

N^o. 5

CJLC
Columbia Journal of Literary Criticism

The Renewed Formalism Issue

featuring

Helen Skiba

on Chrétien de Troyes' *Yvain* or *The Knight with the Lion*

James McGirk

on Ben Jonson's *The Alchemist*

Luciana Colapinto

on Édouard Manet's *Mademoiselle V...en Costume d'Espada*

Isabel Bohrer

on Abbas Kiarostami's *Close-Up*

Jon Kief

on Ch'oe Yun's "The Gray Snowman"

and

A Discussion with

**Amanda Claybaugh, Nicholas
Dames, Jenny Davidson, and
David Kurnick**

An Interview with
Caroline Levine

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The Columbia Journal of Literary Criticism was founded in 2003 as an undergraduate peer-edited journal of literary theory. In addition to interviews and specific features, we publish Columbia undergraduates' writing on the theory and criticism of literature, the arts, and culture. The CJLC publishes annually in the spring of each academic year.

For more information and back issues:
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Conducted by J. H. Jason Jim

We offer this fifth anniversary issue of *The Columbia Journal of Literary Criticism* (CJLC) as our addition to the recently renewed debate on the place of formalism in present and future literary and cultural criticism. This year's five papers written and edited by Columbia undergraduates each explore different methods of formalist reading and analysis, as their authors engage with texts of diverse media and national origins. Helen Skiba reconsiders Chrétien de Troyes' *Yvain* or *The Knight with the Lion* by focusing her new structuralist reading through an integration of the terms of the historical, mythological and economic discourses at stake in this twelfth-century French work. James McGirk examines how Ben Jonson's play, *The Alchemist*, manifests its content, the seventeenth-century preoccupation with alchemy, in its textual form. In a focused analysis of Édouard Manet's *Mademoiselle V... en Costume d'Espada*, Luciana Colapinto negotiates the formal ambiguity of this painting by establishing the significance of the theater to its conception. Isabel Bohrer investigates the director Abbas Kiarostami's merging of factual reenactment and dramatization in his film *Close-Up*. In his reading of Ch'oe Yun's story "The Gray Snowman," Jon Kief explores the interconnection between memory and its political and historical context in late twentieth-century Korea.

In addition to continuing our well-attended "After Hours" student-faculty discussion series, this spring the Journal hosted a panel discussion on Style and New Formalism. The event provided a forum for four professors of the Columbia Department of English and Comparative Literature—Amanda Claybaugh, Nicholas Dames, Jenny Davidson and David Kurnick—to talk about their understanding of style's role in their own critical methodologies as well as in the greater context of current scholarship within and beyond the academic community. We include an excerpt of the transcription of their discussion in this issue of the Journal. Also included in this issue is an interview with scholar and critic Caroline Levine, whose recently published article "Strategic Formalism: Toward a New Method in Cultural Studies" reintroduces the formalist question in terms of its historical framework in order to argue for its relevance today.

As always, we would like to acknowledge all who have supported the CJLC in the past year: our Executive board, Editorial board and authors for their hard work and dedication; the professors featured in our After Hours discussions and in our panel; the students and faculty who attended our events; and, of course, our readers. We also extend our deepest appreciation and gratitude to our faculty advisor, Professor Jenny Davidson, whose enthusiasm and commitment to the Journal have been real since its inaugural issue five years ago. Finally, we would like to thank the Department of English and Comparative Literature and the Columbia University Arts Initiative for their continued generosity and support. We welcome your comments, and invite you to participate in the Journal's ongoing conversation.

Sincerely yours,

Jenny Kane and Elisabeth Vastola
 Editors-in-Chief
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The 2006-2007 CJLC After Hours Discussion Series

The After Hours Discussion Series was started in Fall 2005 by the CJLC to encourage dialogue between students and faculty outside of the classroom on topics such as intellectual research, higher education, and academic pedagogy. These informal conversations have been successful in bringing a range of Columbia humanities professors together with undergraduates for lively conversations on issues regarding academic life.

September 26, 2006 **Bruce Robbins**

Professor of English and Comparative Literature

Professor Robbins spoke on various topics relating to his work on contemporary literature and public intellectuals in academia.

October 4, 2006 **Caleb Crain**

Professor Crain discussed his experiences balancing his scholarly interests and his recent freelance work for publications such as *The New Yorker*.

October 18, 2006 **Martin Puchner**

H. Gordon Garbedian Professor of
English and Comparative Literature

Professor Puchner shared with us his most recent work on “Manifesto Art Politics” and conducted a discussion on the intersection between politics, art, and drama.

November 13, 2006 **Andreas Huyssen**

Villard Professor of German and Comparative Literature

In a talk entitled “Memories of Modernism,” Professor Huyssen recounted his experience and definition of Modernism and his new writing and teaching projects.

February 8, 2007 **Karl Kroeber**

Mellon Professor in the Humanities

Professor Kroeber spoke about the importance of story as a thread of continuity in literature and in life, as well as his experiences in teaching non-traditional literatures.

February 21, 2007 **Molly Murray**

Assistant Professor in English and Comparative Literature

Professor Murray gave a talk on “Jokes and their Relation to the Academic Unconscious.”

Nobility, Money, and Metaphor: *Yvain's* Mythic Reclamation of Debt

Helen Skiba

Chrétien de Troyes' *Yvain* or *The Knight with the Lion* (1177) is a twelfth-century Arthurian romance in Old French, written in the Champagne region under the patronage of Count Henri le Liberal and Countess Marie of France. Chrétien was among the first and most influential writers in the Arthurian tradition, and solidified the legends' importance in court society.¹ *Yvain* is the story of a young knight's marriage, his transgression, and his wife's retaliation, from which he descends into madness; his recuperation of his reputation, and finally, his reconciliation with his lady. The narrative arc formulates itself around two distinct strands of meaning, juxtaposed and reticulated through a vocabulary of money, worth, and bankruptcy. The first strand is that of the nominal character's moral degeneration, climactic loss of identity, and self re-integration; the second is the work's re-expression of the mythic form or hero-cycle. Both strands concern the generation of meaning, and the idea of the money economy as an exchange metaphor. The correlation of personal quality and economic solvency expresses Medieval society's struggle to integrate and internalize the new system of meaning presented by the twelfth century's swift metamorphosis from barter economy to monetary exchange.² This integration is the unconscious but dynamic and essential process of imbuing a new form of measurement—capital, debt, coinage—with the force and importance of human meaning, the process by which a culture comes to re-express its most central truths through an unfamiliar medium. Alterations in modes of exchange, because they impact human relationships, affect a culture's artistic production, form, and imagination. The twelfth century's shifting ideas of money deeply color Chrétien's vocabulary and the mechanisms of his narrative; as a coin expresses the value of a thing, lending it a new mobility and a wider circle of influence, so do Chrétien's metaphors, as modes of mental exchange, allow his characters a broad imaginative range, while binding them within an interdependent system. As Eugene Vance writes, "such narrative can itself be considered as a kind of economy."³ But a historical and economic reading of the romance, while important, cannot alone be sufficient: we

must also employ a romantic reading of history, in which economic shifts have as much poetic potential as a mythic king. The poem's meaning lies not only in its immediate, changing temporal context, but its use of that context as a new medium through which the eternal puzzles of love, life, and death, as well as writing itself, can be reinterpreted.

Yvain is the story of the adventure of a man who embodies a culture and whose adventure gives moral meaning to a new form of economic exchange—a new form, therefore, of societal structure and the basic bonds of human relationships. In the twelfth century, those relationships could increasingly be cast in terms of *worth*. Chrétien can say in his prologue that “a courteous man, though dead, is worth a great deal more, in my opinion, than a living churl,” a statement that has larger implications as the poem's system develops.⁴ Though enunciated with new terminology, the knight's quest is the same as that of the heroes who precede him. In Joseph Campbell's paradigm, *Yvain* chronicles “a separation from the world, a penetration to some source of power, and a life-enhancing return.”⁵ It is only the vocabulary of his adventure that differentiates him from Homer's Odysseus. In place of contention with the gods, Yvain must comprehend new quantifiers of the good and heroic in his world; he endeavors to balance his accounts and recoup his reputation, reinventing himself through an external symbol that functions like a coin. Odysseus, similarly, sought to restore what was rightfully his and to reclaim his identity. The stories are not at all dissimilar, but the matrix through which each is filtered has changed significantly with the flux of time.

The Arthurian tradition that Chrétien formed and extended undertook to align itself with the timelessness of myths inherited from the Greco-Roman past, whose stories and philosophy the slowly but insistently growing Medieval universities were continually digesting.⁶ *Yvain* is no exception; it seeks to carve out for the nobility an area of secret and unassailable privilege—an incontestably superior history—as a defense against the encroachment of two distinct forces. On one side, an increasingly affluent bourgeoisie enriched by the novel mechanisms of commercial trade was threatening to diminish the nobles' identity and privilege; on the other, monarchies were consolidating and bolstering their power by stripping the noble class of independence, drawing it into the insular world of the court.⁷ The mythic claims of the new court romances are a reaction against this impending loss of noble status. The timelessness of these stories, the way they are divorced from any fact-based history, serves in fact as an affirmation of an exclusive history: if the claim is based in myth, its authenticity cannot be denied, and noble status is secure because their superiority is one of blood and inner worth.⁸ In romance, exterior status is integrated with interior value, so that appellative nobility is equal to a noble lifestyle and mode of income, which, for many nobles in twelfth-century Champagne, may not have been the case.⁹ Mythmaking cannot be divorced from its economic stimuli; in aspiring to fulfill a necessity of timelessness, Chrétien's romance reveals that its structures and consequences are fundamentally determined by the time-bound conditions under which it was produced. Chrétien understood this phenomenon

and was able to undercut *Yvain's* timelessness and the hermetically sealed, magically luxurious world of romantic nobles.

We can read *Yvain* in two very different and even opposed ways: it is the rewriting of the immortal forms of the hero's journey, in which case we should believe with John Baldwin that Chrétien's romances are "remarkably insulated from his own historical context," so much, in fact, that they become usefully "unhistorical." Equally compelling is the reading that the romance may "reflect—or occult—a set of values that constitute a given ideological context."¹⁰ The scholarship on this issue is so sharply divided and so convincingly argued that it leads us to the conclusion that there must be some measure—indeed, a great measure—of truth in each contention. I propose instead that the romance's attempt at un-historicity is its reflection of the increasingly "squeezed" identity of the twelfth-century aristocracy, and that its timelessness fulfills a need arising from the changing economic base. This essay prefers to keep, as it were, one foot with Campbell and one with Marx, and seeks instead (like *Yvain*) for a synthesis, a vision of literature in which history and myth are involved in a symbiotic evolution. The deliberately "unhistorical" and mythic form of the romance is a product of its historical root. Chrétien uses the rich means at his disposal—a contemporary and time-colored vocabulary—to at once endow that vocabulary with the thrust and immediacy of primeval stories while enunciating the unhistorical themes of those very same timeless myths. Words like debt, capital, and worth, along with the metaphorical idea of a coin, are made spiritually and intuitively intelligible through their use in a mythical story of origins. In turn, the story of origins is re-expressed as a relevant explanation of how to live in the age of this vocabulary. The two cannot be divorced, precisely because language carries with it such an immensity of tradition, while bearing the indelible autograph of the peculiar circumstances at the precise moment of its utterance. This reciprocal exchange is similar to a central idea of Campbell's monomyth: the hero's transcendence of opposites. *Yvain* scholarship has repeatedly identified the main binaries as the two codes of *chevalerie* (honor and bravery) and *amor* (love and mercy) that the hero must fulfill at once.¹¹ Through the loss and recuperation of his honor and moral solvency, he becomes the "master of two worlds," capable of understanding and bestowing the ultimate boon of life—the synthesis and unity of man's separate obligations. In this reading, the opposites are equally those of debt and credit, new terms by which man's mastery of the essential balance of his life could be measured.

The twelfth century rapidly exchanged a barter economy for one of commercial profit motivation. Lords and serfs increasingly sought to define one another's roles and legally determine the uses of a manor's land and labor. Old contractual obligations were undergoing swift alteration, as lords more and more commuted labor dues into annual money payments. At the same time, because of continuous and widespread population growth, the entire landscape was in a state of flux: previously a sea of dense forests intermittently punctuated with villages and castles, the European wilds were progressively shrinking, pressed by concentrically expanding circles of crops cultivated according to the new rotational system. Chrétien lived

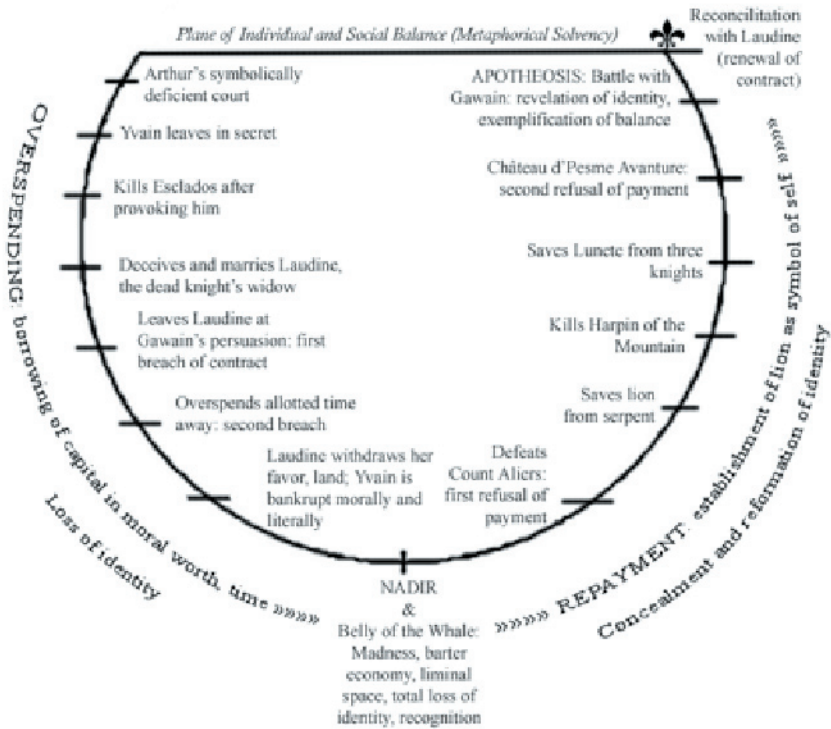
and wrote in Champagne, where flourishing market-fairs exemplified the revival and growth of commercial centers and towns, a consequence of the dramatic increase in trade that characterizes this period in France.¹² The loss of wilderness, combined with increased population density that narrowed the distance between people, and a greater frequency of fairs, must have led to a new awareness of how an individual's economic activity affected and was affected by other individuals. A new awareness of just how much was owed, in quite explicitly monetary and service-related terms, by one person to another, arose; both literally and in one's conception of oneself within society, one's neighbors were suddenly and starkly visible. It is this new awareness of economic necessity, the underside of the nobility's supporting framework, that romance attempts to obfuscate, distancing the nobility from the mode of production. From the mid-twelfth century, the Champagne region's baronial and knightly families began to mortgage their lands and villages, to provide for debts incurred by overspending.¹³ *Yvain's* vocabulary, then, describes one way the nobility processed the changes occurring in its economic status and the new ways in which it was required to uphold the overtly luxurious and free-spending habits through which, in large part, it claimed distinction from non-noble classes. Part of Chrétien's cultural work in the romance is to caricature and critique this very phenomenon.

Thus grounded, we begin to read on two levels. From the start, the world somehow does not conform to the surface-level Arthurian ideal that Chrétien wants to present: that distant time of "kinglike splendor" when "[l]ove's order was still fine and flourishing" (Y 257). Instead, the prologue relates a negative caricature of the Arthurian court: a knight tells a story not of triumph, but of unmitigated shame and defeat, as a seneschal viciously attacks the queen, and Arthur himself proves unkingly, since he "forg[et]s himself" in the queen's bed and is unable to keep order in his own court (Y 258). Chrétien here sets in motion two layers of his narrative arc: the first is that of the myth, whose commencement requires that the mythic world suffer from some symbolic deficiency, the second is the arc of moral debt and credit.¹⁴ The court indeed suffers from a moral deficiency, or even deficit: Arthur is guilty of overspending his time with the queen, just as Yvain will later be guilty of overspending his allotted time away from his lady. The account of the court that is given does not balance with what the reader expects—there is, so to speak, a discrepancy in funds. These are the provocations of the driving narrative. The financial arc parallels the mythological, recasting the hero-myth in the terms of the new *de facto* vocabulary of commerce. Once those terms are paired with the familiar heroic arc, they are internalized and given a meaning in relation to that story. That is, they are not inherently meaningful but must be imbued with meaning, as a coin is worthless unless it is recognized by an extensive web of people and institutions. *Yvain* becomes, through this pairing, the story of a culture reflecting on and subsuming an untried method of moral measuring that nevertheless arose organically—and thus mysteriously—from within itself.

I find it useful to think of the romance's structure spatially, as a movement downwards and away from the chivalric ideal, a climax at a nadir of madness and

anonymity, and a subsequent climb to a place of balance. Following a brief synopsis of the plot, I will illustrate this visualization in a diagram. *The Knight with the Lion* begins with Yvain's search for adventure in nameless parts of the British forest. He leaves Arthur's court in secret to find a magical spring he has heard of from his cousin Calogrenant, who was unable to defeat the Red Knight, Esclados, who is the lord of the lands surrounding the spring. Yvain performs the rites at the spring, kills Esclados and, with the help of the handmaid Lunete, marries his widow, the lady Laudine. But when Arthur and his court visit Laudine's city, Sir Gawain, Arthur's nephew, persuades Yvain to leave his new bride to compete in tournaments. Laudine reluctantly grants him one year's leave. But Yvain overspends his time away, and Laudine withdraws her favor from him. The knight goes mad from grief, living naked in the woods and eating raw flesh that he has caught with his bare hands. Eventually, Lady Norison's maid recognizes him while wandering in the forest, and restores him to his senses with a magic ointment. He now begins to restore his reputation. First, he defeats Count Aliers, who had been plundering the defenseless Lady Norison's land, and effects peace between them, accepting no reward for his services. Yvain leaves and comes upon a lion being attacked by a fire-breathing serpent. He saves the lion, who, in gratitude, becomes his constant companion and helpmeet. He embarks on three subsequent adventures: he kills the Harpin of the Mountain, a giant who had been blackmailing a nobleman; he saves Lunete, who had been falsely accused of treason, from burning at the stake by defeating three knights; and he kills two sons of the devil at the Château d'Pesme Avanture, where women are forced to weave silk in payment for an old debt. He frees these women and, as in all previous cases, refuses any payment or reward. By now he is known not as Yvain, but as the Knight with the Lion. The final adventure involves a dispute between two orphaned sisters: the elder seeks to withhold any inheritance of land from the younger, who chooses the Knight with the Lion as her champion. The elder daughter has chosen Sir Gawain. The men fight each other without knowing who their opponent is, and that each is in fact the other's greatest friend. The match ends in a stalemate, and Arthur commands that the correct inheritance be given to the younger sister. Having revealed his identity to the court, as both Yvain and the Knight with the Lion, the hero returns to Laudine, where the maid Lunete again mediates their union through clever manipulation of promises. Alternatively, we can visualize the plot in accordance with my diagram (see opposite page).

It is important to note that Chrétien's court is already moving towards the bankrupt nadir even as the story begins. Like all heroes, Yvain is called onto the hero-path by a blunder: here, it is Arthur's overspending of time in bed, and Calogrenant's adventure, which itself creates a debt of honor that Yvain must repay. This call to adventure transfers the hero's "spiritual center of gravity from within the pale of his society to a zone unknown" (Campbell 58). Certainly, Yvain seems relentlessly and mysteriously drawn to the spring as to an unknown world, and it will be his destiny to rectify the debts of his court. Still, his own actions perpetuate the erring already apparent in the behavior of his peers. His embarkation is impetuous and preemptive:



THE ECONOMIC AND MYTHIC ARCS OF THE KNIGHT WITH THE LION

he leaves clandestinely and without his monarch's permission, and the reasons for his departure are extremely selfish; Chrétien describes an "impatient" Yvain "yearning desperately" to see the spring (Y 265).¹⁵ The knight spirals downward, away from the center of the chivalric ideal, accruing moral debt as he goes. The path is a perverted manifestation of the hero's traditional route: rather than venturing outward, driven by external forces, it is Yvain himself who drives the knight further and further "down" into the moral red. It will be, then, at the furthest point from his ideal, at his most destitute and beholden, at the outermost reaches of his known sphere, that he penetrates Campbell's "sacred zone of the universal source" (81). The sacred zone of his madness gives Yvain the ability to integrate and thereby surmount not only the opposition of *chevalerie* and *amor*, but also the constraints of morality represented by the new lexicon of debt. The hero steps beyond both rings of the world to look back upon it, attaining a transcendent vision of their unity. When he is restored to sanity, Yvain is a completely new person, as is evidenced in the contrast between the post-insanity adventures and the battle against Esclados. While he once hunted Esclados "impetuously" and without mercy, during his combat with Count Aliers,

Yvain magnanimously “accept[s] his pledge of surrender” (Y 267, 296).

The episode at the mystical spring serves as the first threshold Yvain must cross, and one to which he will return. Marking the edge of his present sphere is a simultaneously protective and destructive guardian, the churl, who is neither good nor evil, but perhaps both: “a man,” extraordinarily ugly and “lord of his beasts” (Y 261). The churl is cast as a model towards which Yvain will need to aspire in order to integrate and balance the accounts of *chevalerie* and *amor*. The spring itself serves as a threshold guardian as well, at once a hideous, destructive Hell and a harmoniously beautiful Eden, the very image of the “demons—at once dangers and bestowers of magic power—every hero must encounter who steps an inch outside the walls of his tradition” (Campbell 83). Yvain steps outside the tradition of moral solvency and personal identity; he does not acquire a definitive knowledge of mankind, but rather explores the potential for generation of multiple meanings. Chrétien divests his character of home, clothing, and the ability to express himself. Without these things, Yvain faces true nakedness, the essence of the human being, which will return later in the form of the timber-bark metaphor. Chrétien asks us to deeply consider what we *are* without our “coverings.” Madness also exemplifies Yvain’s paralysis in the face of his conflicting obligations and his inability to be, ironically, like the churl, a whole “man.” He lives instead like a beast, naked and consuming raw flesh. Chrétien, however, is extremely—and again, ironically—careful never to use the previous simile. Though mad, Yvain is never compared to a beast; rather, the language is reversed: he lives “like a man,” though a wild and savage one (Y 291). The power of madness, when used by Chrétien in this kind of ironic play, challenges the idea of identity itself, as a form of meaning attached to an exterior system: Yvain is insistently human, but a nameless, almost person-less human.¹⁶ In contrast, the churl, with a forceful and entrenched identity as “master of [his] beasts” who ambivalently calls himself “a man,” is variously a “packhorse,” “elephant,” “owl,” “cat,” and “wild boar” (Y 260). Yvain and the churl are conflated, and so lose their ability to define one another. These are among the consequences incurred when one’s deeds do not balance with one’s professed social code: the self is lost.

The narrative arc necessitates that Yvain drive himself to utter moral destitution. Like his cousin Calogrenant, he issues no formal challenge to Esclados, violating the chivalric code. His transgression alerts the reader to a discrepancy in appearances much like that at the King’s court—Yvain’s behavior in combat is unsettlingly villainous and “cruel,” despite Chrétien’s heavy-handed assurance that because the two men did not attempt to cut each others’ horses down, “the combat was the more honorable” (Y 267). Further, from a selfish desire to see the magical storm, Yvain widows and makes defenseless a woman whose husband was exemplary: Laudine says of Esclados that “Generosity was [his] friend, courage [his] companion,” foreshadowing the kinds of syntheses Yvain will need to make to rectify his moral status (Y 272). It is possible, in fact, to read the romance as the process by which Yvain transforms himself into the husband who can replace Esclados, a knight both courageous and, importantly, generous, or perhaps merciful. At this point, however,

the hero is a *villains vis*—"a living churl"—who has visited utter ruination on a woman and her town, creating void and indigence that must, somehow, be refilled (Y 257).¹⁷

While his marriage to Laudine may thus appear a sufficient remedy, we see that there is a distinct difference between Yvain's reputation, which is the primary reason Lunete gives Laudine for her acceptance of him, and his real identity—murderer, thief, deceiver. There is, in other words, a disjuncture of appearance and reality; like buying on credit without actually having the means to do so, or like a well-made counterfeit coin that is indistinguishable from the genuine article. Chrétien is asking, through the metaphor of fraud, whence meaning comes and where it inheres; what makes an insane nobleman distinct from a churl; how a crafted fiction differs from reality. The marriage is allegorically an exchange, in which Yvain is a dishonest party.¹⁸ But because this sale is transacted with a valueless coin—Yvain's outwardly polished but inwardly lacking reputation—it is invalidated; in effect, no payment at all has been made. Chrétien is fascinated by the idea of the counterfeit as it represents the "twelfth-century resurgence of the ancient preoccupation of the mind with the distinctions between appearance and reality."¹⁹ The problem with a counterfeit or debased coin like this is its similarity to an authentic coin—identical objects may *appear* to represent a certain value, when only one *really* does. Chrétien's language when the marriage is complete is rightfully ominous, deliberately pointing out the discrepancies between what should be and what is: "From then on Sir Yvain was lord and the dead man completely forgotten. His killer was now the husband of his widow, and they lay together. The people loved and esteemed the living lord more than they ever did the dead lord" (Y 282). The marriage, predicated on falsehood, is already undermined and it is now the part of the creditor to discover the deception and to withdraw her funds.

Laudine does so when Yvain breaks his oath, characterizing him as "the liar, the hypocrite ... who tricked and deceived her ... who purported to be a true lover but was a fool, a deceitful scoundrel" and even a "thief," exposing the inconsistency between Yvain's words and deeds (Y 289). His laundered reputation thus unmasked, Yvain loses all sense of himself and feels that he owes to Laudine and Lunete what he can never repay—he becomes aware of his status as a fraudulent form of currency. The cause of the knight's madness is a reflection of the new pressures under which the nobility was made to operate: "Yvain undergoes a crisis which is a familiar one among the nobility – desperation over indebtedness" (Kellogg 18). His madness is a realization of the "death he had brought upon himself" in the form of moral bankruptcy (he has even "robbed" himself), the breaking of a contract, and also of his inability to fulfill his dual role as lover and fighter, knight and husband (Y 290). Yvain's insanity—his loss of ego and identity—privileges the knight to an existence utterly undetermined by any social agenda, a stepping beyond all contexts and all memory. Like the romance itself, he becomes ahistorical, and conflated with the churl; he is neither *cortois* nor *villains*, but *un homme*. Anne Hawkins writes that in *Yvain* madness functions to "reinvest social conventions with the energy and primacy

of natural instinctive drives while at the same time recognizing the limitations and tensions of the code"; that is, to make the system of chivalry a *solvent* one, in which interior and exterior reflect one another in truth.²⁰ For Yvain, madness is a necessary consequence; the journey of the hero is in itself his maturation and the object of his quest.

