THE BUNGLED ONE: FAILURE AND THE FICTIONAL IMPETUS

by
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This manuscript has been read and accepted for the Graduate Faculty in Comparative Literature in satisfaction of the dissertation requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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ABSTRACT

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This basis for this dissertation is that the act of writing is incompatible with the content of the written, and that fiction is founded on this incompatibility. I argue that this incompatibility results in an ontological category of fiction that exists before any generic category is implemented that tells the reader how to read, how to engage with the referent. The corollary to this hypothesis is that what applies to fiction necessarily applies to language as a whole: that human consciousness is constituted in an engagement with fiction. My method is an interrogation of fictional accounts of the act of creation and of writing, because, if fiction is to be understood as a general, ontological category, it is in the genre "fiction" that this problematic can best be explored. More importantly, I argue, it is the genre of fiction that is the site of coming to terms with this aspect of human consciousness, and that it must do so in the form of a coming to terms with a failure in self-representation.

This failure is understood in this dissertation in two senses: 1) the failure of the author to represent the act of writing *in* fiction; 2) the failure of the ability of fiction to represent human violence and atrocity without it being preempted by being understood as suffering in its existential sense, to which all humans are subject. Applying narratological analysis to phenomenological theory, I show how these two notions of failure are implicated in each other. I arrive at an overarching theory of failure as a necessary constituent of all fiction. Beginning with the Biblical book of Genesis, I proceed to an analysis of Herman Melville's *Pierre or the Ambiguities*; Marcel Proust's *A la recherche du temps perdu*; and Georges Perec's *W ou le souvenir d'enfance*, all texts that, in different ways, thematize the act of writing, and address the relation between writing and lived experience.

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This to be my wife? I that but the other day weighed an hundred and fifty pounds of solid avoirdupois;—I to wed this heavenly fleece? Methinks one husbandly embrace would break her airy zone, and she exhale upward to that heaven whence she hath hither come, condensed to mortal sight. It can not be; I am of heavy earth, and she of airy light. By heaven, but marriage is an impious thing!

Herman Melville, *Pierre or the Ambiguities*

There is nothing to stop the top of the rope though. There is nothing to argue. People in the audience have seen the boy dancing and it is not hypnosis.

It is the definition of the rope that ought to interest everyone who wants to climb the rope. The rope dance. Reading the poem.

Jack Spicer, "A Textbook of Poetry"

INTRODUCTION

This dissertation is an inquiry into the disparity between the *unity* that a work of fiction offers and the fragmented realm of lived experience which does not offer to its subject an ability to parse its structure. The failure of which the title of this dissertation speaks is exactly the failure to convey *in* fiction, the fragmentation of experience.

The first part of this dissertation offers a theory of narrative which attempts to account for the role of fiction in everyday life. First, I address the different quality of experience in fiction and in that of everyday life. Then, I attempt to show, that despite their incompatibility, it is the *clash* of these modalities (and not their unity) upon which human consciousness—the experience of being a subject—has its foundation.

The bulk of the theory is presented in Part One, Chapters 1 and 2. Chapter 3 of Part One, then, contextualizes this theory in terms of two philosophical traditions: that of hermeneutics and that of phenomenology. Parts Two and Three of this dissertation engage in literary analysis, less in order to *apply* the theories of Part One, and more to continue to develop the theory itself.

I build my theory through recourse to two sets of seemingly antithetical pairs, which attempt to provide a language for the different ways in which the self identifies—comes to awareness of—itself: that of *the individual and the person*; and that of *the observer and the absorbed.*

Thus, the *individual*, as will become clear, is the self understood in its social sphere, as member of and participant in an artificial, conventional structure; and as a speaker of language. What I call the *person*, then, is the self as it is understood in the existential sphere; the one who is alone in the world before death: the person, as I will define it, then, is the experience of being an individual. Neither, of course, can exist without the other: one might

say that the individual is the form for the person's content; yet it is a content that can only be expressed in the language, in the form of the individual. What will call the *subject*, then, is understood to be the conflation of these two, ultimately inseparable constituents.

What makes a subject a subject is that it believes in itself. The subject locates itself in its subjectivity: it believes that what it experiences is true, and it suffers this experience of the truth as *reality*. Yet there are other modalities that permit the subject to loosen its faith in the world: thus, in fiction the subject who is *absorbed* in his or her experience, is not the same as the subject who *observes* this experience. It is this bifurcation between *observer* and absorbed that makes fiction possible; it is also that which delineates the realm of fiction from that of "reality."

If one could place an observer upon the subject, then the subject would be able to loosen his or her belief in the particular existence that he or she finds him- or herself. The impossibility of inhabiting such a position *on* the subject, is, I will argue, the very impetus for fiction. If one were able to inhabit such a position, then the subject itself would be a fiction. It is this notion that I call *ontological* fiction: the perpetual attempt of the subject to be able to *see* itself.

Because I will, in the course of this dissertation, and particularly in Part One, pay particular attention to the analysis of this bid to get a view on the subject, we run the risk of confusion in the term "fiction" itself. As a result, then, I distinguish between ontological fiction in the sense that I have just defined it, and *generic* fiction, as that which refers to particular texts of fiction. While the term "generic fiction" is undoubtedly awkward in a literary dissertation, it nonetheless seems necessary to distinguish between an existential condition, and an empirical *response* to that condition.

This dissertation oscillates between these two types of fictions: generic fiction, I argue, is always attempting, and always failing to create the view that the subject, absorbed in his or her own being, lacks.

PART ONE

CHAPTER 1:
I AM WRITING: FICTION AND LIVED EXPERIENCE

I. FICTION EXCLUDES WRITING

Fictional narrative is impersonal: it does not include us, neither as readers nor as writers. In fiction, the broad view eclipses the middle view. The *eye*world eclipses the world as our bodies intersect it, experience it. Fictional narrative, we might say, is the ability to see what "I" cannot. It is precisely this "cannot" that is the engine that propels the narrative forward; it is in the desire to turn the "cannot" into sight and into speech that narrative has its impetus. But it is in the failure of this endeavor that narrative gains its actuality. Fictional narrative must circumambulate, as Jack Spicer writes, "the circumference of a circle that has no point but the boundary of your desire" (173), where desire is the desire to see, to know.

If in "life," that is, in space and in time, we cannot see where we are precisely because we are spatially and temporally situated, fictional narrative permits an Archimedean point, a perspective from *outside*, allowing us a product: a beginning, middle and end that we, real flesh-and-blood readers, cannot have in our *own* lives. The paradox, then, is that this narrative vision cannot represent *our* vision. This, we might say, defines the realm of the fictional.

The problem between "me" and narrative: my desire to see *where I am* is mismatched with the object of, the desire of, the narrative. The end of the narrative provides *a* resolution, but what it provides resolves nothing for the me who is living in the narrative of my own life.

We might say that fiction is built out of this mismatching. The vision fiction affords is not *our* vision, because the "I" of "life" gets elided, consumed in the creation of the sensible world: it is built on the backs of the *things* of our world, turning them into symbols, rendering them ethereal, ungraspable. The things that narratives speak of slip through our fingers, pass through the body, because they are not made of the same *things* that our bodies are made out of.

I *make* narratives but I in my body am forever excluded from one. The perspective from the body is impoverished, rendering the necessity of entering into this fictional modality where we can see. But *if* we see, we see *above*, not *with*. Bodies *write*, but narratives, what the writing is about, even though they issue out of bodies, even though they speak of bodies, and even though they exist *for the sake* of bodies, nonetheless exclude our bodies. Narration and writing seem to originate from two separate "traditions." But this is further complicated by the fact that the things that narrative requires to turn into symbols are those same things that I live with, that I use, that constitute the world I live in, the world of the writ*ing*. To narrate things is to propel them out of the body, to turn writing into narrative, and so, if I wish to attempt to understand *who I am* through narrative, I must *suffer* the disparity, the failure of the narrated thing to return to the bodily thing. I can experience this impoverishment when I try to bring the *act* of writing into my writing, that is, when I try to turn myself into *content*. This, of course, has been a preoccupation of fiction since its invention. But if, as the *act* of writing and the narrated content approach each other, we could catch the last words before the ultimate silence that must ensue, they would be of very little interest to us: a perpetual, autistically-repetitive, affirmation of existence: "I am writing; I am writing; I am writing…"

I am writing. But, what I write is narrative. This disparity, we might say is the work of meaning. If so, meaning involves suffering an original exclusion, an exclusion of our bodily selves, because there could be no understanding of the body that is not already "fictionalized," already narrated, where narration should be understood as precisely fiction. To say this, however, is to ascribe to fiction a primordial significance, which requires first and foremost, a distinction:

By *ontological fiction*, I mean that which encompasses not only fictional narrative, but all narrative, written or spoken, all that we say about ourselves, in all aspects of our lives. I mean, then, a fiction that is founded in the mere fact that the act of producing cannot enter into the produced. Because we live in a world where we understand ourselves through our productions, linguistic and otherwise, we live under the sign of fiction. All that we produce is a manifestation of what we *do not have*, of where we are *not yet*. The *genre* of fiction, then, is what ontological fiction makes possible: it is what arises immediately to tell us how to read or write. It is the medium in which this separation between writer and written is exploited; it loosens the grip between narrative and referent, and creates the possibility of absorption, or belief, in the content.

But before the imposition of genre, before even a work of narration is deemed "fiction" or "non-fiction" comes the original engagement with the fact of a presence that has nothing to say, a constant hissing of intention, which must, if the work is to manifest, get covered over by the content. It is this untenable moment that is my point of departure here: the moment *before* the convention of genre, before the experience of the personal takes linguistic, and thus, impersonal form.

Spicer writes:

> I would like to make poems out of real objects. The lemon to be a lemon that the reader could cut and squeeze-a real lemon like a newspaper in a collage is a real newspaper. (33)

How to approach the thing as a thing? How to stay on the same level as our symbols, the things which give us *meaning* because meaning is, we might say, *sight*, and sight requires space, organization, structure, all that I do not have as I plod through time. Sight, we might say, is a fiction which excludes me, and which nonetheless, I must inhabit.

Our ability to see, to be spectators, is founded on this inexpressible, unseeable "I." Even to say that we see ourselves, then, is to draw on this invisible "I" (I use the word provisionally) that gets pushed under in the act of seeing, in becoming the motor for sight. And the need to see, to be spectators to ourselves is a *requirement* for the kind of being that we have been born into: to be subjects.

Maurice Merleau-Ponty, in his discussion of the parallax that occurs in human vision, speaks of perception as something which we must create through a similar eliding of raw sense data: "The monocular images cannot be compared with the synergic perception: one cannot put them side by side; it is necessary to choose between the thing and the floating pre-things. We can effect the passage by *looking*, by awakening to the world; we cannot witness it as spectators" (*Visible* 8).

If perception is an act of synthesis, and thus, of *poesis*, narrative exploits this technology to create the space, the context, by which our perceptions become meaningful. It is the *place*, the structure by which we perceive ourselves in our inability to be spectators to ourselves: it is a fictional place where becoming spectators is exactly what is fictional. It is only through this elision, then, that we can then return to begin to understand what this elided "I" is. Fiction, I will argue here, does not simply produce an analog of the "I" by which we can infer who *this* "I" is. Rather, in the very process of coming-into-

consciousness, in the fulfillment of perception as narrative, the "I" gets created. We wake to the world as subjects, and in the act of *creating* a generically fictional world, as writers *and* readers, we re-create this coming-into-consciousness. Re-create, that is, in the absence of the originary moment of creation.

Meaning, then, comes at an expense, a loss, a loss of the *self who the meaning is for*. Something passes us by. It is a loss of the one writing, the one being, in favor of the *subject*. And when the subject of the work is the one writing, the theme of the work will be loss, and the performance of the work, failure.

The subject *cannot* be the one writing. The writing *subject* can only be a fictional subject, pushing something *else* to the place behind the writing, forever out of the picture. Fiction as failure: such is the theme of this work.

One can choose to embrace this failure, or resist it.

To embrace the failure: the pleasure of two worlds, of the mise-en-abyme, of endless creativity, perpetual adoration. To resist it is to resist fiction, and the tyranny that fiction has over life. But it is also to resist *speech*. Whenever we speak, we divorce ourselves from our words, affirming the very condition which I call here "ontological fiction."

How to arrive at the before-the-beginning, the proto-moment that occurs before what is written about eclipses the act of writing? How to incorporate the writer into what is written, the seer into the seen?

The writer can only see *out*, see him or herself as *out*, as space, as extension. Everything that he or she wants to say about the intimate self, the unspeakable, incommunicable self has to be built on the back of the external, on what can be communicated: a word, and for a word, a corresponding image, and for an image, a corresponding *thing*. Images are always images of things. And the *things* are what banish us

from the internal, into the external world, what take away our intimate space in order to make space. Things are charged with representing the self, yet they also must be things, things *outside* the self. Things become symbols and symbols *always* symbolize the failure of vision, the failure to return to the meaning of the *thing*.

How to arrive at the place of *intimacy*? How to turn the external world into which we are banished *into* internality? How to find a self being with itself, not mediated by things?

Generic fiction, in order for it to work, requires that part of the beholder be *absorbed* in the fiction, at some level, *believing* it (though the very formulation calls into question the foundation of the word belief). Yet it also requires another faculty: an observer, the fictional vantage, a kind of proto-camera which is the very possibility of any kind of mimesis, who *sees* the absorbed self, from *outside* the place of absorption.

Emile Benveniste, discussing the phenomenon of the "person" in language, argues that the third person tense is *not* a person, unlike the "I" and the "you" who imply the *presence* of each other, and thus coordinate a reciprocal relation between each other (*Problems* 165). There is, he argues, no such relationship in the third person. The "I" speaks about itself to a "you." The "you" is spoken by an" I" to the "you." But the "he," "she" or "it" has no such relationship between its speaker and who or what it speaks of. Famously, Benveniste notes that in Arabic grammar, the name for the third person is literally translated as "the one who is absent" (165).

While certainly "I" and "you" can be distanced from their referents, such distanciation is nonetheless built on the back of an *ordinary* communicative act that "he," "she," or "it" cannot partake of.

We might say that it is "the one who is absent" who inaugurates the notion of fiction. We might also say it is the one who is absent who permits the possibility of *structure*,

and thus, of *meaning*. Fiction then, would be precisely this non-person, this third "person" who is not part of the conversation, who delivers it *back* to the ones who cannot see, giving them the synergic faculty necessary for sight.

If so, we could say, then, that meaning is construed by the installing of an observer, an impersonal observer, which permits the view of the whole, a view unavailable to the "I" and the "you": the impersonal, impossible perspective, an ontological, irreducible fiction, to which, as conscious beings, we are subject.

The fictional observer, then, as the absent, third "person:" we can easily see how, in what has become a narratological orthodoxy, this has generated the notion of an "implied author," put forward by Wayne Booth in his *Rhetoric of Fiction*. In the spirit of Benveniste's notion of the third person as a *non*-person, we might do better to think of this phenomenon as simply an impersonal observing force, an *impossible* observer, yet one that is the very possibility of fiction, because what makes fiction fiction is that it is *not*.

How this impossibility is nonetheless something *for us* is the subject of what follows. For now, let us say that it is this observing faculty that provides the context that is missing in "real life." We are absorbed in our real life, and we cannot stand outside it, cannot *see* this absorption, cannot speak it. Fiction, by framing this absorbed self, provides a context, which allows for the possibility of *meaning* to the things that otherwise in our everyday lives, bear only the weight of their materiality. In a narrative, in a structure, everything the observing-self expresses is an expression *of* the absorbed self for the absorbed self. The result of this split is that *meaning* can only be produced *out of* the "material" of this absorbed self, but this self, always spoken for and about, can never speak for itself. It is, in a certain sense, essentially passive, even paralyzed, without agency. The limitation inherent in narratological theories that are founded on the notion of an "implied author," is that these

theories and systems are well placed to investigate the internal mechanics of a narrative, but precisely because the notion of an author remains a given, they cannot begin to analyze the relation of an author (and correspondingly, a reader) to his/her narrative. The *phenomenon* of the text, what the text is *for us*, then, gets passed by, because the text is never understood as a *thing* in *our* world: such a theoretical approach remains *absorbed* in the reality of the text, in the same way that *we* remain absorbed in the reality of our own lives. To posit the notion of a fictional author of a text is then, to pass by the phenomenon of fiction itself. And it is this overarching *fiction*, this thing that is *not*, which is what I am interested in understanding here. The way this manifests, I maintain, is in the *unavailability* of author to the fictional subject. Only by *not* seeing these two entities on a continuum, existing in a single modality, can we, paradoxically, begin to understand what our essential relationship is to our fictions.

Narratologists following Booth engage in a particular kind of reduction which enables what is peculiarly fictional to come to light. By rigorously excluding the author in favor of a "second self" or "fictional author," they are able to respect the discrete modalities that characterize the regions of fiction and lived experience. The narratological reduction is a necessary one. It is only through effecting it that we can generate a terminology, create a lens by which to view the mechanics of fiction. In the method that I will pursue here, I do not propose to eliminate this reduction, but rather, to expand its scope to the act of production, which is embodied in that entity that we call an author. The reduction that I propose includes in its scope both the realms of "fiction" and that of "life," but relegates them to two heterogeneous *regions*. This, then, permits the ability to view these two different regions of being, and to explore the relation between them. In doing so, we can begin to characterize "what the world is like" in both regions, to understand their differences, and to

ultimately arrive at understanding the necessary contiguity between production and produced.

Ultimately, any time that the inquirer becomes implicated in the inquiry, one courts the crisis of objectivity that characterizes modernity. This crisis, we might say, is manifested in fiction; and it would be, then, no coincidence, that the novel is inaugurated just as this crisis comes to historical consciousness, and that it accompanies the trajectory that the notion of objectivity takes in the modern era.

It is a melancholic crisis, one which puts into question the very possibility of ourselves as meaningful. Meaningful to whom? To resist, to oppose the formation of this ontological fiction leaves an observer with nothing to observe. We see only because a stable sense of ourselves bends back upon the contingent world of the body in order to give it a place. We become conscious, only through the formation of a narrative that transcends who we are now, because the apprehension of the "now" can only come in the form of a kind of narrative of which the "now" is just a sign. One might say that the resistance to narrative so characteristic of modernist fiction is the resistance to being *for-oneself*, that is, not present to oneself, in favor of the *in-itself*, the thing complete in itself that the subject desires to be and fails to be, because it can only "be" in fiction. Such a resistance, futile as it may seem in these terms, nonetheless underlies all our endeavors to understand who we are *here*.

Yet such a resistance to fiction is a resistance to living, a melancholic rejection of being, where living and being mean incompletion, and where the project of meaning is forever haunted by the certainty of its incompletion, the failure to grasp the whole, the what-this-is. Yet far from rejecting this resistance, we must attempt to incorporate it into any theory that attempts to account for the impetus to fiction. And as such, we must be careful not to think of this melancholy in its pathological sense.

In melancholy, the shadow of the object falls on the ego, Freud writes (159). For Freud, the melancholic self is unable to express itself in terms of anything else but the objects which surround it, which comprise its world; it cannot delineate itself from that which it is already plunged into—the inside can only be expressed in terms of the outside. From out of this, one might begin to formulate the notion of a kind of "ontological melancholy" that follows from the condition of ontological fiction. Melancholy is a feeling that has an *inner cause*, but that must be expressed in terms of externality. But melancholy is exactly this turning of an outside relation into an internal relation. We might understand this, topologically, as an eclipsing of, an excluding of one's space *for being* because one must always express oneself in terms of the *objects* of one's world, not just to others, but to one's self.

What follows, then, is an inquiry into the way meaning is *suffered*, an inquiry into the personal experience of, the suffering of, the split between generic knowledge—knowledge as it is shared, expressed, communicated, experienced collectively—and knowledge as it is felt, and suffered *intimately*, before the moment that it becomes speech. If the act of personal expression can only manifest generically, if the "I" that speaks or writes can only do so under the constraints of a public language, this dissertation is an inquiry into the failure of personal experience to become shared knowledge. If all expression is in its ontological sense, fictional, this dissertation will seek to demonstrate that the genre "fiction" is the site of the problematic, the site where this failure to reconcile fiction and life is confronted and felt personally, the site where the ontological dilemma is reproduced in practice, and thus, the site of the production of meaning.

Meaning we might say, is the disparity between an inexpressible *intimacy*, a *presence* which we cannot speak about, cannot experience, and a garrulous externality that never quite

reveals what we would like it to *about* this intimate sphere. The intimacy cannot be experienced as intimacy precisely because it must be conveyed in the "language" of externality, must be re-experienced as communication. The "I" itself (not the pronoun, but the experience of subjectivity), as a will-to-express, is already a product of externality. But what is expressed in the will-to-express is *not* the will-to-express, but express*ion*, where something—not really some *thing*, certainly not the "I"—has already withdrawn. Externality, as a world of shared recognition, we might say, occurs *institutionally*, impersonally.

This realm of externality is *space* itself, a space which we always discover as the conflation between the shared world and intimate experience. Human space, I will argue, is always a compromise between this "institution" (that which we are a part of and thus which can never coincide with who "we" are) and an individual; that is, a place, a place for living, is not just what exists between two individual consciousnesses, but is already instilled *inside* of each consciousness as an encounter between that which one is a part of, and the part. What is *lived* is the compromise: the disparity between the desires of the whole (the institution) and the desires of the part (the individual). It is this disparity of desire, I will argue, that *creates* the perception, and thus, the experience, and thus, the *reality* of the space, the structure, we live in as that which *enfolds us and resists us*. Yet, paradoxically, it is only in the *experience* of this space that these two constituents, the institution and the individual, can be delineated, and thus, come into being. It is, then, the ensuing contest for origin between the individual and the institution (each trying to undo, take over, the other) that becomes the experience of "the public," of space. But it is also what becomes the experience of being a self. Space then, becomes not so much something that is actively shared, as much as a shared not-being-there.

In order for this to come to consciousness, however, *something needs to see this*. We need to find a realm in which we are not completely absorbed in ourselves.

We might say that fiction is this realm.

We might say that we are now exiled in fiction.

II. TWO ONTOLOGICAL GENRES

This dissertation is concerned with *the relation of the fictional sphere to that of lived experience*. As such, its range of inquiry will be comprised of various "limit cases," which fall into two categories, or "ontological genres": on the one hand, I consider texts which self-consciously explore fictional production, and as such, reveal the limits of human poesis; and on the other hand, I consider texts which attempt to *unify* this ontological bifurcation between the realms of "fiction" and "reality," to turn these two realms into one. The delineation of these categories will have the aim of illuminating two fundamental ontological ideologies. One of these ideologies views the world as irreparably "broken" into two perspectives—that of the body and that of fiction; the other views the world as ultimately *unified* despite the *fact*, the *condition* that interdicts against the experience of this unity.

Each of these categories of fiction, I will argue, are equally expressions of the ontological menace that bifurcates consciousness into two modalities, each reactions to the suffering that this bifurcation produces, a suffering that results in human consciousness. Every fictional narrative, I maintain, is at some level, the narrative of the coming-into-being of this consciousness. Within each of these two overarching categories, the texts that I consider will offer very different approaches and perspectives toward these respective

ideologies, which, in the last chapter, I will attempt to synthesize in showing that these two ideologies are not fundamentally irreconcilable.

The texts in the first of these two genres fall, in ordinary language, under the rubric of fiction proper: Herman Melville's *Pierre*, and Marcel Proust's *A la recherche du temps perdu*. These are texts that, through representing the *act* of representation, through portraying the suffering involved in attempting to express the writing self, highlight the clash of modalities between lived experience and fiction. Rather than attempt a reconciliation, these texts confront the *limit* of human expression, and, as I will show, attempt to turn the actual text that we read into a *performance* of this limit, bringing it into obtrusiveness either despairingly, in the case of Melville's text, or joyously, in the case of Proust's. These texts, which I term *inside-directed* fictions operate, as I argue all works of generic fiction do, under the sign of the mise-en-abyme, in the condition of the impossibility of bringing the act of writing into the writing. The texts that I consider here bring this issue into the foreground by asking the impossible question, "who speaks?" (or in poststructural idiom, "What is the subject of enunciation?"), exploring the tragic fact that the answer can only be the text itself. I will argue that in fiction the question *must*, as the very impetus of fiction, be asked, though it is a question that cannot be answered, because to approach the answer would be to leave the modality of fiction altogether. The primordial failure in answering this question refers us to its homologue in life: the question "Who am I?" Likewise unanswerable, this question would, in a vicious circle, force us to leave the boundary of bodily experience, and refer us back to the realm of fiction. It is a failure that Proust's and Melville's protagonists, who both attempt this question, are condemned to suffer. And if the fictional protagonists are models for *our* life story, we too, as readers and writers are also condemned to suffer it: the book that the reader holds in his or her hand becomes an emblem of this ontological failure.

What constitutes generic fiction is its essentially fictional perspective: *it does not pretend to ground itself in the reality of the reader or writer*. The unanswerability of the question "Who speaks," however, as much as it is the impetus *for* fiction, is nonetheless untenable. We have seen this since the beginning of the history of narrative, in its concern to establish authority for its telling, from the muse in Homeric narrative to the *mise-en-abyme* of postmodern fiction (which itself draws on techniques of the early novel). The search for an ultimate verisimilitude, for a true representation of life, causes fictional narrative to attempt to transgress itself, a transgression that must always end in failure. This is the futility of the "I am writing," the moment where narrative attempts to bring the act of composition into the representation.

The second genre that I will consider, then, which I call "outside-directed" fictions, are *not* fictions in the ordinary sense, but rather, only in the ontological sense that I have begun to develop here. The texts that I will consider in this regard offer no comfort of a boundary between a *possible* world and this world, are not content to sit on the other side of the boundary between "fiction" and "lived experience." Rather, these texts operate in *one* world, in an attempt on the one hand, to change, perform, even create the conditions *for* reality, and on the other hand, to *resist* the compulsion toward genre formation, to refuse to participate in the "play" that characterizes the history of the genre. If I nonetheless adhere to the label "fiction" for both categories, it is because, though fully aware of the radicality—and even the violence—of the gesture, my concern here is with the notion of an overarching fiction, which encompasses all human production. If "inside-directed" fictions reveal the problem, "outside-directed" permit us to enter into a continuum with the books that we hold in our hand, to revive the question, "Who speaks?" These texts refuse to allow the

answer to bifurcate itself into two modalities of which only one modality, the fictional, contains the grammar by which the response can be formulated.

The texts that I will consider in this regard, share very little in common: one, the Biblical book of Genesis, having been with us now for some 2800 years, has an inaugurative role in the history of fictional narrative. It is, I argue, a (failed) bid to reconcile the disparity between the known and the unknown, a bid to *create* the grounds for understanding, and in doing so, to create the possibility of a "self." The other, George Perec's *W or le souvenir d'enfance,* written some 400 years into the novel's development, turns the history of the genre back upon itself in a bid to *take it apart*, with the intent, I will argue, *to see what it is.* Despite their radical heterogeneity, in both of these texts, the question "who speaks," is referred out of the realm of fiction; both texts attempt to construct a world that reaches into the "real" world of the reader. On the one hand, there is the transcendental deity who inhabits the space of the question, while on the other, the very condition for shared meaning is, melancholically, put to the test: both, however, preclude the genre of fiction as we have come to know it, and yet, both texts, I will argue, point to the ineradicability of the *realm* of fiction.

The "inside-directed" texts re-enact the split into two modalities that human consciousness must originally undergo in arriving at self-consciousness. In their doing so, we are permitted a representation of the suffering and the failure involved in attempting to represent oneself: a suffering that all representation, I argue, tacitly entails. What differentiates the category of "outside-directed fiction" from "inside-directed" fiction is that in the former, *there is no observer of this.* The "outside-directed" fictions attempts to seize the condition of ontological fiction in its purity, without recourse to a fictive observer, without the regress, the mise-en-abyme that holds the genre of fiction secure in its place.

"Outside-directed" fiction, then, is less amenable to being understood as a genre, because its intention is to show, in the case of the Bible, that being is unified and genreless, or in the case of *W ou le souvenir d'enfance,* to subvert the very notion of genre, to destroy the sedimented boundary between the two ontological modalities of fiction and non-fiction. Such works, then, can only operate in the absence of (in the case of the Bible), or in the interstices of (in the case of Perec) the fictional genre. That I nonetheless refer to these categories as "genres" points toward an important distinction that underlies this dissertation: genre here, is to be understood not in its *literary* sense, but rather in its ontological sense, in the way that Edmond Husserl describes a "region" of being, or in the way that Merleau-Ponty refers to a "style" of being. A genre, then, as I understand it here, is the very condition of the failure to represent *oneself* as a living being in the act of creating *in* one's creation. Genre is the condition of living with things, of having to speak in language, of a failure to be present to oneself. Genre, in this ontological sense, is both *fiction* and *sight. All the texts that I discuss here, I hope to show, recognize this "problem."* All of these texts, both "inside-directed" and "outside-directed" are attempts to "repair" the world, because fiction, in its general sense, is a desire for *the whole.* The "inside-directed" texts I discuss here attempt to engage in this reparation homeopathically, through the fictionalizing of fiction, through the attempt to install an observer *on* the fictional observer by which sight, and thus knowledge, becomes possible. The "outside-directed" texts attempt to do so directly, through the bid to cleanse the world of its fictional contaminants.

In every case, the result is failure. Failure as exile (Genesis), as horror (Perec), as revelation (Proust), and as death (Melville). What follows, then, is an inquiry into the relation between creating, failure, and being a self.

III. THE TRAJECTORY OF THE INQUIRY

This dissertation is divided into three parts. The first part presents a theory of fiction as a confrontation between an impersonal, institutional voice with the intimate and incommunicable *experience* of being a subject. The basis for this theory is that the act of writing is incompatible with the content of the written, and that fiction is founded on this incompatibility. The second part puts this theory into practice through critiquing texts from the two ontological genres that I have described. The third part of this dissertation explores the ramifications of these critiques, and in doing so, applies my theory of fiction to that of lived experience.

The first two chapters will be concerned with establishing this notion of the bifurcation into two "genres" of being, that of fiction and that of lived experience. Delineating *ontological fiction as the goal of the inquiry, and the two sub- genres of fiction that I have established as the object of the inquiry*, I attempt to show the role of fiction in subject formation. In Chapter 3, I contextualize these notions in terms of both 20th century narratological theories, as well as in terms of modern philosophical thought. Specifically, I treat two philosophical traditions, that of 19th century hermeneutics, and that of 20th century phenomenology, in arriving at two paradigms for the understanding of a literary text, which I call, respectively, *interpretation* and *intuition*. Interpretation, stemming from the tradition of Kant, and most notably, here, in the work of Schleiermacher and his notion of the hermeneutic circle, presupposes an essential difference between the interpreter and the object of interpretation; the interpreter, who can only perceive the text along a linear trajectory, piece by piece and part by part, finds his/her method in the resistance that the

fullness of the object offers to existence in space and time. The tradition of *intuition,* founded in Husserlian phenomenology, presupposes, on the other hand, a *direct* and immediate connection with the object of inquiry. Here, one is *already inserted* into the world, and understands the object through, as Merleau-Ponty writes, "a certain node of the simultaneous and the successive" (*Visible* 132). In this way, the very notion of a subject's relation to an object is put into question.

The trajectory that my dissertation will take is not to choose one paradigm over the other, but rather, to show that *both* paradigms, though qua paradigms they necessarily exclude each other, together generate the possibility of the experience of human consciousness; that is, if direct access to the objects of our perceptions is illusory, such illusions are an essential component of human consciousness. In Husserl's terminology, illusions are world-defining *things* (*Ideas* 112). Fiction, I argue, is *the fiction that there is an immediate relation with the object*, one which precludes the possibility of interpretation. Yet if fiction in its general sense is the condition of human consciousness, we cannot be content with notions of a "mere" fiction that serve only to uphold a "real" but unexperienceable world to which we are nonetheless subject. Understood broadly, it is the ability to project what is *not now* onto the *now*: the *possible*, and as such, the *not-yet*, then, bends back upon the now, and defines the experience of the present, creating the two regions: a "real" that is the experience of our body in the world, and a "fictional", that nonetheless, we must live with in order to be conscious.

In Part Two of this dissertation, I engage in the analysis of literary texts. In Chapter 1, I examine the Biblical book of Genesis as an inaugural text for modernity and for modern fiction. Beginning in the 17th century, a notion began to be formed that will be crucial to the development of the novel. Arising from out of a profound skepticism in philosophies as

diverse as that of Descartes and Giambattista Vico, and subsequently, in the work of Friedrich Jacobi, came the conviction that appearance and reality were hopelessly irreconcilable. This conviction gains its fullest expression in Vico's proclamation that "*verum esse ipsum factum,*" the true is precisely that which is made (*Ancient Wisdom* 46). The idea here is that humans can never know that which is beyond their sphere; that the work of God must remain forever an unapproachable mystery to the human mind. Humans, then, gain their sense of meaning in the world through the creation of their own proper institutions. Humanity exists in a perpetual inability to arrive at its own origins, and rather than searching *back* for it, must *create* the world as a meaningful place to be. I posit the Biblical account of creation here as a key text for modernity, and as a foundational text for narrative fiction; as an "outside-directed" fiction, it is a bid to reconcile the disparity between the known and the unknown, as a bid to *create* the grounds for understanding, and in doing so, to create the possibility of a "self" as it is understood in modernity.

Genesis is the story of a creation that results immediately in human exile *in* that creation. If, in modernity, humanity exists in the condition of a perpetual inability to arrive at its own origin—a kind of exile—and is condemned to know only what it makes itself, it sees itself essentially as the subject of a sovereign to whom it can never know because it can only know what the sovereign *says;* and if it is this sovereign who is in *control* of the power of speech, then, the creation of the figure of a God as the image of this inability to enter back into the origin, allows for the *possibility of being master over oneself.* God, then, becomes a kind of fiction, to whom, regardless of his fictional status, humanity is nonetheless subject. It is because of this originary bifurcation of ontological regions that I see the Bible as a kind of modernist "arch-fiction." The text itself is founded on a series of exiles: from the originary Garden, from one unified language, and all the way through to the banishing of Ishmael

from the story. In a manner that will inform discussions of other texts, I will look at the way exile is performed *in* the text (beginning by discussing a primal exile of God into the world). Through close analysis of the Hebrew text, and drawing on narratological and stylistic techniques of analysis, I show that the God who creates through speaking creates the foundation for an *impersonal and perspectiveless* narrative voice, which humans appropriate as the very possibility of their own creation. As an "outside-directed" text, I argue that the Bible is a fiction that we are supposed to experience as *real*, but that at the same time, inaugurates human creative power through the possibility of narration.

Chapter Two is devoted to Herman Melville's *Pierre or the Ambiguities*, which takes as its hero a young man named Pierre who is trying to write the novel to end all novels. As an "inside-directed" fiction, Pierre, I argue, serves as a figure for the self, who suffers the clash between institutionality and individual. As a writer trying to write *life* (his hero is named Vivia), he will be condemned to failure because whatever he writes will necessarily exclude *his* life, as the writer. Pierre must play the roles of both the outcast, and the sovereign. He is cast out of the world into which he was born, and he is the sovereign of the world that he creates; he is denied entry into both. It is this unavailable book that must get *re*-incorporated back into lived experience. This comes, however, at the expense of the individual's own *proper* expression. Pierre's attempt to transgress the edict that "one can only know what one makes" only has the effect of emphasizing his imprisonment in it (and in the novel Pierre dies in prison).

Like Melville's Pierre, Proust's narrator in *A la recherche du temps*, the subject of Chapter Three is also writing a book. Unlike *Pierre*, the narrative of *A la recherche* is structured in such a way that at the end, the reader realizes with a certain horror that he or she has just spanned the length, not only of the fictive narrative, but of its fictive narration as

well. I argue that Proust, in his novel, explores the limits of "inside-directed" fiction. Part of the act of writing this book, I argue here, is the experience of the incompatibility, yet inextricability of the faculties that respectively participate in life, and observe life. It is only by turning oneself into a stranger, the narrator tells us, only by alienating oneself from one's "proper place" that one can *see*. The regularity of the world bears "a prosaicness which serves as a deep reservoir of poetry to the stranger who passes through," the narrator says (67). I argue that the grand battle in *A la recherche* is that between *seeing* and *being*. If Proust's hero, *in* the novel, is both the absorbed participant *and* the observer of his participation, we are now forced to reckon with the observer. Yet, as with any time we try to catch sight of the observer, we find, that in the process of doing so, the observer withdraws into the observed. It is this motif, I argue, this reification of the act of observing into *material*, that both permits the book to be written, but ultimately causes it to "fail," a failure which paradoxically, becomes the joyous discovery of the possibility of fiction. Merleau-Ponty's notion of the invisible, then, in the trajectory that my dissertation will take, takes over from Husserl's notion of the phenomenological reduction: if for Husserl, as I argue in Part One, Chapter Three, it is possible to manufacture a perspective *outside* of life in order to see it, Merleau-Ponty's notion of existence as *flesh* causes us to see the physical world that surrounds as already infused with this manufactured perspective: it is only because consciousness requires this fiction of the whole, that we can arrive at the consciousness that we are part of this whole.

In this dissertation, I argue that the rift between fiction and reality is a failure that humans are condemned to suffer. The problematic I consider in the third part, beginning with Chapter Four, is a corollary to this conclusion, which I explore in George Perec's *W ou le souvenir d'enfance*: If generic fiction is an expression of a general human suffering of lack of

vision, there are nonetheless other kinds of suffering to which humans are subject. How then, does the representation of atrocity, of violence by humans against humans, avoid being taken as simply a metaphor for this overarching existential suffering of being alone in the world, to which all humans are subject? The question returns me to the underlying categories of this dissertation: that of "ontological" fiction and "generic" fiction. If all narrative is in a general sense, fictional, what is the place for, the role of fiction in human life? Perec, in offering a book that juxtaposes, in alternating chapters, a fictional narrative and his memoir of becoming a Jewish orphan during Nazi-occupied France, creates an uncategorizable text, where these two modes of discourse are forced to clash against each other. Because it is unclear whether the fiction comes from the memoir, or vice versa, Perec puts the very notion of fiction into question. It is a return to an "outside-directed" fiction, one that attempts to remove the bifurcation between the modalities of fiction and life. Unlike the Bible, however, the author of this work is conscious of this failure to bring about this unity. It is, I argue, the theme of his work: the inability to extricate universal existential suffering, from the particular, individual suffering which only *some* humans must undergo.

Fiction, I conclude, is an endless process of reparation, that involves both a revelation of the condition, and the ability to envision, and create, new forms of human existence, *poesis* in the strongest sense of the word. Fiction, in other words, is vision: it is built out of an "I" that is inexpressible, unavailable to itself. This inability, this inexpressibility is however, the condition of creation. Understanding this requires what Freud calls *Durcharbeitung*, working-through. Ultimately, it is the *failure* of the transcendental viewpoint, the understanding of its fictionality, that one works through: the understanding that one can remain neither completely absorbed *in* life, nor an alienated observer to it; that one *is* both participant *and* observer, in a relation both of mutual exclusion *and* of dialogue.

It is only in this way, perhaps, that the unspeakable (in both the traumatic sense and the existential sense) can be made into the speakable, and that suffering can be given language, and can be experienced and shared, as *poesis*, as meaning.

IV. ONTOLOGICAL AND GENERIC FICTION

> *Someone who can see the whole of reality as a closed circle of meaning in which everything is fulfilled will speak of the comedy and tragedy of life.*
>
> -Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*

Because we live in bodies, we are capable of perceiving the world. As perceivers, we are bound to these bodies, constrained to space and to time. Fiction permits the possibility of transgressing the body and its perceptive constraints: it masters space and time through representing space and time, and in doing so establishes a perspective outside that which envelops the body. But fiction, through the very fact of this transgression, always reminds us of our failure to break the bonds of the body: the body, constrained by its weight as it plods through time, reverberates, as we read, as we write, through the unanchored view that fiction affords us, reminding us that "we" are *here*, and what we read or write is not here in the way that we are: we live in our bodies, but our bodies cannot live in our fictions. The paradox, then, as we have begun to articulate it, is that this vision cannot represent *our* vision. Fiction is the contrary of the body: where fiction sees and speaks, our bodies can do neither, because fiction builds a view *out* of the material of our perceptions, turning them into a language. "Fiction is *about* the body": this is to say that the world seems to be divided

into *seeing* and *being*. The failure, then, is not *in* fiction, but in consciousness, or even in being: it is in the irreconcilability of these two perspectives in everyday experience that brings about the very possibility of fiction.

