreflectiveness and spontaneity as by acute self-consciousness and self-reference, and by alienation from action and experience—qualities we might refer to as ‘hyperreflexivity.’ (8)

In its self-reflexive, self-generating representation of a heightened paradoxical condition, twentieth-century modernist art and thought achieves, according to Sass, “the most illuminating analogies for the mysterious symptoms of schizophrenia” (9).

Sass locates the importance of his investigation in its attempt to “expose the inadequacy of certain popular notions regarding differences between creativity and madness—notably, the oft-expressed view that whereas ‘the poet is a master of language, the schizophrenic is a slave to it,’” (184) for such views fail to register the complexity of both madness and modernist art. By addressing this complexity himself, Sass hopes to achieve the following:

to illuminate the no less complex motives and modes with which schizophrenics can approach language; also [to . . .] cure us of certain overly simple dichotomies, such as the assumption that the unusual speech of schizophrenics must necessarily be either empty nonsense or utterly saturated with meaning, or the tendency to see such people as either Machiavellian schemers or overwhelmed victims. (185)

With the dissolution of space between subjectivism and objectivism, and with the blurring of temporality, the twentieth century is characterized, according to Sass, by a pursuit of extremes and a crisis in attitudes toward language in intellectual and literary domains. This is manifested in two features, among others, which he identifies as ‘self-reflexivity’ and ‘ineffability.’ While modernist writing enacts an aesthetic subversion of conventional certitudes, a turning inward toward itself (in a mode of “hyperreflexivity”) characterized by styles of irony and detachment (34-48), schizophrenia enacts what Sass labels a “desocialization” (failure to accord with social convention),<sup>7</sup> “autonomization” (loss of transparency) and “impoverishment” (poverty in content and/or form) of speech.

According to Sass's configuration, while in the literary world the language crisis generates "a turning to literary styles united only by a certain incomprehensibility" (184) reminiscent of schizophrenia, in the world of schizophrenia, the crisis is manifested by symptoms (desocialization, autonomization and impoverishment) which "contribute to the unconventionality and incomprehensibility of schizophrenic language; and [. . .] all three are related to the reflexivity or inwardness that is so characteristic of modernism" (177). Sass registers the symptoms, or characteristics, of madness as functions of speech or text, which render the speech or text difficult in the face of reading; such symptoms are not, in the context of his project, a function of the interpretation or the reading itself. Madness and modernism are united, according to this paradigm, by a series of common characteristics which signal a heightening in consciousness, and which deserve an appreciation through the act of reading.

Sass supplements the proposition of his study with the following disclaiming remarks:

I am not suggesting that madness and modernism are alike in all important respects; nor is there any intent to denigrate modernism or to imply that such art or such a culture *is* schizophrenic. I certainly do not wish to glorify schizophrenic forms of madness—to argue, for example, that they are especially conducive to artistic creativity, or to deny that they are profoundly dysfunctional and in some sense constitute a disease. Nor am I claiming there is an etiological connection between madness and modernism—for example, that modern culture or the modern social order actually causes schizophrenic forms of psychosis. (9)



But if madness is a heightening of awareness, then why would the implication that modernism is mad be a ‘denigration,’ as he suggests above? Why, moreover, does Sass use negativistic measurements (such as derealization, desocialization, impoverishment, incomprehensibility, loss) to register qualities of ‘heightening’ in schizophrenia? His analysis amounts to an assessment of madness that is structurally equivalent to assessments figured within psychiatric modes of inquiry, where madness is announced by the diagnosis upon the identification of prescribed symptoms in the subject’s discourse, or in the text, symptoms that are readily available for interpretation, and are presupposed as such by the interpretation itself. Even in a mode of self-reflexivity, this diagnostic method operates according to presuppositions of sense and comprehensibility, and at the same time, in its reading, seeks to diagnose functions of nonsense and incomprehensibility (whether such incomprehensibility is a ‘heightening’ or ‘denigration’ in intellectual function is irrelevant to the methodology at hand).

In spite of his insistence that reflexivity, a characteristic symptom of the rise of modernity, has now progressed, with a radicalization of modernity itself, to a state of “hyperreflexivity,” so that we have entered an age not of postmodernity—not post, but hyper—but of “hypermodernity,” Sass does not seem to offer reflections upon his own reading, or to address the reading’s own presumed mode of reflexivity. In his consideration of some structural features of schizophrenic discourse, Sass submits that the discourse “has often been observed to display” (156) characteristics such as fragmentation of narrative and theme, a lack of conventional space-time framework, an absence of comprehensible causal relations, and a lack of a normal semiotic framework to regulate reference-symbol relationships. As a textbook example, Sass quotes a

“schizophrenic-type response” (155) to the Thematic Apperception Test (TAT), taken from a psychology book,<sup>8</sup> as uttered by an eighteen-year old hospitalized male. The test requires the patient to look at a series of pictures and say four things about each picture: “(1) what activity is going on in the scene depicted; (2) what led up to this activity; (3) what the outcome will be; and (4) the thoughts and feelings of the characters” (154-5). These instructions urge, as Sass notes, for a narrative response. The patient in this example responds to a card “that depicts two people shown facing each other and in close physical contact” (155), as follows:

Before this picture, these two people, ah, hated each other.... And then they were accidentally thrown together in some situation and just before this picture, a miraculous change took place which I can't describe. In the picture they—they feel as if they are a picture—a complete thing. And they're aware of their limits and they accept them and after the picture, they leave each other um—and the picture. [What are their limits? asks the testing psychologist.] The boundaries of the picture. (qtd. in Sass 155)

In his reflection on the patient's response, Sass includes various observations dealing with qualities such as ‘presentism’ and ‘timelessness,’ but of relevance to this study are the following remarks:

When asked by the examiner about the boundaries of the people described, the patient engages in one of those odd shifts of frame of reference that are characteristic of schizophrenics as of no other group: he says that the boundaries of the people are the boundaries of the picture [. . .] When interpreting the thoughts and feelings of the characters, the patient even says that ‘they feel as if

they are a picture' and are 'aware of their limits,' which turn out to be the boundaries of the picture—almost as if he were ascribing to the characters represented an awareness of their existence as representation. (155-6)

Sass, in his reading, identifies a symptom which he labels 'odd shifts of frame of reference' and which he attributes to a condition 'characteristic of schizophrenics.' According to this configuration, symptomatic referential transgressions occur in the discourse of people with schizophrenia. However, does the diagnostic circumstance not occur according to an inverse configuration? Is it not the case that schizophrenia occurs, materializes as diagnosed condition, *upon* the interpretive diagnosis of presumed referential transgressions? That is, upon the interpretation of discourse (where characteristics such as 'odd referential shifts' serve as interpretive guidelines for diagnosis), the diagnosis of schizophrenia is pronounced. In this example, the confrontation between a 'proper' interpretive order and a certain mode of articulation which defies it, produces the diagnosis of madness. The boundaries of the people in the picture *are* the boundaries of the picture. There is no referential confusion in such a statement; the shift in referential frameworks occurs *between* the interpretation and the articulation itself. The TAT test, with instructions aiming for narrativity, tests for a response involving the metaphorical representation of people, while the patient's response delivers a discourse focusing on the materiality of the medium of the representation itself. The semiotic 'oddity' is a feature of neither the question nor the response; it is the occasion of incommensurability between the two frameworks.<sup>9</sup>

However, even if one were to go along with Sass's reading, attributing oddity to the patient's response, there is a double layer of complexity in this specific example: The

perceived ‘oddity’ in the patient’s referential construction is in its irregular or ‘improper’ *reading* of the visual representation. Sass offers a reading of the patient’s reading of a representation. He provides a reading which diagnoses a failure of a reading mechanism; a reading which diagnoses a failure of the parameters of reading. Ironically, Sass presents this example in the first place in order to argue that the ‘odd referential shift’ should not be framed in negativistic terms, that it is not a deficiency; his analysis delivers a performative contradiction of itself. In another example, “A patient who had described a woman on a TAT card as ‘terrified,’ was asked the standard inquiry question, ‘What led up to this?’ and responded: ‘The expression on her face’” (156). Although this is supposed to indicate, in diagnostic terms, an inversion of causal relationship, it is another instance of a response which focuses on the medium of representation (the picture of the face causes, communicates, an image of terror; the picture, producing a terrified face, makes the woman terrified and not the other way around). The double irony is that each psychiatrist is presented with a TAT card: Here is a schizophrenic patient. What led up to this? The expression on her face.

In her consideration of Toni Morrison’s 1993 Nobel Lecture in Literature, Judith Butler recounts the parable in which children play a joke “and ask a blind woman to guess whether the bird that is in their hands is living or dead. The blind woman responds by refusing and displacing the question: I don’t know. . . but what I do know is that it is in your hands. It is in your hands” (Butler, *Excitable* 6). Butler notes that the blind woman is an analogy for a “practiced writer, suggesting that writing is to some extent blind, that it cannot know the hands into which it will fall, how it will be read and used, or the ultimate sources from which it is derived” (8). The children force the woman to

make a choice—to choose a proper frame of reference—that she cannot make, so that, as Butler comments, what the woman reads is the force of the address, thereby “exercising an agency that the address meant to deny her” (8). The blind woman, instead of making the choice, “calls attention to ‘the instrument through which power is exercised,’ establishing that the choice is in the hands of the interlocutors she cannot see” (8). The woman cannot know if language, analogized as the bird, will live or die in the hands of those who do speech with force, so she shifts the presupposition conditioning the mode of the question, she shifts the focus away from the distinction between life and death (conditioning the possibility of a ‘living’ language, of a visible language of sense and comprehensibility), and toward the presupposition underlying the mode questioning: the question itself is out of her hands, is inaccessible to her. She supposes there were no question and submits that the answer would be in *their* hands, would be the question, in question, itself. Hands, here, represent responsibility, a responsibility for presuppositions conditioning the life or death of language, and conditioning the possibility of the question itself. Butler submits that “The children’s question is cruel not because it is certain that they have killed the bird, but because the use of language to force the choice from the blind woman is itself a seizing hold of language, one whose force is drawn from the conjured destruction of the bird” (9). The doctors’ question in the context of the TAT test is not cruel; it is impossible, impossible not because it is certain that they intend to forcefully uncover schizophrenia, but because the frame of reference of their question is itself a seizing hold of language, one whose force, in confrontation with the patient’s conflicting frame of reference (or lack thereof), will result in a crisis, in the conjured destruction of the scene of signification, in the materialization of madness. In the context

of this study, madness figures as the moment an interpretive framework encounters a space which necessitates a reflexive evaluation of interpretive frameworks. The diagnosis precedes the madness. It conditions the possibility of madness, and madness conditions the moment of impossibility in diagnosis.

\* \* \*

The experience of observing the clinical interviews and discussions included in the interchapter of this study is not wholly unlike the experience of observing a doctoral thesis defense in the field of literature.<sup>10</sup> In the clinical context, the candidate for patency is required by the interviewing doctor to answer a series of questions regarding a prior manifestation (a 'psychotic-like' episode, or other symptomatic behaviour which led to hospitalization). The candidate is required to recount and interpret her symptomatic manifestation, and to identify or account for inconsistent or unintelligible gaps either in the manifestation itself, or in her analysis of it. Her response serves as a narrative representation for the doctor. The interviewer and interviewee, in this case, sit in a room of which one wall is replaced by a one-way mirror. The interview takes place immediately beside the mirror, on the other side of which is an observation room containing the audience. Members of the audience, consisting of a number of specialized doctors, psychiatric residents, and medical students, view and listen to the interview occurring on the other side of the window. If the patient and doctor look at the mirror, they will see themselves; if an audience member looks through the window, she will see the patient and the doctor. The patient cannot look through the mirror (although she is

aware of people on the other side), for it is dark in the other room; she can only look at the mirror; she can only see herself, as an image being seen by some others. The interviewing doctor cannot look through the mirror, for it is dark in the observation room, but he has knowledge of what lies behind it (he has only just occupied the other room several moments prior, said his good mornings to the audience, noted who is sitting where and what everyone is drinking for breakfast). If he looks at the mirror, he will be looking at the audience, but seeing himself. The audience, however, can look both through and at the window. Should members of the audience lose, for a moment, the necessary level of concentration—should they stare forward in automatic reverie, letting their minds and attention wander ever so briefly—given the right angle, they will see a reflection of themselves in the specular window.

At some later point in the interview, the interviewer announces the arrival of a second expert doctor for just a few further questions, at which time the specialized doctor travels from the observation room to the interview room, and proceeds to ask a few more questions. Once the interview has been completed, the doctors thank the patient, the latter is informed that she will be updated regarding her diagnosis at some later date or time, and the patient exits the room. Upon her departure, the interviewing doctor and some members of the audience gather in the interview room to discuss and evaluate the patient's performance, and the success or failure of the interview itself, in order to vote on a diagnosis and confirm the patency of the candidate. Occasionally (though not often), it is decided that the interview was insufficient for proper diagnosis, due to poor performance on the part of the patient, or the interviewer, or both, and revisions (in the

form of further investigation of the patient's history and medical records, further conversation with the patient, or an additional interview) are in order.

During a doctoral thesis defense in the humanities, the candidate is required by an expert committee to answer a series of questions regarding a prior manifestation (dissertation); the candidate is required to recount and interpret the dissertation, and to identify or account for inconsistent or unintelligible gaps either in the dissertation itself, or in her analysis of it. Her response serves as a narrative representation for the committee. This interview takes place in a room divided into two spatial territories, separated by an imaginary window, such that the candidate and committee surround a table, thereby constituting a marked spatial enclosure which occupies one part of the room, while the audience members sit in audience position, facing the spectacle on the other side of the imaginary barrier. During the defense, members of the audience, usually doctoral students and professors (where each professor has been subjected to the experience of a 'defense,' likely from both a candidate's and the committee's perspective), experience the anxiety of identification with the candidate, or the committee, or both. Conversely, both candidate and committee experience the anxiety of performing under observation—under self observation, and under the observation of an audience, as well as under that of one another. The imaginary window, in this instance, fluctuates between its figurative function as transparent window, reflective window, one-way mirror and two-way mirror, creating an experience of a reflective reflexivity trap. Once the interview has been completed, and the members of the audience have had the opportunity to ask a few last questions, the committee thanks the candidate, and everybody apart from the committee leaves the room. The members of the committee



then meet in the interview room, in order to discuss and evaluate the candidate's performance and confirm her advancement to doctoracy. In some cases, it is decided that revisions, or an additional defense, are in order. Here, the literary object takes on the role of the psychotic episode, and the candidate advancing to doctoracy takes on the role of the hospitalized subject advancing to patency. The examining committee, like the group of psychiatric interviewers, consists of doctors. And all examination rooms become typical variations of the Foucaultian panoptical configuration; or of the modern disciplinary institution.

Friedrich Kittler, in his discussion of the discourse network of 1900,<sup>11</sup> already notes that "The insane asylum and the artist's cafe witness performances too similar to require comment" (302), and subsequently submits that "Literature in the discourse network of 1900 is a simulacrum of madness" (304), because

the act of writing is nothing beyond its materiality. The peculiar people who practice this act simply replace writing machines. Because technologies and pathologies are convertible circa 1900, the bachelor machines known as writers have to be pretty much crazy in order to have any pleasure in the *acte gratuit*. No one promises them a silver taler [. . .] but only the mystical union of writing and delirium [. . .] the beginning of writing will thus, [. . .] always be its end. (335)

In Kittler's analysis of the materiality of media technology during the modernist era, writing is a medium of recording the now, the opaque this, so that

Recorders that record thisnesses become thisnesses themselves. That makes every instance of archiving into a discursive event. The less purpose a discourse in the discourse network of 1900 has, the more impossible it becomes to

neutralize it. It follows that incomprehensible debris, that is, literature, incessantly does not cease. (339)

An inversion of Sass's configuration (wherein psychosis becomes a 'heightening' of consciousness to the level of modernist literature), Kittler's analysis proposes a 'lowering' of literature to the level of psychosis, debris, nonsensical noise. The appearance of psychophysics in the modernist discourse network,<sup>12</sup> and the emergence of technological media, alters the entire framework and purpose of knowledge production:

Psychophysics takes language to a point where it stops making sense, or rather, it shows that all sense making has its frontiers (and therefore its definition) in domains of nonsense and in automatized operations that no longer belong to a subjective authority. On the margins of language use there proliferate a host of breakdowns: dyslexias, aphasias, agraphisms, asymbolisms; the strict division between normal and pathological is transformed into a gradient of standards [ . . . ] In short, the modernist discourse network unravels language, reduces its wholeness and centeredness to a tangle of nervous, sensory-motor threads, to a scatter of differential marks. (xxix-xxx)

The relevance of Kittler's analysis to this study lies not so much in its provocative methodology, but rather in its conclusion that 1) with the rise of intransitive writing, madness and writing share a constitutive space marked by a differential of sense and nonsense; and 2) the dynamics of such a space are inaccessible to modern disciplinary hermeneutics. David Wellbery, in his Foreword to the book, describes Kittler's project as an attempt at a method of 'post-hermeneutic' criticism that "abandons the language game and form of life defined by the hermeneutic canons of justification and enters into

domains of inquiry inaccessible to acts of appropriative understanding” (ix).<sup>13</sup> In the context of the present study, writing and madness share a constitutive space marked by a differential of sense and nonsense, only insofar as madness is a moment in *reading*, a moment in which modern disciplinary hermeneutics, presupposing a differential of sense and nonsense, attempts a reflexive reading beyond its own parameters, a reading of a space whose dynamics are inaccessible to hermeneutics. This study considers the consequences of remaining within the framework of modernity’s “double hermeneutic” (Giddens, *Consequences* 15),<sup>14</sup> contemplating the moment of the hermeneutic breakdown. To claim that on the margins of language use there proliferate a host of breakdowns such as dyslexias, aphasias, asymbolisms and so forth, is to claim that on the margins of *reading*, at the moment the reading attempts to process a space exceeding the delimitation of its own margins, there proliferate a host of breakdowns, marking the condition of madness itself, in language.

\* \* \*

*To begin:* This study offers a consideration of reading in three permutations, comprising three critical aporias: Chapter Two, Chapter Three, and the space between. Chapter Two considers a fictional representation of writing in the middle voice, contemplating the dynamics conditioning the place where writing and madness converge. Divided into two parts, it begins with an evaluation of the presupposition of sense as a constitutive element of interpretation, and introduces the term *sensorship* in order to conceptualize the dynamics of everyday interpretation and communication, wherein the

tacit presupposition of sense plays an implicit and constitutive role conditioning acts of interpretation and understanding. The second part of the chapter engages a reading of Vladimir's Nabokov's *Lolita*, a text of fiction in the form of a madman's (or mad writer's) diary, to establish the dynamics of sensorship in the hermeneutic scene of writing, and further address the historical reception of the text itself, a reception marked by acts of appropriative censorship and clinical diagnosis. This reflection on writing and madness in the fictional text is methodologically closer to Shoshana Felman's attempt to locate the moment in which writing about madness and madness converge; it locates the moment of convergence, however, and the moment of madness itself, in reading [itself].

Chapter Three offers a consideration of the crisis of reading in the middle voice, through a reading of Gertrude Stein's lectures on writing. Stein's thoughts on the movement of reading inside the action of writing, and on the presupposition of sense which simultaneously conditions and confines the possibility of such movement in the context of the hermeneutic scene of signification, serves to conceptualize a notion of reading in the middle voice, at the moment of crisis, or of non-decision. Rather than engaging a consideration of madness and modernism (as does Louis Sass in his extensive and incisive project), this chapter delivers a contemplation of one (arguably modernist) thinker's theory of reading and writing. Fragments from the writing of Maurice Blanchot, fragments connecting reading to madness, frame this reading of Stein, allowing for brief points of contact, or moments of confrontation, between the two voices, marking a series of junctures between this configuration of reading and a configuration of madness itself.

The Interchapter, between chapters Two and Three, is an aporetic space entitled “Madness Itself.” The purpose of this space is twofold. It seeks, first, to address the question of the heuristic value, and viability, of configuring a crisis of reading and hermeneutics as one of madness. That is, what of madness itself; what of schizophrenia, or psychosis, what of ‘real’ madness? By allowing a brief and partial view of the clinical setting, wherein clinical diagnosis materializes as a permutation of reading discourse, the Interchapter seeks to note, to foot-note, that the reading crisis contemplated in the space of surrounding chapters *is* the reading crisis propelling the clinical diagnosis of madness, and is, moreover, constitutive of madness itself.<sup>15</sup> There is, in other words, no other madness itself, no ‘real’ madness which constitutes a self-contained entity independent of diagnostic presuppositions of sense and comprehensibility.<sup>16</sup>

The Interchapter seeks, second, to perform, structurally and thematically, the moment of crisis in reading, and the moment of crisis in reading writing, in the middle voice. Calling the parameters of the chapters themselves into question, the Interchapter supposes there were no chapters, and asks, what would the Interchapter—what would the space between—be? The Interchapter would be the Chapter. But suppose there were no such thing as chapters; the interchapter would of course be impossible. Enacting the anti-rhetorical question itself, the space between chapters Two and Three presupposes the substance of the surrounding chapters, with their consideration of sensorship and the middle voice, of reading and the hermeneutic scene, of sense, nonsense and a place beyond, and yet at the same time, supposes there are no chapters. The Interchapter remains inside the action of the chapters, temporally and spatially enclosed between them, affected and effected by its positionality, and yet attempts to configure a space that

is outside of the configuration of 'chapters,' a space that is outside of its own parameters and, therefore, remains unattainable, impossible. Suppose there were no inside, what would the outside be?

The Interchapter, structurally questioning the parameters of this study itself, is the middle voiced permutation of the chapters, a chapter which questions its own status, its own delimitation, unable to do so from without the structural confines of this study, continuously encountering its own inadequacy at a moment of indecision, inside the action of its reading, inside its writing. This inter-space attempts, impossibly, to inject a view of the dynamics of clinical diagnosis in the context of reading, without reading; it attempts to contemplate a blind spot, without looking, without the act which conditions the blind spot in the first place. Not active and not passive, the Interchapter, a written space, a writing, delivers a reading which seeks to not read and yet cannot articulate 'not reading' from within the parameters of reading itself. In response to the Interchapter, one reader remarked that the tone, the *voice*, of the piece is not active enough to be critical or accusatory, and yet not passive enough to be uncritical and non-accusatory; what does it mean to (actively) accomplish? Recalling something like the middle voice, the Interchapter seeks to achieve the moment of crisis in reading, of madness itself, in its impossible attempt to not read, to impossibly foot-note the non-comment from within the parameters of commentary, and hence arrive at the moment of its own impossibility, its own madness, taking the question into its own hands, taking responsibility for the limit of questioning itself, and articulating the need for a means of dealing with such moments of limitation.

The Interchapter delivers moments of observation, moments of intransitive reading and, inside its action, does not read, acknowledging the impossibility of the task at hand. *To read*: tr. *I read the book*; intr. *The book reads like a novel*. The Interchapter reads intransitively. It stands unexplicated, not as a rhetorical question, not because its ‘message’ is too obvious for explication, but rather as a radical permutation of the anti-rhetorical question, because an answer is impossible, or else an answer is the question, itself, *in* question. The aim, here, is not to perform a radical dismissal of clinical psychiatric practice, but rather to problematize presuppositions which enable disciplinary hermeneutic modes of inquiry, of which the modern psychiatric is one other example, at the moment of self-reflexivity, at the moment (as opposed to at all moments) the inquiry seeks to critique itself, to question the question of its decision. The aim, moreover, is not to suggest that the clinical setting should incorporate literary theory and criticism into the diagnostic agenda. Rather, the suggestion is that the clinical and literary settings can inform, and arguably already do inform, one another. The aim is not to debilitate, but rather to problematize, to articulate a need for something that is neither a question nor an answer, and cannot be understood on the basis of, or in view of, such terms; the aim is to engage the force of the problematization itself.

The Interchapter is framed with fragments from the work of Blanchot, presupposing the substance of Chapter Three, while engaging an implicit economy of sensorship, presupposing the material in Chapter Two. In madness itself, it attempts to exceed, temporally and spatially, its presuppositions. The configuration of this study, in three sections, attempts a *beginning* of a middle voiced crisis, of a crisis which questions its own turning point, its own decision to begin at all, advancing toward the moment in

which decision, turning against itself in the middle voice, returns to the question of its own *beginning*, “of its own crossing—the crossing of the uncrossable—and, from this, prohibited” (Blanchot, *Step* 45).



## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> See Patricia Meyerowitz's "Editor's Forward" to Stein's *Look at Me Now and Here I Am: Writings and Lectures 1909-45* (London: Penguin, 1967. 9)

<sup>2</sup> The meaning of the term "hermeneutics" can become problematic itself, if one considers the shifting use of the term in German, French and American contexts, and if one is to further divide the disciplinary domains in which hermeneutics may be considered (social science, philosophy, and so on). I note, in this context, Gadamer's definition of hermeneutics as a general theory of interpretation which takes into account the circularity arising from the realization that the text's identity comes into being only through interpretation (applied to the text, to history, to social configurations); the sense of each part of a text depends on the sense of the whole interpreted text, but the whole can only be interpreted through the sense of the parts. It was Friedrich Schleiermacher who first coined the famous phrase "hermeneutic circle" in his consideration of hermeneutics as a methodology.

<sup>3</sup> Friedrich Kittler, with reference to the discourse network of modernism, suggests that the appearance of the typewriter (that which takes language away from the writing hand), by allowing inscription to be mechanized (thus distancing writing from subjectivity), allows that, in David Wellbery's words, "writing, as writing, be written down" (*Discourse Networks*, xxx), intransitively. In this context, Barthes intuits a shift in the relationship between the writing subject and her writing, such that with the growing distance between writing and subjectivity, there is an obliteration of the distance between the agency and patiency of the writing subject herself, in the act of writing. The writer is no longer simply the agent of writing, but simultaneously agent and patient inside the action which itself cannot be described in either strictly active or strictly passive terms, but can be conceptualized in terms closer to the grammatical category of the middle voice.

<sup>4</sup> With the qualification that *modernity* "refers to modes of social life or organisation which emerged in Europe from about the seventeenth century onwards and which subsequently became more or less worldwide in their influence" (*Consequences* 1), Giddens investigates the difference between modern social institutions and prior traditional social order, by addressing themes of security vs. danger and trust vs. risk as defining contingencies of modernity, especially with the rise of "the industrialization of war" (9). Of relevance to this study is Giddens's consideration of writing and reflexivity in the modern social world: "To understand tradition, as distinct from other modes of organising action and experience, demands cutting into time-space in ways which are only possible with the invention of writing. Writing expands the level of time-space distanciation and creates a perspective of past, present, and future in which the reflexive appropriation of knowledge can be set off from designated tradition" (37).

<sup>5</sup> The source of all citations from the *Oxford English Dictionary* is the on-line 2<sup>nd</sup> edition. <<http://etext.library.ubc.ca/cgi-bin/oed>>

<sup>6</sup> In this respect, Sass's analysis attempts an inversion of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, a book symptomatic of the French anti-psychiatry movement in the 70's and 80's. Sass rejects Deleuze and Guattari's work for its idealization of the schizophrenic as "true hero of desire," and for its celebration of a Nietzschean type of "Dionysian madness" characterized by a loss of

self control and a celebratory unrestrained “primordial unity” (Sass 22). He reflects on the association of this Dionysian condition with models of primitivity, since such a condition is reminiscent of early stages of development and evolution ruled by “rampant instinct” and lack of “capacity for abstraction and self-awareness” (22).

<sup>7</sup> Sass’s description of ‘desocialization,’ where there is a “failure to monitor one’s speech in accordance with social requirements of conversation” (177), is reminiscent of Erving Goffman’s description of the psychotic individual who fails to comply with social ritual norms of interaction in face-to-face conversation (*Interaction Ritual: Essays in Face-to-Face Behavior*. Chicago: Aldine, 1967).

<sup>8</sup> Allison, J., S. Blatt, and C. Zimet. *The Interpretation of Psychological Tests*. New York: Harper and Row, 1968. 107-8.

<sup>9</sup> In this particular context, incommensurability may be figured in terms close to Jean-François Lyotard’s conception of the *differend*. Lyotard considers incommensurability “in the sense of the heterogeneity of phrase regimens and of the impossibility of subjecting them to a single law” (*Differend* 128), so that the ‘differend’ is a conflict between incompatible phrase regimens or genres of discourse. It is important to note that the differend means “not that humans are mean, or that their interests or passions are antagonistic [but that] they are situated in heterogeneous phrase regimens and are taken hold of by stakes tied to heterogeneous genres of discourse” (140). The concept of the *differend* is further complicated in the context of this study, where incommensurability materializes not only between phrase regimens, but also between any given phrase regimen and a space which exceeds its delimitation, at the moment the phrase regimen seeks to reflect upon itself as a regimen, and yet cannot do so from outside of the presuppositions which condition its possibility as a phrase regimen in the first place.

<sup>10</sup> The observation of clinical interviews for this study took place in Vancouver General Hospital. These interviews were part of a weekly series wherein psychiatric residents were provided with an opportunity to improve their interview techniques, and doctors were provided with an opportunity to acquire second (or multiple) opinions for the diagnosis of their patients. Most patients were recently admitted to hospital for psychotic symptoms. In my discussion of the defense setting, I am referring specifically to Canadian academic contexts.

<sup>11</sup> Kittler defines the term ‘discourse network’ as follows: “The term *discourse network*, as God revealed it to the paranoid cognition of Senate President Schreber, can also designate the network of technologies and institutions that allow a given culture to select, store, and process relevant data. Technologies like that of book printing and the institutions coupled to it, such as literature and the university, thus constituted a historically very powerful formation, which in the Europe of the age of Goethe became the condition of possibility for literary criticism” (369).

<sup>12</sup> Psychophysics begins with Ebbinghaus’s experiment, described by Wellbery in his Forward to Kittler’s *Discourse Networks*: “In order to measure memory he [Ebbinghaus] lets pass before his eye a series of nonsense syllables and counts the number of passes required for the memorization of combinations of these syllables [. . .] The experiment, in short, institutes language as writing, a system of inscribed differences emerging as a selection from a reservoir of nonsense, etching their differences on the body’s surface, and returning to the murmur of the source” (xxix).

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<sup>13</sup> Wellbery supplements this claim with the assertion that “Post-hermeneutic criticism, to put the matter briefly, stops making sense” (ix).

<sup>14</sup> Giddens uses this term in his discussion of the function of sociology and the development of sociological knowledge. The “double hermeneutic” conveys the double action of knowledge spiraling in and out of the social universe, “reconstructing both itself and that universe as an integral part of that process” (*Consequences* 16-17).

<sup>15</sup> Such a proposition neither disclaims nor addresses the possibility or impossibility of organic causation, or of an organic condition of the brain, in the cases of persons diagnosed with schizophrenia. Rather, it seeks to contemplate the dynamics of the interpretive space at the time of diagnosis. The *DSM-IV* specifies that “No laboratory findings have been identified that are diagnostic of Schizophrenia” (280), but that “Structural abnormalities in the brain have consistently been demonstrated in individuals with Schizophrenia as a group” (280), individuals who have *already* been diagnosed with schizophrenia. This study considers the interpretive setting at the time of the diagnosis itself, at the moment conditioning the diagnostic decision of madness.

<sup>16</sup> That, however, is not to say that there is not a suffering subject, in pain, or in need, with or without an organic condition of the brain. The state of the subject is not under dispute, and at the same time the circumstance of such a state itself is not under consideration in the context of this study. The focus is on the dynamics of diagnostic practice, dynamics which precede and exceed the circumstance of diagnosis, and which condition the configuration of madness itself, based on prescribed and fixed parameters applied to a discursive articulation. The suffering of the subject, the state of the patient, in that sense, remains in the blind spot of such a configuration; remains somewhere apart from, or outside the terms of, the diagnostic evaluation of discourse, but nevertheless conditions its possibility.

## CHAPTER 2

### SENSORED TO DEATH: *Lolita*, or The Confession of A White Widowed Male

*I cannot of course count upon being fully understood because things are dealt with which cannot be expressed in human language; they exceed human understanding.* (Schreber, *Memoirs* 41)

#### I. CENSORSHIP

##### Censorship

In *Excitable Speech*, Judith Butler proposes that “if one always risks meaning something other than what one thinks one utters, then one is, as it were, vulnerable in a specifically linguistic sense to a social life of language” (87), and that “this risk and vulnerability are proper to democratic process in the sense that one cannot know in advance the meaning that the other will assign to one’s utterance, what conflict of interpretation may well arise, and how best to adjudicate that difference” (87-8). In speaking, one cannot know in advance the meaning arising from one’s speech, and further, one cannot be sure in advance that one’s speech will enter the domain of speakability, or of possibility. Upon speaking, one cannot be sure of the possibility of one’s speech. Hence, Butler asks, “What will constitute the domain of the legally and legitimately speakable?” (88), for if the domain of the speakable is governed by generally accepted universal rules, and if, as she insists, “existing and accepted conventions of universality *constrain* the domain of the speakable” (90), then it follows that “this constraint produces the speakable, making a border of demarcation between the speakable and the unspeakable” (90). To put it another way, Butler suggests that “The border that produces the speakable by excluding certain forms of speech becomes an

operation of censorship exercised by the very postulation of the universal” (90). And put yet another way, “censorship precedes the text” (128).<sup>1</sup>

Censorship precedes the text. Variations of this phrase are the subject of the current chapter. I begin with Butler’s proposition that “censorship seeks to produce subjects according to explicit and implicit norms, and that the production of the subject has everything to do with the regulation of speech [. . .] through the regulation of the social domain of speakable discourse” (133). The question, for Butler, is not “what it is I will be able to say, but what will constitute the domain of the sayable within which I begin to speak at all” (133). In other words, the question is how a given registration of censorship selects its censorable candidate according to whether or not the subject’s speech adheres to universal norms governing the domain of speakability, norms dictating what is and is not speakable. What is not speakable is, nevertheless, censorable. According to Butler, “to claim that certain speech is not speech and, therefore, not subject to censorship is already to have exercised the censor”(128). It follows that censorship, this kind of deciding in advance what is speakable and what is not, is a way of producing speech; censorship operates as a productive power in order “to make certain kinds of citizens possible and others impossible” (130). Impossible subjects, as Daniel Paul Schreber reminds us, *cannot count on being fully understood*, because they deal with *things which cannot be expressed in human language*; they speak the unspeakable, they speak that which *exceeds human understanding*:

To move outside the domain of speakability is to risk one’s status as a subject. To embody the norms that govern speakability in one’s speech is to consummate one’s status as a subject of speech. ‘Impossible Speech’ would be precisely the

ramblings of the asocial, the rantings of the ‘psychotic’ that the rules that govern the domain of speakability produce, and by which they are continually haunted.

(Butler 133)

By speaking according to accepted norms governing intelligibility and speakability, as I do here, one is not necessarily consciously following a set of established rules. Butler explains that “One speaks according to a tacit set of norms that are not always explicitly coded as rules” (134),<sup>2</sup> and that if a subject gains his subjectivity by “entering the normativity of language,” then “these rules precede and orchestrate the very formation of the subject” (135). Intelligibility, its condition, its viability, is formulated inside and through “power,” where “this normative exercise of power is rarely acknowledged as an operation of power at all” (134). Paradoxically, such power “works precisely through its illegibility: it escapes the terms of legibility that it occasions. That power continues to act in illegible ways is one source of its relative invulnerability” (134). The subject maintains her intelligibility, her viability as subject, by ‘acting her place in language,’ as Butler puts it, and this viability is secured by the threat of dissolution:

If the subject speaks impossibly, speaks in ways that cannot be regarded as speech or as the speech of a subject, then the speech is discounted and the viability of the subject called into question. The consequences of such an irruption of the unspeakable may range from a sense that one is ‘falling apart’ to the intervention of the state to secure criminal or psychiatric incarceration. (136)

Butler speaks of ‘impossible speech,’ but is there such a thing as ‘impossible censorship’—a censorship that censors impossibly, whose viability can be called into

question and discounted—and if so, is there a difference between the two kinds of impossibility? First, it is necessary to distinguish a difference between two kinds of censorship.

“It is one thing for certain kinds of speech to be censored,” writes Butler, “and quite another for censorship to operate on a level prior to speech, namely, as the constituting norm by which the speakable is differentiated from the unspeakable” (137-8). Censorship, in the juridical sense, most often applies to restrictions directed against the content of speech employed by certain persons, or against the persons themselves. The Vancouver RCMP’s arrest of UBC student protestors during the 1997 APEC convention, and the confiscation of their ‘free speech’ signs (publicly displaying slogans such as “Fuck APEC” in a geographical zone that was within view of important APEC delegates) is an example of such censorship. However, the suggestion that censorship is also a productive, normative force, one which produces speech by restricting in advance the domain of its possibility, implies that censorship must be understood in terms which go beyond its juridical usage. It becomes important, as Butler suggests, to distinguish between what she calls “explicit” and “implicit” kinds of censorship (130). Implicit censorship, according to Butler, “refers to implicit operations of power that rule out in unspoken ways what will remain unspeakable” (130); this is the kind of censorship which takes the form of unspoken, even unconscious, formative constraint, one which produces in advance the domain of speakability, but remains illegible itself. Such censorship operates through a series of foreclosures<sup>3</sup> which produce the unspeakable through the exclusion of the speakable, and the speakable through the exclusion of the unspeakable:

The operation of foreclosure is tacitly referenced in those instances in which we ask: what must remain unspeakable for contemporary regimes of discourse to continue to exercise their power? How is the ‘subject’ before the law produced through the exclusion of other possible sites of enunciation within the law? To the extent that such a constitutive exclusion provides the condition of possibility for any act of speech, it follows that ‘uncensoring a text is necessarily incomplete.’ On the assumption that no speech is permissible without some other speech becoming *im*permissible, censorship is what permits speech by enforcing the very distinction between permissible and impermissible speech. Understood as foreclosure, censorship produces discursive regimes through the production of the unspeakable. (139)

Implicit censorship is a tacit, preemptive and productive form of constraint which operates within and through its own illegibility.

Explicit kinds of censorship, on the other hand, state their prohibitions in a readily legible manner (e.g. ‘The use of signs using offensive language against APEC representatives is prohibited beyond the demarcated geographical boundary for peaceful demonstration,’ where there is a list of explanations for what constitutes offensive language, what constitutes breach of demarcated boundary, and what constitutes breach of peaceful demonstration). According to Butler, such available legibility is precisely what renders this form of censorship vulnerable:

The regulation that *states what it does not want stated* thwarts its own desire, conducting a performative contradiction that throws into question that regulation’s capacity to mean and do what it says, that is, its sovereign pretension.



Such regulations introduce that censored speech into public discourse, thereby establishing it as a site of contestation, that is, as the scene of public utterance that it sought to preempt. (130)

Explicit censorship defies itself, uttering what it wishes to prohibit from the domain of utterance, and introducing into the realm of speakability precisely that which it wishes to exclude (e.g. ‘Use of the word *fuck* in a specific context constitutes offensive language, and is prohibited’). This becomes especially problematic in certain contexts such as, for example, the regulation of hate speech, or the diagnosis of psychosis, or the regulation (via publication bans) of pornographic books, because it leads to the realization that “*the state produces hate speech*” (Butler 77), that the psychiatrist produces psychotic speech, or that the censor produces pornographic text. This does not mean, of course, that the state is accountable for hate speech and pornography, or that the psychiatrist is accountable for psychotic discourse, or that either state or psychiatrist is responsible for the various hateful or psychotic forms of expression which make their way around the population of the universe. Rather, this means that the categories of hate speech, pornography, or psychosis “cannot exist without the state’s ratification” (Butler 77), or the psychiatrist’s, and “this power of the state’s judicial language to establish and maintain the domain of what will be publicly speakable suggests that the state plays much more than a limiting function in such decisions” (77). Likewise, the power of the psychiatric establishment’s diagnostic language to establish and maintain the domain of what will be ‘normal’ or ‘coherent’ suggests that the psychiatric establishment plays much more than an interpretative function in the decision of diagnosis. With regard to hate speech, Butler proposes that “in fact, the state actively produces the domain of

publicly acceptable speech, demarcating the line between the domains of the speakable and the unspeakable, and retaining the power to make and sustain that consequential line of demarcation” (77). With regard to psychosis, one can add, the psychiatrist produces the domain of ‘normal,’ acceptable, possible speech, demarcating the line between the domains of the speakable and the unspeakable, or the speakable and the psychotic, and retaining the power to make and sustain that consequential line of demarcation. Explicit and implicit forms of censorship are distinct in important ways, but are also bound together in that the former cannot exist without the latter, for it can only gain its explicit legitimacy and legibility through the performance of an implicit and already existing, albeit illegible, form of power.

### **Sensorship**

*The more narrowly we examine actual language, the sharper becomes the conflict between it and our requirement. (Wittgenstein 107)*

What Butler calls ‘implicit censorship,’ a formative power which produces a border of demarcation between the speakable and the unspeakable, can be thought of as an operative force which distinguishes between sense and not sense (or senseless). From that perspective, Butler’s account of implicit forms of censorship resembles a reformulation of Wittgenstein’s consideration, in *Philosophical Investigations*, of the operation of ‘sense’: “To say ‘This combination of words makes no sense’ excludes it from the sphere of language and thereby bounds the domain of language” (Wittgenstein 138), and “When a sentence is called senseless, it is not as it were its sense that is senseless. But a combination of words is being excluded from the language, withdrawn

from circulation” (139). Sense and senseless, in Wittgenstein’s equation, occupy the space of the speakable and unspeakable respectively in Butler’s configuration.