The insanity Chrétien paints is therefore another of Campbell's thresholds, whose passage is a rebirth: "the hero would appear to have died" (90). We recall the poem's opening, where "a courteous man, though dead, [*cortois morz*] is better than a living churl [*villains vis*];" in order to achieve true *cortoisie*, the integration of the spheres of love and war, Yvain must symbolically die.²¹ Yvain's death, a complete renunciation of all ties to the civilized world of either love or war, of either legitimizing context, is in that way a step towards their integration and is the distillation of the now important word "man." The idea of distilment has a strong parallel in Chrétien's earlier poem *Cligès* [1176], whose titular hero conducts a more gradual effacement of identity. Before he dies, Cligès' father tells him that he must measure himself against the British knights, but that he must keep his identity a secret. When Cligès asks for his uncle's permission to depart, he gives as his reason that "Gold, to know if it is pure, is applied to the touchstone" (C 138). The adventure he conducts in Britain is an exposition and exploration of his value that seeks to discover once more whence meaning comes, here in the form of identity. To accomplish this, he presents himself to the tournament as an anonymous knight in black armor. The spectators ask, "Where is he from? Where was he born? Who recognizes him?" which are, indeed, the questions this text asks about itself (C 144). Cligès wins great renown in the black armor, and the next day in a suit of green, the next in red. On all three days he is the champion of the tournament, but each day he hides his armor away so that no one can recognize him by his exterior sign. In this way, *Cligès* questions the generation of meaning: without his armor, the sign of his identity, the knight who wins the day cannot be awarded his value and valor, even though it still exists regardless of the color by which it is recognized. Through this process, Cligès becomes pure *sens*, substance without accident, matter without form. This clarity is expressed on the fourth day, when he dresses himself in white armor, including a "shield without color or design made from elephant bone that could not break or split" (C 136). The colorlessness of the armor indicates the clarity of the external sign as well as its strength, and, like Yvain's nudity, represents an identity-less human core. Like Yvain, Cligès' final battle is a stalemate against Gawain, the paragon of chivalry: neither hero is greater than the other; this is the ultimate valorization and balance.

Having come face to face with his unmitigated, nude, ahistorical self, the madman must return to life and create an identity—like Cligès, he must establish his currency within that new identity. Yvain's resuscitation is enacted primarily by the damsel's recognition of his external identity; like Odysseus, Yvain's identity is bound up with a scar, which like a coin represents his internal worth. That symbol, however, has been utterly devalued, and so the hero must begin the long process of "backing" a new self

with good deeds. Yvain's choice of the lion as the signifier of his new identity, and the lion's presence and actions are highly symbolic. In the twelfth century, the image of a lion was emblematically rich; noble but fierce, extremely strong but infinitely forgiving, the king of beasts was associated with the topos of Jesus as Divine King. Like man, the lion was a spiritual animal. Thierry, Abbot of St. Trond, wrote in his *De mirabilibus mundi* of 1099 that "the anger of the noble lion may spare the defeated: do likewise, whoever governs here on earth" (Hunt 1986: 72). Recall that, when he defeats Count Aliers, Yvain charitably "accept[s] his pledge of surrender" (Y 296). In the same battle, Yvain is "a lion among deer": the lion is already present in his actions before it so majestically and mutely appears among the romance's cast of emblems (Y 295).

Many scholars have misconstrued the lion as a being that is separate from Yvain, a creature who must be subsumed into his new identity.²² The lion is at once much more and much less than this—remember that Yvain is a whole man, *cortois*, integrating *chevalerie* and *amor*; prior to any mention of the actual animal. It must therefore be only a symbol, an outward manifestation, a coin standing for Yvain's inner wholeness. Again, in his battle against Aliers, Yvain is "the moon among the stars, as the sun in comparison with the moon," a portrait that directly references the previous "meeting that took place between the sun and the moon"—that of Lunete and Sir Gawain, respectively representing perfect models of feminine *amor* and masculine *chevalerie* (Y 295, 285). Yvain has become both celestial bodies; his synthesis of love and war is complete without any helpful beast. Moreover, the embattled Yvain is a lion "when the torment of hunger provokes," a characterization that at once establishes the forthcoming leonine symbolism and underscores the necessity of Yvain's actions (295). Fittingly, that need is the repayment of the service rendered by Lady Norison and her damsel. We must, instead, think of the lion as Heinrich Zimmer does, as a "second ego" and "divine boon of superhuman power, combining pride and strength with generosity and forbearance"; it is a redoubling of the new Yvain, an extrinsic substantiation of the hero's transformed and synthesized inner being (Zimmer 119).

As such, however, the lion is far more than "a symbolic blend of the savage and the noble" or "the principle of ferocity to aggressors and gentleness to the meek," though those significations are important aspects of its function (Hawkins 389; Hunt 1977: 297). The beast also communicates the power Yvain accrues in his madness—the wild state, the clothesless or armorless man. The lion, as Yvain's proxy, reveals the hero's transcendent sight beyond the walls of the world when he "tug[s] and [tears] with all his might at the giant's hairy hide as though it were a strip of bark" (307). This is a direct apostrophe to Lunete's ring, which hides Yvain so well that "no man could see him, however open his eyes, any more than he could see the wood beneath the bark"; we must also note that Yvain never removes Lunete's gift from his finger (Y 269). The same metaphor appears in *Cligès*, whose hero is "perfect wood under perfect bark"; the image implies the coincidence of the exterior with the interior, a balance of meaning and sign, coin and wealth, beauty and valor

— or value (CR 2769).²³ The lion, then, represents the principle that allows Yvain to penetrate the external garments of the world, to become raw and naked, surpassing the counterfeit nature of his previous identity to find “the power that constructs the atom and controls the orbits of the stars. That font of life is the core of the individual, and within himself he can find it—if he can tear the coverings away” (Campbell 191). Yvain, doubled by the lion, overcomes the fantastic odds of his world, the world of oppositions: “Whatever he touched, he stripped away, leaving the entrails exposed.” He integrates not only the realms of love and war, but also those of the mundane and the *merveilleux*, becoming “he who kn[ows] the truth” (Y 310). The lion is not “subsumed” into the hero’s identity; rather, like a piece of money, it physically represents an incorporeal truth about a person. The exploration of metaphor as it relates to a representative economy is one of the great marvels of Chrétien’s text: he dissects a worldly, grounded value system of honor and identity, grafts it onto a consciously ahistorical myth, and simultaneously retells the mythical history of a human being’s self-creation.

Having acquired the symbol that will represent his new world-view and hide his fraudulent past identity, Yvain’s selfless and anonymous services to other women as the *chevalier au lion* represent the incremental repayment of his debt.²⁴ Even as he goes mad, the hero is paying his dues to Laudine: Yvain “claw[s] his flesh,” reiterating and thereby repaying Laudine’s actions when “she began, like a madwoman, to tear at herself and pull her hair, clawing her hands” (Y 270, 290). The series of adventures he undertakes all involve female characters, who are unable, either physically or legally, to help themselves. He explicitly refuses Lady Norison’s land, hand in marriage, and “rewards so large that he would have wished to accept them,” this time restoring literal economic solvency as well as moral worth, as he refuses to accept what he is owed (Y 296). We see then that Yvain’s disregard for wealth is a crucial element in his self-reconstruction as the quintessential hero for a certain class of people. His devaluation of compensation evidences Duby’s concept of the cultural consequences of twelfth century mercantile influx: “As the advance of a money economy gathered pace, the moral outlook of the gentleman condemned more insistently than ever the profit motive and taste for increasing personal wealth” (Y 258). Thus, while the hero’s scorn for riches may balance his “karmic” and mythological accounts, it also serves as a model for and vindication of the noble style of life. His descent into personal debt for the sake of others is revealed in his need to know what causes the distress of the people plagued by the Harpin of the Mountain, “whatever sorrow such knowledge costs me,” and in his second refusal of land and marriage, in which he “give[s]” the girl back to her father (Y 302, 325). This surely reflects a moral valorization of the nobility’s propensity and insistence on spending without limit and the importance granted to their self-portrait as rulers crowned with and defined by economic ease. Yvain’s metaphorical spending, as if spending were inconsequential, makes the public display of a great lack of fiscal restraint central to the identity of the upright and magnanimous noble, who shuns the upwelling system of profit motivation.

But Chrétien is never simply supplying a courtly paradigm—he constantly questions and undermines the courtly value system, exposing its hypocrisies and blindness. This is the function that the Château d'Pesme Avanture fulfills. The episode is a subtle critique of the aristocracy's complicity in the rise of an economy characterized by a mode of production akin to the castle's caricature of an industrial sweatshop. The women weaving cloths of silk will never “earn enough to have better food” while their “employer becomes rich from [their] earnings,” and in the nobleman's chamber, where he sits “reclining on his side on a silk rug,” “there was too much to eat” (Y 320–1). The nobleman is using two incompatible means of production: he “compounds his distastefulness by trying to combine what the aristocracy held to be mutually exclusive occupations—those of the leisured noble and the commercial entrepreneur” (Kellogg 11). Because he has not sufficiently distanced himself from the genitive source of his luxury, he shatters the illusion of benevolent ease—at the Château, noble generosity is not a magical boon presented to a person because of blue blood, but is obviously dependent on a physical action by some person other than oneself. Pierre Bourdieu, writing about the experience of visual art in the twentieth century, and the class distinctions associated with a detached method of viewing, says that

[t]he pure gaze cannot be dissociated from a general disposition toward the world which is the paradoxical product of conditioning by negative economic necessities—a life of ease—that tends to induce an active distance from necessity . . . Art and cultural consumption are predisposed, consciously and deliberately or not, to fulfill a social function of legitimating social differences.²⁵

These observations are equally applicable to *Yvain's* Château, whose lord has not separated the world of necessity and manufacture from the consumption of luxury—that which, by definition, is inessential. The man's daughter, who dresses Yvain in new clothes trimmed with rare furs, “was so noble, so well born, and so courteous that she still believed she had done little” (Y 321). Her nobility depends upon a conception of clothing—an exterior—that utterly divorces basic necessity from usefulness; it is not because Yvain needs a new shirt that she gives it to him, but because she is defining herself as a well-born person for whom acquiring new clothes is inconsequential. In a courtyard of her castle, three hundred women, “so poor that men had nothing on their heads and no belts around their waists,” work incessantly to weave the silk she lies upon (Y 319). Chrétien's Château manifests Bourdieu's use of the word *distinction*: as a synonym for nobility, it is the quality characterizing a person who has divorced himself from all appearance of human need. It is at the same time a synonym for separation, the estrangement from all people who produce the things that fulfill a noble person's hidden human needs. Chrétien's exposition of the connections is yet another inquiry into the generation of meaning—if the myth of magically effortless, causeless ease is torn away, a nobleman is as dependent on

money and physical labor as any worker of the fields.

The pointed exposure of the relationship between production and luxury lays open the cruelties inherent in the very lifestyle the romance purportedly champions. It is an indictment of the blind consumption endemic to the noble class, who seeks to repress its new dependence on commercial enterprise and the increasing impossibility of maintaining its precarious control over the manner of exchange in its lands. This anxiety is tied to the previous discussion of how the twelfth century witnessed the shrinking of wilderness and space between people, and the sudden visibility of one's economic connections to people of other classes. Chrétien's romances constructed the foundation myth for the aristocracy's privilege, but at the same time subtly heralded that very myth's insupportable claims about aristocracy and the immanence of its demise.²⁶

Inquiry into the hidden workings of a system, which characterizes the treatment of the Château, is also present in Yvain's last adventure. The hero's final internal equilibrium is made visible through his anonymous battle against Gawain, where Chrétien mockingly uses a scholastic mode of discourse *in utramque partem*, à la Abelard's *Sic et Non* [1120], to explicate the strange thing that is a paradox. The men simultaneously feel for one another perfect love and perfect hate: each "would have laid down his life for him" in the same instant that "each would certainly have wished to smash the other's head," and importantly, "Gawain knew the knight well, though he was ignorant of his identity" (Y 328; 313). The poet reconciles the superficially insoluble disparity by plainly stating what Yvain has been unearthing about his personhood: "in one house are several divisions with galleries and bedrooms." Yvain has known this throughout his history: at the enchanted tree after the storm, he saw the birds "singing sweetly in harmony, one with another; each was singing a different tune and I never heard one sing another's tune" (Y 329, 262). But, like all mythic heroes, he must rediscover and then articulate his own internal knowledge. A parallel with *Cligès* again surfaces: Chrétien writes "voices in unison that seem a single voice cannot come from one mouth" (C 121). Harmonious equilibrium, the idea of a song made of many voices or a house made of many rooms, reveals the hero's attainment of what Campbell calls *apotheosis*: he understands himself "as the outside and inside of a single self-mirrored mystery, which is identical with the mystery of the manifest world" (40). We recall that the hero must "tear the coverings away" to find the "font of life." Each of these metaphors points to Yvain's knowledge of the multiplicity that exists in a single being; the versatility of the *just*, or timber, beneath the *escorce*, the bark; the system of relationships that gives a coin its value. The distillation of the pure self, executed through the eschewal of external identity (Cligès' changing armor, Yvain's new name) is an explication of how meaning is generated and how it inheres

The battle with Gawain reveals that Yvain is finally solvent. As Gawain says, he has "repaid the account well, principal and interest. You generously paid back more than I was ready to accept" (Y 331). The emphasis on generosity, a value of *amor*, in a scene of valiant *cortoisie*, recalls Laudine's description of Esclados (272). Through the

liquidation of his identity and reformation of a conjointly generous and courageous self, Yvain as the Knight with the Lion has accrued enough moral and honorable “capital” to become a lord and husband. Where he was destitute, explaining to Laudine only that he “owe[s] more than [he] can pay,” he has now “paid for [his] ignorant action” and wishes “to pay for it still” (Y 311, 337). He and his lady are now perfectly matched, and live out their days in “unending accord.” Cheyette has written extensively about the meaning of “accord” in *Yvain’s* conclusion, and judges that Laudine accepts the knight because they do, in fact, hold each other in an observable, public, and mutual esteem or honor.²⁷ The balance of visibly demonstrated and reciprocal giving can alone create a successful relationship between man and wife, and it is also what creates the successful and whole man himself, suspended in equanimity between debt and credit, love and war. Only at this point can his adventure come to a close. This consummation of the economic narrative arc, which has in its path subsumed the vocabulary of commercial exchange, creates a moral discourse that enunciates eternal mythological meaning, the *fast* of a human being.

The deeply symbolic nature of the text, with its lion who stands for a man like a coin stands for a king, for moral and political solvency, reflects the culture’s struggle to understand a new system of value and values, “a new casuistry of exchange whose fiction is in reality a transcoded social imperative now suffusing the feudal world from below” (Vance 121-2). History influences the very workings of our minds and therefore the products of our literature, just as our literature redacts upon and changes the ways we mythologize ourselves and our origins—changes, in effect, our history. *Yvain* reveals the reasons for the perennial retelling of the hero-myth. The story is forever the same, but the way in which the tale is told ultimately holds as much if not more meaning. It is the manifestation and vocalization of the particular and poignant presence of the eternal mysteries, the “Uncreate-Imperishable,” in the rich world of our daily existence, down to the pennies in our pockets and the promises we make to pay, the recognition of what we owe to one another. Chrétien, we may venture, quests like Yvain for a balance of meaning: the inside and outside of the story must be reconciled; form is as expressive as content, and as versatile. The poem is a hymn composed of distinct voices singing different and even opposing tunes; timeless but critical of its time, catering to and undermining its audience, it recognizes that, as a fiction, it is a counterfeit—falsehood indistinguishable from truth. To use an anachronistic metaphor that Chrétien, living before Newton, certainly would not have used himself, the poem is white light: it contains a spectrum of possibilities as distinct from and opposed to one another as red and blue, whose coalescence creates a seamless, unified, indivisible substance that functions, above all, to illuminate. The reader, then, is the prism through which its hidden hues are known. ■

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Notes

- ¹ See Loomis, Roger Sherman. *Arthurian Tradition and Chrétien de Troyes*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1961.
- ² See Duby, Georges. *The Early Growth of the European Economy*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1974; and Lopez, Robert S. *The Commercial Revolution of the Middle Ages, 950-1350*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998, and North, Douglass C. and Robert Paul Thomas. *The Rise of the Western World: A New Economic History*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973.
- ³ “Money summons forth and expresses the significations of things as values so that they can be exchanged. Translation, or metaphor, is the verbal instrument by which Chrétien transacts mental substitutions of things for other things,” Vance, Eugene. *Merveilous Signals: Poetics and Sign Theory in the Middle Ages*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1986. 122.
- ⁴ *Yvain* 257.
- ⁵ Campbell, Joseph. *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1968. 35.
- ⁶ See Baldwin, John W. *Scholastic Culture in the Middle Ages, 1000—1300*. Long Grove, IL: Waveland Press, 1997. 35 ff.
- ⁷ Hunt, Tony. *Chrétien de Troyes: Yvain. Critical Guides to French Texts* 55. London: Grant & Cutler, 1986. 12.
- ⁸ Kellogg, Judith L. “Economic and Social Tensions Reflected in the Romance of Chrétien de Troyes.” *Romance Philology* 39.1 (August 1985): 1– 21. p. 15. Tony Hunt points out that in romance, “chiastic ordering of time is designed to evoke an ideal timelessness in which the historicity of the Arthurian world is effaced before its symbolic significance,” see “The Dialectic of Yvain.” *Modern Language Review* 77.2 (April 1977): 285–299, 285.
- ⁹ See Kellogg, “Economic and Social Tensions Reflected in the Romance of Chrétien de Troyes.” 1-21.
- ¹⁰ See Baldwin 3 and 13, Vance 151.
- ¹¹ For these arguments, see Baldwin, John W. “Chrétien in History.” In *A Companion to Chrétien de Troyes*, edited by Norris J. Lacy and Joan Tasker Grimbert, 1–14. Rochester: D.S. Brewer, 2005; Hunt, Tony. *Chrétien de Troyes: Yvain. Critical Guides to French Texts* 55. London: Grant & Cutler, 1986; Zimmer, Heinrich. *The King and the Corpse: Tales of the Soul's Conquest of Evil*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1957.
- ¹² See North 34-36.
- ¹³ Kellogg 16.
- ¹⁴ See Campbell 37 for a description of this phase of the hero-cycle.
- ¹⁵ Hunt, Tony. “Le Chevalier au Lion: Yvain Lionheart.” In *A Companion to Chrétien de Troyes*, edited by Norris J. Lacy and Joan Tasker Grimbert, 156–168. Rochester: D.S. Brewer, 2005. 162.
- ¹⁶ Sylvia Huot writes that madness addresses “our socially received concept of borderlines, of the categories of difference that determine identity”; Yvain has undergone “an effacement of personal identity.” See Huot, Sylvia. *Madness in Medieval French Literature: Identities Lost and Found*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2003.
- ¹⁷ For Tony Hunt’s analysis of the relation between the churl and Yvain, see “The Dialectic of Yvain.” *Modern Language Review* 77.2 (April 1977): 285–299.
- ¹⁸ Fredrick Cheyette notes that the courtship scene “offers a sparkling literary representation of the basic verbal structure of [a sale or gift]” as practiced in the twelfth century; see Cheyette, Fredrick L. and Howell

Chickering. "Love, Anger, and Peace: Social Practice and Poetic Play in the Ending of *Yvain*." *Speculum* 80.1 (January 2005): 75–117, 85.

¹⁹ Nolan, Peter E. "Mythopoetic Evolution: Chrétien de Troyes's *Erec et Enide*, *Cligès*, and *Yvain*." *Symposium* 25:2 (Summer 1971) 139-161. p. 139. Lopez writes of the same period that "kings, dukes, and communes spent more than they could afford and tried to cover their sins by imposing the same face-value on less and less good metal"; the problem was endemic and contemporary. See Lopez 71.

²⁰ Hawkins, Anne Hunsaker. "Yvain's Madness." *Philological Quarterly* 71.4 (Fall 1992): 377-397, 389.

²¹ Hunt 1977, 293.

²² See Huot 31.

²³ Here I have used Burton Raffel's translation, in lieu of Staines, to further my point.

²⁴ Vance writes that we can consider these deeds as "a kind of primitive capital," 137.

²⁵ Bourdieu, Pierre. *Distinction*. Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1984. 6-7.

²⁶ As Kellogg puts it, Yvain paradoxically "allows the aristocracy to maintain its class privileges, while at the same time it encourages a subtle acceptance of the very forces which are working to transform its traditional identity," 19–20.

²⁷ "He is given something by her, and she is given something by him. 'Love' here does not refer to the subject's interior feeling but to what one receives externally from another," Cheyette 113.

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Ben Jonson's Rebus: Visualizing the Textuality of *The Alchemist*

James McGirk

Ben Jonson's *The Alchemist* captures the tension and claustrophobia of Jacobean London during an outbreak of the plague by structuring its drama around the alchemical process. Every aspect of Jonson's play—its characters, its plot, even its setting—contains the semantic structure of the alchemical process, suggesting that Jonson deliberately inscribed its form into the textuality of *The Alchemist*.

Jonson's deliberate inscription of the alchemical process is not without precedent. At one point, *The Alchemist* describes the creation of a pseudo-hieroglyphic sentence called a rebus. London merchants used rebuses as semaphores, allowing illiterate Londoners to read street signs by forming words from pictures.¹ Superstitious sign-makers would try to gain a magical edge over their competition by contracting an alchemist to make their rebuses for them. Jonson playfully uses a rebus for his Argument, creating an acrostic out of the title of *The Alchemist* to illustrate his plot for uninformed readers. This illustration of the plot also imprints the symbol of alchemy onto the structure of the play. Using this rebus as a beachhead, the textuality of *The Alchemist* can be visualized by using a combination of Mikhail Bakhtin's notion of the speech genre and E. D. Hirsch Jr.'s intrinsic genre to reconstruct the play's form.

During its sporadic outbreaks of the plague, Jacobean London was abandoned by its elites.² Anyone who could afford to would board up his manor and flee to the countryside until London was deemed safe enough to return. To protect their property during these emergencies, homeowners left behind a skeleton crew of servants. Ben Jonson staged *The Alchemist* entirely within the confines of an abandoned townhouse in the Blackfriars,³ describing how the suddenly idle servant Face and his confederates, the "fraudulent 'Doctor' Subtle" and "his punk"⁴ Dol Common, assume the identity of an alchemist and his assistants and proceed to fleece a series of Londoners.

London's periodic emergencies created an entirely different city. Abruptly stripped of its upper echelons, the city's rigid social hierarchy was thrown into disarray,

particularly around the dry-docked domiciles of the elite. These areas were rife with intrigue and opportunism as the idle serving class living amongst the possessions of the wealthy could easily assume the identities of their missing masters, while legions of hucksters and whores descended upon what they perceived as a treasure-trove. These liminal moments were fleeting. As soon as the real masters returned to London, ostensibly everything returned to normal.

This irresistible setting was quite dangerous territory for its playwright to portray, requiring constant explanation, lest anyone denounce Jonson as a rable-rouser, heretic or worse. Renaissance plays were quite sensitive to the problems of interpretation. Audiences comprised of the wealthy and destitute meant that “private and public theatres were...sites for social conflict.”⁵ According to Mikhail Bakhtin, the Renaissance was a time when “familiar genres and styles could play... a large and positive role in destroying the official mediaeval picture of the world.”⁶ To steer audiences towards a particular interpretation playwrights of the era deployed an arsenal of paratextual devices.⁷ Illustrated frontispieces, arguments, prologues, even muses were conjured to help a potential reader decode a playwright's intentions. *The Alchemist* contains no fewer than four paratextual objects declaiming its author's intentions: a frontispiece indicating that *The Alchemist* is “a comedie,” a grouchy letter addressed “to the reader”⁸ clearly differentiating between “understanders” and “pretenders,” an Argument in the form of an acrostic, and finally a Prologue.

The Alchemist's nearly outrageous specificity was a matter of life and death, as a misinterpreted play might be misconstrued as fostering insurrection or advocating heresy.⁹ “Our scene is London,” wrote Jonson in his Prologue, “cause we would make it known, / no country's worth is better than our own: / no clime breeds better matter for your whore, / bawd, squire, imposter, [and] many persons more, / whose manners, now call'd humors, feed the stage.”¹⁰ Jonson defends his choice, “this pen did never aim to grieve, but better men,” and reminds his audience that “if there be any, that will sit so nigh / unto the stream, to look at what it doth run, / they'd find things, they'd think, or wish, were done; / they are so natural follies, but so shown / as even the doers may see, and yet not own.” The mention of humors in the Prologue is Jonson's first reference to his most potentially troublesome metaphor, alchemy¹¹—a capital offense repeated throughout *The Alchemist*.

Having justified his troublesome subject, Jonson's Argument is the reader's first indication that *The Alchemist* is structured around the form of the alchemical process. The Argument is an acrostic, a poem that uses each letter of *The Alchemist's* title to trace its plot. Besides establishing a framework by summarizing the play, it is also a rebus, which is both a reference to the alchemist's chicanery that drives the plot forward and performs the function it intended, touting the playwright's wares and explaining what they are:

The sickness hot, a master quit for fear,
His house in town: and left one servant there.
Ease him corrupted, and gave him means to know

A cheater, and his punk; who now brought low,
 Leaving their narrow practice, were become
 Cozners at large: and, only wanting some
 House to set up, with him they here contract,
 Each for a share, and all begin to act.
 Much company they draw, and much abuse,
 In casting figures, telling fortunes, news,
 Selling of flies, flat bawdry, with the stone:
 Till it, and they, and all in fume are gone.¹²

Jonson's Argument is a rebus standing in for the entire play. Looking at Jonson's argument-rebus in purely visual terms, *The Alchemist* appears as an empty vessel, a vacant townhouse being filled with three elements: "one servant," "a cheater, and his punk," who on their own had only "narrow practice," but when all three combined in one place "begin to act."¹³ Much company they draw, and much abuse, / In casting figures, telling fortunes news, / Selling flies, flat bawdry, with the [Philosopher's] Stone: Till it, and they, and all in fume are gone."¹⁴

Permutations of this image of an alchemical process running its course appear throughout the text. Subtle, the alchemist, contrasts alchemy with the hatching of an egg¹⁵ and his assistant, Face, describes coitus as "Firk, like a flounder; kiss, like a scallop, close: And tickle him with thy mother-tongue. His great Verdugoship has not a jot of language."¹⁶ Structurally, these passages describe a swirl of action within a tight space that ends with a release. This form is repeated throughout the text. Anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss argued that works of art "proceed from a set (object + event) to the *discovery* of its structure."¹⁷ This shape is an interlocutory device that modulates how the structure of a text will eventually be perceived. In other words, this is the shape of its intrinsic genre, inherent structure that steers the play's textuality.

Because Jonson was acutely aware of the power of imagery, *The Alchemist* is rife with metaphor and allusion. Subtle and his two companions swindle their customers with conceptual illusions of love or infinite wealth, but even this sleight of hand requires props ranging from flasks and costumes to elaborate deceptions involving phony faerie queens. However, there are two distinct scams that involve the actual production of images. It is here that Jonson's treatment of the intrinsic structure of his text is the most deliberate, as he begins to break the illusion of the play and draw attention to its fabrication.

In the first of these illusions, a young pharmacist, Drugger, contacts the triad asking for image-related assistance saying, "I am a young beginner, and am building of a new shop, and't like your worship; just, at the corner of the street: (here's the plot on't) and would like to know, by art, sir, of your worship, which way I should make my door, by necromancy."¹⁸ Here, Drugger hands Subtle a design of his building and asks him to rearrange it according to his necromancy—a sort of medieval séance. Later, Drugger returns asking Subtle to design a rebus for his

storefront.¹⁹ Subtle makes one up on the spot, telling him “I will have his name formed in some mystic character; whose radii, striking the senses of the passers-by, shall by a virtual influence, breed affectations, that may result upon the party that owns it. . . . He shall first have a bell, that's Abel; And, by it, standing one, whose name is Dee, In a rug gown; there's D and rug, that's Drug: And, right anenst him, a dog snarling *Er*; that's Drugger, Abel Drugger. That's his sign.”²⁰ Ben Jonson chose to preface *The Alchemist* with a rebus created from his title in the opening argument,²¹ so by mentioning a rebus created out of letters, Johnson is referring back to his Argument once again. Through this reference, Drugger's sign reinforces the idea of creating images from text, re-inscribing the idea of alchemy onto *The Alchemist* the same way that Subtle's necromancy modulates Drugger's request.