Fiction, as much as we might say that it exists in order to *transcend* the constraints of being in a body, is nonetheless founded on the exclusion of the body: we can never find our bodies *in* fiction because our bodies are the material from which fiction gets its vocabulary. Fiction issues from *out* of bodies, through bodies, because of bodies, but the body must be silent as the fictive observer takes power. Yet without this capacity for the body to transgress itself, perception itself would *mean* nothing. If fiction, then, gives meaning to our perceptions by offering them a *context* unknown to the body, then fiction takes on a more general significance: if our ability to see *where we are* requires transgressing the bodily perspective, then consciousness itself must be founded on the ability to see the body from outside the body, to build a language out of the body. Consciousness, then, would have to be understood as a kind of fiction; the language that consciousness builds out of the body, then, would be exactly language in its ordinary sense, and fiction would be the currency by which we recognize ourselves and each other in the world. Understood in this way, the perceptions by which we orient ourselves in the world, if we are to understand this orientation as the work of meaning, must also involve an exclusion of the body. To make meaning, then, is to transcend the body by building a world "on the back of" the body. And yet, in order to arrive at this conclusion, we must necessarily gloss past the origin of fiction in its ordinary usage, as literary, or generic, fiction. If everything meaningful that we engage in is in some sense fictional, how then do we account for fiction in its generic sense?

It is not, however, the body that I am concerned with here, but rather, the *silence* that ensues when we try to arrive at an origin of fiction. It is the silence, the void even, that we

arrive at whenever we attempt to find an origin, a subject of perception, a subject for ourselves as perceivers. The concern here is in the origin of this unanchored perspective that makes anything like fiction possible. It is in making *generic fiction* the object of inquiry, I will argue, that we can best understand this overarching fictional perspective, this seeming bifurcation into a modality of seeing which serves the body and a modality of being which *is* the body. The goal here is to inquire into the split between seeing and being as a *primordial* fiction, but this phenomenon only makes itself available for inspection in *generic* fiction, that is, in the description of a world that *does not have to be*. Such an inquiry must begin with a primordial exclusion: if generic fiction is a world that does not have to be, it is a world that must exclude ourselves as readers and writers, who are *necessarily* here. Thus, we must specifically *not* begin with the body because to understand the body as something meaningful to us (but who is "us"?) we have already entered into the domain of this overarching fiction, and have thus concealed our point of entry into the inquiry: we have no place outside to *see*.

Regardless of what the body "really is," we do not view the body as something fictional: it is something that concerns us as a *thing* in the world; we believe in it; it is the foundation for all that we declare meaningful. If we remain in the perspective of the body, we would never be able to arrive at an account of this fiction that remains true to our experience of the world, where our bodies and all that concerns them are precisely what is *not* fictional in the ordinary sense of the term. We need, rather, to find a realm where we can loosen the body from our faith in it. One can never create a narrative that expresses its coming into being. The fictional text, we might say, arises instead of the physical *act* of writing, as the very admission of the impossibility of its inclusion. As fictional, it bears allegiance to an origin that is *not* of the body, that is not subject to the laws which govern

bodies, and yet is nonetheless, a *physically written thing* which seems to come into being only because there is a body which it concerns.

The origin of the text's fiction, we might say, is fiction. The circularity of this proclamation indicates the limit of the human perspective: it points to the necessity that fiction be understood from the perspective of the fact of lived experience; the notion "fiction" means nothing but the fact that it is *outside* the realm of lived experience, that it comes from an unavailable perspective. To trace back a work of fiction to its origin is to pass by the act of writing, to pass by the body, to arrive at a point beyond which no physical thing can manifest. From the perspective of the body, bound to the earth, to space and to time, it hangs from the void: it has *no essential perspective or position*, no body, no being-written. The fictional "position" which makes generic fiction possible (and the need to make a catachrestic trope out of a concrete word in order to express its opposite, already exemplifies the situation) can never be represented, is "spirit" to the text's "body." We cannot get beyond lived experience, and that we engage in *poesis*, that we make fiction, is the expression of this consciousness. The writer in a body cannot narrate. The more one is bound to a perspective in the world, the less one can *tell*. Fiction, though it is *about* the body in the world, pushes the real body away.

To recount requires a starting point, a stance outside the body of the writer, a *fictional* stance. This is to say that fiction, in its generic sense, requires that the very perspective by which it comes into being *already* have been fashioned through an act of *poesis*, and thus of fiction. This time, however, fiction is to be understood in its non-generic sense, if it can be agreed that the term "genre" presupposes something *there* to experience, something to read: thus, content. The content of fiction, then, requires a conception of fiction that *precedes* content. That which I am calling ontological fiction—precisely the fictionality of fiction, or

fiction in its non-generic sense—is diaphanous in relation to the materiality of the narrated content. We call it "ontological fiction" because it is the perspective *of* fiction, the stance by which generic fiction comes into view, and as such, is the very possibility of generic fiction. Yet it is a position hopelessly *outside*, formless, unapproachable: it cannot be represented without becoming generic, without taking its place in content, which would thereby require a stance for *it*.

What seems to be an infinite regress will never be understood if thought in these terms. Instead of a regress, let us think, rather, of an unimpeachable barrier between the ontological and the generic, between the representable *part*, and the unrepresentable whole which is the possibility of the *experience of* the part. The part can *point* to the whole, but it can never express it or embody it. The experience of reading (including reading what we write) comes generically: we can only read the *product* of this fictional position. A regress can be imaginable only insofar as its components can be represented; that is, a regress can only exist as content, and thus, *on this side of the limit of being*. Yet each time a narrative attempts to represent its own origin *in* narrative, the ground slips away into non-materiality, and non-representability. In order to resuscitate this ground, a new narrator has to be theorized. Yet it would make no sense to say that there is a limitless series of narrators of narrators in any given text: a narrator is already *here*, subject to the rules of genre. Rather than attempting to inquire into a regress, which will do nothing to explain *how* a work of fiction comes about, we may do better to try to apprehend the *absolute limit* that the regress, always unsuccessfully, attempts to *transgress*. The idea of the regress here is an attempt to ground fiction, to find the narrator *of* the narrator. A regress, then, assumes that fiction and lived experience exist in the same modalities, or that, at least, these modalities have the same rules. My contention is that they do not. Whereas in "life," one can always seek out a cause for any given

phenomenon, to ask that question *of* fiction is to make a category mistake. The fact that fiction cannot be grounded, that the attempt to come up with a ground for, a narrator of, a fiction is impossible, is precisely what makes fiction fiction in its ordinary sense.[1]

To approach this problem requires a confrontation with this failure of expression, with the unexpressed *qua* unexpressed. The attempt to replace the unexpressed with a narrator, with a subject, will only obscure the possibility of inquiry by repeating this failure of expression. Generic fiction, I will argue, offers the possibility of such an inquiry, precisely because, in accordance with the very rules of its genre, it has no anchor, no perspective, does *not* seek a subject of expression.

Generic fiction, in its ability to transgress the limits of the body, of space and of time, represents the ontologically unapproachable realm of a world without perspective; we could say that it manufactures the impersonal, disembodied perspective that generates the notion of a *world*, in which we, incarnate beings, find ourselves. In this way, one might understand the notion of an infinite narrative regress, of a *mise-en-abyme*, as a trope employed precisely in order to emphasize the limits of representation, to *perform* the inability to represent a perspective that comes from beyond the body, to point toward an unrepresentable breach in modalities that nonetheless is constitutive for our experience.[2] To attempt to represent this origin would only be to endlessly defer it. To begin to *understand* this origin would be to admit that we can never grasp it, that it is constituted *by* an engagement with the ungraspable.

Let us, then, formalize the word "text" to mean precisely the conflation of these two poles: 1) that of the work's physical aspect—the work as the thing written by a living writer—with 2) its fictional content that bypasses the living writer. The term "fiction" here

is used to indicate the *general* exclusion of the writer from the written, which we can understand in even more generalized terms as the failure to be *present to one's body in language*.

Whenever I express myself, whenever I say anything, I have already withdrawn into the intimacy of my body as my words, as even my gestures (which if I want, I can calculatingly use to create my desired affect) act in the world. This is, in fact the case with any act of *poesis* at all: as soon as we bring a thing into the world, we withdraw from it as it lives out its own autonomous existence. At its most extreme formulation, the very world that we live in would have to be characterized as "fictional."

Yet such a resolution, by no means original, can fall prey to the danger of conflating under one rubric the place that we find ourselves in, and the representation of this place that we create. To adhere to this position would be only to arrive at another rehearsal of the radical constructivist position of Vaihinger, and of Glasersfeld, which following in the traditions of Vico and Jacobi, declares that "we can only know what we make."[3] Understood in this way, everything that we can know, whether product or institution, is precisely fictional, because the knowledge that consciousness has available to itself is limited to its own production, and can reveal nothing about the world which contains it. Yet such a radical reduction to the realm of human *poesis*, as tempting as it may be, only re-institutes the regress: what we lack at each moment of such a critique, is exactly a grasp of the consciousness involved in the act of creating, without which, there can be no facility for critique at all of our production and our institutions, and, one might argue, such productions and institutions could not *exist* without this critical faculty. A position which locates itself rigorously *inside* the realm of human production can only perpetuate a never-ending search for a subject *of* this production: with each new "discovery" with regard to the process of human creativity, we move from one rung of the regress to the next under the illusion that

we are arriving somewhere, while all the while the frontier between the *un*expressed and the expressed firmly and ineluctably re-establishes itself. From this perspective, any attempt at knowledge would require a theological, or otherwise transcendental perspective *outside* in order to be able to arrive at any valid knowledge. Yet even the possibility of *arriving* at such a perspective would need to be accounted for in such a way that is beyond the scope of human knowledge, precisely what such an epistemology renders impossible. Short of divine intervention, then, all knowledge beyond our own production would be illusional.

An illusion, however, is not fiction. Fiction *becomes* illusion when we believe in it the way we believe in our bodies, in material, and in the institutions in which we live and to which we are subject. Yet this is precisely what the *genre* fiction does not do: generic fiction loosens our belief in lived experience. In Frege's terms, we could say that it prioritizes *sense* [*Sinn*] over *reference* [*Bedeutung*]. And yet, the distinction between these two terms is not absolute: in generic fiction, one does not do away with the referent, but rather re-refers it to another region, re-orients the discourse from the ontic to the ontological.[4] It requires a reconfiguration of the way we understand the things of our world; in alienating us from our practical orientation in the world, it offers the possibility, if not of knowledge of the world beyond the *part* that we are permitted to experience, at least of confronting the *impossibility of such knowledge*. The site for this confrontation, then, is in exactly the "we" of the "we only know what we make." The impasse at which we arrive when we arrive at "we," is the same impasse that we arrive at when we ask the question "Who speaks?" of a narrative.

It is in the *failure* of generic fiction to manifest *in* lived experience, then, in the bifurcation of the world that it inaugurates, and in the exclusion of the writer and the reader from this realm, that we might find our entry into a critique of human production. From the perspective of a work of fiction, there is *only* an inside. But from *our* perspective, as readers

and writers *of* fiction, there is both an outside and an inside. Insofar as humans are *creators* of fiction, insofar as there is a *genre* that does not bear allegiance to the realm of lived experience, a genre that reappropriates the objects of lived experience, and makes them available to be seen *as our products*, rather than as things that we live with, we could say that fiction reveals the possibility of an outside to our inside, of an ontological bifurcation, which casts us into the world as created subjects. It is through our fictionalizing, we might say, that we first arrive at the apprehension of our stolid, inexpressive bodies, of an unknowable outside that nonetheless seems to be the basis for all our *poesis*. Fiction, then, in loosening the grasp on a referent in the world, loosens as well, our belief in our own subjecthood, by revealing the subject itself as a kind of fiction, and allows us to inquire, however failingly, into something more originary than ourselves *qua* subjects. To say that the subject is a kind of fiction, however, is, as should be clear by now, not to say that the subject is a *mere* fiction, an illusion, which must then refer itself to something more real than it. Rather, it points to the notion that there can be *no origin* to the subject. We wake to consciousness as subjects, and so the attempt to understand "who" the subject is, must take place under the condition of already being a subject.

A radical constructivist perspective would preclude the possibility of generic fiction, because the real world would be no different from the fictional world. Fiction, however, the original fiction of the subject, *operates under the sign of the unknown, the unavailable*, under, we might say, the sign of failure. When we write fiction, as well as when we read it, it is *we*, who cannot enter into the realm of fiction, we who occupy the place of the unknown. This, we might say, permits the possibility of a confrontation with the unknown, even, in a certain sense, a mastery of the unknown: *not*, however, by transforming the unknown into knowledge. Fiction, as the discourse that does not speak of *this* world, as that which

unanchors our things, and re-signifies them, not as *ours* but as a confrontation with an unspeakable other, allows the unknown to be brought to sight and to speech, to come to consciousness as a theme.

As such, non-fiction and fiction in their generic senses, would be understood to have heterogeneous, though essentially connected, origins: while both fall under the ontological rubric "fiction," the realm of non-fiction is concerned with ourselves as subjects, and understands ourselves to exist in the same modality as them. The "voice" of non-fiction (including the voice of this text) has full faith in the world as a structure, and participates in it. The speaker of a work of non-fiction is firmly ensconced in his or her position in the world, and speaks about it with the authority of experience, confident that he or she shares this world with the readers. The "voice" of fiction, however, does not share the world with us, is not a person in the way that we, as readers and writers are. Because the voice of fiction is alien to our worldly being, it permits the possibility of a confrontation with the unknowable and the unspeakable: the very fictionality of fiction points to this impossibility, which is nonetheless constitutive for ourselves as reified subjects in the world. Fiction, not through its *content*, but through our relationship to it as a genre, as a product, is, we might say, the possibility of going *back before* the construction of our identities as beings in the world. In putting the things of our world out of play, fiction permits our things to have a second life, a symbolic life. Yet this re-keying of the thing as symbol, we might argue, allows the possibility of "seeing what our lives our like," of doing the impossible: of standing outside life in order to see it. Generic fiction, understood in this way, does not strive to transform the unknown into the known, but rather, to create an *encounter* with the unknown on its own terms.

If we make a delineation between fiction and non-fiction in establishing them as genres, actual writing, of course, does not always remain faithful to these heterogeneous origins in practice. In terms of non-fiction, we can think, for example, of the regularly recurring "scandals" that occur when work put forward as non-fictional is discovered to have been fabricated. Likewise, we can look to instances in which the genre "fiction" is exploited in order to offer "thinly-disguised" accounts of real-life events. Fictional techniques are used in narrating history, autobiography, etc. It is for this reason that I adhere to the notion of "genre," by which I would like to convey the idea of an intentional structure shared by both writer and readers, very similar to Philippe Lejeune's notion of a "pact" between writer and audience which distinguishes between fiction and autobiography. Understood in this way, generic fiction cannot be defined by technique alone; though fictional techniques certainly offer up signposts that lead us to read something according to certain habits, fiction, in order to be understood as fiction, does not require any particular feature, and it is this that gives it its pliability, its efficacy in being able to represent lived experience in all its vicissitudes. What is required is less something that one finds *in* the text, but rather, the particular form of attention that we bring *to* the text: a loosening, a division of the sense from the referent. In Husserl's terminology, the reader effects a kind of *epoché,* or bracketing, of the referent, an act which we shall discuss in detail in Part One, Chapter Three. For now it will suffice to say that generic fiction is a reading practice, a particular kind of institutionally recognized *poesis*.

What distinguishes generic fiction, then, from fiction in general, is that it brings self-consciousness to human production. This offers the possibility, one which we shall exploit here, of a *function* of generic fiction: *generic fiction, precisely because it does not posit a referent in the world, is the site in which this ontological condition of the exclusion of the writer from the written can be*

investigated. Generic fiction, then, we might say, is faithful to the original exclusion of the writer from the written. If any work that claims to be non-fiction must anchor itself in the world of things and bodies, generic fiction acknowledges that such an anchoring is ultimately impossible. To use a paradoxical formulation, one might say that non-fiction is *more fictional than fiction*. This, because it must *pretend* that the world it is talking about is contiguous with the consciousness that is writing it, in the face of the irremediable withdrawal into intimacy that any act of creation necessitates with regard to the thing brought into being. Generic fiction, by definition, makes no such pretensions: it bypasses the world of the writer, freely admitting that it has no basis, that it is not contiguous with the world which gave it birth. As the productive possibility of ontological fiction, generic fiction, allows ontological fiction to be disclosed

To summarize, I am proposing, then, a threefold distinction in the notion of fiction: 1) fiction in its ontological sense, as the non-bodily perspective that comes about in the necessary exclusion of the writer from the written,[5] and ultimately in the exclusion of the producer from the produced; 2) fiction in its *general* sense, as anything produced from an act of *poesis*, as our regular mode of being in the world: products, institutions, and works that we call "non-fiction"; and 3) fiction in its generic sense, which brings to awareness this originary engagement with fiction, which has the possibility to stand "outside" being, with the goal of *seeing being*. What separates fiction in its general sense from fiction in its generic sense is the self-consciousness involved in its creation, the understanding that that which is created exists in a different modality from that of the creator. In this dissertation, then, my concern is with the relation between ontological fiction and generic fiction, and in particular, I am concerned with those generic fictions that thematize or perform the act of *poesis*.

To say that a text is a thing in the world, then, is to speak of two points of origin, two possibilities, which come together as the text, but which are both stubbornly silent with regard to the text that they constitute, because neither knows that the other exists. As such, each of these origins is necessarily inexpressible, even impossible to the other. The condition of fiction is such that it does not have its genealogy in the writer, but rather, in precisely that which is *not* the writer: in fiction itself. The writer, however, is that which is not fictional, that which lives on the ground, in the body. Neither of these two modalities can exist in the world of the other. It is, however, in the *text*, in the representation of *things* in fiction, that these two genealogies, despite the fact that they exclude each other, intersect. In content, the unrepresentable fictional origin takes the empirical, bodily world as its medium for representation. This offers the possibility of other uses for our bodies and for the things our bodies live in and live with: as symbols for fiction's use, as material for the ontological perspective to consume. This consumption, which the reader experiences as representation, is precisely the transfiguration of the physical world into "content." It is this, we might understand as the work of meaning, and in doing so, understand that meaning is bound up with fiction, in our clarified sense.

But it is here that we might begin to imagine the possibility of a fiction that does not consume, a fiction without objects, a fiction that represents nothing, a bare fiction, one which, without material, we could know nothing about.

The question before us, then, is how to approach this realm this realm of "bare fiction," fiction before it manifests in, as content. What we must specifically interdict is the framing of the question as a search for a spiritual, diaphanous realm of pure consciousness. Rather, we must attempt to be faithful to the *experience* of fiction as conscious beings in the world. Only this way can we approach the failure, and thus, the *suffering* of the inability to

express oneself. Only in this suffering do we glimpse the apprehension of a "pure" fictional realm, from which all expression comes, and of which we can never experience. It is this engagement *here*, as a worldly phenomenon that we must be concerned with. The pure realm of fiction is exactly nothing if not something that confronts the writer as a bodily being, and we can only explore it insofar as it is a phenomenon that manifests in this world. It is the writer, and by extension, the creator, who must confront this ontological menace, who must suffer the inability to express him- or herself, who must *observe* a meaning being brought into being, but who cannot participate it. What the creator suffers is his or her withdrawal in favor of the *product*. The inability to remain *with* the product, to bring the act of creation *into* the creation results in fiction. Generic fiction always fails in expressing this bare fiction, this fiction without content: it must always venture into the world of bodies, of things, and thus, of exclusion.

A thing can only exist in the world insofar as it is recognized by others, shared as a thing together. Generic fiction traffics in things by turning them into representations of the writer, into proxies for the writer's unavailability in his or her work. It is in this way that fiction becomes itself a thing. But as such, it becomes a thing in a very peculiar way: it is a *thing* in the world, recognized, shared by others, that nonetheless requires a redefinition of thingliness, by turning the thing *away* from its objecthood, from its stance as something shared, though without fully ever being able to relinquish itself from this position. Fiction, as the exclusion of the expres*er*, then, is a phenomenon of the fact that human consciousness is existentially discrete, while at the same time, intersubjectively constituted: the experience of being an individual, can only be expressed in terms of the *things* we share, the things we collectively recognize as things: a thing, then, is only a thing generically. Fiction in its generic sense, we might say, expresses this *original* fictional constitution of

human consciousness, is the product of an originary *failure* to express, to make manifest, the personal. If "fiction" and "lived experience" are two heterogeneous modalities of existence, we might say that the text of generic fiction is their conflation, the place where consciousness grapples with this heterogeneity. Yet if the expression of a consciousness can only manifest in something in the world, in a thing, in a product *of* consciousness, then it is this conflating work of consciousness that produces the conflated, fictional text.

Something, then, is *passed over*. Something is forever unavailable. But it is the pursuit of this unavailable something, the identification with this something, as it moves from "floating pre-thing" to visible constituent of our world, that makes us who we are as subjects. What, then, is this unavailable thing that triggers this failed identification, this passing, that moves from the inexpressible individual experience, to the shared experience of being—in space, in time, and in language—by which we first come to consciousness of the inexpressible? It is in the very failure of bringing this inexpressibility into speech, that expression becomes possible in the world. Consciousness, then, would be the conflation of this unavailable fictional perspective, with the things that we live with and by which we orient ourselves, identify ourselves, in the world.

The work forms a unity precisely through excluding the act of writing, by *negating* the confrontation with the unexpressed that constitutes the act of writing. The act of writing, and thus, bodily time, if it could be included in a fictional narrative, would of course destroy that unity, because it would destroy precisely what is fictional about the fiction: its fictional origin. *Fiction negates* the inexpressible by replacing it with meaning. But the experience, then, of writing *or* reading a work of fiction, then, is the experience of suffering the failure to inhabit this unified world. Writer and reader alike must locate themselves on *that* side of the unified fictive world, and thus, writer and reader must confront their exclusion.

This failure, I will argue, is the very basis of the possibility of fiction. Fiction expresses our estrangement from the meaning that we make, the condition that meaning, in a certain sense, *is not for us*.

Content must move in a trajectory *away* from the body, away from the fact and materiality of writing. It does so, we might say, because content does not operate in the service of the writer, but in the service of *narration*. Its genesis, then, is not in the body, but in ontological fiction. Here we arrive at a critical distinction, one which will form the basis of this inquiry: the writer and that which he or she writes, come from heterogeneous genealogies, each with their proper allegiances. *The author's allegiance is to the writing. The narration's allegiance is to the content.*

What might confuse our ability to think of these traditions as heterogeneous, will serve as the starting point of this inquiry: generic fiction only exists because there are flesh-and-blood writers. We are inclined to think that fictions are *our* fictions, that they exist in *our* service. This is because fiction uses for its material bodies and the things that bodies live with in the world. It is clear that it can do nothing else: a fiction that did not have "reality" as its basis would be unimaginable. If fiction can only traffic in things, then clearly, the things of the body and the things in fiction exist in an essential relation. This, of course, we do not contest. What is of interest, however, is that each ontological tradition, that of the body, and that of fiction, put this materiality to different uses.

If we locate ourselves in the body, and understand ourselves as beings confined to space and to time, we also understand fiction as the response to this confinement: where we have only a limited "now," located somewhere between an unrememberable beginning and an unavailable end, fiction offers the possibility of a broad view, that moves from beginning to end. Its concession to the body is that it must be read in time. Fiction, then, can do what

that life cannot. If the writer cannot include the act of writing in his or her narrative, we might begin to understand that this is precisely because fiction is not subject to the same constraints of time and space to which the body is, and, we might even say, exists to compensate for this privation. On the other hand, from this perspective, fiction can only be understood in a privative mode: it only serves to emphasize the limits of "reality." Yet if we can begin to distinguish between these two genealogies, then we no longer have to look at fiction as something that serves reality. Rather, fiction begins to assume its own ontological dignity, alongside that of the body. We might then say that generic fiction, is the site of mediation between the two ontological traditions: generic fiction can only manifest as content in making use of "life," of the things of the world, of the body and all that the body lives with.

V. FROM LABOR TO MEANING: HEIDEGGER'S BROKEN EQUIPMENT AND ARENDT'S "WHO"

In order to understand the relation between the world of generic fiction and this world, the world of lived experience, we need to first trace the movement of meaning from ontological to generic fiction. We begin, phenomenologically, in accepting that the things that populate our world our meaningful to us, in understanding that there is no thing in which our consciousness is not already implicated. Yet what I want to show here, is that things acquire their meaning only through taking a circuitous route that leads through fiction, in order to return back to us as our experience of reality as meaningful. If fiction is, as I have been saying, an untenable, impossible "position" on a life that we are already *in*,

then we arrive again at "seeing" and "being" as irreconcilable. Either we stand above the totality of our experiences, looking down upon it, paralyzed in our ability to *act*, or we stand *in* our lives, possessing motility, but unable to see where we are. The condition of paralysis: what we *see* when we achieve this "fictional" vantage is not our own lives precisely, but paradoxically, because being, in the way that we are using the term, precludes seeing. Yet at the same time, because we could not otherwise *be* as we in fact are as conscious beings without such a vantage, being must, at the same time, include seeing in its breadth; it must, then, include this vision that cannot act. Being then, insofar as it is implicated in lived experience, seems to acquire conflicting significations: it comes to mean the totality of being, that which, for us as *part* of being, is necessarily beyond our experience; but it also comes to mean the realm that is given to us as incarnate beings: lived experience. Being, then, is both understanding, and action. But because we cannot act without having at least a provisional idea of the structure in which we act, this *unexperienceable* totality is nonetheless implicated in our *experience* of being.

In *Being and Time*, Heidegger famously defines his subject, Dasein, as that being for whom being is an issue (Dasein in its ontic structure is ontological) (34). Heidegger argues that it is only through a *failure* in its experience of the ontic world that Dasein first comes to transcend its consciousness of the ontic and achieve *knowledge* of its ontological structure (which is the very possibility of Dasein having an ontological structure at all). The world, first and foremost must work as a whole for Dasein. We understand things only first and foremost only in their *relation* to us, and in that relation, the world assumes a totality.

Heidegger argues, however, that this totality remains out of Dasein's consciousness until something *disrupts* it: in order for the world to come into view, something must *break*, be *missing*, or *be in the way*. These obstacles, which Heidegger calls "conspicuousness,"

"obtrusiveness," and "obstinacy" respectively, impede Dasein's ability *in* the world, but enable it to understand that it *is* in a world. Only then, when the things in the world cease to function as they are supposed to, does the "totality of references," that is, the world, come into view. It is at this critical moment in Heidegger's account of being, that Dasein acquires its capacity for ontological understanding: the thing in the world that ceases to work becomes re-referred from the ontic to the ontological. It becomes (or can become) a sign *for* the ontological condition that Dasein finds itself in. "A sign," Heidegger writes, "is something ontically ready-to-hand which functions both as this definite equipment and as something indicative of the ontological structure of…referential totalities, and of worldhood" (114).

Any time that Dasein *projects* his understanding onto the world that it lives in, we might say, it creates the conditions for this "paralyzed" sight; it allows for the possibility of a world to come into view, albeit one that we cannot participate in *now*. This is because a projection necessitates something not (yet) manipulable, not part of the repertoire that constitutes Dasein's agency. Yet it is in the very condition that Dasein, as a being who projects itself *onto* the world, *cannot* participate fully in the world, that the world can be brought to view and to understanding at all. What is needed, however—and this, as we shall discuss below, is absent in Heidegger's account—is something that cannot be repaired or righted, something that remains perpetually "broken," such that the world can remain in view. In the vocabulary that we have been using here, we could say then, that Dasein understands itself, and *is* itself through recourse to fiction, if fiction is precisely the thing that we don't have available to us *here*. Fiction, because it requires that we take the stance of observer at the expense of *using* the world as participant, bifurcates being into observer and

participant and renders them mutually exclusive. In this process, the possibility of signification—the faculty of sight itself—gets established.

Seen in this way, the function of generic fiction would be to provide us with the understanding that we live in a world (the defining feature of Dasein), by *putting the world out of play*, by making it perpetually conspicuous or obtrusive. Fiction offers a world that exists as a structure, that is, as a "totality of references," albeit one that we cannot participate in. It is, then, precisely this paralyzed stance that fiction provides that creates ontological understanding. Here, we could say that generic fiction draws on the very possibility of a primordial ontological fiction, in creating a structure that brings it into view. Because a work of generic fiction can *never* open itself to participation by a reader (or writer), it remains forever out of play. The things, then, that one finds in the world of a fiction (its characters, its plot, its resolution) are forever estranged from the beholder, who must see them only from *this* world. Because these things can never be brought back into play in this world, their use-value as things diminishes, as their value as signs increases. The fictional thing, then, thus draws on the thing that is something useful to us in this world, and in the act of putting it out of play, re-refers it to the ontological realm. Yet, as we shall soon see more clearly, we must be careful not to ascribe to fiction the status of a "tool" for showing us the world-as-totality. To see it as such would be to turn fiction back into a thing among things, and would thus, lose its ability to put the world out of play in order to apprehend it. Fiction must show itself to be of a different order than our experience, one which we, in this world, have nothing to do with. It is only when we arrive at an impasse with regard to the fictional thing's utility in *this* world, what I will call here *suffering*, that we can begin to learn, surreptitiously, from fiction, *what* the structure of our world is. It is precisely because fiction cannot *be*, that it gains its vantage on being.

To say, however, that fiction re-refers things from the realm of the ontic to the realm of the ontological, however, does not mean that we *begin* with the thing in "life", and only later, see it as a symbol for the world as an ontological structure. To maintain this would put forward the uncritical notion that the "ontic" and the "ontological" inhabit discrete spaces. Rather, the claim here is that in referring a thing to the ontological realm, we already see the thing as meaningful *here*, where the epithet "meaningful" already indicates its ontological status. Thus, it would be erroneous thinking to claim that the thing only *later* acquires ontological currency. Rather, if we say that the thing-in-fiction is re-referred to the ontological realm, it is only to indicate that we *experience the thing unhabitually*, in its obtrusiveness, for example, in such a way that the world that was always already there comes into view. Things, in life or in fiction, are only meaningful because they have an ontological structure: the very fact that we can refer to, isolate, delineate a thing is already emblematic of this condition; the act of putting the thing out of play, however, permits the thing to return to us *not* as a thing that closes off the world, but rather, that creates the possibility for it to be beheld; to understand it then, *not as a thing, but as a representation of the beholder; not as an object of perception, but as perception itself coming-into-being.* What we do in fiction, then, is what we already do, and have always done; it is what has permitted us to live in a meaningfully structured world. Generic fiction, however, re-creates this phenomenon, while at the same time, allowing us to remain observers: to put *ourselves* out of play.

Now, the experience of the world "proximally and for the most part," as Heidegger would say, is not that of the ontological, but is concerned with the ontic, with things as we use them. If, then, we are to be able to engage in this act of re-referral from the realm that we *know*, to the realm that structures us, the thing, in its *normal* way of being understood,

must be represented as such. This is the challenge that generic fiction, *if it is to be meaningful to us*, must always, however certain of its failure, take up.

Yet if generic fiction always fails in its efforts to achieve representation of "life," precisely because it propels us out of the "normal" engagement with the things that it represents, we must, then, offer an account of how it comes to exist, and why it continues to play an important role in the maintaining of, and production of, meaning in our lives. It is its believability that generates the possibility for our absorption in fiction; it is its ability to be *experienced* beyond the fact of its artificiality. If fiction only produces, as it approaches the *mise-en-abyme* which underscores its artificiality, the anxiety of its failure to represent life for the reader or writer, it nonetheless permits, at least for the duration of the spectacle that it presents, a life in itself, a life resolved: one that has a beginning, a middle, and an end. It is the very production of this finitude that permits us to see our lives through a fictional lens. "The real story in which we are engaged as long as we live has no visible or invisible maker because it is not made," writes Hannah Arendt in *The Human Condition*. "*Who* somebody is or was we can know only by knowing the story of which he is himself the hero" (186). It is only given these conditions—the apprehension of a structure, and the ability to place oneself in it as a subject—that anything like meaning is possible.

This points to a failure, not only *in* fiction, but *between* fiction and life. If the "who" can only be understood after the fact, at the end of the story, the apprehension of the totality of the structure by which the "who," the subject, gets constituted, always comes outside of life, too late for life itself. The "totality of references," and thus, subjecthood itself, becomes relegated to the fictional realm. Fiction, then, serves not only to reveal this totality of references, but reveals that this totality of references and the subject that it creates is indeed a fiction! But it is, nonetheless, fiction that permits the very possibility of the structure by

which the "who" finds him/herself *in* life, before the story is finished, and thus permits the possibility of a kind of "seeing" in being. Fiction is *unlike* life, in that it has a structure that the experience of life does not offer. Yet it is *like* life, insofar as life achieves its structure through this fictional engagement. Meaning, we might say, is precisely this disparity. But if the totality of references is a fiction, then fiction inasmuch as it reveals the truth of this condition, conceals the crisis of meaninglessness that comes from an inability to partake of the whole *in* life. If fiction has been characterized as an "escape," it is precisely an escape from meaninglessness and into meaning. If fiction produces a meaningful world that we cannot partake of, we might say then, that it is precisely this *relationship* with fiction, this desire to produce that never results in a product that imbues lived experience with meaning. In other words, if there is a law that precludes the narrator from entering qua narrator into his/her narrative, and if it follows from this law that we can never enter qua ourselves into our productions, the world (and we as subjects) gets produced only out of this disparity. Generic fiction, we might say, reveals the generic quality, the conventional constitution of the life we live *in*, through concealing the inability to experience life *beyond* genre, beyond convention. It reveals, then, the impersonal foundation for our intimate experience of ourselves, and of being in general. We might say that fiction can reveal only because its function is to conceal. It is in the disparity between the total fictional world—the fictional world as product—and the incomplete *experience* of a life that is forever being produced. The ability to understand the "who" comes from the very fact that this "who" is put out of play, that it may be seen.

And yet, the action involved in "putting out of play" does not provide a simple transcendental vantage by which the world becomes meaningful. Rather, it is in the suffering of the inability to *act* in the putting out of play—the subjection to the law that

prohibits the producer from entering into the product—that meaning arrives. The transcendental vantage, then, as unavailable in lived experience, manifests itself in our fictionalizing. It is generic fiction—*because* it is inoperable in life, because it cannot be used the way we use a machine or a chair—that allows *this* story, which is not the story told *in* fiction, to be told.

Yet it is not, of course, always seen, and the fact that fiction can be understood to serve an ontological "function," does not mean that it will consistently operate in accordance with this function. In everyday language, fiction is normally understood as "that which is not real." Indeed, our absorption in a work of fiction is founded almost entirely on this distinction. If, indeed, our experience of reality is conventional, and thus, implicated in fiction, the ordinary notion of fiction allows the experience of the everyday to appear seamlessly *real*, because it is *fiction* which marks the edge of reality. We exclude fiction from reality, declaring it *not* reality, thereby attributing "reality" to everything that is not fiction. From this seamy side of the fictional relation, we arrive again at the formation of the subject, the creation of the "who."

The "who" is a product. Yet insofar as the "who" is what we call ourselves, it is, as Arendt argues, not "us" who make it, and this is indeed the crisis that we confront, either through the revealing or concealing that fiction makes possible. As we shall see in the discussion of the book of Genesis, whether fiction is understood to reveal or conceal has enormous consequences for *this* world. For now, however, let us attempt to understand the particular ways in which the making of generic fiction is different from making in general.

In normal making, the act of producing becomes elided, because the product does precisely what lived experience does not: it has a function; it is purposive. It is only through our products that we can imbue the meaninglessness of daily existence with a purpose. Yet

insofar as ordinary production serves everyday existence, meaninglessness does not get transformed into meaning; the "who" does not come into view, and insofar as this is the case, there can be no "who," no subject formation, no consciousness of existence in a structure. And yet, *meaning, if it is to be found, must be found only in the act of production, because this is where we find ourselves as subjects.* That the product is always alienated from us, gives us our first inkling that the subject, which is a product, is a product of alienation.

We cannot make the "who" because the "who" is us. We are both makers of products, and products ourselves, the making of which is forever elusive, unavailable to us. Fiction permits to us a model, by which we come to understand what it means to make, by allowing us to be in the position of makers of things that we cannot use. It is in fiction, then, that we can transcend the "we can only know what we make," not by making, but by creating an epistemology for ourselves that includes, that is even founded on, the unavailability of the maker to the made. When Arendt says that the "who" is not made, we can understand this to mean that *we* are the ones who make, and thus *who* we are is subject to an impersonal force that falls out of the vocabulary proper to human creation, if one first needs to be a subject—*to know what one wants*, to apprehend structure—in order to create.

In *The Human Condition*, Arendt attempts to show the genealogy of the different modalities by which we relate to others and to the things that populate our world. Her account addresses this complex relationship between the act of making, and our identity as makers. She proposes three modalities that together constitute the phenomenon of the human, which she calls labor, work, and action. Labor, as Arendt defines it, comprises the realm of all that pertains to the necessary maintenance of the human body. It involves the perpetual toiling to which the human is subject, but also the bliss of endless, rhythmic, erotic repetition (139). The satisfaction of labor is not that of accomplishment, but rather, the

timeless, because endlessly cyclical, engagement with the natural world. Work pertains to the artifice of human production; it is the "activity which corresponds to the unnaturalness of human existence, which is not imbedded in, and whose mortality is not compensated by, the species' ever-recurring life cycle" (7). Work is the realm of the product, and as such, excludes the *act* of production: the product of work consumes, replaces the act of laboring, so that that which work produces, and the labor involved in the production, exist in disparate modalities. Finally, action, for Arendt, is the sphere of plurality. Unlike labor and work, the realm of action occurs between people, and not between a person and material. In laboring, the human's primary contact, Arendt argues, is with nature. In working, it is the *world* that the human is concerned with. In action, however, labor and work become re-signified so as to be understood in the context of a shared engagement with the "web of the acts and the words of other men" (188) and is founded on more than mere survival (labor) or utility (work): it is the order of the political, where the political is expressly understood to mean not the protection of society, but the possibility of freedom.

These three realms are built out of each other, each usurping the place of the other while, nonetheless, coexisting with each other. The laboring human (what Arendt calls *animal laborans*), lives in the world created by the working human (*homo faber*). Likewise, "the meaningfulness of this world…is beyond the reach of *homo faber*" (156), which, solely concerned with the product, has "an innate incapacity to understand the distinction between utility and meaningfulness" (154). In both labor and work, then, the experience of life is unending and thus, meaninglessness: in labor, because life consists solely of consistently repeated tasks; and in work because "there is no way to end the chain of means and ends and prevent all ends from eventually being used again as means" (154). Only in the realm of action, of plurality, can meaning appear as an end in itself. This is because, just as in the

realm of work, labor is re-signified in its integration into the paradigm of the product, so too in the realm of action, the *thing* that labor produces becomes re-referred from its function as a thing to be used, to a thing that serves to mediate between the innumerable perspectives that comprise the very phenomenon of the human. Each of these aspects of the human, we might say, is built on the back of its "more primitive" modality, turning something that could otherwise not be identified, delineated, into a structure whereby it can be seen; each generates their own system of signification. It is only in the realm of action that this signification comes to consciousness, however, and only *because* there is a realm of action that anything like work or labor can be conceived of as such.

If the "highest" realm of existence in Arendt's schema is that of action, then it is only through the transformation of the product from the realm of work into the new modality that the work, and thus, the world comes to be meaningful. The product, just as it transforms labor into utility, likewise becomes the "raw material" by which one's consciousness of being a subject is achieved.

Unproductive labor, Arendt shows, was derided during the enlightenment and the period of industrialization; this contempt for labor was to be the basis of the economic systems of both Adam Smith and Karl Marx (86). In this way of thinking, the institution of slavery was contemptible because, as Smith wrote, slaves generated no product: "that portion of his revenue which a rich man annually spends is in most cases consumed by idle guests and menial servants who leave nothing behind them in return for their consumption" (438). It is only in the act of transforming raw materials into something durable, which labor can accomplish only in effacing itself, only putting itself in the service of work, that value is generated. For Arendt, this value can only be transformed into meaning, through a similar act of transformation. It is for this reason that Arendt stresses the notion of the story in the

realm of action: the story is the promise of a product that we have not made. Its very constitution as promise, and thus, as incomplete, is what permits it to enable the human to discover itself as a subject. The story permits the *process* of its constitution to be preserved, precisely because the product never comes into being. The story, then, as product, remains forever, out of play. It is only in this dissociation from itself, as both process and product, that the human can arrive at an understanding of itself as producer, and that the things that it produces can be understood as meaningful. What is produced in the realm of action, however, is, then, subjectivity itself.

It is this unfinished story of the subject, then, that must take completed form in generic fiction. Generic fiction is a model of this ever-unfulfilled promise. In fiction, we are permitted a model of just this creation of the subject. The model works, however, not through generating the notion of the fictional subject as a proxy of ourselves, but rather, through the very experiencing of the inability of *ourselves* as subjects to enter into our creation. It is the very experience of the "who" as *not us* that permits an apprehension of ourselves as subjects, which is, then, the realm of the meaningful. What is required, then, is an "engagement" with an impersonal, or absent "creator," a confrontation with a modality that is alien to our experience: the story as a finite object whose boundaries are visible. In this way, narrative is indeed the "circumference of a circle that has no point but the boundaries of your desire." It is this desire, *through the work of fiction*, that gets transformed into structure. With that, the subject has a place.