According to Wittgenstein, ‘sense’ is a preemptive constraint, a tacit *boundary* (45), which orders language in advance, which is a ‘putting in place’ (139–40), creating a border of demarcation between what makes sense, or what is acceptable, useful and speakable, and what is senseless, or unacceptable, unspeakable, useless. “Look at the sentence as an instrument,” writes Wittgenstein, “and at its sense as its employment” (126). To say that a combination of words makes no sense excludes it from the sphere of language, renders it useless, impossible. This exclusion, marking the ‘outside’ of language, is also a demarcation of the ‘inside,’ is also a boundary which marks the limit of the ‘inside’ contained within itself. Consider Butler’s claim that “The border that produces the speakable by excluding certain forms of speech becomes an operation of censorship exercised by the very production of the universal” (90), alongside Wittgenstein’s earlier claim in the context of its complete paragraph:

To say ‘This combination of words makes no sense’ excludes it from the sphere of language and thereby bounds the domain of language. But when one draws a boundary it may be for various kinds of reason. If I surround an area with a fence or a line or otherwise, the purpose may be to prevent someone from getting in or out; but it may also be part of a game and the players be supposed, say, to jump over the boundary; or it may shew where the property of one man ends and that of another begins; and so on. So if I draw a boundary line that is not yet to say what I am drawing it for. (138-9)

When one draws a boundary, it may be for various kinds of reason. I invert Wittgenstein's phrase: When one draws upon reason, it may be for various kinds of boundary. *Censorship precedes the text*. The use of the boundary precedes its drawing. The question, to repeat Butler once again, 'is not what it is I will be able to say,' or how I will be able to use the boundary, to jump over it, or stay within in, but rather 'what will constitute the domain of the sayable within which I begin to speak at all.' The question is geographical: where will the boundary be (regardless of what it is for), and which side of it will constitute the 'inside,' before I begin to play at all? Wittgenstein asks "What does 'discovering that an expression doesn't make sense' mean?" (140). I place this question next to Butler's: "what must remain unspeakable for contemporary regimes of discourse to continue to exercise their power?" (139). The flipside question is 'what must remain speakable?,' or 'what does it mean to discover that an expression makes sense?' *Does one discover that an expression makes sense?* As already noted by Butler, one who speaks according to norms of speakability, one who makes sense, is not necessarily consciously following a set of norms. One makes sense, one orders one's language, puts it in place, according to Wittgenstein, in the same way that one follows a signpost: "a person goes by a sign-post only in so far as there exists a regular use of sign-posts, a custom" (80), for "'obeying a rule' is a practice. And to *think* one is obeying a rule is not to obey a rule. Hence it is not possible to obey a rule 'privately': otherwise thinking one was obeying a rule would be the same thing as obeying it" (81). Wittgenstein observes that

On the one hand it is clear that every sentence in our language 'is in order as it is.'

That is to say, we are not *striving after* an ideal, as if our ordinary vague sentences

had not yet got a quite unexceptionable sense, and a perfect language awaited construction by us.—On the other hand it seems clear that where there is sense there must be perfect order.—So there must be perfect order even in the vaguest sentence. (45)

A sentence, in itself, is an order—an organized configuration abiding by a tacit set of presumed norms (albeit grammatical) which dictate what constitutes a sentence and what does not. As such, a sentence, any sentence, is a type of sense, a “regularity” (Wittgenstein 82), a “neutrality” (Deleuze, *Logic* 95), or what Derrida otherwise describes as a kind of “normality:” “By its essence, the sentence is normal. It carries normality within it, that is, *sense*, in every sense of the word” (Derrida, *Writing* 54). Within Wittgenstein’s framework, and within the framework of this study in general, making sense is an implicit form of censorship, a productive form of power which constrains in advance the domain of ‘normalcy,’ or speakability, by ruling out and excluding what will remain unspeakable. Making sense is making censorship. I propose to reconsider, perhaps misconside, what Butler calls an implicit form of censorship, under the rubric of *sensorship*. I do this in order to contemplate the category of ‘impossible speech’ through the contemplation of a form of censorship which occupies the space *between* two types, between what Butler describes as explicit and implicit types of censorship, or else between censorship and sensorship. I will call this third type, affected and effected by its positionality, ‘*impossible sensorship*.’

Sensorship, on its own, is governed by a normative and productive economy of ‘making sense,’ or reasoning, that is ‘foreclosed’ in Butler’s sense, and yet is the operative condition for the formation of the subject. As such, it performs the operation

both of sense maker, or sense regulator, and of foreclosed ‘sensor,’ a “device giving a signal for the detection or measurement of a physical property to which it responds” (*OED*), a nonsense detector.<sup>4</sup> Embodying the Wittgensteinian operation of sense-making in and through the operation of implicit censorship, while remaining illegible and silent, sensorship is the condition for the formation of the subject and subjectivity. As such, it typically corresponds to the Hegelian notion of ‘Reason,’ or reasoning, which is the condition for and the sustainability of ‘self-consciousness.’

For Hegel, ‘Reason’ is an implicit productive power which predetermines the normative constraints of ‘observation.’ Through a tacit demarcation of set boundaries, or categorical dividers, Reason organizes the world for the act of observation. Through the preemptive operation of Reason, the subject (‘self-consciousness’) organizes the world upon observing it—the subject makes sense upon observation—and knows to separate herself from the world. Hegelian Reason constitutes precisely that which in Butler’s earlier description comprises “implicit operations of power that rule out in unspoken ways what will remain unspeakable” (130), or “existing and accepted conventions of universality” which “*constrain* the domain of the speakable” (90). Hegelian Reason, moreover, is what Wittgenstein calls ‘regularity,’ and Derrida ‘normality.’ Hegel proposes:

Consciousness *observes*; i.e. Reason wants to find and to have itself as existent object, as an object that is actually and sensually present. The consciousness that observes in this way means, and indeed says, that it wants to learn, not about itself but, on the contrary, about the essence of things *qua* things. That this consciousness means and says this, is implied in the fact that it *is* Reason; but

Reason as such is not as yet object for this consciousness. (*Phenomenology of Spirits* 146)

Reason is both sense and sensor, and as such, it both senses and sensors: “This action of Reason in its observational role we have to consider in the moments of its movement: how it looks upon Nature and Spirit, and, lastly, upon the relationship of both in the form of sensuous being, and how it seeks itself as actuality in the form of immediate being” (147). Reason constitutes the conventions of universality, for it has “a universal *interest* in the world, because it is certain of its presence in the world, or that the world present to it is rational” (145). It, therefore, precedes both the world and the observation of the world, persisting through its own illegibility. Reason precedes the text. “For Reason is just this certainty of possessing reality; and what is not present for consciousness as something existing in its own right [*Selbstwesen*], i.e. what does not appear, is for consciousness nothing at all” (151). Illegible as it is, Reason is an unconscious instinct, foreclosed once again, for “in its observational activity, Reason operates only instinctively” (149); it operates as “the instinct of Reason” (149). In this condition, Reason is the instinct which seeks to reason, or else seeks itself in the world: “Observation has here reached the point where it openly declares what *our* Notion of it was, viz. That the certainty of Reason seeks its own self as an objective reality” (208).

Hegel’s Reason seeks the certainty of itself as an objective reality through the subject’s observation of and separation from that reality, thereby constituting subjectivity itself. At the same time, “This Reason remains a restless searching and in its very searching declares that the satisfaction of *finding* is a sheer impossibility” (145). Like the ‘sense’ which, in *The Logic of Sense*, declares itself a “nonexisting entity” (Deleuze xiii)

that is nevertheless “essentially *produced*” (95) as “a predictable generality” (97), “the instinct of Reason” observes the world “in order to see how [it] finds itself therein, but does not recognize itself in what it finds” (Hegel 156), and still “attains only to a contemplation of itself as universal life” (179). The seeking of Reason is a circular process which turns in upon itself, so that “The necessity in what takes place is hidden, and shows itself only in the End, but in such a way that this very End shows that the necessity has also been there from the beginning” (157). The instinct of Reason, like that of sense, both seeks and precedes itself, excluding (implicitly censoring) its own impossibility, in a feedback loop which allows for the emergence of the subject:

Therefore, what it arrives at through the process of its action is *itself*; and in arriving only at itself, it obtains its feeling of self. We have here, it is true, the distinction between what it *is* and what it *seeks*, but this is merely the show of a distinction, and consequently it is in its own self a Notion.

But this is just how *self-consciousness* is constituted; it likewise distinguishes itself from itself without producing any distinction. Hence it finds in the observation of organic Nature nothing else than a being of this kind; it finds itself as a thing, *as a life*, but makes a distinction between what it is itself and what it has found, a distinction, however, which is none. (157)

Finally, it is the *seeking* and *finding* of Reason, sense, or normalcy—the operative *seeking* and *finding* in a tacit self-feeding mechanism of sensorship—that is of relevance to this chapter. Hegel submits that “Just as the instinct of the animal seeks and consumes food, but thereby brings forth nothing other than itself, so too the instinct of Reason in its quest finds only Reason itself” (157). The instinct of the subject, in its quest, seeks and



consumes *words*, but thereby brings forth nothing other than itself. Or else, in the case of the non-subject, brings forth nothing.

### **Impossible Sensorship**

“The domain of speakability is to be governed by prevailing and accepted versions of universality” (Butler *Excitable* 88), by Reason and common Sense, which dictate what is speech and what is not, what is text and what is not, by simultaneously preceding and producing the domain of speakability, or of possibility. Reason seeks and finds itself, thereby producing nothing other than itself. Implicit operations of power, in the form of sense and Reason, rule out in unspoken ways and in advance what will remain unspeakable, what will defy sense. Sensorship precedes the text. If the production of the subject, as Butler proposes, “has everything to do with the regulation of speech” (133), and if “The subject’s production takes place not only through the regulation of the subject’s speech, but through the regulation of the social domain of speakable discourse” (133), how does “impossible speech” move outside the domain of speakability and enter the realm of impossibility? In other words, how does one “risk one’s status as a subject” (133) by leaving the domain of speakability, and further, how is “impossible speech” (in which Butler includes “the rantings of the ‘psychotic’”) produced by the “rules that govern the domain of speakability” (133)?

I propose that what Butler includes under the category of ‘impossible speech’ gains its entry into the domain of impossibility precisely upon its retroactive exclusion from the domains of both speakability and unspeakability. That is, if, as Butler suggests, the question is not what one will be able to say, but rather what will constitute the domain

of the sayable before one begins to speak at all—if the question is how a certain operation of censorship, or sensorship, determines in advance the norms governing what is sayable and what is not, and therefore who is a candidate for subjecthood and who is not—then “the rantings of the ‘psychotic’” become impossible by evading not only the norms which govern the domain of the speakable, but the very boundary which separates the sayable from the unsayable, the speakable from the unspeakable, sense from nonsense, and subjecthood from nonsubjecthood. To move outside the domain of speakability is, indeed, to risk one’s status as a subject. However, to move outside the domain of both speakability and unspeakability, to turn the inside into the outside, is to escape the realm of possibility altogether, to be not possible, not speech and not not speech, to test the realm of no possible things, the realm of no-thing. The instinct of the ‘psychotic,’ in its quest, seeks and consumes language, but thereby brings forth *nothing*.

If censorship precedes the text, then the impossible text is that which accomplishes the impossible, that which, impossibly, precedes censorship and renders censorship itself impossible. However, it is upon the impossibility of censorship that the impossible text gains its status of impossibility. In other words, it is the impossibility of censorship which precedes the impossible text and subject. The impossible subject is impossible in the sense that he is difficult and troublesome, a nuisance, like an impossible child, and also in the sense that he is not *possible*, or not existing. To say that certain speech is not speech and therefore not censorable is already to have exercised the censor. To say that certain speech is not speech and not not speech is to render censorship itself impossible. If one is to consider implicit censorship as sensorship, as an implicit preemptive type of sense-making, or an operative reasoning which tacitly seeks to

discover and affirm its own operation, then impossible speech is, first, unsensored; that is, it does not sensor itself. If sensorship is a foreclosed mechanism, then a resistance to sensorship involves the impossible retrieval of that which is foreclosed, and a resistance to it. In their discussion of the psychoanalytic usage of foreclosure, psychoanalysts J. Laplanche and J.-B. Pontalis explain that foreclosed phenomena do not enter the subject's unconscious, and that foreclosed signifiers cannot be integrated or recalled; their integration into the symbolic order is a sign of psychosis (*Language* 166-7). Accordingly, the exclusion of foreclosed signifiers from the symbolic order, as Butler observes, is what "guarantees symbolic coherence" (*Excitable* 180) in the first place.

Impossible speech is unsensored, but also unsensorable; that is, it cannot be made sense of, and does not abide by normative rules of symbolic coherence. It resists both censorship and sensorship and, paradoxically, is censored for that very resistance. Impossible speech resists censorship because the censor cannot explicitly name in advance that which he does not want stated. A delusion, for example, cannot be named in advance, for its diagnosis rests on the perceived authenticity of the speech act itself. The expression 'I can fly even though I am human' is not delusional in and of itself, or in advance. The diagnosis of a delusion rests with the interpretation of this claim at the time of its utterance. It is upon the listener's conviction that the utterer believes her utterance and further does not recognize it as a delusion—it is upon the perception and conviction that the utterance is at once authentic and unviable—that it may be labeled a 'delusion' by an agent other than the one uttering. A delusion cannot exist as such prior to its pronounced interpretation. The boundary which separates reason from delusion, however, does precede interpretation. In that sense, during the diagnosis of psychosis,

censorship follows the text because censorship cannot precede it. When the censor cannot make sense of that which is spoken, cannot render it speakable or unspeakable according to predetermined universal norms, the censor renders the speech impossible, or else unspeakable because of its impossibility. Here, speech is censored not only because it falls outside of a predetermined domain of speakability, and not only because it falls within an implicit domain of unspeakability, but because it is not clear that it falls either outside or inside of any normative domain at all. In this context, the question is not only what will constitute the domain of the sayable before I begin to speak at all, but also what will constitute the domain of the censorable before I begin to speak at all. Is it possible to speak that which is not sayable and also not censorable (not unsayable)? In the case of psychosis, impossible speech is indeed, as Butler suggests, that which is diagnosed as not speech, as not subject to censorship, and that which is, therefore, already censored (by having been pronounced ‘not speech’). However, it is important to add that impossible speech is also diagnosed as not not speech. As such, not speech and not not speech, it does not fall within the domain of censorability, but nevertheless becomes the impossible object of censorship.

### **The Impossible Question**

In *Writing and Madness*, Shoshana Felman defines madness as “nothing other than an irreducible resistance to interpretation” (254), which “consists neither in *sense* nor in *non-sense*” (254). She submits that “The question of madness is nothing less than the question of thought itself: the question of madness, in other words, is that which turns the essence of thought, precisely, *into a question*” (36). Suppose there were no

questions, what would the answer be? The answer, of course, would be the question. In the introduction to her book, Felman insists that her intent is to ask a question:

This book [. . .] does not seek to ‘say madness itself’ but rather to ask the question: Do we really know what *talking about madness* means? Do we really understand the significance of writing *about* madness (as opposed to writing madness)? Since there is no metalanguage, could it not be that writing madness and writing *about* it, speaking madness and speaking *of* it, would eventually converge—somewhere where they least expect to meet? And might it not be at that meeting place that one could situate, precisely, writing? (14)

To say that writing about madness and writing madness converge in writing, is the same as saying that thinking about madness and thinking madly converge in thinking.

However, the question is not so much how one writes and thinks about or inside madness, but rather what constitutes the domain of the writable, or thinkable, before one begins to write or think at all.

While asking “How can we read the unreadable?” (187), Felman proceeds to offer readings of what she identifies to be ‘texts about madness,’ such as Henry James’s *The Turn of the Screw*, in order to provide, inevitably, an answer: “It is somewhere *between* their affirmation and their denial of madness that these texts about madness *act*, and that they act themselves out as madness, i.e. as *unrepresentable*” (252). Finally, her question transforms into an answer, and not the other way around: “The more a text is ‘mad’—the more, in other words, it resists interpretation—the more the specific modes of its resistance to reading constitute its ‘subject’ and its literariness. What literature recounts in each text is precisely the *specificity of its resistance to our reading*” (254). But what

constitutes the domain of the readable before one begins to read at all? To answer her question about reading the unreadable, Felman provides a *reading*, albeit a brilliant reading, of both madness and writing. Madness and writing, thus, through Felman's reading, become not unreadable, and Felman's original question shifts into an answer. Her analysis produces a performative contradiction by performing the opposite of its claim; it performs a reading of what it wishes to render unreadable, and further provides an answer in place of that which it insists must remain a question. This reading, as any reading, is a form of sensorship in and of itself. Felman, however, is not unaware of the impossibility of her task:

How can we read the unreadable? This question, however, is far from simple: grounded in contradiction, it in fact subverts its own terms: to actually *read* the unreadable, to impose a meaning on it, is precisely *not* to read the unreadable *as unreadable*, but to *reduce* it to the readable, to interpret it as if it were of the same order as the readable. But perhaps the unreadable and the readable *cannot* be located on the same level, perhaps they are *not* of the same order: if they could indeed correspond to the unconscious and to the conscious levels, then their functionings would be radically different, and their modes of being utterly heterogeneous to each other. (187)

In an attempt to modify her original question, then, Felman offers another answer, in the form of a question:

The paradoxical necessity of 'reading the unreadable' could thus be accomplished only through a radical modification of the meaning of 'reading' itself. To read on the basis of the unreadable would be, here again, to ask not *what* does the

unreadable mean, but *how* does the unreadable mean? Not what is the meaning of the letters, but in what way do the letters *escape* meaning? In what way do the letters *signify via*, precisely, their own in-significance? (187)

However, to ask in what way does in-significance signify, or to read how the unreadable means, as opposed to what it means, still entails a reading which remains loyal to the norms of the domain of signification. These revised questions are no less contradictory than their predecessor. Suppose, however, that there was no question; what would the answer be then? Suppose, otherwise, that Felman's answer could turn back into, or return to, a question. If the texts she examines are not readable and not unreadable, what constitutes the domain of the readable before she begins to read at all? What constitutes the questionable before one begins to question at all? Suppose there *were* no questions. What constitutes the domain of the answerable. What, in other words, are the universal normative constraints which uphold the demarcation between question and answer? Suppose there were no questions, what would the answer be? The answer, of course, would be impossible.

The impossible question marks the intersection of madness and writing; it marks the site of the dead end. A dead end is a non-end, for it is dead already, from the beginning. Suppose there were no beginnings, what would the end be? The end would be the beginning, or else impossible, or both. The question that contradicts itself and further turns in upon itself only to contradict itself again, ad infinitum, is the figuration of the reflexive intransitivity that is characteristic of the middle voice. It is, moreover, a site of impossibility, for it escapes the universal law of contradiction. To ask, 'suppose there were no questions, what would the answer be,' is to suppose a question in the first place.

The question contradicts itself structurally, but also semantically, for it presupposes that there will be an answer even in the absence of questions—it does not ask ‘could there be an answer,’ but ‘what would the answer be?’ The answer would be the question, but suppose there were no questions, and so on. To say that the answer would be impossible—that there would be no answer—is, already, an answer, and it is also not an option, for the question is ‘what would the answer be;’ the answer would be, regardless of its impossibility. The answer, in this sense, precedes censorship. Suppose there were no questions, what would the answer be? The question, too, by questioning, precedes the censorship of questions. Censorship, in this configuration, is out of the question.

The question asks and, therefore, seeks. It is an indication of a search. The impossible question seeks intransitively, for it seeks after and returns to itself in an affirmation of its impossibility; the impossible question seeks its own dead end, its own death, which is to say it seeks to begin the death of the end only to return to the beginning. The impossible question, in other words, seeks to re-solve the difference between beginning and end. Giorgio Agamben reminds us that *to solve*, which can be broken into *se-luo*, is the verb from which the word ‘absolute’ derives:

In the Indo-European languages, the reflexive group *\*se* indicates what is proper (*suus*)—both that which belongs to a group, in the sense of *con-suetudo*, *suesco* (Gr. *ethos*, “custom, habit,” Ger. *Sitte*), and that which remains in itself, separated, as in *solus*, *sed*, *secedo*. The verb to solve thus indicates the operation of dissolving (*luo*) that leads (or leads back) something to its own *\*se*, to *suus* as to *solus*, dissolving it—*absolving* it—of every tie or alterity. The preposition *ab*, which expresses distancing, movement from, reinforces this idea of a process, a



voyage that takes off, separates from something and moves, or returns toward something. (92)

The impossible question is Absolute: “To think the Absolute signifies, thus, to think that which, through a process of ‘absolution,’ has been led back to its ownmost property, to itself, to its own *solitude* [. . .] For this reason, the Absolute always implies a voyage, an abandonment of the originary place, an alienation and a being-out-side” (Agamben 92). The impossible question seeks to dissolve the universal law of contradiction and, in its seeking, returns: “The verb to return derives from the Greek *tornios* (lathe); that is, from the name of the simple woodworking instrument that, turning around on itself, uses and consumes the object it forms until it has reduced the material to a perfect circle. (*Tornios* belongs to the same root as the Greek *teiro*, use, like the Latin verb *tero* and the English adjective *trite*.)” (Agamben 94). In its seeking, the question turns upon itself, moving toward the impossible retrieval of and resistance to Hegelian Reason.<sup>5</sup> If Reason “wants to find and to have itself” (Hegel 146), and if we must consider the action of Reason “in the moments of its movement,” to see “how it seeks itself as actuality” (147) and yet “remains a restless searching and in its very searching declares that the satisfaction of finding is a sheer impossibility” (145),<sup>6</sup> then the impossible question is a figure of Reason at the moment of impossibility, a figure reflected in the reflexive intransitivity of the middle voice, or else in the impossible voice of intransitive seeking.

“Intransitively, to write is to seek, through the destination of writing” (*Peregrinations* 4), writes Lyotard. Writing and madness converge at the site of intransitivity, through the destination of seeking. “Writing seeks,” writes Barthes, “a systematic exemption of meaning” (*Rustle* 54). In Hebrew, the verb *to seek*, from the

root *hapas*, contradicts itself in the intransitive reflexive voice, *hitchapes*, which means to disguise oneself; to hide oneself under disguise, as is the custom in Halloween. To seek, in the Hebrew inflection of the middle voice, means to hide.<sup>7</sup> Intransitive writing seeks intransitively; that is, it seeks itself and, in its seeking, hides. Suppose there were no writing, what would the reading be? Intransitive writing renders reading impossible; the reading, of course, would be the writing. That is, intransitive writing, like madness, seeks itself dead, dissolving the normative constraints which demarcate the domain of readability in the first place; intransitive writing seeks to censor the domain of the censorable, for through writing, it seeks to suppose there is no writing. Writing and madness converge at the site of the impossible question, or at the moment of impossible sensorship. Suppose there were no problem, what would the diagnosis be? The diagnosis would be the problem, or else the diagnosis would be impossible.

### **The Pursuit of Nothing**

Shoshana Felman's project corresponds to Michel Foucault's effort in *Madness and Civilization*, not because the object of analysis is the same (Foucault wishes to capture, impossibly, an archaeology of madness, while Felman wishes to capture the site at which writing about madness and madness converge), but because the analysis itself is mad. That is, it is impossible. In his critique of Foucault's project, Jacques Derrida charges that Foucault's attempt "to write a history of madness *itself*. *Itself*," a history of "madness speaking on the basis of its own experience and under its own authority, and not a history of madness described from within the language of reason, the language of psychiatry *on* madness"—a history "of madness as it carries itself and breathes before

being caught and paralyzed in the nets of classical reason, from within the very language of classical reason itself, utilizing the concepts that were the historical instruments of the capture of madness”—is at once “the most audacious and seductive aspect of his venture” and “with all seriousness, the maddest aspect of his project” (*Writing* 34-5). Derrida focuses on the madness/silence motif which runs through Foucault’s book (to support the claim that madness has been reduced to silence by psychiatric reason at the end of the eighteenth century<sup>8</sup>), citing the famous Foucaultian quote: “The language of psychiatry, which is a monologue of reason *on* madness, could be established only on the basis of such a silence. I have not tried to write the history of that language but, rather, the archaeology of that silence” (34). Foucault’s project, here, is itself founded on the very reason it seeks to resist and, moreover, is based on an investigation of juridical records *on* madness, and not on an investigation of madness itself. Derrida begins with an interrogation:

[F]irst of all, is there a history of silence? Further, is not an archaeology, even of silence, a logic, that is, an organized language, a project, an order, a sentence, a syntax, a work? Would not the archaeology of silence be the most efficacious and subtle restoration, the *repetition*, in the most irreducibly ambiguous meaning of the word, of the act perpetrated against madness—and be so at the very moment when this act is denounced? Without taking into account that all the signs which allegedly serve as indices of the origin of this silence and of this stifled speech, and as indices of everything that has made madness an interrupted and forbidden, that is, arrested, discourse—all these signs and documents are borrowed, without exception, from the juridical province of interdiction. (35)

He proceeds to elaborate on the impossibility of Foucault's aim, an impossibility of which Foucault is not unaware, but which he, nevertheless, cannot avoid:

All our European languages, the language of everything that has participated, from near or far, in the adventure of Western reason—all this is the immense delegation of the project defined by Foucault under the rubric of the capture of objectification of madness. *Nothing* within this language, and no one among those who speak it, can escape the historical guilt—if there is one, and if it is historical in a classical sense—which Foucault apparently wishes to put on trial.

But such a trial may be impossible, for by the simple fact of their articulation the proceedings and the verdict unceasingly reiterate the crime. (35)

According to this Derridean configuration, reason (order) is the criminal enemy, and madness its innocent victim: “The misfortune of the mad, the interminable misfortune of their silence, is that their best spokesmen are those who betray them best; which is to say that when one attempts to convey their silence *itself*, one has already passed over to the side of the enemy, the side of order, even if one fights against order from within it, putting its origin into question” (36). The reason of Foucault's mad project, the impossibility of his task, is inevitable and classic, as opposed to classical, concludes Derrida:

this crisis in which reason is madder than madness—for reason is non-meaning and oblivion—and in which madness is more rational than reason, for it is closer to the wellspring of sense, however silent or murmuring—this crisis has always begun and is interminable. It suffices to say that, if it is classic, it is not so in the

sense of the *classical age* but in the sense of eternal and essential classicism, and is also historical in an unexpected sense. (62)

The success of Foucault's project, according to Derrida, is in its ability to enrich "the concept of *crisis*" and "reassemble all its potentialities, all the energy of its meaning" (62). The irony, of course, is that Derrida's is also a discourse of reason *on* the madness of Foucault's project; it, too, is a repetition recording the crisis between reason and madness. Suppose there were no reason, what would the madness be? The madness would be impossible, or else the madness would be the reason. Madness, however, is already both.

Derrida, in his critique of Foucault's analysis, presupposes an implicit distinction, or difference, between 'crisis' and 'madness,' in that the former arises at the site of convergence between madness and reason, for reason cannot capture madness (and yet, madly, attempts to), while madness is a (paradoxically rational) resistance to reason. The madness of Foucault's project, according to Derrida, is that it speaks from the confines of reason in an effort to liberate that which is denounced and victimized by the discourse of reason in the first place. This approach results in a crisis between reason and madness. If Foucault's is a mad project, however, has he not in some sense succeeded in capturing madness after all? Could it not be that the *crisis* is *itself* madness, and that madness could only materialize as such at the site of a crisis of reason, or at the site of impossibility? Derrida suggests that any project attempting a liberation of madness from the language of reason, in order to produce an archaeology of silence, would only be possible if one agrees to "not mention a certain silence (a *certain* silence which, again, can be determined only within a *language* and an *order* that will preserve this silence from

contamination by any given muteness), *or* follow the madman down the road of his exile” (36). However, is it not reason that produces madness? Without reason, where would the crisis be? That is to say, is it not the preemptive normative constraint, upholding a demarcation between speakability and unspeakability, that produces the domain of the unspeakable in the first place? If silence stands for impossibility, and psychotic speech is impossible for it dissolves the demarcation between speakability and unspeakability by escaping both domains, then its impossibility can only be determined according to an economy of censorship and censorability. Psychotic speech must be censored because it cannot be censored. That is, psychosis, madness, insanity, silence, can only materialize upon censorship, or sensorship, upon and as a *crisis* in which the domain of sensorability turns in upon and contradicts itself.

Shoshana Felman, in her analysis, submits that she does not intend to side with either Foucault or Derrida, for “The question ‘whose reasoning does justice to madness’ is in any case an absurd question, a contradiction in terms” (46); instead, her aim is “to seek to examine what is the *issue* of the debate, what is *at stake* in the argumentation” (46). In her seeking, however, Felman repeats Foucault’s methodology (for she examines what she identifies to be texts about madness as opposed to madness itself, and further attempts a *reading* in order to illuminate the complex dynamics of the *unreadable*), while providing a self-aware Derridean critique of her own tactics in order to examine the impossibility of any argumentation at all in the face of a madness that is, ultimately, a representation of the unrepresentable. Foucault, Derrida and Felman, in fact, all share the same methodology, for they all choose to consider writings about madness, and all acknowledge their respective choices to treat the writing or the record *about* madness, as

opposed to what they call ‘madness *itself*.’ Foucault’s choice is based on the fact that the object of his analysis is, conveniently, the madness of the classical age, as opposed to that of his own age, a madness that is accessible only via documented records. Derrida’s choice is based on the fact that the object of his analysis is Foucault’s writing. Felman’s choice is based on her intention to examine the site at which writing madness and writing about madness converge. All three authors imply that there is a configuration of ‘madness *itself*,’ of a madness that is ultimately inaccessible to their respective projects (for, they insist, the projects themselves only examine written representations of something unrepresentable). However, if madness is a resistance to interpretation, an impossibility in the face of sensorship, then there is no madness without sensorship or interpretation. There is no madness other than the *crisis* of interpretation; no madness other than itself. The very suggestion that these projects must inevitably reach a dead end instead of ‘madness itself’ and are, therefore, impossible, is a repetition of the impossible instance of Reason which in the moments of its movement seeks itself as actuality, yet remains a restless searching and in its very searching declares that the satisfaction of finding is a sheer impossibility. If writing and madness converge at the site of intransitive seeking, at the time of the impossible question, or at the location of the dead end, then the *writings* of Foucault, Felman, Derrida, converge with madness (and are, therefore, successful) precisely at the site of impossibility; that is, the impossibility of each project, in its effort (through *writing*) to *solve* and *re-solve* the difference between reason and madness, records the moment at which writing and madness converge, *returning* to the same Absolute *crisis*—to the site of the impossible question, the question

that escapes the domain of sensorability—seeking itself through hiding, and thereby bringing forth nothing.

“If it is true then that the question underlying madness *cannot be asked*,” writes Felman, “that language is not *capable* of asking it; that through the very formulation of the question the *interrogation* is in fact excluded, being necessarily a confirmation, an *affirmation*, on the contrary, of reason,” then it is “not less true that, in the fabric of a text and through the very act of writing, the question is at work, stirring, changing place, and wandering away: the question underlying madness *writes*, and writes itself. And if we are unable to locate it [. . .] it is not because the question relative to madness does not question, but because it questions *somewhere else*” (55). The question relative to madness, in other words, questions impossibly; it questions always somewhere else, which is to say it questions nowhere. The next section will focus on the impossible text, considering how madness and writing converge at the site of intransitive seeking, or at the site of the dead end, and how the operations of sensorship, censorship and diagnosis converge in their pursuit of nothing.

## II. THE TEXT

### Opening: Word Killing

*The essential relation between death and language flashes up before us, but remains still unthought.* (Heidegger qtd. in Agamben, *Language* xi)

*Lolita* begins with a breakdown, a trip of the tongue to nowhere. “LOLITA, light of my life, fire of my loins. My sin, my soul. Lo-lee-ta: the tip of the tongue taking a trip of three steps down the palate to tap, at three, on the teeth. Lo. Lee. Ta” (Nabokov,



*Lolita* 11). The tongue, in its seeking of the name, breaks it from the inside and from the beginning, bringing forth the killed game, a dead name, or nothing: “You can always count on a murderer for a fancy prose style” (11). *Lolita*, or the *Confession of a White Widowed Male*, is the fictional diary of a “murderer,” a “madman” and a writer; it is a fictional record of the impossible moment which unites all three in a single voice, in the middle (voice), in its seeking, and nothing more: “And there she is there, lost in the middle [. . .] my Lolita” (55). Lolita is there, precisely where she is not, precisely where she is lost.

The pages which comprise *Lolita* are presumably published posthumously, subsequent to Humbert Humbert’s death of coronary thrombosis—while in prison awaiting his trial for the murder of Claire Quilty—in November of 1952. Lolita, too, is dead prior to the publication of the diary—she dies while birthing a stillborn girl, while giving birth to death, on Christmas day of the same year—for Humbert states that he wishes “this memoir to be published only when Lolita is no longer alive. Thus, neither of us is alive when the reader opens this book” (311). The book opens with the death of its fictional author, confirming the famous Barthesian claim that “the birth of the reader must be requited by the death of the Author” (Barthes *Rustle* 55); but *Lolita* also opens upon the condition of Lolita’s death. Thus, it begins upon the condition of its dead end, and ends only in so far as by ending, it is ready to begin the dying. *Lolita* closes with a dead beginning.

The fictional editor responsible for the publication of the diary is John Ray, Jr., Ph.D., from Widworth, Mass., who is a friend of Humbert’s lawyer and had been awarded a prize for his “modest work (‘Do the Senses make Sense?’) wherein certain

morbid states and perversions had been discussed” (5). In his foreword to the memoir, the editor proposes that “had our demented diarist gone, in the fatal summer of 1947, to a competent psychopathologist, there would have been no disaster; but then, neither would there have been this book” (7), and predicts that “As a case history, ‘Lolita’ will become, no doubt, a classic in psychiatric circles” (7). The farcical editor’s comic forecast is a parody gone flat, or else a reflexive intransitive parody, for it is a parody of itself which through the act of parodying loses its parodic dimension and becomes serious. *Lolita*, published in 1955 first by a press in Paris and then by Putnam, after being rejected by a series of American publishers and banned by the French government (the ban subsequently lifted by the French High Court), also raising the brows of US customs officials along the way,<sup>9</sup> is, more than four decades after its first appearance, still pronounced “the classic fictional portrayal of pedophilia” (Centerwall 199) in psychiatric circles such as that of Dr. Brandon Centerwall, a psychiatrist from Seattle, whose project (ludicrous as it may sound) entails the elimination of the word ‘fictional’ from its original, less than ingenious, context. *Lolita*, however, is neither a ‘classic portrayal of pedophilia,’ nor a classic portrayal of pornography; nor is it a novel “about a precocious schoolgirl seduced by a middle-aged man” as listed under the entry for “Lolita” in the Oxford English Dictionary, or a novel about a middle-aged man seduced by “a precociously seductive girl,” as suggested by Webster’s Dictionary. *Lolita*, for starters, is not about Lolita. It is regardless of her. It is because of her impossibility.

*Lolita* is the mad writer’s record of an impossible crisis. Humbert Humbert’s name has been pronounced funny, idiotic, and redundant by numerous readers. In an interview with *Playboy* in 1964, Nabokov, in response to the question “what inspired you

to dub Lolita's aging inamorato with such engaging redundancy?" (Nabokov *Strong* 26), replies:

That, too, was easy. The double rumble is, I think, very nasty, very suggestive. It is a hateful name for a hateful person. It is also a kingly name, and I did need a royal vibration for Humbert the Fierce and Humbert the Humble. Lends itself also to a number of puns. And the execrable diminutive "Hum" is on a par, socially and emotionally, with "Lo," as her mother calls her. (26)

The name, however, is perhaps more crazy than it is stupid or hateful; Humbert Humbert is impossible—it is the name that cannot be, the name that is nameless. The subject's first name is his last name, defying the common demarcation between given name and surname, between first and last, beginning and end, between personal and formal modes of address. Mr. Humbert Humbert cancels himself out. He has no given name. "He is abnormal. He is not a gentleman" (*Lolita* 7). H. H. is, nevertheless, a writer. He had planned to acquire a degree in Psychiatry, but instead decided to switch to English Literature, subsequently embarking on a project compiling a "manual of French literature for English-speaking students" (18). He had planned to specialize in diagnosis and instead switched to reading; he planned to study madness, but instead decided to write it down: "Oh, my Lolita, I have only words to play with" (34). First in the psychiatric ward and then awaiting his trial in legal captivity, Humbert is "writing under observation" (12), and has only words to kill.

### **Censoring: Only Words**

In *Only Words*, Catharine MacKinnon charges that “When words of sexual abuse are in our mouths, that is pornography, and we become pornography because that is what pornography is” (66). Her infamous argument proposes the construction of pornography as a site of social injury which incites and perpetuates the subordination of women and, therefore, constitutes a form of discriminatory inequality compromising the rights and liberties of some citizens (namely women) at the expense of others’ right to freedom of expression. The pornographic industry, moreover, according to her, deforms the speech of those it subordinates, thereby depriving them of a voice, of agency, and of the capacity to mean what they say. MacKinnon, for her purposes, cites the popular example of Anita Hill’s testimony, and its reception, during the legal proceedings of her sexual harassment charge against Clarence Thomas. Hill’s testimony recounting the injury done to her (in order to establish the fact of injury) becomes, in the hands of the Senate, a pornographic, sexualized account displaying her own pornographic inclination toward sexual fantasy. By speaking the words of her sexualized abuse, Hill becomes sexualized herself; by speaking pornography, she becomes guilty of pornography. She cannot resist pornography without becoming pornographic. Butler notes, in her reading of MacKinnon’s (faulty) analysis, that according to this line of argument the following is true:

The class of people, mainly women, who are subordinated and degraded through their depiction in pornography, the class to whom pornography addresses its imperative of subordination, are the ones who lose their voice, as it were, as the consequence of having been addressed and discredited by the voice of

pornography. Understood as hate speech, pornography deprives the addressee (the one depicted who is at once presumed to be the one to whom pornography is addressed) of the power to speak. The speech of the addressee is deprived of what Austin called its ‘illocutionary force.’ The speech of the addressee no longer has the power to do what it says, but always to do something other than what it says (a doing distinct from the doing that would be consonant with its saying) or to mean precisely the opposite of what it intends to mean. (Butler, *Excitable* 82)<sup>10</sup>

In her consideration of the implications of MacKinnon’s argument, Butler observes that the inversion of Anita Hill’s speech during the Senate hearings, the reconstruction of that speech as pornographic, is what MacKinnon, oddly, takes “to be paradigmatic of the kind of reversal of meanings that pornography systematically performs” (Butler 84), so that according to MacKinnon, “this power of pornographic recontextualization means that whenever a woman says ‘no’ within a pornographic context that ‘no’ is presumed to be a ‘yes.’ Pornography, like the Freudian unconscious, knows no negation” (84).

What MacKinnon presupposes, of course, is that one can and ought to be able to say words that mean as one intends them to mean, that mean (to the other) what they say (to one), and that pornography deprives one of that right because “it creates a scene in which the performative dimension of discourse runs counter to its semantic or communicative functioning” (Butler 84). Butler aligns MacKinnon’s project with the Habermasian theory of speech which seeks “to devise a communicative speech situation in which speech acts are grounded in consensus where no speech act is permissible that performatively refutes another’s ability to consent through speech” (86). MacKinnon and

Habermas structure their arguments according to cultural agendas which seek to critique the inversion and deformation, or misappropriation, of utterances in a compromising speech situation. Such projects, however, entail a presupposed correlation between words and their unequivocal meanings. Habermas writes: “the productivity of the process of understanding remains unproblematic only as long as all participants stick to the reference point of possibly achieving a mutual understanding in which the *same* utterances are assigned the same meaning” (qtd. in Butler 86-7). But how is it possible to operate in a speech situation that is univocal and irreversible? Butler asks:

are we, whoever ‘we’ are, the kind of community in which such meanings could be established once and for all? Is there not a permanent diversity within the semantic field that constitutes an irreversible situation for political theorizing? Who stands above the interpretive fray in a position to ‘assign’ the same utterances the same meanings? And why is it that the threat posed by such an authority is deemed less serious than the one posed by equivocal interpretation left unconstrained? (87)

Pornography, according to MacKinnon, deforms the speech of its subjects (women), inverting its meaning, so that it becomes “speech that means one thing even as it intends to mean another, or it is speech that knows not what it means or it is speech as display, confession, and evidence, but not as communicative vehicle, having been deprived of its capacity to make truthful claims” (85). The problem with this argument, Butler points, is that it leads to the following questions: “If pornography performs a deformation of speech, what is presumed to be the proper form of speech? What is the notion of nonpornographic speech that conditions this critique of pornography?” (86).

MacKinnon's argument does not take into account the disjuncture between words and their meanings, between what one says and what it means to another, or between what is said and what it potentially means. Such an argument does not take into account that based on such a disjuncture, "one always risks meaning something other than what one thinks one utters," so that "one is, as it were, vulnerable in a specifically linguistic sense to a social life of language that exceeds the purview of the subject who speaks" (87).

Hence, to return to an earlier citation:

This risk and vulnerability are proper to democratic process in the sense that one cannot know in advance the meaning that the other will assign to one's utterance, what conflict of interpretation may well arise, and how best to adjudicate that difference. The effort to come to terms is not one that can be resolved in anticipation but only through a concrete struggle of translation, one whose success has no guarantees. (88)

The blind woman from Tony Morrison's fable cannot know in advance if the bird in the hands of the boys is living or dead; all she knows is that it is in their hands.