A parallel can be drawn between the rebus and E. D. Hirsch Jr.'s concept of intrinsic genre, which Hirsch imagined as “that sense of the whole by means of which an interpreter can correctly understand any part in its determinacy.”²² To Hirsch, an utterance exists fully articulated within the mind of its communicator. However, it “has a dimension of inexplicitness because the details of the utterance are not present to the consciousness all at once.”²³ To articulate an utterance is to recreate it in terms that are mutually intelligible. Since the meaning of an utterance is not present to the consciousness all at once, Hirsch suggests that this process of interlocution further mangles its meaning. To Hirsch, the process of transcription into terms that are coherent terms reconfigures the meaning of the original message, blurring it. But it retains the lingering resonance of something intrinsic, a “determinacy as meanings functioning in a particular way.”²⁴ As speech genre pertains to spoken utterances, where communication occurs in real time, this seems correct. But where Hirsch's concept falls short is when it is applied to an utterance that has had the benefit of being reworked with that intrinsic genre kept in mind, for example, in a literary work.

Throughout the editing process, as evidenced in the changes between folio editions, Jonson emphasized those parts of the play that fit his concept of *The Alchemist*, and eliminated those that did not. As he edited each draft of *The Alchemist*, Jonson made his utterance more intelligible, articulating the intrinsic genre of his speech act. If the rebus swindle suggests that the Argument quilted the alchemical process into the play, then Jonson's other image-swindle suggests that textuality is a visual process. After receiving his rebus, Drugger mentions that he is in love with a wealthy widow whose brother has vowed to never let her marry “under a knight.”²⁵ Her brother has come to the city to “learn to quarrel, and to live by his wits, / And will go down again, and die in the country”; he has come to the city to learn to act like a gentleman and to join the nobility. Face promises to assist Drugger, telling him Subtle has “made a table, with mathematical demonstrations, / Touching the art of quarrels: he will give him / An instrument to quarrel by.”²⁶ Besides foreshadowing the inevitable quarreling that results their alchemy, this reference repeats the idea of an inscription imposing its form on behavior, not unlike stage directions. By applying this concept to the entire play, as with the argument-rebus, Jonson weaves alchemy

into every aspect of *The Alchemist*. The purpose of this behavioral palimpsest is to manipulate narrative, which, for the reader, emerges between the plot and stage direction.

This is further articulated when Subtle begins describing [his] mathematics to Kastril, his “quarreling disciple,”²²⁷ to lure him into their fold: “Come near, my worshipful boy, my *terrae filii*; / That is, my boy of land; make thy approaches: / Welcome; I know thy lusts, and thy desires, / And I will serve, and satisfy ’em. Begin, / Charge me from thence, or thence, or in this line; / Here is my centre: ground thy quarrel.”²²⁸ Instead of teaching the young gentleman how to quarrel, Subtle is actually insinuating that he will con Kastril, revealing his tactic for deceiving everybody else in the play: to tempt each with his greatest desire, only to deny it in the last moment. This misdirection is the real alchemy in the play. It is also an illusion-breaking reference to playwriting itself, as Subtle continues his lesson using literary terminology: “O, this’s no true grammar, And as ill logic! You must render causes, child, Your first, and second intentions, know your canons, And your divisions, moods, degrees, and differences, Your predicaments, substance, and accident, Series extern, and intern, with their causes Efficient, material, formal final, And ha’ your elements perfect.”²²⁹ After a moment of anger, Subtle’s prey is mollified and is so taken with his tutoring that when Subtle, under the guise of using it as an example of logic, kisses Kastril’s sister, the “soft, and buxom widow,”²³⁰ Kastril does not respond.

If the text is a linear progression from beginning to end, then the reader can visualize narrative space emerging from it, like a projection from this line. However, some fundamental unit of meaning must be identified in order to properly determine this emergent function. At first, Hirsch’s intrinsic genre seems like it could be a morpheme (the smallest piece distinguishing meaning), but Hirsch doesn’t explain where the divisions between his intrinsic genres should occur. Instead, Mikhail Bakhtin’s speech genre provides a clearer model for unraveling the way the narrative emerges from the text.

Bakhtin describes speech genre as a third category to Saussure’s *langue* and *parole*, an “idea of the form of the utterance, that is, of a particular speech genre, guides us in the process of our speaking.”³¹ Bakhtin subdivides these “relatively-stable” subcategories according to their complexity.³² Secondary speech genres are complicated superstructures created from combinations of less complicated primary speech genres. A literary text, for example, is a complex secondary speech genre created out of a myriad of relatively stable and identifiable fragments of dialogue and action, such as everyday phrases or occasionally even fragments of other plays. A primary speech genre, a single fragment of text, exists within the boundaries of the secondary speech genre, but its meaning is entirely dependent on the contextual frame provided by the secondary speech genre surrounding it. Applying this to our model of a text’s progression, each successive primary speech genre distorts its following and preceding speech genres. Meaning, in other words, the phoneme of narrative space, is in turn dependent on a speech utterance’s finalization.³³ Finalization, the formulation of a response to an utterance, is what Bakhtin called “the main criterion

of the utterance as a true criterion of speech communication.”³⁴ To Bakhtin even monologues and scientific tracts were addressed to the anticipated responses of an observer. Narrative is truncated into similar segments, each marking a perceived response to a speech utterance. Hirsch's speech genres and the idea of the editing process, as a method for reinforcing and re-contouring meaning, can thus be restated in Bakhtin's terminology. If transcription is the creation of relatively stable speech genres, then editing is a process of stabilizing and re-stabilizing responses, of tailoring the structure of each speech utterance to its anticipated response. Consequently, in our textual model, each successive utterance manipulates the intrinsic structure of a text.

The Alchemist divides its utterances according to the progression of the alchemical process contained within its Argument, specifically with the misdirection of desire. When these utterances remain within the contextual frame of what has happened before, residing within the narrative space of an earlier sequence, what occurs seems believable. The effectiveness of each swindle implicates the reader's "response," as the finalization of an utterance, as communication. ■

Notes

¹ Jonson, Ben. *The Alchemist*. Ed. Elizabeth Cook. London: New Mermaids, 2004. 90. Note to lines 19-24.

² Among others, Daniel Defoe would write about Londoners' behavior during outbreaks of the plague in his fictional *Journal of the Plague Year* (1722).

³ Archer, Ian W. "London and Westminster," *A Companion to Renaissance Drama*. Ed. Arthur F. Kinney. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing Ltd. 68.

⁴ *The Alchemist*. The Argument. 27.

⁵ "London and Westminster." 69.

⁶ Bakhtin, Mikhail. *Speech Acts and Other Late Essays*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1986. 97

⁷ "London and Westminster" 69. Archer remarks, "Jonson in his effort to assert his control over the performance of his plays used his prologues to encourage audiences into criticisms of the gallants whose presence threatened to overwhelm the dramatic action."

⁸ *The Alchemist*. To the Reader, 25.

⁹ Dutton, Richard. "Jurisdiction of Theatre and Censorship," *A Companion to Renaissance Drama*. Ed. Arthur F. Kinney. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing Ltd. 232. Dutton describes how Thomas Middleton "may have spent some time in prison over a game of chess." He also notes "all the early purpose-built theatres were constructed outside the jurisdiction of the city authorities" (226).

¹⁰ *The Alchemist*. Prologue. (9) 28.

¹¹ *The Alchemist*. (I.i.112-113, ff) 35. Passed in 1541, the statute of sorcery forbade "invocation of gold or silver." Also, "tampering with coin was a capital offence."

¹² *The Alchemist*. The Argument. 27.

¹³ Ibid. The Argument. 27.

¹⁴ Ibid. The Argument. 27. Philosopher's Stone is a substance that forms in the final stage of transmuting base metal into gold.

¹⁵ Ibid. (II.iii.127-140) 73.

¹⁶ Ibid. (III.iii.69-71) 106-107.

¹⁷ Lévi-Strauss, Claude. *The Savage Mind*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1966. 26.

¹⁸ Ibid. (I.iii.8-11) 35.

¹⁹ Ibid. (II.vi.5-10) 90.

²⁰ Ibid. (II.vi.12-23) 90.

²¹ Ibid. The Argument. 27.

²² Hirsch, E.D., Jr. "Intrinsic genre," *Validity in Interpretation*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1967. 86.

²³ Ibid. 79.

²⁴ Ibid. 85.

²⁵ *The Alchemist*. (II.vi.50-51) 92.

²⁶ Ibid. (II.vi.65-69) 92.

²⁷ Ibid. (IV.ii.5) 126.

²⁸ Ibid. (IV.ii.13-17) 127.

²⁹ Ibid. (IV.ii.21-27) 128.

³⁰ Ibid. (IV.ii.37) 128.

³¹ Bakhtin 81.

³² Ibid. 85.

³³ Ibid. 82.

³⁴ Ibid. 82.

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Where the Studio Meets the Stage: Painting and Theatricality in Manet's *Mademoiselle V...en Costume d'Espada*

Luciana Colapinto

Édouard Manet's painting, *Mademoiselle V...en Costume d'Espada* (1862), is perhaps best known among art historians for its "problematic compositional difficulties,"¹ a categorization which has too often limited our understanding and appreciation of the work. Manet (1832-1883) has dressed his favorite model of the time, Victorine Meurent, in the attire of a Spanish bullfighter and has placed her in a bullring. In addition to these enigmatic gender and cultural choices, he has dismissed the standard use of perspective, sacrificing depth and space for a flattened representation of his subject. The painting has been both criticized and defended over the years, but scholars have often been hard-pressed to find justification for the perceptual difficulty of the piece. One may understand Manet's choices of gender, nationality, and spatial composition as the means by which he explores the theatrical nature of painting in nineteenth-century Paris. In depicting the artificiality of a costumed model before an ambiguous backdrop, Manet sought to modernize painting by exposing and embracing the flatness of the two-dimensional canvas.

The foreign influence is of particular interest in Manet's work, for Mlle. V. is portrayed in Spanish bull-fighting attire, complete with bolero, trousers and sombrero. France had gained a close relationship with its neighbor during the first part of the nineteenth century as a result of the Napoleonic conquest, the Trocadéro campaign, and the Bourbon marriages, and one could see the infiltration of the Spanish style in the literature, art, and theatre of Paris.² In the middle of the nineteenth century, expositions of Spanish art were shown at the Louvre, and when a Spanish troupe came from Madrid to perform at the Hippodrome in Paris, Manet asked a handful of the group's performers to pose for him.³ In his work on Manet, Michael Fried makes a specific reference to the importance of this event in the artist's life, arguing that the arrival of the Camprubi troupe in 1862 gave Manet something he needed: "a contemporary equivalent"⁴ for the early eighteenth-century French and Italian comedy troupes. Although Manet had Spanish men and women at his disposal during the year he painted the *Espada*, he nonetheless chose a female, Parisian model, later featured in Manet's *Olympia* and *Le déjeuner sur l'herbe*, to pose for a traditionally

male role in a Spanish-themed painting. It was in this way that he purposefully emphasized the costumed artificiality of his subject matter.

The Spanish influence in the painting extends beyond the superficial costume and includes a reference to an earlier work by Francisco Goya. The bullfighters in the background of Manet's painting are taken directly from the group in Plate Five of Goya's *Tauromaquia* (a series of thirty-three etchings that he executed around 1815), and the figures lining the ring's edge are taken from another plate in the same series.⁵ In Manet's composition, the "true," Goya-inspired Spanish bullfighter atop the horse mirrors Victorine in that their weapons follow a similar diagonal across the picture plane, and yet their differences could not be more apparent. Whereas the bullfighter in the background forces his spear into the bull in front of him, Victorine holds her sword with little conviction and in no particular direction. As she lifts the sword upward and to her right, it appears too heavy for her, and if we extend the line of the background figure's spear across the picture plane, we find that Victorine's sword falls below the imaginary diagonal, creating an unsettling tension. Her inability to hold the sword at a higher angle breaks the link between the two figures, and hence disrupts the relationship between foreground and background.

Indeed, Victorine is portrayed in a manner that is altogether awkward, for her feminine incompetence in a traditionally male role emphasizes her posed stance and the artificiality of her placement in the scene. She holds her cape as though she knows not what do with it, touching the fabric lightly as if it is an unknown object. Her gaze, fixed towards the viewer, is also problematic, for were she truly in the ring about to fight an angry beast, it is unlikely that she would address us with such fixed attention. Lastly, Manet has dressed her in a cape of the wrong hue⁶ and shoes that are entirely inappropriate, yet again emphasizing her lack of belonging in the sphere of the bullring.

In her work *Manet Manette*, Carol Armstrong addresses the artificiality of the *Espada* and writes persuasively about the ironic articulation of Victorine's female body in masculine costume. She argues that the "paintedness" of the painting (the insistence on the materiality of paint, most notably found in the pink cape, "no cloak but blatantly paint") is used as a way to explore "the correlation between the ambiguities and artificialities of pigment and personality."⁷ Armstrong's analysis of the *Espada* is unparalleled, as it recognizes significant cultural meaning where other scholars have seen mere problems. But in focusing on the subject rather than the setting behind her, she avoids a discussion of the spatial composition of the piece. She unites foreground and background in her analysis, discussing the unavoidable "paintedness" of the entire painting, and does not distinguish between the unique variations of treatment on the painted surface.

Despite the artificiality of her stance, costume, and setting, Victorine is portrayed with a higher level of naturalism than the more authentic bullfighter in the background. On Victorine's face and clothes Manet's brushstroke delineates both the texture of the black tassels on her trousers and the satin embellishments on her jacket. The bullfighter and the figures in the background are, on the other

hand, rendered with rapid brushstrokes and without much attention to detail, their forms alluded to by the contrasts between dark paint and brighter highlights. It may be said that the impetus for such distinct representations was to create a sense of atmospheric perspective, or to differentiate the movement and energy of the two figures. Yet these answers still necessitate an investigation of Manet's use of contrast between foreground and background.

As a means for exploring this question, one must consider the notorious flaws in the spatial composition of the painting. The bullfighter on the horse is far too small for his placement in the painting. Critic Beatrice Farwell makes an effort to note "the coinciding outlines of the model's back and the tail of the horse, a feature that paradoxically telescopes the space and affirms the supremacy of the picture plane over space illusion."⁸ The intersection of Victorine and the background figures confuses the perspective of the piece, flattening the representation of space; it is almost as if Victorine is rendered from a different level than the bullfighter—he appears to be seen from higher above. The artificiality of the painted composition is further emphasized, because it is as if Victorine is portrayed standing in front of a painting herself, or even a scenic backdrop. This interpretation has been refuted by the critic Anne Hanson, who argues that there is no apparent break in the ground on which all the figures of the painting stand.⁹ Indeed, one can easily see that the deep brown of the foreground fades into the brighter pinkish hues of the background.

But Manet did not always render the division of foreground and background unclear. In the early 1860's Manet painted a variety of Spanish subjects, like *The Spanish Singer* (1860) and the *Young Man in the Costume of a Majo* (1863), which differ from the *Espada* in their spatial representation of the Spanish subject, as framed by a clearly defined foreground and background. Manet has depicted *The Spanish Singer* and *Young Man in the Costume of a Majo* in a studio setting, painting a visible division between the plain walls and the floors on which they stand, and using lighting and props to present the figures in their posed artificiality. Manet's *Espada*, by contrast, appears to be a studio piece that resists the studio setting. While some believe that the lack of spatial depth in the *Espada* is problematic, Alan Bowness argues that Manet was attempting to do something altogether new, "seeking to develop an informal-type of composition which would nevertheless be as tightly organized on the surface of the picture as a Velasquez." Bowness goes on to say that the spatial arrangement of Victorine and the background bullfighter is a well thought out artistic choice, used to relate the figures on a single plane.¹⁰ But Bowness does little to draw out any potential meaning behind Manet's compositional choices. It is clear that Manet sought to distinguish his female model from the action behind her not merely through an unusual use of perspective, but also through his use of light, brushwork, and attention to detail.

One would think that by including the bullring in the background of the painting, thereby eliminating the spatial studio construction, Manet had placed his subject in a more naturalistic setting. Even though the sun appears to light the space behind Victorine in the *Espada* and not the dark, shadowy ground on which she stands, she

remains frontally lit.¹¹ Her face and the exposed skin of her hands and legs do not fall into shadow but are highlighted by a source of light in front of her, and in that way, she remains a studio subject like the *Majo* and the *Spanish Singer*. Moreover, it must not be forgotten that Manet has heightened the artificiality of his portrait by depicting a female, Parisian model as a traditionally male, Spanish bullfighter, and has carefully conveyed her ineptness through her inappropriate costume and clumsy stance. Further, the title Manet chose for the piece, *Mademoiselle V... en costume d'Espada*, exposes the painting as a staged event. We are immediately alerted to the fact that we are looking at a female model (and not a real Espada) playing dress up for the sake of the painting. The inclusion of the bullring, then, should be seen not as a means of naturalizing the setting, but as a means of further emphasizing the artificiality of the subject and her background.

Considering the arguments of Armstrong and Bowness, it becomes clear that it is precisely in the newness of this strange background that we see Manet moving beyond his exploration of the ambiguities of the nineteenth century individual to explore the artificial and theatrical nature of the painter's trade. During the year that Manet was painting the *Espada*, the young novelist Edmund Duranty was venturing to revive the world of theatre, specifically by bringing back the tradition of *commedia dell'arte*.¹² A piece that Manet made in the same year as the *Espada* displays the influence of nineteenth-century theatre on his works: a frontispiece etching designed for a *Collection de huit eaux-fortes, sujets divers* (1862). As Theodore Reff describes it, "an actor dressed as Pulcinella peeps through a curtain, which becomes elsewhere a wall supporting an old sword and balloon prints." It is in the purposefully vague separation of curtain and wall that Reff believes Manet was playing with "stage and studio metaphors."¹³ Reff associates the *Espada* and the frontispiece because of the Spanish costume pieces in a basket on the floor of the etching, but he focuses his essay on the symbolic nature of the etching itself and does not explore the implications of the connection between the two works of art. However, it is precisely through the visual ambiguity of the frontispiece, in which curtains turn into walls and stage into studio, that we are able to embrace the complexity of Manet's *Espada*. The figure emerging from the curtain has been interpreted as an actor dressed as a popular commedia figure, but one could almost imagine Victorine Meurent in his place, peering out from behind a studio curtain with an image of Goya's *Tauromaquia* painted on it, as she changes in preparation for her studio portrait. In both his frontispiece etching and the *Espada*, Manet complicates the relationship between the studio and the stage, relating the visual portrayal and theatrical performance.

This connection between theatricality and painting, evident in the depiction of a French woman dressed as a Spanish man before a painted backdrop, reveals the artificiality of both media. Using literal and aesthetic "props" within the painting and in the world of theater, Manet emphasizes visual flatness, thereby exposing the lie of an expected three-dimensional world. Thus, the artist's exploration of flatness represents a break away from past artistic traditions in favor of a modernist European perspective. ■



Notes

- ¹ Richardson, John qtd. in Bowness, Alan. "A note on 'Manet's Compositional Difficulties.'" *The Burlington Magazine*, Vol. 103. No. 699, Special Issue in Honour of Professor Johannes Wilde (June 1961), 276.
- ² Rich, Daniel Catton. "The Spanish Background for Manet's Early Work." *Parnassus*, Vol. 4, No. 2 (Feb., 1932), 1.
- ³ *Ibid.*, 3.
- ⁴ Fried, Michael. *Manet's Modernism or The Face of Painting in the 1860's*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press 1996) 46.
- ⁵ Farwell, Beatrice. "Manet's 'Espada' and Marcantonio." *Metropolitan Museum Journal*, Vol. 2 (1969), 200.
- ⁶ Object label, Mademoiselle V... in the Costume of an Espada, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, New York.
- ⁷ Armstrong, Carol. *Manet Manette*. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002) 148-149.
- ⁸ Farwell 197.
- ⁹ Hanson, Anne Coffin. *Manet and the Modern Tradition*. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1977) 79.
- ¹⁰ Bowness 277.
- ¹¹ Farwell 197.
- ¹² Fried 55
- ¹³ Reff, Theodore. "The Symbolism of Manet's Frontispiece Etchings." *The Burlington Magazine*, Vol. 104, No. 710 (May 1963), 182.

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Mademoiselle V...en Costume d'Espada

166 x 129 cm

Oil on canvas

Édouard Manet (French, 1832-1883)

1862

H. O. Havemeyer Collection, Bequest of Mrs. H. O. Havemeyer, 1929

Image reprinted courtesy of The Metropolitan Museum of Art

Image from ArtStor

Looking at it *Close-Up*: Abbas Kiarostami Directs the *mise-en-scène* of Reality

Isabel Bohrer

In the 1940s, film theorist André Bazin characterized photography as “essentially objective,” a mere mechanical operation in which the lens (the *objectif* in French), records an image of the world “automatically, without the creative intervention of man.”¹ Stemming from the same principle of capturing reality through “the instrumentality of a nonliving agent,” Bazin’s central notion involves thinking of cinema as “objectivity in time.” In this view, the photographer, and by extension the filmmaker, has little control in crafting an image of the world, his personality “enter[ing] into the proceedings only in his selection of the object to be photographed and by way of the purpose he has in mind.” And even though Bazin recognizes that “the final result may reflect something of his [the photographer’s and the director’s] personality,” photography and cinema ultimately “[derive] an advantage from [man’s] absence.” Insofar as the filmmaker’s lens records a series of images mechanically, cinema depicts “objective reality.”

While Bazin’s argument that cinema aspires to objectivity has some validity inasmuch as the nonliving agent, the *objectif*, intervenes “between the originating object and its reproduction,” it left little place for the shaping subjectivity of a director’s vision. In the 1950s, however, François Truffaut would assert in contrast to Bazin the centrality of the director as auteur. The director’s personal creative vision would become increasingly significant, so much so that in the ensuing French *nouvelle vague*, the absence of man, of the auteur, became unthinkable.² Objective reality, as proposed by Bazin, had been superseded by the subjective reality put forth by the director.

In Abbas Kiarostami’s film *Close-Up*,³ the director’s subjective vision takes on a particularly interesting dimension as Kiarostami explicitly draws attention to his craft, guiding the viewer through his narrative, his version of reality. As it chronicles the scandalous story of Sabzian, a poor man being charged for having assumed the identity of Iranian director Mohsen Makhmalbaf, *Close-Up* presents itself as a hybrid between reenactment and drama. In fact, Kiarostami intertwines the documentation of true occurrences with staged scenes in such a way that the spectator is ultimately

unsure where the line between reality and fiction can be drawn. Initially based on the article “Bogus Makhmalbaf Arrested” by journalist Hossein Farazmand, the film thus examines Sabzian’s story through Kiarostami’s own subjective lens. Additionally, Kiarostami’s self-reflexive meditations provide a general commentary on the role of the director to depict social critique and more specifically, the suffering of marginal figures within Iranian society. As the director, Kiarostami not only manipulates the cinematic *mise-en-scène*—a term referring to all the elements incorporated in the composition of a shot, such as framing, camera movement and lighting—but also the *mise-en-scène* of real life, as *Close-Up* impacts the lives of the marginal figures Kiarostami presents. The filmmaker thus transcends the confines of his artistic medium, and ultimately, becomes not only a director of cinema, but also a director of reality.

In 1989, Kiarostami decided to tell the story about the case of Sabzian, a printer’s assistant and lover of film, being tried for impersonating the Iranian director Makhmalbaf. One day on a public bus, Sabzian is reading the screenplay of Makhmalbaf’s *The Cyclist* when Mrs. Ahankhah takes the seat next to him. Kiarostami makes the striking choice that all the parts in the film are played by “real” people. Both admirers of the famous director, Mrs. Ahankhah and Sabzian begin a conversation in which Sabzian tells her it is his script and his film—that he is Mohsen Makhmalbaf. For the next few weeks, Sabzian maintains this pretense, visiting the Ahankhah house on the premise that he plans to depict their residence, as well as their sons, in his next film. Sabzian borrows significant amounts of money from Mr. Ahankhah on the pretext that it will go towards this new film, yet the latter begins to become suspicious of the supposed “director” when he comes across a magazine photo of young Makhmalbaf with hair darker than Sabzian’s. Hossein Farazmand, a journalist and friend of the Ahankhahs, is summoned to confirm Sabzian’s fraud. Subsequent to Sabzian’s arrest, Farazmand publishes “Bogus Makhmalbaf Arrested.” *Close-Up* chronicles the aforementioned events, although not chronologically: the back story is intertwined with the subsequent judicial proceedings that Kiarostami obtains permission to film—or should we say direct—as he repeatedly asserts his presence, literally placing a close-up lens on Sabzian while Kiarostami himself questions Sabzian and the plaintiffs.

Kiarostami’s opening scene establishes that his film will be taking a closer look at the journalist’s story, broadening its context and perspective so that Sabzian’s particular case functions as a representation of Iranian society as a whole. *Close-Up* opens with a tracking shot of Farazmand and several armed police officers entering a taxi, embarking to uncover “the strange case,” as Farazmand introduces it, of the man who “has been passing himself off as Mohsen Makhmalbaf.” By beginning with chronicling Farazmand’s mission, Kiarostami immediately establishes a relationship between the journalist and himself because both are fascinated with turning Sabzian’s story into art.

Their motives in bringing the story to the forefront, however, are dissimilar, as the ensuing conversation between Farazmand and the taxi driver invokes a social

commentary within Kiarostami's version that is lacking from Farazmand's, and which contextualizes Sabzian's particular case. Sabzian is not the only person who believes he is destined for a role he cannot pursue. Throughout the film, people aren't where they are expected to be, but are instead confined to professions they did not choose, and from which they cannot escape: "[N]obody in *Close-Up* seems satisfied with who they are or what to do," writes film critic Alberto Elena in *The Cinema of Abbas Kiarostami*.⁴ "The taxi driver is an ex-pilot who, for unexplained reasons, earns his living driving the streets of Tehran."⁵ In the Ahankhah family, the situation is similar: "I have a degree in civil engineering but I haven't found a job in my field," says Mehrdad Ahankhah, the youngest son, "and my brother [Manuchehr], a mechanical engineer," he adds, "is selling bread." Even though his mother specifically corrects Mehrdad that "Manuchehr doesn't sell bread, he's director of the bakery," the son is still not pursuing a career in engineering: "He didn't study to sell bread," Mehrdad counters. "[Sabzian's] case works in the film as a genuine distorting mirror of the situation in Iran in 1990," according to Elena.⁶ And even though *Close-Up*, like the journalist's article, capitalizes on a sensational story, the film becomes Kiarostami's way of casting a spotlight on marginal figures, who, like Sabzian, find themselves trapped in roles they never intended to occupy and for which they feel ill-suited.

As he expands upon Farazmand's story, Kiarostami uses the tools of film to focus the audience on these marginal figures. Upon arriving at the home of the Ahankhah family, Farazmand advises the police officers that, "he [Sabzian] might see you from the window; stay in the car until I call you." This is precisely the advice that Kiarostami, too, follows, and as spectators, we stay in the car with him; Sabzian does not see us, and we do not see Sabzian. Shortly afterwards, Farazmand returns to call the police officers, but we remain outside of the home with the taxi-driver and with Kiarostami, waiting for Kiarostami to call us, waiting for Kiarostami to bring us inside. While Farazmand directs the police officers, Kiarostami directs the audience, and it is not until much later that he opens up the doors of the Ahankhah house to us. Staying away from the journalist's sensational story, Kiarostami focuses on the ordinary, the discarded story, taking a closer look at that which society has cast away and forgotten: in this scene, the taxi driver. After the police enter the house with Mr. Ahankhah, Kiarostami cuts to a close-up of the taxi driver, intently gazing up towards the sky: a shot of an airplane flying vertically across the frame follows. The juxtaposition of the two shots makes a clear point: despite his occupation as a taxi driver, the man is an ex-pilot, and the sight of the airplane is meant to direct our attention to the role he would have preferred to pursue.

Following the vision of the airplane is a shot of an aerosol can, a cryptic shot that shifts the narrative's focus to the discarded object, so that the can becomes a metaphor for Sabzian, the marginal figure. As the airplane fades and the taxi driver begins picking out withered roses from a pile of leaves and refuse, he comes upon the aerosol can. After moving the can slightly when he pulls out the first few flowers, the taxi driver then watches as it rolls to the ground, where he kicks it lightly so that it rolls down the road. Kiarostami follows the can in a single shot for a full forty-five

seconds. After a first viewing (or even after numerous viewings), the long shot of the can will most likely seem dull and perhaps even irritating, especially considering that the “real” story of Sabzian’s arrest is going on elsewhere.