Generic fiction, however, is concerned with the quotidian realm, with the realm of the unproductive. It must *preserve* this unproductivity, as proper to the experience of the human, while nonetheless transforming this realm into a product. It must, however, be a special kind of product: one that we cannot *use*, a product that is put out of play. It is, in

fact, only through this putting-out-of-play that the unproductive realm of ordinary human experience can get preserved, can be saved from becoming something that we use. It must do this, because insofar as something is useful, it cannot *signify* anything beyond itself. That fiction "looks like" life, but is not life, is precisely what allows it to refer the thing to its ontological, rather than ontic, genesis, that is, to the formation of the subject, rather than to the realm of the subject proper. It is we, as readers and writers, who experience this discrepancy between the resolved world of fiction, and the forever incomplete and fragmented realm of lived experience. We might say that, in creating a horizon, a structure, generic fiction creates a product out of unproductivity, while surreptitiously preserving the realm of the unproductive. It is this that imbues the unproductive with meaning, that gives signification to the endlessly cyclical labor that necessarily accompanies all human production and activity. If fiction excludes ourselves as incomplete beings, it nonetheless valorizes this incompleteness, by offering the notion, without recourse to an impossible transcendental perspective or in a faith in a creator, that structure is *necessary* to our existence. If, as Georg Lucáks writes, "the novel is the epic of a world that has been abandoned by God" (88), it is because it knows that it cannot answer the question "Who speaks?" anymore than we can answer the question ourselves without recourse to tautology. The novel, in fact, is not interested in an answer per se, but rather, in what the question means to us. The "I am writing" which drones continually—and meaninglessly—behind every narrative is the confirmation that there *can* be no transcendental perspective, no God that can be reached through the mechanics of our own epistemology. The best that the novel can do then, is to represent the meaningless labor of the everyday, and to transform it into a product that cannot be used *by us*. Only then can one begin to approach the us as a made thing that is made by no one. "The novel hero's psychology is demonic," Lucács writes; "the objectivity

of the novel is the mature man's knowledge that meaning can never quite penetrate reality" (88).

CHAPTER 2:
THE IMPERSONAL

I. DUELING PRESENCES: PROUST AND SAINTE-BEUVE

> *The* I *of the one who writes is not the same as the* I *which is read by* you.
>
> -Roland Barthes, "To Write: An Intransitive Verb?"

The writer writes. The written is brought to sight and eclipses the writer, relegates the writer to an alien modality. To speak of the text's narration as an entity apart from that of the real author is to speak from the side of the created, and is, thus, to bypass the question of the bifurcation into two incompatible worlds that a narrative, written by a *person*, effects when it comes into being. Whether anthropomorphized into an "implied author," or treated more diplomatically as a "narrating agency,"[1] the writer-who-is-not-an-author remains a created being, a contingent being, a *character* in a story whose act of creation continues to elude us. Such an entity permits the *structure* of a narrative to come into view, but it nonetheless conceals what fiction is, for *us*, the *desire* that the phenomenon of fiction manifests.

The desire: The return to the "I am writing," the return to the subject. This, we might say, is the subject of all fiction, *even though the "I am writing" is meaningless*. Such a return is impossible, because fiction requires, *is*, meaning. Correspondingly, we could say that the subject of all being is a return to an equally futile "I am being," which would lead us only to the empty mechanics of survival. We make the distinction between life and fiction as if we

could move from one realm to the other, when in fact each is implicated in the other. And yet, the distinction must nonetheless be made because this *is* our experience.

Yet to move away from the "I am writing," or the "I am being" and into the world of production, of *things*, does no more to imbue existence with meaning; the "who" cannot be discovered as a thing among things. The act of making the distinction between the incomplete quality of lived experience, and the *structure*, the beginning-middle-end that fiction offers creates the field in which meaning must appear. Ultimately, what we find is that it is not the *totality* that fiction offers that gives it the possibility to be "like" life: it is not that lived experience comes with a hidden structure which we somehow discover in fiction, but rather, in the irrevocable *fact* that the totality that fiction offers is *unlike* life which renders fiction forever incomplete in its totality, and which causes it to always fail in its endeavor to represent life as it is lived. Understood in this way, meaning comes from neither fiction nor life, but through their juxtaposition. Ultimately, fiction has no ground; its authority hangs in the void. It makes us believe things that simply are not *here*, and it does so without compunction. It is only, then, through what occurs between fiction and life that real verisimilitude can be achieved, that life can be represented as such, and only in this way, then, that the desire that propels every work of fiction toward its resolution can be actualized *in this world*. It is through this *encounter* that we can begin to understand fiction and lived experience as existing on a continuum, in a shared modality. It is through the establishing of a shared space between life and fiction that we can begin to approach the notion of a subject that is not made by us, and it is only in this way that we can transcend the dictum of the "we can only know what we make." Meaning, then, is not concerned with things as such, but rather, in the promise that they will serve, *not* as functional things, but rather, to tell the story of the "who." As such, meaning requires confrontation with an absence.

Here, we can begin to see how the compulsion to see the voice of the story as a person obscures the possibility of allowing this confrontation *with* fiction to come into view: the notion of an "implied author" obscures the *dissimilarity* between fiction and life. Insofar as the idea of the implied author can serve to delineate the artifice of fiction, and to distinguish the voice of narration from that of the real author, it can serve as a useful narratological—and above all pedagogical—tool. However, insofar as one is concerned with fiction as a *phenomenon*, the implied author offers plenitude instead of absence. Fiction operates through offering a *promise* of totality, a totality that mirrors the "who" of the reader. A promise, however, founded on *desire*, and thus, on something that is not (yet) here, must take the *confrontation with absence* as its basis.

Writing and being, then, must be a constant promise of, and desire for, the "I am," because it is only in this desire that the world of things can be transcended, that things can be re-signified from the practical to the existential, from the ontic to the ontological. This, in the face of and despite the meaninglessness of the "I am." This desire, then, is the desire *of* the subject, *for* totality, from the place of an *absence* of totality. As an expression of this absent totality which it is charged with representing, the voice of fiction must come from *before* us, as subjects. It must, then, come from beyond the *personal* experience of life as it is lived. It must be impersonal.

To introduce our discussion of the notion of an impersonal "voice" of fiction, we can profit by returning to a literary conversation that takes place on the cusp of the era of 20th century narratological theory and its structuralist concerns. It is the occasion upon which Marcel Proust famously rejects Charles Augustin Sainte-Beuve's claim that the understanding of a literary text must be grounded in knowledge of the life of the author. Sainte-Beuve writes (and Proust quotes):

> Tant qu'on ne s'est pas adressé sur un auteur un certain nombre de questions et qu'on n'y a pas répondu, ne fût-ce que pour soi seul et tout bas, on n'est pas sûr de le tenir tout entier, quand même, ces questions sembleraient les plus étrangères a la nature de ses écrits: que pensait-il de la religion? Comment était-il affecté du spectacle de la nature? Comment se comportait-il sur l'article des femmes, sur l'article de l'argent? Était-il riche, pauvre; quel était son régime, sa manière de vivre journalière? Quel était son vice ou son faible? Aucune réponse à ces questions n'est indifférent pour juger l'auteur d'un livre et le livre lui-même, si ce livre n'est pas un traité de géométrie pure, si c'est surtout un ouvrage littéraire, c'est-à-dire où il entre de tout. (126)[2]

To this Proust responds that work and author cannot be understood on a continuum with each other:

> [U]n livre est le produit d'un autre *moi* que celui que nous manifestons dans nos habitudes, dans la société, dans nos vices. Ce moi-là, si nous voulons essayer de comprendre, c'est au fond de nous-mêmes, en essayant de le recréer en nous, que nous pouvons y parvenir (127).[3]

Sainte-Beuve believes that he can find the "autre moi" in the everyday "moi." For Proust, one has nothing to do with the other. Proust would not deny that information about a writer's life could reveal something about the sociology of writing. But to remain in this *social* realm would be to deny, to negate the existence of an intimate realm that comes *through* the social, but is *not* the social. What is bypassed is the interest of the work itself, the very reason why one would engage in researching the life of a writer to begin with.

The paradox here is that Proust engages in the exact same endeavor *in fiction*. His novel is concerned with exactly the pinpoint description of habits, of vices, and of seemingly insignificant social interaction, so much so, that the work has often been (mis)taken for an autobiography, or a memoir, rather than a novel. He excoriates Sainte-Beuve for his hope that "Un jour viendra, que je crois avoir entrevu dans le cours de mes observations, un jour où la science sera constituée, où les grandes familles d'esprit et leurs principales divisions

seront déterminées et connues" (125), while at the same time, it is his narrator's "vocation" to devote hundreds of pages, with an Aristotelian zeal, to the botanic or zoological examination and classification of the traits of aristocratic families, homosexuals, Jews and others, to their vices, their daily habits, and their overall behavior in the world. Why, we may ask, is it acceptable to categorize, classify, and analyze the traits of a fictional character and not that of a historical person?

The difference is that the world that Proust, and the writer of fiction in general, creates exists in a different world than we do, one to which we have no essential ties, one which we cannot access in our everyday being. As such, it is not *our* world that Proust's narrator describes, and precisely because it is not our world, we are permitted the vision and the context by which to make *meaning* out of these analyses. To appeal to something *real*, that is, contiguous with our lives, does nothing to move from the incomplete experience of the everyday, into the totality of the structure out of which meaning arises. In order for this to happen, the subject of the analysis must exist in another region. "En réalité," Proust writes, "ce qu'on donne au public, c'est ce qu'on a écrit seul, pour soi-même, c'est bien l'oeuvre de soi" (131).[4] Insofar as the writer is a member of the public, he is writing for *this* modality; he exists as an anonymous thing in the world among things. Insofar as the writer is writing for him- or herself, the writer is engaging in an act of transformation, propelling the things he writes about into a significance which can never be experienced in the products, the things, that we live with and share. It is the self which we must *re*create, Proust argues, that permits the very possibility of creation, and the tools that the self must use for such re-creation are the things of this world, that which we find, here, already created. In order for the world to be invested with meaning for us, or rather, in order for the world which we find ourselves in to *have been* invested with meaning for us, the empirical body of

the writer, and all his or her empirical and documentable engagements with the world, must be eclipsed by his or her re-creation.

The fault of a critic like Sainte-Beuve, then, is to confuse the modalities of life and fiction, to treat them as if they existed on a continuum. But, as will become the subject of Proust's great work, it is in the suffering of the disparity of these modalities, that the work is really about. Eugen Simion writes that Proust is "the first who has the revelation of an *abyss* separating two elements which were considered by nineteenth-century criticism to determine and explain each other, one being the cause, the other, the effect" (51). Yet in order for one to write the "oeuvre de soi," one must use what one has available: the "meaningless" things of lived experience. What, as Simion argues, Proust abhorred in Sainte-Beuve, was not the method itself, but rather, the very notion that a deeper self can be found at all. One might say that Proust writes in the absence of the possibility of arriving at deep knowledge of a person. Rather, for Proust, it is only through the route of showing the self in *all its superficiality*, that one can arrive at anything like deep knowledge at all. It is only through transforming the superficiality of life into fiction that intimate experience can be shared. In this way, the *product* that the author creates, surreptitiously preserves all the *labor* of everyday experience, all that comprises the realm of being a person subject to the world, by *putting it out of play*. He writes in *Le temps retrouvé*:

> Et je compris que tous ces matériaux de l'œuvre littéraire, c'était ma vie passée; je compris qu'ils était venus à moi dans les plaisirs frivoles, dans la paresse, dans la tendresse, dans la douleur, emmagasinés par moi sans que je devinasse plus leur destination, leur survivance même, que la graine mettant en réserve tous les aliments qui nourriront la plante. Comme la graine, je pourrais mourir quand la plante se serait développée, et je me trouvais avoir vécu pour elle, sans le savoir, sans que ma vie me parût devoir entrer jamais en contact avec ces livres que j'aurais voulu écrire et pour lesquels, quand de me mettais à ma table, je ne trouvais pas de sujet. (III : 728)[5]

Proust's novel is not an autobiography, is not a gathering of data on the life of the writer. Rather, the novel is a gathering of evidence for itself; each "remembrance" is put out of play with regard to the *writer*, thus preserving *meaningfully* this otherwise scattered and insignificant documentation of a life lived. The insignificance of life itself is transformed into significance. Indeed, the bulk, if not the entirety of *A la recherche du temps perdu* grows from out of the narrator's encounter with a simple and seemingly superficial product: the famous madeleine. Yet the madeleine dipped in tea (and we shall analyze in detail how this works in Part Two, Chapter Three) in offering the narrator the possibility of deep knowledge of himself, does not yield up its superficiality, but rather, transforms and expands into a continued superficiality that moves through some three thousand pages. The madeleine does not give up its secret, does not become transparent, but rather, opens up into an endless opacity of things. What the narrator finally realizes is that there can be no deep understanding of the self without an engagement with the "meaninglessness" things that populate one's existence.

Sainte-Beuve, in limiting the notion of criticism to this world, by viewing the literary work and the author along a continuum, advocated, as far as Proust was concerned, a prescription for endless meaninglessness, in his disallowing the possibility that the superficial could ever have a forum for its significance. This nihilism, Proust rejected. His hope *was* in the superficial.

The superficial, the necessary labor of existence which, when preserved so that the product does not *replace* them, can reveal the world, the totality of references. This can only occur when one (that is, the writer), has subtracted one's interest, and has propelled oneself into the position of being a kind of fictional observer. *This fictional observer is not the writer,* absorbed in his or her life. It is not an *I* the way the writer is an *I*.

What Proust offers in his treatment of the superficiality and ephemerality of everyday life, and we shall see this more closely in Part Two, Chapter Three, is the ability to read the *act* of life passing into structure.

II. THE INDIVIDUAL AND THE PERSON

> *The curious discrepancy between language and theory turns out to be a discrepancy between the world-oriented "objective" language we speak and the man-oriented subjective theories we use in our attempts at understanding. It is language and the fundamental human experience underlying it, rather than theory, that teaches us that the things of the world, among which the* vita activa *spends itself, are of a very different nature and produced by quite different activities.*
>
> -Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*

The question that the argument between Sainte-Beuve and Proust permits us to begin to ask pertains to our standpoint when we look at a work of literature, both as analysts, and as ordinary readers. We are certainly permitted to look, as Sainte-Beuve does, at literature as a critical lens placed over the phenomenon of the social, and indeed, if we are ultimately to understand the place of literature in the world, we must. My contention here, is that to restrict our attention to this aspect obscures the personal compulsion, even the *asocial* compulsion to create a work of art, and thus obscures what is peculiar and essential to the work of art itself. Only once this distinction has been made, can we then attempt to understand literature, and art in general, as a societal phenomenon. The problem that we have been discussing in this regard pertains to the difficulty of distinguishing between literature as personal expression, and literature as social expression. This, in turn, is founded on the difficulty in distinguishing between the personal and the social. A personal compulsion, a desire for intimate knowledge of oneself qua self, is certainly also a *societal* compulsion. Yet because, despite even, the fact that these two modalities of being are built

out of each other, we run the risk of losing ourselves in our critical vocabulary. Only the realm of the social is quantifiable; indeed, only the realm of the social can be exhibited. There can be no thing, no object, which is not already recognized as a thing *plurally*: a thing only gains its thinghood because it is recognized from myriad unique perspectives, in a kind of "agreement." At the very least, this is because to delineate what one sees, to name a thing, even for one's own use, is to use language. Language is that which exists *between* individuals; it does not originate *from* an individual qua individual: it is social through and through. Thus, even to delineate a realm which we call the *asocial* is, as is anything else that we can name, necessarily social. The *intimate experience* of being a person, however, no matter how one can trace it as a social effect founded on a social cause, nonetheless must attempt to differentiate the modality in which it speaks, in moving from a shared world to an intimate (and ultimately inarticulable) intimation of being. This process is what I have called the re-referring from the ontic to the ontological. The point here is not that the individual has greater ontological status than the social, but rather, that the experience of the social can only founded in individual experience, *can only come to meaning through individual experience*, an experience which, nonetheless, *has no proper language of its own*, and thus, must be articulated institutionally, in the realm of agreement. This is what Proust attempts to clarify in his disagreement with Sainte-Beuve in his declaration that "ce qu'on donne au public, c'est ce qu'on a écrit seul, pour soi-même, c'est bien l'oeuvre de soi."

To write the experience of being oneself in an institutional language is what Michel de Certeau calls a "tactic" in opposition to a "strategy:"

> [A] *tactic* is a calculated action determined by the absence of a proper locus. No delimitation of an exteriority, then, provides it with the condition necessary for autonomy. The space of a tactic is the space of the other. Thus it must play on and

> with a terrain imposed on it and organized by the law of a foreign power. it does not have the means to *keep to itself*[.] (37)

M.M. Bakhtin argues that discourse is structured through a similar reappropriation of an institutional, or imposed language, upon which the writer must impose him-or herself in order for the writer or speaker to say something about him- or herself:

> The speaker strives to get a reading on his own word, and on his own conceptual system that determines this word, within the alien conceptual system of the understanding receiver; he enters into a dialogical relationship with certain aspects of this system. The speaker breaks through the alien conceptual horizon of the listener, constructs his own utterance on alien territory, against his, the listener's, apperceptive background. (282)

If to express oneself in language is to act in the context of an "alien conceptual system," it is because anything that one wants to say about oneself *cannot* be already inscribed in the language. To speak is to reconfigure the system, to make a place in it for the speaking self.

The effect of the discourse's imposition on language, of these tactics played out upon an institutional structure in which the subject finds him- or herself, is that the subject takes its place as part of the language, and as part of the institution. The result is a conflation of intimate individual experience and the institution which receives it and, ultimately, gives it a place for it to *mean*. The subject, we might say, *is* this conflation of institutional and intimate experience. Yet, as conflation, the subject does not, cannot, differentiate between the two: the subject is *absorbed* in his or her self in the same way that a reader is absorbed in the act of reading: in this absorption, the reader "believes" in what he or she is experiencing for the space of the reading, and in order to do so, the reader must locate his or her reading self in a structure: it is this, we might say, that makes fiction "like"

life. This is the basis of theories of reading such as Wolfgang Iser's "implied reader," or Peter Rabinowitz's "narrative audience."[6]

The difference, however, between reading a work of fiction and living one's life, is that in life, there is no outside, no perspective by which one can "see" or even experience this absorption. This is the heart of the conflation between individual experience and the institution which gives it its place. Because in life we do not read ourselves from outside of ourselves, we wake to this conflation, we come to consciousness as subject, just, as Merleau-Ponty shows us, we do not *see* how monocular vision moves into synergic vision. We cannot be witnesses to our own formation as subjects. In life, then, as opposed to the artificial environment of the novel, there can ultimately be no "dialogic relation," such as Bakhtin speaks of, because the question that must then be asked is, "Where did the speaker get the language that he/she uses to engage in a dialogue?"

There is no outside to the subject. This is to say that there is no language that can "speak" the subject. If we want to understand the subject, we have to understand it precisely through the experience of this irremediable conflation, where as soon as something is spoken or written, it is no longer an expression of the subject who is subject *to* language. "The paradox of subjectification," Judith Butler writes, "is precisely that the subject who would resist such norms is itself enabled, if not produced by such norms" (*Bodies* 15). Here, we can think of this resistance as precisely sight, the sight that would show us what it is that precedes subjectification. And sight, as we have argued, is exactly what we do not have *here*, in, with our bodies, because it comes from the fictional realm.

We are now in a position to understand better what this ontologically fictional realm is, and what its relationship is to us. We can begin by thinking of Butler's notion of performativity. That the subject performs itself, Butler is careful to say, does not mean that

the subject can be whatever it wants. On the contrary, the subject is *compelled* to perform what it wakes to being in the world. Performativity, then, is not an act of the subject bringing into being what it names, "for it is always a reiteration of a norm or set of norms, and to the extent that it acquires an act-like status in the present, it conceals or dissimulates the conventions of which it is a repetition" (12). As such, performativity is less an "act" than a "practice" (2).

To say, then, that anything that can be recognized as a thing is done so by a kind of "agreement," is another way to express this performative practice: we agree that a thing is a thing, not through an act of conscious willing, but in waking to ourselves as subjects *through* the agreement: *it is the agreement itself, and the constant performing of this agreement, that generates the subject*. Now, if we can think of naming—and of language use in general—as an attempt on the part of the subject to *express its desire*, it follows that the very articulation of such a desire is the attempt *to see oneself*, to see who one is in the context of the world in which it finds itself. Indeed, the subject can only see by virtue of what it *is*, and what it is it knows from its desires. Yet the desire *of* the subject could not exist unless there was a subject already there to do the desiring. The subject, however, is social through and through, despite the fact that it *experiences* itself as an individual. It is only by interrogating these desires, by understanding them from a perspective from outside the subject, that the subject itself can be seen. The subject must suffer the disparity, in understanding that the only way that it can express itself as an individual—and indeed know itself as an individual, is through the agreement by which it woke to itself: it must find itself in the language of plurality, which is of course, language itself.

Butler defends Leo Bersani's contention that "only the decentered subject is available to desire."[7] This is another way of saying that the subject wakes to itself with the

apprehension that it is the subject *of* something, and that what it is a subject of, despite the fact that it cannot be grasped, is nonetheless part of its constitution. The subject, finding itself *here*, with no outside, no ability to contextualize itself, to *delimit* itself as a subject of something, sees itself as a thing among things. If this exhausted the epistemological repertoire of the subject, such a condition would preclude consciousness, or at least the kind of consciousness that we think of as human consciousness. Indeed, there would, then, be no subject. But instead, the subject wakes to itself and finds that the things that it lives among *cannot fulfill its desire because they cannot represent its desire*, precisely because nothing that the subject finds in its world can take it back before its own constitution. It is only, following Heidegger, when the subject experiences this failure in the very mechanism of desire, that anything like the possibility of understanding itself, of a world coming into view, can occur. Spurred on by this failure, the subject engages in the act of re-presenting the world in such a way as to *find itself there,* to make the "who" visible; the subject, absorbed in its life, deprived of vision, however, only arrives at the possibility of the "who" through this beyond-the-subject perspective. This, then, is the ontological fiction that makes the subject possible. Yet if ontological fiction is the subject attempting to see itself, who is it that sees this? If the subject can only see itself in terms of totality, that is, fictionally, then the one who lives in the body, who experiences life in time seems to fall out of the picture. Who is the subject of ontological fiction, if the body, the "I am writing," even the "I am being," is elided each time the subject comes close to an apprehension of "who" it is?

If we permit ourselves to include this *failure* to apprehend the subject as part of the definition of the subject, the impasse where we arrive, this non-traversability between a structure and a process, allows us to begin to see *what* is fictional about fiction. *Fiction is exactly the unavailability of the "who" to the subject who nonetheless requires this "who" in order to be a*

subject. The subject, then, is that being who turns *things* into representations of itself, in order that it may be itself. Being a subject, then, requires a seeing that is unavailable to lived experience.

It is only in everyday experience, only, in Arendt's terminology, in *laboring* that the subject experiences itself intimately. It is only in the product of this labor that the subject acquires the vision necessary in order to be itself. But to turn labor into a product, to eclipse everyday experience, produces nothing *for* the subject, that is, nothing meaningful, unless this labor can be preserved. The product, as a shared thing, as that which is institutionally recognized, as something agreed upon *between* subjects, appears bent on doing away with the *experience* of being a subject. Generic fiction, then, as the realm where the product cannot be *put to use* becomes the realm where the labor of the individual, on its way to becoming a subject, gets preserved.

The subject requires this preservation of the experience of the individual. Yet even the notion of the individual, as that which is indivisible, inseparable, produces an impasse as soon as one inquires into what constitutes the individual as a phenomenon. Precisely because one cannot go back behind the individual, we must come to accept the individual as a sort of building block, the basic element of all the structures and institutions which are built *for* the individual. The individual as the ultimate inseparable entity, then, stubbornly resists analysis. What gets concealed then, is the way in which these structures and institutions that are founded on the individual, are also formative, even constitutional for the phenomenon of the individual. If to be an individual is to not be able to be divided into smaller entities, each time the attempt is made to engage in such analytical division, it is only the *larger* entity, what is built *out* of individuals, that comes into view. Again, the laboring, the *experience* of being an individual, gets occulted.

The problem here, is again that of dueling presences, of mismatched modalities. To view the individual as a product of the social precludes the possibility of a critical language founded on experience. And yet, because the subject is, as we have seen, precisely the site of this conflation of modalities, we must be careful not to preclude both perspectives from our interrogation. To do so would result in the loss of our critical language, because it is precisely this conflation that *is* the experience of being a subject, which is founded on *both* intimate experience and thinghood, that is, on both process and product. Thus, we would do well to take Gayatri Spivak's admonition that "The solution is not merely to say, 'I shall not objectify.' It is rather, to recognize at once that there is no other language but that of 'objectification' and that any distinction between 'subjectification' and 'objectification' is as provisional as the use of any set of hierarchical oppositions" (*Grammatology* lix).

Generic fiction, we can then say, is about the *experience* of the individual, but is *recounted* in the objectified language of the social. It will be helpful to use terminology that reflects these different allegiances, in order to remain true to them: provisionally, then, we can distinguish between a *person* and an *individual*. We can thus reserve the labels "subject" and "self" to indicate the conflation of these two notions, much in the same way that we use the word "text" to indicate the site of the conflation of the real writer with the fictional content. It is important that we do not understand these terms as *components* of the subject or self, but rather as aspects, or as perspectives: if the subject is a conflation of the individual and the person, it is because each exists *for* the other, and would be unthinkable without the other.

The *individual*, then, is the object recognized by the social; it is the creature of *nomos*; it is the being available to the sight of others. The *person* is the one who confronts being *alone*, the one who must experience—and suffer—this disparity—suffer, because the person

does not have a language of his/her own; it is the person who can be talked about, but it is the individual who does the talking. The individual, then, is the realm of the product, of the statistic, of the thing, of the creature. The person is the realm of process, of labor, of creation, of desire, the suffering of the being taken for an object.

If the self is compelled to perform itself, it is, in our new terminology, the attempt on the part of the person to represent, express itself on the terrain of the individual. It is, then, in this performing that the self wakes to itself. If we find ourselves in a world that is spatially organized, it is already because I cannot locate myself in my self: there is always part of me that exceeds my ability to be who I am. The objective world of others, of *nomos* and of regulation then, is *already* part of the constitution of the self; the very act of performing oneself, of acting upon one's desires to *be* something in the world is the self compelled to express itself in a language that is never completely its own. What results then, is a kind of paralysis that comes from out of the incompossibility of these two modalities to be experienced as an ensemble. The person is paralyzed because it cannot speak for itself, cannot express or represent who he or she is. The individual, while having the capacity for language, cannot animate itself without the impetus that the person generates through the fact that only *it* desires. What the self wakes to find is that what it wants is not within the range of its grasp: the desiring person is checked by the individual, who, as the possessor of language, must speak for it. Thus, the subject finds itself in a world with others, in short, in space. Space, then, becomes the inauguration of a paralysis, that refers the subjects' desire to *be* itself, always outside the range of its possibility. The subject always manifests to itself as a *product*, as something created, and must then, suffer the withdrawal of the creating agency.

The *personal* drama, then, which can only be expressed in the *societal* product, must be understood both as a thing and not as a thing. To desire, to want something is the impetus

behind the person. But the thing wanted is always outside of the domain of the person: this is the *experience* of being a person.

To talk about, to represent desire, then, without turning it into a product: this we might say is the ultimate desire of the person; its dream is to catch desire as desire; to turn labor into the product *without* cancelling the desire, because to do so would annihilate the person. This is the fiction of a language that is not separate from the person, the fiction of non-alienation. In other words, we might say, fiction.

III. THE SIGHT THAT DOES NOT SEE

The person, then, is unrealizable in life as it is lived. Fiction, as much as it reveals who we are, nevertheless defines who we are *not*. In other words, it reveals the *condition* of being. *Who* we see ourselves *as* is unavailable to us in our bodily, sensuous discovery of the world we are in. Fiction, understood in its ontological sense, does not, then, show us what we *can* be, as much as it shows what is missing *here*: the grasp of, the vision of the whole.

This, then, is the discovery of space. Space is precisely this condition of a *being-in* that precludes the possibility of the vision of a whole, which must then be manufactured as fiction. It is the interplay between this fiction of the whole, and the sensuous envelopment in experience, then, that generates the very consciousness of space, which we might say, is consciousness itself. The whole, the who-we-are-not, gives the experience of being in the body the quality of paralysis. Space is a not being able to be *who* we are, and thus, only because the *who* hovers fictionally over the sensory field given to the body, does the body discover itself in space. Space is the field of lack that envelops the body. Thus, every

apprehension of desire to *be* something is the experience of the *person* subject to the compulsion to participate in a realm that is not given to the body; when the person attempts to manifest this, to *be* someone, he or she must confront this desire, this lack: this is the compulsion to be an individual, an image for others, and thus, an image to oneself.

The individual, however, cannot be *experienced.* Taking on the desire of the person in formulating (that is, performing) its identity, it sees and can be seen*;* it speaks and can be heard. But what it sees and what it speaks is not *itself*, and what we see and hear of it is not *us*.

Wittgenstein writes:

> "If I wrote a book called *The World as I Found it,* I should have to include a report on my body, and would have to say which parts were subordinate to my will, and which were not, etc, this being a method of isolating the subject, or rather of showing that in an important sense there is no subject for it alone could *not* be mentioned in that book.—
>
> The subject does not belong to the world; rather, it is the limit of the world. (57)

If, instead of writing from the position of the subject, if instead of writing from the position in which one understands oneself to be contiguous with the things among which one finds oneself, one were to interrogate the *inability* to see the subject (precisely because it is the subject who does the seeing), we would be in a position to be able to interrogate the limit of the world as the *subject* sees it. But we would still only have "the world as we found it" for vocabulary. In this case, however, we would not be writing "about" the world, but rather, the "oeuvre de soi."

One might say that we are *always* writing, speaking this *oeuvre de soi*, that we can do nothing but write it and speak it. In an important sense, however, we cannot know that we are doing this, because we are *absorbed* in the world and in being subject to it. It is in the

encounter between the languageless person and the languaged individual that the person achieves the possibility of becoming something durable, of becoming available for sight and speech. But it is also in this encounter, formative for our becoming who we are as subjects *in* space and *with* others, that we realize that the *oeuvre de soi* is a fiction, where fiction signifies precisely that which is beyond our experience: as soon as something becomes durable, it eclipses, replaces the *becoming* which is characteristic of labor, and thus, of the person in his/her body. The promise of the *oeuvre de soi*, then, passes us by. Yet as it does so, announcing itself as "merely a fiction" in relation to the body which we are condemned to experience, we wake to ourselves, we find ourselves here. It is, then, not the "who" that is who we are, but rather, desire itself.

Yet the "who" is the forum by which desire gets experienced. All that we have is desire. But in order to *make these desires our own*, we must be subjects, which requires asserting ourselves in the world as individuals. We must detach our desires from the *person*, and use them as playing cards, give them value through recourse to the structures we already find in the world; that is, we must use language. But this language must nonetheless be built out of the uncommunicative experience of the person; and thus, this language must be continually recreated. It must resist the having-already-been-agreed-upon, infusing language with the personal, yet nonetheless maintaining itself as a recognizable thing. This we can call communication. To communicate is always to communicate desire. But it is also to concretize this desire; to turn it into a thing, to extend the language; to create an institution by which the subject finds itself as a durable thing.

How then to get behind the durable world, if it alone is communicable? Butler proposes "a return to the notion of matter not as a site or a surface but *as a process of materialization that stabilizes over time to produce the effect of boundary, fixity and surface we call matter*"

(*Bodies* 9, Butler's italics). Such a proposal is a call from beyond the subject, because the subject can only find itself *in* things that are durable and fixed, and thus, in the world as product. It is a call then, to re-cast all the things that permit us to orient ourselves in the world, including the body, as a primordial fiction. This re-orientation requires us to no longer use the subject as the basis for understanding ourselves. In this way, the things among which we find ourselves must be re-signified as our *oeuvre de soi.* But this resignification is nothing but the very genesis of the sign itself. Only once we recognize that the things that we find in the world exist *for* the subject, can we permit ourselves the possibility of a vision that is *beyond* the subject, a vision that is, then, beyond space because the experience of space can only come out of it. It is a vision, however, that we cannot partake of, because we *are* subjects, and we live in bodies and in space. That we cannot partake of this vision is exactly its ontologically fictional aspect. It is through this primordial fictionalizing, then, that we can re-cast all that we see in "the world as we found it" as a not-seeing. Such a fiction is the view from the other side of the subject, that provides a *context* for the subject, and thus the possibility of *meaning.* But what meaning requires, then, is that we understand that the *oeuvre de soi* is in fact, not *our oeuvre.* Not, insofar as we identify ourselves as subjects. And we cannot do otherwise.

The sight that does not see, then, is me here. It is my subjection. I do not live *in* fiction. I live in a world where I believe that what I see is really there, external to me. When, however, I inhabit the fictional perspective, all that I see here in *life* is understood as a veil, rather than sight. Only then can we *see* this encounter between the person who cannot see, and the individual, who becomes the embodiment of this otherwise unmanifestable person. This can occur, however, only when I, through an act of *poesis*, one that comes from *out* of my absorption in the world, *create* a vision that I do not live in.

That the world is meaningful to us, is the attestation of the fact that we are more than subjects, that is, that we live part of our lives *in abstentia*, and thus, fictionally. Because we become absorbed in our fictions, we cannot see this, and we emerge as subjects: the world becomes solid and durable, and we take our place in it. I propose that the evidence, and the documentation, for this process, is in our fictions, in our stories, where, freed from our absorption in our own subjection, we create subjects whose contexts are delineated, and thus visible. The inability to *experience* the world from the perspective of this visibility becomes *meaning*; that is, it becomes our grasping of the condition of subjecthood. Meaning is not "for" us, but at the same time, we are not who we thought we were. Generic fiction permits us to see both the thing and its becoming, both product and process. But it is in the realization that we cannot inhabit our fictions, that generic fiction truly takes its place in the production of meaning. Meaning *passes* by the subject.

Butler's call to interrogate our notions of materiality as *the basis*, then, as Heidegger called before her, is an appeal to that which cannot be said. It requires a new understanding of the endlessly repetitive and meaningless "I am writing" that accompanies all writing: in this new understanding, writing, and by proxy, being, no longer emanates from a body, but requires us to conceive of a bare fiction, an ontological fiction, *in which* the body comes to take its stand. Butler writes:

> The body posited as prior to the sign is always *posited* or *signified* as *prior*. This signification produces an *effect* of its own procedure the very body that it nevertheless and simultaneously claims to discover as that which *precedes* its own action. If the body signified as prior to signification is an effect of signification then the mimetic or representational status of language, which claims that signs follow bodies as their necessary mirrors, is not mimetic at all. On the contrary, it is productive, constitutive, one might even argue *performative*, inasmuch as this signifying act delimits and contours the body that it then claims to find prior to any and all signification. (*Bodies* 30)

Such a view does not do away with the body, nor views it as merely a construction, but rather, offers the possibility of a *context* in which the body—which normally, in its role as accomplice to the subject, does the seeing—can itself be seen. Because generic fiction does not emanate from out of a body, it is well positioned for such a reconfiguration of sight. What we can learn from observing this reconfiguration is that the *soi* in the *ouevre de soi* is not the subject.

IV. READING FROM BEYOND THE SUBJECT: THE OBSERVER AND THE ABSORBED

> *We must travel abreast with Nature if we want to know her, but where shall be obtained the Horse—*
> *A something overtakes the mind—we do not hear it coming*
>
> -Emily Dickinson, Prose Fragment 119

Let us examine the activity of reading—though this could just as well include any type of beholding—watching a film, viewing a painting, listening to a story etc.—without yet permitting ourselves the possibility of delineating fiction as a genre or reading practice.

I read. I read the agreed upon meaning, an agreement which I have already entered into as a language user. But this meaning does not reach all the way into what I need it to mean, into what I need meaning itself to mean. I therefore apply *myself* to the meaning; I apply my personal experience of being, that includes my body, and the desires that are particular to my person. In doing so my engagement with what I read creates something for me, something that can be for no one else. It is, in fact, *unspeakable*. Because it is unspeakable, I must *resist* this compulsion toward the personal. But there is a double

resistance: I must also resist the *individual* who, while articulate, wants to take away what is meaningful to me as a *person*.

Such a description could apply to perception in general. When we behold something, we confront something other than ourselves, and integrate it into our being. We assume a position with regard to what we behold, and this beholding affirms our identity as a discrete being in the world.

Now, however, let us permit ourselves to utilize a particular kind of reading practice. When I assume the conventionally determined stance necessary to read a work of *fiction*, I am permitted new possibilities. My reaction can take two (simultaneous) forms. I can be absorbed in the world that the work presents to me, allowing the content of my reading to resemble my life, even if it does not reflect the conditions of my own life. I can also *judge* the work, and its creator: as adequate or inadequate; as harmful or useful; as addressing such and such an issue in the world, etc.

In the latter category, I look at the work as a product, and determine its efficacy. I place myself in a continuum with it. In this way, the work is like anything else that can be encountered, studied and described. But I have not yet seen it as a work of fiction.

In the former category, I do not see the work as a thing. In fact, I do not see the work at all. Rather, just as in being a subject, I am unable to perceive the boundaries of my subjecthood, so too in the work, insofar as I am *absorbed* in it, insofar as I allow it to take over and inhabit my experience of being in the world, I cannot perceive it as an object, as a work of artifice. In this way, I insert my subjection into the work, and allow it to perform itself as *my* subjectivity. While there is no *requirement* that I view the work from this stance, only in assuming it can a work be read as fiction.

Yet to inhabit this stance is not enough to assure that work will be experienced as fiction. To enter into the work, and to permit it to take over one's world for the space of its reading, would offer an experience no different that that which we experience in our everyday lives. If this were the case, the things *in* the fiction, would be no less real to the reading subject, than the world of everyday life is.

Rather, it is only in the conjunction of these two perspectives that the characteristic experience of reading fiction can arise. Fiction, then, permits a context by which we can *see* our own subjection; we see the work as an artifice, as a product; but we *also* see our own absorption in it, precisely in the way that we cannot see our own absorption in the world in which we locate our bodies, and in which we are actors. This is, of course, the case, because we have no way of understanding the world as a made place, as artifice or product. We perceive ourselves to be in a continuum with the things we live among. As subjects, the limits of the world are also the limits of our subjecthood

In the application of this *observing* component of the self, to the *absorbed* component, the experience of fiction can reconfigure our relationship to things. Absorbed in the work of fiction, we likewise perceive ourselves to be in a continuum with the things in the *work*; we are under the influence of the work, just as in our everyday lives we are under the influence of the *world*. The observer of this absorption, however, perceives the things in the work as referring to a different modality from it, and thus, does not take its stance among the things it reads about. Through the achievement of this understanding, the subject as a whole, and in its everyday being, learns to loosen its belief in the referents of its own world, and gains an apprehension of something beyond the perceivable limit of the subject. The observer, however, can only arrive at this delineation of modalities through the agency of the absorbed. The absorbed *is* lived experience as it is experienced in fiction. It is a bodily

perspective that is not of *our* body. Yet in order for us to *know* that this perspective is not our perspective, we must be conscious of another perspective. The observer is the one who "knows" that the perspective given to us in fiction does not emanate from our body. The observer is firmly ensconced in *this* body, and as such, offers the context, the horizon by which anything like an absorbed perspective can be cultivated. Yet, the *fact* of a perspective that comes from outside one's proper body nonetheless permits the loosening of the hold that our bodily perspective maintains on us; it is a loosening, but never a complete withdrawing. Nonetheless, it permits the possibility of a consciousness that comes from beyond the body, and thus, the possibility that our body is not the solid foundation that we assume it is.

It is both a conjunction and clash of perspectives, then, that make the phenomenon of fiction possible. Both must be in play: we must at the same time "believe" in the work and not believe it. Lacking either, fiction becomes on the one hand, for the observer, merely an opaque product in the world, no different than any other thing that we encounter; and on the other hand, for the absorbed, as large and intractable as life itself. The conjunction of the two, however, forces an inquiry into thingness in general. Together they permit us to wrest from the world, by analogy, a "picture" of our own subjection, but even more so, they permit the possibility of creating a picture of a self beyond the subject: if meaning can only come "after the fact," once the identity of the "who" has been ascertained, the ability to believe in a world that is beyond our experience, and to *see* and thus name and preserve our absorption in this belief, might then be the very possibility of meaning to begin with. Meaning, then, must *be* this picture, and must come from beyond the subject.