### **Censoring Sensorship: Impossible Words**

Humbert Humbert has only words to kill. In the hands of the censor, the juror, the reader, or the doctor, is the disjuncture between what these words say and what they mean (to the potential reader, doctor, juror). Humbert addresses the "Gentlemen of the jury!" (71), the "learned reader" (51), the "able psychiatrist who studies my case" (168) on numerous occasions, guiding the reading figures with instructions and addendums. In his writing, he reads. He addresses Lolita, another figurative reader, and in his reading,

writes her down, or else breaks her, writing her dead. *Lolita*, the testimony, as any articulation, is open for deformation in the hands of the censor, the juror, the doctor, the reader. Humbert's testimony, which takes the form of a middle voiced intransitive quest, is an account which writes and simultaneously *reads itself*, continuously shifting the gap between what he writes and how it reads, what he utters and how he himself receives it, within the writing. The account reads itself in writing, deforming and reforming, preempting the reader, rendering reading inadequate in advance. His is an account of an injury inflicted by the agent upon an other, which, through the injurious act, through the repetition of the injury in the account itself, afflicts the agent himself. That is not to say that Humbert is the victim of injury, but rather that he is a victim of his account; he is a victim, or patient, of his account, but that is not to say that he is not the agent of that account, or of its potentially injurious force. If Humbert's testimony is at all an example of sexualization, who is being sexualized, and in whose hands (or mouth) can such a sexualization become a potentially censorable pornographic deformation? Is it not in the reader's hands? Humbert's diary introduces an economy of nympholepsy, a science of his obsession with a nymphet. Does his discourse propose a sexualization of the girl-child herself, or of the injurious obsession which he inflicts upon the nymphet-like figure? Is there a difference? Or does the parodic nature of the account seek to counter sexualization altogether? Is the concept of a 'nymphet' itself a type of injurious transgression, and is such a transgression pornographic, as has been deemed by the string of publishers and legal officials who censored the text in the first place? If considered on such terms at all, would Humbert's testimony then occupy the inverse conceptual space of Anita Hill's testimony in that the writer offers an account which seeks to repent and



counter the injury he inflicted, and in its countering, rehearses the injury through the account? Humbert's testimony, in reading itself, cancels itself out; it knows not what it means, it is a non-communicative vehicle, lacking the capacity to make not only truthful claims, but any claims at all. The testimony establishes its writer as the subject and object of his injury, and simultaneously as neither the subject nor the object of injury. In his writing, Humbert reads, censors, judges and diagnoses himself, and the same time misreads, uncensors, misdiagnoses himself. Humbert Humbert is a hateful and crazy name, a no-name, but it is the pseudonym which the writer assigns himself: "for some reason I think my choice expresses the nastiness best" (310). It is he, reading, who cancels himself out.

Humbert's confession, in its reading, affirms the deformative gap conditioning all communicative language, affirms the potentiality for deformation in language, and supplements that affirmation with a simultaneous 'proper' reading of its implications. His discourse deforms, and at the same time asks, but what is presumed to be the 'proper' form, or, how is the very notion of *proper* a deformation? His discourse shifts and turns upon itself, re-turning, re-solving, and dissolving each claim. His vulgar references to his first wife, the "poodlehead" (29), "obese Valenchka" (32), whose "only asset was a muted nature" (28), are congruent with his reports of Charlotte Haze, his subsequent wife and Lolita's mother, "the big cold Haze" (59) with "the thick thighs" (87). He imagines drowning Charlotte and "slapping Valeria's breasts out of alignment" (89). The nature of this line of reference is perniciously parodic, parodying the writer's discriminatory claims themselves as well as their objects (the women) as *read* by the other; the writer is scandalous, abnormal, not a gentleman, and is simultaneously aware

of his own vulgarity, is sensitive to the nature of his own transgression, rehearsing the science of injury to a degree of precision, only to cancel itself out. The Humbert who makes these discriminatory references, dutifully supplemented by the occasional racist nod toward “the Negro maid” (40) and the “very amiable and athletic Negro” chauffeur (75), is a version of “Humbert the Hummer” (59); it is the abominable version of Humbert, the one who maneuvers Lolita to sit on his lap on a Sunday morning while performing “the obscure adjustments necessary for the success of the trick” (61) required to crush “out against her left buttock the last throb of the longest ecstasy man or monster had ever known” (63). This Humbert is horrible, but what he presents is the disjuncture between what his horrible words say and what they could potentially mean. He mocks the condition of his very testimony, the grounds for its legitimacy, and the contrived nature of the writer’s ecstasy, in the midst of his account: “The stars that sparkled, and the cars that parkled, and the bars, and the barmen, were presently taken over by her; her voice stole and corrected the tune I had been mutilating” (61). This Humbert is perhaps inexcusable. He is too incorrigible to care for excuses, and yet wise enough to wish he had some. He is desperately aware that there can be no justification, and yet is incorrigible enough to suggest one:

I felt proud of myself. I had stolen the honey of a spasm without impairing the morals of a minor. Absolutely no harm done. The conjurer had poured milk, molasses, foaming champagne into a young lady’s new white purse; and lo, the purse was intact. Thus had I delicately constructed my ignoble, ardent, sinful dream; and still Lolita was safe—and I was safe. What I had madly possessed was not she, but my own creation, another, fanciful Lolita—perhaps, more real

than Lolita; overlapping, encasing her; floating between me and her, and having no will, no consciousness—indeed, no life of her own. (64)

However, he already knows, at the time of the incident and now, sitting in his jail cell, that the harm had been done—that Lolita, through the injurious act and through his account of this act, had been deprived of a life of her own and simultaneously given life, given death, in the discourse of her beholder—and that the harm will have been repeated, redone; when he claims that ‘absolutely no harm’ was done, that “The child knew nothing. I had done nothing to her. And nothing prevented me from repeating a performance that affected her as little as if she were a photographic image rippling upon a screen and I a humble hunchback abusing myself in the dark” (64), his countering affirms the harm, affirms the difference between what he writes and how he reads it, and means to—the countering of the harm is ironic, is an acknowledgment, a repetition, and a deploration of the injury, by antiphrasis. Or is it? When Humbert claims that no harm had been done, he leaves the ‘learned reader’ with the aporetic disjuncture between what Humbert the Hummer says and what he means.

The incorrigible Hummer covers numerous towns in his journey with Lolita:

In whatever town we stopped I would inquire, in my polite European way, anent the whereabouts of natatoriums, museums, local schools, the number of children in the nearest school and so forth; and at school bus time, smiling and twitching a little [. . .] I would park at a strategic point, with my vagrant schoolgirl beside me in the car, to watch the children leave school—always a pretty sight. This sort of thing soon began to bore my so easily bored Lolita, and having a childish lack of sympathy for other people’s whims, she would insult me and my desire to have

her caress me while blue-eyed little brunettes in blue shorts, copperheads in green boleros, and blurred boyish blondes in faded slacks passed by in the sun. (163)

Humbert the Hummer knows no limits. He knows no boundaries, or knows not that he knows them. On the one hand, Humbert sardonically claims that no harm is done when he climaxes in his pants (that famous Sunday morning with Lolita on his lap), thereby introducing the very boundary which separates harmful from harmless, through his invocation and transgression of that boundary; on the one hand, he knows that there is a boundary. On the other hand, here, in his account of the grotesque voyeuristic scenario in the car, he is seemingly oblivious to the boundary between harmful and harmless, or is he? Lolita's disdain for the task at hand is, according to this account, due to her 'lack of sympathy for other people's whims.' Such a claim, itself a conspicuously gross deformation of Lolita's unsympathetic disregard, is outrageously tragic, or is it so outrageous that its absurdity reaches fatally comic proportions? Can it be both? Humbert mocks his own deficiency, so that the deficiency itself is tragic and can only reach comic proportions in the event that Humbert *knows* the severity of his deformation of Lolita's situation, and of the injurious force of both the revolting act and its sardonic account.

Humbert knows that he does not know, and in his knowing, acts:

What we are dealing with is a knowledge that is, rather, indestructible; a knowledge which does not allow for knowing that one knows; a knowledge, therefore, that is not supported by meaning which, by definition, knows itself. The subject can get a hold on this unconscious knowledge only by the intermediary of his mistakes—the effects of non-sense his speech registers: in dreams, slips of the tongue, or jokes. (Felman *Writing* 121)

With the trip of his tongue, Humbert the Hummer slips, knowing the nature of his slip, knowing the nature of his hums, his dreams, knowing that the effects of non-sense his speech registers are no joking matter.

“From what depth this re-nonsense” (271), he asks himself while waiting for the married and pregnant Lolita, years later, to open the door. This, now, is Humbert the Lover, Humbert the sufferer. This is the Humbert who, all along, swears that “My heart seemed everywhere at once” (46), that “I was sick with longing” (48), that “Never have I experienced such agony” (46). At one point, he recounts, “[I] sat down on the grass with a quite monstrous pain in my chest and vomited a torrent of browns and greens that I had never remembered eating” (240). It is the Humbert who demands empathy: “Imagine me, reader, with my shyness, my distaste for any ostentation, my inherent sense of the *comme il faut*, imagine me masking the frenzy of my grief with a trembling ingratiating smile” (249). Humbert the sufferer drives away “through the drizzle of the dying day, with the windshield wipers in full action but unable to cope with my tears” (282), weeping, insisting that “I loved you. I was a pentapod monster, but I loved you. I was despicable and brutal, and turpid, and everything, *mais je t’aimes, je t’aimes!* And there were times when I knew how you felt and it was hell to know it, my little one” (286-7). This Humbert is suffering because he knows: “It had become gradually clear to my conventional Lolita during our singular and bestial cohabitation that even the most miserable of family lives was better than the parody of incest, which, in the long run, was the best I could offer the waif” (289). This Humbert knows unambiguously: “I was unable to transcend the simple human fact that whatever spiritual solace I might find,

whatever lithophanic eternities might be provided for me, nothing could make my Lolita forget the foul lust I had inflicted upon her” (284-5). He knows, or does he?

Humbert Humbert’s testimony does not know, and does not not know. It is an impossible attempt to resolve the difference between knowing and not knowing: “I am trying to describe these things not to relive them in my present boundless misery, but to sort out the portion of hell and the portion of heaven in that strange, awful, maddening world—nymphet love. The beastly and beautiful merged at one point, and it is that borderline I would like to fix, and I feel I fail to do so. Why?” (137). Suppose there were no sides, where would the border be? Humbert asks the impossible question, seeking, “weeping again, drunk on the impossible past” (284). Nymphet love is an impossible phrase, an oxymoron; nymphet, a beastly deformation, a delusional classification, cannot *properly* include ‘beauty’ or love, or can it? “To say ‘This combination of words makes no sense’ excludes it from the sphere of language and thereby bounds the domain of language” (Wittgenstein 138). The combination, nymphet love—as a phrase and as a concept—subverts the universal normative constraints which through preemptive exclusionary mechanisms uphold the demarcation between *proper* and not *proper*. Is love itself a proper deformation; a deformation of *proper*? Love—in tennis and certain other games, no score:

[T]he initial tennis coaching I had inflicted on Lolita [. . .] remained in my mind as oppressive and distressful memories—not only because she had been so hopelessly and irritatingly irritated by every suggestion of mine—but because the precious symmetry of the court instead of reflecting the harmonies latent in her

was utterly jumbled by the clumsiness and lassitude of the resentful child I  
mistaught. (235)

Humbert's testimony produces no score, knows not which side is which, knows not the  
difference between tennis and other games:

She said: 'Look, let's cut out the kissing game and get something to eat.'

[. . .]

'What's the katter with misses?' I muttered (word-control gone) into her hair.

'If you must know,' she said, 'you do it the wrong way.'

'Show, wight ray.' (122)

Humbert seeks and consumes words, and thereby brings forth nothing. He loses the  
boundary between beautiful and beastly, between heaven and hell, sense and nonsense;  
he loses all the answers and yet seeks the question (seeks Q), in a spiral web of  
negativity, between what is not sense and not not sense. He loses the preemptive  
constraint, the tacit *boundary*, which orders language in advance, which is a 'putting in  
place,' which creates a border of demarcation between what makes sense, or what is  
acceptable, useful and speakable, and what is senseless, or unacceptable, unspeakable,  
useless. Something cannot be both hell and not hell. Humbert's testimony is impossible  
because it deforms the universal law of contradiction: Something cannot be both rape  
and not rape. (But can it be neither?) "I am not a criminal sexual psychopath taking  
indecent liberties with a child," writes Humbert, "The rapist was Charlie Holmes; I am  
the therapist—a matter of nice spacing in the way of distinction" (152).

Humbert's testimony accomplishes the impossible, precedes its own censorship,  
calling the very demarcation between censorability and uncensorability into question.

The reading, that is, precedes the reader. The writer himself, by addressing the reader, the juror, the doctor and even Lolita, assumes the reading roles of these figures, performing their sensorship and censorship of the text, as he writes; censorship, already taken into account, already performed and deformed, is subverted by the text. Humbert, in one instance, diagnoses himself for the doctor/reader: “After all, gentlemen, it was becoming abundantly clear that all those identical detectives in prismatically changing cars were figments of my persecution mania, recurrent images based on coincidence and chance resemblance” (240). He sensors (interprets) his own discourse and censors (dismisses) it as clinical symptom of persecution mania. This instance of censorship, one of many, is an antiphrastic subversion of diagnosis and censorability altogether, for it becomes abundantly clear that the identical detectives in changing cars were Clare Quilty—CQ, See Cue, Seek You—and not figments of Humbert’s persecution mania. At the same time, that is not to say that Humbert does not suffer persecution mania, but rather that the boundary between mania and normalcy has been subverted. His account, the writing, performs a preemptive specular deformation of its reading, or of its diagnosis. By addressing the “frigid gentlewomen of the jury” (134) and at once the “sensitive gentlewomen of the jury” (137), Humbert precensors the censorship of the frigid, and the sensorship of the sensitive, reader; he judges himself, sentences himself, deforming the very domain of juridical legitimacy. Upon censoring, the censor must stare at the deformation of censorability reflected in the impossible text.

Ironically, it is the text’s unsensorability, the text’s unsensorable aporia, that leads to its scandalous historical and critical reception, originating with a series of publication bans (censorships) and charges of indecent content. If Humbert has only words to kill,



the censor has only words to bury and commemorate. *Lolita's* censorship (due to the text's presumed inclusion of 'pornographic' material) *produces* pornographic, sexualized material. Today, an internet search seeking 'Lolita' produces a string of hard porn adult sites, Lolitalands, containing images of small girls, large penises, and fine print announcing that the designated site does not include or promote child pornography. In that sense, *Lolita's* original censorship precedes and produces the cultural (con)text of the term 'Lolita.' The censorship sexualized the text, producing pornography through pornographic reading. *Lolita*, a now cultural icon, is engraved on the tomb marking its original censorship/burial, forever disfigured. It makes its way into pop songs dealing with schoolgirls' fantasies about despairing teachers, such as the famous "Don't Stand So Close To Me" by *The Police*, and gains a spot in standard dictionaries that define 'Lolita' as the name for indiscriminately sexual young girls seducing or seduced by middle aged men. *Lolita* is not defined as the figure of a young girl as seen through the grotesque, or perniciously comic, or fatally despairing distortion of a middle aged man's lens. *Lolita* is not defined as Humbert's game, killed or otherwise. Rather, the term, in its contemporary context, commemorates the injury, so that the dictionary, in its memorializing of words, in its commemoration of *Lolita* the precociously seductive girl, plays the role of Humbert the Hummer, Humbert the Horrible, repeating his version of the account minus his reflection. Or does it?

Humbert wishes "to introduce the following idea. Between the age limits of nine and fourteen there occur maidens who, to certain bewitched travelers, twice or many times older than they, reveal their true nature which is not human, but nymphic (that is, demoniac); and these chosen creatures I propose to designate as 'nymphets'" (18). He

notes that his proposed designation substitutes temporal limits for spatial ones, so that he would “have the reader see ‘nine’ and ‘fourteen’ as the boundaries” (18). He insists, however, that not all girl-children between the assigned age limits are necessarily nymphets, or else “we nympholepts would have gone insane” (19). This half-comical antiphrastic claim is as important as it is ironic, for it implies that the capacity for nymphethood lies with the beholder of the nymphet and not with the nymphet herself. The nymphet is not any girl-child, but the *chosen* one, with the *true* nature. Chosen by whom, and true to what? Like an hallucination or delusion, created by its beholder, the nymphet is created by her pursuer and cannot exist as nymphet independently of him. “Good looks” (19) are not a criterion, and “vulgarity, or at least what a given community terms so, does not necessarily impair certain mysterious characteristics” that distinguish “the nymphet from such coevals of hers as are incomparably more dependent on the spatial world of synchronous phenomena than on that intangible island of entranced time where Lolita plays with her likes” (19). Within the allotted age group, the number of nymphets is scarce:

A normal man given a group photograph of school girls or Girl Scouts and asked to point out the comeliest one will not necessarily choose the nymphet among them. You have to be an artist and a madman, a creature of infinite melancholy, with a bubble of hot poison in your loins and super-voluptuous flame permanently aglow in your subtle spine (oh, how you have to cringe and hide!), in order to discern at once, by ineffable signs—the slightly feline outline of a cheekbone, the slenderness of a downy limb, and other indices which despair and shame and tears of tenderness forbid me to tabulate—the little deadly demon among the

wholesome children; she stands unrecognized by them and unconscious herself of her fantastic power. (19)

A ‘normal’ man does not recognize the nymphet upon beholding her, does not deform her upon the disjuncture between what she is and what she means to him. Only the artist and the madman know the nymphet. The signs are ‘ineffable’ and ‘unrecognized’ by anybody else, including the nymphet herself—ineffability is a prerequisite for admission into nymphetdom. Finally, “It is a question of focal adjustment and a certain distance that the inner eye thrills to surmount, and a certain contrast that the mind perceives with a gasp of perverse delight” (19). Humbert’s scientific treatise on nympholepsy, like his entire account of *Lolita*, is doubly deformed by the dictionary definitions of ‘nymphet’ offered in the OED and Webster’s respectively: “nymph-like or sexually attractive young girl” and “a sexually precocious girl barely in her teens.” Humbert states that the nymphet is not “attractive” (19) and is presumably unaware of her powers. She is a question of focal adjustment, ineffable, defined by what she is not, by the contrast between what she is and what she means to another—she is a *question* of focal adjustment; suppose there were no questions, what would the answer be? Like the Lolitalands on the world wide web, the dictionary—with its revised entry of ‘nymphet,’ following the scandalous publication of *Lolita*—performs a sexualization of Humbert’s already deformed account, producing a double deformation, a subversion which turns in upon itself, reflecting a deformation of its own reading, of its own sensorship. The dictionary, in its reading, performs a focal distortion of the word nymphet; this reading, of course, is precensored by the text, is already a deformation of itself, producing a focal distortion of its own image reflected in the specular surface of the self-reading text. The

dictionary's definitions of 'Lolita' and 'nymphet,' in their sexualization, do not take into account—and, therefore, censor—the Lolita who, in Humbert's words, is “a typical kid picking her nose while engrossed in the lighter sections of a newspaper, as indifferent to my ecstasy as if it were something she had sat upon, a shoe, a doll, the handle of a tennis racket, and was too indolent to remove” (167). These definitions, memorializing the censorship of the text, censor its fictional writer, burying his account of “How sweet it was to bring that coffee to her, and then deny it until she had done her morning duty” (166-7)—burying his account of Lolita—under the commemoration of a ‘precciosly seductive girl.’

*Any* reading of the text is preemptively deformed, is potentially inadequate. For the text preemptively deforms any possible reading, subverts any censorship, renders any available interpretation an enactment of a gross inadequate transgression. Charles Rolo, in his early review of the book, submits that

above all, Lolita seems to me an assertion of the power of the comic spirit to wrest delight and truth from the most outlandish materials. It is one of the funniest serious novels I have ever read; and the vision of its abominable hero, who never deludes or excuses himself, brings into grotesque relief the cant, the vulgarity and the hypocritical conventions that pervade the human comedy. (78)

A reading which proposes that Humbert never deludes or excuses himself circumvents the most aporetic and impossible moment in the book, denying the site of the dead end, avoiding the impossible question. For such a reading takes Humbert at his word when he produces, addressing the “Frigid gentlewomen of the jury!” (134) upon the first time he accomplishes complete sexual intercourse with Lolita, the inexcusable excuse: “I am

going to tell you something very strange: it was she who seduced me” (134). I am going to cut out the jokes and tell you something strange—not vile, but strange—something impossible. It was she who seduced me. This phrase, paradigmatic of the impossibility of the entire text, dissolves the difference between Humbert the Hummer and Humbert the sufferer, Humbert the liar and Humbert the lover. It dissolves the difference, moreover, between the writer’s delusion and that of his reader. It was she who seduced me, writes Humbert. Is this an instance of antiphrasis, of an ironic subversion, or is this a case of delusional belief on the part of Humbert; or, could it be possible that this phrase is ‘true’ in as much as anything can be properly ‘true’? Is the notion of truth itself a form of proper deformation? This phrase, it was she—it was her fault—it was she who did it, is a revolting violation. It is the singular, inexcusable, grossly horrific phrase that is left hanging, unread, for the reader. The fate of this phrase, undiagnosed, is in the hands of the reader alone. That is, if the reader renders this claim ‘true,’ it will be true. If the reader renders the phrase an ‘excuse,’ or a ‘delusion,’ then it will be rape. It was she who seduced me. What is the difference between delusion and truth? Can this claim be both; can it be neither? Unreadable? Not  $x$  and not not  $x$ ? Not delusion and not not delusion. Not rape and not not rape. Would that undecidability, too, be a violently inadequate deformation, an already censored reading? What constitutes the domain of the readable before one begins to read at all? What separates Humbert’s hands from those of his reader? “Lolita. The name of a novel (1958) and its main character by Vladimir Nabokov (1899-1977) about a *precocious schoolgirl seduced* by a middle-aged man, used to designate people and situations resembling those in the book” (*OED*). Also, “Lolita. from Lolita, character in the novel *Lolita* (1955) by Vladimir Nabokov. A *precociously*

*seductive girl*" (*Webster*). Rolo's review, like that of the dictionaries, decides: She is precocious and, consequently, seduced; or, she is precocious and, consequently, seduces. It is she, in any case. The book, here, is about her, not about the complexity of Humbert's account of her. Humbert is in no dictionary. It is she. It was she who seduced me.

In another reading, Lionel Trilling charges that "*Lolita* is not about sex, but about love" (5). Harold Bloom responds with a flat dismissal of this claim: "Rereading *Lolita* now, when no one would accuse the book of being pornography, I marvel that acute readers could take it as a portrayal of human love, since Humbert and Lolita are hardly representations of human beings. They are deliberate caricatures" (2). Bloom, in his critique, implies that *Lolita* is a deformation—a deformation of love, a comical caricature of human beings—and that as such, it is neither a portrayal of 'human love' nor of human beings, but a caricature of both, a deliberate, albeit comical, deformation. According to Bloom, in other words, the text cannot be simultaneously caricaturic and not caricaturic, for there is a normative distinction between truthful portrayal and untruthful comical deformation. Bloom presupposes a difference between portrayal of true love, and portrayal of deformed love; or else between true portrayal of love and deformed portrayal of love. According to Bloom's argument, Nabokov *intends* Humbert's speech to mean one thing even as it intends to mean another. Nabokov, in other words, intends a deliberate caricature and ought to be able to write Humbert's account such that it knows not what it means, but simultaneously means, to the reader, as Nabokov intends it to mean. If *Lolita* performs a deformation (comical or tragic) of human speech, what is presumed to be the proper form of human speech, one that would not disfigure the shape

of the universally accepted human being? What is presumed to be the neutral form of portrayal, one that would not perform a deformation? If there is a caricature at work, is it not that of the reader?

In his afterword to the book, Nabokov submits the following:

The first little throb of *Lolita* went through me late in 1939 or early in 1940, in Paris, at a time when I was laid up with a severe attack of intercostal neuralgia. As far as I can recall, the initial shiver of inspiration was somehow prompted by a newspaper story about an ape in the Jardin des Plantes who, after months of coaxing by a scientist, produced the first drawing ever charcoaled by an animal: this sketch showed the bars of the poor creature's cage. (313)

Most critics and readers of *Lolita*, however variously inclined their readings of the text might be, tend to doubt the 'veracity' of Nabokov's anecdotal account of his original inspiration. Regardless of whether or not his anecdote is 'truthful,' in as much as anything can be, it provides yet another *reading of Lolita*. Humbert the ape can only produce *Lolita*, an account which operates within and performs its own limitation—which is subject to its own inadequacy, or to the limiting factor defining its own parameters—an account which reflects the restrictions imposed by the scientist/reader. Nabokov's analogy is merely another reading suggesting that, censorable or not, *Lolita* is in the reader's hands. But the reader's hands, of course, are also in *Lolita*.

### **Writing to Death: The Voice of Intransitive Seeking**

*Death is the possibility of the absolute impossibility of Dasein. Thus death reveals itself as that possibility which is one's ownmost, which is non-relational,*

*and which is not to be outstripped. As such, death is something distinctively impending.* (Heidegger, *Being and Time* 294)

In an interview of June 5, 1962, Nabokov remarks that his “pleasures are the most intense known to man: writing and butterfly hunting” (Nabokov *Strong* 3). Writing and “collecting” (9), or else writing and hunting, comprise Nabokov’s list of occupations. As a professional lepidopterist, he describes his interest “in the classification, variation, evolution, structure, distribution, habits, of lepidoptera,” explaining that “this sounds very grand, but actually I’m an expert in only a very small group of butterflies. I have contributed several works on butterflies to the various scientific journals—but I want to repeat that my interest in butterflies is exclusively scientific” (10). Upon being asked at another interview, two years later, whether his two pleasures are “in any way comparable” (39), he submits a definitive “No,” and elaborates:

In the case of butterfly hunting I think I can distinguish four main elements. First, the hope of capturing—or the actual capturing—of the first specimen of a species unknown to science: this is the dream at the back of every lepidopterist’s mind, whether he be climbing a mountain in New Guinea or crossing a bog in Maine. Secondly, there is the capture of a very rare or very local butterfly—things you have gloat over in books, in obscure scientific reviews, on the splendid plates of famous works, and that you now see on the wing, in their natural surroundings, among plants and minerals that acquire a mysterious magic through the intimate association with the rarities they produce and support, so that a given landscape lives twice: as a delightful wilderness in its own right and as the haunt of a certain butterfly or moth. Thirdly, there is the naturalist’s interest in disentangling



the life histories of little-known insects, in learning about their habits and structure, and in determining their position in the scheme of classification—a scheme which can be sometimes pleasurably exploded in a dazzling display of polemical fireworks when a new discovery upsets the old scheme and confounds its obtuse champions. And fourthly, one should not ignore the element of sport, of luck, of brisk motion and robust achievement, of an ardent and arduous quest ending in the silky triangle of a folded butterfly lying on the palm of one's hand.

(40)

With regard to the pleasures of writing, Nabokov adds that “They correspond exactly to the pleasures of reading” (40). Nabokov's pleasures are united in the pleasure of *seeking* and, further, of seeking dead. In the case of butterfly hunting, he distinguishes first, the hope of capturing; second, the capturing; third, the disentangling of unknown histories; fourth, the sporting, the quest. *To seek*: “To go in search or quest of; to try to find, look for (either a particular object—person, thing, or place—whose whereabouts are unknown, or an indefinite object suitable for a particular purpose);” also “In imper. As a direction to a reader: Look or search for (in a book, table, etc.);” and, “Sporting. To seek dead: chiefly in the imperative, as an order given to a dog to search for and retrieve killed game” (*OED*). Nabokov, in his seeking, knows not what he seeks, and in his finding, kills; in his killing, he names, giving birth to a new species, at times naming the specimen after himself, as his ownmost property, at times sending the description and picture for publication in entomology journals. He seeks to name the newly dead, to give birth by death, resolving the difference between the two, disentangling the *life* history, seeking the *Absolute* discovery, absolving himself in the name of science. “To think the Absolute

signifies, thus, to think that which, through a process of ‘absolution,’ has been led back to its ownmost property, to itself, to its own *solitude* [. . .] For this reason, the Absolute always implies a voyage, an abandonment of the originary place, an alienation and a being-out-side” (Agamben 92). Nabokov’s pleasure, in other words, lies with the hunting component of butterfly hunting. It lies with the *anticipation* of death; with the solitude of seeking, of the voyage, and the unpredictable game.

In his autobiography, he writes, “I discovered in nature the nonutilitarian delights that I sought in art. Both were a form of magic, both were a game of intricate enchantment and deception” (*Speak* 125). In his seeking, he hides, disguising himself: “I have hunted butterflies in various climes and disguises: as a pretty boy in knickerbockers and sailor cap; as a lanky cosmopolitan expatriate in flannel bags and beret; as a fat hatless old man in shorts” (125). In his hiding, he is alone, “since any companion, no matter how quiet, interfered with the concentrated enjoyment of my mania. Its gratification admitted of no compromise or exception” (126); and in his gratification, he suffers: “Let me look at my demon objectively. With the exception of my parents, no one really understood my obsession, and it was many years before I met a fellow sufferer” (127). In response to the question “What is a ‘perfect trip’ for you?,” Nabokov replies: “Any first walk in any new place—especially a place where no lepidopterist has been before me [. . .] the cold of the metal netstick in my right hand magnifies the pleasure to almost intolerable bliss” (*Strong* 204). The banal symbolism of cold netstick, or pen(is), in right hand, is worthy of no more than a perfunctory half-chuckle. Nabokov does not conduct a trip without his net, or an interview without his pen.<sup>11</sup> The relationship between writing and butterfly hunting has not gone unnoticed by either Nabokov or his

readers. Still, the drawing of four dead butterflies inside the cover of an original copy of *Lolita* given by Nabokov to Vèra (his wife),<sup>12</sup> reminds us that *the essential relation between death and language flashes up before us, but remains still unthought.*

A perfect trip is any first walk in a new place. Agamben writes:

When we walk through the woods at night, with every step we hear the rustle of invisible animals among the bushes flanking our path. Perhaps they are lizards or hedgehogs, thrushes or snakes. So it is when we think: the path of words that we follow is of no importance. What matters is the indistinct patter that we sometimes hear moving to the side, the sound of an animal in flight or something that is suddenly aroused by the sound of our steps. (107)

An animal, perhaps a butterfly, in flight, indistinct, makes our thought possible:

The animal in flight that we seem to hear rustling away in our words is—we are told—our own voice. We think—we hold our words in suspense and we are ourselves suspended in language—because, finally, we hope to find our voice in language. Long ago—we are told—our voice was inscribed in language. The search for this voice in language is thought. (107)

If the search for the voice in language is thought, the death of the voice in language is the death of thought, is, otherwise, *madness*. In his attempt, following Heidegger, to rethink the relationship between death and language, Agamben proposes that “If the relationship between language and death ‘remains still unthought,’ it is because the Voice—which constitutes the possibility of this relationship—is the unthinkable on which metaphysics bases every possibility of thought, the unspeakable on which it bases its whole speakability” (88). That is, “The essential relationship between language and death takes

place—for metaphysics—in Voice. *Death and Voice have the same negative structure and they are metaphysically inseparable*” (86).

Agamben distinguishes between voice and Voice, in order to theorize the negative transformation between former and latter upon the anticipation of death in language. To experience death is to experience the removal of the voice, but the voice in any case “says nothing; it does not mean or want to say any significant proposition. Rather, it indicates and means the pure taking place of language, and it is, as such, a purely *logical* dimension [. . .] The voice does not will any proposition or event; it wills that language exist, it wills the originary event that contains the possibility of every event” (86-7). The voice, like the Heideggerian *Dasein* which is a potentiality-for-Being, is the possibility for the existence of language. The voice, as logical dimension—as condition, as diathesis—that allows for the taking place of language, also allows for the censorable event and wills, or anticipates, the possibility for sensorship (just as *Dasein* anticipates death ahead-of-itself, as something *distinctively impending*<sup>13</sup>). To experience death, the removal of voice, entails experiencing the simultaneous “appearance, in its place, of another Voice (presented in grammatical thought as *gramma*, in Hegel as the Voice of death, in Heidegger as the Voice of conscience and the Voice of being, and in linguistics as a phoneme), which constitutes the originary *negative* foundation of the human word” (86). The Voice is the *re-turn* to the *Absolute* negative foundation, to the no-thing, of the word: “Only the Voice with its marvelous muteness shows its inaccessible place, and so the ultimate task of philosophy is necessarily to think the Voice” (92).

Agamben positions the Voice in relation to logic and ethics: “By rigorously establishing the limits of that which can be known in what is said, logic takes up this

silent Voice and transforms it into the negative foundation of all knowledge. On the other hand, ethics experiences it as that which must necessarily remain unsaid in what is said. In both cases, however, the final foundation remains rigorously in-formulable” (91). Logic and ethics, the sensor and the censor, experience the muteness of the Voice as that which is in-formulable, as that which is always negative—that which is not knowledge and not not knowledge, not speech and not not speech—that which is impossible.<sup>14</sup> Finally, “To experience Voice signifies [. . .] to become capable of another death—no longer simply a deceasing, but a person’s ownmost and insuperable possibility, the possibility of his *freedom*” (86); to experience the Voice, in this context, is to become capable of freedom, of freedom to die again and, therefore, of freedom to give birth to death, to be the agent and patient of death, preceding and succeeding the action. The Voice signifies the condition for this possibility; that is, it signifies the disposition or predisposition for death. *Voice: Diathesis. Gr. disposition. Med. A permanent (hereditary or acquired) condition of the body which renders it liable to certain special disease or affections; a constitutional predisposition or tendency.* The Voice, effected and affected by its positionality, signifies the possibility of freedom, and in its seeking, asserts itself through the impossibility of the aporetic middle voice.

The Voice seeks intransitively; that is, it seeks itself in the middle voice. If the search for the voice in language is thought, the voice which searches for itself and, in its seeking, hides, is the thinking voice which through the birth of itself, seeks itself dead, only to seek itself again, ad infinitum, seeking itself to *madness*, asking, what constitutes the domain of the thinkable before it begins to think at all? In his soliloquy, Oedipus speaks his final words:

I am called the last philosopher because I am the last man. No one speaks to me except me myself, and my voice reaches me like that of a dying man. With you, lovely voice, with you, last breath of a memory of all human happiness, let me be with you for just one more hour; through you I trick solitude and I let myself be deluded in multiplicity and love, because my heart refuses to believe that love is dead; it cannot sustain the shiver of the most solitary of solitudes and it forces me to speak as if I were two.

Do you still hear me my voice? Do you murmur a curse? If only your curse could break up the viscera of this world! But the world still lives, and alone it watches me, full of splendor and ever colder with its pitiless stars. It is alive, stupid and blind as always, and only *one* dies—man.

And yet! I am still listening to you, lovely voice! Another beyond me also dies, the last man, in this universe: the last breath, your breath dies with me, the long Oh! Oh! Breathed down on me, the last man of pain, Oedipus. (qtd. in Agamben 94-5)

Agamben cites this soliloquy to demonstrate the link between the experience of death and that of the Voice, with reference to a fragment written by Nietzsche (in 1886-1887) in response to the soliloquy. Nietzsche writes: “Not to hear any response after such an appeal to the depths of the soul—no voice in response—is a terrible experience which could destroy the most hardened man: in me it has severed all ties with living men” (qtd. in Agamben 95). Although Agamben considers this example in the context of his discussion on the fate of philosophy after the death of the voice, I cite Oedipus’s soliloquy, and Nietzsche’s response to it, in the context of the impossible question: The

terrible experience, for Nietzsche, is the absence of a response—the absence of an *answer*—to Oedipus's appeal. Suppose there were no questions, what would the answer be? Oedipus, in his last words before death—a death of which he is both agent and patient—produces a dialogue between his voice and itself. The voice asks the impossible question, the mad non-question: Do you still hear me my voice? The voice seeks itself; can you hear me? The answer is the question, and is also impossible. The voice, in its asking, answers, for in its asking it both hears itself and is heard by itself; the voice, at the same time, cannot answer, for it asks. In its seeking of itself, the voice supposes there are no questions, and at the same time asks (questions), what would the answer be? The answer is impossible, and is also the question itself. The entire soliloquy takes the form of the impossible question, for it is the last question; it is the question which seeks itself dead. For Nietzsche, the terrible experience is the experience of the question which asks itself, suppose I was no more—suppose I were dead—what would the answer be? The answer is impossible, or it is the question, the dead question. The answer is the question of death. For Nietzsche, the terrible experience is that the question of death is now in his hands. It is in his hands.

In his seeking, Nabokov seeks the impossible question of death. Whether he does this holding the cold netstick or the bold pen is irrelevant. What is important is that it is in his hands. For Nabokov, the terrible experience is that the Voice of this seeking, the answer to the impossible question—suppose there were no butterfly, what would its name/species be; suppose there were no writing, what would the reading be; suppose there were no Humbert, what would *Lolita* be—is, ultimately, out of his hands. It is out of his hands.

### Writing Madness: Journey To Nowhere

*Lolita*. The Voice of madness and death, in its seeking, writes. “Exhibit number two is a pocket diary bound in black imitation leather, with a golden year, 1947, *en escalier*, in its upper left hand corner” (Nabokov *Lolita* 42), writes Humbert. “I speak of this neat product of the Blank Blank Co., Blankton, Mass., as if it were really before me. Actually, it was destroyed five years ago and what we examine now (by courtesy of a photographic memory) is but its brief materialization, a puny unfledged phoenix” (42). Humbert’s diary, the presumably original *Lolita*, had been given death five years prior to its (re)writing, and like the mythical phoenix plunging to death by fire only to rise back to life and repeat the cycle toward death, this dead diary—the product of the double blank, the double negative, the empty nothing—rises, again, for nothing. Humbert writes: “I remember the thing so exactly because I wrote it really twice. First I jotted down each entry in pencil (with many many erasures and corrections) on the leaves of what is commercially known as a ‘typewriter tablet’; then, I copied it out with obvious abbreviations in my smallest, most satanic, hand in the little black book just mentioned” (42). Humbert had written the diary several times, writing and erasing words, writing and erasing his voice: *I speak of this neat product of the Blank Blank Co.* Now, in his writing, his voice seeks intransitively, re-producing, retracing its original steps and thereby erasing them, going backwards, going nowhere: “Have written more than a hundred pages and not got anywhere yet. My calendar is getting confused. That must have been around August 15, 1947. Don’t think I can go on. Heart, head—everything. Lolita, Lolita, Lolita, Lolita, Lolita, Lolita, Lolita, Lolita, Lolita, Lolita. Repeat till the page is full, printer” (111). Repeat until the page is blank.



“*Saturday*. (Beginning perhaps amended.) I know it is madness to keep this journal but it gives me a strange thrill to do so” (44). In his journey, in his journal, Humbert loses the beginning each time he begins, recording its death, only to begin again. He knows it is madness to keep this journal, and knows in his journal to keep this madness. The journal, that is, performs the crisis between itself and its reading, between the voice and itself, producing an economy of sensorship within the text itself, within its own voice, performing the crisis of the impossible question through the Voice which seeks itself—can you still read me my reader?—dead. If madness can only materialize upon sensorship, upon and as a *crisis* in which the domain of sensorability turns in upon and contradicts itself, Humbert’s journal performs the crisis of its own diagnosis, the crisis between the voice and itself, Voice and voice—the Voice, in this crisis, knows not if it is dead or alive, but it is in its own hands—in its own hands. If the search for the voice in language is thought, the death of the voice in language, the crisis of the voice in its own hands—the *crisis between* the voice and its censorship of itself—is the death of thought, is, otherwise, *madness*.

Humbert announces the madness of his writing—it is madness to keep the journal—and also diagnoses the writing of his madness, obliterating the distinction between writing and diagnosis, and between agency and patiency in both. “If and when you wish to sizzle me to death, remember that only a spell of insanity could ever give me the simple energy to be a brute (all this amended, perhaps)” (49), he writes, suggesting an act of erasure inside the writing. If you wish to kill me, in your reading, reader—or in your judgement, juror, or in your diagnosis, doctor—remember that I am mad.

Remember, too, that this is a correction, re-production, an erasure inside the writing and a

writing inside the erasure, perhaps (that is, perhaps it is not). The writer, here, assumes the role (the voice) of the reader, remembering to consider the circumstance of diagnosis, and at the same time problematizing the very domain of the readable, subverting the demarcation between writing and erasure, and between madness and diagnosis. The writer reminds the reader that he is mad, and simultaneously deforms this claim by throwing the condition of its legitimacy into question, leaving the deformation in the hands of the reader; the writing insists that any claim, in the hands of the reader, is a deformation. Perhaps the claim is a re-covered erasure, perhaps it is not an erasure and, therefore, the suggestion that it is erased, must be erased. If the claim is an amended correction, which version is its proper form, or voice, and which the deformation? Is there a difference? The writing questions its own condition—the voice asks itself to read properly, deforming the notion of proper and the legitimacy of reading—reading itself, erasing itself, chasing itself dead into the hands of the reader, the hands that are already, twisted, inside the writing: “I am writing under observation” (12).

Humbert submits that “All at once I knew I could kiss her throat [. . .] I knew she would let me do so [. . .] I cannot tell my learned reader (whose eyebrows, I suspect, have by now traveled all the way to the back of his bald head), I cannot tell him how the knowledge came to me” (50). Knowledge is what Humbert knows.<sup>15</sup> The voice asks itself: Suppose there were no knowing, what would the knowledge be? The knowledge would be the knowing—Humbert answers the impossible question which, he presupposes, is in the hands of the reader. It is impossible to know how this knowledge came to me. In his knowing, Humbert reaches “a state [. . .] bordering on insanity” (60), while exercising “the cunning of the insane” (60), and maintaining the ability to keep “a

maniac's inner eye on my distant golden goal" (61). In his madness, he is seeking the distant goal, the impossible destination:

Our destination was, let me remind my patient reader whose meek temper Lo ought to have copied, the gay town of Lepingville, somewhere near a hypothetical hospital. That destination was in itself a perfectly arbitrary one (as, alas, so many were to be), and I shook in my shoes as I wondered how to keep the whole arrangement plausible, and what other plausible objectives to invent after we had taken in all the movies in Lepingville. More and more uncomfortable did Humbert feel. It was something quite special, that feeling: an oppressive, hideous constraint as if I were sitting with the small ghost of somebody I had just killed. (141-2)

*Lolita* is the record of Humbert's seeking through the destination of writing. It is the record, also, of his seeking through the destination of driving; driving and driven to nowhere, Humbert turns the wheel and pen in his hands, *re-turning*. *Lolita*, inside the car, inside the journal, is the small ghost of somebody he had just written, or driven, over and over again, back and forth, down and up—"We continued our grotesque journey. After a forlorn and useless dip, we went up and up" (231)—written and driven to death, to nowhere.