Yet while the shot of the can may perplex us, we cannot help but continue watching, witnessing Kiarostami’s subjective vision as he leads us along the journey of the discarded object and by extension, the marginal figures. And like the marginal figures, the can, too, returns. After summoning Sabzian, Farazmand frantically begins searching for a tape recorder, and when he finally finds one, he kicks the can more violently than the driver, sending it flying across the entire frame and rolling downhill. A celebratory gesture marking his triumph in finding a recorder, the kick effectively juxtaposes the sensational (the recorder) and the discarded (the can). With a second kick of the can, Kiarostami reinforces the idea that the truly sensational story lies elsewhere, and that, through the film, he is giving us a close up of the story he wants us to see: that of the discarded. More than just a metaphor for Sabzian’s particular case, the can thus becomes a metaphor for the marginal figures that define the film as a whole.

Close-Up takes on a social significance, as Sabzian’s poverty and oppression lead him to take on Makhmalbaf’s identity. In the courtroom, Sabzian admits that, when he first met Mrs. Ahankhah, he “only [assumed Makhmalbaf’s identity] for a meal,” explicitly relating his motivations to lack of money and food. But Makhmalbaf’s identity represents more to Sabzian than just a meal: the director’s identity is associated with respect and power in Sabzian’s mind, specifically the power to depict and elevate suffering in his films. Towards the end of the courtroom scene, for example, Sabzian draws attention to other films through which his suppressed sufferings are able to surface, stating that when he “comes across a good man who portrays all [his] sufferings in his films,” he wants to “see [these films] over and over again,” referring implicitly to the influence Makhmalbaf’s script has had on him. In assuming Makhmalbaf’s identity, Sabzian sees the potential to make a film about the anguish of the oppressed, the marginal figures like him. Sabzian asserts that the Koran remains dear to him as it “speaks of things [he] would have liked to express himself”: these “things” being his sufferings, which he wants to portray through the cinematic medium. And even though Sabzian himself fails at directing, his story is ultimately illuminated by none other than Kiarostami in *Close-Up*.

While portraying Sabzian’s suffering, the film takes on a self-reflexive dimension that explores the dichotomy of objective versus subjective reality. Particularly evocative of this dichotomy is the parallel between Kiarostami and Farazmand, between cinema and journalism. Throughout the film, Kiarostami repeatedly draws attention to technical devices involved in both disciplines. Not only is Farazmand desperately searching for a tape recorder and frantically taking photos, but the significance of his actual camera recurs several times: shortly before Sabzian is arrested, Farazmand’s camera occupies the majority of the frame, and in the courtroom, Kiarostami tilts upwards from the camera on Farazmand’s lap to the people in the court room. For the journalist, there is an emphasis on recording, uncovering and documenting the

truth. Thus journalism's claim to objectivity is called into question; when interviewed by Kiarostami, Mr. Ahankhah states that in Farazmand's article, the plaintiffs had been misrepresented. He calls on Kiarostami to represent them more "favorably" in his film.

In contravention to the emphasis placed on objectivity by Bazin and journalism, Kiarostami suggests that cinema is a subjective endeavor. While uncovering the story of Sabzian and the Ahankhahs, Kiarostami repeatedly draws attention to his cinematic devices and techniques, making the spectator increasingly aware that he or she is not only watching a film, but also witnessing the actual filmmaking process. Just after the title sequence, Kiarostami depicts his interviews with several guards outside the prison in which Sabzian is being detained. Although Kiarostami himself is never in the frame, the spectator senses his presence both visually and aurally: through the handheld cinematography, we become aware that Kiarostami is directing our field of vision, and because it is Kiarostami himself that is posing questions from behind the camera, we are alerted to his presence and direction. As the film progresses, we become increasingly familiar with Kiarostami's presence, and indeed aware of the filmmaking process itself. The court room scene opens with a close-up of a clapper board stating "Scene 1, Take 1" of the "Law Courts," calling attention to the question of whether the scene was staged or not. The viewer is made unsure of the extent to which the dialogue has been scripted as Kiarostami's voice from behind the camera continues to direct the narrative as he interrogates both Sabzian and the plaintiffs. He even informs Sabzian that he will be using a close-up lens and a zoom lens to film the proceedings, the former of which "will stay on [Sabzian]." Much later, he pans from the Ahankhah family and Sabzian to the judge, exposing the film crew and their equipment and startling the spectator as the shot unexpectedly widens the visual space; we had previously only seen separate shots of the judge and the audience at opposing ends of the courtroom. Now consciously aware of the film crew, it might come as less of a surprise to the spectator that Kiarostami not only "'directed' the trial according to the requirements of the filming" but "went even further and 'recreated' the trial once it was over."⁷⁷ "The hearing lasted for an hour," says Kiarostami, "but then the judge left and we continued talking to the accused, behind closed doors, for another nine hours. So we have recreated a large part of the trial while the judge was absent. [...] By putting in a few close-up shots of the judge at the editing stage, we give the impression that he was present the whole time."⁷⁸ Reconstructed and sensationalized, the film is, despite all its claims to documentation, only *based* on a true story: "Screenplay by A. Kiarostami," as the title sequence poignantly states. In contrast to journalism's claims to objectivity, *Close-Up* presents Kiarostami's version of reality, which is by definition subjective.

Kiarostami, like the filmmaker Sabzian aspired to be, is also able to manipulate reality, and his directorial power thus transcends the cinematic medium. It is because of Kiarostami that the Ahankhahs are featured in a film (*Close-Up* instead of *The House of the Spider*, the film that Sabzian aspired to make). It is because of his filming schedule that the course of events is altered, that the trial is moved. And most of all,

it is through Kiarostami that Sabzian is able to meet his idol, Mohsen Makhmalbaf. In reference to the last scene, Elena writes: "At this point Kiarostami has already abandoned the simple filming of an event and his more or less faithful reconstruction of it using the real protagonists—now, like a real god, he creates reality and makes Sabzian's dream come true."⁹ *Close-Up* creates what Sabzian, the marginal figure, wasn't able to: the director becomes divine and reveals his creation to an audience.

As powerful as the cinematic medium has proven to be, Kiarostami's creation does have its limitations. *Close-Up*'s final scene, in which Sabzian meets the real Makhmalbaf, opens with Kiarostami saying (off-screen) that: "we've lost [Makhmalbaf]. He didn't wait at the right spot. I can't see him": a first hint at the scene's cinematic limitations. Subsequently, the microphone supposedly malfunctions and only part of the conversation between Sabzian and Makhmalbaf can be heard. Off-screen, Kiarostami talks to his crew, saying that the scene cannot be re-shot. But did the microphone failure actually occur? Many critics, including Elena, have argued that the breakdown of the equipment is "fictitious": "Kiarostami no doubt wished to respect the privacy of the meeting"¹⁰ However, more than just a sign of respect, the microphone failure is suggestive of directorial weakness, implying that there is a world beyond the grasp of cinema, a world that not even a close-up lens can capture. On the level of content, the real is now leading the cinematic: the motorbike carrying Sabzian and Makhmalbaf leads the way and the mini-bus containing the film crew follows. Like the broken sound, the shattered glass of the mini-bus becomes a metaphor for cinematic failure, indicative of the fractured *objectif*, an admission of limitation.

The film's failure to capture the whole of reality culminates with Kiarostami's one and only use of non-diegetic sound – sound that emanates from the story world of a film – a gesture that restores the scene's unity, and at the same time adds a fictive dimension, which ultimately reasserts Kiarostami's reality. With the same score of Kambiz Roshanravan that Kiarostami used for his previous film *The Traveller*, Kiarostami anchors his own presence, and his own reality, in the film. Just like Sabzian proposed during the trial, Kiarostami's life and his art are intertwined. *Close-Up*, while taking on a fictive dimension as the music is not diegetic, concludes with a connection to reality: reality as Kiarostami forces us to see it. Through the music, Kiarostami reasserts his control as the director.

The film is Kiarostami's close-up: a close-up directed by a strong subjective vision. Through his self-reflexivity, Kiarostami creates a subjective reality that focuses on the tragic fates of marginal figures. Yet more than merely documenting their suffering, *Close-Up* crosses a certain boundary between cinema and life: Kiarostami, unlike the journalist, embraces subjectivity as a tool that empowers him to direct the people in his film as well as his audience. As spectators, we are compelled to question Kiarostami's judgment, his subjective reality and his cinematic vision. Throughout the film, Kiarostami repeatedly points out the artifice of his cinematic endeavor, but in the final scene, even he acknowledges that there is a world beyond what can be captured on film, beyond his power of direction. As he is unable to direct, or even

record, the conversation between Sabzian and Makhmalbaf, Kiarostami admits that his power as the director is limited. Refracted through, and limited by, the subjective lens of the filmmaker, the truth of cinema is incomplete, and while the director can certainly play a guiding role, reality ultimately remains to be interpreted and shaped by the spectator. ■

Notes

¹ Bazin, André. "The Ontology of the Photographic Image." *What is Cinema?* Translated by Gray, Hugh. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971. 9-16. Quotations are on 13-14.

² A film movement in the 1950s and 60s, the French *nouvelle vague* (New Wave) stipulated the importance of the director as the *auteur*, or author, of each of his or her films. Originating from the critics of the film magazine *Cahiers du Cinéma*, this new wave of directors included, amongst others, François Truffaut, Jean-Luc Godard, Eric Rohmer, Claude Chabrol and Jacques Rivette.

³ Kiarostami, Abbas. *Close-Up*. Facets Video, 100 min. 1990.

⁴ Elena, Alberto. Translated by Coombes, Belinda. *The Cinema of Abbas Kiarostami*. London: Saqi in association with Iran Heritage Foundation, 2005.

⁵ *Ibid.* 86-87.

⁶ *Ibid.* 87.

⁷ *Ibid.* 87.

⁸ *Ibid.* 87.

⁹ *Ibid.* 89.

¹⁰ *Ibid.* 90.

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On the Body with Wintergreen Organs: Excising Text, Narrating Ribs

Jon Kief

Despite its extensive engagement with the events of the remembered past, Ch'oe Yun's 1992 short story, "The Gray Snowman,"¹ nevertheless frames its narrative in terms of the present act of remembering. For this reason, I argue that the text is best understood as an intervention into its early-1990s post-authoritarian context. More specifically, I argue that the text articulates a critique of its contemporary society as one in which forces of fragmentation and dispersion have converted the previous three decades' intense socio-political activism into self-reflexive interiority and vacuous demobilization.

The remembered past nevertheless emerges as central to the text's critical and strategic vision. Not only does it allow for an interrogation of the present paradigm itself (memory is an archival inscription of its apparatus of production), but it also allows for a critical encounter with its historical emergence (memory narrates the present's past). Finally, and perhaps most importantly, the staging of the memory-narrative allows the text to creatively develop (from within) a new technique of strategic textual practice to be mobilized in the present towards an alternative vision of post-authoritarian subjectivity.

Ch'oe's text presents us with a narrator, Hawôn, whose position is fundamentally in-between; her narrative moves infinitely back and forth between past and present, between communality and marginality, between hope and despair, between the known and the unthinkable. My own critical engagement with the text attempts to extract the logic of these infinite crossings-over and doublings-back. This is a work in progress that I plan to continue to develop with future revisions. So if you happen to encounter such a draft-to-come, I hope you will not be disappointed; together, we can stage the impossible return.

The Post-authoritarian Present (I): Society is/in Control

Hawôn's present act of remembering is occasioned by a chance encounter with a newspaper article that announces her death. It reports as follows:

A Korean woman was found dead in New York's Central Park on the 26th. The woman carried a long-expired passport that bore the name Kang Hawôn, age 41. The Korean Association, however, is questioning her identity. The woman is listed as an illegal alien. An inquest revealed the cause of death to be starvation. (347)

Hawôn is here faced with a direct challenge to her subjectivity. Yet it is a challenge of a certain kind, one articulated according to a certain logic. Crucially, it is not a challenge voiced by the state. It is posited, after all, in direct contestation of state knowledge-authority; passport identity is in question. Instead, this is a challenge voiced by the newspaper as an independent institution and it is one that sutures its knowledge-authority to the position of the Korean Association, a civil society organization with transnational links. In place of passport identity, moreover, the article presents the category of "illegal alien"; this is a negative positivity, a unit of pure modulation, a datum of informatics and its processes of digital assortment.

The newspaper article thus signals distance from the state-disciplinary paradigm of authoritarian rule; correspondingly, it signals the emergence of a high technology-driven and information-oriented post-authoritarian society, one that intersects usefully with Gilles Deleuze's theorization of "societies of control."² Whereas disciplinary apparatuses deny meaningful subjectivity by individualizing and totalizing, societies of control impose regimes of "dividuals" as regimes of infinite dispersion; subjectivity dissolves into endless circuits of information transfer. Hawôn thus encounters the encroaching power of control as data stream-absorption. Is there any possibility for resistance to this new paradigm?

The Present Act of Remembering (I): Memory's Analytic of Finitude³

Faced with the present's threat of subjective dispersion, Hawôn remembers the past; she turns inwards to memory as a field of bounded interiority. This attempt at resistance, however, is by no means successful; it yields a fundamental disempowerment that consolidates the legitimacy of the present. Hawôn's narration provides us with a robust description of the present act of remembering. The centrality of this figuration merits reproducing the passage at length:

The events of that period almost twenty years ago have returned to my memory like a stage being lit. I see them first as a somber, bluish green tableau. But then, as if through a window beside the tableau, a warm light emerges... There are periods in our past that can't be dismissed with a flippant "Oh, *that* time." They may be short, those periods, but they work their influence throughout our lives. Nevertheless, daily life is a powerful healer. Day after day, snow and rain have fallen, flowers have withered and bloomed,

and that period has gradually scabbed over, like a wound grown slowly insensible. (346)

According to this account, memory is by no means a stable repository of things known. The present act of remembering is an act of re-membering; the events of the past become known-present-visible to the remembering subject when they "return" to memory. To remember is thus to rediscover the events of one's past.

Yet, how exactly does this operate? Events inscribe themselves on the surface of the body as wounds, but they soon become scabbed over and insensible. The past is thus forgotten, but this is by no means a process of neutralization. On the contrary, it is a process of incorporation and internalization, the very production of subjective identity; as Hawôn narrates, "those periods...work their influence throughout our lives" (346). As the wounds of the past are rendered interior to the body, they simultaneously become both insensible and essential; subjectivity's truth-of-identity is produced as interior depth, as intrinsic latency, as that which is necessarily unseen, unfelt, unknown.

Knowledge of subjectivity's truth-of-identity—epistemic agency and empowerment in a general sense—thus only arises belatedly as recovery, and it does so through the body of forgetting itself. After all, remembering operates in terms of the past's becoming-visible, its transition from insensible obscurity to illuminated visibility; the production of unknown, interior depth is that which makes such (re)illumination possible. Forgetting is the foundation of subjective identity as well as knowledge of it; forgetting is the operator of subjectivity in a broad sense.

Moreover, remembering is not a process of gradual empowerment through progressive reclamation. After all, Hawôn's act of remembering not only signals her recovery of events from her past (surface knowledge), but it also enables her to figure the complex processes of memory on a broader meta-level (depth knowledge).⁴ The act of remembering not only stages a "recovery" of past forgettings, but it also makes visible the fact of forgetting, itself; the meta-content grasped through the act of remembering is memory's own selectivity, its radical finitude. To remember is thus to know that there are memories about the past to be had (to know that the tableaux of past experience, epistemic positivities, are present on memory's stage), and at the same time, to know that one's knowledge of them is finite and imperfect (to know that the stage is only partially illuminated). The past's becoming-visible operates as positive delineation of the threshold of visibility; it operates as positive delineation of subjectivity's epistemic agency.

The Present Act of Remembering (II): Illuminations and Archival Incriptions

Remembering's recovery of the forgotten past is thus also its affirmation of infinite obscurity, its affirmation of infinite embeddedness in darkened obsolescence, its affirmation of infinite epistemic interiority. Each illumination—each surface-level assumption of an epistemic "outside" vis-à-vis forgetting's encompassing

darkness—in fact turns out to be nothing more than a reconsolidation or recentering of depth as depth. Interiority extends indefinitely, each passing day adding new unknown and unseen dimensions.

With this question in mind, it is significant to note the text's figuration of the phenomenon of illumination. The act of remembering is linked to the introduction of a beam of light that illuminates the stage "selectively." This beam of light therefore opens up as that which makes visible this entire structure of forgetting and remembering, that which posits selective memory, that which posits memory's analytic of finitude. And yet, can we establish anything about this light, itself?

Hawôn tells us that it illuminates the stage "as if through a window," and while this description does not present us with an explicit characterization, a basic structure nevertheless emerges: memory's warm light of illumination comes from outside. Interiority is not an infinite abyss, but rather a positive production, a bounded delineation that is finite and contained. Subjective interiority is made selectively visible and invisible by a light that comes from outside; the operation of memory is structured as well as occasioned by a relationship with the social.

Hawôn's description of the operation of memory intersects usefully with Gilles Deleuze's articulation of Michel Foucault's concept of the archive: "each stratum or historical formation implies a distribution of the visible and the articulable which acts upon itself....A way of saying and seeing, discursive practices and forms of self-evidence: each stratum is a combination of the two....What Foucault takes from History is that determination of visible and articulable features unique to each age which goes beyond any behaviour, mentality or set of ideas, since it makes these things possible."⁵ Social spaces operate in terms of positive (yet dynamically transformational) systems of visibilities and articulabilities. Every social apparatus enfolds its own "audio-visual archive," which organizes that which is visible and articulable.

Jacques Rancière expands this theorization of the archive by linking it to the question of differentiated subject positions and social formations, and as such, to the question of political subjectivity more broadly. He calls this adaptation of the archive "the distribution [or partition] of the sensible," and he defines it as "the system of self-evident facts of sense perception that simultaneously discloses the existence of something in common and the delimitations that define the respective parts and positions within it... This apportionment of parts and positions is based on a distribution of spaces, times, and forms of activity that determines the very manner in which something in common lends itself to participation and in what way various individuals have a part in this distribution."⁶

Memories therefore arise in tandem with social spaces and their corresponding aesthetic regimes;⁷ to remember is to mobilize the present archive vis-à-vis the events of the past. The process of memorial "rediscovery" operates through the present's light of illumination and it therefore operates firmly within the present socio-historical formation; it is an actualization of the present's network of social relations (power). The post-authoritarian society of control thus absorbs memory of the past

back into its own modulating structures; it structures narration of the past in terms of its own present-fulfillment as telos of historical development.⁸

This is not simply a matter of memory; it is an issue of the relationship between interiority and resistance. Faced with the present's threat of dispersion, one turns to bounded interiority as resistance. Yet, this turn necessarily acts as consolidation; it asserts that resistance is contained within the body of the present state of affairs, and it thus sutures knowledge-authority to the epistemic outside.

Hawôn, then, is not the only one who attempts to prevent dispersion by constructing bounded interiority. She resembles those who surround her: the man in the library "...who for several days had laid out on the desk before him some sort of statistical data before dozing for half the morning" (346-7); or the professor "who had quit teaching and moved to the country to commit his life's work to writing. He was a linguist and said he was preparing a book called *Contemporary Linguistics*" (370). The self-reflexive gaze—the belief that truth and resistance lie hidden within a bounded interiority, latent within the given state of affairs—translates into demobilization, vacuous self-absorption, consolidation of the present.⁹

The Post-authoritarian Present (II): The Question of Resistance

The 1980s were a decade of massive anti-authoritarian mobilization in South Korea. In particular, the student movement became an almost unmatched socio-political force; as Namhee Lee (2002) writes, "In the late 1980s, the South Korean student movement was considered one of the most important political actors in Korean society, second only to the military. In 1986, a government official privately remarked that South Korea seemed to be 'at the brink of choosing either a military republic or a student republic.'"¹⁰ Building throughout the decade, opposition to the Chun Doo Hwan (Chôn Tu-hwan) military regime¹¹ came to a head in the summer of 1987, when a broad-based coalition of workers, students, activists, and ordinary citizens staged a series of mass protests and uprisings. Under such extreme pressure, General Roh Tae Woo—who had in June of 1987 been hand-selected to succeed Chun—announced direct presidential elections. 1987 thus marked the beginning of a process of democratization.

Yet the 1987 transition also presented significant problems. Clearly, procedural democracy did not mean substantive democracy; in fact, it did not even mean civilian rule, as a split in the opposition actually allowed Roh to win the 1987 elections. The process of democratization was also uneven with respect to social and economic divisions; as Jang Jip Choi writes, "While the Roh regime... allowed a considerable degree of political democratization in the middle and upper classes, it [did not change] its repressive policy towards the popular sector-based movements, notably the labor movement. Therefore, the transition to democracy under the new regime may be characterized as highly class-specific."¹²

Yet perhaps even more significant was the impact that this uneven process of democratization had on the broader community of dissent; as Choi continues,

“Under such harsh circumstances the student-led movements and working-class movements [were] subjected to their own dynamics of disintegration, which gained momentum toward the end of the 1980s... The rapid disappearance of the *minjung* forces from the political scene in the late 1980s [was] as remarkable as their potent advancement during the early 1980s.”¹³ After winning direct elections and partial democratization, activism began to stall and wither.

In fact, the process of democratization produced a significant re-orientation within the opposition movement. As Hagen Koo notes, “...in the 1990s, tension and competition appeared between [the new *simin* (citizens’) social movements and the *minjung*, student, and labor coalition], eventually leading to a clear separation of the two. With this bifurcation of social movements, the labor movement and the *minjung* movement declined noticeably, whereas the new social movements grew significantly. It seems thus clear that there existed more than an accidental relationship between the decline and isolation of the labor movement and the success of new social movements.”¹⁴ The post-1987 fissure between the middle class and the more radical dissident forces gave rise to an alternative vision of activism; the late 1980s and early 1990s saw the rise of more reform-minded *simin* movements.

Significantly, this question of the decline of *minjung* activism and the rise of *simin* activism was not only a question of revolution versus reform, it was also a question of dispersion and fragmentation; as Nancy Abelmann argues, “In spite of [continued] widespread activism, *minjung* epics and cultures of dissent have waned... It has become clear that 1990s activism cannot be easily subsumed under a singular aesthetic or narrative of dissent. With civilian rule the objects of dissent are more dispersed and the narratives and organization of the dissent are more fragmented.”¹⁵ The newspaper article’s threat to Hawôn’s subjectivity thus mirrors the dissolution of resistance movements in a broader sense.

The question, then, is one of strategy and its conditions of possibility: how should we think of subjectivity and resistance in the post-authoritarian present? Faced with the newspaper article’s challenge of dispersion, Hawôn turns inwards to memory as a field of bounded interiority; she attempts to resist the present paradigm by staging a return to the heritage of 1970s and 1980s opposition. But what does it mean to attempt to resist the present by remembering resistance from the past? In fact, the text frames its narrative in terms of two more basic questions: what is memory and what was resistance?

Doubling and Obliteration: Search for a Method

Despite the text’s despairing vision, however, this doubling of the question of dispersion and resistance points towards a possibility for strategic contestation. Hawôn’s narration of memory is articulated from within the present’s aesthetic regime. Yet it nevertheless traces the historical trajectory of authoritarianism and resistance; moreover, it does so in terms of contestations on the level of the aesthetic order, the distribution of the sensible. The present regime thus narrates its own process of

development; it constructs a genealogy of its own emergence that interrogates the past on the level of the archive.

This intersection of genealogy and archaeology is essential. Genealogy engages questions of rupture and discontinuity,¹⁶ but archaeology is an affair of necessary thresholds and limits. Genealogy thus interrogates points of emergence at which archives dissolve and re-form. It interrogates those points that archives cannot think, those points that archives cannot give to thought; it interrogates the impossible points at which archives attempts to see and speak their own form and presence.

A Patrimony of the Sensible (I): Developmentalist Instrumentality

Hawôn's memory-narrative begins with an engagement with the context of 1970s developmentalism. In the aftermath of his May 16, 1961 coup, General Park Chung Hee (Pak Chông-hûi) sought to legitimize his seizure and exercise of power through a program of economic and military development. Arguing that material self-strengthening forms the core of national self-sufficiency and that national self-sufficiency forms the condition of possibility for democratic political structures, the Park regime asserted its alignment with the interests of the nation even as it disavowed democratic practice and it disavowed democratic practice even while it exalted it as endpoint and ideal. Developmentalism's ends legitimized its means, and the eventual material yield of export-oriented industrialization therefore operated as self-reflexive political justification.

This logic of self-evidence was essential. As described above, the Park regime's 1960s ideology leveraged its teleological vision of future prosperity-towards-democracy as justification for present policy and proof of state-nation coincidence. This logic took a new turn in the 1970s, when the state's program of rapid industrialization began to show its profound and unmistakable results. The Park regime was then able to point to the rapidly industrializing nation it had materialized as self-immanent and self-evident justification of its past, present, and future. Whereas the 1960s state leveraged its teleological future vision as proof of its present practice's alignment with the interests of the nation, the 1970s state simply pointed to itself as self-present legitimacy. The commodity took on its own use-value and state-nation coincidence emerged as simple self-recognition.¹⁷

Crucially, this ideological shift coincided with a state-led push towards heavy industrialization as well as with the 1972 proclamation of the *yusin* ("revitalization") constitution, which consolidated authoritarian rule as a matter of formal law. A number of scholars have described the *yusin* paradigm as "bureaucratic authoritarianism" and I find this terminology useful. The push towards heavy industrialization and the concomitant rise of *chaebôls* (business conglomerates) occasioned an increased emphasis on a logic of bureaucratic rationality and economic instrumentality. The economic development of the 1970s, indeed, was founded upon the state's manipulation of domestic and international financial markets; the *yusin* state was a state of technocrats, a state run—as Bruce Cumings writes—by Seoul's "mechanics

of finance.”¹⁸ This whole-scale emphasis on economic development as self-present legitimacy thus gave rise to a logic of self-evident instrumentality. And indeed, this was mirrored in the *yusin* constitution’s formalization of authoritarian rule; the state’s authoritarian repression was now the letter of the law. Self-evidence thus became the state’s central epistemic claim.

This is the context of the opening section of Hawôn’s narration of memory, and indeed, this question of instrumentality operates centrally in the text’s vision of 1970s developmentalism. Like so many others—workers as well as students—Hawôn has left her home to come to the city, where she leads a life of anonymity, isolation, and de-politicized and de-socialized fragmentation. Importantly, the text links this modality of subjectivity to an instrumental vision of language.¹⁹ In order to get by, Hawôn takes up tutoring; as she narrates, “I would teach older children Korean, English, math—the usual things—and occasionally, ‘*Ich bin, du bist*’ or ‘*Comment allez-vous?*’ Though these were languages I’d never studied formally, I’d teach them after a day’s brush-up; it was a common practice at the time” (348). Language has not only “become object,”²⁰ but it has also become a commodity, a transparent and self-present/self-evident materiality to be exchanged for money, food, clothing, subsistence. Implicitly compared to math, languages are here presented as rational formalizations. They are stable codes that can be memorized and deployed, transparently exchanged.

Hawôn describes books in similar terms. They are self-present yet exchangeable materialities, commodities valuable in terms of material exchange rather than signification or content. In describing a book she has recently purchased, Hawôn tells us that she “obtained it for the price of a meal of instant noodles” (348). Books are understood in terms of their instrumental exchange value. In a parallel sense, even when Hawôn describes her entrance into an underground economy of banned books, she does not seem to place any emphasis on the ideas contained in these subversive tracts. Instead, she is interested in the books insofar as they are banned objects and/or exchangeable commodities; as she narrates, “In those days, I was intent on collecting banned books... It gave me the sort of thrill one might get from collecting guns. They were also like money in the bank, something I could sell when I ran out of cash...” (348). She values her banned books as material entities rather than conceptual statements.