The observer, then, is an institutional figure. It is the sedimented history of perception, the *nomos*, the set of perceptual rules which permit a thing to be understood as a

thing. It is, indeed, all public. It is the observer who is responsible for the "agreement" which creates us as subjects among other subjects. In personifying it here, we turn it into the standard bearer of being, the one who knows *how* the world works, and who is charged with transforming perceptions into understanding, and thus, language.

If the observer is the institutional agent, we might think of the absorbed as a kind of child or savage, who has (from the perspective of the observer) not yet received his or her training, has not yet learned how to be. The absorbed is that being who has not *integrated* into the institutional world, the world of plurality, precisely because the absorbed *has no language*. The absorbed is the *unspeakable* aspect of the self: it is then, *the person*, where the observer is the *individual*. But as the person, the absorbed is the one who experiences the world. Paradoxically, even though the observer's allegiance is to *this* body, it is the promiscuous absorbed, having no such allegiance, who can "live" in fiction, who *experiences* the body. It is the observer who speaks, who "translates" the unlanguaged experience of the absorbed into the world of durability, of agreement. The observer's task then, is to incorporate the absorbed, to turn the absorbed into a *thing*. The resulting thing, however, always on *this* side of language, can never express the experience of absorption.

Meaning, then, comes about not from *out* of this incorporation, but through the consciousness of the failure of such an incorporation: the absorbed self can *never* be incorporated by the observed self. The meaning that the (languaged) observer attempts to extract from the absorbed must *pass* by the subject whenever the subject says, "that is me." This is the creation of the individual (if creation, in Butler's sense can be a *practice* rather than an *act*). It is the moment when one understands that "meaning is not meant for me" and thus, "I am not myself." The institution is the intersubjective product of a constitutive unfulfilledness of the "I," an intersubjectivity that, paradoxically, each must experience alone

and subjectively. Meaning, then, must pass by the experience of being a subject, on its way to the *public*: the absorbed self provides the "material," the impetus for meaning. But the absorbed self, always spoken for and about, can never speak for itself.

As both observer *and* absorbed, I read from a stance *beyond* the subject. I generate the fiction that *there is no reader*, that is, I generate an impersonal perspective, and in doing so, I generate fiction itself. In this way, the words that I read create for myself an *oeuvre de soi*. In re-referring the things of my world from the ontic and everyday, to the ontological and existential, it is fiction that, whether I read or I write, tells me who I am.

To be sure, I am not insisting here on a narrow definition of generic fiction. Such a conjunction of perspectives could, one would think, be possible in many different media, and in many different experiences, narrative and otherwise. I am less concerned with the *intention* that something be a work of fiction, as much as the peculiar kind of attention that is brought to bear on certain perceptions that create the consciousness of fiction. Certainly, that we *engage* in this kind of consciousness brings about the *intention* to create fiction, and permits the possibility of fiction as genre. But we can also think of fiction as a genre of perception. Stanley Fish writes that fiction, "is language around which we have drawn a frame, a frame that indicates a decision to regard with a particular self-consciousness the resources language has always possessed" (109). Yet we might say the same for perception in general. For if language has always possessed it, the kind of consciousness that uses language must also have always possessed it.

What the fictional genre then, permits, is the transcendental perspective denied to us in our everyday bodily existence. Yet at the same time, the experience of fiction reminds us of the impossibility of such a position. Fiction is not "like life" precisely because it offers a total world. But when one's incomplete life is stacked up against this total world of fiction,

life can be "seen" in a way that is "normally" denied to the subject. This normality, however, is, in our terminology, the world as the observer experience it. The absorbed forces not the observer, but the *subject* to confront its own limits, and the view that this creates becomes constituent for the very possibility of *being* a subject.

Thus, fiction permits the possibility of asking, "who speaks the subject?" But as soon as we begin to ask this question, the subject is silenced, faced only with the impossibility of the response. The question *must* not be answered, but it must be asked: to not ask the question is to forego the very possibility of being a subject, or a self, at all, if to be a subject is to be concerned with "who" the subject is. To give an answer to the question, however, creates a *new* fiction: but it is a fiction that can never be perceived as a fiction: here, fiction becomes *faith*, and this faith in something *else*, this directional pointing away from the subject, creates a form of self-governance founded on not seeing, and thus, not knowing. In doing so, the *responsibility* involved in being one's own "who" is foreclosed. Thus, the fiction of the answer to the question eclipses the very possibility of the consciousness of fiction itself. Without such a consciousness, fiction loses its fictionality, in becoming *illusion*, and indeed, an illusion that offers no possibility of being taken as such. We could say, then, that fictional consciousness, in its bifurcation of the subject, preserves the *person* in its unspeakability. Without it, we arrive at a construction that imposes a narrator of the subject of which the subject has nothing to do, which closes off the possibility of self-understanding in favor of a theological fiction that we *believe* in: believe in, without the possibility of *observing*, of interrogating this belief.

In delineating two fields that together create the subject, that of the individual and the person, I have attempted to clarify the play of competing forces that comprise the experience of being a subject. To have the consciousness of a subject, in this formulation,

requires an engagement with an impetus that is *beyond the subject*. Because the subject exhausts the field of consciousness, first hand knowledge of this impetus is unavailable to the subject. As such, there is a faculty in place which is charged with *observing* the subject who is absorbed in his or her life. In everyday experience, this observing force regulates and normalizes the subject, in attempting to locate the subject in the context of the shared world, in language, and in general in the institutional setting in which the subject finds itself. In the *fictional* relation, however, this everyday way of being is suspended, because the bodily perspective is put out of play. Here, the subject is loosened from its grip on the intersubjective world. Freed from the responsibility of having to locate the body in terms of the world it shares with others, the observer can be reactivated, in order to be put in the service, not of the institution, but of the person. As such, the focus of the observer, then, is not on integrating the subject into the world, and thus, perpetuating the subject's consciousness of itself as a thing, as something "all outside." Rather, when the bodily world is suspended, the observer is able to illuminate the subject's subjectivity; it is what *sees* the subject's subjection. In the fictional relation, the things that the subject encounters do not exist in regard to the subject's body; no action on the part of the subject is demanded. Things, then, no longer demand the same kind of attention on the part of the subject; they no longer call to the subject in the same way: they are free to be inspected and interrogated, rather than being acted upon. The observer is the aspect of the self that "knows" that the subject is no longer engaged in his or her bodily, everyday world.

The absorbed, on the other hand, does not change its attitude. It encounters things, whether in fiction or in reality, and it is filled with them. It is the observer who determines *how* this absorption is to be understood. The observer, in this capacity, is a *creative* force. It reshapes, resignifies the things that the absorbed encounters, and endows them with

significance, by offering them a new context in which they can be understood. In the real world, the subject is a thing among things. In fiction, it is *the things themselves* that become now, representations of the subject. In fiction, we might say, there is *space* for the subject to confront itself. It transforms the outside, the world of transactions *between* subjects, to an inside, where the being of the subject itself gets revealed.

The new context that the observer offers to the subject in the fictional relation, is, however, not really new at all. It is only because the subject *has* this "inward" context, only because things mean something to it *before* they acquire their intersubjective significance in the world of the agreement, that the real world can mean anything at all to the subject to begin with. That the subject loses itself in the world of this agreement, that it believes it to be a thing among things, and as such, believes itself to be an originally intersubjective creature, is the very possibility for the phenomenon of fiction to begin with. We might say, then, that fiction is a *return* to subjectivity, a subjectivity that must always accompany the subject's everyday being in the world, the subject's uncritical belief in him- or herself as a locus of significance.

This is not to say that the genealogy of the subject is not *founded* on intersubjectivity. Rather, if there is to be anything like intersubjectivity to begin with, this intersubjectivity must be experienced inwardly, and thus, subjectively. We might say then, that the subject is intersubjectively constituted, yet existentially discrete. Thus, even if it is intersubjectivity that creates the very possibility for the experience of subjectivity, intersubjectivity nonetheless exists *for* subjectivity. It is only in this limited sense that I make the claim that subjectivity precedes intersubjectivity.

Language, then, despite its homogeneous appearance, must in some way be understood to manifest both these phenomena: it must both serve to *communicate* something

from one subject to another, and it must be used to *reveal* or *express* something to the subject itself about the fact of the subject's subjection. Thus: when we are absorbed in the world, the *things* that populate our world are products; when we are absorbed in fiction, the things that populate our fictions are symbols of ourselves: symbols in the strongest sense of the word, because there is nothing articulable that they can be said to represent. They are unrepresentable precisely because they are *not* products: they are, rather, process, becoming, expressed in the language of the product, which is, of course, language itself.

If we turn now to the structure of generic fiction, we can begin to understand how language can be used to *intentionally* effect this transformation.

V. COMMUNICATION AND EXPRESSION 1: COMMUNICATION

> *Mais tous les sentiments que nous font éprouver la joie ou l'infortune d'un personnage réel ne se produisent en nous que par l'intermédiaire d'une image de cette joie ou de cette infortune ; l'ingéniosité du premier romancier consista à comprendre que dans l'appareil de nos émotions, l'image étant le seul élément essentiel, la simplification qui consisterait à supprimer purement et simplement les personnages réels serait un perfectionnement décisif.*
>
> Marcel Proust, *Du côté de chez Swann*[8]

One of the issues that has occupied the field of narratology over the past forty years is that of the distinction between the author and the narrator in fiction, and the role of the communicative act in narration. Particularly since Booth's notion of the "implied author" has appeared, critics have been divided into proponents of a "communication model" of narration, in which a speaker is ascertained for every narrative level of a fictional work, and a "narratorless" model, the most well known formulation of which has been put forward by Benveniste.

Though this dissertation has provisionally taken its stand in the latter camp, the critical debate is, nonetheless, of interest here, because it is not my concern to disprove the notion of the implied author, as much as it is to understand the impetus for such a formulation in the history of the attempt to delineate the fictionality of fiction. Ultimately, we may find that it is neither the one nor the other that defines what is fictional about fiction. Rather, it is in the role that communication plays in narrative, the way that, as I will argue, the communicative impulse and the narrative impulse eclipse and repulse each other, that we can understand the special place that generic fiction has in our encounter with the world as a whole. We may well discover that the notion of an "implied author" can be restored, not as a phenomenon in fiction, but rather, as a structure put forward by the subject itself in its attempt to understand *itself* in the world. And if this is so, we may discover that generic fiction is the place where the subject works through this notion as part of the process of *seeing* itself.

Let us first address the "communication model."

For Booth, as we have previously noted, the implied author is the narrator's "second self." This construction is necessary, Booth argues, in order to differentiate between the author, as the ultimate but unapproachable organizing force of a work of fiction, and the narrator, as that aspect of the text which communicates something to the reader. The implied author is the "official scribe who will never be neutral toward all values" (71). It is the middle position between "the technical irrelevance of talk about the artist's objectivity and the harmful error of pretending that an author can allow direct intrusions of his own immediate problems and desires" (75). In this formulation, it is the implied author that permits the work to be understood as an artifice, because the imposition of a mediate term between author and narrative provides the context that permits us to be able to read the

narrating voice as a character, subject to the reader's interrogation. It is this that allows us to avoid "pointless and unverifiable talk about such qualities as 'sincerity' or 'seriousness' in the author" (75). The narrator, then, can be understood as pliable, as a being who is becoming in the face of the totality of the world that the narrative presents. In this way, the institution of the implied author permits the ironic play that loosens the relationship between *this* world and the fictional world. With this structure in place, the narrator, at any instance in the story, can be understood in the context of the closed world of the story, which cannot reach all the way into the *life* in which, as subjects, real to ourselves, we sit with book in hand. This offers us a provisional delineation of the *scope* of fiction.

Yet if we have already rejected this model, it is precisely because its formulation proposes an answer to the question "Who speaks?" which thereby violates and cancels the very fictional relation which the notion of the implied author was supposed to uphold. Who speaks? The implied author speaks. This construction, which can serve provisionally to aid in delineating the modality of fiction from that of lived experience, nonetheless fails to address the *relation* of fiction to lived experience, as well as the significance of fiction *in* lived experience. The problem is that the implied author is precisely a fiction, and as such, is no less fictional than the text that he or she fictionally writes. This, as we have seen, sends us on a regress from out of which we cannot escape.

This is not lost on Booth's successors. Seymour Chatman, for example, attempts to modify Booth's notion by subtracting its personal quality:

> Unlike the narrator the implied author can *tell* us nothing. He, or better, *it* has no voice, no direct means of communicating. It instructs us silently, through the design of the whole, with all the voices, by all means it has chosen to let us learn. (148)

Chatman's replacing of a personal pronoun with an impersonal pronoun here is betrayed by the anthropomorphic, and thus *fictive* quality of the way that he describes it. He makes clear not only that "it" instructs us—which conceivably could occur without volition—but his standpoint is revealed when he says that "it has *chosen* to let us learn." As such, even if *it* has no "direct means of communicating," its desire, nonetheless, is to communicate. We are faced then, with an impersonal, but nonetheless communicative voice: insofar as "it" communicates, we must reckon with it as a volitional entity, whom we cannot locate *in* the world: thus, it is a fiction. As such, we must move up the regress to find the *next* implied author, who desires to communicate *this* to its readership, precisely because communication is understood to be the irreducible quality in all language use. Such a formulation continues to do nothing to illuminate the relationship between lived experience and fiction, to show the impetus in *this* world, to *our* fictionalizing.

Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan recognizes this contradiction in Chatman. She likewise sees as suspect the notion that an impersonal force with no direct means of communicating is nonetheless "cast…in the role of addresser in a communication situation" (88). She argues that the implied author is "best considered as a set of implicit norms rather than as a speaker or a voice (i.e. a subject)." Yet, unlike Chatman, who argues that the narrator is not a necessary requirement in fiction, appearing only when there is an embodied voice who participates in some way in the story's action, Rimmon-Kenan argues that a narrator can be delineated in every fictional text: "In my view there is always a teller in the tale, at least in the sense that any utterance or record of an utterance presupposes someone who has uttered it." She thus defines the narrator "minimally, as the agent which at the very least narrates or engages in some activity serving the needs of narration" (88).

Rimmon-Kenan then, in doing away with the notion of a personified implied author, seems only to reinstate it in the office of the narrator. The narrator, then, must serve the double task of being delineated as a character *in* the story, while somehow being responsible for the structure of the story. While such a position offers a practical way of understanding the fictional narrative, and of setting it off from life in general (and to be fair, she is concerned in her critique more with *praxis* than with demonstrating the genealogy of the narrative position), her account only obscures the issue of whether the "set of implicit norms" manifests on this or that side of the divide between fiction and life.

Gérard Genette likewise takes a mediative position in attempting to delineate the structure of what he calls the narrative "voice" (212):

> When I read *Gambara* or *Le Chef-d'oeuvre inconnu*, I am interested in a story, and care little to know who tells it, where and when; if I read *Facino Cane*, at no time can I overlook the presence of the narrator in the story he tells… (212)

Genette, in his project of delineating narrative levels, is nonetheless incapable of bringing the *original* level of narrative into view. His concern with the text as artifact does not venture past *absorption* in the artifact, and thus, cannot offer an account of how the narrative as artifact implicates the extra-fictional world which produced it. As a result, he runs the risk of mystifying the very phenomena he attempts to specify with precision. Genette's notion of the role of the narrator as organizing force is revealed best in his discussion of the breaching of modalities that occurs when a narrator intrudes into the narrative which he or she is in the act of narrating, a phenomenon he terms "metalepsis." He offers an example from Balzac's *Illusions perdues*: "While the venerable churchman climbs the ramps of Angoulême, it is not useless to explain…" (235). Such narratorial intrusions, Genette argues, are experienced *strangely* by the reader: "The most troubling thing about

metalepsis indeed lies in this unacceptable and insistent hypothesis that…that the narrator and his narratees—you and I—perhaps belong to some narrative" (236).

Indeed, in the breach of narrative levels that such narratorial intrusions create, the reader *is* made into a character, one that stands in stark contrast to the being who sits before his or her book and reads. One has a body out of which the world emanates, and the other does not. As a result, the world of the fictional content, and the world of the reader are revealed as incompatible; any attempt *in fiction* to arrive at the *original* narrative level can only generate more narrative, can only *postpone* the bringing of the narrator of *this* into unconcealedness. And yet, if we permit the *real* reader and the real author to be understood also as a "narrative level," we might indeed think that what Genette finds "troubling" and "unacceptable" in narratorial intrusions is that, through them, the reader recognizes that he or she *is* a character in someone else's narrative, and that the very phenomenon of metalepsis in fiction points to the reader's apprehension that he or she, likewise, *cannot discover who his or her narrator is*. In other words, fiction serves to reveal the *impersonal constitution of the subject*.

I have argued that fiction, by recontextualizing the things that we encounter in our world, resignifies them so that we no longer see them as merely external things, as products, but rather, that we reconstitute them as images of our *internal* experience of being a subject; thus, in fiction, the outside becomes inside, and only in this transformation can we understand things as *for* us, rather than understanding ourselves as living among things. Only then, can the thing as external, as shared thing be, likewise, clarified as meaningful. Fiction, then, offers the original face of the things, that, as subjects, we are absorbed in. It returns to this origin by fabricating an observer, who *sees* this absorption and propels this absorption into meaning. It can only do this because we *originally* do not see things as merely things, though without an observer in place, we cannot see this: what fiction shows us—and

a fortiori the breach of narrative levels *in* fiction—is that the sight that emanates from the subject is a sight that does not see the subject.

That there is a discipline of narratology, we could say, testifies to the notion that, contrary to the prescription of Sainte-Beuve, we are concerned with more than the sociology of the author as producer, but rather, with ourselves as product, as that which is produced in a producing which is beyond our apprehension.

Yet if communication, as I have been arguing, is indeed a *product*; if behind every act of communication is an incommunicable "I am communicating," then to remain on the level of communication, of an implied author, or a narrator, communicating something to a fictional reader, is to perpetuate a regress that we will never be able to extricate ourselves from: it is to see fiction through the lens of the everyday world, rather than as a view *on* the everyday world that is otherwise unavailable to us. We cannot do away with this regress; it is essential to the very phenomenon of fiction because fiction must take the things of the everyday world as its material. Yet, it is in fiction, and not in the theory or criticism of fiction in which the regress must be experienced. To extend the regress to life is to ignore *what it means* to the one, to the observer, who stands outside the fiction. As such, we cannot speak of communication *in* fiction in the same way that we can speak of communication as that which occurs between real beings.

The point here, then, is by no means to do away with communication. On the contrary, we can say that *every narrative is communicative*. This is because every narrative is written by a real author, with the intent of reaching a real audience, through the act of narration and representation. The characters, the narrator, the elements of the plot, all the formal aspects of the narrative then, become a sort of alphabet, which the reader reads and reconstructs for him- or herself. Ultimately, in the transaction involved in someone (a

reader) reading a story that has been written by someone (an author), something has been communicated by an agent to a recipient.

The problem with the "communication model," however, is that the representation of communication in fictional narrative (and ultimately, in narrative in general, if we can say that all representation of communication is at its essence fictional) does not function in the same way that it does in lived experience. A narrative is "organized" in a way that the subject's lived experience is not. The act of communication in life is precisely a bid to organize life, to create a perspective, to offer a structure to lived experience that is necessarily perceived as lacking. Fictional narrative, however, already comes with this structure. Communication in fiction, then, *does nothing*. As such, while characters *in* a fictional narrative communicate with each other in their own bid to create a perspective and a structure for *their* lives, we, as readers, must perceive this communication in a fundamentally different way than we do our own communication.

We can then delineate an *actual* communicative level in the act of creating and receiving a work of fiction. All, however, that occurs *in* fiction, even though it is founded on the *representation of communication*, we must attempt to understand in another way.

VI. COMMUNICATION AND EXPRESSION 2: EXPRESSION

Merleau-Ponty writes:

> Speech, as distinguished from language, is that moment when the significative intention (still silent and wholly in act) proves itself capable of incorporating itself into my culture and the culture of others—of shaping me and others by transforming the meaning of cultural instruments. It becomes 'available' in turn because in retrospect it gives us the illusion that it was contained in the already available significations, whereas by a sort of *ruse* it espoused them only in order to infuse them with a new life. (*Signs* 92)

If the structure which defines the sphere of our being as subjects is continually in a state of flux and upheaval, there is never any operative structure available in which we can locate ourselves. And yet, each time we speak, we take a stand; we do indeed locate ourselves. To take a stand in which there is no operative structure is essentially a *generative*, or creative act. Speech, as communication, can only occur if the structure in which we speak is pliable, capable of being modified. Each time we speak, we both locate ourselves in and reconfigure the structure which defines us, creating new significations out of the "sedimented" structure in which we find ourselves, and which, in the very act of communication, always must become already inoperative, already cast into the past in relation to the presence of the speaker. As subjects, we are always attempting to catch up to a structure that vanishes as soon as we engage in the act of grasping it. This *is* communication.

We experience life *through* communication. That is, we experience life in space and time. Locating ourselves *here* and not *there*, we manifest our limitation in having to be *here,* that is, in our bodies, at this moment, through the act of communication. Communication projects our being-here onto a *there*. What we are communicating in the communication, however, is incommunicable. It is only in putting communication out of play that we can arrive at the context *for* our communication, and thus, arrive at the meaning *of* this communicating for us. To put communication out of play is to relinquish our perspective *in* the world, replacing it with a perspective *on* the world.

The "communication model" of narration cannot address communication precisely because it is absorbed in communication. In generic fiction, we can say then, *communication does not modify the structure of the subject*. Certainly communication modifies the structure for the experience of fictional characters, if fictional characters can be said to have experiences, just as it does for

us in everyday life. For us, however, insofar as we are readers of fiction, it does not: when we read, even when we read what we write, we enter into a structure that remains unchangeable, and it is this that renders the structure available for inspection. It is in this way that the *representation* of communication differs from actual communication.

To see what communication communicates, we must put it out of play. The second model for understanding narrative, the "narratorless" model, is concerned less with communication *per se* than with what we can provisionally call "expression." Understood in this way, communication is reserved for the actual, for the transaction that occurs in life as it is lived. As far as fictional narrative is concerned, then, it is what occurs not *within* a text, but between an author and his or her readers. In this way it becomes possible to illuminate what fiction does *for us*.

In his essay "The Correlations of Tense in the French Verb," Benveniste offers a formal way of distinguishing between the act of communicating and the act of narrating. He shows that in French there is a fundamental distinction between the perfect tense (in French the *passé composé*) and the aorist (*passé simple*): the perfect tense, a compound tense in both French and English, requires an auxiliary verb conjugated in the present tense (in French either *avoir or être*; in English "to have") plus (in both languages) the past participle of the main verb. The present tense of the auxiliary verb operates deictically: it refers to the speaker. Thus, to say "Il a écrit" (literally, he has written) is to refer to the present; that is, it implicates the I that is speaking, and places the subject of the sentence and the act described on a continuum with the speaker. The perfect tense, Benveniste writes, "creates a living connection between the past event and the present in which its evocation takes place. It is the tense for the one who relates the facts as a witness, as a participant" (210). In the aorist tense, however (French "Il écrivit," which we might translate into English as "He wrote,")

the "speaker" is neither witness nor participant. "[T]here is then no longer even a narrator," Benveniste famously writes, "The events are set forth chronologically, as they occurred. No one speaks here; the events seem to narrate themselves" (208). Thus, if we contrast the perfect, "He has written," to what might approximate the aorist in English, "Once upon a time, he wrote…," we see that there is no presupposed connection between the action that occurred in the past, and the speaker. The "He" who wrote exists in a different narrative modality from that of the "speaker" of the sentence. The emphasis then, is on *what* happened, as opposed to *who* is saying it. The latter mode, Benveniste argues is narration proper. It is with this that Benveniste arrives at the now classic distinction between *histoire* and *discours* (206). In *histoire*, "events that took place at a certain moment of time are presented without any intervention of the speaker in narration" (206).

If indeed in the mode of *histoire* there is no narrator, then it must follow that there is no *recipient* of the narrative, no narratee. Narra*tion* is then, narrator*less*, and it is this that, for Benveniste, defines the mode of narration. What distinguishes *discours* from narration is precisely the notion of a speaker and a hearer. *Discours* encompasses then, "every utterance assuming a speaker and a hearer, and in the speaker, the intention of influencing the other in some way" (209). If this is the case, the moment of *discours* is indeed, as Merleau-Ponty says, "when the significative intention…proves itself capable of incorporating itself into my culture and the culture of others" (*Signs* 92). Benveniste's achievement is to show how, at least in French, the presence or absence of a speaker is grammatically marked so that "the temporal location of the perfect is the moment of the discourse while the location of the aorist is the moment of the event" (210).

The absence of a hearer, an issue which Benveniste does not pursue (because his interest is in the grammar, and the way the grammar marks or does not mark a speaker's

presence), illuminates the distinction in modalities between *histoire* and *discours*. The real reader reads what the author writes. But it is not the author whom we are addressing here, and thus, not the real reader. If we think of a narrator as communicative, then there must be, at least potentially, someone for the narrator to communicate to. The reader or hearer cannot be a candidate, because he or she exists in a different modality than that of the narrator. Thus, the notion of a "narratee" has been put forward, most notably by Gerald Prince, but also in similar formulations by Wolfgang Iser and Peter Rabinowitz[9]. The narratee, however, is the one who *actualizes* discourse; in other words, it is the very *lack* of a narratee that guarantees that the discourse remain uncommunicative.

Benveniste does not make the distinction between narration in general, and fictional narration. In his explication, he offers examples from both the genres of history and fiction, and treats them interchangeably. In addition, he makes no claim that this grammatical phenomenon occurs outside of the French language. The ramifications of his discovery for both fiction, and language in general, have been explored by, among others, Ann Banfield and, following her, Robert Kawashima. Drawing on Benveniste's argument, Banfield, in her landmark study *Unspeakable Sentences* argues that the mode of narratorless narration is the very possibility for narrative fiction. She founds her argument on the postulate that "One cannot indirectly quote another speaker's expression" (44).

Banfield first shows that the grammatical distinction between *histoire* and *discours* is operative in other languages as well, offering the evidence of the linguist S.-Y. Kuroda. Kuroda likewise distinguishes between two functions in language, which he terms, following Bertrand Russell, *indication* and *expression*[10]. Kuroda reports that in Japanese, two distinct verb forms are used to describe sensation, one for *expressing* the subjective experience of being in

a particular and one for *indicating* or reporting the state of another person (*Unspeakable* 11). The examples that Kawashima offers in explicating this notion are as follows:

> (1) "*Watusi wa atui"* ("I am hot"); (2) "*Anäta wa atugatte iru*" ("You are hot"); (3) "*John wa atugatte iru"* ("John is hot")….

The first person formulation here requires a different grammatical mode than that of the second and third persons. This is because, Kawashima explains, "Japanese grammar makes an epistemological distinction between subjective and objective knowledge" (12). At the same time, there is the possibility that *in narrative*, these modalities can be breached: "[W]hile a sentence using the [subjective] form with the third person, such as **Mary wa atukatta* (Mary was hot), is unacceptable in the spoken language; it can appear in what [Kuroda] calls non-reportive style—novels written in the third person, for example" (12). Like Benveniste, in his work in French, Kuroda concludes that Japanese manifests a literary style which "transcends the paradigm of linguistic performance in terms of speaker and hearer" (qtd. Banfield 11).[11] Banfield's project, then, is to show, despite the fact that not all languages grammatically mark this linguistic function which alienates articulation from experience, that it can nonetheless be identified. It is this, she argues, that is the very possibility of fiction itself.

Banfield builds her formulation of narrative vertically, beginning at the level of the sentence. Her project is not to grasp a narrative as a *whole* in order to understand how it is narrated, but rather, to inquire into the narrative status of the primordial semantic unit: provisionally, the sentence.[12] Her argument, in what appears to be an innovative version of the diegesis/mimesis distinction, hinges on the relationship between direct speech and indirect speech. The context of direct speech, she argues, is always the conflation of the expression of a consciousness *and* its communication. Indirect speech, however, can only

communicate this consciousness, without expressing it. Indirect speech and direct speech, she argues, do not share a common deep structure (Banfield employs the methods of generative grammar in her analysis), and thus, their transposition from one to the other in practice yield heterogeneous content. Thus, the sentence "She said, 'I am going home'" *can* become, in indirect speech, "She said that he was going home." But it could likewise become "She said that she was going home" or "She said that Ismaïl was going home." Likewise, there are sentences in direct speech that contain constructions that cannot appear in indirect speech. Thus, she quotes a sentence of direct discourse from Virginia Woolf's *To The Lighthouse,* "'Not for the Queen of England,' said Mrs. Ramsay emphatically," to show that this sentence is not embeddable as indirect discourse: "*Mrs. Ramsay said emphatically that not for the Queen of England" (32). Banfield builds her argument by showing that this is the case with various other linguistic phenomena, including the unembeddability of subjectless imperatives ("*Mr. Chubb repeated that to excuse him") (33) and other formulations involving direct address.

The reason grammar forbids that these sentences, or fragments of sentences, to be embedded, Banfield argues, is because to embed them would be to cancel out their *expressive,* rather than communicative value. A sentence of indirect discourse which can *report* on a state of consciousness, cannot at the same time *express* this state of consciousness. These sentences, then, are governed by expressions. Thus, Banfield proposes a revision to the sentence as the originary unit of meaning: rather than understand the basic semantic governing force as a Sentence (or "S" in linguistic shorthand) Banfield proposes a more primordial governing force: that of the Expression, or "E." This "node E" she argues, is not "recursive," that is, not embeddable, because, in our terms, to subsume an E would be to

turn an expression, that is, the intimate *experience* of being in the world, into its *communication*, which would leave the expression opaque and unrepresentable, and indeed, without purpose.

The function of the "node E" then, is to describe the way in which consciousness is locatable in grammar. Ultimately what Banfield attempts to show is that an E is structured by the expression of *one* consciousness. This consciousness must express itself in language, and thus, in speech. Thus, every E manifests only one speaker. The presence of the speaker, however, is in no way to be confused with the narrator: the speaker is a fictional character, and thus, there is no requirement that the consciousness that speaks have an overall perspective on the story that he or she acts in; the speaker, rather, is narrated. What, Banfield argues, is required, and this is what she attempts to show with her grammatical evidence, is that every expression be the expression of only one perspective. She provisionally states this in a rule (Banfield formalizes her terminology with capital letters):

> *1E/1I*: For every expression (E), there is a unique referent of *I* (the SPEAKER), to whom all expressive elements are attributed, and a unique referent of *you* (the ADDRESSEE/HEARER). (57)

Clearly with the presence of a speaker and an addressee/hearer, Banfield has not done away with the notion of communication. What she has done, however, has relegated communication to that which occurs *in* the sentence, and thus, to that which is internal to the narrative. This is because, language, in its "normal" use, is communicative. Indeed, the fictional narrative is for the most part concerned with life as it is normally experienced. Yet to say that communication is language in its normal use is not to derive the abnormal from the normal. Rather, we might say, communication must be derived from expression, because it is the expression, the experience of being in a perspective, and thus, of being a subject, that is what is communicated in the communication. The paradox is that despite

this *priority*, the aboriginality, of expression, it can only be expressed *through* communication. Fiction, then, exploits the communicative function by turning communication itself into *material for expression*. Thus, if we act in the world primarily through communication, it is by putting communication out of play, by *representing* communication, that it can be put (back) into the service of expression. Thus, in Benveniste's *discours,* that is, in the act of communication, one can always locate both a speaker an interlocutor; it follows from this that one can also locate a present moment in which the discourse is actualized. Yet in eliminating the interlocutor, speech moves from the *actual* to the represented. In representation it is precisely the *present* necessary for communication which is excised: "Represented speech…has no PRESENT, because it is not part of a dialogue; it lacks the SPEAKER-ADDRESSEE/HEARER pair required for linguistic communication…It is the second person which inevitably entails the present tense" (135).

Ultimately, then, if the speaker in an expression has an interlocutor, narration does not. The way to insure that there is pure expression, then, even when condemned to the language of communication, is to rid the "you" from the highest narrative level; this occurs when discourse is made to be *inoperative*; that is, it is represented. If there is no "you" to talk to (including a "you" that is oneself), then there is no communication. Thus, Banfield concludes, "Subjectivity is not dependent on the communicative act, even if it is *shown* through language. And if it is not subordinated to the communicative function, then language can contain speakerless sentences" (70). As subjects finding ourselves amidst other subjects, we live through communicating. Eliminating the interlocutor, and as a consequence, eliminating the present, is something that cannot be *lived*. Narration, then, offers a (fictional) view from beyond the subject. The subject is condemned to the present; narrative is not:

> [T]he expressive function, which reveals its linguistic features in the difference between direct and indirect speech, is not in the spoken language separable from the communicative function. Direct speech is at once expression and communication…It is the language of narrative which creates a uniquely literary form of reporting speech and thought which ultimately allows us to establish the independence of expression from communication. (63)

Banfield distinguishes, then, between two general categories of language: 1) that of discourse, which necessarily functions in the present, and requires an interlocutor (the "ADDRESSEE/HEARER") even if the interlocutor is the speaker him- or herself; and 2) that of narration, which involves representation, and thus, the exclusion of both the present (the moment of discourse, the present-tense "have" of the "I have written"[13]), and the interlocutor. She further divides narration into various sub-categories: narration can manifest as "pure narration," which, roughly but with important differences, approximates Benveniste's *histoire*; and that of represented consciousness, which she refers to as "represented speech and thought" but which is better known as *style indirect libre* (free indirect style, or *Erlebte Rede,* in English and German respectively) where the consciousness (or E) does not coincide with the narration. "Represented speech and thought" is further divided into two categories: that of *non-reflected* consciousness, in which the consciousness is not aware of the thoughts represented, and *reflected* consciousness, in which it is.

Discourse, then, is "associated with *both* a SPEAKER and an ADDRESSEE/HEARER and with a PRESENT" (144). Pure narration, however, is founded on the exclusion of the interlocutor, and thus, the exclusion of any deictic reference to the act of writing or to the positionality of the writer or speaker in space or time. Such a formulation creates the possibility of an "objective" representation of subjectivity; that is, it is an account of a consciousness' experience of subjectivity that is not contaminated by the

writer's entanglement in the present. That such a position is indeed unavailable in life, is exactly the *fictive* quality of narration.

In order to show this, Banfield must revise Benveniste's formulation of *histoire* and *discours*. Benveniste argues that only the third person is permitted in historical narration, following his argument that the "I" and the "you" are reversible, and imply each other in their reversibility (199). Because the third person does not imply such a relation, Benveniste argues that "he," in itself does not specifically designate anything or anyone." Thus, the "he" is already a kind of proto-fictional character: "the one who is absent" (197).

Banfield, however, offers a plethora of evidence to show the frequency with which the first person is used in combination with the aorist. It is not the "I" that must be excluded, she argues, but rather the *communicative* function of the "I," the "I" speaking to an interlocutor. Thus, she calls for a modification of "this definition of narration [Benveniste's *histoire*] to include the notion of first person narration *which addresses no one*" (145 my italics). In discourse, then, Benveniste's notion of reversibility holds: the "I" implies a "you," and the inverse, while the third person implies no such opposition, serving only as "the one who is absent" (it is for this reason, Benveniste surmises, that the third person remains grammatically unmarked in many languages) (198). Insofar as an "I" depends upon a "you," the "I" requires *presence*, a reference in the world: thus, communication. In *narration*, however, Banfield argues that the "I" can detach itself from its referent. This, then, becomes precisely an "unspeakable sentence," that is, a sentence that no longer functions in the context of communication. Thus, in the mode of narration, even though the "I" is employed, it functions non-deictically: it does not refer to the speaker. In this way the "I" is an object, rather than the locus of subjectivity: in other words, the subjectivity of the "I" is

narrated objectively. Here *je* is indeed *un autre*; the sentence of narration, even if it employs an "I," has no narrator, because the "I" itself is narrated, and narrated impersonally.

If indeed "grammar does not allow one speaker to 'express' another's state" (62), it is in the subtraction of the speaker that we might find the very impetus to fiction: the (impossible) articulation of a person's state of consciousness, a state that cannot be experienced except by the person experiencing it; here, done so, not by *another* person, but by *no one*. And, we might say, it is this articulate *no one* through which the *individual* comes into being.

The admission of the "I" into narration encompasses then, a wide range of fictional narratives that employ the first person. Together with Benveniste's absent third "person," evidence mounts for a theory of grammar which includes narrative as the representation of subjectivity without communication. Yet this by no means exhausts the possibilities for fictional narrative.

Indeed, pure narration, while capable of interrogating the subjectivity of a consciousness, is nonetheless incapable of *expressing* this consciousness, because to engage in expression would require some kind of referent in time and space, precisely what narration does not do. Banfield also, then, analyzes *expressive* sentences which seem to transgress the rubric of narration by including both deictic references, as well as shifting points of view: these are the sentences of *style indirect libre*, or "represented speech and thought." Such sentences are a hybrid of indirect and direct discourse, because they seem to embody the *expressive* consciousness of a subject, while nonetheless are not narrated by the expresser. In this sentence, for example, which Banfield quotes from Virginia Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway*, not only the point of view, but the *expressive* quality seems to emanate from Mrs. Ramsay, though Mrs. Ramsay is herself a narrated figure:

> "There was in Lily a thread of something; a flare of something; something of her own which Mrs. Ramsay liked very much indeed but no man would, she feared" (77).

In the sentence that Banfield quotes from Flaubert's *Madame Bovary*,

> "La maison était bien triste, maintenant!" ("The house was truly sad now!") (98)

the *narration* is in the past (*était*), but the consciousness of the subject which likewise dominates the sentence, speaks of a "maintenant."

Banfield bolsters her argument for voiceless narration by showing that what is presented in the sentences representing speech and thought is not the act of narration, but the pure consciousness of the *self* that is represented. Such sentences make use of deictic references from the perspective of the *narration*; there can be a "now," that is, an internal temporal reference, but not a "present," no deictic that goes all the way to the narration. Thus, again, nothing is being communicated because, though the characters in sentences of represented communication seem to speak, the fact that they are divorced from the act of narration relegates them to another modality from that of the narration: they speak, but there is no "you" to speak to. While Banfield's argument is notoriously difficult to represent because of the complexity of the grammatical factors that constitute it, what she shows is that in de-activating the "now" of discourse, communication is likewise put out of play, leaving only the expression preserved.

What we see hear then, is the creation of a *context* for the expression, a context that would elude us if there was a narrator who was engaged in the act of communication. *The context of narration is founded then on the exclusion of communication.* The person, for the most part absorbed in his or her involvement in the world, is not available to be expressed or to be seen. Narration, understood in its broad sense as including the representation of speech and thought however, in excluding lived experience, permits this sight to *us*.

We might say, then, that narration exists in order to address a primordial divorce between expression and communication, between the intimate experience of life as it is lived—the experience of the *person*—and the need to act, to communicate, to transform this experience into the shared world. The self, we might say, only exists *because* of this divorce. It cannot be "healed" because to do so would only result in the annihilation of the self, the putting of lived experience itself out of play. Thus, consciousness requires the *experience* of this divorce in order for it to *be* itself. The conflation of narration and experience in *style indirect libre*, we might say, is indeed the grappling with this primordial split that is constitutive for consciousness. What we must confront, then, when we ask the question "Who speaks?" is an impersonal force that is the very origin of our own subjection. As subjects, we also are being narrated, but because the narrator comes from *beyond* the subject, we must likewise experience this "narration" as impersonal, and as "unspeakable." What narration provides then, is the context, the ability to create an observer who can turn this absorption into expression.

Communication, then, can be restored when it is understood to be that which happens between an author and his or her readers, that is, between *real* consciousnesses each undergoing and reconfiguring the structure of lived experience.

Critics of the narratorless model often found their objections in the lack of attention to the totality of a narrated text; in the refusal to engage with an organizing force which controls the text. Yet to do so is, paradoxically, to refuse to engage with the very impetus for fiction to begin with, because only when the representation of communication is pitted against actual communication can the value of fiction be understood to lived experience. Fiction must *imitate* life in order for it to ultimately say something about life. Thus, fiction must be founded in the fragmentary quality of lived experience, while insofar as the reader

reads, the reader is engaged in turning fragmentation into coherence. The narratorless narrative, we might say, is precisely the *lack* of organizing force on the part of the narrat*ed*, in the same way that, as subjects, we ourselves have no organizing force available to provide structure to our own lives. Life, for narrated characters, as it is for us, is fragmented. Yet for us, it is a fragmentation that is put out of play, so that it can be seen. Fiction, understood only as a totality loses its very ability to achieve verisimilitude, to represent life as it is lived, in its fragmentation.