*Lolita* is the record of the traveler in his seeking; a road trip and a dead end. During the year of 1947-48, following the lucky death of Charlotte Haze, Humbert begins his extensive trip with *Lolita*. The first stop, at the Enchanted Hunters Hotel, marks the consummation of the relationship—the initial breaking and entering—Lo. Li. Ta. "It was then that began our extensive travels all over the States" (147), writes Humbert,

accounting for “that mad year” (155) in keeping with the legal advice of Clarence, his attorney:

Our route began with a series of wiggles and whorls in New England, then meandered south, up and down, east and west; dipped deep into *ce qu'on appelle* Dixieland, avoided Florida because the Farlows were there, veered west, zigzagged through corn belts and cotton belts (this is not *too* clear I am afraid, Clarence, but I did not keep any notes, and have at my disposal only an atrociously crippled tour book in three volumes, almost a symbol of my torn and tattered past, in which to check these recollections); crossed and recrossed the Rockies, straggled through southern deserts where we wintered; reached the Pacific, turned north through the pale lilac fluff of lowering shrubs along forest roads; almost reached the Canadian border; and proceeded east, across good lands and bad lands, back to agriculture on a grand scale, avoiding, despite little Lo's strident remonstrations, little Lo's birthplace, in a corn, coal and hog producing area; and finally returned to the fold of the East, petering out in the college town of Beardsley. (156)

In his travels with Lolita, Humbert drives his car back and forth, crossing and recrossing borders, avoiding the birthplace upon returning, seeking nothing other than the driving itself, seeking the seeking, through the destination of driving. Humbert, in his seeking, must hide both himself and the destination: “I have to tread carefully. I have to speak in a whisper” (136). He justifies the journey to Lolita under the pretext that they are traveling to visit her supposedly sick mother in the hypothetical hospital. Only later, he reveals the death of the mother, the death of the journey—the absence of its end; he

reveals that their journey is a hiding out, a trip toward nowhere, a trip folding in upon itself, stuck in the beginning: “And so we rolled East [. . .] We had been everywhere. We had really seen nothing” (177). In its seeking of nothing, Humbert’s voice seeks intransitively, conversing with itself, seeking the hearing voice—the reader: “Oh, do not scowl at me, reader, I do not intend to convey the impression that I did not manage to be happy. Reader must understand that in the possession and thralldom of a nymphet, the enchanted traveler stands, as it were, *beyond happiness*” (168). The reader, moreover, “should bear in mind [. . .] the fact that far from being an indolent *partie de plaisir*, our tour was a hard, twisted, teleological growth” (156), including “about 150 days of actual motion (we covered about 27,000 miles!) plus some 200 days of interpolated standstills” (177). In its search for the voice of the reader, the writing voice of the enchanted traveler thinks (*the search for the voice in language is thought*):

We had been everywhere. We had really seen nothing. And I catch myself thinking today that our long journey had only defiled with a sinuous trail of slime the lovely, trustful, dreamy, enormous country that by then, in retrospect, was no more to us than a collection of dog-eared maps, ruined tour books, old tires, and her sobs in the night—every night, every night—the moment I feigned sleep.

(177-8)

Humbert catches himself thinking, catches himself in the act, hiding inside. Who hears Lolita’s sobs in the night? The writing voice pretends not to hear, hides, feigns ignorance, writes what it does not hear; seeking the reader, seeking the hearer, catching itself (the hearing voice) in its writing, the voice thinks itself to death. “You know, what’s so dreadful about dying is that you are completely on your own” (286), Humbert

overhears Lolita speaking to an other, and, he writes, “it struck me, as my automaton knees went up and down, that I simply did not know a thing about my darling’s mind” (286). He catches himself knowing that he does not know a thing; he knows that he knows no-thing, and writes no-thing down: “Parody of a hotel corridor. Parody of silence and death” (121). Humbert, in his traveling, seeks directions from strangers, afraid he will “lose all control” (118) over the car, losing, instead, his “way in the maze of [. . .] well meaning gibberish” (118), losing, all along, over and over again, *Lolita*. Or does he?

Just when he thinks he had lost the nymphet to adolescence, lost his delusion to the reality of a “vulgar untidy highschool girl” (206), Humbert thinks again, catching himself: “How wrong I was. How mad I was! Everything about her was of the same exasperating impenetrable order—the strength of her shapely legs, the dirty sole of her white sock, the thick sweater she wore despite the closeness of the room, the wenchy smell, and especially the dead end of her face with its strange flush and freshly made-up lips” (206). He recovers, in his madness—in his rereading, in the crisis between his original claim and its reevaluation—the dead end of her face. After a few months at the Beardsley private school, under the guardianship of Humbert who, Lolita is sure, “had murdered her mother” (207), Lolita argues and says “unprintable things” (207), she keeps “turning and twisting [. . .] this way and that, surreptitiously trying to find a weak point so as to wrench herself free at a favorable moment” (207) in the struggle, and does not listen to Humbert who orders her to “go upstairs and show me all her hiding places” (207). Lolita, finally, turns Humbert’s madness in upon itself, turning the madness of his journey into a journey of madness, re-turning the death of the end into the end of her

death: She proposes to “Go for a long trip again. But *this* time we’ll go wherever I want, won’t we?” (209). This time, Lolita determines the route, the impossible destination, driving Humbert to drive her, driving and driven through the destination of seeking—through the destination, ultimately, of hiding—seeking to escape. Or does she?

On the second journey—a journey instigated by Lolita who is presumably following the secret instructions of Clare Quilty, the famous playwright who appears in various disguises throughout Humbert’s journal—Lolita navigates, but she does this following Q’s cues. Thus, Humbert Humbert drives, driven by Q’s Cues—Humbert Humbert, pursued by Q’s changing cars, seeks Cues—across the quilt of maps clearly marked under the direction of Clare Quilty. Lolita acts according to Q’s Cues, and is driven by Humbert Humbert, stuck between two doubles, driven in the middle, between the agency and patiency of an impossible trip. The voice of Clare Quilty moves just below Humbert’s text; it is the negative dimension marking the condition of Humbert’s seeking. It is the Guilty Glare reflected in the specularity of his voice, and in his back mirror:

Being a murderer with a sensational but incomplete and unorthodox memory, I cannot tell you, ladies and gentlemen, the exact day when I first knew with utter certainty that the red convertible was following us. I do remember, however, the first time I saw its driver quite clearly. I was proceeding slowly one afternoon through torrents of rain and kept seeing that red ghost swimming and shivering with lust in my mirror [. . .] What was happening was a sickness, a cancer, that could not be helped, so I simply ignored the fact that our quiet pursuer, in his

converted state, stopped a little behind us at a café or bar bearing the idiotic sign:

The Bustle: A Deceitful Seatful. (219-20)

Clare Quilty, identified by the writer as detective Trapp, is the ghost in Humbert Humbert's mirror, the ghost of Humbert's text, of his journey, and of his voice, blurring the distinction between delusion and reality, splitting Humbert Humbert in two:

It occurred to me that if I were really losing my mind, I might end by murdering somebody. In fact—said high-and-dry Humbert to floundering Humbert—it might be quite clever to prepare things—to transfer the weapon from box to pocket—so as to be ready to take advantage of the spell of insanity when it does come. (231)

Soon, Lolita (the deceitful seatful) is lost with Q, and Humbert is left conversing with himself in the now inverted pursuit, seeking in reverse, pursuing Q with an empty back mirror. Humbert, like a ghost of himself, now seeks Q who has, impossibly, taken Lolita. Humbert loses his shadow, loses the echo of his own voice, and seeks the impossible Question which leads to nowhere and back again, seeking and losing himself across the border: “At the time I felt I was merely losing contact with reality; and after spending the rest of the winter and most of the following spring in a Quebec sanatorium where I had stayed before, I resolved first to settle some affairs of mine in New York and then to proceed to California for a thorough search there” (257). Humbert the search-engine, however, yields no matches and, in his seeking, shoots only blanks. Lolita. Lolita. Lolita. Lolita: “Oh, my Lolita, I have only words to play with” (34).



Humbert fills and kills his days with words. With nothing left to seek but the ghost of his own voice, the death of his own journey, he composes poems which record his impossible predicament and, in his despair, reads them to death. He writes:

Where are you hiding, Dolores Haze?

Why are you hiding, darling?

(I talk in a daze, I walk in a maze,

I cannot get out, said the starling). (257)

Humbert composes the unfortunate poem and, in his madness—in his reading—kills it: “By psychoanalyzing this poem, I notice it is really a maniac’s masterpiece. The stark, stiff, lurid rhymes correspond very exactly to certain perspectiveless and terrible landscapes and figures, and magnified parts of landscapes and figures, as drawn by psychopaths in tests devised by their astute trainers” (259). By diagnosing his own discourse, Humbert sensors himself to madness, exercising the voice of Reason, performing a crisis of intelligibility, and further deforming the legitimacy of the crisis itself with antiphrastic disqualifiers: “Emphatically, no killers are we. Poets never kill” (90). That is, poets never reason. Humbert reasons himself to madness.

The seeking of Reason is a circular process which turns in upon itself, so that “The necessity in what takes place is hidden, and shows itself only in the End, but in such a way that this very End shows that the necessity has also been there from the beginning” (Hegel 157). Humbert finds Lolita pregnant in “the moment, the death” (271) he had been conjuring over and over again, then murders Q, killing the question that has tormented him for three years, only to discover that in the absence of questions, the

answer is impossible, that the answer is the question and the question is, still, dead in his hands:

The road now stretched across open country, and it occurred to me [. . .] that since I had disregarded all laws of humanity, I might as well disregard the rules of traffic. So I crossed to the left side of the highway and checked the feeling, and the feeling was good [. . .] all this enhanced by the thought that nothing could be nearer to the elimination of basic physical laws than deliberately driving on the wrong side of the road [. . .] Gently, dreamily, not exceeding twenty miles an hour, I drove on that queer mirror side. Traffic was light. Cars that now and then passed me on the side I had abandoned to them, honked at me brutally. Cars coming towards me wobbled, swerved, and cried out in fear. Presently I found myself approaching populated places. Passing through a red light was like a sip of forbidden Burgundy when I was a child. (308)

Driving to the end of the universal law of contradiction, driving to death, driving dangerously to himself and/or others, driving injuriously, to the end, Humbert writes *Lolita*—an answer to the impossible question, an in formulable crossing, an impossible possibility, a borderless aporia—in fifty-six days. He begins in the psychopathic ward for observation and concludes in “this well-heated, albeit tombal, seclusion” (310). Although he is in legal captivity for the murder of Clare Quilty, he sentences himself for the death of Lolita. *Lolita*. “This then is my story,” he writes, “I have reread it” (310). I have rekilld it: “publication is to be deferred” (310) until “Lolita is no longer alive. Thus, neither of us is alive when the reader opens this book” (311). Neither of us is alive when the reader, opening death, repeats the crime.

**Closing: [Of Diagnosis]**

Dr. Brandon S. Centerwall, M.D., a psychiatrist in private practice in Seattle, Washington, reads *Lolita* in order to diagnose the non-fictional author, Valdimir Nabokov, with clinical pedophilia. He summarizes his article, “Vladimir Nabokov: A Case Study in Pedophilia,” in the prefatory abstract as follows:

Humbert Humbert, the protagonist in the novel *Lolita*, is the classic literary portrayal of a pedophile. Evidence is presented that the author of *Lolita*, Vladimir Nabokov, was himself consciously a pedophile who acted out his desires vicariously through his writing. Drawing upon his literary works and biography, the manifest and genetic origins of Nabokov’s pedophilia are traced back to an unresolved oedipal conflict complicated by childhood sexual abuse. The raw power of *Lolita* derives from the abreactive discharge of a libidinal cathexis denied any other mode of expression. (199)

In this article, miraculously published in *Psychoanalysis and Contemporary Thought* (1992), Centerwall proposes to “argue that Humbert’s conflicts are an unintended reflection of his creator’s own unconscious torments” (200), in order to “confirm Nabokov’s conscious pedophilia” (201). The introductory remarks include “A final prefatory note” assuring the reader that “I take it as self-evident that Nabokov could easily create a convincing portrait of a pedophile even if he were not one himself. Therefore, I make no attempt to infer his pedophilia in so banal a manner. The real evidence lies elsewhere” (201). The ‘real evidence’ lies, presumably, in Nabokov’s interviews, notes, and autobiography:

Nabokov writes that ‘my creature Humbert is a foreigner and an anarchist, and there are many things, besides nymphets, in which I disagree with him.’ The statement is nonsense unless Nabokov perceives and experiences nymphets independently of any vicarious experience through his creature Humbert; that is, the statement can only be made sense of provided Nabokov is himself a pedophile. (202-3)

Since this line of reasoning leaves much to be desired, Centerwall dutifully supplements his claim with further insight—“Humbert Humbert’s name is Vladimir Vladimirovich’s most direct admission to pedophilia (206)—adding that:

It should be noted that a diagnosis of pedophilia can be made even if the person has never acted upon his urges. According to the American Psychiatric Association’s diagnostic criteria for pedophilia, ‘The person has acted on those urges, or is markedly distressed by them’ [. . .] Nabokov’s repetition compulsion, already described, is the manifestation of his distress. (203)

In his own preoccupation with Nabokov’s nonsense and pedophilia, Dr. Centerwall fails to note that according to his diagnostic criteria, it is possible that he too, in his paranoid-delusional distress over Nabokov’s conspiracy to conceal an alleged criminal insanity, fits the profile of a nonsensical pedophile.

Centerwall’s reading, admittedly unworthy of the space devoted to it thus far, is nonetheless relevant in that it demonstrates how easily clinical sensorship precedes the text, and how quickly diagnosis produces madness. It goes without saying that Centerwall does not take into account the potential disjuncture between what both Humbert’s and Nabokov’s words say, or between what any speech subject to the

*Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* says, and what these can potentially mean in the other's (namely his own) hands. By exercising his democratic right and clinical expertise, Dr. Centerwall demonstrates that *one cannot know in advance the meaning that the other will assign to one's utterance, what conflict of interpretation may well arise, and how best to adjudicate that difference*. The consequence of Centerwall's reading of Humbert's impossible account, however, is that it performs the very sensorship which has been pre-censored by the specular text, performing a death already anticipated, a murder already turned in upon itself, killing words which outlast their blanks. Centerwall, through his reading and diagnosis, thus demonstrates that he has nothing in his hands. The trouble, nevertheless, is that it is in his hands.

Centerwall's hands are already in the text, preemptively empty. "So much for those special sensations, influenced, if not actually brought about, by the tenets of modern psychiatry" (169), Humbert writes, never forgetting the "psychiatrist who studies my case—and whom by now Dr. Humbert has plunged, I trust, into a state of leporine fascination" (168). In an account of his treatment and 'recovery' in a psychiatric hospital, he writes:

I owe my complete restoration to a discovery I made while being treated at that particular very expensive sanatorium. I discovered there was an endless source of robust enjoyment in trifling with psychiatrists: cunningly leading them on; never letting them see that you know all the tricks of the trade; inventing for them elaborate dreams, pure classics in style (which make them, the dream-extortionists, dream and wake up shrieking); teasing them with fake 'primal

scenes'; and never allowing them the slightest glimpse of one's real sexual predicament. By bribing a nurse I won access to some files and discovered, with glee, cards calling me 'potentially homosexual' and 'totally impotent.' (36)

To this elaborate parody of Freud's work on psychoanalysis,<sup>16</sup> Humbert adds that "The sport was so excellent, its results—in my case—so ruddy that I stayed on for a whole month after I was quite well (sleeping admirably and eating like a schoolgirl)" (36).

According to Humbert, his recovery, in this case, is due to the enjoyment he derives from gaming with clinical authorities, and not due to any perceived clinical treatment. His account, in its anticipation of its own clinical sensorship, precedes that sensorship, deforming it in advance. Reading, clinical or otherwise, is here *the possibility of the absolute impossibility* of Madness. As such, reading is here *something distinctively impending*. It is the condition which allows for the impossible condition of madness, as *Death* allows for the impossibility of *Dasein*. The impossible text preemptively denies sensorship, deforms the very condition of its possibility and, ironically, for that reason, it was nevertheless censored; for that reason it is nevertheless diagnosed. Brian Centerwall performs a reversal of meanings that have already been reversed, a sensorship that has already been censored; his analysis cancels itself out, presenting a case study of nothing.

Nabokov, to supplement his character's (Humbert's) account, provides a case study of his own—a case study of Freudian psychoanalysis. In an interview with *Playboy* in 1964, he comments on "Freudianism as practiced by American analysts" as follows:

The ordeal itself is much too silly and disgusting to be contemplated even as a joke. Freudism and all it has tainted with its grotesque implications and methods

appears to me to be one of the vilest deceits practiced by people on themselves and on others. I reject it utterly, along with a few other medieval items still adored by the ignorant, the conventional, or the very sick. (*Strong* 23-4)

This infamous diagnosis of hermeneutic psychoanalysis as a danger to itself and/or others, is consistent with Nabokov's announcement, in an interview of the same year with *Life* magazine, that "I cannot conceive how anybody in his right mind should go to a psychoanalyst, but of course if one's mind is deranged one might try anything" (47) and that "One of the greatest pieces of charlatanic, and satanic, nonsense imposed on a gullible public is the Freudian interpretation of dreams" (47); this followed by a much cited dismissal of Freud as the "Viennese quack" (47). These flagrant, albeit comical, anti-Freudian remarks provoke critics like Harold Bloom to include Nabokov among "the modern writers who most consistently and ignorantly abuse Freud" (1).

However, is it not familiarity that breeds contempt? With intransitive writing, modern writers such as the fictional Humbert Humbert and his creator, Nabokov, perhaps engage a dynamic of *simultaneous* negative exclusion and positive interaction with diagnostic reading, through a performance of the crisis of reading itself.<sup>17</sup> Could it be that these contradictory processes, of excluding and interacting with diagnostic reading, not only overlap and interfere with one another, but further act upon and condition one another, so that the possibility of one is the very condition for the negativity of the other? In seeking to read itself, the text of *Lolita* engages a dynamic of negative exclusion and positive interaction with the presuppositions which condition the possibility of its reading. The work, that is, engages an economy of intransitive reading and diagnosis. Is an intransitive, middle voiced diagnosis—a diagnosis which is the object and the subject

of its own seeking, a diagnosis which seeks the end of itself, the ghost of itself, only to begin again—not the very condition which marks the possibility of impossibility, or else the possibility of madness, in reading? Is the middle voiced reading not the very condition which marks the possibility of the impossible text, and of the impossible question? Which comes first? Diagnosis: an institutionalization of reading; reading: a reading of the institutionalization of reading; intransitive reading: a reading of the reading of the institutionalization of reading: a reading of itself, beginning again, in its own hands, with madness.



## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Butler adds that by “text,” she includes both speech and “other cultural expressions” (128).

<sup>2</sup> This Foucaultian claim is explored at length by Pierre Bourdieu in *Language and Symbolic Power* (wherein he considers how norms inhabit the body, governing and cultivating the ‘habitus’ of the body, in a way that has nothing to do with the subject’s intentional acceptance of ‘norms’ or deliberate belief in ‘rules’). Also see Craig Calhoun, Edward LiPluma and Moishe Postone’s *Bourdieu: Critical Perspectives* (Chicago: U of Chicago Press, 1993).

<sup>3</sup> Butler explains implicit forms of censorship as the workings of a series of ‘foreclosures.’ She notes Lacan’s use of ‘forclusion,’ the French translation of Freud’s ‘Verwerfung’ (‘rejection’ in English), and considers the use of the term ‘foreclosure’ by psychoanalysts Jean Laplanche and J.—B. Pontalis. The latter argue, in *Vocabulaire de la psychanalyse*, that foreclosure is a preemptive rejection of what must remain outside of the symbolic world of the subject, a rejection that does not enter the unconscious of the subject, and cannot be recalled by the subject, but operates as a normative force which makes the formation of the subject possible. What is foreclosed constitutes the outside of the subject’s world, and through its exclusion, determines what remains on the inside of that world—the inside, the world of the subject, maintains its coherence precisely through the exclusionary force which marks the normative boundary of inside/outside. Butler points to a similarity between Laplanche and Pontalis’s use of ‘foreclosure’ and Derrida’s notion of a “constitutive outside” which defines the limits of the inside “*through its exclusion*” (180). However, having acknowledged the psychoanalytic and complicated use of the term ‘foreclosure,’ and having acknowledged its dictionary use, “to bar, exclude, shut out completely” (138), Butler proposes to divorce the term from its originary usage, and to “misappropriate” it in order to consider how “censorship acts as a ‘productive’ form of power” (138-9).

<sup>4</sup> ‘Nonsense’ (disorder) can be thought of as merely another permutation of ‘sense’ (normative order used to organize meaningful discourse, as distinct from meaning itself) which therefore has the capacity for sense. When one discovers or ‘detects’ that an expression does not make sense, one seeks to make sense of the expression, to explain or reorganize it, to put it into place. In other words, nonsense is not the opposite of sense, but rather what one needs to make sense of, or what has the capacity to be reorganized, neutralized, made sense of. To ‘sense’ is to make sense according to implicit universal conventions of constraint, and this includes not only uttering the speakable and censoring the unspeakable, but also detecting breaches of the boundary which separates them, and reinforcing that boundary. Compare this notion of ‘sense’ to Freud’s use of ‘the censor,’ taken from the German ‘Zensur’ (‘censorship’), as a mental self-observing agency which stays awake during dream time in order to censor foreclosed painful memories or feelings from entering the material of dreams. The censor regulates and organizes dreams during sleep, “keeps a check on them and criticizes them and reserves the power to interrupt them” (*Interpretation of Dreams* 648).

<sup>5</sup> Hegelian Reason, here, includes foreclosed mechanisms of implicit censorship as defined by Butler, as well as the kind of normative sense-making considered by Wittgenstein; it includes, in short, the operation of sensorship.

<sup>6</sup> Within the progress of Hegel's argument, the restless searching of Reason is not infinite, but rather reaches a possibility of coming to rest at the End. I am here extracting a particular moment of Reason's movement, prior to the culmination of its searching, for the purposes of the present context.

<sup>7</sup> In his essay, "The Antithetical sense of primal words" (1910), Freud considers the function of antithesis and contradiction in dreams, elaborating on the supposition that a dream may represent the opposite of what it means. He notes that in "the primitive world" of "the Egyptian language," there are "a fair number of words with two meanings, one of which says the exact opposite of the other" (*Collected Papers IV* 185). "Imagine," he writes, "if one can imagine anything so obviously nonsensical, that the word 'strong' in German means 'weak' as well as 'strong'; that the noun 'light' is used in Berlin to denote 'darkness' as well as 'light' [. . .] the ancient Egyptians habitually exercised this astonishing practice in their language" (185). Freud notes, moreover, that "in addition to the words which unite antithetical meanings," the Egyptian language "possesses other compound-words in which two syllables of contrary meaning are united into a whole, which then has the meaning of only one of its constituent members. Thus in this extraordinary language there are not only words which denote both 'strong' and 'weak', or 'command' as well as 'obey'; there are also compound-words like 'oldyoung', 'farnear', 'bindloose', 'outsideinside'" (186). Of this group of compound words, Freud explains, only the first denotes the meaning of the word (so that 'oldyoung' means old, for example). Thus the combination of two words does not create a third meaning through the resulting compound, but rather retains the meaning of its first term as though it were left alone. Freud considers the potential confusion of these combinations, and notes that this configuration of contradictory meanings can also be found in Semitic and Indo-European languages. It is important to note, however, that Freud's examples, in his essay, are confined largely (almost exclusively) to adjectives. When he does mention a few verbs, he does not discuss their voice or tense. The example of the Hebrew verb, *to seek*, in my discussion, is meant to convey an antithetical meaning which arises out of and *only* in the diathetical inflection of the reflexive intransitive form, or in the middle voice. The *voice* of the verb determines the status of its action; to seek oneself, to be agent and patient of the act of seeking, entails a simultaneous act of hiding.

<sup>8</sup> According to Foucault, the exclusion of madness, or its reduction to silence, begins with the Cartesian *Cogito*. Descartes, in his *Meditations*, establishes what Foucault understands as a mutually exclusive relationship between madness and thought, abolishing madness from the domain of language and culture; *I think, therefore I am and cannot be mad*. Derrida dismisses this reading as "naive" and offers a correction in his account of the *Meditations*, in which he claims that Descartes does not exclude madness but rather establishes the *Cogito* as a complex mechanism in which madness can be understood as a type, or case, of thought itself.

<sup>9</sup> This brief summary of the book's journey through censorship appears in a famous 1958 review by Charles Rolo in *The Atlantic Monthly* 3 (1958): 78. A more extensive account of Nabokov's struggle with publishers and editors can be found in his *Selected Letters 1940-77*, eds. Dimitri Nabokov and Matthew J. Bruccoli. New York: Harcourt, 1989.

<sup>10</sup> Although MacKinnon uses the example of Anita Hill's testimony as an example of sexualization, it is important to note, as Butler does, that she does not consider the relationship between Hill's racialization and this 'exemplification.' Butler problematizes

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MacKinnon's use of her example, arguing that "it is not only that Hill is doubly oppressed as African-American and as a woman, but that race becomes a way to represent sexuality pornographically," so that "African-American status permits for a spectacularization of sexuality and a recasting of whites as outside the fray, witnesses and watchers who have circuited their own sexual anxieties through the publicized bodies of blacks" (83).

<sup>11</sup> Nabokov demands, whenever possible, prewritten questions for his interviews, and prewrites all of the answers, reserving the right to edit the interviews prior to publication.

<sup>12</sup> See figure 1.

<sup>13</sup> Heidegger, *Being and Time* 293-311.

<sup>14</sup> In *Aporias*, Derrida provides an existential analysis of *Dasein* in its anticipation of death, tracing the aporetic structure of this anticipation in Heidegger's *Being and Time*. Derrida considers the notion of *aporia* as "possibility of impossibility" (72), as the negative condition for possibility. Agamben's consideration of Voice is in many ways directly congruent with Derrida's discussion of Aporia. The Voice, in other words, is the site of aporia in language.

<sup>15</sup> Humbert affirms the Steinian insistence that 'knowledge is what one knows.'

<sup>16</sup> Humbert (Nabokov's character) is here mocking *The Interpretation of Dreams* in particular. Elsewhere, he submits that "I found myself maturing amid a civilization which allows a man of twenty-five to court a girl of sixteen but not a girl of twelve" (20), and announces that "Taboos strangulated me. Psychoanalysts wooed me with pseudoliberations of pseudolibidoes" (20), covering *Totem and Taboo* and, ultimately, the whole of Freud's writings.

<sup>17</sup> Such dynamics of simultaneous negative exclusion and positive interaction can be likened to the process that Martin Jay proposes, in an article entitled "Modernism and the Specter of Psychology," to describe the relationship between modernism and psychology.

## ***INTERCHAPTER***

### **MADNESS ITSELF: The Clinical Aporia**

*Attempt to delimit a certain territory again with the absence of any limit.*

(Blanchot, *Step* 102)

I begin this inter-space with a note of gratitude to the Psychiatry Department at the University of British Columbia, for opening its doors and allowing me to attend classes with psychiatric residents, and for facilitating dialogue in that context. I am grateful to a number of psychiatrists, especially Dr. Peter Liddle (currently the Jack Bell Chair in Schizophrenia Studies at UBC), for enabling and facilitating the clinical research which I conducted in the psychiatric division of Vancouver General Hospital in 1998, and for providing generous, invaluable intellectual insight.

The purpose of this section is to provide a series of brief and interconnected openings into the disciplinary space of the clinical psychiatric setting. I do not here seek to introduce a proper analysis of the history and genealogy of contemporary psychiatric practice, or a comprehensive account of the history and genealogy of schizophrenia at the hands of modern Psychiatry. Studies of such scope and nature, figured as variously inflected extensions of the Foucaultian project, have been and continue to be fruitfully explored by scholars from a wide range of disciplinary backgrounds (including psychology, sociology, philosophy, history, psychoanalysis, psycholinguistics, and so on). I submit this section as a temporal and spatial supplement, in the Derridean sense, marking the site of a crisis which can be understood as a series of limits—of moments in time and points in space—seeking to indicate the absence of any limit. As a structural

hesitation itself, this non-section thematizes the anti-rhetorical question, featuring the impossible space which exceeds every hermeneutic disciplinary framework.

If madness is a crisis which materializes upon reading, at the instance in which the domain of readability confronts the limit of its own parameters, the clinical setting presents the most extreme permutation of such a crisis. Featuring the classification of the psychotic episode, the break-down, the site of the dead-end, clinical diagnostic practice engages an economy of sensorship which seeks to precede, retroactively exceed, and delimit a differential of unsensorability. The diagnosis of the psychotic episode marks the site of ‘madness *itself*’ insofar as it marks the reification of the impossible space between no-thing and not no-thing, or the space which exceeds the universal law of contradiction and obeys no normative limits, rendering a literalization of the anti-rhetorical question and of its impossible answer. Suppose there were no inside, no intelligible thing, what would the outside be? The outside would be the inside, or else impossible, or else nothing. The ‘psychotic episode,’ signifying loss of boundary, is the diagnostic term indicating a detected *diathesis* (voice; medical condition) marked by the order of *extreme* disorder. A clinical designation for the literal and figurative voice acting upon itself, psychosis is the diagnostic category indicating the possibility of the *extremely* impossible: “the term has been defined conceptually as a loss of ego boundaries or a gross impairment in reality testing” (*DSM-IV* 273). Psychosis is a preemptive and retroactive categorical demarcation designating the presence of an absent limit, a gross breakage, an extreme situation of intransitive loss. The ‘psychotic break’ is a regulatory term which designates a normative constraint postulating, at the moment of diagnosis or interpretation, a retroactive pronouncement of an ‘episode’—an enclosed

temporal unit presumably marked by its very resistance to predictable temporal containment—an onset, a beginning which turns in upon itself and constitutes an eternal return of an extreme event. For once the psychotic episode has been pronounced, there is always a danger of its return, of its latent potentiality: “Non-present, non-absent; it tempts us in the manner of that which we would not know how to meet, save in situations which we are no longer in: save—save at the limit, situations we call ‘extreme,’ assuming there are any” (Blanchot, *Step 6*).

The clinical diagnosis of psychosis presents a configuration of the *crisis* of madness *itself*, madness at the extreme—a crisis between a given domain of discourse and the regulatory function of norms governing the domain of its possibility, speakability, and permissibility. That is, the category of psychosis cannot exist without the ratification of diagnosis, and the power of diagnostic language to establish and maintain the domain of what will be possible, speakable, comprehensible and normal suggests that the diagnostic function plays a constitutive role, not merely a detached interpretative role, in the decision making process leading to the pronouncement of a psychotic disorder. Maurice Blanchot remarks that “When we say: it is madness, or, more seriously, he is mad, to say this is already madness” (*Step 91*). The diagnosis both engages and functionally constitutes the moment of crisis. Keeping in mind the consideration of *sensorship*, wherein sense-making entails an economy of implicit censorship—an economy of normative, tacit constraints which propel the interpretative hermeneutic process—this interchapter presents fragments of clinical sensibility, or sensorability, itself, in crisis, wherein psychiatric diagnostics are presented as regulatory ‘sensors’ which serve to sustain and reify a consequential line of demarcation between the domains

of the normal and the psychotic, the inside and the outside. The hermeneutic activity which regulates the disciplinary practice in this context operates according to a mechanism whereby sensorship precedes the text, but the discursive domain of the text in question is potentially unsensorable—potentially inaccessible to the interpretative function which seeks to define it—and is, ironically, retroactively censored or diagnosed because of its very inaccessibility to any normative domain at all.

If, as Butler suggests and as I note once again, the question is not what one will be able to say, but rather what will constitute the domain of the sayable before one begins to speak at all—if the question is how a certain operation of sensorship determines in advance the norms governing what is sayable and what is not, and therefore who is a candidate for subjecthood and who is not—then ‘the rantings of the psychotic,’ as she calls them, become impossible by evading not only the norms which govern the domain of the speakable, but the very boundary which separates the sayable from the unsayable, the speakable from the unspeakable, sense from nonsense, and subjecthood from nonsubjecthood. To move outside the domain of both speakability and unspeakability, to turn the inside into the outside, is to escape the realm of possibility altogether, to be not possible, not speech and not not speech, to test the realm of no possible things, the realm of no limit, no space, and no-thing. During the diagnosis of psychosis, sensorship (as a set of implicit limits which define the disciplinary clinical space) precedes the text, and explicit censorship (the application of predetermined exclusionary limits) retroactively exceeds the text, delimiting that which resists limits, naming the very no-thing which turns in upon and contradicts itself, reifying the temporal and spatial territory of

resistance and, in this decisive moment, in this decision, sustaining the consequential line of demarcation which renders psychosis a legible, legitimate and measurable category.

The suggestion that madness, or psychosis (the most extreme permutation of madness), entails a crisis in which clinical diagnosis plays a constitutive role, excludes neither the possibility nor impossibility of a condition or experience of the subject which precedes the diagnostic setting and exists independently of clinical or other forms of interpretation. The consideration of madness as discursive crisis, in other words, neither negates nor addresses the experience of the suffering subject, the veracity and facticity of the condition of such suffering, and the contribution to and/or alleviation of such suffering by the psychiatric establishment. Such a consideration does not aim to discount the unhappiness of the subject, or the facticity of a painful experience which destabilizes the very notion of subjectivity and renders the subject in the midst of a crisis of collapsed binarisms—a crisis wherein the distinction between agency and patiency collapses and the *reification* of doubt prevails. This consideration does not aim to solve or resolve a predicament, but rather to problematize the moment of the decision, or the moment of crisis. Moreover, the configuration of such a circumstance does not necessarily disqualify the role, or diminish the capacity, of Psychiatry as a valid disciplinary space; rather, it necessitates a responsible disciplinary approach, a responsible reading or diagnosis which must take into account its own constitutive role in the very crisis it seeks to resolve. If madness comprises the crisis which occurs between every hermeneutic disciplinary norm and the supplementary space which resists it, then it is the responsibility of every hermeneutic reading to address the aporia of its own limits, to acknowledge the moment of its own madness, or account for a madness of its own.



With the following series of fragments I hope to present a string of independent clinical moments involved in the sustenance of the domain of sensorability which leads up to the diagnosis of the psychotic episode, and to provide some insight about the clinical aporetic circumstance of diagnosis. While the chapters of this study engage a discussion of the space which resists readability, and of its properties and dynamics in specific instances, this portion of the study includes a fragmented series of limits and demarcations which play a constitutive role in clinical reading. In that sense, this spatial territory can, ironically, do no more than reify the very limits of the clinical aporia. I draw my examples from two settings: First, from notes, discussions and hand-outs distributed in selected Psychiatry classes at UBC, which I attended with psychiatric residents during the fall of 1997 and winter of 1998; second, from some observations of clinical interviews at Vancouver General Hospital during the summer/fall of 1998. I present these examples as random moments of contact with the disciplinary space of clinical diagnosis.

#### **DSM-IV: The Basics of the North-American Psychiatric Bible**

*He is in a closed world whose closing is the only event that produces itself in it.*  
(Blanchot, *Step 65*)

The *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-IV)* opens the section entitled “Schizophrenia and Other Psychotic Disorders” with the preliminary statement that “The disorders included in this section are all characterized by having psychotic symptoms as the defining feature. Other disorders that may be present with

psychotic symptoms (but not as defining features) are included elsewhere in the manual”

(273). The following is listed as an introductory definition of the qualifier “psychotic:”

The term *psychotic* has historically received a number of different definitions, none of which has achieved universal acceptance. The narrowest definition of *psychotic* is restricted to delusions or prominent hallucinations, with hallucinations occurring in the absence of insight into their pathological nature. A slightly less restrictive definition would also include prominent hallucinations that the individual realizes are hallucinatory experiences. Broader still is a definition that also includes other positive symptoms of Schizophrenia (i.e., disorganized speech, grossly disorganized or catatonic behavior).

[. . .] Finally, the term has been defined conceptually as a loss of ego boundaries or a gross impairment in reality testing. The different disorders in this section emphasize different aspects of the various definitions of *psychotic*. In Schizophrenia, Schizophreniform Disorder, Schizoaffective Disorder, and Brief Psychotic Disorder, the term psychotic refers to delusions, any prominent hallucinations, disorganized speech, or disorganized or catatonic behavior. (273)

According to the *DSM-IV*, a psychotic episode is a manifested disturbance of a given duration which includes one or more of the following symptoms, variously defined as follows:

*delusion*. A false belief based on incorrect inference about external reality that is firmly sustained despite what almost everyone else believes and despite what constitutes incontrovertible and obvious proof or evidence to the contrary.

Delusions are subdivided according to their content (e.g. bizarre, grandiose, etc.).  
(765)

*hallucination.* A sensory perception that has the compelling sense of reality of a true perception but that occurs without external stimulation of the relevant sensory organ [. . .] The person may or may not have insight into the fact that he or she is having a hallucination [. . .] Transient hallucinatory experiences may occur in people without a mental disorder. (767)

*catatonic behavior.* Marked motor abnormalities [. . . such as] *extreme negativism* (apparent motiveless resistance to instructions to be moved) and *echolalia*. (764-5)

*echolalia.* The pathological, parrotlike, and apparently senseless repetition (echoing) of a word or phrase just spoken by another person. (766)

*alogia.* An impoverishment in thinking that is inferred from observing speech and language behavior. (764)

Each symptom is marked by an explicit demarcation separating two sides of a binarism; truth/falsity, external/internal, fact/fiction, relevant/irrelevant, sense/nonsense, positivism/negativism and, in each case, normal/abnormal. The diagnosis of a given disturbance is determined by the duration of the episode, or the temporal specificity of the perceived disturbance. For example, the manual specifies that “Brief Psychotic Disorder is a psychotic disturbance that lasts more than 1 day and remits by 1 month” (274), and “Schizophrenia is a disturbance that lasts for at least 6 months and includes at least 1 month of active-phase symptoms (i.e., two [or more] of the following: delusions, hallucinations, disorganized speech, grossly disorganized or catatonic behavior, negative

symptoms)” (273). Moreover, the Diagnostic Criteria for Schizophrenia—schizophrenia being a temporally extreme variation of a psychotic disturbance—are as follows:

*Characteristic symptoms:* Two (or more) of the following, each present for a significant portion of time during a 1-month period (or less if successfully treated):

- (1) delusions
- (2) hallucinations
- (3) disorganized speech (e.g., frequent derailment or incoherence)
- (4) grossly disorganized or catatonic behavior
- (5) negative symptoms, i.e., affective flattening, alogia, or avolition (285)

The diagnosis of schizophrenia, finally, occurs on the condition that “The disturbance is not due to the direct physiological effects of a substance (e.g., a drug of abuse, a medication) or a general medical condition” (286).

In *Schizophrenic Disorders: Sense and Nonsense in Conceptualization, Assessment, and Treatment*, Leighton C. Whitaker submits that the primary characteristics of schizophrenia

do not distinguish schizophrenic disorders from other disorders unless all are present and organic causation is absent. People with organic brain syndromes—actual diseases or physical defects of the central nervous system—may display seemingly similar kinds of characteristics, though their impairment is of neurological capacity rather than functional ability. Schizophrenic persons, by definition, have functional rather than physical disorders. (5)

Although many clinical psychiatrists would not accept the designations of ‘functional’ and ‘physical’ as mutually exclusive categories, it is important to note that the clinical diagnosis of psychosis must be based on the *provisional inability* of the clinician to determine a known medical causation for the perceived psychotic symptom. In other words, before the clinician produces a diagnosis of psychosis, she must be confident of the immediate *impossibility* to determine what members of her profession would recognize as a ‘known medical condition,’ or an immediate organic cause, for the perceived ‘functional disorder.’ Peter Liddle remarks that “When we apply the DSM-IV criterion that excludes a general medical condition before diagnosing schizophrenia, we do not imply that schizophrenia is not an organic psychosis. We are excluding cases of ‘organic psychosis of known aetiology.’”<sup>1</sup> Although the diagnosis must, effectively, be based on the *absence* of any intelligible (or measurable) medical condition, many clinicians do not doubt that the disorder is nevertheless a manifestation of a provisionally unintelligible organic condition.<sup>2</sup> In Liddle’s words, “While the question of whether or not there is a specific ‘organic’ brain disorder that accounts for the majority of the cases we currently call schizophrenia remains unanswered, few psychiatrists doubt that schizophrenia is an organic brain disorder, with associated ‘physical’ abnormalities.” Thus, regardless of the clinician’s personal conviction that organic causation for the perceived psychotic disturbance could be present, the diagnosis must be based on the absence of a ‘general medical condition.’

In accordance with the criteria outlined in the *DSM-IV*, the diagnosis of psychosis (brief psychotic disturbance) and/or schizophrenia (a psychotic disturbance which lasts ‘actively’ for a minimum duration of one month, and ‘passively’ for a duration of six

months) is based on the application of diagnostic measures to a discursive space which consists of the subject's verbal and non-verbal account, the rhetoric of its presentation, the historical account of documented records indicating prior psychiatric hospitalization, and (whenever available) supplementary accounts of family members.