Finally, it is also significant to note Hawôn’s other instrumental uses of her books. Beyond market exchange, she also mobilizes her books towards basic bodily subsistence; as she describes, “The coal briquette in my stove had always burned out by the time I got home, which made it a chore to cook. I would take the clothes iron I’d picked up from who knows where, prop it upside down on a few books, toast some cheap bread on it, and make do with that” (349). Once again, Hawôn values her books for their explicitly instrumental use as surfaces upon which to toast bread. She makes use of them insofar as they are concrete materialities and shows little interest in conceptual content. Broadly, then, the developmental subject engages with language as instrumentality, or in other words, as a tool to be mobilized for

rational and concrete use. Language is a simple means to an end; it is a given, a concrete and unified materiality to be mobilized unproblematically. Language is infinitely self-present as well as infinitely exchangeable.

Developmentalist instrumentality also enfold a regime of subjectivity-meaning. Within this opening section of the memory-narration, Hawôn's painfully unsuccessful search for subjectivity and existential meaning takes the form of an unceasing movement back and forth between confinement in her tiny room and endless wandering outside in the cold city. Engaging her own subjective existence as a problem of meaning and knowledge, she oscillates between reified materiality (confinement in her room) and infinite displacement (endless wandering in the city in search of social interaction and exchange). Hawôn leads a life of anonymity and loneliness.

A Patrimony of the Sensible (II): The Print Shop and its Media

This dual instrumental vision is problematized with Hawôn's entrance into the counter-public sphere of the student movement. Taking up this question of language and its status position quite literally, the text figures this dissident space as a print shop, a space of text-production. In this way, opposition to the authoritarian state and its ideology operates in terms of a problematization of language as self-present materiality, self-evident transparency, system of unproblematic coincidence of utterance and effectivity. Within the space of the print shop, language is thrown into question as a system of signification and displacement. Indeed, the print shop is a place of disagreement, contestation, ideological debate. Beyond simple printing-production, the group's leader, An, and his colleagues consult and argue over their dissident vision and its articulation.

In a parallel vein, Hawôn describes the print shop as a beacon of light that she seeks out just to hear the comfort of her companions' voices. This characterization extends the problematization of instrumentality beyond the purely textual. Hawôn's engagement with the print shop is an engagement with illumination, an engagement with light, itself. Additionally, it is an engagement with voice and utterance, with spoken communication in its primary and direct enunciation. In terms of the visible as well as the utterable, then, the space of the print shop denaturalizes the medium. Disrupting instrumentality's logic of self-evidence and self-presence, the print shop paradigm focuses attention on light, text, and voice, the media of appearance and communication. The questions of visibility and utterability suddenly become visible and utterable.

The print shop nevertheless presents its own problems. First, insofar as it questions language's self-evident transparency, it operates as a paradigm of subjectivation; it produces fragmented individuals who understand themselves in terms of self-reflexive interiority.²¹ It is within the context of the print shop, after all, that expression suddenly becomes an important problem for Hawôn, who describes her recurrent feeling of her inability to be understood. Despite her desire

to communicate with those around her, she repeatedly questions the possibility of self-expression. Language has been problematized as instrumentality, but this opens up an additional field of fragmentation; Hawôn becomes confined within her own interiorized consciousness. Instead of voicing her thoughts, she begins to stage conversations in her own head; despite her entrance into an intersubjective space, sociality is turned inwards upon itself and the result is self-reflexive interiority, a self-consciousness operative out of subjectivation.

The print shop's resistance to instrumentality also presents problems of power and agency. Signification operates through displacement; by necessity, the meaning of any linguistic articulation always resides beyond, infinitely "there" rather than "here." Language can be understood neither as self-present materiality nor as a system of unproblematic coincidence. Yet this act of denaturalization nevertheless serves to invest the state-ideological utterance with new power insofar as it justifies a process of endless resignification towards typologization. The print shop is raided and its texts are seized, but the result is not only censorship, repression, and silence; the state-sponsored newspaper endlessly resignifies the dissident articulation as "anti-national" and "communist." The state gains new power in appropriation; the print shop resists the state's assertion of coincidence through an appeal to displacement, but this ends up legitimizing the state's propagandist dissemination.

A disciplinary power in the Foucauldian sense, the developmentalist state thus both individualizes and massifies; it fragments by reifying its subjects within a self-reflexive consciousness and it subsumes and incorporates by signifying its subjects towards codified typologies. This dual operation constructs subjectivity in the form of that which Deleuze and Guattari call the Face. Indeed, the figure of the snowman—male-coded in its features and dress, gray as not-quite-white (contaminated by both dirt and soot in comparison to the West as "developed"), silent and passive yet present and material—emerges as the paradigmatic image-embodiment of the developmentalist state's ideological programmatic; it therefore stands stable and erect throughout the entire episode of resistance and suppression.

A Patrimony of the Sensible (III): *Minjung* and Resistance in/as Reflexivity

Following the police raid, Hawôn's narrative stages an important transition. The print shop has been shut down and boarded up; the text in production has been confiscated and silenced. The print shop's intersubjective space has been fragmented and the group members have disappeared and gone into hiding. At least initially, this turn of events occasions Hawôn's return to her earlier life of reified confinement and abject wandering. And yet, she realizes that her experiences in the print shop have provided her with a new alternative. She can recreate the dissident articulation through her memory; she can reach back into her recollections of the past and reproduce the lost text, thereby reconstituting resistance.

Hawôn's recuperative gesture extends beyond linguistic expression. It is not only aimed at reproducing the dissident articulation, but also at re-instantiating the

community of resistance, as she narrates:

Mobilizing all of my recollections, I wrote down one by one the titles of the pieces in the book we'd been preparing, essays I'd proofread at least twice... Afraid my resurrected memories would fade, I kept feverishly at my work with scarcely a thought of resting my eyes. A kind of prayer, I guess you could call it. Or perhaps autosuggestion, a superstitious belief that I could signal them as long as my memories were kept fresh. (363-4)

Hawôn's act of remembering is thus much more than an act of material reproduction; it is an act of communication, an attempt to "signal" the members of the lost dissident community through memory. And in fact, Kim Hûijin—one of the contributors to the print shop text—promptly shows up at her doorstep, entering Hawôn's life as well as the text's narration itself in an abrupt—almost magical—fashion. In this way, Hawôn mobilizes her memory and reclaims the confiscated, suppressed, silenced dissident articulation, and she thereby (re)creates some degree of communality. Hawôn reclaims the silenced past and thereby instantiates new community in the present.

This new community is one in which the previously marginalized have taken center stage. Hawôn is finally writing rather than just typesetting and proofreading; she is finally producing text without the supervisory gaze of An and his colleagues. Similarly, Kim Hûijin is finally fully present and embodied in her authorship. Although she had written a significant number of articles for the text under production, she had never actually entered space of the print shop. She had only existed as a name, and in fact, we learn that Hawôn had always thought she was a man. But in this new community, those who had been kept on the margins assume the center; Hawôn makes the silenced past audible and this allows previously suppressed voices to speak.

Hawôn narrates her new relationship with Kim Hûijin in terms of hope: "The day Kim Hûijin came to my room I watched her weary eyes fall shut and woke up to the fact that I'd long been infected with a hope that was difficult to pinpoint. I knew that in one form or another it would end up guiding me for the rest of my life. Obstinate expectant that my vague hope would be realized, I tended Kim Hûijin" (367). This developing intersubjective bond, although temporary and provisional, orients Hawôn towards present action as well as future imagining. And indeed, it marks a transition in her life; as Hawôn narrates, "I dropped out of school once and for all, returned to my aunt's, and for years I helped her with the farm work. At the same time, I ventured into other activities, wanting to share with those around me the color of the hope I had tasted" (369). Implicitly, then, Hawôn returns to the countryside in order to organize the local community towards dissent and resistance; she does this by recounting her memories of her (failed yet hope-instilling) activist experience.

Broadly, this section of the narrative can be read as an engagement with the rise of the *minjung* movement of the 1970s and 1980s. The *minjung* movement was a diverse coalition of oppositional movements that sought to bring an end to military authoritarianism, U.S.-capitalist neocolonialism, and national division by re-centering national subjectivity, and therefore political legitimacy, around the figure of the historically oppressed yet resistant common people (*minjung*).²² In other words, it contested the state's claim to legitimacy by asserting the marginalized and rebellious *minjung* as the proper subjects of the nation's socio-political history as well as its cultural identity.

This assertion of legitimacy also brought with it an attempt at empowerment; to affirm *minjung* subjectivity in history—or alternatively, to reclaim and practice *minjung* folk culture—was also to attempt to empower *minjung* subjectivity vis-à-vis historical action in the present. As Choi Chungmoo writes, “The methodology of the *minjung* culture movement is essentially a rereading of history as a history of the oppressed *minjung*'s struggle and a representation of that history as a paradigm of change. In the history thus reread, hitherto marginalized people enter the central arena or become agents of history.”²³ The movement sought to give voice to the silenced history of popular oppression-resistance-suppression and thus to resignify it towards meaningful historical subjectivity in the present.

We can therefore see the way in which a certain strand of *minjung* theory pivots on historical memory as a structure of reflexivity: activism is self-emplacement within a lineage of past activism; dissent is the invocation of past dissent; resistance is remembering, re-awakening, and resurrecting past resistance. As we have seen, then, Hawôn's narrative links the act of remembering and its reconstitution of silenced past dissent to the construction of a new community of resistance in the present (Kim Hûjün as well as the village population). It thus intersects quite explicitly with Nancy Abelmann's characterization of *minjung* practice as “a dialectic of movements activating memory and of memory activating movements.”²⁴

Memory allows *minjung* theory to posit intersubjectivity without recourse to signification and its structure of expression-displacement.²⁵ In other words, memory opens up as *minjung*'s hinge of solidarity and mobilization, its response to the state's resignification of the dissident articulation towards interiority and fragmentation; as Abelmann writes, “Activists and activism in 1980s South Korea were imagined in terms of particular lineages of activism... In this sense, these lineages were thus literally biographical or generational; they evoked real genealogies of persons or groups. Alternatively, lineages can suggest the unconscious transmission of identities, loyalties, or politics. In the community of dissent I found in South Korea, this sense of *unconscious transmission* was itself a powerful cultural and discursive frame.”²⁶

Within this context, it is significant to note that Hawôn's act of memorial reproduction is by no means an act of signification; it is an act of communication that operates according to an alternative logic. Hawôn remembers the dissident text and thus sends “signals” to her lost colleagues, but the text she inscribes in front of her and the “signals” she sends are by no means the same. Hawôn does not signal

Kim Hûjij with the text she reproduces; she does so through the act of textual re-inscription itself. There would thus appear to be a kind of textual unconscious; the intersubjective community of resistance would open up out of the material body of the dissident articulation rather than out of its signified content.

The transition from early 1970s print shop opposition to *minjung* discourse can therefore be reframed in terms of a transition from an emphasis on signification—with its implications of displacement and non-coincidence—to an emphasis of direct experience.²⁷ Opposition could no longer simply articulate its critique of the state or describe its alternative vision; it now encountered a need for present performative action, specifically, towards transformation. Instead, resistance would have to break with signification and would instead have to instantiate and affect the actual work of social, cultural, and political reconstruction. Hawôn's (re)construction of community through her reproduction of the dissident text operates firmly within this theoretical framework.

In the same way, it is essential to note that the community of resistance constructed through memory is more than a simple reproduction of that which was lost; the intersubjectivity constituted in the apartment is different from that which had been present in the print shop. At least in theory, whereas the print shop paradigm brought together a group of individuals playing apportioned roles in an organization, this new community would be one of intersubjective *minjung* communality. Hawôn signals Kim Hûjij through her act of memory-inscription; she signals her through a kind of unconscious transmission operative through memory.

If we can see the operation of a certain textual unconscious, we must say the same about memory; memory is a "collective repository"²⁸ and its mobilization thus instantiates a form of collective that is fundamentally intersubjective rather than provisionally amalgamated/cooperative (as in the print shop context). Similarly, Choi Chungmoo speaks of the breakdown between members of the community and action of an ecstatic intersubjectivity.²⁹ Hawôn thus re-instantiates the lost community of resistance but in a different form: the intersubjective *minjung* body, the body of *minjung* intersubjectivity.

Returning to Hawôn's act of memorial reproduction one more time, it is significant to note that Hawôn's act of reconstruction is not simply described in terms of collective memory towards unconscious communication, but also in terms of material inscription:

I sharpened the blunted feelers of my memory and began to send out signals for anything that could deliver me from despair. But there was no receiver. I opened the notebook on my table and sat down. Mobilizing all of my recollections, I wrote down one by one the titles of the pieces in the book we'd been preparing, essays I'd proofread at least twice... Afraid my resurrected memories would fade, I kept feverishly at my work with scarcely a thought of resting my eyes. A kind of prayer, I guess you could call it. Or perhaps

autosuggestion, a superstitious belief that I could signal them as long as my memories were kept fresh. (363-4, emphases mine)

Hawôn makes two attempts to contact those whom she has lost. In the first attempt, she simply remembers the past, the communality that has been fragmented; she uses the language of writing, but she neither writes anything nor engages the textuality of that which she remembers. This first attempt to project memory-signals is unsuccessful; as she narrates, “there was no receiver.”

But then she tries again, and in this second attempt she takes out her notebook and reproduces the dissident text. This second attempt differs doubly from the first. Hawôn does not simply remember the dissident text. Neither does she simply write her memories. Instead, she reproduces the lost text in the present; this is a material engagement with past materiality. It is not a symbolic representation, but rather a material instantiation; “past is surrealistically grafted to present,”³⁰ and indeed, Kim Hûjjin soon comes knocking at the door. What is at stake here? Are we to understand the memorial unconscious in terms of a textual unconscious or even a broader material unconscious?

This is a theory of latency, of resistance as latent potentiality. The re-instantiation of the materiality of past resistance would find its power not in material action or expression but rather in the latent power of material presence or representing. Hawôn’s reproduction of the material text would signal this: *minjung* resistance opens up out of the latent depths of past (suppressed) resistance; it opens up out of the unconscious interiority of past resistance’s materiality or material body. *Minjung* resistance would thus operate in terms of the memory-reproduction of the materiality of past resistance as well as its re-interpretation towards unconscious interior depth.

The Critical Turn (I): *Minjung* on the Inside/Outside

As a whole, however, Hawôn’s narrative of memory chronicles repeated disappointment rather than heroic triumph. As previously discussed, Hawôn’s reproduction of the dissident text can be read in terms of empowerment. Within the space of the print shop, Hawôn was intellectually marginalized; in reconstructing the text, however, the dissident articulation flows through her subjective action. Yet what are the implications of the fact that Hawôn’s act thus consolidates the previously communal and intersubjective dissident articulation under the power of a single individual? What does it mean to say that Hawôn becomes empowered insofar as she speaks for others, as she renders the dissident articulation entirely univocal?

More specifically, we should not forget that Kim Hûjjin originally authored some of the articles included in the text. What, then, is the exact nature of the relationship between Hawôn and Kim Hûjjin? Hawôn tells us that when Kim Hûjjin arrives at her door, she is both emotionally drained and physically exhausted; she is desperate and in need of help. Hawôn describes her initial impressions as follows:

The woman sat down next to me on the floor, gathered her legs to the side, and slumped against the wall. She had with her a good-sized travel bag, and the hand that had set it down looked rough and knotty. That hand spoke of physical and emotional impoverishment. She was pale, but no more than I. Her face had a chilling beauty that made me feel she had come from a faraway place and would vanish to another. *But her expression and general appearance skillfully camouflaged all these things.* Her eyes had a feverish glimmer. I could see she was ill, and I placed a pillow behind her back. We observed each other silently. (364, emphasis mine)

Hawôn narrates her visitor in terms of “physical and emotional impoverishment,” but she also says that this condition of extreme distress is not visible; it is “skillfully camouflaged” and hidden. How does Hawôn know that her visitor is so in need of assistance, when Kim Hûijin does not say so? According to Hawôn, it was in the texture of her hands, in her posture, in the glimmer of her eyes; in other words, Hawôn “could see she was ill” by interpreting her body as composed of signs.

Hawôn thus deploys her hermeneutic gaze and reads distress. Yet it is not only in her initial impression that Hawôn narrates in this way; she subsequently describes their dinner together that night:

We finished the meal *in silence*. I had eaten meals like this a long, long time ago, *silent* meals taken late at night, *oppression* in the air, and I had cautiously observed the *weary face* across from me. On the other side of the table had been Mom, home from work, her fatigue *camouflaged* by makeup, and opposite her was myself, no more than eight or nine at the time. But Kim Hûijin displayed a *weariness* different from Mother's. Her face had an unusual aura I hadn't recognized till then, an aura I felt *she had perseveringly nurtured to resist exhaustion*. I wondered if Kim Hûijin was about as old now as my mother had been back then. No. Kim Hûijin's face looked much younger. It didn't know how to age. (366, emphases mine)

Hawôn links the silence of her meal with Kim Hûijin to the silence that had reigned during her meals with her mother, to the “oppression in the air” at that time. Moreover, she remembers her mother's face; it was a weary face, but it was also a face whose fatigue had been camouflaged by makeup. She then compares Kim Hûijin's face to her mother's *camouflaged* weary face. Kim Hûijin's face displays a weariness that is different from her mother's *camouflage* weariness; it has an aura that has been “nurtured to resist exhaustion” (weariness). Kim Hûijin's silence thus opens up infinitely as both evidence of weariness/oppression and evidence of resistance to

weariness/oppression (“skillfully camouflaged”; “nurtured to resist exhaustion”).

Hawôn develops this double vision in a significant way. In her initial impression of Kim Hûijin, Hawôn notes her “chilling beauty,” and the way in which her face seemed as though “it didn’t know how to age.” She subsequently extends this thread:

Her face, her bearing, aroused in me something I had to find the words for. And there was nothing so difficult to define as her beauty. She resembled so-and-so, or she looked like such-and-such; no, she had something about her that such comparisons couldn’t hope to explain. The only word that occurred to me finally was the simplest of adjectives—*beautiful*. Was this the fantasy of a lonely, immature girl? Certainly it wasn’t. (366)

Silence is evidence of both distress and resistance; the silent body thus emerges in terms of an austere suffering. Rather than express her distress and call out for help, Kim Hûijin camouflages her pain and cultivates self-control as non-disclosure. She bears the brunt of oppression without murmuring a word of complaint or asking for any pity, and Hawôn idealizes this image as utopian perfection. The victim who stifles her cry of pain is Hawôn’s paradigmatic vision of beauty.

Yet Kim Hûijin is not always silent and passive. Hawôn narrates an episode of conflicted action: “One night I awakened to a clattering in my kitchen. I opened the door and there she was, scrubbing away at the cupboards and cookstove with a rag... Hearing me, she turned with a sheepish laugh, like someone caught red-handed in a secret activity. But in that laugh was a hint of a deeper anxiety” (368). Kim Hûijin has been caught red-handed. What was she doing? She was doing Hawôn a favor. She was taking action herself. She was attempting to throw off her helplessness and break out of her dependence on Hawôn’s aid. This becomes an anxious and uncomfortable encounter; it confuses the relationship’s established roles.

The Critical Turn (II): *Minjung* and its Discontents

The relationship between Hawôn and Kim Hûijin thus presents us with a crucial constellation of phenomena. Hawôn has reconstructed resistance, but in a new form; by mobilizing memory as collective repository and medium of unconscious transmission, she has instantiated the body of *minjung* intersubjectivity. But what is the *minjung* body? In her emphasis on the materiality of Kim Hûijin’s body as a cluster of signs signaling the truth of oppression-resistance-suppression, Hawôn constructs her as the laboring body of the paradigmatic *minjung* subject.³¹ According to this vision, the laboring *minjung* body is the very foundation of Korean national subjectivity; not only does it construct the nation through its bodily action, but it also emerges as the very stuff of the nation’s material constitution. The *minjung* body is thus more than just a material object; it has vital and essential meaning.

Kim Hûijin's body therefore becomes a signifier for historical oppression, for the people's having-been-silenced by an entire lineage of repressive state apparatuses. Yet this movement of signification—whereby an emphasis on the material body, which displays no overt signs of suffering, yields an understanding of silence as suppression, a concealed truth of suffering—stages a core paradox insofar as it signals a displacement of that very same material body. Hawôn's leveraging upon Kim Hûijin's material body as a body thoroughly saturated and inscribed with meaning is in fact an act of material disarticulation; the body is nothing more than an empty façade that conceals an interior truth. And in fact, it is the material body's very silence that discloses this interior truth; silence says that silence is not silence, but rather suppression.

The *minjung* body therefore must disclose its truth of suppression without speaking; it must carry the weight of historical oppression in silence. Moreover, it must hide and camouflage its truth of suffering; it must construct its material body as façade and this would be an act of resistance to the state power that has tried to crush it and make it collapse in upon itself. Correspondingly, the *minjung* body must be interpreted by a knowing gaze. It is thus Hawôn's job to make silence speak its truth of oppression-resistance-suppression. Silence is both the fact of oppression and an act of self-empowered-resistance; it is a latent oppositional potentiality that must be decoded by a hermeneutic gaze and thereby excavated and re-awakened. The oppressed *minjung* body cannot, itself, speak; its silence—as both suffering and resistance—must be made audible by the reading gaze of the intellectual/activist. This is a relationship of power.³²

But the intellectual also needs the silent *minjung* body in order to act. It is the silent *minjung* body that enfolds both historical oppression and oppositional resistance; the act of giving voice to those who have been silenced is premised upon the material presence of the *minjung* body as object of interpretive excavation. The *minjung* intellectual derives legitimacy for her/his activism through an engagement with the silent *minjung* body; in this sense, the hermeneutic gaze enfolds relations of desire in addition to relations of power.

In a similar vein, her idealization of Kim Hûijin as the silent victim also takes on new significance; Kim Hûijin is the crystallization of *han*³³ (both oppression and resistance) and Hawôn's hermeneutic gaze operates by opening up the inside of Kim Hûijin's silent body; this is a thoroughly gendered paradigm, and indeed, it is significant to note the extent to which the relationship between Hawôn and Kim Hûijin is linked to the figure of An as male symbol of power and authority. At least in part, Hawôn derives meaning from her relationship with Kim Hûijin in terms of the fact that it has been facilitated by An; the fact that An has sent a close friend (a lover?) to Hawôn in order to receive help, signals his trust in her, his validation of her significance. *Minjung* activism thus reproduces the same set of patriarchal power relations present in the print shop paradigm.

Hawôn constructs herself as subject insofar as she gazes upon Kim Hûijin as object, but at the same time, Hawôn understands Kim Hûijin in terms of national

subjectivity, “the proper subject of history.” Hawôn constructs herself as subject insofar as she reads Kim Hûijin’s body as objectification of subjectivity itself. In this way, the relationship between *minjung* and the intellectual must also be understood in terms of conflicted identification. Even as Hawôn constructs Kim Hûijin as object, she identifies with her as subject. Within this context, it is significant to note the way in which Hawôn describes the developing bond between her and Kim Hûijin; they become almost like family, almost like real cousins, perhaps even almost like sisters. Further, Hawôn’s vision of Kim Hûijin is framed in terms of a comparison with her own mother; as above, the dinner eaten in silence establishes a link between Kim Hûijin and Hawôn’s mother.

This idea of conflicted identification finds its final culmination in the exchange of the passport. Hawôn subsumes Kim Hûijin under her own name and her own identity, and moreover, she sends her to go and visit her own mother in the US. She, thus, constructs Kim Hûijin as her own ideal image. Yet this movement of identification is also a final bifurcation, an infinite displacement; sending her off the US with her own passport, Hawôn exiles Kim Hûijin to the infinite beyond, the land of stuffed animals and disembodied bodies, as Hawôn’s mother works in a stuffed animal factory. She exiles her in order to stabilize her as symbol of distressed beauty, future utopian hope and possibility. Kim Hûijin becomes the infinite beyond, the impossible outside, but at the same time, she also becomes the doubling of self (as other). This final identification-bifurcation stages the contradiction of *minjung*’s dual gaze: to be *minjung* (intersubjectivity and body) but also to lead *minjung* from an epistemic “outside” (the interpretive gaze).³⁴

Kim Hûijin thus disappears just as abruptly as she arrived, and Hawôn is once again alone. Further, An subsequently further reaffirms his power, dominance, and control. We learn that he has become an influential leader in the *minjung* movement and Hawôn soon sends the young people she has been guiding to go hear him speak, implicitly acknowledging his claim to intellectual authority. Similarly, Hawôn also seeks out An’s lecture in order to give him the reconstructed text as well as the additional writings produced by Kim Hûijin during her convalescence. She thus re-subsumes the subjectivity that she had grasped for herself—as well as that which was delivered to her by Kim Hûijin—under his guidance and agency; once again, the *minjung* paradigm comes to re-absorb all of the imbalances of power present in the print shop.

Hawôn’s narration of *minjung* activism also blends rather seamlessly into her account of post-authoritarian personalized complacency; 1980s resistance exhibits little to distinguish it from the fragmented interiority of the early 1990s. There is no great historical rupture here; there is no narrative of *minjung*’s dissolution and decline. In fact, Hawôn’s memory-narrative presents us with a vision of almost complete continuity; it straddles the 1987 transition without any significant gesture towards change. *Minjung* quietly fades into the text’s critical vision of the post-authoritarian present; more strongly, the 1990s vacuous interiority emerges as the logical outgrowth of the *minjung* paradigm.

In her discussion of the post-1987 decline of the *minjung* movement, Choi Chungmoo tells us a great deal:

If we imagine that the *minjung* movement, a collective ecstasy, was a releasing of the *han* of the oppressed nation, then how to achieve sublimation and the transformation of a nation is left unanswered... When the revolutionary *han* seemed sufficiently released and the next stage of thinking was required, South Korean oppositional intellectuals found a vacuum, which was exacerbated by the decline of socialism upon which they belatedly relied.³⁵

Minjung theory tells us that resistance is to be materialized by looking within, by uncovering and releasing that which has been suppressed, silenced, forced to remain under wraps. Truth of resistance is thus infinitely interior. The implication is this: in the absence of resistance, one must keep searching deeper within; one must look deeper under the surface; one must dig farther and farther into the obscure depths of things, the past, the world, oneself, etc. The text's figuration of post-1987 interiority and its infinitely vacuous self-reflexivity thus opens up as the logical culmination of *minjung* theory's methodological and epistemological vision.

What can we say, then, about this vision of *minjung* resistance? In fact, Hawôn herself asks this question at the end of the text. After completing her narration of memory, she returns to the present and considers Kim Hûjij's recent death, wondering if there is any possible way to contact her in the infinite beyond; she asks herself, "Shall I gather the neighbor children this winter and build a huge snowman in the fields? We'll fit the head with a long branch, an antenna to send signals to the star of the woman who recently left this world" (370). Hawôn had compared the first snowman to the dissident text; her only reservation had been the fact that it could not signify. Based on the experience of reconstructing the dissident text, however, it would seem as though reproduction would solve this problem; it would indeed place a functioning antenna on its head. Hawôn is thus proposing to use the snowman to recreate the seemingly miraculous communication that she had previously effected by means of memorial reproduction.

Yet Hawôn immediately rejects this proposal; it is ridiculous, an impossibility. The idea that material and/or memorial reproduction can somehow yield a directly intersubjective, a-signifying form of communication is a utopian myth. In fact, this vision of a non-symbolic writing is the very form of community's endless self-righteous violence. Is this ideal so different from the vision of language posited by the developmental state? As discussed above, the developmental state framed language in dual terms: self-present materiality (non-displacement) and self-evident transparency (communication). We therefore must finally dispense with this ideal. It is finally time to break with the myth of its messianic possibility. How, then, to proceed?