Brian McHale, for example, in a scathing critique of Banfield, objects to her "linear," decontextualized approach in defining fiction grammatically, in founding it in the sentence, rather than in the narrative as a whole. Such a method, he argues, fails to take into account the reader's reconstruction of the text at the level beyond the sentence, elements such as "characters' psychologies, relationships among characters, fictional worlds, and even attitudes,… themes, and 'ideas' in the largest sense" (34), all of which are generated through the "'particular personality' identifiable neither with the author or the central consciousness" (38). Certainly this reconstruction is what we do in communication. An utterance occurs linearly, which then must be reconfigured in order for the hearer to turn it into a whole, into a product, which then replaces the fragmented engagement involved in the act of communication. Yet, as we have seen, it is only when communication is put out of play that an observer *of* this absorption can be delineated, and only then, can the process, the intimate experience behind every act of communication be discovered. To do what Banfield does, McHale says, is to:

> first read the parts in order, then interpret the whole text. Now contrast this with the alternative model I have been arguing for…what might be called an *integrational* model, whereby sentences give rise to interpretive reconstructions which in turn affect the interpretation of subsequent and even, retrospectively, of preceding

> sentences, and so on, a global picture of the text's meaning and intentionality being continually built, unbuilt and rebuilt at every point. If, as I believe, this provides a much more adequate model of text and reading, then what Banfield goes on to say about the "jurisdiction of grammar" looks like an admission of defeat. (39)

Yet what McHale refuses to see is that Banfield is working *immanently*, from the perspective *of* fiction, not from that of the reader or writer. If she is not interested in organization *per se*, it is because she is interested in the experience of how being subject to space and time in lived experience can be reproduced *in* fiction, and as such, she is more interested in the *act* of reading, than with the text as an intentional and total object. While reading, as does any other perception, involves turning a linear experience into a *Gestalt*, I argue that what fiction offers is the possibility of viewing and apprehending the *labor* involved in transforming a perception into meaning.

"Trained as we are to perceive texts as totalities, we seek to apprehend their structure and, in the description of that structure, to assert our mastery over the text," write Wlad Godzich and Jeffrey Kittay (48) in proposing that we look *not* at the text as a whole but through following the "processive threading of the text." To be master over the text is to refuse the *experience* it offers. Mastery might be appropriate for understanding the world as a product, appropriate for *homo faber*, but it cannot reach (as, of course, Hegel has shown) into the realm of meaning. I would propose that we must understand our *absorption* in the text as a way of understanding how we are *subject* to the text. It is only in this way that we can approach the understanding of our subjection in general, and only in this way that we can view our subjection as a structure which can be experienced as a whole.

Banfield's essentially bracketed approach, her rigorous *lack* of attention to totality, reveals, we might say, her interest in *absorption*, and in the incommunicability of this absorption. It is this incommunicability, then, that can get preserved in the fictional *product*. In the narratorless model, fiction excludes *you*. Its meaning is not meant for you. It is only

this way that its meaning can be preserved, without being depleted by the all-demanding PRESENT. In the communication model, one begins with language qua speech, and fiction is then derived from speech. In the narratorless model, however, speech is not understood as contiguous with expression. Rather, speech is *derived* from expression. That this can never manifest *in the world* is precisely, then, what is fictional about fiction.

We might say that it is not *mastery*, then, that we want from fiction (although certainly fiction can be a bid to master a reality which we cannot control, an issue which we shall explore in Part Two, Chapter One), but rather, knowledge of our subjection. Banfield wants fiction to be able to give us this knowledge:

> All modern exploration of the mind and the world arrives at this same no-man's-land of unknown knowledge. In language, this knowledge remains unknown as long as it remains spoken—that is, in man. Its existence can be seized and subjected to a self-conscious, objective scrutiny only when it is separated from its human author and incarnated in the text (273).

Yet we might say that it is not *fiction* that offers this knowledge, but rather, that which occurs *between* life and fiction. In our confrontation with the fictional world, we find that this knowledge, this view on the world that fiction affords is not for us, does not say anything about us, and it is in that confrontation with absence of knowledge, that our desire to know replaces this absence of knowledge. This is perhaps where the real significance of fiction—and the impetus toward its creation— lies.

Ultimately, what we can learn from our critique of the communication model of narration is that expression and communication are always implicated in each other. That there is no such thing as pure expression is demonstrated by the fact that expression can only take place through the *communication* of expression. If expression is the experience of existing, communication transforms this experience into the fact of a shared world.

Narrative offers a technology by which communication can be neutralized. And yet, in fact, there is no *phenomenon* of expression. Only when we understand this can we arrive at the *true* phenomenon, that is, the *creation* of an "inside" which, comes into being nourished by the communicative act. Expression, then, is founded in communication, founded in the intransigence, the unsurmountability of communication that results in a symbolic bestowal of the communication act onto what we call "meaning." The "node E" then, which must occur in the *form* of communication, is the discovering of *ourselves* in space, that is, as not available to ourselves, before we discover ourselves in the world with others, and is the very condition of our being able to discover the world of others. In the unavailability of ourselves to ourselves, we first learn to communicate. This *original* communication is lived experience, what we have thus far been referring to as "expression."

In a model of narrative founded on communication, the act of communication can never come into view because the recipient is absorbed in being communicated to. If this were the case, there would be neither a subject who is capable of exploring the limits of his or her subjecthood, nor would there be fiction.

CHAPTER 3:
INTERPRETATION AND INTUITION

Division One: Interpretation

I. APPROACHING THE SYNTHESIS OF INTERPRETATION AND INTUITION

> *Qui, de Dieu est le plus près? Celui qui L'invente comme Il a crée l'homme ou bien celui qui prie pour L'approcher?*
>
> –Edmond Jabès

We have described now two models for understanding narrative: that of communication, and that of a non-narrated, or impersonally narrated text. If we have rejected the communication model as the foundation for narrative, it is only to be able to put communication into its proper place in an overarching theory of fictional narrative. *Communication is what occurs between people*—including that which occurs between author and reader—because it is communication that makes shared, recognizable, things out of our intimate experiences.

Communication requires space, distance. Fiction, however, *negates* distance, in offering a *view* of the subject, a view of the whole, that we can never have when we are absorbed in our communication. We can never have it because there is no critical faculty available when we are absorbed in being who we are. In fiction, we can see across time and space, grasp the notion of a beginning, middle and end, precisely the things that permit us to structure our lives and to identify ourselves in the world. I have argued that while we can *see* this process through the phenomenon of generic fiction, this process is nonetheless

something that we engage in ordinarily, as subjects, in order to *be* who we are. The "who" in Arendt's terminology, the consciousness that we have of ourselves as locatable in a structure, and thus, locatable to ourselves at all, comes from the *ontologically fictional*, the productive aspect of consciousness, which permits the possibility of generic fiction as a phenomenon. Generic fiction, I have argued, permits the installation of an observer on *this here*, so that the very fact of the primordial engagement with fiction can come to consciousness.

If, actually, we live our lives through communication, that is, if we live life in conveying a *this-here* to an *out-there*, we nonetheless would have no capacity to know *who* it is who is communicating if we were not able to superimpose an observer on this process, an observer which *becomes*, fictionally, the perspective of the "who." It is through *representing* communication that we can return to the very impetus for communication at all. This comes about, first and foremost, because we live intersubjectively: that we exist with others gives us our vocabulary. But, this intersubjectivity, nonetheless, is not foundational because we *experience* it discretely. Fiction then, recasts our intersubjective vocabulary into a language of the "inner" self. But, there is an ineluctable circularity in this structure: this inner self is still nothing more than the *experiencing* of the intersubjectively constituted world. In that sense, we might say that the inner self is indeed a fiction, a bare fiction that can offer nothing until it is given objective (and thus, intersubjective) content.

Thus, in order for there to be communication, we must live part of our lives in *vision*, a vision that excludes our bodies. It is the things of the world transmuted into vision that gives form to this bare fiction, and gives vocabulary to experience. Fiction permits, then, not only a negation of space, but also, in a certain sense, a "negation of being" in favor of *seeing*. It is this negation of being that is the work we engage in when we put communication out of play. What fiction permits us to understand, then, is that there are two faculties

involved in being a subject, faculties that are, nonetheless, mutually exclusive: that of acting in space, and thus, in the world, and that of seeing the whole, from "outside" space (the inverted commas signify the fictionality of this perspective). What generic fiction permits us to experience, however, is not this outside perspective, but rather, the incompatibility of these two faculties.

Like characters in a novel who cannot know that they are being narrated, we also are subject to an impersonal force, which, if our lives are to take on structure, and thus, meaning, we must grapple with. This impersonal force is the ineluctable *fact* of our intersubjective constitution: it is this, we might say, that defines the real. As such, we require, in order to be subjects both the ability to experience the world in space, and thus, communicatively, but also, the ability to re-signify the *content* of our communicative acts. It is this second ability that provides a context for our communication that is grounded in a structure, in the "who." It is only through recourse to the ontologically fictional realm that we can recognize that the experience of being in space is already inscribed in the subject "before" the subject encounters others, and other things, in the world. That we only experience this primordiality of space *in* the subject and thus through the experience of space, time and the body is exactly what generates the notion of an ontologically fictional region. The world of spatiality, the experience of being in the body, is itself a *product* of an original confrontation internal to the subject which cannot be experienced in the world, because the world always *manifests* to us as product. The question, for us, then, is not how communication manifests psychic structures, but rather, how it performs the psychic through the "innovation" of manifestation, an innovation which conceals the origin of the structure, of the world. The problem, as Wittgenstein expresses it in *Philosophical Investigations*, is that "We predicate of the thing what lies in the method of representing it"

(104). Our engagement with generic fiction, then, can be understood as the possibility of viewing the act communication passing into structure, something we can never see in ordinary life, because we are creatures of the structure.

The communication model, thus, is inadequate, because it cannot account for both faculties necessary for being a subject. When we communicate, we *act* in the world. But the significance of this acting, the vision of the whole that gives this acting meaning, lies *beyond* communication. If all is acting *in* the world, a model founded on just this acting has no faculty for interrogating itself. In communication, we take space as originary, and thus, cannot discover the primordial "space" that is already immanent to the subject. At the same time, an account of communication is necessary, because it is through communication, and thus, action, that we first discover ourselves in the world; it is through our encounter with others, other consciousnesses and other things, that we first locate ourselves, and provisionally understand ourselves. We cannot, then ignore the role of communication in narrative because to do so would be to ignore our *relation* to narrative; it is to deprive ourselves of the ability to interrogate ourselves, because it is how we in fact find ourselves in the world.

We understand ourselves through negotiating our way through space and in time, and thus, we understand ourselves through *interpretation*. Insofar as we, like characters in a novel, encounter the world in all its contingency, insofar as we have no capacity to *master* our own origin, interpretation, and thus, communication, is the first way in which we discover our consciousness.

Yet, to restrict ourselves to this perspective would be to treat ourselves only as characters in someone else's fiction, and this would preclude the very possibility of fiction. That our world *includes* the possibility to represent ourselves fictionally attests to the fact that

there is a capacity to inquire into this origin, to understand our subjection from beyond our de facto situatedness in the world. If in our bodies, we are condemned to time, the perspective of the "who" is nonetheless not one of temporality: the "who," we might say, *binds* time, gives us a view of the passage of the body through time. The "who" is the "all-at-once" that guides, in its vision, the body who must indeed plod through time, and negotiate space, live in a world that is a constant confrontation with an other. Such a capacity we can call, following Husserl's application of the term for his phenomenological philosophy, *intuition*.

The perspective that intuition gives us is that of ontological fiction. It is indeed the capacity to find a more primordial signification to the things we find in the world, as *expressions* of ourselves in the world. Such a capacity, though more primordial than interpretation, is nonetheless built on the back of interpretation. It is the faculty of intuition that reworks the interpretive function, turning the things that we find in the world into the *oeuvre de soi*.

I turn, in this chapter, then, to an inquiry into the genealogy of these two capacities for understanding, in attempting to show that fiction is a synthesis of intuition and interpretation. This synthesis, has, of course, already been established in the work of Heidegger. In *Being and Time*, Heidegger brings together, in a gesture that will be decisive for the history of philosophy, these two different approaches, which correspond to two heterogeneous schools of thought: on the one hand, that of modern hermeneutics stemming from the work of Friedrich Schleiermacher, and on the other, phenomenology as first formulated by Heidegger's teacher, Husserl. Yet, because Heidegger does not directly treat the phenomenon of fiction, we must, using his work as a starting point, nonetheless, return to the components of his synthesis.

Heidegger begins his inquiry into being by applying Schleiermacher's notion of the hermeneutic circle, which was formulated as a method for the interpretation of texts, to that of being in general. For Schleiermacher, a text already exists as a unified totality: in its completeness, it is timeless in relation to our perception. The mind can only perceive the text along a linear trajectory, piece by piece, part by part. The parts can only be understood by *already* understanding the whole, but the whole can only be understood in terms of the parts. Thus, as we approach a text, it resists us because anything that exists in space and time does not give itself to immediate apprehension.

Using this logic, Heidegger argues that in order to inquire into the notion of being, one must first understand that "Inquiry itself is the behavior of a questioner and therefore of an entity and as such has its own character of Being" (24). Thus, at the most preliminary moment, the inquiry is already thwarted by the fact that the *object* of the inquiry is at the same time, the very thing which one must employ in order to engage in the *act* of inquiring. The very notion of a trajectory from question to answer must be turned back upon itself such that the field of inquiry must become an inquiry into the notion of inquiry itself: "The very asking of the question is an entity's mode of *Being*" (27). Thus, in order to understand being, one must begin by acknowledging that the very act of attempting-to-understand *resists* the possibility of understanding, because a being cannot, insofar as it is a thing in the world, stand outside of itself and look at being as a mere object. The kind of consciousness for whom this is an issue, is, of course, what Heidegger calls *Dasein*.

Heidegger argues that Dasein only can enter into this circle of interpretation because it already comes to being with a provisional understanding of what being is. This "fore-structure of understanding" (191ff) is the impetus to engage in the inquiry to begin with. Thus, while Dasein must negotiate itself in a world where it finds itself among others and

other things through the mediation of time and space, it nonetheless has an *immediate* understanding of itself that it seeks to explicate through the act of interpretation.

For Heidegger, Dasein finds itself "proximally and for the most part" in the mode that he calls *Das Man* ("the they"). Rather than coming to terms with itself as a being that projects its possibility ahead of itself in order to *make* space for itself, Dasein, in the mode of *das Man*, understands itself as contiguous with the space that surrounds it. In doing so, it cuts itself off from being. *But*, such a cutting off can only occur because of what Dasein authentically *is*, regardless of whether it understands this or not. Inauthentically, Dasein does not understand itself as "itself" but rather as a thing among other things. In not understanding its proper relation with things, Dasein "falls." *Das Man,* in viewing itself as just another thing *in* the world, continually passes by the particular nature of its existence. This is Dasein as it normally is, in its "average everydayness:"

> The "they" [*das Man*] is there alongside everywhere, but in such a manner that it has always stolen away whenever Dasein presses for a decision. Yet because the "they" presents every judgment and decision as its own, it deprives the particular Dasein of its answerability…It can be answerable for everything most easily, because it is not someone who needs to vouch for everything. It 'was' always the "they" who did it, and yet, it can be said that it has been 'no one.' (165)

This, we might say, approximates our notion of communication. Put in our terms, *das Man* does not understand its communicating as doing anything more than negotiating itself through time and space. In this sense, *das Man*, like a fictional character, cannot know that it is being narrated.

In Heidegger's account, it is only because Dasein has forgotten itself by falling into *das Man* that it has the potential for pulling itself out of this delusion and into authentic existence. This being-summoned out of *das Man*, out of this originary forgetfulness, comes as *der Gewissensruf*, "the call of conscience." The call is direct, and thus, unmediated. It

pierces through Dasein's mesmerization, its absorption in the world of things; it is an "attestation of Dasein's ownmost potentiality-for-Being—an attestation which lies in Dasein itself" (324). Such a "call" then, must take place in a modality that is fundamentally different from that of the things of the world as Dasein ordinarily perceives them: it must exist outside of time, because existence in time necessarily requires that being cannot be experienced as a whole, that is, as being. The call cannot be understood as having the character of materiality because the call must likewise not exist in space: it is the call *from* being as a whole, and a call from out of the "forgetfulness of being." It follows, then, that the call must not *communicate* anything—because, likewise, anything that is communicated must necessarily take on material in taking place in space and in time. If the call were to be communicative in nature, the very signs that it would be required to use, in serving to point to something *other* than itself, would require the materiality of the sign to be the illusion that the sign *be* the thing it is the sign of. A sign, insofar as it is not what it indicates, requires that meaning be perpetually passed on. A sign can *point* to the call, but it cannot *be* the call itself.

The call, then, "discourses solely and constantly in the mode of keeping silent" (318). It is the realization that Dasein is the possibility of the world that it lives in. It re-organizes Dasein's ontological perception of the world, causing it to understand that which it *fundamentally* is: "The call reaches Dasein in the understanding of itself which it always has, and which is concernful in an everyday, average manner" (272). Thus, the call transforms language, the normal way in which Dasein discovers itself, into silence, into an immediacy that negates space and time.

If the call cannot manifest in language, there must, nonetheless, be some mechanism which brings about this shift in modalities from the inauthentic to the authentic. In a later essay, Heidegger argues, adopting the language of a poem by Rilke, that it is the poet who

dares language by revealing its lack of primordiality, the poet who is "more daring by a breath" than life itself. "The more venturesome are the poets," he says, "but poets whose song turns our unprotected being into the open" ("What Are Poets For?" 140). For the most part we use language, Heidegger argues, in order to *shield* ourselves from understanding who we are authentically. Language in its everyday manifestation protects us from having come to terms with the fact that we are not masters of our own subjection, and paradoxically, permits us to avoid the responsibility for our authentic being. The poet, however, transmutes language from indicating a *thing in the world*, to expressing the ontological condition of a consciousness that finds itself in the world. This requires a "rescue" by which "we turn the transient and therefore preliminary character of object-things away from the inner and invisible region of the merely producing consciousness and toward the true interior of the heart's space, and there allow it to arise invisibly" ("Poets" 130).

Yet Heidegger does not, in *Being and Time* nor in his later writings, account for how we arrive at the fore-structure of understanding which permits the possibility of the rescue to begin with. Furthermore, despite Heidegger's concern with poetry in his later writings, he does not address how language has the capacity for effecting the transformation from the ontic to the ontological. As a result, Heidegger does not offer a method by which *der Gewissensruf*, can come into being. Likewise, Heidegger's discussions of poetry are not concerned with what is inherent in language itself that gives it the capacity to effect the transformation; rather, his critiques of poems in the essays "What Are Poets For?" and "Language" tend to turn the poems into sources for an expanded philosophical vocabulary. The vocation of the poet for Heidegger, then, seems to be that of a kind of philosophical muse, and as such, operates through an heroic inspiration which remains outside of the

critique proper. As a result, the function of *reading*, the transformation that can occur in the act of perception on the part of the reader, becomes elided. While, one might argue that poetry is a possibility for any being with the consciousness of Dasein, the notion that the poet can transform consciousness for *others*, that is, for non-poets, would seem to imply that non-poets would have to rely upon the hero-poet to create the conditions for this transformation for them, because it is only the poet who is capable of bestowing this transformative capacity onto language. This, in turn, would seem to imply that one's "ownmost potential for being" would have to fall back on a dependent intersubjectivity.

In *Being and Time*, then, Heidegger calls authentic *Dasein* the consciousness that is aware of itself as the one who is concerned with its own being. This authenticity, however, is only a modification of *in*authenticity; it is *der Gewissensruf* which "calls" Dasein out of its inauthenticity, and its absorption in *das Man*. In Heidegger's later writings, it is the poet, or poetry, which calls human consciousness back into its ontological understanding from out of its absorption in the "objective" world. In both cases, however, this occurs *silently*. Just as *der Gewissensruf* comes only inarticulately, so too for the later Heidegger, authentic language comes only through the silencing of everyday language: "*Language speaks in the mode of keeping silent,"* he declares (*Language* 207). It is poetry which allows language to speak authentically by cancelling out its communicativeness: "everyday language is a forgotten and therefore used-up poem, from which there hardly resounds a call any longer" (208). The function of the poet then, is to move from forgetfulness into authenticity, to bring back "the peal of stillness" in language, and to move the human into an understanding that transcends its subjection, its absorption in the world:

> If attention is fastened exclusively on human speech, if human speech is taken simply to be the voicing of the inner man, if speech so conceived is regarded as language

> itself, then the nature of language can never appear as anything but an expression and an activity of man. (208)

Such a position, seems to perpetuate the notion of truth as stillness and silence, that, as Arendt shows in *The Human Condition*, has dominated the history of Western philosophy and manifested in the distinction between *physis* and *nomos*, between things which are themselves what they are, and things which are the result of humans:

> The primacy of contemplation over activity rests on the conviction that no work of human hands can equal in beauty and truth the physical *kosmos*, which swings in itself in changeless eternity without any interference or assistance from outside, from man or god. This eternity discloses itself to mortal eyes only when all human movements and activities are at perfect rest. (15)

Such a position, in offering only stark alternatives between a meaningless garrulousness and an eternal silence, discounts the possibility of how we arrive at the *consciousness* of ourselves as subjects, and does not permit the possibility of a picture of, of a *narrative* of subjection, which must necessarily take place *in* the world. A picture is different from a philosophical critique because it is less interested in arriving at eternal truths, than in effecting an experience. Fictional narration, perhaps then, is the place where we engage, not in a critique of subjectivity, but in creating a picture of subjectivity.

Heidegger, despite the fact that time is the predominant theme of his early work, has little or nothing to say about narrative. Yet a narrative, and more particularly, fictional narrative, has the capability of *representing time in time* while at the same time not participating in time. A fictional narrative, unlike a theory, does not posit an eternal truth, and so does not need the silence and inactivity of the contemplative stance. Fictional narrative, in its representative capacity, puts activity out of play. But it does so without recourse to Truth as a referent. As a result, it remains *in the world*. This we might say is what is fictional about fiction. Heidegger's concern with truth as *aletheia* or unconcealedness, and thus, his rigorous

attention to the phenomenon of the everyday, leads him to reject the notion that it is possible to manufacture a perspective by which ontological understanding can be represented in life. Dasein's absorption in the perspective of *das Man*, for Heidegger, is the very fact that truth remains rigorously concealed in the everyday. If a narrative is a kind of model of living in time *in* time, there is no place for such a model in Heidegger's critique, because there is no possibility of transcending *in form* Dasein's absorption *in form*. Language, which necessarily manifests in form, must, if it is to efficacious in serving truth as *aletheia*, always point towards silence that it itself can never achieve. It must serve as a muse rather than a model.

For this reason I propose that, in order to account for the role of fictional narrative in everyday experience, we return to Husserl's phenomenology, in looking at narrative fiction not as something revelatory, akin to Heidegger's notion of poetry, but rather, as the technology for creating just such a model in life. Husserl's notion of the phenomenological reduction, or epoché, involves indeed the manufacturing of an impossible perspective *on* lived experience, through the act of putting out of play, or bracketing the "natural attitude," the perceptual faith that we live in the world as a thing among other things. As we shall see, Husserl's phenomenological reduction requires a "fictional" perspective on the world, where fiction means precisely a perspective that we cannot inhabit in our bodies, and in space and time. Generic fiction, we might come to understand, likewise effects a similar accomplishment, in putting communication, and all actual living, out of play.

Yet precisely because fictional narrative takes as its material the representation of the world as we normally find it, and because it is concerned with representing the experience of time, rather than transcending time, fictional narrative is founded in communication. If, as I have argued, fictional narrative is not communicative, it nonetheless is built out of the

possibility of communication in its representation of communication. We thus, must also return to the interpretive aspect of Heidegger's analytic of being in order to better understand the relation of communication to fiction. We turn, then, to the two traditions, interpretation and intuition, which serve, respectively, as the theoretical foundation for communication model, and for the impersonal model of narration. In doing so, I hope to show that, rather than preclude each other, each has their place in a theory of fiction. Fictional narrative, I will argue, traverses both poles, in creating a model of our subjection, a model which then must be contended with as a thing in the world.

In Friedrich Schleiermacher's notion of the hermeneutic circle, we find an account of being that derives subjectivity from intersubjectivity, individuality from plurality, thought from language. This, I argue, describes the world as the subject finds it, experiences it. In Husserl's phenomenological reduction, the world as it is experienced is put out of play in a productive act. This, I argue, is the function of an ontologically fictional process which produces the subject, and manifests *for us* in generic fiction. Ultimately, I argue here that neither is dispensable: the experience of being a self is an engagement between an act of communication, and the production of a fictional, impersonal perspective.

II. SCHEMATISM FROM KANT TO THE HERMENEUTIC CIRCLE

The notion of interpretation, whether it be of an utterance, a text, or a concept, implies that the object of interpretation is insufficient in itself to provide the meaning. To interpret something is to acknowledge an existential difference between the interpret*er* and the object of interpretation. The very fact that the interpreter is located at a distance from the object, in space, time, psychological constitution, language use, etc., requires that the

interpreter acknowledge these factors, and compensate for them by "translating" the object of interpretation into a modality by which he/she is capable of integrating it into his/her capacity for understanding. We might then say that the interpretation *replaces* the object of interpretation in the act of rendering it meaningful for the interpreter. It is the interpretation then that, working in concert with the original object, produces, or generates the meaning. The paradigm of interpretation then, becomes one of *distance* and *difference*: the object of interpretation, as discrete object, is *never* capable in itself of bearing its own meaning without the supplemental activity on the part of the perceiver of the object. To speak of interpretation then, is to speak of an obstinacy with regard to the physical object: there is an essential unavailability which makes the act of interpretation, of *generating* meaning necessary. A paradigm of interpretation, then, requires that there be no direct experience of the object of interpretation. The responsibility for meaning formation, then, is on the side of the subject, in the face of an unyielding, unknowable object.

As we shall see, the paradigm of phenomenological intuition will do away with the notion of the subject itself, locating the very possibility of meaning not in the confrontation of a subject with an object, but rather, in the consciousness that *perceives* itself as a subject confronting an object. Schleiermacher will, on the contrary, radicalize this notion of an ineluctable subjectivity in declaring that it is only the ensemble of subjectivities that collectively *becomes* the possibility of understanding, in "reducing the relativity of knowledge to knowledge" (276). This, for Husserl, can only be accomplished by putting the very notion that we confront objects out of play, through performing the phenomenological reduction.

It is Kant, however, who creates the impetus for these divergent notions to begin with, in putting forth an account that renders ontological knowledge eternally elusive. For

Kant, even though we cannot *experience* what is beyond our subjectivity, the faculty for rationality permits us to achieve knowledge of it.

In Kantian epistemology, the attempt to achieve a direct experience of reality through consciousness is cast aside as an impossible endeavor. If, for Kant, there is no way to transcend consciousness *in* consciousness, and yet, if consciousness is a necessary requirement for any ontological inquiry, then that which determines consciousness is impossible to experience, at least directly. Rather, everything that we experience *here* can only be understood as the appearance, the sensory manifestation of a supersensory being. Understood in this way what we experience as humans is only the *sign* of being: we must understand our perceptions *as if* they were signs of a noumenal, unavailable realm. While it is this invisible, noumenal realm that determines who we are and how we experience ourselves, others, and our surroundings, there is no way of achieving direct knowledge of this realm. If, then, we are not, as subjects, available to ourselves, we must attempt to come to terms with a pre-personal, or impersonal realm that nonetheless constitutes us as subjects.

With Kant, the data we receive from our senses, when put in the service of an inquiry into the meaning of being, must be recontextualized: we must see what we see with a different attitude. The world available to the senses then, becomes understood as appearance rather than actuality, and we must use this clarified understanding of the objects our senses make available to us to turn these objects into evidence of what remains unavailable. In this way, the world as it appears to us serves as a kind of prosthesis for the *truer* world that does not appear to us. Thus, for Kant, truth can only be experienced indirectly; understanding then, can only be achieved through the act of interpretation. That understanding is possible despite this inability to transcend consciousness requires the assumption that consciousness is only a small territory in the greater ontological realm; even

if consciousness were able to "go to the things themselves," we would have no way of knowing that, thereby assuring that consciousness only operates in a restrictive realm and that being is "greater than" consciousness.

Whatever ontological understanding we are capable of achieving then, can only occur in the speculative realm. Yet such an account of being operates under two assumptions. The first is that there is an original, primordial ontological *unity* which somehow, in the process of translating the experience of being into perception, and thus, into the world that we experience as conscious beings, has been split into the being understood as the confrontation of a subject (consciousness) and an object (the world); the unity of subject and object can never be achieved directly in the world of experience, but nonetheless can be recuperated intellectually. The second assumption, a corollary to the first, is that there is a correlation, though it must remain forever obscured and mysterious, between what we see *here* and how things really *are*. Thus, in order to accept that there is the possibility of ontological understanding, there must be some way of reconciling the beings that we are with being in general. That is, if we "naturally" understand the world as the realm of the split between subject and object, then we must be able to, at the same time, accept the *fact* of an original unity of these two aspects of being *despite the impossibility of it ever being experienced*; but the only way to do so, precisely because our experience is limited to the realm of subject and object, is through faith that such a unity exists.

Schleiermacher, without doing away with these assumptions, nonetheless eschews the speculative orientation of idealist thought. Schleiermacher, in both his *Hermeneutics* and in his *Dialectic*, the two works in which he directly concerns himself with these issues, is not concerned with giving an ontological genealogy (unlike his post-Kantian contemporaries Fichte, Schelling, and Hegel). Rather, we might characterize Schleiermacher's orientation as

"existential" in that his concern is with how, given the condition of an absent unity of subject and object, we are nonetheless capable of understanding if not being, at least each other in the context of an overarching and seemingly unknowable being. Schleiermacher does not explicitly do way with the notion of a primordial and unknowable unity of subject and object as fundamental ontology. Yet Schleiermacher has recourse to these absolute notions only as unapproachable limits that allow us to generate the context in which things *are* in the world of experience. Thus, for Schleiermacher, such a unity of absolute subjectivity and absolute objectivity is only a "regulative idea" (8) which all understanding strives for but never achieves. As a result, the emphasis, in Schleiermacher, is on the experience of being, on being, then, in practice. Rather than offer accounts of "how we got this way," Schleiermacher's method-driven philosophy of interpretation is concerned, pragmatically, with "what we do with what we have" in the light of the impossibility of attaining absolute knowledge.

Such a position is both a reaction to and a revision of Kant's theory of how we acquire knowledge, which Kant presents in his chapter on schematism in the second book of the Transcendental Analytic of the *Critique of Pure Reason*.

The basis of the problem, as Kant puts it, is that "Pure concepts…can never be encountered in any intuition" (A137/B176)[1]. For both Kant and Schleiermacher, intuition can only be empirical. There can be no intuition of the general, of the concept or essence, which must be formulated *in* consciousness, from *out* of the empirical intuition. There is then, a barrier between the particular sense-perception and the general concept that must be somehow overcome, despite the fact that such a barrier seems to be untraversable. A "third thing" must be found that connects the two spheres: this is what Kant terms the "schemata."

The schemata are in essence the mediators between the sensible and the conceptual worlds. They are what allow us to perceive the world as we know it; that is, they allow us not only to simply register raw data through sense perception, but to be able to construct that data into the representational forms by which we apprehend the world as meaningful. The schemata are the "rules" by which we understand ourselves as subjects in a worldly context:

> The concept of a dog signifies a rule in accordance with which my imagination can specify the shape of a four footed animal in general, without being restricted to any single particular shape that experience offers me or any possible image that I can exhibit *in concreto*. (A141 / B179)

Without the intermediary schemata, we would have no way to organize the world we live in; thus, "it is not images of objects but schemata that ground our pure sensible concepts" (A140 / B180). Schematism then, in the terminology of Donald Davidson, is a system in which we "see as," rather than "see that" (qtd. Bowie 123), in a manner consistent with Kant's overarching contention that the world we perceive is only one of appearances. Through the mediation of the schemata, we view the world the only way we can: interpretatively.

This interpretive understanding is generated for Kant, then, not through the act of intuition (and thus perception) but through subjecting it to the act of judgment, "the faculty of thinking the particular as contained under the universal" (*Critique of Judgment* 16). The act of judging entails the active application of the imagination ("spontaneity") to the perceptive faculties ("receptivity") in the achieving of understanding. The schemata then, are the products of this judgment; they are the refinements of the representations of that which we derive through intuition. As such, Kant emphasizes that the schemata must be distinguished

from images. He illustrates this by comparing the five dots in an illustration of the number 'five' with the number five itself. While one could easily enough perceive five dots as representing the number 'five', one would have great difficulty in referring to large numbers without schematic representation. The example however, is merely illustrative. There could not be, without schematization, any talk at all of deriving the number five out of five dots: only because we schematize can the perception of the dots be translated into the rule 'five.' Schematism then, bears something of the character of language: it provides a conceptual stratum to our perception by allowing numerous heterogeneous elements to be organized into homogeneous units. Thus, Kant describes schematism as a "monogram of pure *a priori* imagination" (A142 / B181). Schematism must, then, paradoxically, *precede* the image, because it is only the schemata "through which and in accordance with which the images first become possible" (A142 / B181). Schematism tells us how to see so that we *can* see. Yet what we see is not the thing itself, but rather, only a representation, a sign, a "translation" of the ineffable thing into the "language" of the senses, and thus, into language proper, which relies on the sensory world.

It is, then, only through the schemata that understanding is possible, only because there is, for consciousness, a primordial interpretive apprehending of the world. The difficulty with this however, lies exactly in the act of interpretation that a judgment requires. If we can only understand the world interpretively through the intervention of the schemata, the schemata themselves, as concretized units of interpretation, would *themselves* require interpretation, sending us off on an infinite interpretive regress. Likewise, in order for there to be the possibility of making a judgment, there must already be some faculty for judgment already in place that sets up the conditions for the judging. Kant himself points out the regressive nature of the act of judging:

> Since no representation pertains to the object immediately except intuition alone, a concept is thus never immediately related to an object, but always related to some other representation of it (whether it be an intuition or *already a concept*). Judgment is therefore the mediate cognition of an object, hence the representation of a representation of it." (A68 / B93, my italics)

Kant, then, requires a synthetic judgment out of which the schemata are produced: "By synthesis in the most general sense…I understand the action of putting different representations together with each other and comprehending their manifold in one cognition" (A77 / B103). Before this, however, the raw data of the physical world must be intuited: "The first thing that must be given to us *a priori* for the cognition of all objects is the *manifold* of pure intuition" (A78 / B104).

The problem here is that this offers no way to account for such a pure intuition. How are we to intuit at all, without already having consciousness, which necessitates already that we have the ability to understand concepts schematically? For in Kant we still find the view that a concept can only exist as a concept in our intelligence if it is capable of being applied to more than one representation of an intuition: "The concept of a body thus signifies something, e.g. metal, which can be cognized though that concept. It is therefore a concept only because other representations are contained under it by means of which it can be related to objects" (A69 / B94). Here we stand at the heart of the regress, by which the attempt to find a genealogy of a concept runs into itself. It is perhaps for this reason that Kant represents this activity in ambiguous language:

> Synthesis in general is...the mere effect of the imagination, of a blind though indispensable function of the soul, without which we would have no cognition at all, but of which we are seldom even conscious. (A78 / B103)

This recourse to obscurity and to the idea of the "soul" returns again in the schematism chapter of the *Critique* when Kant calls the process of schematization "a hidden art in the depth of the human soul" (A141 / B180), a passage upon which Heidegger remarks that Kant had lost his critical bearing. "Kant himself was aware that he was entering into an area of obscurity," Heidegger writes, because he was trapped by his having dogmatically assumed the position of Descartes, so that the "'I think' was shrouded in utter darkness" (*Being and Time* 45). The issue is, then, the seeming inability to get from the original intuition, which requires a synthesis, to a consciousness that only the schemata can provide,

In order for there to be the representation of an object through intuition, there must be a representation *already* in place, one which can only have come about through an *a priori* act of judgment. Kant is able to resolve this difficulty through the *a priori* establishing of time and space as foundational intuitions that transcend the merely empirical. Thus, "the schema of time [is] a line" (A137n) because this is how we originally interpret time; this schema is an interpretation, but it is a *fundamental* interpretation in accordance with the fundamental nature of time itself. Here the regress ostensibly stops because there can be nothing knowable behind time itself. Yet ultimately, this does not solve the problem, because, while the fundamental *a priori* intuitions may be all that *we*, as conscious beings, are capable of apprehending, there still remains the problem of the condition by which time and space arises, which allows us in turn to engage in the act of judging at all. This is a condition that is, in Kant's system, forever hidden to us, so that, as Andrew Bowie writes, "just adding further 'conditions' will not render something intelligible, unless that which can grasp significance in an 'unconditioned' manner is already in place" (129).

Friedrich Schelling recognized this problem, and in his *System of Transcendental Idealism*, he reinstates the regress, this time not as a problem in the account of the origin of consciousness, but rather, as the very foundation for consciousness. He thus, in a certain sense, replaces the *a priori* intuition of space and time with the regress itself:

> The common explanation of the origin of concepts, if it is not to be merely an explanation of the empirical origin thereof, namely that whereby the concept is said to arise for me because I suppress the particular in a number of individual intuitions, and retain only the general, can be readily exposed in all its superficiality. For in order to carry out this operation, I must undoubtedly compare these intuitions with one another; but how do I achieve this, unless I am already guided by a concept? For how, then, do we know that these individual objects given to us are of the same sort, unless the first has already become a concept for us? (139)

What Schelling shows is that the regress itself is not an epistemological problem, but an ontological one: it is not something that can be avoided or explained, but is rather, the condition of being itself. Consciousness then, does not exist in *spite* of this regress, but because of it: the inability to get to the bottom of a judgment, then, is the very foundation of consciousness. Schelling's argument activates the regress, by turning Kantian explication *of* consciousness into an account of the way consciousness performs itself. In doing so, Schelling reconfigures the problematic into that of a consideration of consciousness as essentially *productive*, as that which brings itself into being as a result of the confrontation with an unknowable, noumenal realm. For Schelling, consciousness, in coming into being, does not so much seek, as it does create.

Schematism, to Schelling, first comes about because of the self's *original* inability to immediately comprehend the self. In a line of thinking that anticipates Heidegger, Schelling argues that the self cannot arrive at an explanation of its own self-consciousness through the synthetic judgment by which it understands the external world, because such a judgment would necessarily *already* presuppose a self:

> Since the intelligence, so long as it is intuitant, is one with the intuited and in no way distinct therefrom, it will be unable to arrive at any intuition of itself. (134)

Because the self cannot look at itself from outside the self, all knowledge of the self can only be explained through an *analytic* act. The act of analysis is essentially inferential, and has its basis in Kant's reflective judgment: one begins with the particular, and only from there proceeds to the universal. For Schelling, then, the reflective judgment is primordial, and is the basis for the determinative judgment (Kant will arrive at a similar notion in the *Critique of Judgment*). Thus, in the self's inability to discover the foundation of its own consciousness, it must begin with itself *as such*. The problem of course, is that consciousness is attempting to be both the *object* of analysis, as well as the *act* of analyzing. As long as these two aspects of the analysis remain homogeneous, there is nothing to see, and no inquiry can be possible. The difficulty is in delineating the two forms of acting: the acting that will be analyzed as an object, and the acting that will do the analyzing. Here we approach the issue of the regress: each time that we attempt to see, our seeing is corrupted by its *already* being that which is seen. Schelling's escape from this regress is to make the artificial, analytic distinction between "act" and "product." Though in essence, no such distinction "really" exists, because, in his system, there is a primordial unity of subject and object, one can still pronounce this distinction, see these two components *as* distinct, nonetheless. This is Schelling's definition of "abstraction": the sidestep out of the regress by which we can look conceptually at what is occurring in the intelligence *as if* we were able to separate ourselves from it. "Act" and "product" then, are figures, synecdochical prostheses, which as act as proxies for what they are part *of*. They stand for what we cannot see because we are part of it too. To abstract then, is to create a model, to make a picture that stands for what we represent to ourselves *as* ourselves.