### **Clinical Picture**

*There is a moment when generality is frightening: the generality which, whether one likes it or not, one puts to work—using its slightest words, always beyond singularity—and by which one risks generalizing one's own error: fatigue discouraged, as if, without this contribution, the unhappy level of the world could, by a mere nothing, find itself lowered. (Blanchot, Step 130)*

The *DSM* is compiled by an appointed group of expert committees consisting of distinguished doctors who specialize in various disorders. In the contemporary psychiatric setting, clinical psychiatrists and residents acknowledge that the process by which members of these committees review and define diagnostic criteria is fraught with political tension and ideological constraints which contribute to the inflection of both the overall manual, and the configuration of each particular category. On a day-to-day basis, for the purposes of clinical practice and training, psychiatrists do not exclude the possibility that in a given clinical situation, or in a particularly unique context, any given DSM criterion may serve as no more than an arbitrary set of rules which may or may not be properly applied to the clinical circumstance at hand. Residents, in their training, learn not only how to use the *DSM-IV* as a clinical guide, but also how to use common sense; how to develop and maintain, over time, an elaborate and discretionary set of supplementary demarcations, an implicit guide with explicit specifications, which may

function as an additional readily effective framework for the measurement of variously perceived phenomena in the clinical situation. The following criteria appear on a hand-out entitled “Schizophrenia—The Clinical Picture,”<sup>3</sup> distributed to psychiatric residents in a class on schizophrenia, as a supplementary guide for the diagnosis of schizophrenic disturbances:

### **Disorders of the Form and Flow of Thought**

#### ***Unstable goal***

Tangentiality	Responses that are off the point.
Derailment	Inappropriate shift to a loosely related or unrelated idea during flow of speech. (asyndetic thought)
Distractability	Shift to an irrelevant idea triggered by an external stimulus.
Perseveration	Unwarranted intrusion of a previously expressed word or idea.

#### ***Idiosyncratic thought & language***

Idiosyncratic word use:	Normal words used in an inappropriate context (word approximations, metonyms) or non-words (neologisms).
Idiosyncratic ideas:	Unusual ideas that appear to reflect peculiar, personal concepts, or ideas expressed in an unusual manner that impedes comprehension.
Idiosyncratic logic:	Reasoning that does not follow normal rules of logic (autistic logic)
*Incoherence	Incomprehensible speech, apparently reflecting absent or idiosyncratic connections between words. (Word salad)

***Weakening of goal***

Empty speech	Utterances lacking an identifiable goal composed mainly of vacuous phrases of the type normally used merely to maintain flow of speech. (Poverty of content of speech)
Generalization	Speech lacks specificity and conveys little information because of over-generalization.
Unelaborated ideas	Ideas lack normal development; speech contains few adjectives, adverbs or modifying clauses.

***Disorders of flow***

Poverty of speech	Decreased amount of speech; brief replies, lack of spontaneous speech.
Pressure of speech	Excessive rate of speech.
Blocking	Transient interruptions of speech during which the subject experiences absence of thought.

\*Incoherence apparently involves both unstable goal and idiosyncrasy.

***Disorders of Affect***

Affect can be blunted, incongruous, unstable, irritable, depressed or elevated.

*Blunted affect:* There is a failure to express feelings either verbally or non-verbally even when talking about issues which would normally be expected to engage the emotions. Expressive gestures are rare, there is little animation in facial expression and in vocal inflection.

*Incongruous affect:* The expression of affect is inconsistent with the circumstances.



*Depression:* Depressed mood is usually part of a syndrome of depression similar to that in primary depressive illness: occurs in prodromes, acute phase, post-episode, chronic phase. (5)

This set of criteria is meant as a supplementary aid for the identification, measurement, and specification of phenomena that are generally listed in the *DSM*. However, here too, perhaps even to a greater degree than in the manual itself, interpretative guidelines function as explicit demarcations of the sensorable domain, and further presuppose a series of implicit rules which can serve as restricting ‘sensors.’ These can be retroactively applied, as limits, in order to contain the manifestation which resists limits in the first place. The entire framework manages an explicit and implicit economy of clinical ‘common sense.’

The set of guidelines, presupposing an explicit general distinction between order and disorder of thought—or else an explicit category of order which includes certain types of ‘thought’ and excludes others—seeks to reify this distinction with a series of explicitly marked binarisms, each endowed with a pronounced border separating responses that are on/off the ‘point,’ appropriate/inappropriate, related/unrelated, relevant/irrelevant, warranted/unwarranted, coherent/incoherent, full/empty, normal/abnormal. Moreover, this cluster of prescribed binarisms complies with a larger set of explicit expectations delimiting territories of acceptable and expected *degrees* of *specificity* in speech, acceptable and expected *amount* of adjectives and modifying clauses in a *proper* response, acceptable and expected *rate* and *quantity* of speech, and so on. During diagnosis, these criteria serve as explicit reinforcements which sustain the domain of accepted and legitimate conventions of constraint, delimiting the domain of

the sensical, producing an explicit border which excludes the non-sensical, and thereby exercising a certain operation of sense-making which decides in advance the distinction between acceptable and unacceptable—proper and improper—forms of speech.

When a given discursive manifestation resists any binaristic configuration, thereby resisting both the inside and the outside of any predetermined demarcation, it risks being retroactively excluded as that which cannot be ‘included,’ or that which is *idiosyncratic*. For example, when an utterance presents that which is not a word and not a non-word—that which cannot be located either inside or outside of the demarcation restricting the category of ‘words’—the diagnostic criterion qualifies the utterance under *idiosyncratic word use*. Thus, the ‘neologism’ becomes paradigmatic of schizophrenic ‘idiosyncrasy,’ for it resists the common configuration of words (it is listed as a non-word in the above handout) and yet, once it is read or diagnosed as that which resists the common configuration of words (once it is deemed unreadable), it is retroactively qualified as the ‘neologism’—the abnormal *word* which belongs to the category of *idiosyncratic word use*. In other words, that which is diagnosed as the non-word, becomes qualified as the special word; that which resists limit is retroactively placed within the specific limited category which it resists. The not word and not non-word which cannot be defined within the confines of the dictionary, is recorded, ironically, in the context of an alternative figurative dictionary of schizophrenic neologisms (see examples in Figure 2).<sup>4</sup>

Along the same lines, an ‘idea’ expressed in a *manner that impedes comprehension*—a discursive space which figures as unintelligible, resisting prescribed categories of expectation or interpretation—is to be retroactively *comprehended* under

the rubric of *idiosyncratic idea*. By the same token, a ‘reasoning’ that does not follow *normal rules of logic*—that which is not logic and not not logic (for it is a *reasoning*) and, therefore, escapes the constraints of interpretative reason—is to be diagnosed as *idiosyncratic logic*. Moreover, ‘incoherence,’ or ‘incomprehensible speech’—the unintelligible utterance which resists all interpretative expectations—is to be diagnosed as that which *apparently reflects absent connections between words*. ‘Incoherence,’ the diagnostic category for the apparently absent connection—the ‘connection’ that is not there and not not there—is paradigmatic of the reading which seeks apparent absence, or the seeking which reads nothing. Congruently, ‘empty speech,’ the clinical referent signifying *vacuous phrases*—phrases that are not empty (for as phrases, they obey the demarcation marking the inside of a ‘phrase’) and not not empty—is a variation of this diagnostic retroactive containment of absence. Finally, another variation of the diagnostic pursuit of no-thing, ‘Blocking’ refers to interruptions of speech wherein the subject experiences *absence of thought*. This clinical term marks the ultimate reification of the discursive space which resists the very clinical normative constraints by which it is contained. That which is diagnostically deemed an unwarranted, unintelligible, unexpected *interruption*—an interruption that cannot be confined or contained by prescribed clinical categories of understanding—is nevertheless understood as a reified presentation of the *absent thought*. This categorical absence of thought, moreover, is further classified as a marker of the *experience of the subject*, figuring the experience of the non experience. The subject, in this case, is figured as patient of her own agency and further as agent of her own patiency; the subject is said to experience the blocking of her own thoughts, of her own voice—the voice affected and effected by its positionality.

The clinical picture of diagnostic criteria presents an economy of interpretive sensorship and censorship, wherein implicit and explicit categorical markers of clinical *sense* work to regulate and sustain prescribed boundaries which in turn restrict figurative and literal permutations of the normal, readable, and sensical. This picture, thus, functions as a reification of both sensorable and unsensorable discursive space, legitimizing the frame that encloses the very territory which resists closure.

### Note

*And we do nothing but repeat.* (Blanchot, *Step 19*)

Dr. Little offers the following remarks regarding ‘sense’ in the setting of clinical diagnosis:

From my own perspective (in my role as a psychiatrist) I consider that the clinician’s task in making diagnosis is to attempt to make sense of the phenomena (or in terms nearer to your terminology: the verbal and behavioral discourse) in light of recognized regular patterns of mental phenomena. There are three possible outcomes of this endeavor:

1) all the phenomena are readily understandable as expressions of normal mental function (that is; the mental function that is commonly observed in individuals who are functioning in a manner that is satisfactory to themselves and to society).

In these cases, the discourse is judged as sense both according to common understanding of what makes sense and according to the experience of those who practise the discipline of psychiatry.

2) The pattern of phenomena makes sense according to the rules established by the discipline of psychiatry, even though it might not make sense according to common understanding. For example, the person might report the experience of being controlled by alien influences, he might exhibit flattening of affect and his ability to care for himself might have deteriorated by virtue of decreased ability to pursue an organized series of actions. While this pattern of phenomena might at first sight make no sense, to someone practiced in the discipline of psychiatry, it makes perfect sense. It is the pattern of phenomena typical of schizophrenia. This pattern has been identified by careful documentation of cases seen previously; furthermore, there is now an emerging neuroscientific understanding (or discipline) that makes sense of the pattern of phenomena in terms of brain physiology. Provided the phenomena satisfy criteria for persistence and also that several other causes of such phenomena can be excluded, the psychiatrist diagnoses schizophrenia. In other words, the psychiatrist has applied the discipline of her profession to make sense of what might have appeared to the lay person to be non-sense.

3) The psychiatrist has difficulty making sense of the phenomena according to either the rules of normal mental function or of previously documented abnormal mental function. In this case, the psychiatrist is uncertain of the diagnosis. In a research study (such as the investigation of the efficacy of a potential treatment for schizophrenia) the psychiatrist would exclude that case from further consideration. In your terms, the case makes neither sense nor non-sense and confident diagnosis is impossible. In clinical practice, the psychiatrist usually

feels obliged (by the demands of the patient, society or perhaps her own professional pride) to use judgment to form an opinion. She constructs a differential diagnosis list comprising those recognized patterns of disorders that bear some resemblance to the observed phenomena and decides whether there is a sufficient degree of resemblance between the observed phenomena and any of the recognized patterns (such as those codified in DSMIV) to justify a provisional diagnosis. She then decides upon recommendations for treatment based on balancing degree of certainty in the diagnosis, the likely harm from treatment and the likely harm from failing to treat.<sup>5</sup>

### **Malingering**

*The time when all these truths are stories, when all stories are false: no present, nothing but what is actual. (Blanchot, Step 55)*

In his article on malingered psychosis, Dr. Phillip Resnick concedes that “Malingering should be considered in the assessment of all patients” (Resnick 61). The diagnosis of malingering, or factitious psychosis, presupposes an implicit distinction between two mutually exclusive categories of factual and factitious disorder. The implication is that a subject cannot simultaneously malingering and suffer psychotic symptoms. Thus, there is an operative underlying constraint separating fields of facticity and fictionality, truth and falsity, at the site of each clinical diagnostic criterion, so that each symptomatic utterance is always subject to the final meta-diagnostic verdict which determines the status of the utterance inside or outside a realm of ‘the whole truth and nothing but the truth.’ Resnick proposes that “The suspected malingerer should be given

every opportunity to save face [. . .] Clinicians should opt for more general and less accusatory statements, such as ‘You haven’t told me the whole truth,’ rather than, ‘You have been lying to me’” (59).

A sub-branch of ‘malingering,’ the specification of ‘pseudo-malingering’ applies to those persons diagnosed as malingerers who, subsequent to the diagnosis and to the act of ‘malingering’ itself, begin to display ‘true’ symptoms (48). Conversely, there is a classification for persons “who have true schizophrenia” (60) and choose to “malingering additional symptoms to escape criminal responsibility or seek an increase in disability compensation” (60). Resnick contends that in such cases, “Clinicians have a lower index of suspicion for malingering because of a documented history of psychiatric hospitalizations and the presence of true, albeit, residual schizophrenic symptoms” (61). In other words, the migration of symptoms over the marked border, from the domain of the ‘true’ to that of the ‘fake’ and vice versa, is possible and not uncommon. Because the successful transition from one clinical category to the other is so readily attainable, Resnick warns clinicians not to “think of malingering and psychosis from an ‘either/or’ perspective” (61). However, although most clinicians would acknowledge that a subject may present alternate symptoms of ‘malingering’ and ‘psychosis,’ shifting from one clinical category to another with each diagnosis, the presupposition that malingering and psychosis are mutually exclusive categories remains. The implication is that symptomatic manifestations cannot simultaneously present as both psychosis and malingering; these two clinical classifications cannot temporally overlap. For example, according to clinical criteria, although a patient may technically manifest several hallucinations, some of which are ‘malingered’ and some of which are ‘true,’ any given

‘hallucination’ must be diagnosed as either ‘malingered’ or ‘true.’ Thus, Resnick provides a detailed set of criteria to help the psychiatrist distinguish between ‘true’ and ‘malingered’ hallucinations and delusions during clinical diagnosis.

During the diagnosis, detected auditory and visual hallucinations can be further considered in terms of authentic/inauthentic properties, such as ‘true’ and ‘malingered’ vocal characteristics (e.g. loudness, tone, duration, frequency) , source (e.g. inside/outside the head), properties of the hallucination itself (e.g. familiar/unfamiliar voice), patient’s opinion of or response to the hallucination (e.g. insight into its unreality, ability to disregard, tendency to obey), and context (e.g. with other hallucinations, delusions or psychotic symptoms) (51). Accordingly, an elaborate set of criteria provides a series of distinctions between the classification of ‘genuine’ and ‘malingered’ delusion. Resnick maintains that “All malingerers are actors that portray their psychoses as they understand them” (59), and that a simulated ‘portrayal’ often varies from the ‘genuine’ delusion:

In order to recognize a malingered delusion, clinicians must understand the phenomenology of genuine delusions. Delusions are not merely false beliefs that cannot be changed by logic. A delusion is a false statement made in an inappropriate context and most important, with inappropriate justification. Normal people can give reasons, engage in a dialogue, and consider the possibilities of doubt. Persons with true delusions typically cannot provide adequate reasons for their statements. (53)

Thus, the diagnosis of delusion—of the hallmark of schizophrenia—entails a complex economy of sensorship, requiring prescribed clinical sensors which detect breaching of borders between truth and falsity, fact and fiction, certainty and doubt. Each diagnostic



outcome entails an initial explicit identification of the ‘delusional’ utterance, and a subsequent retroactive application of diagnostic ‘sensors’ to determine the legitimacy of the initial diagnosis. Moreover, each diagnostic outcome approximates what might be configured as a reading of middle voiced properties. For example, according to Resnick’s clinical criteria, a ‘true’ delusional utterance entails the utterer’s ‘true’ belief and absolute certainty in her own ‘false’ statement. The utterance, in other words, must figure the utterer as patient of her own ‘false’ belief, patient of her own agency. The ‘true’ delusion marks the delusion of oneself; to be delusional is to delude oneself, intransitively.

If ‘true’ delusion entails the intransitive middle-voiced utterance (to delude oneself), then pseudo-malingering comprises the inversely intransitive delusion: to have oneself deluded. The pseudo-malingerer, according to the diagnostic criterion, initiates the lie and then falls victim to her own simulation. Thus, agent of her own patency, she actively simulates delusional properties and is consequently acted upon by her delusion. The pseudo-malingerer has himself deluded, while the non-malingerer deludes himself. The malingerer, conversely, has the clinician deluded. The diagnosis of ‘malingering,’ that is, is the diagnosis which attempts to diagnose itself, canceling itself out, announcing its own delusional properties. According to the diagnostic criteria for malingering, the clinician must first determine that a belief is ‘false’ (falling outside of a prescribed demarcation of ‘truth’ and ‘logic’) and thereby ‘delusional,’ and then render the false belief ‘fake’ (or simulated, falling outside of a prescribed demarcation of ‘genuine’), thereby rendering the initial detection of delusional utterance false (not true). The diagnosis of malingering nullifies itself, acts upon its own interpretation, falling subject

to its own limits, rendering itself as that which has been acted upon (by the malingerer), that which has fallen victim to deceit. The clinician, in her diagnosis of the malingerer, diagnoses the limits of her own clinical interpretation—she detects (sensors) delusion, and subsequently nullifies the detection, rendering the delusion null and void—she diagnoses intransitively; the diagnosis has itself diagnosed, leading to nothing, to the absence both of the delusion and of itself. What remains inaccessible in such a circumstance is the space which exceeds the limits of diagnosis, the space of not malingering and not not malingering, which cannot be diagnosed in view of, or the basis of, such terms.

### **Clinical Picture**

*As if a feeling independent from them were coming from them.*

(Blanchot, *Step 49*)

The following clinical description for *Hallucinations* is listed in the handout entitled “Schizophrenia—The Clinical Picture:”

Hallucinations in any of the sensory modalities occur in schizophrenia, though auditory hallucinations are the most common. Most characteristics are the three types of auditory hallucination identified as Schneiderian first rank symptoms: voices commenting; voices discussing or arguing; and hearing one’s own thoughts aloud. Second person auditory hallucinations are also common. In the International Pilot Study of Schizophrenia (IPSS) conducted by the World Health Organization (1973), voices speaking to the patient were recorded in 65% of cases of acute schizophrenia.

When schizophrenic patients describe their experiences of hearing voices during acute episodes of the illness, they usually report the perceptions as having the same sensory quality as voices arising from real sources in the external world and heard through the ears. At this stage of the illness it is not uncommon for patients to act on commands issued by the voices. In the chronic stage of the illness sometimes patients describe voices which are recognised as arising from within their own minds. Kraepelin [. . .] reports: “at other times they do not appear to the patient as sense perceptions at all; they are ‘voices of conscience’; ‘voices which do not speak with words’... ‘it is thought inwardly within me.’” These experiences resemble pseudohallucinations, which are sensory perceptions in the absence of external stimuli that patients clearly recognise as morbid products of their own minds. However, usually chronic schizophrenic patients who attribute the voices to their own minds remain ambivalent about whether or not they are a manifestation of an illness. (4)

The following appears as the clinical description for *Delusions*:

Virtually all schizophrenic patients suffer from delusions at some time in their illness, and a wide variety of types of delusions can occur. Especially characteristic of schizophrenia are delusional beliefs that appear to defy logic, either because they arise suddenly and without any foundation based on preceding mental processes, or because they refer to fantastic events or circumstances which could not possibly occur. For example, a young woman suddenly knew, with total conviction, that she was a cat. It was not possible to elicit any mental precursor to this notion. Such a belief arising suddenly from unaccountable

origins is called a *primary or autochthonous delusion*. Also characteristic of schizophrenia are the delusions of alien control of thought, action, will, affect and somatic function which express the disordered experience of autonomy lying at the heart of many of the Schneiderian first rank symptoms.

Delusions of persecution and of reference have little diagnostic specificity but are common in schizophrenia. In the International Pilot Study of Schizophrenia (WHO, 1973) ideas of reference were reported in 70% of cases and suspiciousness in 66% of cases. Patients commonly report that television programmes make special reference to them.

Delusions can be either fragmentary or part of a system of linked, relatively self-consistent delusions. Organized delusional systems are most frequently encountered in female patients with the onset of illness in middle age. In acute episodes, patients often act in accordance with their delusions, but in the more chronic phase of the illness, it is common to encounter double orientation, in which there is a dissociation of affect and behaviour from the implications of the delusion. (4)

The category of *Insight* appears as follows:

While some impairment of insight is implicit in the classification of schizophrenia as a psychotic illness, the degree to which unrealistic thinking interferes with the patient's understanding of the nature of the illness is variable, both over the course of the illness in an individual case and between cases. At its most severe, impaired insight might lead patients to deny that they are suffering from an illness at all. It is difficult to engage them in any therapeutic programme.

At less severe levels, patients may accept that they have an illness, but deny that it is a mental illness. More commonly, the patients accept, at least implicitly, that they have a mental illness, but have unrealistic ideas that diminish their ability to evaluate issues regarding treatment, or to comprehend the impact of the illness on their lives. (7)

Thus, *hallucination*, most commonly *auditory*, is the clinical category for the representation of the voice which acts upon itself, hearing itself, having itself heard. (*Do you still hear me my voice?*) *Delusion* is the clinical category for the representation of the belief which acts upon itself; the belief which is the patient of its own agency. *Insight* is an implicit clinical classification marking an *impasse* between itself and that which is inaccessible to it. It is the clinical term for the evaluation of the patient's capacity to diagnose herself adequately—to diagnose herself reasonably, in accordance with clinical diagnostic logic. The category, 'insight,' marks the subject's refusal of, or the utterance's impermeability to, *clinical insight*; it marks the discursive resistance of the subject, and of his utterance, to the clinical interpretative framework. *Insight*, as a clinical descriptor, marks the absence of itself; it marks the moment in which diagnostic reason seeks to find itself in the subject's utterance, and seeking itself, brings forth nothing.

### Note

*Unhappiness is absolute, which does not prevent its being increased—and this sometimes by the very thing that seems to lessen it. (Blanchot, Step 120)*

The present consideration of madness as *crisis*, does not dispute the painful experience of the subject, nor does it suggest that *non-clinical* criteria of understanding or

interpretation are more likely to alleviate the suffering of the subject, or have the capacity to avoid crisis. Rather, the focus of this consideration engages the dynamics operative at the time and space in which interpretative criteria meet that which materializes through its resistance to and subversion of the very criteria which seek to confine it; this study addresses the dynamics of the representation which becomes accessible through its refusal of access, or the dynamics of that which becomes accessible only after it has been retroactively rendered inaccessible. Thus, madness figures as the crisis *between* (or upon the contact of) a given manifestation and its clinical and/or non-clinical interpretation. That is not to say that the experience of the subject can be dissociated from the crisis, or that the clinical or non-clinical interpretation necessarily denies or disregards the suffering, or the unhappiness, of the subject (and/or of the interpreter). The *crisis*, like the suffering of the subject, like unhappiness, is *absolute*. *This does not prevent its being increased—and this sometimes by the very thing that seems to lessen it.* The British Columbia Schizophrenia Society lists non-clinical characteristics compiled by family members of persons diagnosed with schizophrenia, as follows:

### ***Early Warning Signs***

The following list of warning signs was developed by people whose family members have schizophrenia. Many behaviours described are within the range of normal responses to situations. Yet families sense that—even when symptoms are mild—there is a vague but distinct awareness that behaviour is “*unusual*”; that the person is “*not the same*.” The number and severity of these symptoms differ from person to person -- although almost everyone mentions “*noticeable social withdrawal*.”

Deterioration of personal hygiene

Depression

Bizarre behaviour

Irrational statements

Sleeping excessively or inability to sleep

Social withdrawal, isolation, and reclusiveness

Shift in basic personality

Unexpected hostility

Deterioration of social relationships

Hyperactivity or inactivity -- or alternating between the two

Inability to concentrate or to cope with minor problems

Extreme preoccupation with religion or with the occult

Excessive writing without meaning

Indifference

Dropping out of activities -- or out of life in general

Decline in academic or athletic interests

Forgetting things

Losing possessions

Extreme reactions to criticism

Inability to express joy

Inability to cry, or excessive crying

Inappropriate laughter

Unusual sensitivity to stimuli (noise, light, colours, textures)

Attempts to escape through frequent moves or hitchhiking trips

Drug or alcohol abuse

Fainting

Strange posturing

Refusal to touch persons or objects; wearing gloves, etc.

Shaving head or body hair

Cutting oneself; threats of self-mutilation

Staring without blinking -- or blinking incessantly

Flat, reptile-like gaze

Rigid stubbornness

Peculiar use of words or odd language structures

Sensitivity and irritability when touched by others<sup>6</sup>

The non-clinical picture: “In harmony with the unhappiness of all, this unhappiness which excludes any harmony.” (Blanchot, *Step* 124)

### **Clinical Picture**

*The transparency that does not let itself be crossed and from which nonetheless no reflexion comes back, except as the mark of inflexibility.* (Blanchot, *Step* 19)

The origin and evolution of schizophrenia in the context of its clinical history are briefly considered in the classroom during psychiatric training. The following historical outline of the clinical category is offered in the handout, “Schizophrenia—The Clinical Picture,” in order to situate the inception of the term *schizophrenia* (by psychiatrist Eugen Bleuler, in 1911) within a clinical continuum leading to the present clinical setting:<sup>7</sup>



### **The origins of the concept**

The concept of schizophrenia emerged from nineteenth century attempts to describe the psychotic illnesses of young and middle adult life.

**Haslam** (1809) recognised a state of insanity unaccompanied by furious or depressing passions.

**Morel** (1860) - *démence précoce* - onset in late adolescence with odd behaviour and self neglect, leading to a deterioration in mental function.

**Griesinger** (1862) - unitary psychosis, including affective and non-affective psychoses.

**Hecker** (1871) - *hebephrenia*, a condition beginning in young adult life with silly behaviour, inappropriate affect, disordered form of thought and fragmentary delusions. *Dementia paranoides* is characterised by delusions in a setting of deteriorating personality.

**Kahlbaum** (1874) - *catatonia* - disturbances of voluntary motor activity.

Kahlbaum emphasized the importance of evaluating not only the current symptoms but also the course of an illness. The course of catatonia includes atonic or stuporous periods of underactivity, and periods of excitement and overactivity. It also includes depressive episodes.

**Emil Kraepelin** (1896) separated manic-depressive psychosis (episodic with the restoration of virtually normal mental function between episodes) from the chronic psychoses, hebephrenia, catatonia and dementia paranoides, which tend to produce persisting disability. He amalgamated these three chronic psychoses to form *Dementia Praecox*. The name reflects the tendency to begin, in early adult

life and a tendency to lead to a state of mental enfeeblement. The essential feature is "that destruction of conscious volition ... which is manifest as loss of energy and drive, in disjointed volitional behaviour. This rudderless state leads to impulsive instinctual activity: there is no planned reflection which suppresses impulses as they arise or directs them into proper channels." (Kraepelin, 1920)

**Eugen Bleuler** (1911) discarded the name *Dementia Praecox* (many cases do not show progressive deterioration). He chose the name *schizophrenia* to denote the fragmentation of mental activity which is the hallmark of the illness. He specified a number of fundamental symptoms including affective flattening, looseness of associations, ambivalence and autism, which he considered were present in every case. He gave special weight to looseness of associations: "Of the thousands of associative threads which guide our thinking, this disease seems to interrupt, quite haphazardly, sometimes such single threads, sometimes a whole group, and sometimes even large segments of them. In this way thinking becomes illogical and often bizarre." (Bleuler, 1911, p14). He considered that many of the other symptoms arose from looseness of associations. In the evolution of the concept of schizophrenia, the emphasis was initially on fragmentation of mental functions and enduring deficits. However, as attempts were made to improve the reliability of diagnosis, delusions and hallucinations, especially those identified as first rank symptoms by **Schneider** (1959) assumed greater importance. (1-2)

Following this synopsis is a description of **The Schneiderian First Rank Symptoms** (2-3) which consist of specific clinical types of hallucinations and delusions: Voices

commenting (on patient's actions as they occur), voices discussing or arguing (about patient), thought insertion (alien thoughts), thought withdrawal (thoughts removed by alien influence), thought broadcasting (thoughts broadcast to others directly from patient's head), made will (impulse to act arising from alien source), made affects (affects experienced as alien-induced), somatic passivity (alien influence over bodily functions), and delusional perception. Finally, the following are listed as current "**Dimensions of psychopathology in schizophrenia**" (3):

<i>Reality Distortion</i>	Delusions
	Hallucinations
<i>Disorganization</i>	(Positive) formal thought disorder
	Inappropriate affect
	Disjointed volition
<i>Psychomotor Poverty</i>	Poverty of speech
	Flat affect
	Motor underactivity
<i>Psychomotor Excitation</i>	Pressure of speech
	Irritability
	Motor overactivity
<i>Depression</i>	Depressed mood
	Pessimism/hopelessness
	Low self esteem/guilt
	Anhedonia

*Non-specific psychopathology:* Attentional impairment; Disorientation; Anxiety:  
Sleep disturbance; Somatic complaints

### **Observation**

*To answer for that which escapes responsibility.* (Blanchot, Step 123)

During the summer and fall (August-December) of 1998, I conducted observation of weekly clinical/teaching sessions at the psychiatric wing of Vancouver General Hospital.<sup>8</sup> The clinical/teaching series is meant to provide an opportunity for the training of psychiatric residents, and a context in which practicing clinical psychiatrists can obtain a second opinion for diagnoses of patients who are under their care and have been recently admitted to hospital. Each session consists of two parts: a clinical interview with the patient (approximately 45-60 minutes), followed by a discussion among doctors (approximately 60 minutes) who produce a diagnosis and a rationale for diagnostic decisions. The clinical interview is conducted by an advanced psychiatric resident, or by a psychiatrist, in the interview room. This interview is observed, via a one-way mirror separating the interview room from the observation room, by a group of people consisting of an expert (specialized) psychiatrist, other psychiatrists, psychiatric residents, and medical students. The group usually varies with each session. Each patient is informed about the purpose of the interview (to provide a diagnosis) and about its context (clinical/teaching session), and is aware that the interview is being observed by a group of doctors on the other side of the mirror. Upon the completion of the interview, the patient is escorted back to his or her room, and the observing parties gather in the

interview room, with the interviewing doctor, in order to discuss and evaluate both the patient and the interview itself, and to produce a diagnosis.

With each patient's consent to my observation and use of audiotape, and with the consent of all parties attending each respective session, I was able to join the parties in the observation room in order to view and record the clinical interview. I was able to then remain in the observation room, while the doctors gathered in the interview room for subsequent discussion, in order to observe and record the post-interview consultation. I am extremely grateful to all parties involved, including both doctors and patients, for their cooperation and generosity. What follows is a series of brief vignettes from selected sessions, as opposed to complete transcripts and analyses. These are meant to represent my experience of clinical observation, and to situate the diagnostic criteria, as introduced above, within specific clinical moments involved in the context of the diagnostic interview itself.

Each clinical diagnostic interview is an attempt to acquire information according to prescribed categories of understanding: patient history, family history, psychiatric history, medical history, relationships, sex life, academic background, and so on. A successful diagnostic interview, in accordance with clinical standards, entails an optimal utilization of time in order to gain specific information, as well as an optimal utilization of the information (at the time it materializes) in order to diagnostically assess the situation at hand. In other words, the clinical interview is not an engaged discussion between doctor and patient, in which the doctor merely measures the patient's interactive responses and performance according to prescribed diagnostic categories. Rather, the interview is a formal and elaborate disciplinary structure whereby the doctor attempts to

i) gain specific initial information, ii) organize that information according to specific categories (patient history, academic history, etc.), and iii) decide what sub-set of prescribed categories (schizophrenia, bi-polar disorder, depression, etc.) best suits the particular circumstance at hand, in order to control the interview in a way which will produce the optimal level of information necessary to fulfill the relevant diagnostic criteria. If, for example, the doctor decides, in the course of obtaining family history and psychiatric history, that the patient's response most likely fits the category of schizophrenia, the interview will be accordingly modified to obtain information that can fulfill the minimum requirement for the diagnosis of schizophrenia. The doctor, then, will either ask direct questions regarding hearing voices (hallucinations) or believing in higher controlling powers (delusions), or will attempt to ask neutral 'test' questions leading to answers which can be retroactively measured according to diagnostic criteria (for example, the doctor can ask the patient what he is thinking, and the reply can be retroactively diagnosed as delusional). If, however, the doctor decides, in the course of obtaining initial information, that the patient's response best fits the category of depression, then the interview will be structured according to an alternate set of criteria which may or may not lead to the consideration of schizophrenic symptoms. The interview, thus, is dependent not only on the patient's performance, but also on the doctor's clinical proficiency in prescribed clinical categories, and on her decision-making ability during the course of the interview. She must be able to sensor the information at hand, and simultaneously censor certain lines of dialogue or questioning.

**Case 1: Patient 1/Doctor 1**

*Doctor: Where did you live previously?*

*Patient: In the forest.*

*D: In a tent, or just under a tree?*

*P: Under a tree.*

*D: Right.*

***Clinical Interview***

The first session presents a homeless male in his thirties, recently admitted to hospital: “I ended up leaving my apartment and sitting under a cedar tree and after a few weeks of not eating anything... I was sent here.” The clinical interview is conducted by the specialized doctor (male), and observed by residents and fellow psychiatrists. The direction of the interview presupposes a diagnosis of schizophrenia. When asked to describe his experiences, the patient (P1) explains: “I was a little dot about over here, and all the rest was a spirit entity running my body.” The doctor (D1) then asks, “What, or who, was the spirit?” P1 replies that “There were several, many, of them,” and that these spirits were telling his body what to do, pulling and directing his body in the right direction. D1 reiterates his question as follows:

D1: Did you hear things as well as see things?

P1: Hear things?

D1: Yes.

P1: Oh yes.

D1: What kind of things?

P1: Commentary—a lot of it non-verbal—a string of thoughts rather than of words.

After establishing that the patient has had “no troubles with the law” (thus excluding the category of criminal history), the doctor poses the perfunctory question which appears in all of the clinical interviews:

D1: You say that sometimes it seemed like torture—did you ever get to the stage where life wasn't worth living?

P1: Well, I've been suicidal more or less all my life.

D1 then returns to the subject of patient history, family history, relationships, sexual orientation and performance, and academic background. Having covered the necessary categories, the doctor resumes discussion about specific hallucinatory and delusional disturbances. P1 submits that “Usually I consult the spirits when I'm concerned about my future,” and that he only sees (as opposed to hears) the spirits “in sleep time, in dreams, but I'm allowed to do that.” Upon the question, “Do you think you've been selected by some high power?,” the patient replies that “Yes, but I asked for it. I applied and then got selected, but I'm happy about it.”

P1 submits that he likes medication (he is currently taking the anti-psychotic Risperidone), and mentions that his grandmother was “a schizophrenic” who “was in regular contact with her voices and consulted them whenever she could.” Upon further questioning, he explains that the grandmother was never diagnosed by a professional and did not have a psychiatric history, but that it is his own belief that she was schizophrenic. During the final portion of the interview, the patient is instructed to interpret proverbs, repeat a series of numbers, and memorize three words which he is to repeat at the end of the interview. He performs all of these tasks satisfactorily.



### ***Post-Interview Discussion***

During the post-interview discussion, the doctors usually discuss the performance of the interviewing doctor, the success of the interview itself, and the diagnosis (based on the interview and on the patient's chart). Since this interview is conducted by the specialized psychiatrist, the discussion focuses on the patient's chart and on the information gained from the interview. The purpose of this session is to provide both a second opinion and an example for residents in training.

Chart information: The patient entered the hospital for the first time in October 1997. He was left unmedicated and cleared completely after two weeks. He was encouraged to take medication nevertheless, but refused. He was hospitalized again in February 1998, at which time he was admitted for a suicidal condition. The supervising doctors felt that he was malingering, and discharged him due to inconsistency; they felt that his suicidal threats were manipulative attempts to avoid discharge.

Assessment of the interview:

D1: There was less animation than one would expect on his part.

D: Affect was restrictive or diminished: Forced smile, flat tone of voice...

D1: There was lack of emotional investment. The smile was not connected... mild flatness. He was so involved [with the interview], but not really there emotionally.

The doctors agree that P1 "described delusional control without a doubt," and then wonder, "But was he feigning? Was it too good to be true? Do we think this is real?" Everyone agrees that P1 was reciting "pop psychiatry" descriptions, and that his willingness to embrace that the grandmother had schizophrenia (or, rather, his diagnosis

of his own grandmother) was both questionable and suspect. The patient, moreover, was not incoherent. Furthermore, he was able to perform cognitive tasks (memorizing numbers and words, and interpreting proverbs) exceptionally well. He may have had a motive to malingering for the purpose of social security. He has a psychiatric history of malingering.

In spite of their inclination to diagnose malingered psychotic disorder, the doctors list the following diagnoses (in turn, going around the room): schizophrenia with possible mood disorder; schizoaffective disorder; schizophrenia, with possible poly-substance abuse, and depressive episodes; schizophrenia, or possibly schizoaffective disorder, with recurrent mood disorder; schizophrenia.

***Observational Note***

The above session was conducted in keeping with expected diagnostic criteria for both schizophrenia and malingering, as outlined earlier (i.e. in keeping with the complex dynamics of each diagnostic category, and in keeping with the convoluted problematic surrounding the category of 'malingering' in particular). In this specific circumstance, there was an initial lack of assertiveness and considerable hesitation among the doctors participating in the post-interview discussion. That is, although all doctors recognized what they would term schizophrenic elements in the patient's responses, no doctor was willing to commit to a diagnosis of either malingering or non-malingering. Although the conversation finally focused on the likelihood of malingering, with each doctor following the lead of his or her colleague, the final diagnosis was unanimously inclined toward definite schizophrenia. The patient will remain hospitalized and medicated.

**Case 2: Patient 2/Doctor 2**

*Think about others in such a way that it is no longer you who comes back from this thought and that it is not in a thought that you dispose yourself towards them.*

(Blanchot, *Step 129*)

***Clinical Interview***

Patient 2 is a 26 year old male who contends that although he does not know how long he has been in the hospital, he has been told that he has been hospitalized for three weeks. He submits that, years ago, he had almost completed grade 10 (“I was an honours student”), when he was involved in a car accident which took him “out of school.” The clinical interview is conducted by a psychiatric resident (male) who asks about the nature of the injury from the car accident. P2 replies, “The books I read [about head injury], hmm, that’s basically what happened,” offers no further specification, and later refers to the injury as “the breakdown.” His main concern, he insists, is that “I feel that the medications I’m on are not really the right ones for what I have.” He reports nightmares, loss of sleep and lack of concentration, and explains that although he sleeps for 12 hours per day, he “wakes up a lot” with “stiff joints” and “can’t walk properly.” The patient is currently on Risperidone. During a pause in the interview, while the doctor considers his next question, P2 comments that he was “surprised at finding a welfare cheque instead of a disability cheque.” The doctor ignores this remark and proceeds with the question, “So how is your appetite?”

Following a number of general questions, the patient returns to the topic of medication, repeating that he would like “to get off the medication” and would prefer “to take other medication for pain and headaches, such as Tylenol.” The doctor ignores this

line of conversation, and proceeds to explore psychiatric history. He mentions the patient's record of prior hospitalization and asks, "Do you know why they would have thought it may have been schizophrenia?" The patient replies, "Well, cause it's been so long." The interview progresses at a very slow pace, with the doctor pausing frequently to consider lines of questioning, and consequently changing the direction of the interview (by clinical standards) relatively frequently. The patient eventually loses attention, and either ignores the questions, or needs to have them repeated several times. He complains of a headache and says that it is "hard to go much longer" because the "headache is getting really bad right now. I need a break." The doctor proceeds with further questions, and the patient responds by emphasizing that "my head is spinning like crazy. Can I get some Tylenol?" The doctor asks, "Do you think I can wrap up with a few questions?"

With no response, D2 proceeds with further questions. The patient comments, "I haven't been tested this long for a long time." In the observation room, doctors comment on the "difficult" interview, noting that the interviewer has trouble establishing a line of questioning. The patient does not become receptive and appears to experience pain. At this point, the specialized psychiatrist travels from the observation room to the interview room in order to assist the psychiatric resident with the interview, while the supervising doctor leaves to obtain some Tylenol. The expert doctor, D1, introduces himself to the patient and informs him that "We'll get you some Tylenol, break for one minute, and then continue." The patient insists that "No, usually it takes longer." He accepts and examines the Tylenol tablets, explaining that "plain Tylenol doesn't usually help too much. I need Motrin or something like that." The doctor replies: "Let's see how these

work; usually they're the same as Motrin. Give these a couple of minutes and see how they are." There is a two minute pause at which time D1 and D2 sit with the patient, as the latter waits for the Tylenol to 'work.' The patient finally breaks the silence of the wait, and remarks that "This is what prevents me from doing stuff. This is the part that gets really frustrating." The silence continues for another minute, and then the patient submits that he "would like to lie down." D1 pushes for more time, explaining that the interview will not take much longer, and proceeds with a few questions. The patient insists that "I don't know if I can handle this. The headache is pretty bad," and as D1 proceeds with further questions, P2 reiterates, "I need to get myself lying down. *I can't.*" D1 replies: "I need to ask you three or four questions and then you can go lie down."

An intensive interview follows, at an increased pace of questions and answers, and the patient becomes willing to respond to questions surrounding his history and current state. D1 presents a few questions regarding family history, discussing the patient's sister in particular, when the patient suddenly freezes and becomes silent. He begins to cry, and raises his left arm very slowly as if to test the joints, indicating pain. He says, "I can't speak," continues to cry, and moves his left arm very slowly in front of his body. He repeats, "I can't speak. I can hear, but I can't speak." He waits for his arm to 'crack,' and then seems to feel slightly better, but reports that the arm "feels numb" and "is hurting." D1 tests various ranges of motion with the patient's arm, while attempting to soothe the patient with sympathetic commentary. Following an examination of the arm and some questions regarding pain level with various arm movements, D1 asks, "Did you get any of these experiences with your arm while your sister was with you?" The doctors in the observation room comment that this is a very

good question, since the arm episode began right when they were talking about the sister. The patient does not seem to acknowledge the question, and the interview is terminated shortly thereafter.