The Critical Turn (III): Materialities, Problematizations, Lines of Flight

In addition to its critique, however, the text also offers us a radical new vision of the value of the *minjung* heritage. In our previous discussion, we emphasized the reproduced text's power of unconscious transmission; the construction of *minjung* intersubjectivity operated beyond—or in fact, interior to—the dissident text's material articulation. But extending the passage quoted above, we see that Hawôn's narrative demands reconsideration: "Mobilizing all of my recollections, I wrote down one by one the titles of the pieces in the book we'd been preparing, essays I'd proofread at least twice. I began to roughly outline their contents, as I remembered them. *My memory had mysterious blind spots*, but just as often it put on an astonishing display" (363-4, emphasis mine). Hawôn discusses the phenomenon of selective memory throughout the text, so this is nothing new in itself. But in fact, selective memory is here colliding with its own counter-image; Hawôn's reproduction of the dissident text, after all, is an act that attempts to make silenced voices audible.

We have perhaps been reading everything backwards. Hawôn's act of remembering constructs a new community of resistance not because it makes silenced voices audible, but rather because it points towards its own silences. Hawôn's act of remembering operates in terms of material inscription, but the dissident articulation that she inscribes in the present is not the same one as that which she had printed in the past; the new version enfolds memory's silences, the pieces of the dissident articulation that Hawôn cannot remember.

But why is this significant? This is a question of the essential meaning of resistance. Resistance is a historical engagement rather than a transhistorical continuity; it is a relative position, a position defined by opposition to the present regime, a position that must therefore operate in dialogue with the contemporary state of affairs. Resistance is thus a challenge to the legitimacy of the present; it is subversive insofar as it threatens to destabilize that which passes as self-evident. Or in other words, resistance is a threat to the self-present justification of the order that keeps every thing in its place and every person in his or her subject position, the order that establishes accord between the visible and the articulable, between the thinkable and the doable, between that which is sensible and "reality."

In this sense, we can understand resistance as resistance to the present distribution of the sensible, the apportionment of proper roles and spaces, the apportionment of proper aesthetic, discursive, and epistemic subject positions. Polemically, Jacques Rancière calls this distribution of the sensible the police and he contrasts it with politics, which he understands in terms of dissensus, the disruption of the self-evidence of the distribution of the sensible through the instantiation of a heterogeneous world within the space of the given.³⁶ According to Deleuze's reading of Foucault, "any historical formation says all it can say and sees all that it can see."³⁷ Historical formations are structured by a certain "positive unconscious"³⁸ that establishes an aesthetic and therefore epistemic framework for experience.

The dissident articulation thus has its positive delineation; it can threaten the stability of the present regime, but it cannot breach the limit of the archive. The suppressed, silenced, censored articulation is subversive (that is the reason for its suppression), but it does not puncture the threshold of that which is given to the thinkable, writable, or legible; it does not challenge the basic aesthetic and epistemic structure within which it operates. This is not a failing but rather a logical necessity. Dissent simply cannot move outside the present from within which it speaks. It cannot give voice to that which cannot be said; it cannot give voice to that which would call into question the self-evidence of the present distribution of the sensible. This would be a logical impossibility.

The silenced articulation, after all, is given a place by the state. This is why censorship is never a simply repressive operation; the state reports its suppression of dissident elements in order to give a place to everything and everyone. On the broader level, too, the police order is that which resists the void and that which resists the supplement. The distribution of the sensible has no spaces and no blanks; it has no place for silences that are not thoughts, visions, or articulations that have been suppressed and resignified as "dangerous." And the operation of memory, of course, does not escape this fundamental paradigm. That which can be remembered accords with that which can be thought, understood, articulated, written, read.

But what about that which cannot be remembered? What about the silences of memory? We have seen, as above, that memory's analytic of finitude presents us with a positive delineation of the threshold of that which is able to be remembered; this is the action of the phenomenon of selective memory. There is a silence that is felt in its presence but unknown in its content; there is something that cannot be remembered, but its identity is fundamentally unknown. Selective memory presents us with a positive-negative, a positivity of the inarticulable, the invisible, the unthinkable.

Selective memory thus presents us with a radical opportunity for resistance to the present rather than just resistance in the present. That which is invisible is that which interrogates visibility itself; that which is inarticulable is that which interrogates the articulable itself. To know that there is something that you can't see, for example, is to know that there's something that is visible. That which is insensible and unknowable is that which interrogates the distribution of the sensible by pointing to its presence, the unreality of its self-evidence. Foucault tells us that we cannot know our own archive because we speak from within it; but we could perhaps interrogate it by delineating its thresholds. Resistance to the present is the disruption of self-evidence.³⁹

Selective memory is such a phenomenon of thresholds. Memory points to its own silences, to that which it cannot think, and it thus discloses the positivity of the present apparatus' archival order. Memory of the past is memory of the past's material events and material things, memory of that which was given to the sensible in the past. Past events and past experiences thus constitute a collection of the past possible. But what if something that was possible in the past has become impossible in the present? What would happen in the present act of remembering? Unselected

memory is the theory; it is a theory of resistance that finds its motive force in chance, contingency, and coincidence.

It is perhaps not necessary, then, to find a way to “read what was never written.”⁴⁰ Instead, we could attempt to rewrite that which was already written in the past and fail; the resulting silence would disclose a threshold in the form of an unknowable positivity and it would therefore point to the positive presence of the present regime. It would rupture self-evidence. Yet application is vital here. We must not only remember the past, but also attempt to reproduce it. We need to constitute a surface on which to inscribe the visible and the articulable; we need to create a common scene or a world in common within which to stage rupture. This is the reason why the materiality of Hawôn’s act of remembering-production is so crucial. It is in her attempt at material re-inscription that she encounters failure; it is in her attempt at material re-inscription, then, that she ex-scribes the positivity of the present archive, the present regime, the present police order. Resistance operates through the silences of the material text.

We have returned to the question of silence, then, but we have fundamentally re-imagined it. Instead of mobilizing memory in order to make past silences audible, we must mobilize memory in order to disclose the silences of our present memory of the past. And additionally, these silences must not be interpreted toward their latent truth. They are significant as positivities, exteriorities that delineate a threshold. These silences do not disclose the truth of the present, but they do disclose the fact that the present has a positive organization, of the visible, the articulable, the thinkable. The present is a historical formation, a social apparatus; it is itself a positive organization, a positive nexus of dynamic social interaction.

As we have seen, then, Hawôn’s remembering-reproduction is not wholly successful; it is constituted by selected memories and it therefore enfolds silences. It ruptures the self-evidence of the present order and it therefore reorganizes the distribution of the sensible: Kim Hûijin appears; the apportionment and segmentation of subject positions is fractured; the previously marginalized—those who have “no place”—take center stage and assert their agency; the passport’s state-aligned statement of identity-authority becomes appropriable and malleable. Hawôn’s act of remembering-reproduction instantiates new communality by fracturing the delineation of the sensible and its subject positions.

Within this context, politics constructs a space for which there is no knowledge, or more accurately, for which there is only a “poetics of knowledge;” the discourse of knowledge, after all, opens up out of the assertion of the self-evidence of the accord between the visible and the articulable (its non-political nature).⁴¹ As Deleuze tells us: “Knowledge is a practical assemblage, a ‘mechanism’ of statements and visibilities... That is to say that knowledge exists only according to certain widely varying ‘thresholds’ which impose particular layers, splits and directions on the stratum in question.”⁴² Knowledge is the name that the distribution of the sensible gives itself in its ideological assertion of naturalness and self-evidence.

Through Hawôn’s practice, then, we encounter a rupture in the order of the

sensible and a rupture in the order of knowledge. Yet it brings with it a pervasive and felt silence, which Hawôn begins to interpret as interiority, signification interior, and as latent truth of oppression-resistance-suppression. She asks for reports on the other members of the dissident group; she gropes for information-knowledge. As such, she inscribes a new regime of power relations, a new police order, a new distribution of the sensible. Is there another option, an alternative way forward? Certainly, an affirmation of silence as silence is untenable. This type of "mysticism of silence" is inevitably an alibi for silencing-oppression.⁴³ The affirmation of silence is the affirmation of a truth that cannot be articulated in discourse or put into thought. It is a fundamental displacement, an affirmation-other.

As we have seen, Hawôn disavows the proposition to recreate the snowman. Reconstructing the snowman, after all, would not reproduce the effect yielded by the reconstruction of the dissident text; it would simply reproduce the present's memory-image of the past. In other words, reconstructing the snowman in the present would not mobilize the past in the present in such a way as to reorganize the distribution of the sensible; indeed, as Hawôn narrates, "But wouldn't those children know better than anyone that a person doesn't turn into a star when she dies?" (370). The present's memory-image of the past cannot be equated with the present regime of light, and so what is the value and efficacy of memory in and for the present? To mobilize memory towards resistance in the present is to mobilize it towards a realization of the positivity of the invisible, inarticulable, insensible.

Finally, then, Hawôn suggests this approach; as she narrates, "Of the person who disappears in pain from our lives, all that is left in the hearts of those who knew her is a tiny scar of light" (370). The death of Kim Hûijin inscribes a trace; it leaves a mark in the form of a scar. Yet this scar is not itself visible. It is inscribed in/as light and it is thus an inscription of visibility itself. This scar is the very condition of possibility for seeing, and is therefore invisible.

But in fact, Hawôn introduces this idea in the text's opening paragraph. Describing memory's structure of forgetting-towards-recovery, she narrates, "that period has gradually scabbed over, like a wound grown slowly insensible" (346). Events are inscribed on the surface of the body, but they only become present to memory after they have been internalized and then illuminated; the scar is itself insensible because it is the very condition of possibility for remembering. "The body is the inscribed surface of events,"⁴⁴ but events are becomings-imperceptible. Events, indeed, are ruptures, breaks, discontinuities; they are limit-breachings, border-crossings, threshold-puncturings.⁴⁵

The scar thus inscribes light as visibility and death as rupture: it instantiates the positive organization of the present. We can only engage loss through memory, through the present illumination of that which has been internalized. Memory is the operation of an interiority; death as rupture, as light, as visibility, as the event-present—these are entities of exteriority (not the outside, as the star of light-illumination suggested above). The order of the event—the order of the infinite present—is thus the order of the surface. Can we think this surface? Can we know

its inscription of rupture? Perhaps only by redefining thought and knowledge—and redefining our-“selves.”

“My wound existed before me”⁴⁶(The Present)

Hawôn’s engagement with the emergence of *minjung* demonstrates that the attempt to double the past in the present through the mobilization of memory produces silences, ex-scriptions, obliterations. The past is a positive collection of words, images, and thoughts, but it contains elements that are irreconcilable with the present distribution of the sensible. Collectively, these silences point towards an impossible threshold of the present; they point towards the existence of the archive as a positive organization of the sensible and therefore as a singularity that is invisible but not hidden. Memory’s “mysterious blind spots” point towards the dynamic presence of the archive, the positivity of the visible, articulable, and thinkable itself. Between doubling and obliteration, then, lies the police order, itself, as impossible singularity, the One, violence as such.

Hawôn’s broader narration of memory has also contained its own silences, its own “mysterious blind spots,” and they have pointed towards the text’s closing insight into the invisible presence of the scar of light. This scar is inscribed in/as light and it is therefore visibility itself. It is a scar, moreover, occasioned by an event of rupture—Kim Hûjjin’s death—and this event operates as the impossible singularity between Kang Hawôn’s doubling and obliteration. As such, the scar that is inscribed on the surface of Hawôn’s body is both the insensible singularity of subjectivity (*self-presence*) and the insensible singularity of the distribution of the sensible itself (*the present*). It is a material inscription of the absolute singular, the impossible presence of the One without repetition or dissolution.

Yet Hawôn’s mobilization of memory back upon the newspaper article yields a potential line of flight. Above, memory operated as doubling towards obliteration, pointing towards the presence of the archive. But here, we encounter a slightly different phenomenon; here, we encounter an unhinged simultaneity of both doubling (“Kang Hawôn was two”) and obliteration (“Kang Hawôn is dead”). In reading and re-reading the newspaper article, then, emergent is a practice that constructs a zone of singularity as that which lies between doubling and obliteration. Can we dispose this zone into/onto the impossible surface of the body as the impossible surface of the pure event? Can we mobilize this field of doubling and obliteration towards displacement of singularity, towards the constitution of a new thought-individuation?

The first course of action is to convert the article from a meaning-document into a surface of inscription. As such, Hawôn completely denatures the newspaper article’s text; as she tells us, “I can’t say I *read* that short piece. More accurately speaking, my eyes took in the contents, then swept over the words with lightning speed” (346). She mobilizes the cliché turn of phrase and then explodes it as literality. She grasps the contents before “reading” the words; she unhinges reading,

challenging its surface-depth, form-content hierarchy. She places everything on a single plane of multiplicity. Hawôn thus goes further, narrating, "And then I read the article in a whisper, my lips moving, as if practicing words of tenderest affection. I read it again and again, as though memorizing a formula that wouldn't register in my mind" (347). She repeats the words of the article over and over again until they dissociate. She reiterates them in their material exteriority and she links them to an affection that has no specific content, to an affection that therefore opens up as pure affect or intensity. Through these iterations, she constructs a field of heterogeneous points of pure intensity; she constructs a zone of singularities, of infinitely fluctuating sense-sensation.

The police order begins to break down and Hawôn subsequently registers the effects on her own body:

The violent palpitations of my heart eased, and from a place *deep inside me* there gradually *surfaced* a peculiar *sensation*, accompanied by a faint *convulsion*. At first I felt *regret*, a long-standing regret, it seemed, for *something that could never be repaired*. A regret with *no concrete object*. But *nestled in* that regret was, paradoxically enough, *relief* (347, emphases mine).

The body of depth wrenches, convulses, and becomes a body of the surface, dispersed yet immanent; it becomes a body of surface sensations. Hawôn's encounter with the newspaper article occasions resistance in the form of remembering; she turns inwards, towards interiority. But this turn towards interiority—operative on dual levels of *minjung* hermeneutic gaze and Hawôn's present act of remembering—was always already a turn towards infinite vacuousness; it had "no concrete object." In fact, it was the obscuring of an already-present and already-immanent power and vitality: the relief of the surface.

Resistance must therefore operate through the reconstitution of the body as an open surface, a plane of singularities capable of being integrated with others. This would open up a space for a new modality of subjectivity as practice: non-personal individuation, a folded subjectivation that would reconstitute life and self as contingent assemblage.⁴⁷ It would interrupt the society of control's regime of the "dividual" as modulation-dispersion, its regime of infinite databanks and information streams. After all, it would introduce topologies: foldings, knots, tangled snags and enmeshings. Individuation constructs discrete yet dynamic assemblages; it constructs transformational diagrams.

What would this look like in material practice? Hawôn once again leads the way, narrating, "With trembling hands I excised the article with the point of my pen, then tucked it away in [my] address book. I put away the reference materials, packed up my things, and left. The autumn sky was innocently clear" (347). Hawôn excises her obituary and tucks it away in her bag. She merges memory's doubling and obliteration into her material body and thus displaces singularity into individuation;

she folds the zone of rupture into her own body and thus reconstitutes her life as haecceity, pure immanence, pure bliss.

Necessarily, though, Hawôn has discovered this article and its attendant line of flight by accident, by coincidence, by a throw-of-the-dice that extends beyond the bounds of probability and enters the realm of impossible yet infinite possibility, the realm of the pure event, which is a becoming-mad. And in the same way, we have only arrived at this “second reading” as a second reading. We have only enacted this second reading by reading the text back upon itself, by moving beyond the return and engaging the fold. Or perhaps we could say that we have mourned the passing (of our-“selves”) in the proper way: by scattering our ashes and becoming-animal. ■

Notes

¹ Ch’oe, Yun. “The Gray Snowman” [*Hoesaek Nunsaram*], translated by Bruce and Ju-Chan Fulton. In *Modern Korean Fiction: An Anthology*, edited by Bruce Fulton and Youngmin Kwon. New York: Columbia University Press, 2005, 345-370. All Korean author names are given in the form (Romanization as well as order) in which they have most recently been published.

² Deleuze, Gilles. “Postscript on the Societies of Control.” *October* 59 (Winter 1992): 3-7.

³ On “analytic of finitude,” see Foucault, Michel. *The Order of Things: an Archaeology of the Human Sciences*. New York: Pantheon Books, 1971.

⁴ Hacking, Ian. *Rewriting the Soul: Multiple Personality and the Sciences of Memory*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1998, 198. Hacking writes: “The idea of surface and depth knowledge is patterned after what Michel Foucault called *connaissance* and *savoir*.”

⁵ Deleuze, Gilles. *Foucault*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988. 48-9.

⁶ Rancière, Jacques. *The Politics of Aesthetics: the Distribution of the Sensible*, translated by Gabriel Rockhill. New York: Continuum, 2004, 12.

⁷ I will use the term “aesthetic regime” to refer to Rancière’s archivo-political concept; as he writes, “aesthetics can be understood in a Kantian sense—re-examined perhaps by Foucault—as the system of *a priori* forms determining what presents itself to sense experience. It is a delimitation of spaces and times, of the visible and the invisible, of speech and noise, that simultaneously determines the place and the stakes of politics as a form of experience” (Ibid. 13).

⁸ We can see this, for example, in the way in which the memory of the 1980 Kwangju Uprising has been re-signified towards present democratic fulfillment. See Lewis, Linda S. “Commemorating Kwangju: the 5.18 Movement and Civil Society at the Millennium.” In *Korean Society: Civil Society, Democracy and the State*, edited by Charles K. Armstrong. New York: Routledge, 2002.

⁹ On resistance and interiority, see Chow, Rey. *The Age of the World Target: Self-referentiality in War, Theory, and Comparative Work*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2006. I am grateful to Professor Ted Hughes for this reference.

¹⁰ Lee, Namhee. “The South Korean Student Movement: *Undongkwôn* as a Counter-public Sphere.” In *Korean Society: Civil Society, Democracy and the State*, edited by Charles K. Armstrong. New York: Routledge, 2002, 132.

¹¹ General Chun Doo Hwan (Chôn Tu-hwan) had seized power in a 1980 coup. All areas of social and political life were subsequently emptied out and replaced with martial law, press censorship, “purification camps” for dissidents, a ban on labor unions, and the prohibition of virtually all political parties and activities. See Cumings, Bruce. *Korea’s Place in the Sun: A Modern History*. New York: W.W. Norton, 2005, 381-4.

¹² Choi, Jang Jip. “Political Cleavages in South Korea.” In *State and Society in Contemporary Korea*, edited by Hagen Koo. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993, 46.

¹³ Ibid. 46.

¹⁴ Koo, Hagen. “Engendering Civil Society: the Role of the Labor Movement.” In *Korean Society: Civil*

Society, Democracy and the State, edited by Charles K. Armstrong. New York: Routledge, 2002, 119-20.

¹⁵ Abelmann, Nancy. *Echoes of the Past, Epics of Dissent: a South Korean Social Movement*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996, 227.

¹⁶ On genealogy and discontinuity, see Foucault, Michel. "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History." In *Essential Works of Foucault, 1954-1988, Volume 2*, edited by Paul Rabinow. New York: New Press, 1998.

¹⁷ On the developmental state's discourse on commodity-value and nation, see Hughes, Theodore. "Development as Devolution: Nam Chông-hyôn and the 'Land of Excrement' Incident." *The Journal of Korean Studies* 10(1): 29-57

¹⁸ Cumings, 314.

¹⁹ I am grateful to Professor Ted Hughes for this conceptual linkage.

²⁰ See Foucault 1971 and Chow 2006.

²¹ "Subjectivation" is sometimes also translated as "subjectification" or "subjectivization;" it names the process through which "the subject" is constructed. On the relationship between subjectivation, signification, and the Face, see Deleuze, Gilles and Felix Guattari. *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, translated and with a foreword by Brian Massumi. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987, 167-191.

²² For discussions on the question of the term "*minjung*," see Wells, Kenneth M., ed. *South Korea's Minjung Movement: the Culture and Politics of Dissidence*. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1995.

²³ Choi, Chungmoo. "The *Minjung* Culture Movement and the Construction of Popular Culture in Korea." In Wells, ed., 117.

²⁴ Abelmann, Nancy. "Minjung Theory and Practice." In *Cultural Nationalism in East Asia: Representation and Identity*, edited by Harumi Befu. Berkeley: Institute of East Asian Studies, University of California, 1993, 162.

²⁵ On this idea of *minjung* intersubjectivity, Namhee Lee writes, "The *minjung* discourse necessitated, presumed, and projected *minjung* as an intersubjective historical agency, that was foregrounded as both historical and material and, at the same time, as transhistorical and unchanging." See Lee, Namhee. "Making *Minjung* Subjectivity: Crisis of Subjectivity and Rewriting History, 1960-1988." PhD diss. University of Chicago, 2001.

²⁶ Abelmann 1996, 22; emphasis mine.

²⁷ I am grateful to Professor Ted Hughes for this conceptualization, which I have slightly adapted.

²⁸ Abelmann 1996, 20; she writes, "memory was imagined as a personal resource or collective repository that could mobilize people. Easily naturalized as an objective, neutral repository of the past, memory was posed against official histories that were edited by the hands of those with interests."

²⁹ Choi C 1995.

³⁰ Choi, Chungmoo. "The Discourse of Decolonization and Popular Memory: South Korea." *positions* 1:1 (1993): 349-372, 365.

³¹ On the laboring body in *minjung* theory, see Hughes 2005, 32.

³² Choi C 1993, 367: "In order to prepare (educate) people to assume a role in revolution, these intellectual representatives of *minjung* attempt to instill a new epistemology and raise historical consciousness. In other words, the agenda of the representatives of the people is to shape the people they are representing; this implies the process of othering, while simultaneously representing and constructing 'the people.'"

³³ On *minjung*'s vision of the silent female body as the "crystallization of *han*," see Haboush, JaHyun Kim. "Versions and Subversions: Patriarchy and Polygamy in the Vernacular Narratives of Chosôn Korea," 282. In *Women and Confucian Cultures in Pre-Modern China, Korea, and Japan*, edited by Dorothy Ko, JaHyun Kim Haboush, and Joan Piggott. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003.

³⁴ Lee 2001, 476: "At the level of praxis and in the factories, the workers became increasingly the object of the students' conflicting desires, of wanting simultaneously to become one of the *minjung*, and of leading them as a Leninist vanguard."

³⁵ Choi C 1995, 117-8. Choi prefaces this comment with the following: "As a noted political scientist, Ch'oe Changjip, once observed, the *minjung* movement is the politics of *han*. *Han* is an aesthetic concept denoting bottled-up resentment and sorrow. This *han*, unless released, will explode into a destructive power causing harm to life. Curiously, Korean aesthetics does not provide the methodology for sublimating this *han*."

³⁶ Rancière, Jacques. *The Philosopher and His Poor*, edited and with an Introduction by Andrew Parker and translated by John Drury, Corinne Oster, and Andrew Parker. Durham: Duke University Press, 2002, 226:

"I proposed to call 'police' the division of the sensible that claims to recognize only real parties to the exclusion of all empty spaces and supplements. Society consists here of groups devoted to specific modes of doing, in places where these occupations are performed, and in modes of being that correspond to these occupations and these places. I then proposed to call 'politics' the mode of acting that perturbs this arrangement by instituting within its perceptual frames the contradictory theater of its 'appearances.' The essence of politics is then dissensus. But dissensus is not the opposition of interests or opinions. It is the production, within a determined, sensible world, of a given that is heterogeneous to it."

³⁷ Deleuze, Gilles. "Life as a Work of Art." In *Negotiations, 1972-1990*, translated by Martin Joughin. New York: Columbia University Press, 1995, 96.

³⁸ Rajchman, John. "Foucault's Art of Seeing." *October* 44 (Spring 1988): 88-117, 92.

³⁹ Foucault, Michel. *Archaeology of Knowledge*, translated by A.M. Sheridan Smith. New York: Pantheon Books, 1972, 130-1.

⁴⁰ From Walter Benjamin's "Theses on the Philosophy of History," quoted in Choi C 1993, 366.

⁴¹ On "poetics of knowledge," see Rancière, Jacques. "Dissenting Words: a Conversation with Jacques Rancière," conducted and translated by Davide Panagia. *Diacritics: A Review of Contemporary Criticism* 30:2 (2000):113-126.

⁴² Deleuze 1988, 51.

⁴³ I am taking the term "mysticism of silence" from Rancière, Jacques. "Politics and Aesthetics: an Interview," translated by Forbes Morlock. *Angelaki* 8:2 (2003): 191-211.

⁴⁴ See Foucault 1998.

⁴⁵ On the concept of the event, see Deleuze, Gilles. *The Logic of Sense*, edited by Constantin V. Boundas and translated by Mark Lester with Charles Stivale. New York: Columbia University Press, 1990.

⁴⁶ Deleuze, Gilles. "Immanence: a Life." In *Two Regimes of Madness: Texts and Interviews, 1975-1995*, edited by David Lapoujade and translated by Ames Hodges and Mike Taormina. Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2006, 389. Also refer to this text for discussions of planes, singularities, individuations, and haecceities, as used below.

⁴⁷ On "folded subjectivation" and related concepts of knots and diagrams, see Deleuze 1988.

Edited by Jenny Kane, Emma Kaufman, J. H. Jason Kim, Jhanteigh Kupihea, Kyeong-Hoo Lee, Elisabeth Vastola

Style and New Formalism: A Panel

Transcribed by Elizabeth C. Grefrath, Edited by Jenny Kane

This panel discussion quite literally originated from a conversation between Nicholas Dames and Jenny Davidson over the Xerox machine in the Columbia English department office, while Professor Davidson was photocopying a selection from D.A. Miller's *Jane Austen, or the Secret of Style* for use in her undergraduate Austen seminar. Our renewed interest in the importance of formalism to our reading practices and theoretical methods stems not only from the continued significance of critics like Miller, as well as one of his influences Roland Barthes, but also from the recent work of contemporary scholars and critics, who aim to redefine the formalist perspective in literary and cultural studies. The following transcribed excerpts of the discussion, which was held by the CJLC on March 27th 2007 in the Altschul Auditorium at Columbia University, reflect both the localized scholarly (and personal) interests and opinions of the featured panelists on the issue of style and reference the broader literary-historical context for this "New Formalist" debate. We are grateful to all who made the evening's event possible—students, faculty and staff alike—and especially to each of our panelists for contributing to the conversation.

Amanda Claybaugh, Assistant Professor of English and Comparative Literature

Nicholas Dames, Theodore Kahan Professor in the Humanities

Jenny Davidson, Associate Professor of English and Comparative Literature

David Kurnick, Columbia Society of Fellows

CLAYBAUGH: Because I have been teaching a course this semester on the post-bellum U.S. novel, the topic of style necessarily raises for me the question of bad style as well as good style because, sadly, a number of the post-bellum U.S. novels

that I'm most interested in are kind of badly written. So I'd like to talk a bit about an author whom I consider to be both a brilliant novelist and an absolutely terrible writer, and that's Theodore Dreiser. And I'll use him to throw into relief an aspect of bad style. So what I'm trying to do here is to theorize one thing that makes style bad in the hopes of then inviting you to think about bad style as you know it, and what makes it bad, and we can maybe then come up with a taxonomy of all the things that define badness in writing. And then I'd like to turn to a good stylist, a very good stylist's account of what makes good style good.

The first thing to say about Dreiser's style is that there is a politics to calling it bad. Critical opinion of Dreiser has been bitterly divided throughout the century. Those critics who admire him focus—as I do—on his plots and characterization, where those who disparage him focus instead on his style, saying, as John Berryman famously did, that he writes “like a hippopotamus.” But this division maps very neatly onto another one—that is, a division over Dreiser's politics, which were leftist. So, those critics who admire Dreiser tend to approve of his politics, and those critics who don't, don't. We see this most clearly in the writings of Lionel Trilling, who claimed that Dreiser both “writes badly and thinks stupidly.” And it becomes clear as Trilling goes on in his essay that what he means by thinking stupidly is thinking in a Marxist way.