This act of abstraction, however, is not a metaphysical technique, but is rather a description of how we arrive at consciousness to begin with. If we can only achieve consciousness of ourselves through this act of imagining that which we cannot see, then it is only under this condition that we can be conscious of the external world at all:

> We could not view objects as distinct from us without an *original abstraction*. That they therefore loose themselves, as it were, from the mind, and take their place in space outside of us, is possible as such only through the separation of the concept from the product, i.e. of the subjective from the objective. (136, my italics)

Our very construction of the world is based upon our inability to see ourselves, and consciousness then, is precisely this not-seeing. Consciousness, then, in a certain sense, is the ability to see what we cannot see. This is a departure from Kant, who posits the noumenal realm as that which is precisely outside consciousness. Schelling's "abstraction" then, offers an account of the inauguration of the distinction between subject and object. Understood in this way, consciousness is not anything in itself. It is, rather, the circumscription of a negativity, the positing of a non-existent rift made possible through the sidestep of abstraction by which we evade the closed unity of the intelligence and arrive at the possibility of the formation of concepts. Yet abstraction remains nonetheless, despite its being constitutive for our ability to apprehend the world, an artificial distinction, in accord with the artificiality of consciousness itself. This is why "the question as to how our concepts conform to objects has therefore no meaning in the transcendental viewpoint, inasmuch as this question presupposes an original difference between the two" (135). Only in consciousness is there this separation:

> In the absence of consciousness, the object and its concept and conversely, concept and object, are one and the same, and the separation of the two first occurs with the emergence of consciousness. (135)

It is extremely important to Schelling that consciousness be understood only as an artificial, derivative distinction based upon an analytic, rather than a synthetic judgment: "A philosophy which starts from consciousness," he writes, referring to Fichte's *Foundations of the Entire Science of Knowledge* published six years earlier, "will…never be able to explain this conformity [between subject and object], nor is it explicable without an original identity, whose principle necessarily lies beyond consciousness" (135). Whereas Fichte saw consciousness as *encountering* a necessary error, Schelling saw consciousness *as* the necessary error. To see consciousness as originary then, is to be blinded by the belief that consciousness really *sees*. Rather, in Schelling's system, we must learn how to see consciousness as a prosthetic tool; we must see the objects of our consciousness as a sign for the otherwise inapprehensible. Consciousness, to Schelling, comes from the self's drive (*trieb*) to find itself:

> This drive emerges directly from the contradiction between the idealizing [abstract] self, and the intuiting [empirical] self and is directly bent upon restoring the lost identity of the self. (177)

If we were to apprehend consciousness as originary, as does Fichte, this drive, which manifests as consciousness, would remain frustrated, having no concept of an original unity in which to seek itself.

Consciousness then, is the inverse of a synthetic judgment. It is the taking apart of what cannot be taken apart; the creation of a vehicle which enables us to divine the world figuratively. What we see is an illusion, a picture of the universe dismantled. If the world were apprehended as intact, there would be nothing to see.

The mechanism that permits this act of separation is the judgment itself. It is in judgment that "we first have a separation of what was hitherto united" (136) and thus, it is in the judgment that we first apprehend the world through schematism. As in the Kantian

judgment, the schemata in Schelling's idea of judgment are the result of the comparison between the concept and the intuition.

Like Schelling, Schleiermacher also establishes the regress as originary. Unlike Schelling, however, Schleiermacher is not concerned with establishing consciousness as the drive to return to an original unity. Rather, Schleiermacher's concern with *method*, is an expression of his interest in the *hic et nunc*. Thus, we might say, that Schleiermacher, in some way "brackets" the thesis of an original unity of subject and object, and is concerned purely with what occurs in the light of the de facto experience of a world which we experience in the form of a subject confronting an object.

For an account of schematism to lead to the hermeneutical method, the connection between the schemata and language will have to be made clear, precisely because hermeneutics is first and foremost a method involving communication, and thus, language. Schelling only provisionally makes this link: "We may infer from this very necessity of schematism that the whole mechanism of language will rest upon it," he writes (137). Yet other than suggesting several lines of research—inquiries into the structure of primeval languages and ancient mythologies, a critique of scientific language—he does not pursue the point. It is Schleiermacher who expressly develops the relationship between schematism and language as the founding notion of hermeneutics.

Schleiermacher outlines his version of schematism in his *Dialektic*. To Schleiermacher, the schemata are the "general image" (*allgemeinen Bilder*) by which we mediate between concept and object. This is a significant departure from Kant, who expressly declared that the schemata were *not* images:

> The schema is in itself always only a product of the imagination; but since the synthesis of the latter has as its aim no individual intuition but rather only the unity

> in the determination of sensibility, the schema is to be distinguished from an image. (*CPR* A140 / B179).

Schleiermacher, however, like Schelling, and unlike Kant, locates the schemata on the side of intuition, as opposed to that of the concept. We shall see, however, that in ascribing to the schemata the identity of image (albeit "general image"), Schleiermacher attempts to delineate a frontier between schematism and language, a delineation that becomes more and more difficult to maintain the more evident it becomes that schematism and language are both systems of signification.

Schleiermacher's schematism manifests out of the dialectical relationship between identity and difference. Knowledge, he says, must have a "general identity of construction" (271) in relation to the abstract intelligence. That is, we must be able to identify similarities in the various perceptions that we have of the phenomenal world, in order to arrive at a conceptual context for understanding them. We must also have the capability of delineating differences in actual, objective existence. Thus, to use Schleiermacher's example which is a variation on the example that Kant uses, which is in turn a variation on the example Aristotle uses in the *Topics*, we are capable of understanding both horses and cows to exist in the category of "four-footed animal": this is the principle of identity. At the same time, we must also be capable of distinguishing the *difference* between the horse and the cow. Only in this way can we perceive objects as objects, and not simply as indistinct matter. The schemata, as that which mediates between concept and object, allow us to see the cow as the four-footed animal. The cow is "cow" because we see it as the particular coordinate between *this* intuition and the general concept. So far, Schleiermacher's version of schematism is in accord with Kant's. As long as schematism is the journey of *one* consciousness as it transmutes perception into language, there is little difference between the two accounts.

However, for Schleiermacher, this in itself is not enough to ground knowledge: "To knowledge belongs further that it is a thought which is constituted in the same way in all people" (272). It is only upon the condition that the schematic system can be *communicable* that knowledge can be possible. It is with this gesture that Schleiermacher moves the frontier from an individual confronting his or her unknowable ontological foundation, to that of a plurality of individuals confronting, through the other, their own singularity. Thus, new questions arise: because each individual schematizes *as* an individual, how do we know that there can be such an accord of thought *between* individuals? The problem is, Schleiermacher writes, that "we cannot observe how the outward image appears on the inside of an organism" (272). Because another's schematism is necessarily unavailable to me, "something always escapes from our investigation" (272). It is then, not through direct observation that we can verify a general identity in the way that we construct thought, but only indirectly, through *exchange* of consciousness. It is here that we arrive at the connection between schematism and language:

> We can only bring the sameness of construction to light by exchange of consciousness. This presupposes a mediating term, a universal and shared system of designation, which will be language or something which is substituted for language. (272)

Now, this system of designation is *already* in place in the individual in the form of the schemata. Language then, is just an exteriorization, a publication or broadcasting of what we already do privately. That which we hold in our imagination through the process of schematization is neither a concept nor a particular object, but a *sign*, a "monogram" as Kant puts it, and thus, has the same essential feature as that of the system of language by which we exchange this inner schematism with others.

For Schleiermacher, language, as the exchange of consciousness, is essentially the verification of the universal identity of construction between individual schematizations:

> *Language as a general system of designation* [*allgemeines Bezeichnungssystem*]. The identity of individual and species is posited in this oscillation. The action of being able to synthesize already produces a system of designation. (272)

And yet, while Schleiermacher maintains that "the organism follows the same laws in all people" (272), we can only verify this indirectly, through the medium of language:

> Now that language is an adequate guarantee for us of the identity of the process, i.e. that I am certain that someone who says the same word as I must also construct the same inner image and thereby form the same particular organic effects, admittedly only appears as a presupposition which must continually be proved and, by being proved, will be declared to be true. (273)

The idea that this is "admittedly only… a presupposition" however, proves to be decisive for the form which consciousness itself takes. As with Schelling's account of consciousness, language here is understood as a way around our inability to see; it is a prosthesis which guides us in our inability to get beyond the outside of any other individual's schematism. Yet Schleiermacher is not concerned with an original unity of being, and thus, does not see consciousness as engaging in an artificial act that involves seeing a rift between subject and object where ultimately, there is only a primordial unity. Thus, though Schleiermacher is concerned with the methodical reconstruction of knowledge, he, likewise changes the emphasis of the critique of consciousness from that of a grappling with an original unity, to that of the attempt to arrive at the "sameness of construction." Schleiermacher's concern then, is, we might say, not with the genealogy of knowledge, but with knowledge as a phenomenon, and thus, as something in the world. Thus, for Schleiermacher, absolute subjectivity is only a regulative idea, and one which must give way to knowledge as an expression of our distance from one another in space.

This brings up the difficult issue of the difference between language and schematism: if language, as a system of signification, exists because of our inability to apprehend *another's* schematism, then what is the nature of schematism if it is *also* a system of signs. The question then, addresses the relation between language and thought: how can Schleiermacher make a separation between them if both serve the same function?

In order to answer this question, we must first examine what Schleiermacher means by "general identity of construction." This identity, we must remember, is always opposed to a difference. The identity falls on the side of subjectivity, of the formation of concepts and categories, while the difference falls on the side of substance, of mere material that remains undifferentiated until the judgment delineates it in the schematic process. Thus, while there is a general identity in the way we think, as a result of the access we have to intelligence (that is, absolute, incorruptible, but inaccessible subjectivity), there remains a *difference* in the way that we perceive: a difference that pertains to the "organic function," the very substance that we are. There is then, despite the *possibility* of understanding each other, an unavoidable relativity in the way that this possibility gets actualized. Understanding, then, is always contaminated by the actual; there is always the possibility of misunderstanding or not understanding at all. But this relativity cannot be underestimated in Schleiermacher's account: it is only because it is there that there is any reason to communicate, to compare, to ascertain, or to identify at all.

Consciousness then, is bound up in a difference that manifests in the difference between languages, and in a difference between individuals. Ultimately, then, it is only our difference with others, then, that can propel us into a consideration of a difference within ourselves. Whereas Schelling begins with this difference as one between an unapproachable unity, and the experience of consciousness, Schleiermacher derives the experience of

consciousness from a difference that manifests in the world, between others. *Consciousness then, is not properly consciousness without the exchange of consciousness.* Language, as a product of schematization, is part of the mediating force by which consciousness takes place. It is for this reason that Schleiermacher writes in the introduction to *Hermeneutics and Criticism* that the individual "can think only the thoughts which have their designation in his language" (9). Language determines consciousness by bringing the inner schematization into the "outside," into the public space where it can be seen. Thought involves constantly presenting ourselves to an other, who could tell us what "we" are unable to apprehend directly.

Language then, as all outwardness, must *absorb* the relativity between the different individual schematic constructions. Because of this relativity, because schematization is not homogeneous but manifests along a range of that which is properly "human," there can be no universal language that can convey *im*mediately the inner schemata. Language is the structure of this relativity, a compromise of these manifold insides. Language then, is the mediation of a mediation, the schematization of the schemata. Thus, when Schleiermacher says that no universal language is possible (and here he directs his argument toward Leibniz), the implication is that if there was such a language, it would necessarily be one with the schemata, and if this were the case, there would be no need to communicate at all:

> If then, language is already brought out by the process of schematism, there must already be a difference...which expresses itself in the difference of languages. (275)

Thus, language expresses the difference *between* communicators, and this difference can be expressed only because there is already the possibility, but not the actuality, of an identity between the communicators:

> The identity of the thought expresses the attunement of the person to being in the place where they are located; the difference of thought expresses the separation of their thought from being in the place. (277)

This relativity of knowledge then, is the condition of existence. Schleiermacher sees only one real way of managing it:

> If we assume that we could never remove this relativity then *we would be left with reducing the relativity of knowledge itself to knowledge*. Then we could at the same time take up the task of the construction and mediation of knowledge." (276, my italics)

We proceed then, by understanding consciousness and our ability to exchange it, as ultimately imperfect, and not inherently perfectible. Consciousness then, and this means both individual schematism and public language, takes place between two unapproachable limits: that of absolute subjectivity, "the absolute unity of being within which all oppositions are enclosed," (276) and that of mere, contentless matter. For Schleiermacher, it is *consciousness* that is real, and the limits merely guides by which we are to make sense of our thinking. Thus, whereas Schelling maintains that the world, as experience of subject and object is *false*, only the illusory view of a primordially unified subjectivity, Schleiermacher maintains that it is existence as we know it that is real, with the limits of subjectivity and matter as mere thought forms. "Both the contentless idea of mere matter and the absolute unity of being in which all oppositions are enclosed are only basic conditions of thought, not real thinking itself," he writes. Schelling prioritizes the absolute subject as the origin of consciousness, but Schleiermacher opposes the idea of absolute subject to mere matter, and posits consciousness as the *living synthesis* of both: real, where the limits are not. In this way, Schleiermacher avoids both Fichte's positing of a pure ego, as well as Schelling's requirement that there be an original synthesis from out of which the ego arises as its misapprehension. The "seeing-as" is original, and is composed of the two poles of matter and subjectivity.

We might find here the impetus toward Heidegger's account of Dasein's being-in-the-world. The average understanding of being that Heidegger declares all philosophies of being must begin with, the ontico-ontological structure of Dasein who has its own being as his issue, begins to be articulated in Schleiermacher's version of the synthesis which produces consciousness.

Thus, like Schelling, Schleiermacher grounds consciousness in difference: the difference between absolute subject and contentless matter. Yet unlike Schelling, this difference is not the analytic abstraction that artificially separates the act from the acting, but is rather the difference in the way we perceive as individuals. Whereas to Schelling, the difference comes out of the inability of the original identity to perceive itself, for Schleiermacher, identity and difference exist in a dialectical relation where each is equally primordial, and out of which consciousness arises as the synthesis.

The identity here is absolute subjectivity, which is always the same by definition; the difference is the relativity in perception: the world is perceived by separate individuals in separate locations. Relativity is then not an auxiliary malfunction of consciousness, but its determining factor. It is the gap that is required in order for there to be something for something else to recognize; it is what had to be *created* to Schelling, whereas to Schleiermacher, it is already there. Knowledge then, is the interplay between the identity of the intelligence, and the difference between actual beings. The drive toward self-knowledge in Schelling becomes to Schleiermacher the drive towards understanding the difference in individuals: "We must come to know the individual difference itself and thus remain with our task, namely the task of wishing to know." It is an endless task "for the demand is completely to know the individuality of a people or a single person. And these are objects that we can only attain via approximation" (277). Yet it is this very inability to complete the

task that defines its possibility, and thus, makes possible consciousness itself. Schleiermacher makes this clear when he says, "Absolute identity of knowledge can only arise if the individual factor were completely eliminated" (278), which would void of course, the entire enterprise.

The hermeneutic circle then, moves the Kantian regress of conditions from the speculative realm to the factual world. Schleiermacher's innovation was to equate Kant's universal system—schematism— with the system of language, and then to identify the individual as a point *in* the language. By understanding the regress as ineluctable, hermeneutics accounts for the ability to acquire knowledge in a way that the schematic system does not. Language as the expression of each individual from his or her particular place in the system, is the expression of the inability to apprehend the totality. The hermeneutic circle then, as the inability of the system to represent itself *is* what generates the need for representation, and thus, the system of representation.

We can think of this as the structure of the communication model of narration. In this model, the world, as a foundational object, is what we talk about, in our endlessly fragmented attempts to interpret it: that is, to unite it into a whole, to make meaning out of it. Yet because our interpretations themselves are objects for analysis, interpretation, and communication is endless: the failure to unite subject and object, then, is the source for a consciousness that continually renews itself in its attempts to do so.

III. HERMENEUTICS, COMMUNICATION AND EXPRESSION

Schleiermacher writes:

> The task in hermeneutics is to understand the utterance at first just as well and then better than its author. For because we have no immediate knowledge of what is in him, we must seek to bring much to consciousness that can remain inside him, except to the extent which he himself reflectively becomes his own reader. (23)

Hermeneutics is a returning back to the thought out of which a text originates, a thought of which the original writer may not even have been aware, and of which we may gain access to only through what becomes manifest in language. Thus, the writer him- or herself has no priority over his own text; as soon as something is "fixed" in language, it becomes an object of interpretation—that is, there is something unavailable that can be actualized only in the interplay between the reader and the text, even if the reader is the text's own author. If we apply this idea to the notion of schematism, and if we think of the schemata as a kind of "fixing," in Schleiermacher's terminology, or as a "monogram" in Kant's, we see that the self requires an other in order to understand himself. Why? Precisely because the self requires "language *or something which is substituted for language*" in order to communicate with *itself*.

We generate language in order to communicate, but as soon as we do this, we must engage in interpretation. As such, language and thought exist in an intertwined relationship that *seems* to mirror the logic of the hermeneutic circle.

> There are no thoughts without speech. The speaking of the words relates solely to the presence of another person, and to this extent is contingent. But no one can think without words. Without words the thought is not yet completed and clear. (8)

Thus, while it is the other to whom we ostensibly communicate, we *need* this other in order to be able to arrive at the concretion of thought, to *communicate* thought to ourselves. It thus becomes increasingly difficult to determine whether this other is outside or inside of us.

"Thinking is an inner speaking," Schleiermacher writes in the introduction to *Hermeneutics and Criticism* (9). In the same passage, he proclaims that "the individual is determined in his thoughts by the (common) language." If we take Schleiermacher literally here, we would have to understand the concept of "thought" as having the same ontological status as the unapproachable limit of absolute subjectivity in his theory of schematism. Thought would not be something that takes form in and of itself, but would be more like the limit of language, but which we only find in language. In our terms, then, the person, the intimate experience of being a subject, can only manifest as an individual, the subject's locating of him- or herself in the world. Thought that does not manifest in speech could only "be" in the absolute, unified subject, which would, of course, negate the very possibility of the experience of a world. Yet here we encounter a difficulty: let us recall Schleiermacher's account of the origin of language in his *Dialektic.* Here he argues that language is a "universal system of designation" *(Bezeichnungen)*, which only can exist because there is both the identical construction of thought among humans (subjectivity) *and* the relativity, the "original difference" (275) as grounded in the "organic impressions," the physiological variations in perception and the physical differences in perspective as necessitated by our existing as spatially distinct beings. Language then, as we have said, would be something like the schematization of the schemata. We would then have to postulate something like the "private language" which Wittgenstein argues against in *Philosophical Investigations,* a language installed discretely in each individual, yet one that *we could not call "thought."* This private language subsequently would become organized into the public language by which we communicate.

But if thinking is indeed an inner speaking, if there is "no thought without speech," then this inner schematization would *already* have to be determined by the public language

instead of the other way around. This is because language, by definition, exists to communicate something unknown; it necessitates a difference, a spatial or temporal non-contiguity, out which the system of designation arises, and only because there is the need to address this gap in immediacy. This is the issue that the hermeneutic circle was designed to resolve in its incorporating of schematism into the logic of precomprehension.

Yet as tempting as it may appear, the logic of the hermeneutic circle cannot apply to the origin of language. This is because languageless thought, as absolute subjectivity, requires its opposite: indeterminate matter. It is only in the dialectical relation between these two limits—absolute identity and absolute difference—that language, as the system by which we represent, or designate the world to ourselves can exist at all. Thus, language cannot be opposed to thought in hermeneutic logic. Language must exist in the world, where thought cannot. There can be no entry into the hermeneutic circle here, because language *is* the entry. There can be no language of language that can address the gap between language and thought. The more language tries to reach thought, the more thought resists language, either by remaining unreal *or* by becoming a system of designation, the appropriation, the expression of the resistance. In either case, thought disappears (if something unreal can disappear) the moment that we try to apprehend it. We can thus, begin to understand this languageless thought as the experience of the *person*, before he or she is overtaken by the public language, and becomes an individual.

Thus, when Schleiermacher declares that we require "language or something which is substituted for language" as a "universal system of designation," the issue here is that in isolating language as only the species of the genus "system of designation" the attempt is made to keep our own personal way of representing the world schematically as separate from the way that we communicate with each other. Only in this way can schematism, as

inner speaking, remain separate from the common language that represents our inner schematism to each other publicly. Both here are understood as systems of designation, but each designates differently: one as a system of intra-designation, and one as a system of universal designation.

Yet as soon as we attempt to differentiate between types of designation, we run into the same difficulty that we have already begun to articulate. If a system of designation is a system of signs, which by definition, exploits the possibility of *identity* in its attempt to bridge *relativity*, how do we distinguish at all between systems of signs? Would the difference between inner schematism and language be any different from the difference between one language and another (spoken or written)? If schematism is *real* in the way that "thought" is not, how could it be any different from any other real thing that exists? We must remember that, in Schleiermacher's practical, "existential" outlook, *what is real is real only because we are capable of representing it as a system of signs.*

Schematism and language must be separate because language is the *compromise.* But thought must already be language because language is the very expression of relativity by which we are conscious beings at all. Language, as the resistance to the indeterminate must be the *form* of our thought. Thus, when Schleiermacher says, "language is the manner in which thought is real" (8), we must take "real" to mean something existing, repeatable, representable, and thus, representable to *others.*

Likewise, if we think of language as being the outward expression of some "inside," we find that it is not the inside that is the issue, but rather the representation of it. Schleiermacher readily acknowledges, as we have seen, that "we cannot observe how the outward image appears on the inside of the organism" and it is this that requires the "universal system of designation" by which consciousness is exchanged. But here, we can

see, that the only way that we are capable of identifying anything like this inside at all, is already because of this exchange, which enables the possibility of representation. Inner and outer become merged in the activity of designation.

In his description of the process of creating a text, Schleiermacher distinguishes between two steps. In the act of *meditation* the individual asks himself, "How can I manage thoroughly to research the object?" (105) In the act of *composition,* the thought becomes fixed in language. Here the author asks himself, "how do I move thought though in a certain direction and how do I represent it for other people?" (105). The great difficulty with this division is that, despite the claim that thought cannot be properly thought without language, here a clear separation is made between the two. If both thought and language are the expression of the resistance of existing beings in space and time to absolute, homogeneous subjectivity, how can we delineate thought from language, when it seems more and more they are woven from the same cloth?

The process of composition is the final act of the author by which his or her thought (and we must use the word provisionally) becomes a thing in the world. The composition, as a work of language, must exist in time, and for this reason, requires interpretation. What then, is the ontological status of the meditation? Is the meditation merely an instant of time that is extended out into form during the process of composition? Yet meditation also must exist in time, and thus, the incipient text must also somehow exist in time before it is composed. But the meditation itself, as Schleiermacher recognizes, requires that there be something that in turn, generates *it.* Thus, Schleiermacher requires new causal elements: the "moment of emergence," becomes the impetus behind the meditation

> To the extent that a sequence of thoughts arises from an activity of life it is implicitly already completely posited at its inception, i.e. the whole sequence is only a development of the moment of emergence; the individual parts of the sequence are

> already determined by the deed via which the moment of thoughts arises, and if I understand this sequence, I understand the deed.[2] (105)

"The whole sequence is only a development of this "deed" which functions as the "moment of emergence:" a deed that takes place wordlessly in an *instant* contains the entirety of the expression, and it is *this* that the expression is an expression of. Thus, "What we regard as a development from the first seed must have become language. Here language is the living deed of the individual" (132). Here Schleiermacher moves along a chain of causality. The "deed" is a response to the "original impulse," which through an "act of will" (*Willensakt*) produces the "seminal decision" (*Keimentschluß*) only by which the labor of the meditation begins. This in turn produces the "composition," which finally becomes the *object* of interpretation. But interpretation, as we have seen, as the result of our temporal encounter with a thing that does not exist in the same modality of time as we do, is endless. The difficulty in understanding Schleiermacher's position here, is that the components will not stand still; we cannot fix the relationships between them. It thus remains unclear as to whether meditation falls on the side of the "original impulse," or on that of the composition. The boundary between the two, despite the contention that they are "always two different things and to be distinguished, not just in particular examples but in every case," (105) is nonetheless pliable:

> Looked at as a moment this can include more or less in itself. It can have such a liveliness that the whole, in its main outlines is already given in consciousness by it. The more this is so, the less is the difference between meditation and composition; the less this act of will has this character, the greater is the difference. (132).

We are now required to ask: what is the essential difference between meditation and composition if they are capable of resembling, even coinciding with each other?[3] It is perhaps for this reason that Schleiermacher moves the frontier from *between* meditation and composition, to that which falls between the "act of will" on one side, and meditation and

composition on the other. The "act of will" then, must be capable of maintaining the form that the composition contains. But here the act of will runs the risk of becoming contaminated by form, and thus, language, just as meditation did before it. In fact, the more form that it contains, the more the act of meditation and composition begin to resemble it.

In order to locate the meaning then in Schleiermacher's system, we would have to locate it as a kind of "deed" that exists outside of time, and thus, outside of language. Yet the series of terms that Schleiermacher produces, seems to manifest just the difficulty of isolating this "moment," and if this is the case, it is precisely because the frontier between language and thought cannot be established. Each time one arrives at pure thought, one must then follow the route of language, and thus interpretation in order to arrive at that thought, *even if it is only one's own thought*. The regress, then, reasserts itself as primordial.

While hermeneutics, as the product of schematism prioritizes language as that which *exists*, over absolute subjectivity, which must remain only ideal, we find here, that ultimately Schleiermacher cannot keep the ideal out. We find ourselves in an endless chain. It is just this problematic that led F.H. Jacobi to declare, in his notion of *Unphilosophie*, the impotence of any ontological account, and thus, ending the possibility of a critique in the positing of a transcendental God, who alone can stop the regress. It is significant that this is not a position that Schleiermacher takes in his lectures on hermeneutics[4]. One can see, at the very least, that to do so would be to deny the rigor that he finds so important to the interpretation of the New Testament itself. To declare a transcendental God as the end of the argument would be to negate the need for interpretation to begin with. Self-understanding, however, underlies both Schleiermacher's Christianity and his hermeneutics. Without a theological alternative then, we have no choice but to deal with *time* as the force

behind which language cannot get past, and this, for the very reason that time is constitutive for language.

Language must exist in time, because it is a system of designation. As such, schematism must also exist in time: the self, in confronting itself as a totality, can only apprehend itself part by part. All interpretation, whether it is the interpretive way that we discover ourselves as individuals, or the interpretive way that we exchange consciousness between individuals, is grounded in time. Meaning itself then, is a product of time; it is the gap between the self and its other that takes form in language or thought. Consciousness is bound up with designation: it is the part attempting to apprehend the whole. It is the part resisting itself as part, and from out of that resistance, generating form. Hermeneutics, then, as a philosophy of communication, cannot locate a point of consciousness that is not already communication.

In a certain sense, the conclusion that hermeneutics cannot account for the impetus that generates its structure, performs, paradoxically, the critique that Jacques Derrida offers in *Speech and Phenomena* of Husserl's notion of time and presence.

Derrida, in taking Husserl's *Logical Investigations* as his primary object, argues that there can be no isolation of the present moment, because such a moment must necessarily exist outside of time and space. Insofar as any moment that we can delineate as the "living present" necessarily is both temporal and spatial, then, it can only manifest as a kind of iteration of a convention that is already in place. The source point of the "now" along the linear trajectory of time, Derrida argues, is what Husserl protects as *presence*. This, however, is by no means a singular gesture; rather, it is, Derrida argues, the attempt repeated throughout the history of Western philosophy to protect itself from losing its metaphysical basis in the opposition between matter and form, between life and death.

Husserl, like Schleiermacher, posits a double movement in the development of language. He distinguishes between two types of signs: the expressive, which bears its own meaning (as in speech), and the indicative, which can only refer to an expressive meaning. A flag on a golf course *indicates* the hole, for example.

Husserl argues that expression only actually occurs *inside* the self, precisely because the meaning must be held *in* the expression. In "solitary mental life," the self does not have and could not have anything new to tell itself. This is "auto-affection": the proper forum for expression. When communication occurs between individuals however, indication necessarily comes into play, because in the act of communication, meaning goes from an inside to an outside, where the other, the target of the communication receives the words as indications of the meaning that the speaker holds inside in immediate self-presence. As soon as the words are made actual, are brought into the world, expression must yield to indication.

What Derrida ultimately shows is that there can be no delineation between indication and expression because *sense*, that which gives expression its expressive quality, can only exist in time. The self then, in order to make sense of itself, constitutes sense through indication, because in order to identify itself as a contiguous subject in time, it must represent itself to itself. It becomes no longer possible to isolate one moment from another moment. The source point—the "now"— becomes identified in the self; and yet, the "now" is nonetheless impossible to isolate, because the self, in the act of expression, necessarily reaches backwards and forward in arriving at a structure by which it can assert itself as itself. It is this reaching *out* of the "living now", this non-presence of the singular instant, that becomes the experience of time and the experience of self. Thus, indication—non-self-presence—must enter into auto-affection, into the thoughts of the self, and thus, "The living present springs forth out of the nonidentity with itself" (86). Time, Derrida concludes, does not allow for

any immediate self-presence, and signification, or "writing" steps in to supplement this deficit. All speech then, and all existing in general, is structured by non-presence. We only can achieve an idea of presence at all because of this structure, Derrida concludes; signification, and thus, non-presence, is already at work in the constitution of sense. Thus, "a pure difference divides self presence" (86). All language, including the self-referent, indicates non-presence: "My death is structurally necessary to the pronouncing of the 'I'," Derrida writes (96).

Though Derrida basis his critique on Husserlian phenomenology, this is, however, the problem that we must encounter in the regress which founds Schleiermacher's hermeneutics: identity is "always already" a structure built out of a factical difference. Thus, for Schleiermacher, there is on the one hand, the need to make the "original impulse" a thought, because there is no other way to think about it according to the schematic system: it is the first making of sense in the world. This however, necessitates, on the other hand, a regress, because there is no way to locate the *original* original impulse. Thus we end up on a chain that goes backwards from interpretation to composition to meditation to the act of will to the original impulse, even to an "instinctual moment" (133)—the only mention of this in the book. But, ultimately, this too must be accounted for by another cause, which too would have to be named. The stop-gap to the regress would be to posit the original impulse as instantaneous, outside of time, precisely the theological entity that Schleiermacher refuses to consider. And yet, the only way that he can say that "thinking is an inner speaking" is to declare that the conditions for thinking are beyond thought. We see this attempt to push thought backwards clearly in the following passage where form is given the role of clothing:

> There is… no thought without words, but there are thoughts in different degrees of dress, we can have a thought without already having its fitting expression. With

> regard to the expression, the becoming-ready of the elements only begins with the composition itself. (144)

The attempt, through recourse to this metaphor, is to keep thought separate from language while keeping them together at the same time. We would understand thought then, as something that we do not see or that we do not show in public. The clothes are "fitting expressions," but the body itself is something hidden. Yet would we not have to draw the opposite conclusion? Here, we might say that "clothing" is ontologically ineradicable. That is, the body underneath the clothes is in a certain sense, *unnecessary*. It is however, *what* we talk about. One might say that this perpetual talking, this perpetual attempt at understanding, requires the *producing*, the *poesis*, of a *thing* that we talk about. This *thing*, in turn, is *not* communicated, even though it underlies communication. It is this "body" behind the unremovable layers of clothing, we might say, that is the ontologically fictional realm, and to understand it, requires another model than that of communication. The body, then, becomes, for us, the notion of the *person*, the *experience*, even the incommunicable experience of being.

If this is the case, the "instinctual moment," the "original impulse," the "act of will" are *already* negative moments: not acts, but the *inability to act* in the face of the overarching totality of existence which eludes precisely our experience, and the experience of being then, *becomes* this inability to experience this totality. "Here," we might say, the first apprehension of meaning comes, as inapprehensibility takes on temporality and *becomes* form. The contention that interpretation is endless is, we might say, the mark of Schleiermacher's struggle with this attempt to concretize interpretation as a method. Interpretation is not an act of verification, not the fleshing out of an incipient seed moment, but a productive, creative act that comes out of a gap in the self.

Derrida's critique of Husserl's notion of *expression*, then, becomes equally a critique of the communication model. If expression cannot manifest in the world, if all is indication—and thus communication—we are required, then, to attempt to understand what communication does not say.

IV. THE IMPASSE OF INTERPRETATION

Schelling describes the structure of consciousness as negativity, as an artificial breach in the original unity that came about out of the self's desire to see itself. Yet Schelling could never explain why the self would willfully sunder itself from its original state of unification to begin with. Schleiermacher, in beginning with an originary inability to grasp a *text* in an entirety, suggests an answer in implying that the *self* also is originarily divided, in its inability to perceive totality, and so, is unable to see itself. The self, as existing in time and space, must symbolize itself because it cannot grasp itself in its totality. The symbol is the mark of the self's original division, its inability to see that manifests in the prosthetic sight. Yet the symbol is also the prosthesis itself. The self as originally divided, can only recover itself through the manipulation of its symbols—the process of interpretation. The self, then, is a text that must be interpreted by the self: this is the essence of the logic of the hermeneutic circle that Heidegger brings to light in appropriating Schleiermacher's hermeneutic circle for his account of being.

The schemata then, as the basic form of interpretive representation of thought—if we can use this word in its clarified form—are signs from the self to itself. This is why Kant maintains that they are not images, and why Schleiermacher calls them the "general image." As the material of consciousness, they are the what-is-not-seen that is the correlate to what-

cannot-see. They are the prosthetic existence by which we know ourselves, indeed *are* ourselves, precisely because we are unable to see ourselves. "Seeing as," then, is originary, or is rather, the originary form of existence, because the "that" in "seeing that" is precisely what cannot be seen because it itself is what is trying to do the seeing.

Ultimately, this not-seeing becomes what we know as seeing. There is however, a constant awareness that what we are trying to see, through seeing, cannot be seen. There is then, a desire, in seeing, that remains unfulfilled. Schleiermacher's use of clothing and body as metaphor for consciousness and meaning is apt here. Clothing is both what we see, and that which covers up what we cannot see. Clothing then, becomes the object of desire, the symbolizing of the unavailable body, and it becomes that which holds us transfixed, in the symbol not giving fulfillment, but remaining as symbol. Communication, then, is always understood as inadequate. The space and time that we attempt to bind through our communication is the *basis for this inadequacy*. Because communication is a product of space and time, and exists in space and time, it can never reach beyond itself to arrive at its fulfillment in transmitting itself completely. Thus, when we communicate, we communicate always something more than the things we say. But what we want to say is founded on the very *fact* that we live in the condition of communication. That is, I want the ultimate consummation of an originary, united, absolute subjectivity. *But*, I want to *know* it. This absoluteness would only *mean* something to me if I were able to have it while I was maintaining my individual consciousness. Thus, I want my communication to reach its end in absolute expression. But consciousness is always the expression of my *not* having it; it is synonymous with my inability to see. Sight then, this not-seeing, this apprehension of the totality that I cannot comprehend, is the promise that can never be fulfilled.

Consciousness, to perpetuate Schleiermacher's metaphor, is the fabric of our existence, a resistance that wards off the encroachment of a totalizing subjectivity, by symbolizing it, representing it in its *wish* for the absolute. The tenor of consciousness itself then, is this being-incomplete, this wish for totality, which as a picture of totality, *is also a wish to remain as a desiring person*. The ambiguous wish, then, is both one of self-annihilation *and* the desire to remain existent (much in the way that Freud describes the conflated life and death instincts in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*). If the self identifies itself as this lack, then to unify the self would be to take its lack away; that is, to take its consciousness away.

Thus, even if, as Derrida argues, we cannot delineate a sphere of pure expression, because it always becomes, in actuality, indication and thus communication, we nonetheless must reckon with the desire *to* communicate. That this desire cannot be isolated *as* desire, becomes then, the impetus to communicate to begin with. *Desire cannot be communicated*: it is the "I am writing" behind all writing, the "I am speaking" behind all speaking. If in actuality, we find only an *individual*, existing in the world among others, it is the experience of being a *person* that gives the very notion of the individual its meaning. If there is to be self-knowledge at all, there must be a faculty by which this self-knowledge, despite the inability of it to be communicated, can become apprehended. The condition that we live in, then, is that desire, in passing into indication, becomes a product, leaving the desire itself unapproachable.

Kant's schematism presents us with a regress which leaves the genealogy of self-knowledge forever outside the scope of knowledge itself. The subject wakes to itself, and as a creature of time and space, can never reckon with its own temporality. Knowledge, for Kant, requires a transcendental position, one that is nonetheless impossible to experience as subjects. For Kant, this results in a speculative process, where we attempt to deduce this

transcendental position through our reflective judgments. What Kant does not offer, however, in making his epistemology an ontological problem, is an account of how, in our everyday being, we reckon with this regress, and thus he cannot illuminate the problematic of the unavailability of self-knowledge that it poses. What we learn from this is that the regress is a problem for the subject in its everyday being. Thus, it is not the philosopher who discovers that knowledge of being is unavailable to the subject, but rather, it is the subject who discovers this, in the attempt to impose a transcendental view, a "who," onto the limited scope of vision in which it finds itself. It is in turning everyday vision into self-understanding that the subject comes to consciousness at all. Yet it is in our fictions, I have argued, that we can *see* this process "in action," precisely because it is ourselves, in all our everyday, communicative being, that is put out of play while we remain "in the world." Fiction, by building a language on the back of the things of the physical world, creates this transcendental position, in its very exclusion of our everyday selves. This, I have argued, is the genealogy of generic fiction.

Division Two: Intuition

V. THE PHENOMENOLOGICAL REDUCTION

> *If one is fond of paradoxical phrases, and if one means the ambiguous phrase in the right sense, one can say in strict truth that "feigning" [Fiktion] makes up the vital element of phenomenology as of every other eidetic science, that feigning is the source from which the cognitions of "eternal truths" is fed.*
>
> Edmond Husserl*, Ideas* §70

The modality of attention that is required in Husserl's phenomenological reduction, or epoché, requires that we exclude ourselves as actors in the world. It is through such an exclusion that we arrive at the possibility of *seeing*. Because we cannot, in fact, exclude ourselves from being, while we are, at the same time, *being*, we might say that the very possibility of anything like such an exclusion requires, as Husserl himself acknowledges, a fictional stance. If it is the capability to enter into a neutralizing modality that gives us the possibility of achieving self-knowledge, then we could say that Husserl's philosophical method shares a genealogy with that of generic fiction.

If, for Husserl, however, it is this neutralizing modality that is capable of isolating pure consciousness, we must enter into our discussion of the phenomenological reduction with a caveat: the project of excluding ourselves as actors in the world can never be effected, must always fail when we come face to face with that being who engages in this act of excluding. The act of excluding must also be accounted for, and it is here that we must confront the limit of the phenomenological reduction.

The phenomenological reduction requires the bracketing of any ontological claim, in putting out of play the belief that the world that we encounter is a physical world that stands against us as object to our subjectivity. Likewise, we must also put out of play the belief that we acquire knowledge from the things that we find *in* the world, in favor of an interrogation of experience itself. Thus, the epoché requires bringing a different type of attention to the world than we do normally. This bracketing, in prioritizing the act of perception over the object of perception, preserves experience, but makes no assumptions about this experience: while the world comes to experience as spatial and temporal, performing the epoché requires that we do not derive from this any thesis of a physical world.

In order to bring the experience of being in the world to consciousness, the epoché puts out of play any attempt to make causality as the justification for knowledge. Once this attention is put into place, the world remains, but not as something "out there" juxtaposed to the me-here. In putting the *thesis of actuality* out of play, the world does not become simply the manifold physical things that surround me, but rather, is understood as the correlate to my consciousness. The world manifests, not as mute substance, but as the necessary form of my experience, the correlate of my intentional act. Thus, Husserl writes, "It is that as yet dumb experience…which we are concerned to lead to the pure expression of its own meaning," (*Cartesian Meditations* 33). Yet, paradoxically, in order for this to occur, I must cut off my natural absorption in the world and my belief in it as a thing that is *outside* of me and that contains me. "To reflect on a cogito means that one no longer 'lives' in that cogito; rather, it becomes the cogitatio of another cogito. One now lives in the reflection but not in what is reflected upon," Marcus Brainard writes (82).

Such a position, it is important to note, does not involve *doubting*, though certainly Husserl's enterprise bears many similarities to that of the Cartesian project. To doubt is to

take an ontological position, precisely what the epoché avoids. Just as, in reading a work of fiction, we do not doubt, but rather, neutralize, so too, in effecting the epoché, we do not engage in either positing or negating.

The quality of attention involved in the phenomenological reduction is very similar to that which we adopt when we read a work of fiction: we do not say something like, "there is real substantiality, but we choose to ignore it." Nor do we say anything like, "substantiality is merely an illusion." Rather, by putting the "thesis of actuality" into parentheses, we change our priorities by de-emphasizing the role that physicality, and substantiality in general, has in the structure of being. In performing the epoché, we do not allow our habitual notion of the world to formulate the question of being. In doing so, we do not deny that we see things as *there*, as objective physical things that are coordinates to the subjective act of seeing them. But with the reduction in place, we maintain our attention on *how* we perceive things, rather than the things themselves, and on, then, what it *means* to say that the world manifests to us as something physical. Thus, Leszek Kolakowski writes, "The world before and after the reduction does not differ in content, only in my attitude, in the meaning of 'transcendence' which I used to attribute to it" (39). The goal of the reduction then, is not to deny that there is a physical world "out there," but rather, to reveal a fundamental habit of seeing which results in our finding the world as split between a diaphanous consciousness that is opposed to an objective, substantial, fundamentally physical world. This habitual mode of seeing Husserl calls the "natural attitude," and it is this that we bracket when we effect the phenomenological reduction. Only by putting the natural attitude out of play, through engaging the possibility of a "phenomenological attitude" is it possible to critique the way that the world, normally presents itself to us. The phenomenological reduction then, is a *reversal* of priorities. By explicitly not assuming a

primacy to substantiality, but rather, conferring this status onto perception, we go against our natural inclination to *believe* that what we see is "really there," independent of our consciousness. We thereby allow both belief *and* substantiality to become objects for investigation. Thus, in the effecting of this reversal, we arrive at the understanding that "the being which is first for us is second in itself" (*Ideas* 93)[5].