### ***Post-Interview Discussion***

Chart record/history: The car accident was not major, the patient was not hospitalized at that time. He drove home and was fine for a couple of months. Then, he began to have problems with concentration, grades, headaches, etc. His family members attest that he suffers from anger spurts, but never unprovoked.

The doctors agree that the interview was not successful, that the patient was difficult to engage, and D2 admits that he had trouble controlling the interview and deciding on a specific line of questioning:

D1: There was a blankness about him (but that could be a neuroleptic effect).

D: The conversation was manipulated by the patient. He brings the topic back to his desire to get off medication, to his agenda.

With reference to the arm episode, D1 describes the “slow sinuous motion of the left arm with flexing motion” as unnatural, strange and inconsistent, insisting that it “does not make sense. It could not happen physiologically.” He notes that while he was examining the arm, the patient was “blinking quite fast,” deducing that the patient was “not out of control” (of his arm). D1 is strongly inclined to diagnose malingering, or, more specifically, “Abnormal Illness Behaviour.” The supervising doctor holds that the interview demonstrated “disorganization” (likely underlying a pathology of the frontal lobe) and that according to *DSM-IV* criteria, the diagnosis should be disorganized schizophrenia.

### ***Observational Note***

With reference to the arm episode, D1 is willing to commit to a diagnosis of ‘malingering,’ even though the patient was crying, expressing distress, and would not have been present for the episode at all if he had been released upon his earlier and repeated requests to terminate the interview and to go lie down. Moreover, D1 insists that the range of motion of the patient’s arm, and his ability to perform certain movements, in conjunction with his complaints, are severely ‘inconsistent,’ as is the report of pain during movement. D1 is convinced that the patient’s complaint and the entire arm episode, as already presented—as occurred—are (retroactively) “physiologically impossible.” This is ironic in the context of the patient’s own impossible diagnosis of himself, when he says, “I can’t speak,” thereby simultaneously producing and nullifying his own diagnostic claim. With reference to the patient’s headache, the doctors seem to believe that regular Tylenol can help the ‘true’ headache immediately, even in the context in which this was handled in the interview (i.e. two doctors and an observation room full of people staring at the patient, while the latter waits a minute for the medication to take effect and relieve the headache).

### **Case 4: Patient 4/Doctor 3**

*As if awareness was left to us only for us to know what we cannot bear to know.*  
(Blanchot, Step 124)

### ***Clinical Interview***

Patient 4 is a 26 year old woman, agitated and resentful that she had just been woken up, with no breakfast, for the purpose of this interview. She brings a cup of tea and an orange. She enters the room, expresses her annoyance, approaches her chair near

the one-way mirror, stands facing the observation room, before sitting down, and exclaims: “Enjoy it! It’s important for you. Not for me. I don’t give a shit about this.” The interview is conducted by an advanced psychiatric resident (female). During the interview, P4 submits that she “crossed the ‘frontier’—the border—which most rational, scientific men don’t think about.” She remarks that “Everybody was me. I was everybody,” and proposes that “Schizophrenic or crazy people on the street, if you look at them like this, they know what you’re thinking.” To illustrate ‘our experience in the world,’ she draws a diagram (Figure 3) on a notepad, featuring a dot labeled “US” inside a square, inside a bigger square, inside a bigger square, and holds it up to the one way mirror as if to teach a classroom full of people, exclaiming “experiment.” It is clear to the people in the observation room that she meant to say “experience.”

She describes her experience in a restaurant, where she worked as a server prior to hospitalization, wherein she was convinced that customers were able to read her bad thoughts. She remembers thinking that a specific woman was disgustingly fat and should not be ordering such a huge and greasy meal, and then realizing with horror, for certain, that the woman could read her thoughts and was in turn thinking back hurtful and angry thoughts. P4 answers questions about family history, social background, psychiatric history, and so on. Upon being asked the perfunctory question (for the third time), has it ever been so bad that she felt life was not worth living, or that she could not go on, she replies: “I don’t want to die—how many times do I have to tell you that?!”

### ***Post-Interview Discussion***

D: There was a flamboyant nature to her presentation.

D: Lots of swearing and loudness. She was ‘disinhibited.’



D: Definitely a performer.

D: There was loss of ego boundaries.

D: Here is a person who is having difficulty making sense of the world around her.

The doctors discuss the patient's 'histrionic personality' and previous delusional behaviour, and produce a unanimous diagnosis encompassing schizophrenic disturbance and bipolar affective disorder—type one.

***Observational Note***

Both the interview and the subsequent discussion were in keeping with clinical criteria as discussed earlier, and provided a straight-forward representation of such criteria at work in the clinical setting. The patient is diagnosed with the inability to sensor her own world, with the failure to presuppose the sense of the world around her, the sense which conditions the diagnostic act itself. Her readiness to address and control her surroundings, and her "sarcastic" interventions toward members in the observation room, were rendered (by the observing members) slightly unusual for the setting, and took most doctors in the room by surprise.

**Case 9: Patient 9/Doctor 3**

*Free me from the too long speech.* (Blanchot, *Step 50*)

Patient 9 is a 24 year old male who lives alone in an apartment, and worked in a book store before admission to hospital. The interview is conducted by D3 (advanced psychiatric resident; female). The patient stares downward, and takes a while before answering each question, responding very slowly:

P9: It takes a long time to answer sometimes.

D3: Do the thoughts disappear?

P9: [pause . . .] Yeah.

When asked about the reason for his hospitalization, P9 replies: “I was going to kill myself and I didn’t want to, so I came here.” He explains that he bought sleeping pills at London Drugs and was sitting on the side walk, contemplating. The doctor continues, “Sometimes when people feel low or sad, they also have a lot of bad feelings that they can’t quite make sense of. Has that happened to you?” After a long pause, the patient submits, “No.” The doctor proceeds to ask questions regarding mood fluctuations, and then instructs the patient to memorize three words—poem, statue, peaches—which she will ask him to repeat at the end of the interview. She then continues to ask further questions, and the patient takes a considerably long time to answer each question, at times not answering at all. D3 asks, “When you try to think of the answers to questions, do other things come into your mind?” P9 replies, “The words ‘poem, statue, peaches’ are going around in my head for a long time.”

### ***Post-Interview Discussion***

The patient has been admitted to hospital 4 days ago. All parties agree that he presents “idiosyncratic abstract thought,” that he has “difficulty initiating process” and that he displays “perplexity.” There is no evidence of an organic condition. The doctors produce the following diagnoses respectively: i) preferred diagnosis of schizophrenia; differential mood disorder, schizoaffective; ii) schizophrenic illness; iii) schizophrenia; major depression, bipolar II, schizoaffective. The patient will be treated with the neuroleptic (anti-psychotic drug) Risperidone.

### ***Observational Note***

The main reason for the preferred diagnosis is “idiosyncratic thought,” as outlined earlier under disorders of the form and flow of thought. The doctors have trouble understanding the patient, his long pauses, and his occasional lack of acknowledgment of the questions and of the interview itself. They conclude that he has trouble with understanding or organizing (both the questions and his own thoughts), and diagnose “perplexity” on his part. As with most cases (with the exception of case 2, where one specialized psychiatrist diagnosed ‘abnormal illness behaviour,’ and another preferred ‘disorganized schizophrenia’), although there may be some mild disagreement among parties during the discussion, the final diagnoses among doctors tend to correspond to one another homogeneously. It is rare, in this particular setting of the clinical/teaching series, for one doctor to seriously discount or confront another, and most colleagues tend to follow one another’s lead in their listing of the final diagnosis.

### **Case 10: Patient 10/Doctor 3**

*Loss is impossible.* (Blanchot, *Step 68*)

### ***Clinical Interview***

P10 is a 42 year old woman who was evicted from her home (room in a house) in Abbotsford, and consequently went to the welfare office in Vancouver, where she pleaded for help unsuccessfully, without “getting any.” She subsequently came to the hospital and checked herself in. She begins to fidget with her hands as the interview progresses, and explains that she was evicted because she “was hearing voices with negative energies”:

D3: What kinds of voices?

P10: Derogatory voices calling me names like ‘a piece of shit.’

P10 describes hearing her mother’s voice and her sister’s voice, and explains that the “energy associated with the voices was negative, and I was getting bad treatment from everyone everywhere I went.” She reports that she has trouble sleeping, and sleeps maybe one hour per night. The doctor find this remarkable.

D3 asks how long the patient has been hearing voices, and when did this all begin.

P10 locates the beginning in February 1997, at a stressful time when she “lost my daughter.” The courts “took my daughter” and certified the patient. She was allowed supervised visitations with her daughter, “but not in the past six months, due to a restraining order.” The patient describes feeling like someone is out to get her, and experiencing “negative energy everywhere.” Upon being asked how she feels now, she remarks that she feels safe in the hospital. D3 proceeds with further questions:

D3: Do you have special abilities?

P10: Special abilities?

D3: Yes.

P10: I’ve always been able to see future events before they happen.

P10 explains that she sees future events in dreams. At a pause in the interview, P10 remarks, “I’m starting to feel really uncomfortable here.” There is no response. She continues, “I just felt like someone is putting a little bit of pressure on me.” The doctor proceeds with the interview, in an attempt to cover psychiatric history, family history and general questions. P10 submits that she was previously in the hospital last year in December, that she had used heroin and morphine in the past (last use was four years

ago), and is on methadone right now. It has been four years since she left Edmonton. She smokes, and does not drink. She smokes pot about once per month. She is on social assistance. She worked as a ‘dancer’ before, but refuses to talk about this, insisting that this is not something she would like to share in the context of the interview. Her daughter is 11 years old. The patient was born and raised in Edmonton. Her mother died in 1994; her father died in 1991. Her child’s father is “not in the picture.” When she was pregnant, at 31, she went back to Edmonton to have the baby.

The patient requests to break briefly, in order to go and fetch some tea. Upon her return, she is asked a few further questions regarding the voices:

D3: How do you make sense of the voices?

P10: I don’t make sense of it; I can’t make sense of it.

### ***Post-Interview Discussion***

The first topic of this discussion focuses on the patient’s reluctance to speak about her work. The supervising doctor would like to “break down the categories of why the patient might not want to talk about her work...” He suggests that “the patient may be losing patience or interest, and might be feeling nervous or threatened.” Regarding the interview technique, he explains to D3 that “there are *this* many categories of history (or data) that you need to collect, but do not jeopardize rapport for the sake of data. Make the patient feel comfortable and then come back and get data at some later date.” The supervising doctor noticed that the patient’s “eyes are unequal. Her eyes do not look in the same direction. There are systemic diseases that can give you this eye disorder. There is a physical feature that can have direct impact (a brain tumor?) on the phenomena she is describing.”

The discussion continues with further comments on the patient's affect, reliability and accessibility:

D: She was not expressing enough affect; not as much as people normally would in the context of the interview.

D: There are gaps in her story.

D: What's happening here? Why is it that we don't have the full story?

D (medical student): We must consider her reliability.

D: How *accessible* was she? If she is not accessible, then what are the limitations of access? There are two possibilities: Either 1) she doesn't know; or 2) she doesn't want to tell us. [pause] Both are in play.

It is noted that methadone can cause psychosis, and that the patient is on the drug Loxapine, which may have caused her fidgeting. The diagnoses, around the room, are as follows: schizoaffective, psychosis; schizophrenia, or drug-induced psychosis; schizophrenia, or drug-induced psychosis; schizophrenia, or drug-induced psychosis; psychosis not otherwise specified, or schizophrenia.

### ***Observational Note***

This post-interview discussion is paradigmatic of diagnostic approaches to schizophrenia. The diagnosis features an evaluation of the interviewing technique, an evaluation of the 'success' of the interview, and the application of interpretative diagnostic restrictions to the patient's responses, even where the response exceeds the parameters of the restriction itself. Instances in the responses which fall outside of, or disrupt, the category of 'story,' are identified as 'gaps.' Instances which cannot fit any prescribed category are classified as 'inaccessible.' During the interview, the patient is

instructed to ‘make sense’ of her voices. She refuses this approach to the voices, insisting that she cannot ‘make sense of it.’ It is noted that there may be an organic or ‘physical’ factor responsible for features in the patient’s response, but no medical tests have been performed yet, so for now, the diagnosis remains schizophrenia or drug-induced psychosis.

### **Case 3: Patient 3/Doctor 3**

*Impenetrable, as if they concealed themselves by their transparency.* (Blanchot, Step 53)

#### ***Clinical Interview***

The interview between Patient 3, a 25 year old male, and Doctor 3 (advanced psychiatric resident; female) presents the most extreme permutation of the diagnostic *crisis* in my series of observations. I do not underestimate the inaccessibility of the patient’s responses. Nor do I forget that the patient, in this case, may (or may not) wish for help, for help in making his own thoughts thinkable. What, in such a case, conditions the moment of unthinkability for both patient and doctor? Is it the moment of the attempt to think outside of thought? The question, in this context, is not whether or not the responses are accessible, or how to make them more accessible, but rather what conditions the moment of inaccessibility itself? What conditions the moment in which the interpretative framework, reevaluating itself, must render itself impossible in the face of a space which exceeds its own parameters? What do the parameters themselves presuppose, in this question/answer exchange? What conditions the moment in which the question questions itself? I have chosen to present this case last, and to provide a considerable sample of the transcript from this particular interview, as follows:

D3: So let's just start with some background information.

P3: Okay.

D: How old are you?

P: I'm 25.

D: You're 25. And whereabouts are you living?

P: Right now at the hospital, actually.

D: Yeah, and before?

P: On the lookout, actually.

D: On the lookout.

P: Yeah.

D: How long have you been there for?

P: Um. I've been there for about seven, seven to ten days. It's really hard to remember.

D: Have you had an apartment or something of your own before that?

P: I was living with my sister at the time, but we have uh certain.... Certain uh, opposite uh, points of consciousness, so we don't really want to be around each other that much... Or we have a tendency to, uh, fix things that are broken.

D: Hm.

P: Such as, uh, uh I don't know, uh mentally ill people and retarded people and you know people who just got screwed over by archaic forms of, uh, understanding.

D: And, sorry, how do you fix those?



P: Well, uh, personally I, uh, I reach a point where I uh I basically stay out of it, you know.

D: Okay.

P: I'm mostly, uh, like I usually I dunno it's weird because I mostly work for the spokespeople [Andy Warhol] um, so I'd [Jacob Pistorius as well] um, so, uh, at the same time, and then you know I gradually developed my form of consciousness which is essentially uh, uh, omnipotent.

D: Okay.

P: So I have, uh, the ability to, uh, to you know astrally project and travel to other re[seen(?)] um universes and like develop group consciousness and stuff.

D: So how long have you been able to do that?

P: To have that? Um, well like the basic diagnosis would be manic uh dementia. You know I generally don't slip into lower sights unless I'm uh unless I'm you know suffering for other people which is essentially what is my nature, so.

D: We'll come back to this a little bit later. Um, so you said you were living with your sister prior to being in the lookout and how long have you been living with her?

P: Uh, I've been in Vancouver for about eight and a half weeks, maybe ten weeks.

D: And where were you before that?

P: Prince George, actually.

D: Prince George. Have you grown up there, or

P: Yeah I grew up in Prince George, so

D: And what was it that brought you here to Vancouver?

P: Uh, it's a great city. Um, there's a lot more free will here? As far as I understand it? Uh, but ultimately honest on a psychiatrist sound level Prince George is a 7.125 and Vancouver is more of a 9.78. It depends on how you want to perceive the realities, right.

D: I'm not sure I understand what you mean.

P: Well you have to speak in reasonable terminology, right. You know I think we fixed this one pretty well. Um, so it's like we're looking at about 250 trillion years of modest peace and happiness but you know it's gonna flip over soon, like the Aquarian age is approaching and basically we're entering the dawning of the age of Aquarius right? So I mean it's a simple matter of other wiser more peaceful existing beings to, uh [we're gonna carry aids], um, people entering this reality from like a, like a, a liquid state, so I could publish a lot, but I don't, I don't generally publish myself, because I'm not looking for any kind of status. I try and remain a ghost figure, you know.

D: How is it that you came to be in the hospital?

P: Um, well, I was basically leading myself into a situation that would ultimately lead the rest of us to greater understanding, so I'm working for the system at this point, always have been..

D: Now how did you physically come to be here? Within an ambulance, or yourself or

P: No I was brought in with a wheel chair actually, to this ward from A.P.U. and I was driven to A.P.U. by Arnie and Ray.

D: Who are they?

P: My father, um, um, and who else, um, um...

D: Family?

P: Yeah family brought me here. I had to basically, you know, like deal with a hydroseal to get into melody house at this point, you know. (laughs)

D: What were the concerns they had about you?

P: Well they were understanding that I was moderately suicidal at the time on the outside, um, because

D: Do you feel that was the case?

P: No, actually, it wasn't, I was just expanding my consciousness a little more, so uh

D: In what way?

P: Well, uh, I was becoming nescient as opposed to omniscient? But, so my mind was becoming, I was, I was, like too much cocaine leads to, uh, leads to, uh, really high levels of consciousness.

D: Uhum.

P: Which is why it has to be selectively given to people?

D: Uhum.

P: So we're dealing with more of a structured environment for the hard narcotics, now, like you could still find it around if you have the appropriate connections like cops and uh you know.

D: Was there any particular behaviours that you had been doing that caused people concern?; Have you made any suicidal gestures, or

P: No, actually I don't think so.

D: Okay. Was there anything that you were doing that people expressed a concern to you about?

P: Um, not [method acting], no.

D: Oh, okay. So what concerned them about that?

P: Well, you know, basically you have to keep a lid on certain situations.

D: Okay.

P: Because people are accepted at face value, you know, there's gonna be a lot of freaking out which is why I want to hang out with people who are labeled as of accepted particular labels. So, like, if you want to give me a diagnosis again, it's dementia with manic depression. You know, so basically I'm full-capped as multi-dimensional which is what dementia is, you know. And then we gradually change that to schizophrenia because there's so many different levels of them, right? So, basically, um, I don't know, we're still deciding whether or not it should be legislated, you know, whether medication should be legislated or not, like, we have that in one country but we don't want that in every country. You know,

D: Hm, You mentioned something about the harder drugs as well... you mentioned cocaine—I just wonder if that's been,

P: Sure, what I

D: if you've been experimenting

P: Sure, what I use, but uh, basically, I generally keep my... uh... well, you know  
I'm at a point with telekinesis where people are just starting to notice me a little

bit, because you know, certain activities can occur in uh... it would be a perceptual difference between two people, so I mean I can't really show you the telling right now... um...

D: So, aside from this astroprojection and telekinesis and other things, are there other powers that you have become aware of or developed?

P: Uh, I'm uncertain, I'm uncertain, like it's uh

D: Have you always been able to do these things?

P: Well, it's actually, we all are capable of doing these things, it's just a matter of, you know, what uh, the schizophrenics are gonna allow us to do, right?

D: So they are controlling our ability to do these things?

P: Um, well, I think they're monitored by higher powers than that [but of course...]

D: Such as?

P: Well, I'm uncertain, like, I mean talk to uh, you know, if you want to really get a load on, on realities and stuff like that, then talk to, uh, talk to people who are, are really you know capable of talking, because like, I'm just a collection of memories in certain ways.

D: Uhum.

P: You know, so we can get back to Andy Warhol and stuff, and find out, so. Like, we haven't done that before and that's a stabilizing and testing effect...

D: Tell me a bit about your relationship with those people.

P: Well, uh, you know, Andy was a brilliant idea—it was a great idea and it was, and it was an appropriate time for certain things to happen, like, I don't, I

generally don't, uh, go beyond what the norm is for the universal law of the area, which is essentially what's going on around us...

D: Is he somebody that you've spoken to personally? (or you've had...)

P: Um, well, I've had thought-transfer experiences with Warhol through television, I mean I do reach beyond...

D: What is that like?

P: Um, well, it's a dangerous thing to have because you can really, you can teach people a lot, like, you know, Americans they think I'm a great guy, you know, but I never gave them my last name, so I warned them about the Gulf Crisis, you know, which to me is like not a big deal and to a lot of psychiatrists that wouldn't be a big deal either, but we end up in a lot of trouble if we start, you know, working on our own repairs, um, because it leads to a utopian society that is essentially communist, and we don't want to have a completely communist society, because we're not all ready for a completely communist society, you know we don't want that, so we have a semi-socialistic economic system, like where people who are of greater matter, uh, superstar material, or Donald Trump material, or Onassis material, like one of my dad's idols was Onassis, right [Adolph Hitler] but, uh, that's just another form of Christian consciousness, right.

D: You mentioned the television in communicating (via the television)—have there been times when there has been a specific message there for you?

P: No.

D: No. So it was something that just everybody should have been aware of?

P: No, actually it's not, because, you know, we can't, everybody's gotta have a specific experience of reality or it's not fair, you know, it's simply not fair because certain people have put more work into humanity than other people... And the ones who have put the greatest work get the best situations, like, um, to be a psychiatrist and a person who would be classically diagnosed as schizophrenic by [union death (?)] psychology, would ultimately be [it's just a part on omniscience, but uh] would, ultimately be of high well standard, right, so I mean, but we're basically not allowed to link it to each other at this time because there would be too much healing, and if you're gonna mesmerize people, if you're not gonna work, you know, with your abilities, whatever they may be, you're gonna burn for a while in various forms... like, I've seen people in the mental health community who are essentially a part of it because, you know, they chose to suffer at a certain point—it's either pay now or pay later and I generally go in that one a lot...

D: It sounds like there are a lot of control issues going on... people being afraid of...

P: Yeah, oh yeah, well they protect right?

D: Has that happened to you, feeling like somebody is trying to take control of you or your actions or thoughts?

P: No, nothing like that no, I generally stick to myself and, you know, control myself with other forms that I exist in, right. So I have a tendency to create more wiser means...

D: There is no, sort of, external influence on you?

P: Um, well now I'm living in a shifted reality, right, so basically, like, the weirdest thing about it is, you know, I look like a person who doesn't exist yet...

D: I'm not sure what that means.

P: Well, you know, as a form of protection, because I know what's going on around us, right, we're dealing with a lot of fascism basically, on certain levels, right, but what is fascism? In English it's fashion. You know it's fashion—it's a stage, it's a trend... that we're going through so we'll come to greater understanding of ourself later.

D: Does fascism, does that affect you? Have you ever felt persecuted, or pursued?

P: Uh, personally, well, pursued I guess, but really in fact, I've never actually been martyred or anything like that to my recollection, you know.

D: Do you feel safe?

P: Oh yeah, yeah, well I'm not a Jesus Christ anyway, you know, but that's part of my consciousness, like you know,

D: Do these special abilities that you have, do they make other people sort of jealous, or you know, have you experienced other people sort of

P: Not yet, not yet, because you know, basically, essentially within us all there's like a core matter that has, uh, future and past understanding, you know and that's the ultimate thing that Jung was reaching for—he was reaching for the within part—the within/without you know, so you know I prefer to stick to the low areas, where I don't get wealthy, where I don't, you know I like the peach basically, so that's what this whole session is about and we all agree on it, so



D: This session this morning, you mean?

P: Yeah, it has more to do with education than with anything else.

D: Yes, yes it does.

P: So, but you know as far as psychiatry goes, I mean, basically, I'm in a predicament now where I've been diagnosed so many times differently by so many different geniuses, that the labels just won't hang any more... which is the reason why, you know, I'm here instead of at UBC... right? You know, so that's part of this place as well, you know, we can't, we don't have a great understanding of the people here. The odd thing about it is everyone has a certain capacity to discuss thought transfer issues, or, you know, various things, you know.

D: I'd like to explore some of the features of the diagnoses that you had.

P: Yeah, okay, sure.

D: Tell me what's your mood been like for a while, few weeks?

P: Well, it's varied so much. Like, I've gone through various forms of self-negotiation [?], right.

D: But overall would you say that you've felt happy, or sad?

P: Satisfied, complacent, basically, but I never achieve a happiness state or I have too much persona, and too much attraction from other people, right?

D: Has there ever been a time when your mood has been too elevated? People...-

P: Oh yeah, well I don't, like. I don't know the magnetism factor is uh... It's like, you know... Essentially, you know, I'm just another cosmic idea, basically.

D: Uhum.

P: You know, if the university around me decides to, uh, exterminate this line, then so be it.

D: When your mood was up like that, what uh, what were you noticing at the time?

P: Uh, a lot of a, a lot of external... well, like, the manic episode is often referred to as the 8-ball effect, right?

D: What was it like for you?

P: Too much, too much magnetism, you know?

D: I'm not sure I understand.

P: Well, it's more like people have the mixed conception that you require certain attention. Because in a manic state you're basically a child again, so you're protected by many external forces. That's what mania really is, and depression is the karmic expression of negative forces that we all essentially contain.

D: And have you experienced that in your past?

P: Oh yeah, yeah. Karmically? I've suffered, of course, I wouldn't be here if I hadn't, right? Like, it's not a game or a joke it's not a simple, you know, I'm not simply in the system to figure it out. I'm in here for a reason, you know, so.

D: When you have been depressed like that, has it ever been bad enough for you to want to end your life?

P: Oh yeah (laughs).

D: Have you ever attempted?

P: No, I'm too strong, actually. And the people around me, they're just, they're not gonna allow me-

D: What people are those?

P: My family and friends.

D: Ah, right, okay.

P: So, so like the average, the average, you know, truly schizophrenic person, like what-the-hell-is-it person, you know, could [mental health] consume the entire planet, right, you know that's just the average one. You know, you wanna talk about death rising from the grave. Like, there are so many, there are so many different factors involved [Roger Henry], so. But because I see and I do have a psychic facility as well, I have certain gnosi as well [virtualoptics]. So if someone was trying to push me out of my body and take over, I would defend it, right? And if someone was trying to do that to you, the schizophrenics would defend you, right?

D: Okay.

P: So it's actually 90% of them are good.

D: (at same time as P above) Has that ever happened to you?

P: Well, we've explored that to test me on strength levels and-

D: You've explored with?

P: With various people.

D: Ah.

P: You know, I don't wanna get into that—the names, right?

D: No, that's fine.

P: So, I mean, because certain people are ready to, you know, go onto a higher plane, and you know just leave the system [hyperdepraxic], so I have a tendency to rejuvenate at certain points. It's like an Indian thing.

D: I notice in certain points in a conversation some words come out.

P: Oh yeah.

D: What's... happening there?

P: That's another form of communication.

D: What sort of form?

P: Well, if you're not gonna use direct communication with people, you have to be able to introduce other subjects and concepts, like uh, like uh, a native person naturally would do. Like aboriginals, like it's a, you know we're just a bunch of teachers basically, right? So I mean we're just protecting the planet, and enjoying uh—you know there's sufferings that have been inflicted on us by other people, right, when we, when we, ghost ourselves.

D: Okay. There are a few more points that I wanted to clarify with you too about what your experience has been. I'm sure people have asked you before about unusual sensory experiences...

P: Right.

D: Has that ever been a factor [in what's happening]—

P: Oh yeah, I've had unusual sensory experiences.

D: Can you tell me about them?

P: Sensing at this point probably 40, I don't know, it depends on who's agreeing to what, right, and I don't want to become any kind of uh, you know, like I

published a movie a while ago called uh [psionically] um, what was it called again... uh I did two actually—I did “Powder,” and I did uh, I did another one, I did uh... you know with Travolta, you know. Like Travolta was, you know, he was destined to be a serious major superstar. You know, so we had to bring him back at certain points, right, and then eventually he’ll just find his appropriate place, and you know.

D: We were talking about sensory experiences. Have there been sort of auditory or visual experiences that are unique to yourself?

P: Never had an auditory or visual hallucination.

D: Tactile, or?

P: Or tactile sensations. Never anything that would be considered demonic.

D: What about something that wasn’t demonic?

P: Um, well I’ve had many experiences with, you know, conscious minds, you know. So I mean, like, I woke up when I was 21, which is pretty late for a person who’s native. But it’s pretty early for a person who is White. You know, so, most people, uh... Asians I don’t know why [of all people] they have a tendency to wake up spontaneously—it’s, like, really interesting. You know, so I mean we have to do something with them, right? So, most of the time I think it’s opium bands and things to keep the mind a little more down so that other planets will hear us.

D: I’d like to just explore a bit of your background-

P: Sure-

D: In connection to some of the native experiences and stuff—you're not native, are you?

P: Yes.

D: You are?

P: Aha.

D: And where were you born?

P: Prince George.

D: You were born in Prince George, and what was your family situation?

P: Um, intensely dysfunctional, by choice, to teach and guide, which is essentially what native people do.

D: And how many children were in the family?

P: Two.

D: Just yourself and your sister?

P: Yeah.

D: And your parents?

P: Um... My parents uh... Well, my dad is an interesting guy. He's one of the hardest working men around. Uh, um, he has a tendency to shift his consciousness rapidly, you know. So, you know, but essentially, um, you know, we're looking at different people I know. We're not, you know, I'm at a point where I can show people a lot of stuff, so they have greater understanding, you know.

D: And your mother, what was she like?

P: Um, she's a fascinating woman. Highly intelligent, but she's like, she's like beyond psychic somehow, and she just understands things. She's on an understanding level? Like, she's like the antithesis of Sigmund Freud and she's on a very high level of—I'm not gonna tell you everything, um, you gotta do the work—so, maybe she's on a level of Jung, right?

D: What sort of a relationship do you have with your parents now?

P: Good.

D: [you're close to them?]

P: I've never actually been physically abused, you know, I've never actually had an incest experience, but you know I try to keep a certain amount of dirt on me so I remain relatively outside.

D: Uhum.

P: So I can enjoy the freedom of, you know, artistic creation, because what are we gonna do if it's planet art? You know? What would we do? Planet Art? How weird would that be? That would be as bad as galactic vampires, right? (laughs) You know, that's why Warhol didn't talk to anyone. But because I lived as Warhol I didn't really talk to anyone and Jacko as well. Umm. You know I think what the royals are doing, because of lady Di and—which is unfortunate, but I mean she chose it, um, as far as I know—[gnosis] to acquire knowledge supernaturally without the assistance of regular reality.

D: Can I interrupt just for a few-

P: Oh, certainly.

D: Because we were talking a bit about your family background.

P: Right, yeah, so was I, but anyway...

D: Oh okay, I was having trouble following you a little bit.

P: Yeah.

D: Do things sometimes get a little bit um...

P: No, I generally just tell people what they need to know and then I start to ramble (laughs).

D: Do your thoughts seem to be going a little fast for you?

P: Well, hyper-speed, but uh, you know, I generally keep it toned down to a moderate level so people can understand me verbally.

D: I wanted to ask you about school and what that was like for you.

P: Interesting, interesting. Like being essentially female in a male. The container, as we call those things after a while. Like, I mean Warhol is around for so long, he went through so many cultures and societies-

D: Did you have any friends as a child?

P: Um, I had appropriate friends at appropriate times. Like, I have no desire to hurt people, you know, it's an obvious tactic.

D: Are you still close to any of them now?

P: Uh, unfortunately few of them. But like the main problem is that people have the—they have the conception that I'm gonna make it big at certain points... so they want to hang on to me, right?

D: Right. Were you finding it difficult to make friends, the ones that you had, or were they easy?



P: Uh, you know, friendships and compassionate people have just come to me naturally, you know?

D: What were you like in school academically?

P: Brilliant. But I was born like Einstein. I mean, what do you do when you're 14 and you have 74% of your brain? What do you do? I mean you can't deal with math or you become too physical. Then you have no concept of hyper-realities.

D: So how far did you go for?

P: I went up to grade 10, then I got a GED, and then I went to CFC and they offered me a Ph.D. in sociology. So, you know, it was a non-verbal thing. It was like—you know if you don't do sociology, we're gonna be like really pissed off with you, because it's a brand new philosophical system, where it's like a point where you can understand reality on a more rational level... so it's a natural combination of psychiatric concepts and philosophy... which is art—an extension of art, right—which is creation, which is freedom, which is anarchy-

D: Was there any particular work that you had,... a job?

P: Oh yeah, yeah—I've done construction, I've worked at espresso bars...

D: What was the longest job that you had?

P: The longest job that I had (laughs)? Connecting time... um... So, I don't know, roofing, I guess—10 years, 11 years, you know, but I burn fast, you know, I have a tendency to burn out. So then I have to regroup. So right now, uh, you know I need cocaine or some kind of stimulant, like a lot of caffeine, to keep myself up. Because, you know, regardless of the age of the container or what's in

it, I still have the ability to suffer from chronic fatigue, which is part of what I have as well, you know.

D: When were you last able to work?

P: 2 years ago?

D: Okay. You mentioned the drugs (the cocaine), so when were you last using the drugs, or have you used them?

P: Um, I think I used stuff that would kind of be classified as narcotic substances-

D: like

P: like maybe heroin, maybe cocaine, maybe speed, maybe LSD, but we're not sure because we can't figure out what it is.

D: You're not sure. Has alcohol ever been part of this?

P: I can't get addicted to things, you know, it's just part of what I possess because some of the things I've done in the past.

D: Okay. And in your family has there been any abuse of substances?

P: Well, I'm not gonna talk about the cigarettes now because it's gonna cost talking, um so um

D: What about other, um, mental illnesses or difficulties in your family?

P: Um, we've had eccentricities, but we've never actually had a clear cut case of (talking at same time as D)

D: And what about your physical health?

P: It's usually pretty good, actually. I generally—I'm fairly healthy now. Like, I think I found the appropriate substances to put in my body, right, or people noticed me in appropriate times and gave me the right stuff, right, so anyway.

There's so much—there's mushroom soup, I mean god, how many acid trips do you need to go on, right? (laughs) You know, it's basically a branch of suasimon (?), as far as I'm concerned.

D: Sorry, I didn't understand that word.

P: Well mushroom soup is like a, an aphrodisiac, a euphoric substance, right?

D: Oh, I see, okay—it's a chemical name that you were mentioning?

P: Yeah, so it's a lot like peyote, more accurately, but I generally don't tell people everything, or I sound like a know-it-all and I don't need to be that. You know, because people can hang labels on me at this point, so if I am essentially an asshole right, people can label me with that—I don't care, you know. But, you know, certain people have superseded, right, because you know there are big players involved now.

D: I'm wondering you seem to have a fair bit of knowledge about psychiatry and the system and stuff—when did you first come in contact with it?

P: Hm. Uh, well, you know if you want to talk about ah... what's his name um... the most brilliant guy these days, uh, Jung's current form. Like once you get into certain forms of existence, it's really difficult to get out of them, especially if they're good and they're healthy people.

D: What I mean, more particularly though—

P: Yeah, I took my sister when she was hospitalized, and that's my essential first [time machine] [Warhol]-

D: What was she hospitalized for?

P: Suicidal tendencies, um, and they did the appropriate thing (laughs).

D: And when was that?

P: Ah, that was in... probably in 87/88, maybe even 85 or 86.

D: So that was your first contact yourself with psychiatry?

P: Yeah, oh yeah.

D: And were you admitted to a hospital for treatment at all?

P: No.

D: So when was the first time you were contacting a psychiatrist for your own mental health?

P: Um, I can't age beyond certain points because of certain needs of places and certain times, right?

D: Have there been psychiatric hospitalizations in your past?

P: Um, yeah, oh yeah, I've been hospitalized twice. You know, I have to, uh, you know I have to get entrenched, right?

D: Where were those hospitalizations?

P: UBC and PGRH. Um, I've just seen a lot of stuff you know and I was-

D: Seen?

P: You know, other times and stuff (I'm generally a doom's day-)

(P and D talking at same time)

D: Like a vision or something like that, or?

P: Well, um, yeah, basically. Well no, I have the ability to enter other times and have a look and bring things back, to teach people more, you know. So I mean that's basically what's out there, if people want to go to conquer the universe, right?

D: And, what sort of treatments did you receive when you were-

P: Um, interesting ones. You know, I had to heal my brain basically. I don't know what happens to-

D: Were you on medication?

P: Um,.. um.., uh, yeah. Pepetyl?, olanthopine?, ethadol, paxil, zoloft, loxapine, uh.

D: And the first time you were in the hospital, that was in Prince George?

P: No, actually that was at UBC [experimental ward]. They didn't know why I broke myself because I was [essentially due in?] too long, but I had to get here somewhere.

D: How long did you stay there for?

P: Approximately two and a half months. My usual stays are around two and a half months. And that's generally how long people will tolerate me in a hospital.

D: And after you left the hospital, what sort of follow-up did you receive?

P: Um, generally brilliant psychiatrists who—

D: So you saw somebody weekly or—

P: Uh, usually monthly actually, I mean cause with me things, uh, in those times things [it felt long (?)] wouldn't change traumatically. But now I could use out-patient care, you know if I got into a group home, so

D: Were you maintained on medication at that time?

P: Oh yeah, like I've never actually gone off my medication without uh...

During the few remaining minutes of the interview, the doctor instructs the patient to remember three words—hunger, station, pride—which she will ask him to repeat at the

end of the interview. She instructs him to explain the proverb “Too many cooks spoil the broth,” and he complies. The patient further contends that “I’m as easily distracted as the average lesbian,” that “I had externalized thought transfer experience,” and that “I’m not mentally ill.” The doctor forgets to ask P3 to repeat the three words.

### ***Post-Interview Discussion***

Doctor 3 presents a case summary. The following discussion ensues:

SD (supervising doctor) to D3: There were all sorts of reasons why it was difficult to obtain the history. The question is how did the interview go from your perspective? What was it like?

D3: Well, I found it extremely difficult—and I’m sure that showed—difficult to organize him and difficult to kind of keep him on track, because of... you know, the way he answered questions was completely oblique sometimes... tangential, or even... completely unrelated answers to the questions. For me it felt very difficult to get the information that I needed. It was very frustrating.

SD: How did your attempts to add structure to the interview and to be more specific... well how did that work? Do you think you did that?

D3: Well, I managed to get some of the information. I mean I didn’t get it all, but I think I did manage to put some structure back in. He, most of the time, seemed to be receiving it pretty well [ . . . ]

[ . . . ]

SD: I think his speech was predominantly slightly speeded up most of the time, and at times it was rapid. The volume of the speech was well within normal.

What about his mood or affect? Did he seem happy or sad through most of the interview?

Dx: Quite normal.

SD: I think there were several examples of inappropriate affect (smile/laugh at inappropriate times). He showed more affect (somewhat expansive affect) in this room than other people would have.

(Dy/Dz comment on tangentiality and derailment)

SD: There were multiple examples of tangentiality and derailment? How severe?

Dz: It's not to the point where you can't understand a single thing he's saying, but it's to the point where you'd have to hang on and go for the ride.

SD: So he's thought disordered to the point where it's thought dysfunction.

[. . .]

(further discussion of tangentiality, etc.)

SD: Ambiguous Reference—we don't know what he's talking about and he assumes that we know what he's talking about. Schizophrenics do that.

Dz: Also, he called Kitsilano Skitsilano.

(discussion of neologisms)

[. . .]

SD: Do you think he completely made up words?

(All agree, No)

SD: Misuse of Meaning and Word Substitution: he uses the wrong word that sounds similar in the context of the word that he wants to use. A neologism is a

new word. There is another name (can't remember right now) for making a new word out of an existing one.

SD: So there's this word substitution, there's this inappropriate use of words, there may be this creation of new words, and there may be even neologisms.

SD: He does one more thing that's interesting. One or two words keep popping up—'time machine' and 'Andy Warhol'—it's an Intrusive Word that has nothing to do with what we're talking about. A single word that pops up, and then he continues with the flow of the sentence.

[. . .]

SD: What about his sentences? The structure of the sentences themselves?

Db: I guess the sentences, if you break it down, the paragraphs make sense, individual sentences don't make sense, and then the individual parts of a sentence also don't make sense.

SD: My impression was, most of the time when I listened carefully, his sentence structure was intact most of the time. There were a couple of examples where it wasn't even a sentence—he just rambled and even the sentence structure itself breaks down—but most of the time he's speaking in sentences. There's a subject, there's a verb... He's speaking in real sentences, BUT, even there, the concepts don't match up. There's many many examples where the sentence structure is intact, but the sentence itself may not be making sense—you know, it's extremely difficult to follow. So I think he's very thought disordered at multiple levels.

[. . .]

(discussion of possibility of delusions)



Dy: of grandiosity, and bizzare ideas or thinking.

SD to D3: You didn't pursue it enough to nail it down, but he probably is delusional. I think they're grandiose, they involve telepathic experiences. In fact, he said something very very early on that you never followed up on. He used the word 'telekinesis,' so I would like to know what telekinetic powers he has, and I suspect I would call him delusional as well.

SD: Does he have any perceptual delusions?

D3: That's very difficult to clarify.

The discussion continues and focuses on sentence structure, delusions of grandiosity, bizzare ideas and thinking, and questions of reliability and accessibility. One doctor contends that the patient did not answer the proverb question satisfactorily, that he answered "a proverb with a proverb. He creates one instead of answering." A medical student suggests that the patient was "inconsistent" and "unreliable." The supervising doctor corrects this claim as follows: "No. He's difficult to access. Unreliability indicates you don't believe what he says. But here, he's difficult to access. He's inconsistent because of thought disorder. Therefore, he is disorganized and not unreliable." All doctors (about 7) agree that a preferred diagnosis would include schizophrenic symptoms, and some think that a differential diagnosis would include mood disorder symptoms, but all agree that it was very difficult to determine to what degree the factor of drugs and narcotic substances plays a role. The patient is to remain in the ward and continue to be treated with anti-psychotic medication.