But to know that there is a politics to mentioning Dreiser's bad style doesn't solve the problem of its badness, right? And I really need to emphasize that in many ways it is very bad indeed. To be sure, some of its badness is deliberate, and we see this already in the title of *Sister Carrie's* first chapter, which I think demonstrates what Dreiser wants his bad style to achieve. The title of the chapter is “The Magnet Attracting: A Waif Amid Forces.” And what's bad about that title is that it brings together two quite different cultural discourses, neither of which is particularly elegant in itself. So we have, on the one hand, the pseudo-scientism of the magnet's attracting force, and then we have, on the other hand, the banality of melodrama with “the waif.” Neither of these are very good categories in themselves, and yet he brings them together. But I think that's purposeful, and I think that's brilliant. And so one thing that we can say about Dreiser is that he—throughout the narration of his novel—takes up, uses and then abandons the most banal and hackneyed of our cultural discourses. What I've argued about this is that there is a correlation between the narration and the way Dreiser represents character, which is to say that Dreiser is describing characters who are buffeted by forces beyond their control, both biological forces and economic forces. In a similar way, I want to suggest Dreiser's narration is entirely determined by discourses beyond the author's own control, that the author is as much a product of cultural discourse as the characters are a product of such forces.

So, that is a kind of badness that I think we can see the point of, and even admire, but that does not begin to exhaust the badness of Dreiser. He exhibits another kind of badness as well, and it interests me because I think it is a kind of badness that we—college professors and college students—find particularly uncomfortable, kind

of unbearable to think about. What I want to suggest is that Dreiser's style is very often bad because he wants to seem smarter or more educated than he is, and we notice this because we, too, are anxious about that. The example of this is that Dreiser insistently uses the wrong word; he often uses a word that is fancier in some way than the word he wants to use. So he says "fatuitous" over and over again when he means "fatuous," he'll say "objectable" when he means "objectionable." All of this he did to the despair of his publishers, who knew that he would get very, very angry at them if they pointed out that he had made a spelling or grammar mistake, which he did often. These are the mistakes that I think we all made in freshman writing and they are the mistakes that, even now, I still don't like to think about, the things that I thought were fancy in my writing when I was young.

Aligned with this love of overly fancy words, Dreiser also wants to refer to concepts that he doesn't fully understand. The forces in his title—they are kind of electromagnetic, kind of Freudian, kind of Darwinian—refer to all of these schools of thought, yet in his novel he does not really get them right. There is much that he does not really understand about what he is writing. My point here is not so much that Dreiser was an incompetent writer, but that he failed at a competence that we in the university particularly value, and that we are particularly anxious about. This helps to explain for me his mixed critical reception, and I think that there are a lot of people who are made very uncomfortable by Dreiser.

I have a larger point to make here as well. Dreiser's style is bad because it fails to hide its own aspirations to seem smart, to seem knowledgeable. On the contrary, it makes these aspirations heartbreakingly visible by failing to achieve them. This leads me to a paradoxical conclusion about bad style, which is that style, which we think of as the most personal, the most idiosyncratic element of our own writing, must always be impersonal, at least to some extent. It becomes bad precisely when it reveals too much of ourselves and our aspirations.

With this in mind, I was able to understand an essay by a writer whose style I admire very much, and that is Joan Didion. Didion has written several essays about writing. And these essays focus on the labor of writing, the labor of producing her essays, so she tells us about the migraine she suffers, about how she spends a week writing one paragraph. They don't ever describe the product of the writing. Once the writing is finished, it no longer has anything to do with her; it does not belong to genre of the personal essay. Her fullest discussion of style comes, then, when she discusses the style of someone else. I would like to end by relating a passage from her essay on Ernest Hemingway, which is entitled "Last Words." This essay starts out with the opening passage of *A Farewell to Arms*; she quotes the first four sentences. And then she gives a paragraph long reading about what is so amazing about Hemingway's style: the perfect placement, that sentence one, sentence three have a comma; sentence two, sentence four do not; that all of the nouns have articles until the last noun "leaves," which does not—which tells us that the leaves are falling, that autumn is coming and that winter is on the horizon. This is a brilliant reading of how Hemingway works.

What follows Didion's close reading is a devastating attack on the decisions that have been made by the Hemingway estate about his manuscripts. When Hemingway died (he killed himself) he left behind a thousand pages of manuscript. Didion very dryly points out that if an author kills himself in the middle of writing something, we can safely assume that he wasn't too pleased with how it was going. And yet, his estate decided to release these thousand pages in three volumes. And the release of these books—you may remember the last, which was this African story in which the Hemingway character takes an African wife—and the reception of this novel was entirely concerned with the question (to Didion's disgust) of whether Hemingway himself had taken an African wife in some kind of ritual marriage.

Didion is disgusted by this speculation since the life, she insists, is separate from the work. This descent into the unseemly biographical, she argues, is made possible by the Estate's belief that three books can be made out of a thousand pages of manuscript by following a few simple principles. She then tells us how Hemingway's son went about making this failed manuscript into a book. The guidelines Hemingway's widow set herself in this task were instructive: that "except for punctuation and the obviously overlooked 'ands' and 'buts,' we would present his prose and poetry to readers as he wrote it, letting the gaps lie where they were." This is horrifying if you have read any Hemingway, and Didion goes on to explain, "Well, there you are. You care about the punctuation or you don't, and Hemingway did. You care about the 'ands' and 'buts' or you don't, and Hemingway did. You think something is in shape to be published or you don't, and Hemingway didn't."

What I think is amazing about that passage is that Didion clearly adopts Hemingway's style—the "ands" and the "buts," the "did," and then the "didn't," with the "didn't," the variation within the pattern, having this real drama to it. She does this in order to identify with him, writer to writer, setting aside entirely the personal and over and against the claims of the family. I feel like now I understand this idea that style requires the depersonalization of the self. I understand something about Didion and Hemingway's relationship, which is good...

DAVIDSON: I'm interested in the question of what it means to consider a writer's style, or to describe him or her as a stylist. The names that come to mind when we think of style are most obviously associated with one particular strand of the European novel—Austen, Flaubert, Henry James and Proust might be disproportionately represented in the small canon of critics writing about style. The subcategory free indirect style, the particular mode that lets a third person voice opportunistically borrow bits of different characters' thoughts and speech and so forth, is another subcategory of style that may actually affect our choice of stylists more generally, so that these writers that we think of as stylists are especially interested in experimenting with this very distinctive but relatively unusual voice.

I'm interested in what it means when we talk about writing whose style marks itself as such, that signals to readers a certain stylishness, as well as the vast majority of other novels that certainly have what we might call a prose style, but are not

foregrounding style itself as an issue in the ways that Flaubert does in his fiction. My particular interest that I would like to put on the table is the question of whether in talking about style's technical aspects, or perhaps its cognitive aspects, speaking about it in terms of language and thinking, we can go beyond the linguistic or the strictly literary in order to associate style with positions that have more to do with morality or moralizing. Is style inherently moralized, or is it "unmoralizeable" in some fundamental way? What does a prose style imply about its orientation towards characters; is that a moral orientation or is it inappropriate to make that leap from the stylistic to the moral?

There is a huge range of different positions on this, and what I am going to do here is consider a couple of passages from a novel that has just been published, Lionel Shriver's eighth novel, *The Post-Birthday Word*. It is a novel that makes a very interesting structural choice, which is to say that Shriver opens the novel on the evening of the birthday of the title. It's not the protagonist's birthday; it's the birthday of a man who she is quite attracted to and with whom she has dinner on an evening when her live-in partner is out of town. Shriver begins with this night of the birthday, and a moment in that night when the main character is almost irresistibly overcome with this urge to kiss this other man. Then the novel unfolds on two parallel tracks, considering the alternate lives that the heroine might subsequently lead depending on whether or not she chooses to act on her impulse to kiss the glamorous snooker player with whom she is dining while her staid, solid, think-tank employee partner is out of town.

It was only with her seventh novel that Lionel Shriver received the massive acclaim that, in my opinion, she thoroughly deserves. That novel was *We Need to Talk About Kevin*. It won the Orange Prize in 2005, a prize that is just for novels by women. It is a British prize that is second only to the Booker Prize in the kind of media attention that it receives. *We Need to Talk About Kevin* is a savage, and very funny, novel about a Columbine-style school shooting that is made up of a series of letters by the shooter's mother. It is written in a first-person epistolary voice, the distinctive voice—very sarcastic, sardonic, funny, moving, disturbing, controversial; all those qualities are in that first-person voice.

More often in her earlier novels, Shriver adopts a third-person voice that adheres fairly closely to the female protagonist's point-of-view. I think we can also generalize about Shriver's fictions that her protagonists tend to have a certain amount in common with Shriver herself. I'll just say a little more about her 1997 novel, *Double Fault*, which tells the story of a young man and a young woman in their early twenties who meet on a Riverside Park tennis court, fall in love and marry without adequately comprehending the damage—they're both aspiring professional tennis players—the damage that their respective moves up and down the national tennis ranking will wreak on their marriage since they are both deeply competitive professional tennis players.

Shriver has said in interviews that she explicitly understood herself, as she was writing this book, to be writing a version of a problem that she was experiencing

in her own life, which is to say that her partner at that point was a writer who was distinctly more successful than she was and she was really trying to work out this problem of professional envy. Shriver's themes in all of her novels have to do with the tension between love and work, the temperamental qualities that might make a woman remarkable or distinctive in one sphere but unsuited to marriage in another. In all of her books, there is a sense of paths not taken being achingly present. These are regular themes, but they are themes she has found a new formal technique to foreground in terms of this alternate-life structure that she has put together.

Shriver is an American who has lived in England for a long time. She is also a woman, in spite of the name Lionel. She chose that name for herself at age fifteen to replace the more obviously feminine one. In the self-renaming and also in the "expatriateness" of both of those qualities, you see somebody who has an intellectual or temperamental affinity for thinking about alternative selves or lives not lived, in the sense that if you are an expatriate always some part of a self conjecturally was left behind and was living out the trajectory that first perhaps you were set on because of a place.

The Post-Birthday World picks up a number of these themes. Its protagonist is Irina, an American children's book illustrator, who lives with her partner Lawrence, also American, in London. Their life together is stable, reassuring, perhaps a little predictable. The moment of choice arrives at the end of chapter one, when Irina out for this birthday night with Ramsay, the snooker player, decides to go back home with him and get stoned, which is not something she usually does. It is very late at night. She is watching him shoot a few frames of snooker and this is the decisive moment when she either will or won't kiss him—then the novel moves forward. In case you haven't thought of it already, this is basically like that really awful movie *Sliding Doors*, whose only redeeming feature is Gwyneth Paltrow's haircut. The hairdresser should have been given a large sum of money for producing the only palatable thing in the entire film.

As Shriver writes this novel, we have then two chapter twos, two chapter threes. It is a quite unusual structure, not pursuing wholly the one or the other, really moving chapter by chapter. There are certain commonalities to both stories in terms of things going on in their relationships having to do with the temperaments of the characters, and we also have fixed orientation points that have to do with publicly marked events that would have affected anybody living in these circumstances in this period—the death of Diana and the collapse of the twin towers. Lurking behind the novel and the point of these historical allusions is that kind of incident, which poignantly brings home to all sorts of people a sense of paths not taken, of an alternate history, or an alternate life where things happen differently.

The narratorial voice of this novel is fairly close to Irina's point of view. Thus, this choice to kiss or not to kiss and the aftermath of that choice is reflected especially in the early chapters of the novel very clearly in the texture of the prose as well as in the incidents described, and that is what I find especially interesting. The passages I have provided are both from chapter two, describing Lawrence's homecoming; and

if you think about the structure, these early chapters are running much more closely in parallel than other later ones will as life diverges. Even the smallest details of their interactions are clearly colored based on which post-birthday world we are in at that moment. In both worlds, before the night of the kiss, Irina baked pies that she left on the counter at home. In the world where she did kiss Ramsay, she has stayed out all night with him, she has not come home and put the pies in the fridge; and in the other one, she was home at a suitable hour and did put the pies in the fridge. We see these sort of factual differences, but it is the stylistic difference that I find especially interesting. As a novelist, Shriver is not primarily considered a stylist. She would be thought of, more generally, as an intellectual or ideas-driven novelist rather than someone whose sentences are by far her most distinctive and appealing feature. Of course, really interesting writers have both things going on [they are attuned to their writing's style as well as the ideas behind it] but she is not mainly in the 'style' category.

The first passage is from the post-birthday world in which Irina has kissed Ramsay. Lawrence has come home, and she is going to get him a piece of the pie she has baked for his return:

Leadnly, Irina removed the pie from the fridge. Chilling for under two hours, it wasn't completely set. With any luck the egg in the filling had cooked thoroughly enough that the pie's having been left out on the counter for a full day wasn't deadly. Well, she herself wouldn't manage more than a bite. (She'd not been able to eat a thing since that last spoonful of green-tea ice cream. Though there had been another cognac around noon ...) The slice she cut for herself was so slight that it fell over. For Lawrence, she hacked off a far larger piece—Lawrence was always watching his weight—than she knew he wanted. The wedge sat fat and stupid on the plate; the filling drooled. Ramsay didn't need admiration of his snooker game, and Lawrence didn't need pie.

She pulled an ale from the fridge, and pondered the freezer. Normally, she'd join him with a glass of wine, but the frozen Stolichnaya beckoned. Since she'd brushed her teeth, Lawrence needn't know that she'd already knocked back two hefty belts of neat vodka to gird herself for his return. Spirits on an empty stomach wasn't like her, but apparently acting out of character could slide from temporary liberation to permanent estrangement from your former self in the wink of an eye. She withdrew the frosted bottle, took a furtive slug, and poured herself a better-than-genteel measure. After all. They were 'celebrating.' (45-46)

The following is the language that Shriver uses for the other post-birthday world, the world in which Irina has virtuously suppressed her sexual attraction to Ramsay,

returned home, renewed (internally, at least) her commitment to the relationship with Lawrence. Lawrence's mother is an alcoholic, and he is very critical of Irina for drinking, and that is the context for the first phrase:

Scrutinized for signs of inebriation and disgusted with herself for having overimbibed the night before, in the kitchen Irina poured herself an abstemious half-glass of white wine. She pulled out the pie, which after chilling for a full day was nice and firm, and made picture perfect slices that might have joined the duplicitous array of photographs over a Woolworth's lunch counter. She shouldn't have any herself; oddly, she'd snacked all afternoon. But countless chunks of cheddar had failed to quell a ravenous appetite, so tonight she cut herself a wide wedge, whose filling blushed a fleshy, labial pink. This she crowned with a scoop of vanilla. Lawrence's slice she carefully made more modest, with only a dollop of ice cream. No gesture was truly generous that made him feel fat. (69)

So, I'll just leave you with that; it is suggestive.

DAMES: I wish I had something truly literary here to talk about. I feel oddly naked without a literary example. What I'm going to do is treat my example as though it were truly literary, this quote from Marx that I would like to start with. It will seem like I am departing from what has just been said, and I hope at the end to bring it back around. The word of interest for what I am going to say is this word "form" and less style, although I have a lot of thoughts about what the relationship between the two of them might be. What follows is a slightly personal manifesto about the kinds of work everyone here does, and why I think—if I can be so arrogant as to try to speak for everybody a little bit—why I think we might want to do it.

I want to read this Marx bit, which intimidates me because reading Marx out loud is sometimes like reading Henry James out loud. It can actually miss the point. But I will read this, and there are a few things I would like to say about it as far as what it leads me to think about what form is, and why we should care about form. This is Marx in his rarely seen aesthetic side [Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844]. I would give a context for this, but I puzzled over what that context would be, and I gave up:

...just as music alone awakens in man the sense of music, and just as the most beautiful music has no sense for the unmusical ear—is no object for it, because my object can only be the confirmation of one of my essential powers and can therefore only be so for me as my essential power is present for itself as a subjective capacity, because the sense of an object for me goes only so

far as *my* senses go (has only sense for a sense corresponding to that object)—for this reason the *senses* of the social man are other senses than those of the non-social man. Only through the objectively unfolded richness of man's essential being is the richness of subjective human sensibility (a musical ear, an eye for beauty of form—in short, sense capable of human gratifications, senses confirming themselves as essential powers of *man*) either cultivated or brought into being. For not only the five senses but also the so-called mental senses—the practical senses (will, love, etc.)—in a word, *human* sense—the humanness of the senses—comes to be by virtue of its object, by virtue of *humanized* nature. The *forming* of the five senses is a labor of the entire history of the world down to the present.

I'm not going to do anything so risky as to try to paraphrase what that meant, but I am going to try to pick out some things that seem relevant to me as far as what this thing is. There are two things that are going on in this passage that I think Marx is alluding to that I want to stress about this word form.

The first—what is clear even upon a first reading of the passage—is that form is a kind of sensibility. It is something that is related to our senses, something that is only presentable to our senses; and also that sensibility is also here a term for something that one can be trained to have, that isn't just given. Marx actually uses the word “cultivation”; it is something that one can get better at. And in getting better at—this is Marx at his most humanist—achieving a greater sensibility or sensitivity, one is actually becoming more fully human in the sense that one's senses are more active.

The second is that form has a history. In Marx's thinking about form, it is not some kind of abstract template, but exists in a reciprocal relationship with the sensibilities that it shapes and that shape it in return. At any given moment in human history, there are forms that are possible, there are forms that are not possible, there are forms such that sensibilities exist that can perceive them, and then there are forms that exist to produce new sensibilities; but we cannot know form aside from knowing history. To know form—to know the form of an object—we would have to actually be able to recover (to the extent that we can) the sensibilities of the past that could see it. That is for me a powerful way of thinking about form. It makes, for me, thinking about form, particularly literary form, maybe the most intimate kind of historical work possible because it is actually trying to recover—however we can—the senses that made that form apparent at the moment that a work came into being.

Now, I'm fudging all kinds of things there intentionally. I want to allude a little bit to what Amanda [Claybaugh] said about Dreiser, because I think that there is something powerful about Dreiser's example in relation to this. I am very taken with the description of the badness of Dreiser's style being a function of his aspiration

to seem smarter or more knowing than he is. That is obviously a biographical fact of some kind, but it is also a historical possibility that what it meant to be aspirational at that moment, and what one aspires for at that moment, is encoded in the style as well. One is actually recovering not just “Oh, this is the kind of guy Dreiser was,” but you’re recovering an actual historical possibility of this social-psychological attitude—aspiration. And you are seeing that even in his style, which we feel is bad. And I am far from being any expert on Dreiser, but I think there is something kind of appropriate about that bad style, then, because the bad style actually produces the effect that Dreiser’s novels are about. We gain some sense of what it means to be aspirational in 1900 in Chicago or New York.

The reason I think this is important, in the broadest sense, is that formalism, or the attempt to think about the form of literary work, usually runs into the critique that it is ahistorical; that it is detached from history is always the finding of certain kinds of structures. I think there is a version of formalism that is like that, and I will say a little bit about that later. Here in Marx, I guess the reason why I wanted to start with the passage is that we get a sense of formalism as inescapably historical, and that forms themselves have historical lives because they are the lives of the senses that in any given historical moment were capable of perceiving that form. If I am speaking too much like Marx, forgive me; I will try to get more lucid.

A little bit about form in novels, because this is a panel of people who all work on fiction or prose. There is a curious history to form in the novel, to people thinking about form in the novel. There was a long battle waged to get anyone to acknowledge that there even is such a thing as “form” in fiction. It was decisively won, and the person responsible for that victory I think is largely Henry James. He compels at least this consensus that there might actually be a form, that fiction actually has a form as well as more obviously formed literary genres like lyric poetry. The irony to this is that once that victory is won at the start of the twentieth century, everything else gets ceded to lyric poetry. That is, the ways in which we still think about form in the novel owe a great deal to how we think about form in lyric poetry, more than we realize and more than is good for us as far as our thinking about fiction. My primary example of this, one that I am increasingly interested in, is how we cite novels when we write about them. I think this is something that has gone under-examined for a long time and is deeply, deeply problematic. We tend to cite small pieces; we have this vague sense of what is an appropriate length for a novelistic citation. As the century has gone on, if you look at the history of criticism, especially since the nineteenth century, those passages start getting smaller and smaller and smaller and smaller. As if one cannot actually cite too much for all sorts of reasons, one of which, most obviously, is the charge that you’re just killing space, which is true to an extent.

What drops out of that, what drops out in our tendency to want to see these small citations from novels as representative of the form of the big thing, what tends to drop out first of all is temporality. One of the most important aspects of the novelistic form that has been elided, almost right from the start, is the sense of the sheer length of the form itself and all the things that go along with that length.

To me, one of the most fascinating aspects of novelistic form is the way in which it is consistently interrupted. It is not something that you can read in one sitting, usually, and in that sense it exists in this weird, interwoven way with our ordinary lives, which has never really been accounted for in any way or talked about aside from aphoristically or in passing by various theorists. The set of affects that have to do with time tend to get ignored as well, and by this I mean stuff like boredom—the inevitable boredom that we all feel in certain, even exceptional, novels—waiting, suspense. These are things that are about time, and how we perceive time and how the novel structures time in long ways. The novel itself is something that colonizes our time. These are things that have been dropped out because our dominant protocols for thinking about the novel come from lyric poetry, come from something that is more susceptible to being seen in one flash of insight, and is small enough for that to happen.

And this is where I want to say one thing about the kind of work that we collectively do; and I think this arises out of a certain kind of dead end with the primary mode of thinking in fiction, and that is narrative theory. Firstly, a lot of the best examples of narrative theory are ahistorical, are attempting to do something very scientific with form, which is to find a set of terms and concepts that can be given precise names, that are portable across historical time periods, across different kinds of novelistic genres. In other words, when faced with any text, you would have the right words to go about dissecting it, just like when faced with any organism, you would have the right words to go about describing how it functions.

That is a very appealing dream, at first. I have to say that over time I have grown tired of it and am not interested in it anymore because I actually think that it severely limits the kinds of things that can be seen. Maybe to an extent we need to forget about coming up with terms that would be used for potentially anything, and instead return to terms that might be uniquely generated by specific genres or specific works themselves at specific historical moments. To the extent that you can find terms that can work with any text, you're finding a term that in the end might be actually useless. I do like actually teaching some of these narrative theory terms, but I find there always comes a dead end when you've taught somebody to say that "this is extradiegetic narration" or "that's the hermeneutic code" or any of these terms. Now what? Once you have identified it, once you've labeled it, there is a taxonomic stopping point, when you say: "Well, I've labeled it thank you very much, my job is done. Now on to the next thing." I think that there is a tendency in all of our work to actually want to ask the question what comes next; what would be the next thing to do after that, and is it more productive to ask that "What next?" question when you have actually generated a set of categories or formal terms that comes from the work itself or a specific period, and not from these large abstractions that narrative theory tends to burden us with in a certain way?

I would call this a manifesto, except up until this point I have only talked about what we do not do or do not want to do. Call it a negative manifesto, and I will pass it to David [Kurnick].

KURNICK: I have a couple of very short things to say first in the nature of questions. There seems to be some connection so far in our discussion between the issue of style and the issue of exposure, or being stripped naked. Style seems to have some relation to questions of embarrassment, questions of being located socially in ways that are potentially abjecting. I'm noticing, if you look at the roster of people we have mentioned—Proust, James, Austen, Dreiser—we have two gay men, one woman (not married at a time when that is a socially marginal thing to be) and one social aspirant, an immigrant, whose very attempt to aspire in public ends up giving the game away. I definitely agree that there is some relationship between style and an aspiration to impersonality, but it also seems like certain people need that impersonality more than others. The other two are Lionel Shriver, someone who renamed herself to not sound like the woman that she is, and Joan Didion, whose identification with Hemingway and the butch masculinity of his style seems to me really important for somebody who is making her name as essentially the first woman to have that kind of status as an essayist. The only person I can think of at that time with a similar authority is someone like Susan Sontag, who wrote in some ways quite similarly. Often if you take Susan Sontag's name off an essay, a roomful of students will all think it was a man who wrote it, unless they know the essay. If you ask them why, it is always because she sounds so authoritative. Try it with her essay "On Pornography"; it happens every time.

The distinction between form and content is, of course, the most notoriously deconstructable of oppositions, which is to say that form and formalism are in some sense more interesting to think about as rhetorical than as denotative terms. These are rallying cries more than real descriptions. So I think that we cannot really talk about New Formalism or a return to formalism without talking about what it is we mean when we say formalist, what position we are taking, and what it is we are *not* doing when we say that we are interested in being formalists. If we want to figure out what it means to declare oneself a formalist, we should talk about the fact that "formalist" is primarily an insult; it is what you call someone who is interested in "mere" form at the expense of supposedly more responsible topics like history, or society, or politics. I would guess that we probably all agree that these things aren't in fact separate, as Nick [Dames] explained very well. Form is not an ahistorical concept and can be an excellent way of getting at certain historical experiences or certain historical facts. But again, I think that what is important here is the rhetorical force that this word has, so that the charge of "formalism" has life independent of the fact that form is in fact everywhere and a certain kind of formalism is in fact inescapable.

This question is particularly important to me because I would say that attention to form is just the definition of literary criticism. Formalism is literary criticism; literary criticism is formalist, or so say I. A commitment to analyzing the pattern, rhythm, shape, manner, style of literature and an attention to how literature looks and feels and happens and sounds and thinks is the task of any interesting literary

criticism. So one question that I would like to put on the table is simply, have we ever not been formalist? And if we have always been to some extent formalist as critics, whose game are we playing when we claim that we are “returning” to formalism—because this seems to happen a lot, especially lately. I have some suggestions as to why that is happening. I should make it clear that I like the idea of a New Formalism, if there is such a thing. I like the attempt to embrace unapologetically that interest in questions of form. But because of what I have suggested is the virtual identity of literary criticism with some kind of formalism, I am troubled by the fact that we have to keep “returning” to it and I wonder if it is possible to do so otherwise than sheepishly. I think our squeamishness about acknowledging an interest in form has to do with our uncertainty about the value of our profession in general, and that this uncertainty has to do with a certain fear of irrelevance or political irresponsibility. This is, after all, a period in which our brand of expertise feels increasingly undervalued, and I think literary critics have an uneasy conscience about—a sneaking worry over—the fundamentally unserious or potentially frivolous nature of what it is we actually do. The way we often talk about these anxieties is by trying to justify or apologize for our interest in form. In other words, when we defend our formalism, we are close to adopting a language that trivializes what it is we actually do.

This is even truer of terms like style and aesthetics—this latter is another term that I think is central to what I am talking about. All three of them can work quite well as insults. If you read *The New York Times*, the adjective “mere” goes with the word “form,” the way in Homer, “rosy-fingered” goes with “dawn.” Other epithets to look out for are “simply style,” “cheaply aestheticized.” You start to wonder, what would aestheticizing look like that is not cheap? What does style look like that *The New York Times* approves?

Just in case you think that I am exaggerating this hostility to form, style and aesthetics and the political charge of that hostility, I brought in some excerpts from a recent article in *The New York Review of Books* that I think illustrates some of what is at stake, outside of the academy anyway, in discussions of these terms. Since the context in which the academy exists is the world outside the academy, I think this is potentially interesting for our conversation. This article is by Daniel Mendelsohn. It is a movie review that celebrates Pedro Almodóvar’s new movie *Volver* on the grounds that Almodóvar has finally grown up and gotten over, precisely, style. The politics of this article are (and I am not exaggerating) in favor of maturity over immaturity—a controversial stance to be sure. Maturity for Mendelsohn is defined by, as far as I can tell, domesticity and the abandonment of sexuality. Immaturity is defined by quite a lot else—gay men, transsexuals, unhappy or promiscuous heterosexuals (in fact sexual interest or activity of any kind), melodrama, AIDS, heroin addiction, rape, incest, pop music, an interest in the cultural excitement of post-Franco Spain, glee—you know, immaturity. My point here is that the code words that Mendelsohn uses for all of these to me interesting and politically quite important topics are “style” and “aesthetics,” and you can see this in his writing:

Before then when you talked about “an Almodóvar film,” it was pretty clear what you were talking about [this was before Almodóvar ‘grew up’ and abandoned all of this nonsense]: an exaggerated aesthetic imbued with the lurid neon glare you associated more with certain genres of entertainment—radio and TV soap operas, film noir, pop lyrics—than with anything recognizably real.