By not taking the way that the world presents itself to us for granted then, Husserl, through his "clarified" analysis of perception then, sees the project of his phenomenology as the description of the mental process involved in perceiving. What remains after we effect this bracketing through the reduction is what Husserl calls the "phenomenological residuum"; in it, the focus changes from that of a naïve belief in the being of "things," to one of the certainty of perception *as* a thing:

> [T]hough we have excluded the whole world with all physical things, living beings and humans, *ourselves included*; strictly speaking, we have not lost anything but rather have gained the whole of absolute being which, rightly understood, contains within itself, 'constitutes' within itself, all worldly transcendencies. (94)

If we, Husserl argues, never questioned the ontological priority of the physical, we would have no way of entering into the phenomenological attitude, and thus, we would have no way of describing the way that we constitute the world as something meaningful: meaning would always be, as it is for Schleiermacher, something necessarily obscure because any account of it would always have to rely on a condition that is never available to us as its basis. What Husserl argues, however, is that the experience of meaning is *not* determined by something objective, and thus, alienated from our consciousness. Rather, the very fact that the world appears to us as something "out there" is the form that meaning takes *in us*. That the world appears as external, and thus transcendental, to us, is not some defect or limit on the part of the physical organism; in performing the epoché we do not attempt to replace

our limited view of a physical object with an interpretation that "completes" what perception itself cannot complete, but rather, we begin to see this incompleteness, this unavailability, not as something lacking, but as a *fundamental* quality of being itself. By putting belief on the "objective" side of the subject/object divide (and in doing so, putting into question the very notion of such a divide to begin with), belief itself becomes available as an object of inquiry. Likewise, by recontextualizing the notion of incompleteness, by turning incompleteness into an object, we become capable of seeing *it* in itself, not just as the defective sign of some object unavailable to circumspection.

What characterizes the perception of a physical object, then, for Husserl is that it is necessarily given incompletely, or in his terms, "inadequately" (10). When we use terms such as "incomplete" or "inadequate," however, it is crucial that we understand them, true to the phenomenological reduction, as *phenomena*: we don't seek to "complete" something incomplete; that is, we do not seek to *interpret*; rather, we inquire *directly* into the notion of incompleteness as such. This, far from being the innovation of the epoché, is in fact, a description of our original engagement with the world, an engagement that the epoché then *duplicates artificially* in order to bring it to consciousness.

When we perceive something that exists in space and time, we necessarily see something only in "profiles," or "adumbrations" [*Abschattungen*]. While I may say that I see an apple tree (the example Husserl uses in *Ideas*), the actual mental process in seeing the apple tree requires that I see it only one perspective at a time: I see it only from *this* moment, and from *this* spatial coordinate. Thus, because the apple tree does not, cannot, give itself to me in its entirety, it is a *transcendent* object, in that what it "is" will always transcend my ability to perceive it. Again, true to the phenomenological reduction, that an object is considered transcendent does not pertain to any notion of the physical actuality of the tree's existence.

Rather, we are concerned with the mental process involved in seeing: there is a disparity between the "full" intuition that "this is an apple tree," and the perception of the apple tree that I can only intuit one profile at a time. It is this that delimits the sphere of what we call physical objects. We transpose here the notion of physicality, and thus, actuality, into the mental process involved in perception, and thus exchange the notion of actuality for the *phenomenon* of transcendentality, thereby setting aside any conception of an object's physicality: what is of interest here is not *what* the object is, but *how* it presents itself.

Yet, in order for us to have any sense that this incomplete thing that we *see* pertains to something which we have experience with, there is the necessity that there must be some mental process involved in perception by which we can access the object in its completeness: we must synthesize these series of adumbrations, bind the disparities of time and space that characterize the act of perceiving something transcendentally into something *immanent*. The *eidos* "apple tree" *is* given to us completely, and thus immanently, and determines the fact of our perception of the transcendent object *as* an apple tree:

> Of essential necessity there belongs to my 'all-sided' continuously, unitarily, and self-confirming experimental consciousness of the same physical thing a multifarious system of continuous multiplicities of appearances and adumbrations in which all objective moments falling within perception with the characteristic of being themselves given 'in person' are adumbrated by determined continuities. (74-75)

The "object" apple tree that I hold in my mind remains the same, despite the fact that my perception of it is constantly changing. Even if I were to destroy it, I would nonetheless maintain the *eidos* "apple tree" as fundamentally unchanged. The process recalls that of schematism: we are required to synthesize the various profiles of the tree that are given to us in space and in time, in order to understand them as the eidos "apple tree." Yet importantly, when we perform the phenomenological reduction, we see that there is no

ontological hierarchy involved in perception: we do not see the transcendent intuition as more primordial than the eidetic intuition.

An eidetic intuition then is something that we perceive all at once, and thus, directly: the intuition of the essence "apple tree" does not give itself to me in adumbrations, or profiles. It is only when I direct my intuition to my acts of perception that the mental process requires that I see it only one profile at a time. Thus, a transcendent act of perception occurs when the consciousness is directed to something which it does *not* include in the same mental stream as the perceiver, unlike an immanent act of perception, when the perceived is part of the same mental process as the perception. A mental process, then, can be perceived fully because it is not adumbrated. Thus, the intuition that I am in pain, the intuition that 2 and 2 make 4, and the intuition of an *eidos* created from out of a transcendent object, all are immanent perceptions, because they do not offer themselves to me in a fragmented manner. When I confront a transcendent object, then, I must turn it, if it is to *be* something for me, into something immanent. I must bring it into *one* mental stream. Thus, what Husserl terms the *noema*, is precisely this immanent object which I create out of the myriad adumbrations through which I experience the physical object. It is, however, the very nature then, of what we term *res extensa* to *not* give itself all at once. The process in which I transform that which is given in adumbrations into *adequate* or full intuitions is the act of sense-bestowal, which, as the essential counterpart to the noematic object, Husserl terms *noesis*. It is the very foundation of phenomenology that this noetic process, this process of sense-bestowal, is possible: *not* however, via some kind of perceptual faith that what we see immanently really exists "in the world." Rather, the very fact that we *constitute* a world as meaningful demonstrates that there is an essential relationship between the transcendental and the immanent, which provides for the possibility of anything like *noesis*,

that is, knowledge. The phenomenological reduction, then, is a return to this originary sense-bestowal. Though we might *believe* that we encounter things that are outside of us, phenomenology attempts to clarify our understanding by offering a *return* to our original encounter with the world, not as *thing*, but as representation.

Yet, even though the act of sense-bestowal is, for Husserl, an *original*, and thus, pre-philosophical process, we nonetheless wake to a world in which we find ourselves as subjects confronting objects, as beings who confront physical things, rather than transcendental objects of consciousness. It is only in consciously re-applying this "native" process of sense-bestowal, or *noesis*, that we can *see* how it is that we arrive at our conception of the world. Thus, the epoché, like generic fiction, re-enacts our original discovery of the world *before* consciousness, representing it so that we can, for the first time, see *beyond* our absorption in the world where we have found ourselves. When we communicate, when we act, we are absorbed in the world; there is no space outside the world which we can inhabit in order to see our absorption in it, and so, like fictional characters who do not know that they are being narrated, we *become* subjects to an external, and impersonal world. We see *out*, and our field of sight, then, cannot encompass ourselves as subjects. What we cannot see, however, is precisely this subjection. If fiction offers us a view from beyond the subject, by installing a conscious observer on the act of subjectification, the epoché, likewise, creates a space, albeit a fictional space, out of which we can observe the original process by which the world becomes meaningful. The perspective of the epoché, like that of fiction, is *impersonal*, because it allows us to see the very coming-into-being of the subject, and thus, the *person* who remains wordlessly constituted in the subject: there is no "person" who can see *this*. What is fictional about the epoché then, is that it excludes all that we require for something "real": a person, a body, and a locus of subjectivity. The epoché installs an impersonal

"narrator," an observer, on lived experience. It operates on the fiction of putting ourselves out of play, and draws on then, an ontological fiction: that we can see who we are *as* we are.

Husserl's phenomenology, in eschewing any postulation of an original unity between subject and object does away with the troublesome issue that neither Kant nor Schleiermacher were able to resolve: that of a correlation that can never be verified between consciousness (and thus, experience) and being in general. Like the Kantian system, Husserl's phenomenology requires a recontextualization of experience as it is perceived through the senses. Unlike Kant however, Husserl explicitly does not see the world as it is experienced as a *sign* of an unavailable noumenal realm. For Husserl, Kant's recontextualization of perception is the most natural and instinctual—and naïve—of gestures. According to the Kantian account, we exist in a realm limited to consciousness, where, confined to space and time, we take it for granted that the unity of subject and object is impossible to achieve. Yet for Husserl, the possibility of a unity between subject and object *always* remains in the realm of the speculative. Husserl's phenomenology begins through the act of rigorously *bracketing* anything speculative, and thus, anything that is not available to perception cannot be a consideration in his philosophy, not even in the abstract. This is the "Principle of all principles" of phenomenology:

> Enough now of absurd theories. No conceivable theory can make us err with respect to the *principle of all principles: that every originary presentive intuition is a legitimizing source of cognition,* that *everything originarily* (so to speak, in its "personal" actuality) *offered* to us *in "intuition" is to be accepted simply as what it is presented as being*, but also *only within the limits in which it is presented there.* (*Ideas* 43-44)

If, for Husserl, we allow the possibility of a primordial unity to have no place in our thinking, we nonetheless are still required to reckon with an unavailability that characterizes the attempt to understand being. However, unlike the philosophies of Kant and Schleiermacher, who characterize knowledge *of* this unavailability as the goal which we strive

for, with Husserl, through the sense-bestowing act which binds the various profiles of a transcendent object into something immanent, we recontextualize the very concept of unavailability. Unavailability itself, rather, then, as for Schleiermacher, serving as the very impetus for interpretation as the mediation *between* consciousnesses, becomes for Husserl an "originary presentive intuition." No longer in phenomenology do we see unavailability, unknowability, as the veil in front of an elusive understanding. Rather, we see this unavailability *qua* unavailability, and thus, as an object *in itself*: it is this that is the object of our interrogation. Unavailability, then, becomes the *mark* of the transcendental. It is exactly this, this turning of the experience of unknowability into an object of consciousness that allows Husserl to dispense with what he perceives as a blind-spot inherent in all Kantian and post-Kantian accounts of being, including hermeneutics. Rather than attempting to *replace* the absent with knowledge, we inquire *into* this absent unity as we experience it, as an essential characteristic of the experience of being.

Husserl begins *Ideas* with the radical declaration that, "to have some thing real given originarily and 'attentively to perceive' and 'experience' it in an intuiting simpliciter are one and the same" (8). With this gesture, Husserl does away with the Kantian notion that perception is merely the indication, the manifestation of some supersensory entity. By equating perception with the real, the inquiry into being is oriented squarely in the phenomenal world. Yet here, Husserl explicitly is not adopting an empiricist orientation towards existence. Rather, in Husserl's "radical empiricism," we are to understand that perception *transcends* the merely empirical. Just as the perception of any physical object available to my senses is given to me immediately, in an "intuiting simpliciter," I am equally capable of achieving the immediate intuition of something that is not physically "here." Thus, I can remember something; I can anticipate something; I can imagine something. All

of these perceptions, once we dispense with the assumption that one is "here" and one is "not here," offer themselves equally to my intuition. Because, the phenomenological reduction in effect, I cannot offer any evidence to show that the physical thing that I see before me is more "here" than the dream that I remember, or the fantastic creature that I imagine, I am capable of allowing these two modalities of perception to exist as bona-fide perceptions before me. This does not mean that I am not capable of making the distinction between modalities. I am certainly aware that one comes to me in the mode of "imagining," for example; but nonetheless, if I am truly to make no assumptions about the ontological status of what presents itself to me, I have no authority to engage in the establishing of any kind of ontological hierarchy between these two modalities. The objects that appears to me in my imagination, in my memories, in my fantasies, and through my senses, are in Husserl's clarified sense, equally objects. Phenomenology, then, offers an account of the represented object, then, as an *original* perception. For Husserl, then, the object, stripped of the assumption that it exists separately from my consciousness, becomes an *eidos*. And it is only because of this possibility, we might say, that the phenomenon of fiction, which traffics in representations, is itself a possibility for our experience. Fiction requires that I experience, engage with an *eidetic* object, not one that is physically proximate to me.

The *eidos* exists *independently* of the empirical object before me, or the fantastic object that I imagine. Thus, Husserl's first gesture in the articulation of his phenomenological system is to broaden the notion of the object, transforming it as *eidos* into an object of consciousness, rather than object in the world. It is precisely because I already am capable of intuiting the essence of what I perceive, that I am capable of intuiting the material thing. Thus, "seeing an essence is also precisely intuition" (10). By broadening the sense of the notion of object through the deliberate dispensing with "naïve" assumptions Husserl is able

to speak of an "ideal" or essential world *without* entering into the realm of speculation. Rather, Husserl argues that empiricism is founded—though the empiricists will not admit it—on the fact that *eidetic seeing* is already intimately involved in the intuition of anything empirical: "The empiricist…takes genuine science and experiential science to be identical" (35) in the drive to legitimate all cognition in experience. However, for Husserl, mere empiricism does not explain how we perceive to begin with because it cannot account for the way that our perceptions are meaningful to us. Rather than ascribe to a super-sensory world the function of legitimizing what we see here, Husserl, in allowing ideas and essences to be understood as perceptions, provides for the possibility of a legitimation of our physical perceptions by grounding them in ideas that are no less "objects" than the material things that we perceive:

> "Immediate 'seeing,' not merely sensuous, experiential seeing, but *seeing* in the universal sense as an originally presentive consciousness of any kind whatever, is the ultimate legitimizing source of all rational assertions" (36).

An essence, then, is *necessary*. Not because it is "there," but rather, because my consciousness is bound up with it: I have no choice but to see it *as* this. Thus, we do not look for essences in the way that we look for empirical causes, but rather, we become, through the reduction, aware of our ineluctable engagement with them. Thus, as Oded Balaban writes, "Essences are not entities to be discovered, like Platonic ideas, or even Aristotelian genus and species, but are general features that are determined by the mind according to its own interests" (107). Essences are the very structure of meaning.

It is by incorporating the essence into the notion of an object that Husserl dispenses with the notion of an originary unity between subject and object as the foundation for an understanding of being. Rather than ascribing to the perceived world the status of "object," which we as conscious "subjects" attempt to come to terms with, Husserl argues that "we,"

insofar as we can describe our consciousness, are just as much "object" as anything else, and that all objects exist only *for* consciousness. Everything that exists exists on the "objective" side of the dichotomy, thereby rendering consciousness, not the alienated counterpart to objectivity, but rather, the very grounds for its existence at all. For Husserl, pure consciousness *is* rationality. Because consciousness is always bound up with objects of consciousness, these objects become our experience of rationality, and thus, of meaning. For pure consciousness, then, the body is equally an object of consciousness, rather than a physical entity which happens to be the locus of consciousness.

As such, we might begin to think of the notion of pure consciousness as, in our terms, the ontologically fictional realm. It would be, then, not the body as a physical thing, but the *representation of the body*, that we encounter as the primordial realm by which we find the world meaningful, and thus, for Husserl, rational. The epoché permits our ability to view the body as an eidetic object, rather than a mere physical thing among other physical things. Thus, we could say that the body to us has its meaning precisely because it can be represented. The eidetic body, then, becomes the "material" which the ontological perspective consumes in creating meaning: the transfiguration of the physical world into "content of consciousness." Meaning, then, would indeed be bound up with fiction: the eidetic body, as something that we can find nowhere "in" the world, is in fact, a view *on* the world, from an impersonal perspective.

Phenomenology then, is not a philosophy of overcoming resistance, and thus, of interpretation, not a philosophy which attempts to find the body under the ineradicable "clothing" of a consciousness determined by language. What is required then, is not an attempt to transcend consciousness through speculation, nor an attempt to manage an existing, but imperfect understanding as is the case with Schleiermacher's hermeneutics, but

rather, through deliberately seeing the experience of consciousness *not* as the sign for something else. This for Husserl is the clarification of perception that goes against the natural impulse. Only by willfully bracketing out any thesis of something "more real," only by eliminating all talk of an actuality beyond perception (this table, this body is really "here"), and concerning oneself only with that which one experiences, in all its nuances, can we bring our perception of something, and the object of that perception into the same "stream," and thus "see" the *original* construction of the world as meaningful. And only by doing this do we not make the "mistake" of both Kant and Schleiermacher, in seeing experience as only the sign of being and not real being.

But once we have neutralized this belief, this very belief becomes available for interrogation. This is the radical step that Husserl takes: *neutralizing* belief allows for belief itself to become understood as a phenomenon, as an object. In Kantian philosophy, this is impossible, because belief is instrumental in the very act of inquiring as a presupposition: belief cannot be seen, because it is what is doing the seeing. Kant's critique, then, elides the *experience* of belief. Because belief can only come as an experience, it can never become an object of inquiry itself. While in the case of Schelling belief becomes a tool which reveals being in the form of subject and object, it nonetheless remains unavailable for interrogation because belief is a product *of* consciousness. In both cases, for Husserl, this corrupts the entire enterprise, because it repeats endlessly and *regressively* the problem of the separation between the inquirer and the object of inquiry by concealing the object of inquiry, which is the phenomenon of belief itself. Thus, for Husserl, understanding is that which is to be achieved through activating consciousness' ability to interrogate a belief system, rather than allowing the belief system to govern the interrogation; belief, through the phenomenological clarification, becomes an object of consciousness instead of hiding itself behind the

apparatus that engages in the inquiring. Husserl's phenomenological project involves exactly this: every function of the *act* of inquiring must be rigorously recontextualized so as to be counted, in Kantian terms, only on the side of the object in the subject/object dichotomy. This serves the function of achieving the isolation of *pure* consciousness.

As we have seen, perception *cannot be doubted*. It is *there*. But what is "there" does not, in the phenomenological attitude, manifest as anything but a correlate of consciousness. It is only when one attempts to delineate the modality of the perceived with regard to its substantiality that the problem of the "thesis of actuality" arises. Yet such a thesis operates under the assumption that *substance is ontologically more fundamental than perception*. Husserl argues that there are no grounds for such an assumption. What is important to Husserl is that *perception exists*, and thus, as an existent, answers to the call of being proper. Because all objects that we perceive are necessarily objects of consciousness, and because a perception cannot exist as such without the presence of consciousness, Husserl is able to make the claim that being is constituted by consciousness, and that all objects exist only as *for-consciousness*. Unlike Schleiermacher's hermeneutics, consciousness to phenomenology does not stand in the way of the inquiry as something that must be negotiated with through the act of communication and interpretation, but rather, it is consciousness itself, when properly clarified, that offers direct understanding of the question of being. Thus, in effecting the *epoché*, we interrogate the objects of consciousness in a clarified manner, and in doing so, we interrogate consciousness itself.

If understanding does not have to go the route of the physical, and thus, temporal, world, it can then be direct and unmediated. Language, then, cannot serve the same function that it does in Schleiermacher's inquiry: if language is by its very nature that which mediates between consciousnesses, and between consciousness and "reality," understanding,

in Husserl's formulation cannot be achieved through language. Husserl's phenomenology then, unlike Schleiermacher's language-based interpretive paradigm, seeks for an understanding that goes beyond language, or rather, *language itself is understood as an object of consciousness*, and thus does not generate consciousness in the way that Schleiermacher's hermeneutics claims it does. Thus, for Husserl, to interrogate language is to interrogate consciousness, whereas for Schleiermacher, it is language that generates and constitutes consciousness in the act of interpretation. For Husserl, consciousness as existent, is what is to be understood *through its objects*. For Schleiermacher, consciousness is what does the understanding, and thus, what is to be understood is constantly concealed by the very act of willing to understand; it is this confounding of the *will-to-understand* as the *act* of consciousness with the *object* of understanding, which is *also* consciousness, that necessitates the act of interpretation. Husserl, however, does not view this confounding as an ontological condition, but rather only as a confounding of thinking, a confounding that he proposes to clarify with the phenomenological reduction. All willing, all intending, must fall on the side of the object; the phenomenological reduction then, is essentially an act that purifies the subject from anything that is "in the world." Schleiermacher's notion of consciousness does not undergo such a "clarification"; for Schleiermacher, it is consciousness that wills because the drive toward understanding is *in* consciousness, not an object of consciousness. Thus, where Schleiermacher sees *human* consciousness, Husserl only sees consciousness, and consciousness *as* rationality.

Schleiermacher maintains that there can be no pure experience of rationality, and thus, that our experience of consciousness is necessarily inconclusive. Because the goal of interpretation is a reconciling of different locations in space and in time (we live different lives and in different time periods, and thus, an individual's expression of his/her insight will

always be different from another's) there is an unquashable relativity involved in expression. Yet beyond even this, because for Schleiermacher, it is language that shapes human consciousness, this relativity, this *distance* from absolute truth, must enter into the very process of thinking itself. Thought then, no less than expression, is subject to the mediation of identity through difference, so that even at the level of the individual's confrontation with truth, the very experience of the true is mediated through language or through something that bears the structure of language. For Schleiermacher, the very notion of an individual is that which is structured through a shared and thus intersubjective, and thus mediated process of coming-into-being. Language then, for Schleiermacher, has its origins in the most primordial foundation of the human, and it is *this* that generates human consciousness. There is, then, we might say, no place for a "person" in Schleiermacher's hermeneutics, because the person, as the uncommunicative *experience* of being must, in Schleiermacher's account, already be a product of language. Husserl however, in concerning himself with consciousness proper and not human consciousness qua human consciousness does not allot a primordial role to language in the generating of consciousness; indeed, Husserl does not view consciousness as that which is *generated* at all. Consciousness, then, as the very possibility for rationality, is more primordial than language. Thus, if, in everyday life, language is our engagement with the actual, we nevertheless only arrive at the possibility of language by virtue of an original sense bestowal, an original rationality, which language then, is the product of.

It is only in this way then, that language, as an object *for*-consciousness, can be made to tell the story of consciousness, and thus, the story of the person. The person, we might say, *can only be found in this story*. For if language generated consciousness, there would be no language of language that could then reveal the fundamental nature of language to

consciousness. If language as it is used can, in phenomenology, be put out of play, it is only because the "fictional," impersonal position of the epoché can be inhabited, and thus, can make language speak of its origins. This would require a "fictional" language of language, and could only be possible, we might say, if, ontologically, the fictional perspective is more primordial than language. Generic fiction, then, would be the expression of a world which cannot be *originally* discovered empirically, and one in which language is not the original possibility of consciousness. Communication, as the movement from an inside to an outside, assumes a world comprised of substance. In putting communication out of play, generic fiction represents communication in order to restore *sense*; in the process of its representation, communication is transformed into an *immanent* object of perception, what we have been calling "expression." That this expression must take place only *through* communication is exactly because, as we have seen, expression cannot manifest in the world, but only in putting the world out of play. This is precisely the fictional quality of expression. It is what permits us to read and believe what we are reading, and thus, to forget that we are reading, while at the same time, to deploy an observer *upon* this belief, this forgetting.

If we restrict ourselves to communication, however, without understanding the act of communication to have its origin in something incommunicable, we can never arrive at this fictional consciousness. Consciousness understood as human consciousness as opposed to impersonal consciousness, is inseparable from the organic being which contains it. Unlike Husserl, Schleiermacher admits of no possibility of turning an idea *qua* idea into an object, albeit an eidetic object. If, for Schleiermacher, we are indeed to transform our "innate concepts" into objects, this must be done in such a manner that the innate concepts take on substance and manifest materially: thus, in language. But again, in this very movement, the "innate concepts" retreat from view because they *cannot* manifest themselves as something in

the world, i.e., as an object. If for Husserl, there is the possibility of an empty consciousness, a clarified, pure consciousness devoid of anything material—what I have been calling the ontologically fictional—this is precisely because, in the phenomenological reduction, there is no ontological priority given to substantiality. Husserl's broadened conception of the notion of the object, in allowing for ideas to be no less objective than the empirical, allows for the possibility of a direct understanding that transcends the condition of fragmented substance. Again, for Husserl, *ideal things can be objects*. Our intuition is not restricted to that which is "in the world," and our conscious life is in fact determined by an engagement with an uncommunicative, and thus, ideal realm. The ideal, then, as the thing that *cannot* manifest to us "in the world," is we might say, precisely the confrontation with the *im*personal that is requisite for the *personal* experience of consciousness.

For Schleiermacher however, consciousness, as the consciousness of an individual, is always a fragmented consciousness, and understanding always involves the reconciliation of empirical differences. An object, for Schleiermacher, is always an empirical one: it manifests through the application of judgment in schematization, to the empirical sensation. Yet this judgment nonetheless must itself gain its concreteness, its ability to be intuited, by manifesting in substance as language. Husserl however, in doing away with the notion of difference, likewise does away with the notion that in order for there to be understanding, the general image must be compared and reconciled with the innate (and unavailable) concepts. There is no faith in such a coordination in phenomenology, because there is only *one* perception: the intuited object is not a sign for anything, but is the intuited *thing* itself:

> The sensuously appearing thing, which as the sensuous shapes, colors, odor- and taste-properties, is thus anything but a sign for some *other* thing; rather it is, so to speak, a sign *for itself*. (100)

Language, for Husserl, is not the origin of consciousness. It is for this reason that Husserl is much less concerned with the efficacy of communication: language is merely a tool and its origin follows that of consciousness as a means of communicating *non-linguistic* insights. For Husserl communication is only the *re*production of knowledge, and it is not language but consciousness that is originary. Only after we are capable of expression *within ourselves* (and, as we have already seen, Husserl makes it clear that such "expression" is nonlinguistic) can it then manifest as substance, that is, as language that can be spoken, written, and thus reproduced. Yet precisely because this expression does not come in linguistic form, it cannot manifest in the world, even as *something*. All communication, then, would be the *original* attempt to reproduce this unavailable expression, which it can only accomplish through the *re*presentation of communication, through the re-signifying the things that we find in the world from their status, in the natural attitude, as objects, to originary symbols of the self. We might understand Derrida's analysis of Husserl's notion of expression, then, less as a criticism of Husserl's approach, but rather, as an attempt to address its ramifications: when Husserl argues that expression can never manifest in the world, the conclusion that one must indeed draw is that non-presence—what we can think of now as fiction—is "'older' than Being itself" (*Speech and Phenomena* 159). The originally expressive realm of "auto-affection," then, far from being the self *present* to itself, must be re-cast as a fiction, *because* of its unavailability to the physical world, and thus, its inability to be communicated.

Thus, we could say that for Husserl, intersubjectivity (the particular type of consciousness that language produces) is a product of an originary, if inaccessible, and thus fictive, subjectivity. For Schleiermacher, whose orientation remains with the existent, all subjectivity, all thought and experience is already structured by an intersubjectivity which,

continually evolving, both determines and generates thought, and thus, consciousness. His non-static approach to knowledge then, requires that the will toward understanding—that is, interpretation—be an ever-ongoing process. But, in a world in which everything is real and communicative, there could be no place for fiction.

The difference in approach between Schleiermacher and Husserl, then, depends essentially upon the notion of transcendentality. For Schleiermacher, there can be nothing *but* the transcendental without the possibility of binding this transcendentality into an immanent sphere. It is, he writes, "the word [that] serves to fix the general image in order to bring it to mind again" (273). There is no inner immanent sphere, and thus, no possibility of achieving anything like direct understanding. Everything, for Schleiermacher, is given in adumbrations, and the role of consciousness then, is to interpret: to attempt to reconstitute, always unsuccessfully, always relatively, the thing that we can never perceive in its entirety. There is nothing for Schleiermacher that is not material. We might say then, that for Schleiermacher, there is *only* the "natural attitude," and thus, there is no possibility of transcending this way of being in order to gain direct knowledge of being. For Schleiermacher, the grasping of the unity of subject and object would have to take place *outside* of space and time, which, given that such a condition could not exist in the human sphere, is impossible. Language then, as that which serves the mediating function in the exchange of consciousness cannot transcend materiality, cannot tell the story of materiality. As soon as an interpretation comes into the world, it must be experienced only in adumbrations, and thus, we are forced to reckon with the opacity of language in order to achieve any understanding at all.

And yet, if thought is only real through its manifestation as language, then knowledge of language *becomes* knowledge itself in the reducing of relativity to knowledge.

Language, as interpretation, is the indirect, mediated route to knowledge in the light of an otherwise unknowable, unmanifestable thought: language is thought brought into being in space and time, which for Schleiermacher, is the *only* kind of being that we are capable of achieving. The very notion of the hermeneutic circle then, comes about because of the ineffaceability of the adumbrations as the primal condition, even plight, of being. We can never transcend material, and thus, interpretation becomes the attempt to negotiate our way through the material that characterizes being, in, as material.

For Husserl, however, direct understanding can be achieved precisely because an eidetic intuition can be perceived as an object that nonetheless does not have the quality of substantiality. The transcendent sphere must be understood as that component of existence which is incapable of being anything other than itself. *Qua* transcendent, it has nothing to offer. It is the "stuff," the *hyle,* by which the *morphe* or constituting function of consciousness generates meaning. The morphic function does not *interpret* the hyle, but rather, through its confrontation with an ungiving transcendentality, that has no will *in itself* to be made immanent, creates the experience of meaning. Unlike the philosophies of Schleiermacher or Kant, there is no reflective judgment involved here, precisely because mere empirical substance does not come first to perception. Rather, as equally primordial forms of being, which nonetheless adhere to different phenomenal modalities, each serves the other in the act of constituting meaning, and thus, being. Understanding then, for Husserl, and expressly not for Schleiermacher, *always involves this insubstantial, and thus, non-linguistic, component.* For Husserl, "an object existing in itself is never one which consciousness or the Ego pertaining to consciousness has nothing to do" (88). Consciousness is not determined by substantiality. *Transcendent things do not transcend consciousness*, but rather, the very nature of consciousness itself is transcendental.

It is only because there is consciousness, then, that there is meaning at all. The transcendent thing, then, for Husserl, is *un*interpretable, and yet, at the same time, exists only because there is consciousness. Rather, the transcendentally perceived thing is material *for-consciousness*. There is then, no "higher" or "greater" consciousness, that would be able to see adumbrations as unities where we cannot. *Transcendent things are really transcendent*. It is their nature to be so; they are not signs of some greater, but unperceivable form of being. It is not that God would be able to perceive something transcendent immanently, and thus immediately (79), whereas we, less perfect, would not be able to do so. For Husserl, we do not reckon with an incompletely given thing that *could* be perceived as incomplete if only we had the sensory or extrasensory capabilities to do so. It is for this reason that for Husserl, speculation, such as that which the post-Kantian idealists engage in, offers no possibility of knowledge. The transcendent and the immanent are of completely heterogeneous orders, or *regions*, as Husserl terms it; otherwise, the transcendent object would only be a kind of picture, or sign pointing to something that *could* be perceived in its entirety if only there were someone or some thing capable of doing so. Language then, only comes after the fact, for Husserl: it serves to express the perceptions that we already effect in our very nature as conscious beings. Only because there is already a constituting consciousness is there the possibility of language in which we can indicate to each other, the perceptions that we already have achieved. For Schleiermacher, however, knowledge only happens through its manifesting in the substantiality of language: we are condemned to language, to opacity, and thus, to incompletion.

For Schleiermacher, meaning as interpretation occurs through the dynamic, productive capacity of an incipient consciousness which gathers itself through the sediment of a language that must constantly renew itself: "Every utterance depends on previous

thinking" (9). It is through the resistance to a *fundamental* opacity, and to a fundamental substantiality, that consciousness develops itself in this view. Each time that we attempt to express something, we do so by "abstracting" our empirical perceptions into language, an abstraction, which nonetheless achieves concretion by manifesting materially as language. For Husserl, however, there is nothing to resist: we do not first intuit the empirical object, and only then, transform it into something by which we can consciously perceive it along the lines of the Kantian reflective judgment. Rather, the *originary* nature of consciousness follows from the notion that anything that we intuit transcendentally must be accompanied *at the same time* by a constituting, synthesizing function. The phenomenological reduction renders possible a direct understanding consciousness precisely because it reverses the priority of substantiality. For Schleiermacher, there is only a mass of physicality, of stuff; for Husserl, however, through the phenomenological reduction, substance becomes understood not as actuality, but as transcendentality: it is the way that we see, and it is what constitutes us, not that which we must *resist* in a process which results in the generating of consciousness. The phenomenological reduction, the bracketing of all physicality, allows for the perceiver and the perceived to be unified *here* in immediate intuition. In the hermeneutical outlook however, the failure to arrive at an "original impulse," at a unity of perceiver and perceived is the thing that we talk about, precisely because we can never bring it into being. Yet if the world can only be healed through the creation of a *fictional* perspective, we will nonetheless still have to reckon with this failure in actuality.

VI. THE IMPASSE OF INTUITION: FICTION AND FAILURE

In the interpretation paradigm, the subject is required to discover itself through language in its engagement with others. Yet such a discovery could not come about unless there was some faculty for observing the act of communication. This would require, then, that this observer somehow come from beyond language, and thus, because language can only exist in time, it would have to come from beyond time. Such an observer, then, must be *uncommunicative*. Consciousness, then, requires something beyond interpretation if it is to come to terms with language at all. If, as we have argued, narrative is precisely this perspective which we do not have available to us *in life*, the narrative perspective must, likewise, be uncommunicative. However, because narrative necessarily manifests in language, we have understood narration, then, as a particular use of language: one which *represents*, rather than actualizes the communicative act. This, I have argued is possible, because in narration, the *object* of communication is eliminated. Unlike actual discourse, there is no one, no "you" to receive the narration. Because communication requires a receiver of the discourse, narrative does not communicate, but represents communication. In putting communication out of play, narrative permits a perspective *on* communication. The perspective, however, must be *impersonal*, precisely because there is no personal exchange involved. If narrative excludes a "you" that receives it, it also excludes an "I" that begins the exchange, because a communicative "I" requires a receiver of the communication. This exclusion, I have argued, defines the sphere of the fictional; it is fictional precisely because what is represented is not actualized.

Through our analysis of phenomenological intuition, we have argued that there must be an originary fictive position by which the subject comes to consciousness, and thus speech, at all, one which, then, takes the place of the personal "I." Thus, in reading fiction, I do not begin with my body as the locus of subjectivity, though I do draw on my experience

of my body and bodies in general in order to understand what I am reading. If being a subject entails being subjected to an impersonal horizon which envelops us, then we could say that the fictive position permits the experience of being a subject to be represented for consciousness. Narrative, then, in reduplicating the originary process by which we find ourselves in a meaningful world, permits a perspective *on* the world that we are in, one that we cannot "normally" have because we are *in* it. Yet if "normal" being is already a kind of being that finds meaning in the world, then we must come to terms with an originary fictive modality, a primordial capacity for putting ourselves out of play. This essential constituent of consciousness is the "who" that permeates our absorbedness in the world. Fiction in its generic sense, in recreating this originary *noesis*, makes it available to consciousness, and permits the possibility of reflecting on the phenomena of consciousness.

Fiction, we might say, is the product of the failure of consciousness to see itself. It is, in a certain sense, the aftermath of the failure of the phenomenological reduction to bring pure consciousness into view. Ultimately, interpretation cannot be effaced or transcended in phenomenological intuition, in the epoché. We must, then, insist on Husserl's passing remark that "*that feigning* [Fiktion] *is the source from which the cognitions of "eternal truths" is fed*" (160). What we can learn from reading Husserl in the context of hermeneutical interpretation is that, if fiction excludes lived experience, the project of the epoché must always end in failure, in a return, a fall back to language and to interpretation. The impetus towards fiction, we might say, is precisely the impetus toward this vision that can never be actualized. Fiction, then, is situated in the conflation of interpretation and intuition. Husserl's dogmatism with regard to the possibility of arriving at pure consciousness, however, paradoxically permits this failure to come into view, when we understand it not as

a philosophical dogmatism, but the dogmatism of consciousness itself, which *believes* that it can achieve a transcendent understanding of itself.

It is precisely because we cannot stop time, stop ourselves from being in order to see ourselves being, that this perspective on our lives, this observing faculty, must be construed as a fictional perspective. It is only this fictional perspective which is capable of negating the actuality and thus ineluctability of time. Generic fiction permits this to be seen: just as it *represents* communication, it likewise represents time, and in doing so, puts time out of play. Certainly, a work of fiction cannot stop the movement of time: the act of reading must, of course, occur in time. However, narrative fiction is capable, nonetheless of achieving its own "reduction" by splitting the experience of time into two modalities. When we read fiction, we experience two kinds of time: the time of the reading, and the time of the narrative. The act of reading, like any other perceptual activity, must occur only in adumbrations, sentence by sentence: we encounter the object of our reading, then, transcendentally. This transcendentality, however, must be experienced in relation to the transcendentality of the world as a whole. In focusing our attention on a narrative, we *bracket* the world as a whole, in bringing to the fore of consciousness, the temporal experience of the narrative. Thus, in reading, we bracket out the *act* of reading and the body that the reader is associated with, in allowing the temporality of the narrative to envelop our consciousness. In this way, we achieve the characteristic absorption of fiction. But, as we have seen, fiction could never be possible if there was *only* this absorptive faculty. If this was the case, we would experience fiction as "reality," and there would be no difference, no division in modalities, between the world of the narrative and the world of the reader. We must remember that in phenomenologically bracketing, we do not doubt the world, but rather, turn our attention to the objects of our perception. What narrative enables, then, in

the same manner as the epoché, is the installing of an observer upon this absorption. It is the observer that engages in the act of bracketing. When we do this, we maintain part of our consciousness in the world of the *reading*, that is, the "real" world. It is this observer that is capable of *watching* this absorption, and thus, of watching our "belief" in the narrative. Insofar as we are absorbed in our life, there is no faculty for observing our absorption—thus, we remain in the "natural attitude," believing that what we encounter in the world is extraneous to our consciousness. However, because of this modal bifurcation, narrative fiction, in putting the time of the reading out of play, is capable of representing time, *in* time. Narrative, then, exploits the fact that we perceive only in adumbrations, by putting these very adumbrations out of play: where "life" is fragmented, a novel is a total structure that binds time. When we read fiction, we experience this meaningful temporal structure, one that we cannot experience in the time to which the body is subject.

Fictional narrative cannot tell us the story of who we are as acting beings in the world. Rather, in installing an observer, and permitting a view upon our absorption, it creates a model of our subjection, one that, precisely because it is not *us* that we read about, permits the possibility of experiencing our own subjection, of our own absorption in the world, an absorption that we experience in a controlled environment, through the act of reading. A fictional narrative, then, permits us to tell ourselves the story of our own subjection, and thus, allows us to engage in *noesis*, in the act of reconstituting the world back into the structure that we have "forgotten" because of our absorption in the world. It thus offers a view from beyond the subject.

Thus, through the fictional observer, we effect a kind of epoché, creating a vantage by which we can see ourselves *absorbed* in our communication.[6] Only then, are we capable of isolating the *experience* of being, which can only be *manifested* in acting in the world. The

fictional "reduction," then, permits the possibility of re-signifying our communicative acts, so that we can understand them as representations of the inarticulate *person*, the one who experiences the world through acting, and without which, there would be no impetus to communicate to begin with. It is, perhaps, the capacity for a given narrative to reveal to us this person, that determines its aesthetic force. A fiction, we might say, is successful to the extent that its *content* reflects our own engagement with the world; to the extent that it re-signifies things as symbols of the self.

Fiction and the phenomenological reduction, then, operate through a shared impetus, in achieving what cannot be achieved in everyday experience: the installation of an observer. Because this observer has no qualities per se, it does not get contaminated by my identity, and as a result, does not get conflated with the observed. Only in this way, then, is it really possible to "view" our de facto absorption in the world as subjects. And then, only in this way do we come to the consciousness of ourselves *as* subjects, subject *to* an impersonal "narration." It is in this way that through an act of *noesis*, we are capable of bringing the world into the sphere of immanence. *Noesis*, then, the production of knowledge, and the bestowal of sense, operates, we might say, fictionally. The impersonal perspective that is generated through the phenomenological reduction, then, moves the frontier of the unknowable from between me and others, and into the sphere of immanence to the self. As such, it creates the *possibility* of self-knowledge by generating a context in which my absorption in the world can be illuminated.