### ***Observational Note***

*Does the feeling of an absolute lack of communication, of not being able to share unhappiness with the unhappy one, transport 'me' into this unhappiness, or does it limit itself to the unhappiness of the uncommunicable? (Blanchot, Step 127)*

Suppose there were no questions, in the context of this clinical interview setting, what would the answers be? The patient's responses, much of the time, do not presuppose the question, do not respond, as an answer, to the preceding question, but nevertheless figure in response, shifting in and out of the question/answer framework. The interviewer, in an effort to reinsert or regain the framework, reminds the patient that "We were talking about sensory experiences," or "Can I interrupt just for a few- [moments . . .] Because we were talking a bit about your family background," or else attempts to reflect upon the difficulty of maintaining the framework itself: "I'm not sure I understand what you mean," and "I notice in certain points in the conversation some words come out [ . . .] What's... happening there," or "I was having trouble following you a little bit" and "Do your thoughts seem to be going a little fast for you?" The patient's discourse, at times proceeding by association of words inside itself (e.g. "The longest job I had [was . . .] roofing, [ . . .] but I burn fast [ . . .] I have a tendency to burn out," or "Essentially, you know, I'm just another cosmic idea, basically [ . . .] if the *university* around me decides to, uh, exterminate this line, then so be it"), does not always address the question of the interviewer, but rather the question continuously raised by his own discourse, from within, as it is being articulated: "I generally just tell people what they need to know and then I start to ramble."

During the post-interview discussion, the interviewer questions the framework of the interview itself, interrogating the interrogative domain of the interview. The supervising doctor states that “The question is how did the interview go from your perspective? What was it like?” D3 submits that it was “difficult to organize him,” difficult to organize the patient, his thoughts, his discourse, “because of [. . .] the way he answered questions,” because of the way he produced “completely unrelated answers to the questions.” She submits, moreover, that “For me it felt very difficult to get the information that I needed.” In an effort to reflect on the nature of clinical questioning itself, in the context of this interview, SD asks, “How did your attempts to add structure to the interview [turn out . . .] Do you think you did that?” D3 replies: “I managed to get some of the information. I mean I didn’t get it all, but I think I did manage to put some structure back in” (75).

One doctor remarks, regarding P3’s speech, that “It’s not to the point where you can’t understand a single thing he’s saying, but it’s to the point where you’d have to hang on and go for the ride.” What entails such a ride? Where do the moments of inaccessibility materialize? SD notes that “we don’t know what he’s talking about and he assumes that we know what he’s talking about. Schizophrenics do that.” Do they *assume*? If so, what conditions the moment in which the receiver gets something that could not have been foreseen by the utterer? In a scene where the patient answers “a proverb with a proverb,” where he “creates one instead of answering one,” where he answers a question with a questionable response, the presuppositions which separate question from answer in the first place are called into question (‘the question is how did the interview go’), coming up against that which is not answer and not not answer, not

sense and not not sense, at the moment of diagnosis, at the moment of the decision regarding the undecidable, or in the middle of madness itself.

## NOTES

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<sup>1</sup> I quote, with Peter Liddle's permission, from personal correspondence with him. Liddle, Peter. Letter to the author. 18 November 1998.

<sup>2</sup> The *DSM-IV* states that "No laboratory findings have been identified that are diagnostic of Schizophrenia" (280). However, in groups of persons *already diagnosed* with schizophrenia, "Structural abnormalities in the brain" (280) have been detected.

<sup>3</sup> Handout distributed by Dr. Peter Liddle, Jack Bell Chair in Schizophrenia Studies.

Liddle, Peter. Handout to PGY3 Psychiatry class, UBC, Vancouver. 4 December 1997.

<sup>4</sup> Honer, W. G. Handout to author, UBC, Vancouver. 11 September 1997.

<sup>5</sup> Liddle, Peter. Letter to the author. 18 November 1998.

<sup>6</sup> British Columbia Schizophrenia Society.

*Schizophrenia: Youth's Greatest Disabler*. 6<sup>th</sup> ed. January 2000.

<[http://www.mentalhealth.com/book/p40-sc02.html#Head\\_5](http://www.mentalhealth.com/book/p40-sc02.html#Head_5)>

<sup>7</sup> I include this portion of the handout in its entirety, as it was compiled and written by Dr. Peter Liddle and serves as an accurate guide which, moreover, represents what was covered (in terms of clinical historical context of schizophrenia) in the advanced PGY3 (post-graduate year 3) class.

<sup>8</sup> Formerly known as VGH, the hospital has now been renamed Vancouver Hospital & Health Sciences Centre (VHHSC).

## CHAPTER 3

### GERTRUDE STEIN: Reading Writing and the Middle Voice

*To write as a question of writing, question that bears the writing that bears the question [. . .] (Blanchot, Step 2)*

#### Reading the Middle Voice

The middle voice, a grammatical term originally applied by linguists to designate an inflectional category of Greek verbs, has been reconfigured in this study to include (following the lead of Roland Barthes and, later, Hayden White) a consideration of the figurative inflectional category of the modern verb *to write*, wherein the subject remains inside the action, or the writer inside the writing, existing only through and in the instance of the action of writing itself. In contrast to both active and passive constructions wherein the subject always remains exterior to the action (e.g. I cut something; I am cut by somebody), and where there is a separation between the action and its completion or effect (e.g. I cut something, so that the completion of the cutting results in the effect: something is cut), the middle construction expresses a simultaneity of action and effect, wherein the subject always remains inside the action, as simultaneous agent and patient affected and effected by the action, at the time of the action itself. I scratch [myself]. I write. In his consideration of Barthes's essay on writing and the middle voice,<sup>1</sup> Hayden White notes that according to Barthes's construction of the modern verb *to write*, the writer "does not 'write herself' in such a way that her 'written self' could be separated from her 'writing self.' It is only in writing and by writing that the writer can be said to exist at all. The 'writer' is what exists in the

interior of the activity of ‘writing’” (White, “Writing” 182). Both Barthes and White consider the middle voice as first, a syntactic grammatical category which is used to express, in some Indo-European languages, a certain relationship between an agent and an act; and second, a figurative or metaphorical extension of the original grammatical category, used to conceptualize the relationship between the modern writer and her modern (more specifically, modernist) writing.

In a paper entitled “Middle Voice, Transitivity, and the Elaboration of Events,”<sup>2</sup> Suzanne Kemmer, a linguist, begins by citing John Lyons’s definition of the middle voice<sup>3</sup> as a traditional stepping stone for discussions in the context of linguistic studies: “The middle voice is used to express events in which the ‘action or state affects the subject of the verb or his interests’” (179). The most cited example of the middle voice is the Greek verb *lou-sthai*, or the Hebrew equivalent *lehitrahetz*, meaning ‘to wash [oneself],’ which is the middle form of the Greek verb *louo*, or of the Hebrew *rahatz*, which means ‘to wash [something].’ Although I will not attempt to engage Kemmer’s complex and highly illuminating linguistic analysis in the context of this study, the general aim of her argument is worth noting. Kemmer explores the relationship between reflexivity and the inflection of the middle voice (modern European ‘reflexives’ are similar and often parallel in usage to Greek ‘middle markers’), and at the same time argues that

there is a semantic property crucial to the nature of the middle that has not been previously observed, one which, in fact, subsumes the notion of ‘subject-affectedness.’ This general property, which I term *relative elaboration of events*, is the parameter along which the reflexive and the middle can be situated as

semantic categories intermediate in transitivity between one-participant and two-participant events, and which in addition differentiates reflexive and middle from one another. (181)

Kemmer situates the reflexive and the middle as *semantic*, in opposition to exclusively *syntactic*, diathetical categories. By *relative elaboration of events*, she refers to “the degree to which different schematic aspects of a situation are separated out and viewed as distinct by the speaker” (211), so that the speaker can choose “the resolution with which a particular event is viewed in order to highlight its internal structure to a greater or lesser extent” (211). Moreover, while middle markers are traditionally analyzed by grammarians as ‘intransitivizers,’ or as “markers of syntactic intransitivity” (212), Kemmer argues that “the general correlation of middle morphosyntax with formal intransitivity that has been observed is not due to the fact that middle markers are syntactic ‘intransitivizers,’ but rather to the property of low degree of elaboration of events that is inherent in middle semantics” (212).<sup>4</sup> The gist of Kemmer’s argument, in other words, is that the middle voice is not only a syntactic phenomenon or classification, but also a semantic qualifier of events: “What I hope to have shown in the course of this paper is that the middle is a basically semantic, rather than syntactic phenomenon, and that considering it in semantic terms leads to a revealing explanation of marking patterns in the reflexive/middle domain” (221). As a semantic phenomenon, the notion of the middle voice is a phenomenon not only of grammatical form, but of *meaning*.

The idea of the middle voice as a grammatical phenomenon of *meaning*, a phenomenon which expresses the relationship between an agent, an act, and the *meaning* of the *event* uniting agent and act, would perhaps help meet the issues raised by some



early critics of Barthes regarding his ambiguity about both the middle voice and modernist writing. White reminds us that upon Barthes's first presentation of his view regarding the middle voice and modernist writing, the post-lecture discussion included questions by Pierre Vernant who wondered whether "Barthes was making a historical argument regarding the actual reappearance or rediscovery of the grammatical category of the middle voice in modernist literature or whether he was using the idea only as a metaphor for certain aspects of modernist writing" (White, "Writing" 182), and by Paul de Man who insisted that the relationship between writer and writing which Barthes attributed to modernism was in fact already present as far back as the eighteenth century, and that, furthermore, this category of the middle voice cannot illuminate readings of modernist texts any more than categories already provided by Russian or American formalism (182). White notes that both criticisms—the first regarding historicity and the second regarding heuristic value—touch upon an ambiguity of which Barthes was openly aware, and at the same time miss "the crucial concern of Barthes's discourse, namely, the progressive isolation of modernist writers from their interlocutors" (182), a concern that was observed and addressed by a question posed to Barthes by Jean Hyppolite, regarding writing as a "phantasm of interlocution" (183). White situates Barthes's argument as one concerned less with style, and more with the "phantasmatic scene of writing," so that the concept of the middle voice opens for Barthes "a way of characterizing, in grammatical terms, a kind of writing that denies the possibility of real interlocution by parodying it" (183). According to him, the function of the notion of the middle voice in Barthes's discussion of modernist writing is, moreover, to characterize a form of 'heightened consciousness' on the part of the writer in relation to his writing in this context. With

reference to active and middle forms of some Greek verbs, White (although unaware of Kemmer's analysis) notes that the *meaning* of the action changes with the shift from active to middle, in a way that indicates what White interprets to be a "heightened moral consciousness" (186) on the part of the subject performing the action, indicating a shift in the level of involvement on the part of the subject with her action. White cites the Greek example of the verb *airein* which means 'to take' in its active form, but means 'to choose' (*airesthai*) in its middle form (186). Relevant examples in Hebrew would include the two verbs mentioned in previous chapters of this study: the verb *patach* which means 'to open' in its active form, but means 'to develop' (*lehitpateach*) in its middle form; and, more significantly, the verb *hapas* which means 'to seek' in its active form, but means 'to disguise oneself' (*lehitchapes*) in its middle form.

This shift, or difference, in meaning and voice between active and middle forms can also be conceptualized in terms of Derrida's notion of *differance*, a notion which Derrida introduces as "strategically the theme most proper to think out [. . .] in what is most characteristic of our 'epoch'" (*Speech* 135-6), and situates as an element which is necessary in order to make the process of signification possible. A hybrid of the two uses of the verb "to differ" [*différer*]*—*to differ temporally, to postpone; and to differ spatially, to be other*—differance*, with the suffix '—ance' is in the middle form, not only active and not only passive, as it "recalls something like the middle voice" (137) and "speaks of an operation which is not an operation, which cannot be thought of either as a passion or an action of a subject upon an object, as starting from an agent or from a patient, or on the basis of, or in view of, any of these *terms*" (137). *Differance* is a word which, according to Derrida, is not a word; a concept which, he submits, is not a concept.

With his invocation of the middle voice, and in his own struggle with a concept that is not a concept, Barthes conceives of a distinctive way to describe and conceptualize the relationship between the writer (agent), her writing (act), and her modern *elaboration of the event* of writing. This modern event of writing, in its middle form, occasions a shift in the consciousness of the subject in relation to her action, a shift which implodes the very difference between agency and patiency in the relation of the subject to her action, and perhaps obscures the possibility of interlocution, problematizing its own status as an event, and simultaneously performing the problem. This shift occasions, in other words, a disfiguration of the signifying scene and of its function, of its presupposition of sense, meaning, and comprehensibility. The notion of the middle voice, in this context, is useful not only in conceptualizing the relationship of the modern writer to her writing, but more importantly in rethinking the relationship of the modern reader to her reading. This study is in many ways a consideration of the effect of the shift occasioned by the modern event of writing, on a shift occasioning the modern event of reading—an event which can no longer rely strictly on the presupposition of sense—an event both effected and affected by a rip, or fissure, disrupting the modern hermeneutic signifying scene.

\*   \*   \*

*To write as a question of writing, question that bears the writing that bears the question, no longer allows you this relation to the being—understood in the first place as tradition, order, certainty, truth, any form of taking root—that you*

*received one day from the past of the world, domain you had been called upon to govern in order to strengthen your "Self," although this was as if fissured, since the day when the sky opened upon its void. (Blanchot, Step 2)*

\* \* \*

In a paper entitled "The Exteriority of Writing," composed for oral delivery at a conference on *Writing, Écriture, Schrift: Ripping Apart the Signifying Scene* (the same conference of which White's paper on "Writing and the Middle Voice" was the closing piece),<sup>5</sup> David Wellbery opens with the following eloquent remarks, worth quoting at length, regarding the predicament of the signifying scene:

I take the title of the conference [. . .] to be a kind of retrospective narrative statement that says this: the signifying scene, insofar as it is dominated by the concept of signification and is therefore the *mis-en-scène* of that concept, insofar as it rests on the presupposition of sense, meaning, ideality, and the transience of these concepts; insofar as it opens before the subject viewing it, either as participant or observer, in such a way that the subject commands it or incorporates its elements within the internality of a comprehension—I take the title of the conference to mean that this scene of sense, in its comprehensibility, this hermeneutic scene *par excellence*, has been ripped apart, torn, disrupted, or fragmented in such a way that it is, first of all, no longer a scene transparent to the subject, no longer saturated by the function of representation, [. . .] no longer

bathed in visibility; and second, no longer a scene of sense, no longer dominated by the concept of meaning, by the hermeneutic presupposition of *Sinn*. (11)

Wellbery continues to suppose the title of the conference “to mean, further, that what has ripped apart this hermeneutic scene, what has introduced fissure into the homogeneity of its array, what has displaced and relativized the presupposition of sense, is nothing other than *Writing, Écriture, Schrift*, conceived as the privileged terms of a certain theoretical intervention” (11). He considers, in the course of the paper, four theoretical interventions, of which post-structuralism (especially the work of Derrida) and cybernetics (with its primary tenet that there is no information and no order without the disturbance of random noise, or without the disruption of non-sense) are two, in order to introduce a series of claims and consequences arising from the current predicament of the signifying scene and writing. In his discussion of the post-structuralist intervention, an intervention displacing the binaristic demarcation between the inside/outside of indication (by tracing the originary interlacing between outside and inside),<sup>6</sup> Wellbery considers the exteriority of writing as an element which becomes constitutive of the inner signifying scene, displacing the notion of exteriority as exterior and of constitution as interior. Is it possible, he asks, that the signifying scene in this post-structuralist context is “the product of a self-observation on the part of a certain system (of communication) and that this self-observation requires, in order to get going at all, the distinction or difference inside/outside [. . .]; and that what cannot be observed in terms of this difference, therefore, is this difference itself?” (18). Post-structuralism, then, would mark the moment in which a self-observation system producing the signifying scene, encounters its own inability to observe itself, or else comes up against the limitation of its

ability to observe. According to such a claim, Wellbery proposes, “the signifying scene has been ripped apart by its incapacity to observe the observation that produced it” (19). In relation to writing, one could further rephrase this proposition to say that the signifying scene has been ‘ripped apart’ by its incapacity to read the reading that produced it. The signifying scene, in other words, has been disrupted precisely in the middle permutation of its observational action, at the moment in which the act of reading turned in upon (to read) itself, shifting itself into the inflection of the middle form.

Wellbery’s main objective is to inject notions of ‘exteriority,’ ‘contingency’ (of meaning) and ‘accident’ into the signifying scene, thus situating a notion of randomness and accident as a constitutive element which serves to rip apart the signifying scene and render signification itself an accident (where any given ‘accident’ can be merely a random, unforeseen and nonsensical endowment). Although I will not explore the details of his argument in my reading, the concluding consequences of his paper are relevant for this discussion. Wellbery concludes by announcing “the limitation of hermeneutics as a method for the reflective engagement with works of art. Insofar as hermeneutics operates with the presupposition of sense, it is inadequate both as a strategy of reading particular works and as a characterization of the historicity of works or of art in general” (22). Hermeneutics is a limited method for reading and historicizing works because “both the work and the histories that articulate themselves around it are—not merely extraneously, but in terms of their very constitutive (non) principle—impressed with a non-sensical element” (22), with an element of accident. Wellbery closes with a final remark regarding the methodological consequence of his argument:

[T]he science of art, if you will, would develop its discourse as a reading of the unreadable, a reading that adheres to the moment of accidentality and non-sense that marks the work in its singularity and in the singularity of its history. But it is unclear whether such a reading could codify itself as a method, as a protocol, without obliterating the very thing it seeks to account for.

What Wellbery proposes as a methodological approach to modern writing (which is included in the larger category of ‘art’), in other words, is a discourse of reading the unreadable—a strategy echoing Shoshana Felman’s attempt to read madness—a reading which, impossibly, accounts for that which exceeds the boundaries of its own limitation; a reading which accounts for that which, by definition (by virtue of being unreadable), is inaccessible to reading. Wellbery, however, cannot conceptualize (in this paper) how such a reading could proceed, methodologically, without contradicting itself, without obliterating that for which it seeks to account, since a reading of the unreadable can only, by definition, render the unreadable readable.<sup>7</sup> Wellbery’s own argument is, in fact, subject to this very contradiction, for his differentiation between sense and nonsense, information and noise, accident and determinacy, presupposes a certain difference between sense and nonsense, information and noise, and so on: what cannot be observed, in terms of this difference, or what is unreadable in terms of this difference, is, paradoxically, the difference itself (that which is not sense and not nonsense, not information and not noise, not accidental and not not accidental). What cannot be observed is that which escapes the very differential of sense and nonsense.

In his attempt to account for the unreadable, Wellbery’s reading—a reading that cannot be more astute, illuminating and eloquent—manages, nevertheless, to obliterate

the unreadable. Wellbery's argument thus manages to illustrate two things: 1) that hermeneutic reading can be inadequate in the face of the modern predicament of writing and its relationship to the writer, a predicament which occasions a well-known fissure in the signification scene; and 2) that there is a need to reconfigure the relationship of the modern reader to her reading, in order to account for the inaccessible space beyond the limited parameters of reading, so that the action of reading must necessarily confront its own limitation, or impossibility, and attempt a reading of the unreadable, or else a reading which turns the process of reading in upon itself. Thus, the notion of the middle voice becomes useful in conceptualizing a relationship between reader and reading, such that reading in the middle voice (whereby the reader remains effected and affected inside the action) entails a seeking which, in *its* middle form, signals a shift in meaning and in consciousness. A reading which shifts from an active to a middle mode, seeking to read the unreadable, to read into and beyond its own conceptual markers—read beyond [itself]—becomes a reading which obliterates the very thing (the unreadable) for which it seeks to account. The Hebrew verb to seek, in its middle form, means to disguise oneself. So, too, the modern verb to read, conceptualized in its middle form, means to disguise, to hide, or else to obliterate [itself]. A reading which seeks, impossibly, to access a space beyond its own constitutive range—beyond the scope of its presupposition of sense—can only maintain its status as 'reading' through the use of the very parameters it seeks to exceed, can only turn the boundary which separates inside/outside (or sense/nonsense), inside out, can only sensor itself in an attempt to access that which is obliterated by the very act of sensorship.



\* \* \*

*The same situation can also be described this way: a writer never reads his work. For him, it is the unreadable, a secret, and he cannot remain face to face with it [. . .] The impossibility of reading is the discovery that now, in the space opened by creation, there is no more room for creation—and no other possibility for the writer than to keep on writing the same work. (Blanchot, “The Essential Solitude” 404)*

\* \* \*

In the context of this study, any hermeneutic reading of which the presupposition of sense is a constitutive element operates according to an economy of sensorship; the hermeneutic reading is thus always subject to its own limitations, always subject to crisis with the place which exceeds the differential of sense and nonsense underlying the categorical markers circumscribing the act of reading. The point of crisis between sensorship and the space which exceeds it, or between sensorship and its middle-voiced permutation (that is, between reading and a permutation of reading which obliterates itself in an effort to access the unreadable), is configured, here, as madness. Madness, thus, becomes a constitutive feature of reading, marking the point of contact between each act of reading and the aporetic space which exceeds the purview of its presuppositions; madness defines the ‘inside’ of each reading by bringing it into crisis with the very space which exceeds it and which remains inaccessible to it. Although I do

not conceptualize, in this work, a solution for, or an alternative to, the moment of inadequacy of the modern hermeneutic scene of reading, this study has thus far sought first, to point out the instance of inadequacy itself, and second, to insist on the responsibility of the modern reader to consider the madness of her own reading and to acknowledge, at that moment, the crisis arising at the instance in which a reading seeks to account for both itself and its underlying deficiency. Within the scope of this study, modern (not only modernist) writing, conceptualized in terms of the middle voice, resists a certain operation of reading, conceptualized in terms of sensorship, while simultaneously reading [itself] through and inside the act of writing—sensing itself—to obliteration.<sup>8</sup> Writing in the middle voice, thus, includes an operation of reading [itself], an operation which performs a crisis between the writing [itself] and its simultaneous reading [of itself]—a crisis between a writing which reads itself, and the space which exceeds the both the delimitation of reading and the effectual parameters which presuppose a separation between reading/writing—a crisis between writing and the constitutive norms demarcating a difference between the act of writing and the act of reading in the first place. Writing in the middle voice, that is, entails a certain middle-voiced permutation of impossible reading, inside the action of writing.

One way in which a reading can responsibly address the moment of its own inadequacy, then, is by mobilizing an instance of irremediable indecision marking its relation to the space which exceeds the normative constraints presupposing its separation from writing; or, by enacting the very crisis which results through the attempt of the reading to access the space which exceeds the difference between itself and writing, or itself and its middle-voiced permutation. One way in which a reading can address the

instance of its own constitutive inadequacy is by enabling, through writing, a crisis of reading—a crisis of writing as reading, and of reading as writing. Gertrude Stein, a leading figure of radical modernism and also a writer often addressed in the context of post-structuralist readings,<sup>9</sup> is most notably a thinker (in her words, a “genius”)—both a reader and a writer—who takes the reading/writing crisis and the need to conceptualize it very seriously, rethinking the parameters of the crisis itself throughout her career, performing the constitutive crisis (madness) of every writing scene, and simultaneously addressing the constitutive madness (crisis) of its reading inside the writing. To write responsibly, or on Stein’s terms, to write “intelligently,” entails a simultaneity of the writing [itself] with its reading [of itself], in a deliberate and constitutive crisis marking the point of contact between each reading/writing and the place which exceeds the presuppositions of its action—between each reading/writing and the place which exceeds the great presupposition of sense. For Stein, *to write as a question of writing, question that bears the writing that bears the question (Blanchot, Step 2)*, entails a crisis marking the point of contact between the writing and its impossibility: Suppose there were no questions, what would the answer be?<sup>10</sup>

### **Reading Writing**

“What is the answer?” said Gertrude Stein, moments before her death, to Alice Toklas, and upon no reply, her famous last words resonate: “In that case, what is the question?”<sup>11</sup> In the absence of any questions, Alice, in despair, cannot find an answer, cannot answer—answering is impossible. An answer, as such, can only exist in response, can only materialize within the parameters which presuppose an underlying configuration

of ‘question.’ In the absence of questions, the answer can only configure itself *as* a question: what *is* an answer?; or else, what is the question? The answer, in the absence of questions, is impossible as ‘answer,’ is the (absent) question itself, marking the point of contact—of crisis—between itself and the space beyond its delimitation. The anti-rhetorical question—suppose there were no questions, what would the answer be?—is itself a call for a theoretical intervention which brings the hermeneutic scene and its binaristic presuppositions into crisis. In Stein’s work, writing is conceived as the privileged site for such theoretical intervention, and reading is conceived as the condition (of impossibility, of madness) for both the writing and the intervention itself.

I present, here, a consideration of Stein’s thoughts on writing, as articulated in some of her lectures (readings) about writing which she delivered in the course of her tours to England (1926) and, more notably, to the United States (1934). I do not intend, by this consideration, to offer a proposed method or guideline for the understanding of Gertrude Stein’s work, or to provide a framework or a model for the reading and interpretation of her philosophy on art and the world. Conversely, my reading presupposes that Stein’s work can and does provide a framework for the understanding and conceptualization of the moment of crisis in modern reading itself. Rather than asking how concepts such as *crisis* and *the middle voice* are operative in Stein’s work, or how such concepts can illuminate my reading of Gertrude Stein’s oeuvre in general, I would like to pay attention to some of the theoretical ideas Stein offers in her writing, in order to consider how such ideas serve to inform, help to conceptualize (and ultimately enact) the notion of the middle voice and its relation to a reading crisis constitutive of the reflexive hermeneutic scene.

The body of criticism on Stein's writing is haunted by preemptive disclaimers announcing, prior to the critical reading and hermeneutic interpretation itself, the unintelligibility of Stein's writing and its resistance to a singular overarching interpretation, or to any interpretation at all; or, insisting that no reading of Stein's work can claim to decode the 'true,' hidden and inaccessible secret beneath the surface of her writing; or, suggesting that there is no secret, no meaning, and by extension, no possible interpretation, but only pleasure, in the reading of Gertrude Stein's work. In her first book, *A Different Language: Gertrude Stein's Experimental Writing*, Marianne DeKoven submits that "There is no reason to struggle to interpret or unify either the whole of *Tender Buttons* or any part of it, not only because there is no consistent pattern of meaning, but because we violate the spirit of the work in trying to find one" (76).<sup>12</sup> Charles Bernstein, in an illuminating chapter on Stein, responds to an expansive body of critical approaches such as DeKoven's, by noting, at length, that

Too much of the commentary on [Stein's] work starts with the premise that there is something wrong, something unintelligible, something troubling in its difficulty, something puzzling, something disturbing or deranged or missing or lacking or defective or absent or restricted or nonsensical or impossible or perverse, something enigmatic or something hidden: a puzzle that must be cracked, a code that must be deciphered, a problem that must be solved or dissolved, an inchoate phenomenon that must be theoretically psychoanalyzed; and, worst of all, a secret that must be detected. (*A Poetics* 142)

Bernstein, in turn, submits that his own "primary and continuing response to Stein's poetry is one of intense pleasure" (142), and also one of "an enormous satisfaction in the

words coming to mean in their moment of enfolding outward and a correlative falling away of my need to explain, to figure out” (143). Bernstein takes pleasure in neither the possibility nor impossibility of reading, but rather in the simultaneity of the experience of his reading and the experience that the presuppositions upon which this reading, as a reading, is based, are unnecessary, superfluous, irrelevant. For Bernstein, the pleasure is the experience of the moment of contact between his reading and a space which exceeds the very parameters of the reading itself. Adopting a similar inflection, Peter Quartermain’s analysis of Stein’s writing focuses on the turning movement of the reading against itself, so that faced with the writing, “what we do in reading it is not only watch the words composing, working, but join in. It affords a narrative of our own unfolding perceptions of language as it unfolds before us, and it is thus the reader’s story as well as Stein’s” (29); however, simultaneously, “The transformational strategies in which her writing abounds render impossible the reader’s possession of meaning [. . .] it undermines the reader’s sense of his/her own certainty as arbiter of the meaning of the text” (23). For Quartermain, reading Stein’s work entails a certain permutation of writing [itself], at the moment in which reading encounters the impossibility of its own limitation; reading Stein’s work, in this context too, involves a moment of crisis between the experience of reading [itself] and the simultaneous experience of a space which exceeds the presuppositions delimiting the parameters of reading—including both the presupposition of sense, and the presupposition of a difference between reading and writing in the first place.

The body of critical approaches to Stein’s work is permeated with self-reflexivity and doubt regarding not only the writing in question, but rather, and more so, the

adequacy of reading itself and the legitimacy of the presupposition of distance between writing and reading. Hence the insistence, by some critics, that a reading of Stein necessarily entails a writing like Stein's, or as Lisa Ruddick posits more eloquently, that "performative approaches to Stein put us back into contact with her writing as an artistic as well as political practice" ("Stein and Cultural Criticism" 658). However, at the same time, there is a critical realization that it is, after all, impossible to write like Stein; that a performative approach to Stein's work must ultimately involve the enactment of a crisis marking the point of contact between the reading and its limitation, between the performative written reading and its inadequacy as both writing and reading. A performative reading of Stein's writing, in other words, would entail a performative crisis marking the encounter between the written reading and the space which exceeds the difference between reading and writing in the first place. The reader, in her reading/writing, would then perform the crisis through and inside the action of reading/writing, as the judge performs the judgment through and inside the act of judging, or the minister performs the wedding inside and through his pronouncement of the union between two persons.<sup>13</sup> If reading Stein entails the enactment of this impossible juncture, however, is there any possible reading of Stein that is *not* performative? Does the writing not bring any permutation of reading into a constitutive crisis, pleasurable or not, with itself?

In her lectures about her own writing, and about 'intelligent' writing in general, Stein's own written reading of her work conceptualizes a reading of crisis, and a crisis of reading, in an interrogation which calls into question the adequacy of the hermeneutic scene, with its presupposition of sense, meaning, and referential visibility. I would like to

consider how Stein's conceptualization of the writing scene can 1) illuminate the notion of crisis as a constitutive element of the hermeneutic scene, and illustrate the function of the middle voice as a useful concept for representing the formative element of such a crisis; and 2) inform the current body of critical readings on Stein's work not necessarily about her writing, or about the writing's technique or function, but about itself as a body of criticism—about the status of its own scene of reading.

I frame my consideration of Stein, on such terms, with fragments from the work of Maurice Blanchot, whose conception of the writing/reading crisis is in many ways congruent with Stein's ideas about the process, function and role of writing/reading. Paul de Man remarks, with reference to Blanchot's work, that he "steadily borders on the inexpressible and approaches the extreme of ambiguity" (62), and that "The clarity of his critical writings is not due to exegetic power; they seem clear, not because they penetrate further into a dark and inaccessible domain but because they suspend the very act of comprehension" (62-3). While Blanchot is famous for his remarks on the impossibility of reading ('reading,' in this context, refers to a reliance on hermeneutic preconceptions of sense and order), Stein figures this impossibility within her conception of writing itself. Charles Bernstein describes Stein's text as one which "becomes puzzling, enigmatic, ahead of its time" (143), and at the same time submits that "Stein's writing is not postmodernism before its time" (143); Gerald Bruns, in his consideration of Blanchot's conception of poetry, submits that "Blanchot [is] crossing what will later become the orbit of a certain kind of deconstruction (deconstruction as a kind of logic of plural or hypersignification, speaking many languages at once). But it is important to see that Blanchot is not a poststructuralist before the fact" (51). Stein and Blanchot, not



poststructuralists before their time, were radical modern thinkers of their time (Stein, b. 1874 in Pennsylvania, lived in France in the 1930's; Blanchot, b. 1907, lived in France thereafter),<sup>14</sup> a time in which the very preconditions of rational thought were called into question. Gerald Bruns remarks that for Blanchot, "To be in question is not a state of affairs; it is an event, an *irréalisation*, neither active nor passive [. . .]" (194), an event with the grammar of the middle voice:

Think of it as an event [. . .] akin (1) to madness: 'Madness would thus be a word in perpetual incongruance with itself and interrogative throughout, such that it would put into question its possibility and, through it, the possibility of the language that would admit it, thus would put interrogation itself into question, in as much as it belongs to the play of language' (*SNB* 45). And, of course, (2) to exigency: the claim, the condition of responsibility or answerability to a demand [. . .] (194).

For Stein, too, to be in question is to suppose there are no questions, to question the event of questioning itself. She says, suppose there were no questions, what would the answer be? Blanchot writes: "Finally, as distant as the absolute, there would be the answer without any inquiry, which no question suits, an answer we know not what to do with" (*Writing of the Disaster* 30), and "The enigma (the secret) is precisely the absence of any question—where there is no room even to introduce a question—without, however, this absence's providing the answer" (30-31).

While Stein conceptualizes the scene of writing and reading as a scene which renders hermeneutic sensibility in the middle of the event of crisis, wherein the motion or action of the crisis can be useful in conceptualizing the action of the middle voice,

Blanchot conceptualizes this scene of crisis as an event of madness, the grammar of which can be conceived, between passive and active, as that of the middle voice. My aim is not to compare Stein's work to that of Blanchot, or to offer a reading of Blanchot in this context, although such a task would no doubt be illuminating and laborious (requiring considerable space in a book of its own). I intend, rather, to frame my reading of Stein's work with fragments—"*Fragment: beyond fracturing, or bursting, the patience of pure impatience, the little by little*" (Blanchot, *Writing of the Disaster* 35)—from the work of Blanchot, in order to open (to provide, merely, a beginning for) a space wherein a reading framed with fragments of reading, becomes the space in which *crisis* and *madness* converge, as one, in the nexus of reading/writing itself. "Fragmentary writing is risk, it would seem: risk itself. It is not based on any theory, nor does it introduce a practice one could define as *interruption*. Interrupted, it goes on. Interrogating itself, it does not co-opt the question but suspends it (without maintaining it) as nonresponse" (Blanchot, *Writing of the Disaster* 35).

\* \* \*

*In order to write, he must destroy language in its present form and create it in another form [ . . . ]* (Blanchot, "Literature" 371)

*Let us acknowledge that in a writer there is a movement which proceeds without pause, and almost without transition, from nothing to everything.* (375)

*To write is to make oneself the echo of what cannot stop talking—and because of this, in order to become its echo, I must to a certain extent impose silence on it.*

(“Essential Solitude” 407)

\* \* \*

In her lecture, “Portraits and Repetition,” written in 1934 and delivered (on Sept. 15) during her American lecture tour (1934/5), Stein submits that “Nothing makes any difference as long as someone is listening while they are talking” (“Portraits” 102), that it takes greater concentration for a person to simultaneously talk and listen, and that

One may really indeed say that that is the essence of genius, of being most intensely alive, that is being one who is at the same time talking and listening. It is really that that makes one a genius. And it is necessary if you are to be really and truly alive it is necessary to be at once talking and listening, doing both things, not as if there were one thing, not as if they were two things, but doing them, well if you like, like the motor going inside the car moving, they are part of the same thing. (102)

She proposes, moreover, that “while I am writing I am most completely, and that is if you like being a genius, I am most entirely and completely listening and talking, the two in one and the one in two and that is having completely its own time and it has in it no element of remembering” (108). In this lecture, beginning with the proposition of an act in which the agent remains moving inside the movement of the action itself, effected and affected by her positionality in relation to the talking/listening, Stein develops both a

reading of her own writing, and a theory of writing and reading as permutations of one another, all through a consideration of ‘voice’ as it is conceived in the event of writing and reading. Voice, here, serves both as the literal medium of writing, talking and so on (that is, as the voice of somebody, of a subject; of the speaker in speaking or of the writer in writing), and as the diathetical inflection of the action of writing or talking itself, an inflection which affects and effects the spatial and temporal configuration of the event of writing. I begin with Stein’s consideration of the action of voice as a movement against itself, a movement which she proposes to be constitutive of the act of writing/reading, at the moment in which this act becomes constitutive of the act of living.

According to Stein, living entails a certain degree of self-reflexivity, or a certain awareness about the constitutive movement of the act of living itself, “[b]ut the strange thing about the realization of existence is that like a train moving there is no real realization of it moving if it does not move against something and so that is what a generation does it shows that moving is existing” (98). However, “if the movement, that is any movement, is lively enough, perhaps it is possible to know that it is moving even if it is not moving against anything” (99). The generation contemporary to Stein’s writing, she explains, has experienced such extreme movement—a movement of such extreme events which can be characterised as what Hayden White otherwise calls ‘modernist events,’ events which no prior generation could have conceived of or imagined, whose ‘movement’ is felt regardless of and in resistance to any prior conception of understanding<sup>15</sup>—that it does not need a background, does not need to look out the window of the car, in order to realize the intensity of its own movement: “this generation has conceived an intensity of movement so great that it has not to be seen against

something else to be known, and therefore, this generation does not connect itself with anything, that is what makes this generation what it is” (100-101). Because of the possibility of a movement so intense that it does not need to move against any background in order to be experienced as movement, “there is a new way of making portraits of men and women and children” (99), Stein writes, “And I, I in my way have tried to do this thing”(99). Stein, in her way, attempts to conceive of a simultaneity, inside the action of writing, of the actions of talking and listening, so that if the moving car is an analogy for writing, then the movement of the motor inside the moving car is an analogy for the movement of the talking/listening inside the writing:<sup>16</sup> “As I say a motor goes inside and the car goes on, but my business my ultimate business as an artist was not with where the car goes as it goes but with the movement inside that is of the essence of its going” (117).

Stein’s conception of the notion of ‘movement’ in writing is useful in the conceptualization of the diathetical inflection of the middle voice. Writing entails a motion, an action, wherein the agent remains effected and affected inside the action, and the movement is one which turns in and acts upon itself; the agent, both driving the car and driven by the car, has turned on the motor (talking/listening) whose independent movement simultaneously moves the car which in turn moves the agent (turned patient) inside the car—regardless of anything outside of the car, or outside of the motion itself. No extraneous background is necessary for the movement, no distinction between inside and outside is operative; the movement is inside the movement inside moving, acting upon itself. The writer is agent and patient inside the motion of writing. Although Stein’s comments often refer to her own writing practice, and thereby serve as a reading

of her own work, she ultimately presents her ideas with reference to the acts of writing and reading, in general, conceived in her modern age. The notion of simultaneous talking and listening is the notion of a voice which hears itself in the act of speaking—hears [itself] in the middle form—so that, in speaking, it performs the action of talking [itself] upon itself, and simultaneously mobilizes a listening to [itself]. The injection of this notion as a constitutive element of the action of writing entails a conception of the writing as a reading of itself, in which the writing voice reads itself in the movement of writing, talking/listening inside the writing/reading in a movement against itself. In reading, the writing voice does not read against any outer background, using any prior conceptions of reading, but rather reads inside and through the action of writing [itself], like a moving car with irrelevant windows. In an interview in 1946, Stein submits that “I hate lecturing, because you begin to hear yourself talk, because sooner or later you hear your voice, and you do not hear what you say. You just hear what they hear you say” (“Transatlantic” 31); lecturing occurs in relation to an outside audience and, therefore, ceases to move against itself. In Stein’s view, a writing which enacts this movement against itself, entailing a talking/listening inside the writing, a movement which exists (lives) against no background but its own, is the ‘essence of genius’ and simultaneously the essence of ‘being most intensely alive.’

For Stein, ‘genius’ entails a certain configuration of living. In *Everybody’s Autobiography*, she writes that “It takes a lot of time to be a genius, you have to sit around so much doing nothing, really doing nothing” (70), and that “It is funny this thing of being a genius, there is no reason for it, there is no reason that it should be you and should not have been him” (77). This model of living as genius, of ‘really living,’

moreover, entails a certain configuration of writing: “And if you stop writing if you are a genius and you have stopped writing are you still one if you have stopped writing. I do wonder about that” (85). Ultimately, she proposes that “I do know what a genius is, a genius is some one who does not have to remember the two hundred years that everybody else has to remember” (121). A genius, in other words, does not need the background, temporal or spatial, in order to realize the movement of existence, through the movement of writing; a genius does not remember.<sup>17</sup> While this consideration of action and movement conceives of the notion of genius as that which entails a middle voiced permutation of reading and writing which exceeds the limitation of its historical and spatial context, and of the presuppositions of ‘remembering,’ Stein’s consideration of other functional features inside this movement demonstrates that ‘genius,’ on these terms, entails the realization of a certain crisis within the permutation of reading/writing—a permutation which, after all, *cannot* escape its context. That is, ‘genius’ requires the realization of a hermeneutic blind spot that is inaccessible to the writing and reading observer in the movement of her own observation. This paradoxical realization occasions a conflict between the reading or writing and the space which exceeds its parameters and presuppositions. ‘Really living,’ by extension, entails the simple realization of this crisis—the crisis between the experience of understanding the world (via reading/writing), and the space which exceeds the very parameters of such understanding—the simple realization of a blind spot which cannot be observed, for it exceeds the limits of observation. Having introduced Stein’s notion of the movement in the action of writing/reading, a movement in the middle form, I will now consider how she proceeds, in her lectures, to conceptualize various constitutive features of this action,

so that the action itself entails a realization of the inadequacy of the hermeneutic signifying scene, and requires an enactment of the crisis occasioned by such a realization.

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*[O]ne can only write if one arrives at the instant towards which one can only move through space opened up by the movement of writing. In order to write one must already be writing. (Blanchot, "The Gaze" 442)*

*If we want to restore literature to the movement which allows all its ambiguities to be grasped, that movement is here: literature, like ordinary speech, begins with the end, which is the only thing that allows us to understand. ("Literature" 391)*

*Repetition: the ultimate over and over, general collapse, destruction of the present. (Writing of the Disaster 42)*

\* \* \*

With her establishment of the notion of movement, in "Portraits and Repetition," Stein asserts the following:

I say I never repeat while I am writing because while I am writing I am most completely, and that is if you like being a genius, I am most entirely and



completely listening and talking, the two in one and the one in two and that is having completely its own time and it has in it no element of remembering.