It is worth tracking the key words “style” and “aesthetics” through this article if you want to find out some of the things these words mean today in the highbrow press. Mendelsohn writes that the old, bad Almodóvar had an “exaggerated aesthetic.” He elsewhere calls it an “insufficiently serious aesthetic,” and that his old films “cheaply” aestheticize serious topics—that was the old Almodóvar. As for style, Mendelsohn writes that “a kind of hyperactive ebullience mixed with an edge of hysteria was the hallmark of Almodóvar’s early style,” and that though the style used to feel “fabulous,” it now seems “overwrought and a bit dated.” The homophobic coding is so strong here that if Mendelsohn were not a publicly acknowledged gay man, you would think he was Ann Coulter. This is essentially movie reviewing as hate speech. Mendelsohn goes on to congratulate Almodóvar for finally getting over all of this and arriving at what he calls a “subtle and mature style.” Great depth and maturity is what we have gotten to with *Volver*, a “sober” and “responsible” aesthetic, a “subtle” and “mature” style. But if you want to find out what a mature style or aesthetic is, you are out of luck: once we get to this point in the article, the words simply disappear. For *The New York Review of Books*, at least, there is no such thing as a mature aesthetic and there is no style for the sober. The question that I want to put on the table is should we consider these words as having essentially become synonyms for immaturity or irresponsibility and frivolity.

CLAYBAUGH: Before we do, do you think maybe we should define the New Formalism?

KURNICK: I don’t know if I can. But there is a recent sense that that people, particularly literary critics, are returning to an unapologetic interest in questions of form. Again, the definition of form itself is quite sticky so what I think of as a return to form is actually accepting an unapologetic sense of ourselves as literary critics, that is, people who care about things like how the story gets told—narrative sequence, style, etc.—and a lot of the questions we talk about. The alternative to formalism in this crude sense is usually historicism or some form of socially committed criticism. I guess I want to say that it seems like an opposition we should refuse, and that to “return” to formalism seems somehow to be already playing a game we’re bound to lose. There have been various recent signs of what we’re talking about as the “new formalism”—a few years ago a special issue of *MLQ* was published entitled “Reading for Form,” for example, and I think it focussed for people in the profession some of this new interest. There are lots of announcements of a return to aesthetics.

I think a lot of the work is quite interesting, but I think that it is hard to do without being a little bit apologetic about it. I noticed, for example, that in Caroline Levine's excellent article in *Victorian Studies*, she feels compelled to defend a formalism only on what she calls "strategic" grounds. So it seems to me that a certain apologetic tone is built in to the recent calls to return to formalism, and I wonder if it serves us well to always be saying, "Well, it's okay, we won't go too far down this road." And I think that you can't go too far down that road because everything is potentially describable in terms of some kind of formal question.

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CLAYBAUGH: What I was saying about the impersonality of style was me coming to terms, or trying to put into my own language, a very, very important book on style by David Miller on Jane Austen.

DAVIDSON: That book was the prod that made this panel happen. We were talking in the Xerox room. I was Xeroxing pages from David Miller for my coursepack, and Nick [Dames] was there, and then the CJLC said "We should have a panel on style!"

CLAYBAUGH: This book is called *Jane Austen, or the Secret of Style* and it is brilliant, but there is a way in which I kind of nodded along with it. There are certain kinds of things that you read that the theorists say, and you're like "oh yeah, yeah," and then you realize that you cannot actually recapitulate. For me, at least, he has this brilliant argument about the necessity of Austen's personality, and that is what David [Kurnick] was asking me about. For some reason, that argument ... I couldn't feel it in a deep way. I could reproduce it, I could teach it, but it wasn't until seeing that coming at it via good style ultimately didn't speak to me the way coming at it via bad style did. I felt like rather than talking about David Miller, if I talked about Dreiser, we could get to the same place together.

DAVIDSON: If I could just add here, I am also obsessed with these questions. I decided to try to not repeat the things I have been saying about Austen (obsessively) to some of the people here. So, the Miller argument pushes very heavily on depersonality and the depersonalized style. He is partly borrowing a term from Roland Barthes, which is the neuter, this sort of neuter quality. Terms like "disembodied," "depersonalized," etc. loom very large in this particular account. It is a very elegant, but very "un-pin-downable" critical account; if you tried to grapple with it head on and disagree, you would risk sounding foolish. I think that few reviewers were willing to do so, although our colleague Karl Kroeber did write a very funny review essay that includes some outright disagreement with Miller's conclusions. Certainly, I feel that there have been no more heated moments in my Austen seminar this semester than when we get exactly to this question. When we have the "Austenian"

narrator (if you can generalize about such a thing—the narrators are different in different books)—those moments when you get an “I,” a narrator who introduces an “I,” or the moment in *Mansfield Park* when these sentences that seem to burst out in a narratorial voice that is foregrounded about children of the same family having a kind of connection, children of the same blood, that offers some sort of richness that no other relationships have—I cannot tell you how suddenly deep the disagreement becomes in the room. Are those lines about children of the same blood a deeply revealing personal admission by a woman, who out of pain and social oppression, needs to depersonalize them as a psychological strategy that has all sorts of pathos for us as readers (as one way of responding to its abstractions or philosophizing)? Or is that a more Miller-esque moment of the depersonalized style, the disembodiment, having really come about as some kind of a trade-off that we might try to analyze in various ways?

Many of these questions are very difficult to resolve. Austen has certainly been a touchstone for that kind of argument in particular. I find myself asking—I feel like an idiot child in a Wordsworth poem—is this narrator a he or a she? The most fundamental questions that we ask: He or she or some middle ground? What can you say about an impersonal narrator; can you attribute a sex to them; can you tell what age they are? I was emailing friends of various literary types, and asking, “Are there any omniscient narrators that we know to be a she?” Is this a fact, a strand in the history of the novel as we know it? There is the group first person plural narrative voice of Karen Joy Fowler’s novel, *The Jane Austen Book Club*. Under the sign of Austen, a female first-person plural form of narration—pretty unusual. I could not really think of omniscient female narrators, although I wonder what you think of Gaskell or George Eliot? I must stop talking about my obsession!

KURNICK: Can I just add that it seems that the answer matters differently if the answer is “he” or “she”? This is an obvious feminist point, but “she” is the answer that matters. When my class answers “it’s a man” when I put a Sontag essay in front of them, they’re really talking about the absence of markers that would indicate femininity. It is about a man’s certain kind of authority in the culture. This is something interesting in the Miller book as well that I have had lots of arguments with people about. It seems like this is a book that claims very strongly that style is about impersonality but the argument completely depends, somewhat unfashionably, on the biographical fact that Austen never married. There has to be a socially abject person in some sense behind this amazing production of Austen’s style; without that, the argument falls apart. I think there is, incidentally, a social and historical power in that argument—a claim that even if we define style as the will to be ahistorical, or the will to escape the social, this will can be mapped according to specific social and historical coordinates; that is, the desire to be ahistorical is also a historical desire, is actually an aspiration that some historical actors feel more powerfully than others. All this is to say that wanting impersonality, or the aspiration to impersonality, can be a deeply personal or locating thing, which is what I think is going on in the background of Miller’s book.

DAMES: To add my piece on this book: the phenomenon associated with it is part of what makes it so compelling. I think for anybody who writes literary criticism—to pick up on something David [Kurnick] just said—part of this is a concern about our own styles and our own styles of writing. The most immediately distinctive thing about David Miller’s book (and actually all of his work) is that he himself has a very recognizable, distinctive style. In some of his earlier work, that can sometimes burst into moments of autobiographical revelation. The reason this matters to me is that I was at a conference once, where a woman after a keynote speech about the work of David Miller and his contribution to literary criticism, stood up and said, “I’m sick of David Miller. I’m sick of hearing about his bad back, I’m sick of hearing about his failed love affairs, I’m sick of him.” And she sat down.

DAVIDSON: And it is, in fact, a gloss in his book *The Novel and the Police*; there is a footnote that says “Miller, David, back pain of.” So he is quite self-aware about this rather Proustian stylistic sensibility.

KURNICK: The important thing about that indexed moment (can you tell we have talked a lot about this book?) is that the index says “D.A. Miller, heart of, broken by cardiologist” and it indexes fifty pages of the book you’ve just read. If you look at the fifty pages, of course there is no mention of David Miller or of his love troubles. It is an analysis of Wilkie Collins’ *The Woman in White*. You gather that what’s being admitted here is that “of course, all academic writing emerges from somebody, from some necessarily more or less fucked-up person, and in this case that person is me.” It’s an admission that doesn’t have any content beyond the fact that a real person exists behind the words. So, it is sort of strange to me that someone would stand up and say “I’m sick of it.” It’s like three words in your consciousness for about forty seconds. How tired of it can you be? And what knowledge is being refused in the unwillingness to think about the fact that criticism always emerges from some lived experience?

DAMES: It’s from a person. My first cynical thought of this individual was that this is professional jealousy. This is the form of saying “why isn’t there a keynote about me and my contribution to literary criticism, as opposed to this other person who has a better job and gets more money,” and so forth. But then it occurred to me: at a deeper level it is about an unwillingness to know that style comes from a physical body with senses, with problems, with a history; a desire to shield oneself from that, and a desire that style would help us to not see those things. And that seemed to me to be odd, perverse, revealing, and particularly in a profession where so much of our own training goes into actually forming a style that would hide. It sometimes seems to us that it is a marked professional privilege to stop doing that—a set of our own ambivalences about moments where our own styles or the styles of our students or colleagues become revelatory. We worry to what extent that is acceptable, to what

extent it is readable, desirable. Maybe our own inclinations were against our training. These are complex questions regarding how one writes, as well as how one reads other stylists.

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DAMES: Another difference that I would like to bring out is whether we are tapping this question from the perspective of the writer—that is, what style tells us about that person and what that person can then tell us about a social formation—or from the perspective of the reader. The thing that has motivated me a lot in recent years has been moments in fairly canonical literary theory, particularly narrative theory, where there is an embarrassed aside; where Roland Barthes stops and says, “But of course, everyone has a different Proust and a different Tolstoy in mind, because everybody skips different parts each time they read it. But we’re not going to talk about that right now. I’ll show you my diagram.” David Miller himself writes, “We do have to acknowledge the extent to which reading a novel partakes in moments of daydreaming and actually not paying attention to what is going on. I don’t know how I am going to take account of that, but one has to at some level. It feels like those are moments now where a lot of work is coming through, and we should actually start with moments like that and say, “Let’s not be embarrassed about this and see what we can do with it.” Those are readerly questions, oriented towards reception, which seem to give a slightly different twist on this term “form”; that is one of the fault lines here.

DAVIDSON: But Nick [Dames], isn’t there just a more basic terminology question, which is to say that the form of the word “form” is not quite the same as the form in “formal” the adjective? If we talk about formalist ways of reading that would be affiliated with such a thing as paying attention to style, but if we had terms like “style” and “form,” they certainly could not be reduced to meaning the same thing exactly, although they might cluster together in certain ways...

CLAYBAUGH: I feel like for some reason the conversation has gone very much to what our preoccupations are when we do research, particularly our outgrowing certain kinds of professional formations that were operating when we were in graduate school, and that we are now rebelling against. Certainly, the way that I think about my own work is changing my teaching and that makes me want to know—are you surprised to hear a bunch of literature professors say, in our discipline, we feel like it is really radical to talk about style? Are you kind of thinking “What?” Or do you want to study English because you are committed to a certain kind of historical or political project that we are complicating in certain ways?

DAVIDSON: Clearly, style matters to everyone in this room.

CLAYBAUGH: What is the difference between style and form? My completely ad-hoc answer is that style seems to have to do with the sentences, and form has to do with a lot of other things as well. I was struck, Nick [Dames], when you were saying that you were hesitant about our citational practices, because I actually feel that one of the ways that thinking about form differently has changed my teaching practices is that I realized how strange it was in a seminar on the novel to have students bringing evidence that didn't seem like evidence at all to me because it was two random sentences; but I had taught them to do that. I think it is the form of the novel that may explain how Dreiser can be bad on the level of the sentence and brilliant with the arrangement of characters, with pacing—and I think that we haven't actually developed a way of teaching students how to bring that kind of formal analysis into their own writing.

DAMES: The genesis for me, the “eureka” moment was after a course evaluation I received when I was teaching in graduate school. The writer said “The professor is very anal because he concentrates on single words in books that have hundreds of thousands of words.” At first, I was horrified and angry, and then went through the phases of grief over this comment. When I accepted it, I realized that as dumb as the sentence sounded, it was on to something very important, which is that I had not really thought about why one selects certain words, or why one excerpts one or two sentences. I actually hadn't thought very hard about what the relation between the part and the whole is when thinking about fiction, and what I was doing was simply replaying what I had been taught. As much as I was upset by the comment, it might be a totally worthwhile question to ask, why would one look at the small unit; what value does that have; are there other, larger units one could look at, and how could one go about considering them? Like a lot of naïve questions, it was very penetrating about why it is we do the things we do and why it is we think that the close reading of sentences will tell us about the form of a text as a whole. ■

Formalism, Structuralism, and “Infrastructuralism”: An Interview with Caroline Levine

Conducted by J. H. Jason Kim

Caroline Levine is a pioneer in a new wave of literary and cultural criticism, which redefines formalism as a means to comprehend larger networks that exist around us: political, social, cultural and aesthetic. In her article, “Strategic Formalism: Toward a New Method in Cultural Studies,” Levine explores the possibilities for new formalist perspectives, taking Elizabeth Barrett Browning’s “The Cry of the Children” as the focal text of her formal analysis (*Victorian Studies* 48.4, 2006, 625-657). Levine’s recent MLA talk, “Narrative Networks: *Bleak House* and *The Wire*,” employs a comparison between the Dickens novel and the HBO TV series and culminates with her synthesis of poststructuralism and the analysis of social institutions, a method of reading she calls “infrastructuralism” (Levine, 2007). A scholar of nineteenth-century literature, Levine’s previous publications include *The Serious Pleasures of Suspense: Victorian Realism and Narrative Doubt* (University of Virginia Press, 2003), in addition to various essays in the *Journal of British Culture* and the *Journal of Popular Culture*. Levine’s forthcoming book, *Provoking Democracy: Why We Need the Arts* (Blackwell, 2007), examines the role of the avant-garde in shaping democracy. She is the Associate Professor of English at University of Wisconsin-Madison. The CJLC conducted this interview with Levine over email from February to March 2007.

The Columbia Journal of Literary Criticism: In your essay “Strategic Formalism: Toward a New Method in Cultural Studies,” you argue that social institutions can be understood as forms. How do you define forms?

Caroline Levine: I’m working to define form in a way that will encompass both aesthetic and social forms. Form refers to any shape or configuration, any ordering principle, any pattern of repetition and difference. It could mean poetic rhythm or

racial hierarchy, chiasmus or prison architecture.

CJLC: How does your understanding of formalism relate to previous formalist, structuralist and post-structuralist methods of reading?

CL: Traditionally, formalism referred to the shape of aesthetic objects—literary, visual, and musical art. It could mean the structure of a work—its organization, the way its different parts intersected to make up the whole; or it could put more of an emphasis on the particular style of a work—its rhetoric, grammar, and syntactical specificity. Structuralism, by contrast, was not primarily an aesthetic project. Emerging in such fields as anthropology, psychology, and linguistics, structuralism embraced the idea that cultures and languages—even the mind itself—could be understood as shaped by certain recurrent deep structures. Structuralists often claimed that binary structures were at the basis of all social and cultural formations: rituals and stories in *any* culture would be organized around fundamental oppositions, such as masculine-feminine, sun-moon, mind-body, culture-nature. Certain basic structures organized all meaning. Post-structuralists showed that such systems were neither stable nor neutral: if we followed their logic in any given instance, the systems would break down, blur, and contradict themselves, and they would also reveal certain recurrent patterns of hierarchy and violence. My own use of the term “form” to encompass all three of these approaches is polemical. I’m arguing that readers of aesthetic forms become highly practiced at noticing not only patterns, structures, and organizing systems, but also their breakdowns and internal conflicts. So: a practice of reading for literary form allows us to become good readers of all shaping arrangements—including those crucial social and political ordering patterns that take place far beyond the strictly aesthetic realm. But I’m also arguing that by understanding both cultural objects and socio-political formations *as* forms, the opposition between art and politics starts to break down. If, for example, both poetic rhymes and reform laws involve attempts to impose order, to shape and structure the materials of the world, then we can start to understand them as comparable and competing—sometimes fitting together but sometimes getting in each other’s way—rather than understanding art as a mere response to politics, or an unconscious reflection of political formations.

CJLC: What do theories that impose binary-concluding readings on literature mean for this new formalist approach?

CL: I think that Marxist, feminist, and other politically-minded critics did a great service to the field of literary studies when they began to show how all literature participates in politics: some texts, they argued, reinforce ideological messages about class or gender; others undercut dominant ideas and urge their readers to imagine a better world. But this willingness to treat literature seriously as a political force sometimes resolved itself into a habit of simply concluding that texts were “conservative” or

“radical”—as if it were a matter of just choosing one side or the other. Most critics these days would argue that the politics of texts is a more complex matter than any simple political binary would suggest; I agree, and I want to begin to elaborate a new way to confront and describe this complexity. Elizabeth Barrett Browning is a poet whose work is sometimes praised as brave and radical; at other times, she is accused of conserving a class-based status quo. It seems to me that her poetry is often *both* radical and conservative, and that it has political implications that often go beyond her own conscious beliefs about politics. So what kind of methods do we need to describe the politics of texts that endorse multiple radical and conservative models within them? How might we think about texts that participate in various political projects simultaneously and sometimes contradictorily?

All that being said, I think binaries are inescapable, and, too, that they can be incredibly useful: the challenge is to use them and unsettle them at the same time.

CJLC: What are the benefits of “strategic formalism”? What are its “strategic” aspects?

CL: I call my method “strategic” for two different reasons. The first reason grows out of a reference to the work of Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, who argued famously for “strategic essentialism” in the 1980s. Essentialist arguments—for example, the belief that femininity had a universal, deep essence—had been widely critiqued by the 1980s. But Spivak pointed out that to say that essentialism was wrong *in its essence* would be a contradiction in terms. Indeed, we might not be able to do away with a dependence on essentialist thought, no matter how hard we try. And there might be times when it would be politically pragmatic to assert a universal femininity. As Spivak puts it, “Essentialism is like dynamite, or a powerful drug: judiciously applied, it can be effective in dismantling unwanted structures or alleviating suffering; uncritically employed, however, it is destructive and addictive.” I borrowed the notion of “strategic,” then, to suggest our best option is not to disregard form—an impossibility, it seems to me—but rather to deploy it critically, recognizing its pervasiveness in the thought of even the most anti-formalist thinkers, and then deliberately trying to put it to use. For example, lots of critics have disparaged the New Critical emphasis on the “whole” work of art, where each part contributes to an overarching unity, but it seems to me that no historicist scholar can do without the notion of the “whole” altogether: in order to study cultural life, we draw provisional boundaries around our objects of study—focusing on US culture since 1945 or women’s poetry at the *fin de siècle*. We then see how different cultural, social, and political elements interact within the boundaries that we have drawn. It is not that we believe that there really is a deep wholeness to the culture we have isolated by setting forth arbitrary boundaries, but rather that in order to know a culture at all, we need to work with cultures as if they were provisional unities. Form is inescapable—even profoundly useful—unless we start to assume that unities or binaries or panopticons

or split subjects are transcendent, universally explanatory, transhistorical. So: rather than a traditional formalism that imagines forms as meaningful, underlying truths, we need a strategic formalism that allows us to take critical account of the forms at work in our own thought.

The second reason to use the term “strategic” develops out of the idea that there may be a political efficacy to this new formalism. I have been frequently surprised by how often an attention to multiple forms reveals not coherent political orders—gender ideology or disciplinary power or the logic of imperial expansion—but collisions among conflicting ordering principles that sometimes reroute and destabilize the most apparently hegemonic political formations. I have come to think, then, that social, cultural, and political forms can have their own logic and their own force, and that they even have the capacity to surprise power out of its intended tracks. My method is politically “strategic,” then, because it suggests that we need new ways of thinking about politics that do not resolve the operations of power into stable, uniform, or monolithic formations but take account instead of the multiple, colliding, incommensurable work of social forms. Or to put this another way: if even the most straightforward political projects can be unsettled by the operations of competing forms, then what we *don't* need is a politics that sees itself above all as a way of imposing a new order.

CJLC: How is your theory specifically grounded in literature and literary studies?

CL: For decades, English departments have been borrowing from other disciplines to enrich our study of literature: from philosophy, history, sociology, anthropology, political theory, psychoanalysis, and even the sciences. But I started to think that the kind of careful attentiveness to the subtle workings of linguistic form that literary studies developed over many decades is a superb training in recognizing encounters among different kinds and levels of organizing principles—from narrative form and rhyme to metaphor and syntax—and it's unlike the training in any other discipline. So I really wanted to try to *export* our distinctive skills to other disciplines, to prompt historians and political theorists—for example—to rethink the objects they seek to know through their own methods. My turn to form as a way of knowing the socio-political world is therefore deeply grounded in literary studies, but its target is much larger than literature.

CJLC: In what ways does “strategic formalism” engage with current literary and cultural discourses?

CL: In a very general way, the field of English studies, from the 1930s through the 1960s, privileged aesthetic form over politics and history. In the late 1960s, many scholars began to go to the opposite extreme, putting a primary emphasis on socio-political relations and often deriding formalist approaches. There were certainly

exceptions, but on the whole it seemed embarrassing and old-fashioned to embrace formalism. And yet lately another trend has been gaining strength. In the late 1990s, a range of prominent scholars, including Heather Dubrow, Paul Hunter, Yopie Prins, Herbert Tucker, and Susan Wolfson, started to rethink the relations between form and politics. They argued that English studies had been missing the ways that formal designs and political realities are necessarily intertwined. This work seems to have hit a chord, especially with a whole range of younger scholars, including—in nineteenth-century studies—Nicholas Dames, Monique Morgan, Jason Rudy, and Alex Woloch. The new work that brings together formalist readings with socio-political history tends to fall into one of three broad groups. The first and oldest model is the Marxist model of form as ideology, where literary forms are understood to repress or contain social realities. According to Marxist-formalists, the “happy” ending to a novel, for example, closes down the social contradictions that structure the middle of the text. A second group of critics has argued that literary forms act more like reflections or manifestations of socio-cultural realities. Irregular poetic rhythms, for example, reflect a disorderly culture. The third cohort have urged us instead to see writers as *deliberately* deploying literary forms to engage in self-conscious political and social projects. Their goal is to understand writers as thinkers aware of the ways that aesthetic forms can mold and intervene in the social world. All of these excitingly different approaches to form have led me to wonder whether a more fundamental question is now at stake: that is, *just what kind of a thing is a form?* I’ve wanted to do the theoretical work of rethinking the very category of form itself. So that’s where I think I fit into the current debates in the field.

CJLC: When did it first occur to you that we are able to look at forms to evaluate social institutions?

CL: Wow—I have no idea. I know it’s an idea that’s been brewing for a long while, and that I never wanted to give up on the importance of form, even when it was deeply unfashionable. My first book was about suspense in the Victorian novel. I argued that scientific experimentation and narrative suspense shared a remarkably comparable form—a hypothesis, followed by a delay, followed by the revelation of knowledge—and it seemed to me that nineteenth-century science and the nineteenth-century novel were working powerfully on one another, even when individual thinkers and writers were not aware of the convergence. I realized then that I saw forms as having a kind of social power that went beyond individual texts and intentions, and that form was by no means strictly an aesthetic category for me. But it may be that the story has to start earlier than this. When I was an undergraduate in the late 1980s and early 1990s, I was profoundly shaped by both formalist and deconstructive approaches to reading, and I was never altogether persuaded by the kind of historicism—with its close attention to period-specific detail—that came along to sweep away most traces of poststructuralist thinking in Victorian studies. I knew it was important to think about politics and history, but I was *never* sure why

that meant doing away with an attention to form or structure (to be fair, lots of historicist work took account of form, but some quite forcefully did not). At the risk of sounding much too Derridean, I guess I have to say that this idea had no moment of origin: it was always already working in me.

CJLC: When you read literature, do you read primarily for forms?

CL: Yes, I think so. I generally read literary texts as webs of repeated elements, from rhyme or rhythm (repeated sounds) to characters (names that appear repeatedly over time) to narrative form (time as marked through repetition as well as change) to themes (motifs or ideas that occur more than once). In fact, I'd say that it is an attention to a combination of repetition and difference that forms the bulk of almost most literary analysis, including my own. But I also see *cultures* as webs of repeated patterns, which individual texts participate in. So, to give a simplistic but familiar example, when Mary Shelley casts her scientist as an ambitious masculine figure on a heroic quest and refers to the object of his quest—nature—as feminine, Shelley is incorporating a repeated socio-political form within a literary text (a gender binary in which a male subject seeks and conquers a feminine object). As Shelley knew, the fact that this form repeats itself insistently over time has grave political implications—from rape to environmental devastation. So I try to read for the ways that individual texts and cultures return to the same shapes or ordering principles again and again; and I also read for the ways that different patterns collide and conflict with each other, undermining the efficacy of any single pattern.

CJLC: You recently gave a talk at the MLA on a new theory, which you call “infrastructuralism.” How does “infrastructuralism” differ from strategic formalism?

CL: They're two sides of the same coin—maybe even two ways to name the same method for different audiences. Strategic formalism is a way to value, recognize, and use literary formalist reading practices to understand political and historical formations, while infrastructuralism is a way to approach social formations and historical institutions through the activities of formalist reading. I coined the term “infrastructuralism” specifically to think about bringing two traditions of thinking together. I've referred a number of times to Derrida and deconstructive reading here, but I've been just as deeply influenced by Foucault and his careful analysis of specific social institutions. These two thinkers have frequently been used against one another: Derridean readings are accused of being too transhistorical to take account of the operations of particular material institutions such as nineteenth-century prisons, while Foucauldian-style analyses have sometimes emphasized historical specificity at the expense of recognizing the iterable, transhistorical patterns—forms—at work even in the most particular historical experiences. The term “infrastructuralism” is a playful—but also serious—way to bring together poststructuralist readings and the

analysis of social institutions.

CJLC: What are your thoughts on treating a non-traditional work, like *The Wire*, as a text suitable for critical analysis?

CL: The Victorian novel was the trashy, lowbrow entertainment of its own time. Nineteenth-century readers would probably be absolutely shocked to discover that young people today study such sensational nonsense as *Jane Eyre* or *The Woman in White* in university classrooms, and even more shocked to discover that we imagine that these novels can be a useful part of one's training for professional labor and democratic citizenship. It's in part this perspective on the nineteenth-century novel that always makes me skeptical of the assumption that television must be unworthy of scholarly attention. Like the novel, some tv is totally uninteresting and will be forgotten, but some of it is incredibly rich in ideas as well as powerful in its capacity to shape our sense of the world, and it will continue to hold the attention of anyone interested in cultural and political formations. *The Wire* is one of the most complex cultural objects I have ever encountered. I teach it regularly now, and I love the brilliant things my students have to say about it—they always help me to see new elements in it.

CJLC: Where do you think cultural and literary studies are headed in the near future?

CL: Knowing full well that history will probably prove me all wrong, I'll name three directions that I *hope* literary and cultural studies might take. First: the kind of poststructuralism associated with Derrida in the 1980s seemed like a fad at the time, and many people were delighted to see it pass away, but I predict that the startling richness of that thought will come back to the fore in new guises and help to provide exciting new models for cultural studies in the future. It is my prediction that these new practices won't look much like the deconstructive readings we got so used to (and so tired of) in literary studies a couple of decades ago. Second: I expect that the breakdown of national literatures, which has ushered in complex and compelling new transnational ways of reading texts, will be followed by the breakdown of traditional literary periods, and that the thinkers of the future will become adept at thinking across centuries, just as we have become increasingly practiced at reading texts across geographical borders. And third: I keenly hope and forecast that new forms of left politics, ones that take up the virtues of existing paradigms based in Marxism, liberalism, and identity politics, but also transform them, will come to shape thinkers in the humanities and produce new ways of engaging cultural objects and political action. ■

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