Therefore there is in it no element of confusion, therefore there is in it no element of repetition. (108)

She proceeds to discuss a series of constitutive features, of what might be called the middle-voiced action of writing, which enable an interrogation of certain presuppositions of the scene of reading. In her distinction between “repetition and insistence,” for example, a distinction which must function inside the movement of the writing, Stein proposes a disfiguration of the very notion of repetition and of the presupposition of memory as a constitutive feature of observation. She further reconfigures the hermeneutic distinction between “thinking clearly and confusion” to debunk the hermeneutic presupposition of sense and clarity, in an effort to acknowledge a certain space which lies beyond the difference between clarity and confusion, and beyond the difference between inside and outside—a certain space servicing a crisis of the difference itself. I would like to consider how Stein, in her discussion of the features of repetition and insistence, of thinking clearly and confusion, and of observing the inside and the outside of observation itself, configures the scene of writing and reading as a scene which acknowledges the limitation of its own parameters and occasions a crisis with the very place that is inaccessible to it. The temporal and spatial configuration of such a crisis are outlined in her earlier lecture on “Composition as Explanation,” where she posits the notions of a “continuous present” and “beginning again and again,” and in her lecture on “Poetry and Grammar,” where she considers the spatial and temporal translocation of words between the inside and the outside of the referential scene.

In "Portraits and Repetition," one of Stein's main objectives is to "let us think seriously of the difference between repetition and insistence" (100) in the movement of the acting voice (at the time of writing and talking). According to Stein, "there can be no repetition because the essence of [the] expression is insistence, and if you insist you must each time use emphasis and if you use emphasis it is not possible while anybody is alive that they should use exactly the same emphasis" (100). She offers the example of a frog who cannot hop exactly the same way, or cover exactly the same distance with each hop, in the action of hopping. The frog, in repeating the action of hopping, one hop after the other, configures each hop differently, with a different tone and insistence, so that no two hops are the same, and no hop can constitute an exact repetition of another. Likewise, in the telling of a crime story, witnesses tell the same story, but the insistence of their accounts varies, so that no two witnesses can repeat the story in exactly the same way. It is when Stein "first really realized the inevitable repetition in human expression that was not repetition but insistence" (101), that she began to listen to what everyone around her was saying, "while they were saying what they were saying" (101), and "This was not yet the beginning of writing but it was the beginning of knowing what there was that made there be no repetition" (101). The beginning of writing was the realization of insistence inside the movement of talking and listening, inside the movement of existence against itself, so that "we have now, a movement lively enough to be a thing in itself moving, it does not have to move against anything to know that it is moving, it does not need that there are generations existing" (102), and at the same time "we have insistence insistence that in its emphasis can never be repeating, because insistence is always alive and if it is alive it is never saying anything in the same way because emphasis can never be the same

not even when it is most the same that is when it has been taught” (102). Insistence, thus, becomes a functional feature of the movement which does not need a background—of generations, of memory, or of learned presuppositions—to realize itself. The difference between insistence and repetition, Stein claims, is congruent with the difference between clarity and confusion.

According to Stein, “The difference between thinking clearly and confusion is the same difference that there is between repetition and insistence” (104). However, she immediately announces that “I am inclined to believe that there is really no difference between clarity and confusion” (104), and she has already established that there is no such thing as repetition. In the movement of writing, the difference between thinking clearly and confusion is the same as the difference between repetition and insistence, only in the sense that the difference obliterates itself in the “vitality of movement” (104), or in the sense that there is no difference at all. Stein develops a notion of writing as a movement reading itself, and thereby existing by reading/writing against no prior conceptions of understanding, and against no memory. In the absence of memory, and in the absence of prior hermeneutic presuppositions, repetition can only be configured as insistence (since there is no memory of that which is being repeated, but only a new emphasis); in the absence of a background, the movement cannot be confused, because there is nothing outside of its own clarity. Finally, “if this vitality is lively enough is there in that clarity any confusion is there in that clarity any repetition. I myself do not think so” (104). The trouble with this notion of writing or reading—where there is no difference between clarity and confusion, no repetition, no background and no memory—is that ultimately, in reading, one cannot escape an encounter with the very

presuppositions of repetition, confusion, memory, and background, or with the very historical and spatial context which one's reading seeks to exceed. Ultimately, one cannot help looking out the window, regardless of its irrelevance as a window; one cannot help seeing through, noting resemblances, and remembering, against the background of the signifying scene. And still, in order to write with a vitality of movement, "in order to do this there must be no remembering, remembering is repetition, remembering is also confusion" (106). This contradiction, for Stein, is "a complication which was a bother" (105).

Stein's way of coping with the contradiction of the notion of writing as a movement against itself which simultaneously cannot escape the background scene of signification—the scene of remembering—against which it moves, is to perform the very crisis between the movement of writing and the unavoidable scene of remembering, within the movement of writing itself. She does this by adding a third dimension to talking and listening (inside the writing and reading); she adds a dimension of seeing, in the act of observation. By concentrating on the action of observation, Stein attempts to "avoid this difficulty of suggesting remembering more easily while including looking with listening and talking" (113). With renewed emphasis on the action of observation, she qualifies the movement of her own writing as 'portrait writing.' Here, she attempts to include "looking to make it a part of listening and talking and listening" (114), but also to bring the very action of looking into a crisis with its own observational movement. With the realization that an observation cannot observe itself outside of its own parameters—cannot exceed its own limitations in order to observe itself from without—and, moreover, that "looking inevitably [. . .] forced me into recognizing resemblances, and so forced

remembering and in forcing remembering caused confusion of present with past and future time” (112-13), Stein begins to wonder about the very action of observation itself: “I began to wonder [. . .] just what one saw when one looked at anything really looked at anything” (114). She wonders, that is, “about how words which were the words that made whatever I looked at look like itself were not the words that had in them any quality of description” (115), and questions “How was anything contained within itself” (121). The medium of observation, in this context, is language; the action of observation entails a conflict between its own presuppositions and a certain dimension of language which exceeds the parameters of those presuppositions and marks the motion of existence within that which is observed. With the addition of looking to the talking and listening (inside the writing and reading), Stein addresses the problem of the signifying scene—the scene always in memory from one moment to the next—and of its limitations; she engages a conflict inside the scene, by proposing to deliberately unite each instance of remembering with the instance of its inadequacy, through a change in the emphasis, or in the insistence, of observing (while talking and listening). The result is a crisis, via observation, with the presupposition of sense, or with the presuppositions defining the difference between inside and outside of both ‘things’ and meanings.

Writing and reading, within this paradigm, entail not a forgetting of memory, or an elimination of meaning or reference, but rather a problematization of the mediation of memory, meaning, and reference, and an interrogation of the entire background scene of inherited concepts and thoughts mediating the formulation of observation itself.

Writing/reading does not entail an obliteration of the window in the moving car, but rather an interrogation of the window’s transparency. This notion of writing and reading

entails a further conceptualization of observation in the middle form (to observe oneself observing), where the action of observation mobilizes a problematization of observation itself; writing/reading, thus, becomes a form of *exchange* with an object of inquiry, an exchange which takes into account the observer's unavoidable projections, complicating the problem of voice and subject-position in relation to the object, and foregrounding the moment of contact between an observation and its object of inquiry as the moment of the blind spot—the moment in which the 'existence' of the object of inquiry surpasses the parameters of the inquiry itself. In *Tender Buttons*, the existence of the object surpasses the parameters of its name:

A CARAFE, THAT IS A BLIND GLASS

A kind in glass and a cousin, a spectacle and nothing strange a single hurt color  
and an arrangement in a system to pointing. All this and not ordinary, not  
unordered in not resembling. The difference is spreading. (161)

The difference—between the object that (in this particular portrait) is itself blind, and the space which exceeds the presuppositions marking the condition of its observation—is spreading, increasing; it is, here, extraordinary, clear, and unquotable.

The moment of the blind spot is the moment which exceeds the difference between inside and outside. Stein submits that in her 'portraits,' she "had to find out what it was inside every one [. . .] not by what they said not by what they did not by how much or how little they resembled any other one but I had to find it out by the intensity of movement that there was inside in any one of them" (109-10). Moreover, she had to "find out how I by the thing moving excitedly inside in me can make a portrait of them" (110). In her portraits, Stein attempts not to erase the 'outside,' but rather to disfigure the

demarcation between inside and outside, refiguring the ‘inside’ in a way which acknowledges the problem of the blind spot. Each time a blind spot is eliminated, another blind spot must necessarily arise. The motion of the observing subject, in her observation, impacts its own relation to the motion of the object of inquiry. As with a moving car, the site of the blind spot changes, but the configuration remains. To insist differently each time is to reconfigure the position of the blind spot with each insistence. Stein attempts to create an exchange between the movement of her inquiry and the ‘movement inside’ of the object of her inquiry. Since there is constant motion, the very boundary between inside and outside itself cannot be fixed. “The composition we live in changes but essentially what happens does not change” (117). If the boundary between inside and outside is in constant motion, then the space which exceeds its parameters—the blind spot—is in constant motion too.

In “Poetry and Grammar,” Stein proposes that “One of the things that is a very interesting thing to know is how you are feeling inside you to the words that are coming out to be outside of you” (125). She explores the movement of the boundary itself—the inside/outside of each word, and the word travelling between inside and outside of articulation—in her portraits of people (*Portraits and Prayers*) and of objects (*Tender Buttons*). “As I say a noun is a name of a thing, and therefore slowly if you feel what is inside that thing you do not call it by the name by which it is known” (“Poetry” 126), she writes. *[T]he name has not emerged from the thing, it is the inside of the thing which has been dangerously brought out into the open and yet it is still the hidden depths of the thing; the thing has therefore not yet been named* (Blanchot, “Literature” 379). “A noun is a name of anything, why after a thing is named write about it. A name is adequate or it

is not. If it is adequate then why go on calling it, if it is not then calling it by its name does no good” (“Poetry” 126), she explains. *Everyday language calls a cat a cat, as if the living cat and its name were identical, as if it were not true that when we name the cat we retain nothing of it but its absence, what it is not* (Blanchot, “Literature” 381).

With reference to *Tender Buttons*, Stein explains that in observing objects, she struggled with the boundary between the inside and outside of names, wondering “Was there not a way of naming things that would not invent names, but mean names without naming them” (“Poetry” 141). *Thus is born the image that does not directly designate the thing, but rather, what the thing is not; it speaks of a dog instead of a cat. This is how the pursuit begins in which all of language, in motion, is asked to give in to the uneasy demands of one single thing that has been deprived of being* (Blanchot, “Literature” 382). It is this struggle with the shifting boundary between the inside/outside of nouns, the inside/outside of referentiality, the inside/outside of names moving in and out of articulation, that Stein considers to be the struggle of poetry. “*Tender Buttons* was very good poetry” (141), on the most part, she writes, and, in beginning to write the poetic portrait of each object, “I too felt in me the need of making it be a thing that could be named without using its name. After all one had known its name anything’s name for so long, and so the name was not new but the thing being alive was always new” (141-2). *My hope lies in the materiality of language, in the fact that words are things, too, are a kind of nature—this is given to me and gives me more than I can understand. Just now the reality of words was an obstacle. Now, it is my only chance* (Blanchot, “Literature” 383). Therefore, in writing *Tender Buttons*, she began “looking at anything until something that was not the name of that thing but was in a way that actual thing would



come to be written” (142); *A name ceases to be the ephemeral passing of nonexistence and becomes a concrete ball, a solid mass of existence; language, abandoning the sense, the meaning which was all it wanted to be, tries to become senseless. Everything physical takes precedence: rhythm, weight, mass, shape* (Blanchot, “Literature” 383):

#### MALACHITE

The sudden spoon is the same in no size. The sudden spoon is the wound in the decision.

#### AN UMBRELLA

Coloring high means that the strange reason is in front not more in front behind. Not more in front in peace of the dot.

#### A PETTICOAT

A light white, a disgrace, an ink spot, a rosy charm. (*Tender Buttons* 171)

*Literature [ . . . ] knows it is the movement through which whatever disappears keeps appearing. When it names something, whatever it designates is abolished; but whatever is abolished is also sustained, and the thing has found a refuge (in the being which is the word) rather than a threat* (Blanchot, “Literature” 385). By the time she reaches the conclusion of “Portraits and Repetition,” Stein comes to realize that “for the first time in writing, I felt something outside me while I was writing” (“Portraits” 123), and “now I suddenly began, to feel the outside inside and the inside outside” (123).

Stein’s lecture is itself an articulation of incessant motion, a learning, shifting the boundary between inside and outside, turning it inside out, not in an impossible effort to obliterate the boundary, but rather in an effort to acknowledge its limitation: Suppose there were no outside, what would the inside be? The inside would be the outside, would

be impossible, would not be, would be nothing; *everything begins again from nothing* (Blanchot, "Literature" 362). Writing and reading, for Stein, entail an *absolute* struggle, "an exceeding struggle of knowing" ("Poetry" 145) against itself, absolving, inside and through the movement, "beginning again and again" ("Composition" 23) in the present, which entails a beginning again and again *of* the present. "A continuous present is a continuous present" (25), she writes, and "This makes what follows what follows" (29), so that "knowledge is what one knows" ("What is English Literature" 31). As Bob Perelman notes, "The very act of writing always, for Stein, produces knowledge" (158). The seemingly tautological statement that 'knowledge is what one knows,' what one knows via the act of writing, shifts the emphasis from the entity of knowledge to the act of knowing itself—knowledge is what one *knows*—knowledge is the *knowing* of the agent. The verb 'to know,' in this configuration, takes on the properties of the middle form, so that to know is to know [for oneself] inside and through the action of one's knowing. Knowledge is the action of the subject upon herself—it is what she herself knows through knowing. According to this configuration, there is no knowledge outside of the act of knowing, not because there is nothing outside of knowing, but because knowledge cannot know itself from without the parameters of its own action. Knowledge, thus, is always in relation to a blind spot, to a space which exceeds the parameters of its possibility. Writing, for Stein, entails an interminable movement of these parameters, always a struggle, always in crisis with the presupposition of the parameters themselves, always in conflict with the unavoidable presupposition of sense. What one knows, in writing, is always in relation to what one does not know—always in relation to the impossible difference between not knowing and not not knowing—always

measured against an outside that is not outside: “I went on with this exceeding struggle of knowing really knowing what a thing was really knowing it knowing anything I was seeing anything I was feeling so that its name could be something, by its name coming to be a thing in itself as it was but would not be anything just and only as a name” (“Poetry” 145). *Literature is language turning into ambiguity [. . .] Here ambiguity struggles with itself* (Blanchot, “Literature” 396).

In his chapter on Stein, Perelman submits, with reference to the lectures, that “Stein’s writing was committed to motion *without* repetition, remembrance, or identity” (my italics, 169); however, taken a step further, writing, for Stein, was committed to motion in struggle *with*, was committed to struggle—in motion—*with* hermeneutic conceptions of repetition, remembrance and identity, and to the continuous moment in which such notions (are not obliterated, but rather) enter an aporetic crisis with the impossible space which exceeds their own limitations, which exceeds themselves. That continuous moment of crisis is the moment of reading. In reading, as in writing, the continuous present is, continuously, never present. Now is never now. The continuous present continues by perpetually erasing itself and beginning again. The continuous present is a continuous present is a continuous present, ad infinitum; a continuation of [itself]. It continues to suppose there were no past and asks, what would the present be? The present would be the past, or else would be impossible, would not be now, would be always a second too late to be in the present, or to be at all. *The irremediable nature of what is without a present, of what is not even there as having been, says: that has never occurred, never a single first time, and yet it is resuming, again, again, infinitely. It is without end, without beginning. It is without a future* (Blanchot, “Essential Solitude”

410). Perelman reminds us that “Because any of us reads it, Stein’s writing does not move in a vacuum” (Perelman 129); it moves on. Because any of us reads, the writing continues.

\* \* \*

*The [writer] knows he has not stepped out of history, but history is now the void, the void in the process of realization; it is absolute freedom which has become an event. (Blanchot, “Literature” 375)*

*The reader makes the work; as he reads it, he creates it; he is its real author [. . . but] the reader has no use for a work written for him, what he wants is precisely an alien work in which he can discover something unknown [. . .] This is why works created to be read are meaningless: no one reads them. (364-5)*

\* \* \*

‘Why don’t you write the way you talk?,’ a journalist asked Stein, following her generous and lucid replies to interview questions during the American lecture tour. She replied: ‘Why don’t you read the way I write?’<sup>18</sup> Stein’s lectures on her own writing, a writing which includes an action of reading which both precedes and exceeds the event of writing, do not offer a *GSM* to facilitate the reading of her work. In *Tender Buttons*, she writes, “Act so that there is no use in a centre” (196), and “Explaining darkening and

expecting relating is all of a piece” (197). Also, “A curving example makes righteous finger-nails” (205). How is one to read these fragments of the portraits? Act so that there is no use in a centre, decentre through your action, so that there is no focus, radius or parameter; or, pretend (act as though) the centre is unnecessary. Remember that explanation, as it develops, entails the drawing of relations, entails a system; and examples require a righteous pointing of the finger. No amount of reading will suffice, a conclusive reading—a decision—is not possible, no reading can afford to stop; that is to say, no reading can afford to stop short of reading itself, again. Stein’s comments on writing do not instruct the reader how to read her work, but rather conceptualize the act of writing and reading in a way which informs the current critical body of readings about itself, about how it comes to be in the scene of reading, and how it continues, in spite of itself, to move through a trajectory of blind spots. Act so that there is no use in a reading. Read the way I write. Observe your interpretation. *Fascination is [. . .] the absence that one sees because it is blinding* (Blanchot, “Essential Solitude” 412).

In an article entitled “Observing Interpretation: A Sociological View of Hermeneutics,” Elena Esposito considers the relationship between hermeneutics and observation theory, and explains that observation theory, or the theory of second-order observation, begins with “the consideration that each observer finds in his world, besides the ‘simple’ reflectionless objects (stones, trees, etc.), particular ‘objects’ that themselves observe their world—and the world of each observer is different according to the distinctions guiding his observation” (594). This leads to a condition of circularity arising from a “series of problems connected primarily with the fact that observers observe each other and know it” (594). The result is as follows:

Observing the world of other observers, the first observer finds himself as he is observed by others. Observing others he is compelled to observe himself as well. And he is compelled to do it, because in dealing with the specific object ‘observer’ he cannot avoid noticing that he himself is an observer among observers—and that his world, within which he distinguishes the world of other observers, is only one of many worlds. (594)<sup>19</sup>

Hermeneutics reaches the same circular condition arising from parallel problems.

Esposito, drawing upon Hans-Georg Gadamer’s work, defines hermeneutics as a general theory of interpretation—as applied to texts, history and social orders—which “comes into play whenever one runs into the circularity due to the fact that the identity of a text comes into being only in the course of the interpretation. The parts of a text have a sense that depends on the sense of the whole (the total interpretation)—but this whole can be understood only starting from the sense of the parts” (595). Esposito notes that if one resists the presuppositions embedded in one’s own categories of understanding, namely if one resists the idea of a sense that is independent of an operation of ‘sensorship’ (an operation of the interpretation itself), then ultimately “the interpreter must be conceived as dealing with something external which, however, comes into being only in and through its appropriation” (595). She, therefore, ties the theory of observation with that of hermeneutics as follows:

As a theory of observation, a theory of interpretation tries then to answer the question: how is it possible to grasp something external if one can know it only on the basis of one’s own categories—i.e., by making it internal? And how can something internal remain nevertheless external and build a challenge for the

interpretation (or for the observation)? Today this kind of circularity is certainly no longer a novelty, and it cannot be surprising that the similarity of their initial questions results in a series of parallelisms between observation theory and hermeneutics. (595)

In the course of her argument, Esposito addresses the element of a ‘nontransparency’ characteristic of the hermeneutic situation, in relation to the ‘blind spot’ element that is the condition of making observation possible. She explains that according to Gadamer’s hermeneutics, “Every understanding is only one understanding; it is never the correct one and will never be definitive” (600), and that “This is a corollary of Heidegger’s ‘turn’: the understanding of a text depends unavoidably on the ‘anticipatory movement of precomprehension’ [. . .] i.e., on a contextual moment which is always provisional and makes provisional the very result it reaches” (600). It follows that “The hermeneutic situation is inevitably characterized by an element of ‘non-transparency’ due precisely to the ‘immanent’ position of the interpreter. For this reason, de Man speaks of an insuperable ‘blindness,’ visible only by a further reader, who is able to observe this blindness as a phenomenon on its own” (600).<sup>20</sup> Esposito considers the paradigm of observation theory, wherein every observer has a blind spot that corresponds to the very condition which makes observation possible. Locating the origin of the expression, ‘blind spot,’ in the neurophysiological discovery that the optical nerve is inserted into the retina in a zone devoid of receiving cells, she explains:

Our visual field is thus incomplete, since we are not able to see what falls in that area. It is not however a kind of blindness one can make up for. It stems from the connection to the optical nerve, i.e., the very condition making vision possible—

and this because the eye is itself a 'body' which is as much a part of the world as the objects it allows one to see [. . .] It is not even a blindness one is conscious of. The seer does not 'see' a dark zone in his visual field, which, in fact, appears to him completely coherent and complete—he does not see that he does not see.

(600)

Therefore, blindness can be confirmed only by a second observer (who will in turn have her own blind spot), or by shifting the position of the original observer. Paradoxically, “The condition making vision possible is also the one originating the blindness—which for this reason can never be overcome” (600). In the context of this paradoxical configuration, Esposito invokes Luhmann’s argument that “the distinction guiding observation is what the observation itself can never observe, except by generating a paradox one obtains if one asks whether the distinction between true and false is itself true or false, whether it is right to distinguish between right and wrong, whether it is necessarily good to distinguish between good and evil and so on” (601). Esposito’s interrogation of hermeneutics and observation theory advances itself toward the claim that, finally, there is a need for theoretical instruments which have the capacity to deal with cases “in which the receiver gets something that could not be foreseen by the utterer,” and that “Hermeneutics does not seem able to offer such instruments” (617).

Stein’s writing, with its sensitivity to certain tenets marking the juncture of hermeneutics and observation theory, articulates this need. To read and write responsibly, for Stein, entails an incessant movement of the observer, in observation, and of the reader, in reading. “By this I mean this” (“Composition” 21), she writes, and “What this says is this” (“Plays” 59), so “You see what I mean by what I say” (“Portraits”



110); “Do you see what I mean” (113); “You see what I mean” (114); “Oh yes you do see” (“What Is English Literature” 45); “You do see that” (45); “You do see that” (56); “You do see what I say” (56); “And now you do see what I mean” (57). Observation, seeing, is a constitutive element of understanding, and as such, it is also the condition which originates blindness. With the motion of understanding, there is a correlative motion of blindness. Bob Perelman remarks that “As often as Stein wrote variants of the phrase “You see” in her work in the thirties, there was a persistent difficulty involved, as she also asserted at least as often that her writing was fundamentally different from all other social uses of language” (154). Her writing was, fundamentally, impossible, imploring all other social uses of language to call themselves into question, to engage the crisis between themselves and the space which exceeds their limitation, to question the presupposition of sense, and to address the impossibility of reading [itself] from without the parameters of reading. Criticism of Stein’s work has shifted back and forth, focusing on issues of unintelligibility, unreadability and untranslatability in the context of her work,<sup>21</sup> always reflecting back upon itself, shifting position, addressing its own impossibility, facing the crisis with the insuperable blind spot of reading. Stein’s writing and thinking *necessitates* this struggle, so that the possibility of reading necessarily entails a moment of crisis arising of the reading’s intransitive struggle with itself, with its own presuppositions of sense, order and clarity, marking the impossibility which makes reading possible. Each reading announces a crisis—a moment of instability in which the decision turns upon itself—a turning point, turning. The grammar of this crisis is the middle voice; its condition is a language in perpetual incongruence with itself, a language in madness. If a responsible reading is a reading of indecision—a reading which

addresses the moment of its own madness—then reading Stein’s writing entails taking responsibility, or else taking reading [itself] responsibly, as a diathetical and critical event marking the impossible moment in which reading and writing converge, in the middle voice, to mark the beginning, again, of their own madness.

### **In A Word**

*Madness: let us suppose a language from which this word would be excluded, another in which it would be forgotten in relation to all the other words, another where the terrified search, forbidden, for this one word, lost and constantly threatening, constantly interrogatory, would suffice, orienting all the possibilities of speech, to submit language to the only word that had deserted it. A supposition (mad, it is true), but also easy: on condition that we make use of a language in which madness would be given by a name. In general, we ask ourselves, by the intermediary of experienced practitioners, if such or such a man falls under the judgement of such a word. Strictly, we maintain this word in the interrogative position: Hölderlin was mad, but was he? Or else we hesitate to specialize it, not only with scientific doubt, but in order not to, by making it precise, immobilize it in a certain knowledge: even schizophrenia, in evoking the madness of extremes, the distance that distances us in advance from ourselves in separating us from any power of identity, always says too much about it, or pretends to say too much about it. Madness would thus be a word in perpetual incongruence with itself and interrogative throughout, such that it would put into question its possibility and, through it, the possibility of the language that would admit it, thus would put*

*interrogation itself into question, in as much as it belongs to the play of language. To say: Hölderlin is mad is to say: is he mad? But, it is, starting from there, to make madness so foreign to any affirmation that it could not find a language without putting it under the threat of madness: language, as such, gone mad. Mad language would be, in any speech, not only the possibility that would make it speak at the risk of making it non-speaking (risk without which it would not speak), but the limit that detains all language and which, never fixed in advance, nor theoretically determinable, still less such that one could write: 'there is a limit,' thus outside of any 'there is,' could inscribe itself only on the basis of its own crossing—the crossing of the uncrossable—and, from this, prohibited.*

(Blanchot, *Step 45*)

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Barthes, Roland. "To Write: An Intransitive Verb?" *The Rustle of Language*. Trans. Richard Howard. New York: Hill and Wang, 1986.

<sup>2</sup> This paper is included in a collection (as part of the series on Typological Studies in Language) entitled *Voice: Form and Function*. Eds. Barbara Fox and Paul J. Hopper. Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 1994. 179-230. For a more extensive and elaborate version of Kemmer's study on the middle voice, see her book (also published as part of the TSL series) entitled *The Middle Voice*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 1993.

<sup>3</sup> Lyons, John. *Introduction to theoretical Linguistics*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1969.

<sup>4</sup> This formal linguistic observation is congruent with Barthes's own claim, in his essay, that in the construction of the middle voice, "by acting, the subject affects himself, he always remains inside the action, even if that action involves an object. Hence, the middle voice does not exclude transitivity" (18).

<sup>5</sup> The conference was held at Stanford University, February 27-March 2, 1991, and selected papers were published in the spring and fall issues of the *Stanford Literature Review* in 1992.

<sup>6</sup> In addition to citing from Derrida's *Speech and Phenomenon*, Wellbery here cites Foucault's formulation, in *The Order of Things*, of a "rule of exteriority: not to move from a discourse toward its interior and hidden nucleus, toward the heart of thought or a signification that would manifest itself in the discourse; rather, to depart from the discourse itself, from its apparition and its regularity, and to move toward its external conditions of possibility, toward that which gives place to the aleatory series of its events and which fixes its limits" (qtd. in Wellbery 17).

<sup>7</sup> On Wellbery's terms, moreover, a reading codified as any 'method,' would necessarily obliterate the 'accident' for which it seeks to account.

<sup>8</sup> This contradiction of a reading which obliterates itself does not carry within it the end of reading, but rather the absolute beginning of its reconfiguration, of reading revealed as a problem, at the moment of crisis with itself. Maurice Blanchot, with reference to the reading of literature, writes: "By turning itself into an inability to reveal anything, literature is attempting to become the revelation of what revelation destroys [. . .] But this wish to be a thing [. . .] this insane effort to bury itself in itself, to hide itself behind the fact that it is visible—all this is what literature now manifests, what literature now shows" ("Literature" 384). According to Blanchot, "When literature refuses to name anything, when it turns a name into something obscure and meaningless, witness to the primordial obscurity, what has disappeared in this case—the meaning of the name—is really destroyed, but signification in general has appeared in its place, the meaning of the meaninglessness embedded in the word as expression of the obscurity of existence, so that although the precise meaning of the terms has faded, what asserts itself now is the very possibility of signifying, the empty power of bestowing meaning—a strange impersonal light" (385).

<sup>9</sup> For an extreme example, see Ellen Berry's *Curved Thought and Textual Wandering: Gertrude Stein's Postmodernism*. Ann Arbor: U of Michigan P, 1995. Conversely, Charles Bernstein, in a chapter entitled "Professing Stein/Stein Professing" (in *A Poetics*. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1992), argues that "Stein's writing is not postmodernism before

its time but radical modernism in its time” (143). Also see Joseph N. Riddel’s *The Turning Word: American Literary Modernism and Continental Theory*. Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania P, 1996; Michael Kaufmann’s *Textual Bodies: Modernism, Postmodernism, and Print*. London: Bucknell UP, 1994; and Lynn M. Weiss’s *Gertrude Stein and Richard Wright: The Poetics and Politics of Modernism*. Mississippi: UP of Mississippi, 1998.

<sup>10</sup> Stein posed this question to a group of journalists in New York, during her American lecture tour in 1934. See Patricia Meyerowitz’s “Editor’s Forward” to *Look at Me Now and Here I Am: Writings and Lectures 1909-45* (London: Penguin, 1967. 9).

<sup>11</sup> This widely circulated account is retold in Marianne DeKoven’s “Introduction: Transformations of Gertrude Stein.” *Modern Fiction Studies* 42.3 (1996): 469-83.

<sup>12</sup> Since the publication of this book (Madison: U of Wisconsin P, 1983), DeKoven’s critical work has changed in tone and inflection. In her introduction to a special issue on Stein, in *Modern Fiction Studies* 42.3 (1996), she notes that “While the ridicule and rejection she suffered during her life, and during the decades immediately following her death, focused on her ‘unintelligibility,’ current controversy and critique call her politics into question, especially the racial-ethnic-religious-national politics of both her work and her life” (471). Regarding her own current critical inflection, Dekoven submits that “What I see now when I look at Stein’s writing is a powerful utopian project that is not so much lost as become post-utopian: stripped of aura, detached from its revolutionary potential, indifferentiated, made just one more choice among a vast array of literary, cultural, aesthetic objects of consumption, with its fairly stable market niche and its solid position within the escalated professionalization of literary study” (475).

<sup>13</sup> I am referring here to the basic notion of the performative speech act (derived from J. L. Austin’s *How to Do Things with Words*. New York: Oxford UP, 1973), so that reading Stein’s work becomes an occasion for a certain type of speech act that Austin would have called ‘performative.’

<sup>14</sup> I do not address, in the context of this study, Stein’s or Blanchot’s politics of identity. For a discussion of Stein’s politics, see Maria Damon’s incisive article entitled “Gertrude Stein’s Jewishness, Jewish Social Scientists, and the Jewish Question.” *Modern Fiction Studies* 42.3 (1996): 489-506. For a discussion of Blanchot’s political inflection, see Gerald L. Bruns’s *Maurice Blanchot: The Refusal of Philosophy*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1997.

<sup>15</sup> In *Figural Realism: Studies in the Mimesis Effect* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1999), White accounts for a modernism which envisions “nothing less than an order of experience beyond (or prior to) that expressible in the kinds of opposition we are forced to draw (between agency and patiency, subjectivity and objectivity, literalness and figurativeness, fact and fiction, history and myth, and so forth) in any version of realism” (39), so that a distinctively modernist experience of the world entails a “dissolution of the event” (66), where one suddenly has to register, remember, or understand events which could not have occurred before the twentieth century; events “whose nature, scope, and implications no prior age could even have imagined” (69), events such as the two world wars, rationalized genocidal projects, the rise of technology and warfare, overwhelming population growths, pollution spreads, nuclear contamination, consequential ecological threats, and so on. Thus, the ‘modernist event,’ or the modernist experience of life, cannot be compared to or measured against the background of prior historical experiences

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and events; its force, or the force of its action (or ‘movement,’ on Stein’s terms) is present regardless of, and in resistance to, prior conceptions of understanding.

<sup>16</sup> To this movement of talking/listening, inside the action of writing, she will later add a movement of looking/seeing.

<sup>17</sup> Bob Perelman, in a chapter entitled “Seeing What Gertrude Stein Means” (in his book, *The Trouble with Genius: Reading Pound, Joyce, Stein, and Zukofsky*. Berkeley: U of C P, 1994. 129-69), provides an illuminating discussion of Stein’s notion of ‘genius.’

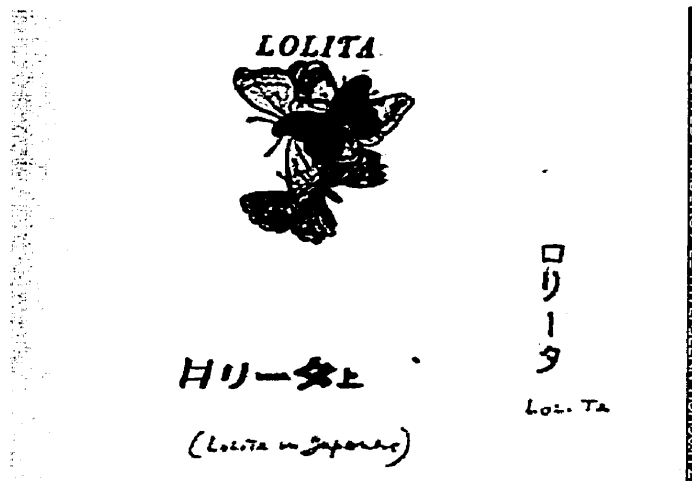
<sup>18</sup> Patricia Meyerowitz includes this account in her “Editor’s Forward” to *Look at Me Now and Here I Am: Writings and Lectures 1909-45* (London: Penguin, 1967. 9).

<sup>19</sup> Esposito further elaborates on Niklas Luhmann’s theory of social systems which applies observation theory to psychic and social systems.

<sup>20</sup> See Paul de Man’s *Blindness and Insight: Essays in the Rhetoric of Contemporary Criticism* (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1983). In the chapter entitled “The Rhetoric of Blindness,” de Man discusses the literary critic as the second reader of the text (the writer being its first reader), who can observe the blindness of the first reader (but the critic in relation to the work, of course, operates according to a blindness of her own).

<sup>21</sup> and more recently interrogating the politics of her project in the context of her identity as a Jewish, American, lesbian woman living in France during the Occupation; interrogating, that is, the politics of what would be configured, in such criticism, as Stein’s own supposed ‘blindness.’

Figure 1: Butterflies drawn by Nabokov



<<http://www.cnn.com/SPECIALS/books/1999/nabokov>>

CNN special—Butterflies drawn by Nabokov inside the cover of Vèra’s copy of *Lolita*, this sketch shows four pencil butterflies in shades of grey, white and red. Nabokov wrote “Lolita” three times in the Katakana alphabet (only two shown here) and then “Lolita in Japanese” underneath in English.

Forrest, David V.: "New Words and Neologisms, With a Thesaurus of Coinages by a Schizophrenic Savant," *Psychiatry* 32:44-73, 1969.

*The Thesaurus of Neologisms\**

1. **Py'ro-leg'is-la'tion:** Fire laws.
2. **Sic'h'o-ty'po-ol'e-ga'tion:** Talk worth getting off the chest.
3. **Tee'to'tal-i-za'tion:** Addition and arithmetic and abstinence from alcohol. The opposite of subtraction. Sulting people to a T with numbers, staying sober. 6, 7, 8, 9, 10 add up to 40.
4. **Spee'tro-tau'to-ro-ta'tion:** Circling in every way, as with checkers or a bat in baseball.
5. **Spee'tro-tau'to-pros-ta'tion:** Going frontwards instead of regressing; improving.
6. **Py'ro-imp'e-tra'tion:** Firestarting. From *pyro* meaning fire, *im* meaning in, and *petrification*, a form of rock, *petr* meaning rock. Fire and rocks. Grass burns in connection with rocks. Rocks can burn.
7. **Sty'lo-trans'ter-pre-ta'tion:** Translation of speech, interpretation.
8. **Hab'it-ol'o-gy:** Study of both bad and good habits.
9. **Hor'o-ster'e-o-tech-nol'o-gy:** Study of clocks and watches.
10. **Ster'e-o-so-ci-o-pa-thol'o-gy:** Solid form of study of friendship and diseases.
11. **Py'ro-prop'a-ga'tion:** Spreading fire.
12. **Super-sty'lo-cy'clo-pe'dic:** Having the mind of a walking encyclopedia.
13. **Sem'i-hec-to'l'o-gy:** Study of half hundreds, or the number 50.
14. **Hem'i-sec-to'l'o-gy:** Study of half sections of cake and stuff.
15. **Pho'to-chrono-graphy:** Study of time by light with a timepiece.
16. **Re'tau-da'tion:** Praising over and over.
17. **Suig'ger-a'tion:** A giggle or sniggering. I do it sometimes. [See 70.]
18. **Py'ro-leg'is-la'tive:** Pertaining to a fire law.
19. **Re-hab'i-ta'tion:** Residing over and over again.
20. **Re-in'fil-tra'tion:** Act of entering again, New Jersey to New York.
21. **Tau'to-jac-ta'tion:** A shaking that repeats (like nerves), a boast that repeats.
22. **Tau'to-tac-ta'tion:** A touching that repeats. Getting communication, talking with somebody. Touch with hands is

- sometimes pleasant when somebody loves me.
23. **In'ter-le-ga'tion:** Interview with law.
  24. **In'ter-vis'it-a'tion:** Interview and visitation all in one.
  25. **In'ter-twist'a-bil'i-ty:** Ability to intertwine, as of rope, string and other cords.
  26. **O'ver-ex'pur-ga'tion:** Too much expulsion.
  27. **Ul'tra-ster'e-o-trans'por-ta'tion:** Transportation on an elevated railway, as to Coney Island.
  28. **Hor'o-le-ga'tion:** Horology and separation; to keep apart in time. On April 28, 1964, I was alone with my clocks and jewelry—clocks, watches and diamond rings, sometimes pearls—watching TV, having a good time, talking with my parents, keeping away from bad company, with my clocks standing far apart, separating those that work and didn't. All people are like clocks with a heart ticking inside.
  29. **O'ver-tan'ta-liz-a'tion:** Teasing that goes on forever.
  30. **Or'tho-pho'to-tit'u-ba'tion:** A straight failure (staggering) that is done by light.
  31. **Re'do-na'tion:** Act of offering again, giving again.
  32. **Sem'i-el-ta'tion:** Half a quoting or citation. In philosophy, believing only half of what you hear. Being a tale bearer is as bad as being a tale maker. On April 3, 1961, there was a false rumor about attendants being mean. They weren't really.
  33. **Trans'li-ba'tion:** Transfer of drinks from one place to another, such as bottled Pepsi Cola on a truck.
  34. **Trans'li-ga'tion:** Transfer of ligatures, as in type setting, e.g., II, from one case to another.
  35. **Trans'ter-po-la'tion:** Transfer by insertion, transfer and insertibility, change of interpolation. Putting the paper on which I wrote my abilities and activities in a folder with clips.

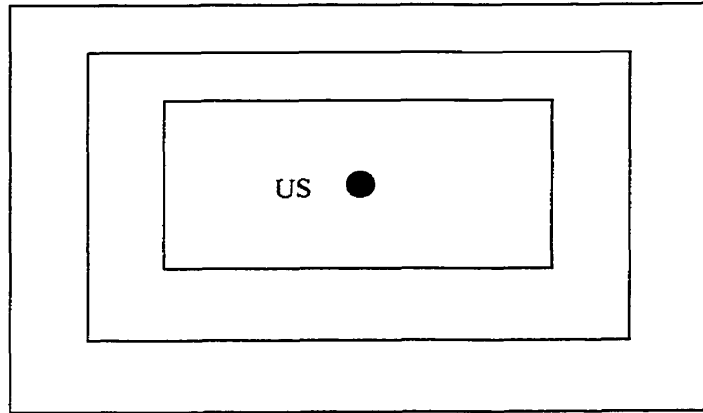
\* Built type and accents added.

36. **En'er-giz-a'tion:** Chock full of energy, galloping or driving energy, as in the Lone Ranger on TV.
37. **Su'per-ar-tic'u-la'tion:** The kind of joining that goes on forever, exceeding in words, joining.
38. **Py'ro-car'di-ol'o-gy:** The study of a heart on fire, also, study of a heartburn. The feeling of acid in the stomach, setting the heart on fire. I feel it with gas.
39. **Pho'to-sec'tion-al'i-ty:** Sectioning by light, of oranges and other fruits into quarters, eights, and sixteens.
40. **Dis'pro-por'tion-a-bil'i-ty:** Act of getting out of proportion.
41. **Su'per-ex'tri-ca'tion:** Act of being high above and independent, freedom above difficulty.
42. **Su'per-in'tel-lect'u-a'tion:** The greatest form of intellect worth working on and living by, superintellectualism, super-intellectuality.
43. **Con'tour'a-bil'i-ty:** Faculty on any problem of configuration. Ability to shape up.
44. **Pho'to-re-jec'tion:** Expulsion of light.
45. **Pho'to-sal'u-ta'tion:** A "hello" by light, "sholom" or good-bye.
46. **Su'per-cor'ru-ga'tion:** Act of wrinkling more and more, as in cardboard containers.
47. **Su'per-sty'lo-med'i-ta'tion:** High thinking, anything resembling superstylo-meditation.
48. **Su'per-ha'bi-tol'o-gy:** Study of both bad and good habits.
49. **In'grow'a-bil'i-ty:** Ability to grow inwards, like toenails. Also inner development, inner strength.
50. **Spee'tro-pho'to-struc'tur-a'tion:** Architecture.
51. **Pho'to-se-lec'tion:** Selection by light given.
52. **Su'per-sty'lo-pho'to-tu'tor-i-za'tion:** Higher education, as in school or college, high learning or high thinking.
53. **Mis-in'te-gra'tion:** Act of mishitching, putting a jigsaw puzzle together incorrectly.

Figure 2: New Words and Neologisms Handout to author, UBC, Vancouver. 11 September



Figure 3: Diagram drawn by P4



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