If, then, in actuality we find ourselves "thrown" into the world, having woken to ourselves as subjects, with no possibility for understanding the nature of our subjection as long as we remain *here*, fiction, like the phenomenological reduction, draws *on* this unavailability of understanding by no longer seeing it as an *impediment* to understanding, but

rather, turning it into an object, into a constituent of the self. It, then *reduplicates* the experience of being a person in an impersonal world, and creates a context, a vantage, by which this experience, this absorption, can be articulated.

That we engage in fiction in the world, both as readers and as writers, is testament to the desire to understand who we are. It is because this understanding is an issue to us, we might say, that anything like a phenomenological reduction is possible. Husserl, however, like Heidegger, offers no real account for how this understanding manifests in the world as an ordinary act. If for Husserl, there is an originary act of sense-bestowal, which results in the phenomenon of consciousness, we nonetheless find ourselves in the natural attitude, where we no longer see the primordial quality of our consciousness vis a vis the world we find ourselves in. This is what Heidegger calls "the forgetfulness of being." We have seen that for Heidegger, we must await a wordless and diaphanous call of conscience in order for us to emerge out of this forgetfulness, and for the world to come to unconcealedness as a correlate of consciousness. Husserl, however, offers a method, the epoché, by which we can manufacture this position. The epoché, however, restricts the possibility of understanding to philosophers and to philosophical discourse. What Husserl cannot explain, then, is how we make the leap from the natural attitude to the phenomenological attitude at all. We might, however, begin to understand fiction as a kind of middle ground between a preconscious act of sense-bestowal—noesis— that results in the notion of a "natural attitude," and a philosophical methodology that permits an account of the subject. It is fiction, we might say, that permits an everyday understanding, however unclarified, of the process by which the world is construed as meaningful: it is fiction, then, that we might say, permits the very possibility of any philosophical discourse by which we attempt to come to terms with the subject, while at the same time *being* a subject.

Yet there is a failure inherent in all this. Because this perspective is fictional, we, in actuality, fail to see ourselves through it. The fictional perspective passes by our actual selves. Thus, we must come to terms with the fact that what the epoché permits us to see, through the manufacturing of an impersonal perspective on being, is nonetheless not ourselves *in action*. Both the epoché and fiction are *impersonal*: the reduction requires us to exclude the "who," our identity, our bodies. This impersonality, as the transcendent perspective on *us*, transcends our own being in the world. As a result, in effecting the epoché and in fiction, we fail to find ourselves. This failure, however, *is* consciousness, and there is only a "who" because of it. A work of fiction alone, I have argued, cannot offer a view of our subjectivity. If fiction is a model of our subjection, it is nonetheless our *invention* of a model, of which the thing it is a model *of* can never be experienced. If there is always an "I am writing" behind each narrated "I," then, as readers and writers, we are propelled *out* of our habitual being in the very attempt to get a view on it. The world, as transcendental remains *always* transcendental, and thus, not depictable in its transcendentality. What gives fiction its force is rather, the experience of the *inadequacy* of the model: this, we would have to say, *is* knowledge. In declaring, however, that knowledge of inadequacy is the foundation for knowledge, we are not "reducing the relativity of knowledge to knowledge," but rather, acknowledging the ineluctable *truth* of the transcendentality, and thus, undepictability of the world that we experience. In fiction, and in the epoché, we fail to find ourselves factically, in action, in our bodies. The body, to us is the least fictional of entities, and in this failure in representation, its non-fictionality re-asserts itself, and pulls us out of the perspective of the epoché and of fiction, demanding again our absorption in *this* world, the world where we find ourselves *in* bodies, among things. Anything that we understand about ourselves, then, occurs in the disparity between the two regions. It is in the untenability of the total structure

that fiction offers by which we achieve understanding. In the relation between ourselves as inadequate, as that which can be experienced only one adumbration at a time, and the totality of structure that fiction offers, we come to see the structure as an invention, ourselves as invented.

Insofar, then, as we find ourselves in the world, however, insofar as we cannot live our lives while putting ourselves out of play, interpretation is ineradicable: as a subject among other subjects, my personal experience of being must be reconciled with that of others. Insofar as lived experience is concerned, then, the *im*personal, then, is not *in* me, but lies between me and others. We cannot, then, simply replace a paradigm of interpretation with that of intuition. Interpretation is the way that we factically find ourselves in the world. We *see* this in fiction, and we do so, because we live part of our lives "fictionally," in constantly inventing, or in Butler's terminology, performing the structure that envelops us. In fiction, we might say, there is *only* interpretation, only communication, only characters attempting to manipulate themselves through a world that they do not create. It is we, as readers, then, who bind the fragmented world into an intuition of the world. In interpretation, in communication, we have no context by which to see ourselves. Like fictional characters, we do not know that we are being "narrated." But the phenomenon of fiction, founded on communication exploits communication, renders it unproductive, turns it into material. Fiction, we can say, is the infiltration of the impersonal into the personal; as such, we might say, it shows us the *untenability of the natural attitude*. Every act of representation of speech or thought is built out of communication, and thus, is experienced as the natural attitude. However, in the *impersonal* vantage that fiction offers the reader, communication becomes expression, an expression that can never achieve its proper language, because language is always the language of things. It is only through the *individual*,

then, the being who speaks and acts in the world, that the *person*, the one who experiences the world, can become available to consciousness.

If fictional characters operate through communication, it is the reader who *intuits*, who transforms communication into expression. *We*, however, as both readers and actors in our own world, must always conflate these two modalities. Truth, then, insofar as we factically find ourselves in our bodies but draw on the fictional perspective in order to *apprehend* these bodies, is this conflation.

PART TWO

CHAPTER 1:
FICTIONAL ONTOLOGY: A COMMENTARY ON THE FIRST THREE CHAPTERS OF GENESIS

And as the words heal, I did not mean the real God.

Jack Spicer, *A Textbook of Poetry*

Genesis is not only the narrative of the creation of the world, but also, the narrative by which the authority of a non-natural divinity, who stands outside of nature as the authority *over* nature, gets established. This divinity, which the text refers to sometimes as "Elohim," and sometimes as "Yahweh," does not serve as the text's narrator. Rather, the text is narrated impersonally with recourse to an all-seeing narrative perspective that is never accounted for. One could, of course, maintain the conceit that, if only the divinity itself could inhabit this perspectiveless perspective, than it is the divinity himself who writes, employing the omniscient third-person narrative stance. Yet if this were the case, at the very least because there is nothing *but* this divinity in the primal creative scene, the divinity himself would have to invent a fictional perspective, an authoritative sight, and speech, which is *not* that of the divinity. It is this essential fiction in the Book of Genesis which is the subject of this chapter.

The Book of Genesis is, in our terminology, an "outside-directed" fiction. That is, it is a text that attempts, through its own rhetoric, to compel belief in an extra-rhetorical authority. As such, the Bible obscures the very rhetoric by which it constructs this authority. Our interest here is precisely in the strategies that the text employs in order to engage in this obscuring, or rather, the strategies by which rhetoric and authority become conflated.

If the subject is founded on the possibility of a *fictional* intuition, a fiction that the very notion of the subject depends upon for its *real* experience of itself, we might be able to see in the book of Genesis the narrative of the inauguration of both fiction *and* the subject, and thus, of the *world* in which the subject finds itself. What follows, then, is a sometimes fanciful insertion of the Book of Genesis back into the genre that it makes possible.

I. CREATED OR CREATING

Genesis begins with a grammatical dilemma that is covered over in its various translations including that of the Septuagint and the Vulgate. Yet that it is originally a problem in the Hebrew is evident from the 11th century Biblical commentator Rashi, who, apparently, was the first to call attention to it[1]. The first word of Genesis, "Bereshit," is a compound of the Hebrew preposition "be" ("in" or "with") and the noun "reshit" (beginning). Rashi argues, however, that the word "reshit" cannot be read as an independent noun: rather, following the Biblical evidence that he compiles, "reshit" is an incomplete noun that requires the genitive, and must be read as "in the beginning *of*." If we follow Rashi, then, the Hebrew, "Bereshit bara Elohim et hashamayim ve'et ha'aretz" cannot be translated "ἐν ἀρχῇ ἐποίησεν ὁ θεὸς τὸν οὐρανὸν καὶ τὴν γῆν" as the Septuagint does, nor "In principio creavit Deus caelum et terram" as does the Vulgate. To do so would be to ignore the genitive form. Yet, if the genitive form were restored, the phrase would yield an ungrammatical sentence: "In the beginning of […] God created the heaven and the earth."

Let us accept for the moment Rashi's contention, which would preclude the translation of the first line as "In the beginning Elohim[2] created the heaven and the earth."

Before we look at the way Rashi proposes to "correct" this error and restore grammatical cohesion, let us first read the line maintaining the lack in grammatical cohesion: we might find that there is good reason to begin the story of the creation of the world with an impossible sentence.

If heaven and earth did not, as we are told, exist before Elohim had created it, then we might think of this sentence as representing the world in its inchoate state. The presence of a genitive without something that it could take possession *of*, would be precisely the situation: the beginning *of* a world that does not yet exist. The grammatical lapse then, read in this way, would only be an error in *this* world, insofar as it is already created; yet we could also see it as a kind of picture of the incipient structure of the universe, a structure that for the reader, whose language is founded upon the created universe, would have to be *read* as an error. Only after heaven and earth come into being can they come to inhabit the blank left by the beginning *of* what was not yet there. With the completion of the first sentence, the world, as we know it, falls into place. In this way, the reader does not simply experience the creation of the world as a linear sequence of events, where first one sees "nothing," and then, one sees "something"; rather, read in this way, the nothing is not depicted as "there"; the reader *experiences* the nothing as the *impossibility of reading.* As the sentence progresses, the world folds back upon the "nothing" of the missing word in the sentence, and inhabits it: heaven and earth take the place of the blank space. The reader then, is not so much *present* for the narration of the events, as much as the figure of the reader itself wakes to the language organizing itself, achieving consciousness only through language, by becoming a creature of language. Such a non-sequential movement would recall Maurice Merleau-Ponty's description of the transformation in perception from monocular vision to the synergic vision that comes about through the coordination of both eyes: the move from the

"floating pre-thing" of monocular vision, to the thing itself solidified in synergic perception. The first sentence of Genesis then, could be seen as a performance of the creation of the universe, a mimetic re-enactment of creation, where the experience of the lack of grammatical cohesion becomes the experience of the lack before creation. In the inability of the reader to make the sentence cohere, the reader experiences "first-hand" the universe before it was brought into being. When grammatical cohesion is realized, the reader, awaking in language, comes to consciousness, a *rational* consciousness that is founded on grammatical cohesion as the very limit of awareness. In this way, the act of reading becomes less an experience of being a spectator then that of participator in a re-enactment.

Yet once the reader "comes alive" in language, it is as if the language had *always* been there. The faulty grammar of the first clause of Genesis, in becoming rehabilitated by the creation of heaven and earth, paradoxically causes the reader to *lose* consciousness of his or her not having been there "before." The before is unthinkable precisely because it cannot be said. The faulty language is only a "floating pre-thing" which, compelled by the very impetus toward cohesion, and thus, rationality, is effaced by the coming-into-being of language proper. Existence and language become inseparable and rational, and any attempt to speak of a "before" existence would, appropriately without its *logos*, be unable to be articulated. Understood in this way, in Genesis, to speak is not only to think, but to be.

In modern criticism of novelistic style, the distinction between "showing and telling," has achieved cardinal importance. Percy Lubbock writes, using his friend Henry James as an exemplar of his criterion: "The art of fiction does not begin until the novelist thinks of his story as a matter to be *shown,* to be so exhibited that it will tell itself" (qtd Genette 163).[3] The distinction between showing and telling, however, has its origins in the Platonic distinction between *mimesis* and *diegesis*. In the diegetic mode, in Plato's formulation,

the poet makes it clear that he is the speaker, and does not pretend to speak as if he were another; whereas in the mimetic mode, the poet "delivers a speech as if he were someone else" (qtd. Genette 162). In the history of the novel, the mimetic mode has come to be prized over the diegetic mode: it is *showing* that permits absorption, permits the reader to feel as if he or she were "there." Yet, Gérard Genette argues, such a distinction can never be rigorously imposed, because showing, in a narrative, must ultimately be construed under the rubric of telling:

> [T]he very idea of *showing*, like that of imitation or narrative representation (and even more so because of its naively visual character), is completely illusory: in contrast to dramatic representation, no narrative can "show" or "imitate" the story it tells. All it can do is to tell it in a manner which is detailed, precise, "alive," and in that way give more or less the *illusion of mimesis*—which is the only narrative mimesis[.] (166)

Understood in this way, showing is merely a telling that dissembles itself; it is speech that pretends that it is not speech. Yet, perhaps the reason that "showing" has, in 20th century criticism of fictional narrative, been given priority over telling is because the possibility for speech to dissemble is indeed has become the very essence of fiction. Fiction must compel the reader to believe in it, and it must do so by disguising the fact that it itself manifests as discourse. The illusion that showing creates is the illusion that what is being shown is *not being narrated*. Even those works of fiction that contain an identifiable narrator must always reckon with the fact that the narrator is not the ultimate narrative level: the narrator him- or herself is subject to narration. It is this "law" that has produced the notion of the "implied author" and its variations, which, as I have argued, only defers the confrontation with an *impersonal narrative force*. The reader then, for the space of the reading, is compelled to believe that he or she is a creature of the narrative, that he or she is made privy to the world that is being disclosed without the mediation of someone who is telling it. Yet if this is the case, then the narrative attempts to dissemble its materiality in order to

persuade the reader that he or she has a privileged perspective on its events, namely, that unlike in his or her bodily perspective on the world, the reader can *intuit* rather than *interpret*. In this way, the reader is given direct access to the things themselves. Yet in the light of this *fictional* perspective, the reader too, must be forced to engage in a similar disguise. Every time that we, as readers, become absorbed in a work of fiction, we are forced, in turn, to dissemble ourselves, to generate the fiction that there is no reader. The reader must look *past* his or her own body, his or her location as a physical being ensconced in space and in time, in order that absorption in a work of fiction can be effected. Without this absorption, there is indeed nothing to see, and thus, nothing to say.

As we have seen, however, the reader, anchored in space and time, is not effaced completely. Though we may "lose" ourselves in reading, there is always "someone" there who is observing this absorption in the work, and who translates it into the experience of meaning, which only comes about in the relation between the observer and the absorbed. Thus, the reader must divide him- or herself into two faculties: the observer, who stands outside of the *fiction*—which is exactly the fiction of a direct link between words and things—makes possible the absorbed reader who exists in the same modality, who is composed of the same material, as that which is read. This absorption, this reverie, can occur *only* because the reader uses his or her own material existence in a body and as a language-user to deny this materiality, to cancel it out, to render it transparent. Along with the writer then, the reader engages in a *poesis*, translating the opacity of physical existence into intuition: into an *im*mediate participation in the fiction, which, to the absorbed reader, is not fiction at all. The words disappear only by virtue of their existence; the reader imagines him- or herself a creature of words, and words, as the very structure of this imagined

universe, can be no more apprehended than can a fictional character apprehend his fictional condition.

Yet for the very reason that there must be, for this reverie to occur, an observer outside and an absorbed being inside, the promise that the fiction offers the self can never be fulfilled; the self, the reader, can never enter—as him- or herself—into the state of absorption, precisely because it requires an observer who stands outside of the frame. This is the ineluctable law of fiction: the real reader can never enter, as real, into the space of the fictional reader. Each time the attempt is made to bridge "fiction" and "reality," the result is only more fiction. The empirical reader is left perpetually outside of the text. The *desire to believe* must take its reckoning against the impossibility of correlating this belief with reality, of reconciling this "real" reader and this "fictive" reader. Each excludes the other, and the ineluctable space between the two is exactly the space of fiction: a space of possibility that is forever on the cusp of becoming real, but is never capable of doing so. Genette's "illusion of mimesis" occurs only because there is a desire to believe in the illusion. Any meaningful experience in fiction then, must be accompanied by a knowledge of having missed the mark.

Yet what happens when what is being imitated in the text is words itself? Here is Genette's one exception to the rule that mimesis can only be effected as an illusion. If imitation in language can only "tell," because telling is the only thing that language can do, then the one thing that language *can* imitate is language. "Mimesis in words can only be mimesis of words," Genette writes. "Other than that all we have and can have is degrees of diegesis" (164). If we take the first phrase of Genesis as the expressing of an inchoate world through its strategic exploitation of a grammatical imperfection, then we must read the creation of the world to be *a linguistic act*. The world comes into being only through the ordering of the linguistic system, the transformation of the incipient "pre-thing" of language

into a language that can be *read*. In this case then, it *is* language that is being imitated, and the text achieves, in its correlating the act of the creation of form and substance with the act of *narrating* this creation, the unity of showing and telling: it is a true mimesis. We might say then, that before there is Elohim, there is language, and that it is language that creates Elohim.[4] Only after the grammatical structure has been put in place can Elohim utter the first sentence. The first sentence he utters (which, while the first sentence of the creator, is nonetheless only a portion of the sentence that we read) perpetuates this unity of word and thing, of showing and telling. If language is made to be the very substance of creation, then "and Elohim said 'Let there be light'" becomes less a magical act of *creatio ex nihilo* observed by a perspectiveless, all-seeing reader, than a *continuing* of the process of creation, a making use of this linguistic *hyle* which perseveres into form through a process that must remain elusive to those created things that are, as created, already infused with language. Language, as much as it serves a narrative function, is *also* the essence of that which is narrated. Light and language are inseparable and seeing becomes a thing of words.

Benveniste divides the verbal function of an utterance into two parts: the cohesive function, and the assertive function. It is the cohesive function which serves to organize the elements of the utterance into a coherent structure. The assertive function then "consists in endowing the utterance with a predicate of reality" (133). The verb in the sentence organizes the sentence so that it has the potential to make sense, and only because it does this can it then *assert* something, and thus, achieve meaning. Thus, in order for the reader to understand what the sentence is about, the sentence must first take on the conventional structure by which we are able to recognize that something is being said at all. Here in the first sentence of Genesis then, at the moment when language comes into being for the perceiver, we find that reality can only exist within the conventional structure of language;

that is, assertion comes only in cohesion. There can be no "reality" without there already being the structure of asserting something about reality. Here, where existence depends upon language, lack of cohesion would mean not only the failure to assert something *about* reality, but would result in the failure of reality itself to come into being. Because the verb "bara" has no object to which it can attach itself, the reader is thus forced to turn "reshit" into a stand-alone noun in order to endow it with cohesive force; yet this noun must nonetheless oscillate between formal existence as a noun, and the *impossibility* of its existence as such a noun, thereby creating something like the "reality of the lack of cohesion." The verb then, takes on the force of the *will* toward cohesion, but without the possibility of consummating this cohesion. If the narrator of the beginning of Genesis is language itself, an impersonal language that pre-exists the Elohim that uses it, then the assertive function and the cohesive function here become inseparable. In the intertwining of assertion and cohesion, language becomes the structure of existence, and the reader, insofar as he or she is inscribed in the text, becomes a structure of language.

Yet precisely because the reader finds him- or herself in the text, already a speaking being at the very moment of creation, the *act* of creation itself must remain elusive, perpetually outside the narrative. How could it be otherwise? The reader can only read *language*, and thus, creation cannot be narrated in anything but language. Elohim then, as a figure of language, can never show the reader what the world was like before there was language. What is remarkable about this passage then, if we continue to interpret it against Rashi (while maintaining our focus on the problem that he points out), is precisely that it does not attempt to "show" what it cannot "tell." The reader does not "see" the nothing of the world before it was created, but rather, awakens with language itself. The earth as "unformed and void" then, is the earth as *already* created enough to be spoken. Language

becomes the limit of existence, that which one cannot go behind. Here, at the very foundation of the history of the omniscient God, we do not find an omniscient narrator; we do not find a narrator who can "see" beyond the perspective that is allotted to him. We might find then, that the authority which grounds the narrative, which generates the compulsion to believe in it, is precisely its refusal to produce an authoritative voice, a voice that stands outside of existence in order to be able to say it. Language here, is expressly not made to be transparent, but rather shares the same attribute of materiality as everything that it signifies. Elohim then, as much as he creates, would nonetheless also be a product of creation.

If there is an ineluctable law that keeps the absorbed reader and its observer eternally separated, there is a corresponding law, equally ineluctable, which forbids the author of a narrative from entering into his or her narrative. In the absence of the ability to point outside of its own rhetorical modality towards its author, who exists in another modality, any attempt to refer to the author can only generate more *poesis*, can only point *away* from its originator. We see exactly this process with the creation that is narrated in Genesis. Each time we attempt to go back behind the discourse of Genesis in order to arrive at a creator before the linguistic manifestation of Reshit, we are confounded by an infinite regress. If language is the substance, and the structure, of existence, then the "nothing" of non-existence would always have to become language in order for it to be narrated, and thus, would always already have to be a product of creation. Elohim can say, "Let there be light," because light is already language. But the one thing that cannot be said is "Let there be speech." If there *is*, somewhere behind the language, a "real" creator who creates language, this creator could never be written. And it is not the subject of Genesis.

The rule that the author can never enter into his narrative then, is not magically effaced in an act of omnipotent authority for the very reason that here, at the moment before narrator and narrated are made to be separate entities, showing and telling are the same thing. Genesis, when we read the first sentence in its failure to cohere grammatically, generates its authority by an appeal directly to language itself. There is no omniscient muse in Genesis in the manner of the Homeric epics to whom the writer can have recourse. Nor is there a transcendent Lady Philosophy who descends down upon an imprisoned Boethius and speaks from a perspective denied to the human being trapped in space and time. Nor again is there the structure of "I heard this story upon good authority and I relate it to you now," in a manner characteristic of the early novel. All of these techniques generate belief by deferring the authority of the narrative to an inaccessible being who stands "outside" of the fiction, but is nonetheless fictional. This deferral, is of course, only a tacit way of positing an authority who is beyond reproach, an authority which is nonetheless inaccessible in narration, and in writing in general. Genesis, however, makes no effort to render language transparent through a deliberate mystification of authorship, through the positing of a fictional author. The reader has no need to account for the narrator of creation by positing some imaginary witness from the primeval scene who, like the messenger in Job, alone escaped to tell us. Language is a constituent of creation itself, a narrator that is not separate from that which it narrates. If the author is mystified in Genesis, here we can understand it as an *original mystification*, one that cannot be avoided, and one that is not deferred, because language has been made to be co-extensive with the narrator. If every work of fiction needs, in some way, to produce in itself the authority that will generate belief, that is, if every fiction must enable the reader to effect the bifurcation of him- or herself into real and fictional, observer and absorbed, then fiction, as we have already seen, is that type of discourse which

does not look to any authority other than itself for its cohesion. As such, we can look at Genesis as an inquiry into the *origin of fiction*. We do so precisely because the text, which places its narrative stance at the origin of *the world*, and of consciousness of the world, weaves together narration and substance in such a way that it does not defer its authority, its compulsion to believe. It is this very structure, then, unlike the muse-grounded poetry of Greek antiquity, that underlies the very possibility of the modern novel, which likewise, appeals to no authority. If fiction is that mode of discourse which has no ground for its authority, we might say that the book of Genesis presents the origin of the genre of fiction. It is, however, only once fiction has solidified into a genre, that the text can then, in retrospect, be read as such.

Before we proceed to analyze the implications of this, let us now turn to Rashi's interpretation of the first sentence.

The Hebrew language does not include vowels in its alphabet; rather, "vowel points" can be superimposed below or next to the letters in order to indicate proper pronunciation. The Hebrew of the ancient versions of the Old Testament, however, like most modern Hebrew texts, does not use vowel points. Rather, vowel sounds are inferred from context. Because the same grouping of consonants can be used to indicate different words or different verb conjugations depending upon which vowels are to be employed, the pronunciation of words is often an issue in interpretation. Likewise, the ancient versions of the Old Testament did not employ punctuation marks. The Masoretic text both standardized the pronunciation of words, and instituted a system of cantillation that determined where sentences, heretofore unmarked, began and ended.

Rashi's argument will hinge on the pliability of the Hebrew vowel and sentence structure. In order to generate a grammatically correct reading of the beginning of Genesis,

Rashi argues that the first sentence is not to be read as an account of the sequence in which creation occurred. Rather, the reference to the creation of heaven and earth is to be understood as a kind of summary of all that will transpire in the following verses. In order to read it this way, the verb root that means "to create"—ברא (BRA)—is not to be conjugated as a verb in the perfect tense, as *bara* (and thus, "In the beginning God created) but rather as a participle: *b'ro* (creat*ing*). In this way, the word *b'ro*, acting as a participial noun can receive the genitive *reshit*: "In the beginning of Elohim's creating."[5] The first sentence then, would be extended through verse 4, and verses 1-3 would be read as one participial phrase. It could be thus translated, "In the beginning of Elohim's creating [of] heaven and earth, [when] the earth was unformed and void, and darkness was upon the face of the deep, and the spirit of Elohim hovered over the waters, Elohim said, 'Let there be light' and there was light."[6] Rashi's interpretation then, provides a more grammatically normative understanding of creation, and does away with the possibility that language is implicated in the structure of creation itself. Here, Elohim is not understood to be a product of a primordial language. The text does not acknowledge that there is anything like language until the "And Elohim said." Rather, the language of narration is rendered transparent, so that the actual narration is not made an issue in the text. This is a more conventional, certainly more familiar approach towards establishing the grounds for a fictional narrative. Without having been given the means to question who this linguistically endowed authority is, we are expected to take the account of creation as authoritative with recourse only to the impersonal and ineluctable narrative voice. If we were required to account for *who* speaks, we could only say that somehow, something stands outside of the creation and says it. Here is, then, the omniscient narrator who presupposes authority for that which he narrates, and who evidently finds no reason to justify his grounds for narration. Such a narrator then,

would be very much like that aspect of the Old Testament God who sees everything, who remains forever in a different modality from his creation. Yet, if we again look closely at the text, we might find that the difficulty nonetheless asserts itself, albeit in a different way.

In this first sentence which we read through verse 4, "Elohim" is mentioned three times, each time in a different modality. "Elohim's creating," with *b'ro* as participle, subordinates the portion of the sentence that runs through to the end of the participial phrase (the end of verse 3), and defers the announcing of the subject of the sentence—Elohim—until verse 4. The earth as "unformed and void," the "darkness…upon the face of the deep" and "the spirit of Elohim [hovering] over the waters" are all then, to be understood as states of being rather than as discrete actions; they are the descriptions of the condition upon Elohim's creating. Only when the phrase ends does the first act of creation occur, when Elohim says, "Let there be light." The problem that we come across here is not a grammatical one, but rather, is that of clashing narrative modalities. The phrase that runs through verse 3 introduces the reader to Elohim as the very condition for creation itself, the structure of all that exists; yet this condition is nonetheless made subordinate to the *subject* of the sentence, which is *also* Elohim, so that Elohim acts as both subject and object. The very same Elohim whom we have just seen as the passive object of verses 1-3 rises up out of this passivity and into activity. Thus, just as in the reading of the first verse as "Bereshit *bara*," we find that we cannot get to the "nothing" of creation because every time we attempt to see it we only arrive at an Elohim who has already begun to create. Because verses 1-3 describe a condition, and verse 4 describes an action, we cannot understand these two parts of the sentence to be constructed as a narrative sequence. This is exactly Rashi's point. Elohim's saying "Let there be light" does not happen *after* the description of the primordial scene of creation, but rather, in the midst of it. Yet precisely because the sentence, as we read it here,

is constructed so as to defer the subject until *after* God has begun creating, we run into difficulties. The first act of creation that we read first-hand is "Let there be light." This however, is not necessarily the first *act* of creation. Creation may have already begun by the time that we read the "Let there be light." The sentence proceeds however, in such a breathless trajectory forward that we have no time to stop and contemplate the world before light. Nothing that we read in the first three verses is permitted to remain as it is, because all that we read is a modification of the subject and verb that we anticipate: "God said." We read the primordial scene of creation only in the process of its being effaced by the arrival of the subject of the sentence. Whatever acts of creation then, which precede the "God said," are forever concealed by the participial phrase which effaces itself with the arrival of the subject. Light is made to oscillate with all that was before light, because even though we read about a primordial darkness, we only do so as the precursor to light, in anticipation of light, as the "pre-thing" that will become light; so that, when we do get to the subject. The sentence folds back upon itself, in the same way that we have seen language fold back upon itself when reading BRA as "bara." Thus, just as in the "bara" sentence, language retains its primary position in creation. The difference however, is that, reading BRA as *b'ro*, language does not have priority over Elohim. Here, on the contrary, language becomes the emblem of Elohim's authority. The mysterious narrator who says, "God said," remains a mystery of the same order as the ellipse in which all creation prior to light came about. It is, the text implies, one of the things that cannot be known, because Genesis does not *tell* it.

Thus, in the "bara" reading, the mystification of language is portrayed as a necessary mystification such that all is told up to the very limit of the possibility of telling. The sovereign here is language, and its law cannot be breached. The attempt to get past the narration of origin only results in the breakdown of language, and in a corresponding loss of

consciousness, because understood this way, consciousness *is* language. The concealment of origins then, is the work of nature, where here we understand language *as* nature. In the *b'ro* reading however, it is not language that cannot be traversed, but rather, the one who speaks, who decides what to tell. Here, as we have seen, the sovereign wields authority by withholding his narration. The concealment of the origin in this case becomes understood not as an exigency of nature, but rather, as a pronouncement of the *law*. As such, the defense of the origin would be maintained through the threat of violence. This sovereign violence can, of course be seen throughout the Bible: most notably in the giving of the law at Sinai, and in the edict against graven images in that law, but also, in the death of Uzzah who "put out his hand to touch the ark of God" in 2 Samuel (6:6).

Both interpretations reckon with anxiety—the anxiety of the inability to approach the origin; it is thus, an anxiety that pertains to the subjection to an authority to whom one has no access—whether this authority is that of a passive nature or that of an active lawgiver. The difference in these two ways of understanding the text could be seen as embodying two different approaches to this anxiety: one existential, and one legal. Ultimately, however, we might find that these two spheres are interwoven with each other, that one cannot so easily separate nature from law.

II. ACTEUR

In the definition that Wlad Godzich and Jeffrey Kittay offer in their book, *The Emergence of Prose*, narrative presupposes an ineluctable mystification:

> Narrative is when that which is necessary but nonverbal in some signifying practice must be taken as said, taken as voice. Once uttered, the addressee then looks for a voice, and a possessor of that voice, an agent of that uttered. Something is considered narrative when the functions of agency become mysterious, and need their own discourse, which is thematized as voice. (235)

Something "must be taken as said" when there is no voice to say it, and the "voice" that emerges in the text appropriates this impossibility of identifying the voice *as* the voice. This, then, is nothing less than the Platonic notion of diegesis. This voice then, exactly because there is nothing behind it, because it does not *imitate*, does not stand for anything other than what it is; it becomes invested with authority. The history of prose writing, Godzich and Kittay argue, is the history of this belief in an essentially artificial and catachrestic authority who has come to replace the rhapsode, the muse-inhabited reciter of poetry. The voice of prose does not come from out of a body who speaks. It is this that gives narrative its essential quality of mystery. We have seen that, reading BRA as the perfect "bara," this mystification reaches all the way back to the capacity for language itself, whereas reading BRA as the participial *b'ro* the mystification is relegated to an anonymous and ineluctable *impersonal narration* which maintains as the emblem of its authority the capacity to dictate what will be told.

Godzich and Kittay discuss the use, in medieval French prose, of a figure in the text who represents a "degree-zero of enunciated markedness" (63). This figure, as it appears in various texts of this period including Jean Molinet's *La ressource du petit peuple*, is given the name "*Acteur*." The purpose of *Acteur* is to tell, or comment on the story in between the dialogue of the other characters. *Acteur* only arises when necessary, only when there is a gap between the reader's need for an overall perspective and the limited perspective of the participants. With *Acteur*, we first begin to understand the other characters as objects of narration, rather than as narrators themselves. *Acteur* is itself an object of narration, but one

endowed with special properties. With the narrator of the story explicitly incorporated into the text in this manner, the narrative structure splays out hierarchically. *Acteur* is the "voice" that has no body, the harbinger of the "neutral," impersonal voice of prose with which we are familiar. Its voice is not one that is heard by the other characters; it is not localized, has no specific vantage point:

> A kind of place, a textual place has been carved out for the entity called *Acteur*. Shall we call it a 'he'? He is not flesh and blood…he is not here listening and seeing…Nor does he have a story about himself to tell…were *Acteur* there, listening, were his heart throbbing, he would just be another feeling, sensing subject to be read as all the others. What would be lost is the potential to escape perceptual requirements and to construct perspectival possibilities, in which, for example, although no *one* (no character, witness) could stand, a member of the audience or (much better) a reader might stand. (65)

Acteur then, becomes *language itself*. Disembodied, it is that which stands both inside and outside the text in its non-participation, its heartlessness. It presents, we might say, in its inhabiting of a position of intuition *on* a text, that it itself can never experience, the incipient violence of reading. It is what makes absorption possible, regardless of whatever suffering is narrated in the text itself. We can understand *Acteur* as the space between the absorbed reader and the observer; as that which can see but cannot be, it renders possible for circumspection a realm beyond the narrow confines of interpretation.

That *Acteur* has disappeared in the modern text does not attest to its non-presence. Its inscription in the text, however invisibly, is what defines fiction itself as the very figure that becomes its hallmark: impersonal narration. It is this figure that allows us to unite both the modern novel and the Bible under the rubric of fiction. It is the deixis, the ground, or rather, the "ground" of fiction, that which establishes the authority of the text to tell anything. That it is not a real ground, an unconditioned condition, is exactly what gives fiction its fictive quality. *Acteur* embodies the regressive structure that comes about when we

try to ask the question, "Who speaks?" As such, *Acteur* is then, the positive expression of the twin interdictions that forbid the narrator from entering into that which he or she narrates, and the absorbed reader from participating in the fiction in which it is absorbed. As a result, the neutral quality of *Acteur's* narration is itself a fiction. If the reader is the ultimate telos of the text, than it is the *reader's* language, the reader's perspective that *Acteur* must assure. It is the reader's perspective then, that has been disguised as that which is perspectiveless. As such, *Acteur* could be understood as the absorbed reader. As such, it is the counterpart to Wolfgang Iser's notion of the implied reader, who, as Iser describes "him," "is generally an embodiment of particular, contemporary dispositions—he is a perspective rather than a person, and as such he takes his place alongside (and intermingled with) the other perspectives of narrator, characters, and plot" (153). This "perspectiveless" perspective is calculated to render the reader's consciousness of his or her own perspective invisible. *Acteur* then, is revealed to be the embodiment of the sovereign, "he" who rises up out of the regress and into deixis, ground. It is *Acteur*, then, who permits the faculty of intuition, in a world that is navigated through interpretation. The absorbed reader, then, is subject to this sovereign in an essential way; it is a product of *Acteur*; what *Acteur* says, the fictional reader does. The figure of *Acteur* is the *confrontation with the impossible* effected by the representation of the impossible. In the book of Genesis, then, we might say that it is Elohim itself, who embodies this figure as a character *in* the text. Yet such a representation cannot exist without creating additional problems. What is covered over in the representation must be experienced as anxiety, one that is well portrayed by the Bible in the notion of the jealous God.

III. NARRATION AND EXCEPTION: FROM VICO'S NEW SCIENCE TO CARL SCHMITT'S EXCEPTION

"Sovereign is he who decides on the exception," writes Carl Schmitt (5). By the state of exception, Schmitt means that which stands outside the normally valid legal system, but which nevertheless belongs to it. "What characterizes an exception," Schmitt writes, "is principally unlimited authority, which means the suspension of the entire existing order. In such a situation it is clear that the state remains, whereas law recedes. Because the exception is different from anarchy and chaos, order in the juristic sense still prevails even if it is not of the ordinary kind" (12). What separates the state of exception then, from a system of social organization that is founded upon a body of laws where the law itself serves as the final arbiter, is that the law as autonomous force recedes until it becomes identified with the authority itself. The sovereign, in declaring the state of exception, suspends the laws that are in effect, and thus, *becomes* the law. Thus, "looked at normatively," Schmitt writes, "the decision emanates from nothingness" (31).

Giorgio Agamben, in his reading of Schmitt's *Political Theology*, characterizes this condition as "a law in force without signification, in which the most innocent gesture or the smallest forgetfulness can have extreme consequences" (52). What makes the state of exception distinctive then, is that, in the same way that the absorbed reader becomes a creature of *Acteur* because *Acteur*, as sovereign, maintains for itself the act of narration and determines what will be narrated, so too does the sovereign who declares the state of exception determine the destiny of his subjects. We might say that the political system over which the sovereign presides is analogous to the relation between an author and his/her fiction. Just as, then, an author can never enter into his narrative so that the narrative must

always remain in this sense mysterious, so too the sovereign can never enter into the system that he inaugurates. He must remain, as he who *declares* the law, forever outside the law. To say that the sovereign is the subject of his own law would constitute a denial of sovereignty. The origin, in the Schmittian system, is something then, that *ultimately cannot be addressed* because everything that manifests within the system is already a metonymical replication of the origin, and cannot "think" anything other than the "thoughts" of the origin. In other words, there is no space between the origin and that which it makes manifest. In such a homogeneous narrative, the narrator must ultimately be construed as impersonal, because all notions of personality could only already be part of the definition of the person as defined by the system; there is no room in the "text" for the individual: "Every concrete juristic decision," Schmitt writes, "contains a moment of indifference from the perspective of content, because the juristic decision is not traceable in the last detail to its premises and because the circumstance that requires a decision remains an independently determining moment" (30). Yet we can also understand this state of exception to be the *beginning* of a story, the point where the authority grounds itself, where the position of narrator and narrated are staked out. We must think of the state of exception then, as the *original* category, that which, because it is at the beginning, stands both outside and inside. The act of authority involved in translating the outside into the inside may be understood as the beginning of the categorical system by which we apprehend the world, by which we speak. It is here, where the linguistic fiction that appropriates that which is beyond speech into an image and into language, that fiction touches, enters reality. It is in this way, then we, in understanding Genesis as fiction, likewise understand it as an *outside-directed* fiction, because its bid is to compel belief in an authority that it nonetheless creates.

Yet an outside-directed fiction, is, despite its intentions, no less a fiction and subject to its laws. As important as the Bible is to the history of western political structures and values, the Bible remains a *literary* fiction. The Elohim who declares the exception and inaugurates the book, does not jump out of the text and assume sovereignty over the actual political structures to which we are subject. If political organization is ultimately a fiction of the system that inaugurates it, we must still differentiate between a fiction that remains as *possibility*, from one that we experience as our political reality. Even if one were to argue that the Bible, and all fiction, is a *product* of the political system that determines "who we are," a literary fiction would nonetheless, not absorb us completely. Thus, the difference between a literary fiction and a political fiction, we could say, is that the literary fiction permits the bifurcation of the observing reader, and the absorbed fictional reader. In a literary fiction, the real reader is still at liberty to *watch* the absorption of the fictional reader, to *play* with the realm of possibility by holding possibility *as* possibility. It is only then, because of this bifurcation, because the reader cannot completely identify with his fictional counterpart, that there is meaning, and thus, we might say that a "fiction" in which there is no bifurcation, in which one is meant to be understood completely as a subject of the sovereign, is a fiction without meaning. As such, literary fiction can serve as an alternative to the hegemonic (here used in the strongest sense of the word) political system that becomes our experience of reality. It is perhaps for this reason that governments have engaged in the censorship of fiction from at least Plato (who censors *in* fiction!) until the present day. Yet the question then remains: if literary fiction can never become a totalizing reality, what is the difference between fiction and reality? Why engage in fiction at all?

In order to begin to answer this question, we must return to the grammatical error when we read BRA as "bara." If Genesis begins by subverting the hegemony of language,

uniting narration with the narrated, and thus bringing together showing and telling into one "voice," the result is a narrative voice who stands in for that which cannot be said. In the light of the ineluctable law that prohibits the narrator from entering into that which he narrates, the impossible becomes a figure in the text, but it is, as we have seen, an empty figure. This is the *Acteur*, the self-grounding fiction. Language, as the sovereign, as the untraversable, *becomes*, in the figure of the narrator, the authority who pronounces the law. The figure of Elohim then, becomes the positive expression of an essentially negative, that is, unthinkable condition. In turning the unimaginable into an image—even an image as essentially unrepresentable as either Elohim or *Acteur*—the notion of God comes into being. This, we might say, is the achievement of fiction; it has created its starting point. If humanity exists in the condition of a perpetual inability to arrive at its own origin, and thus, is essentially the subject of a sovereign to whom it can never know because it can only know what the sovereign *says;* and if it is this sovereign who is in *control* of the power of speech; then, the creation of the figure of a God as the image of this inability to enter back into the origin, allows for the *illusion of mastery*. Thus, each profession of subservience to the fictive Elohim that stands at the beginning of the world is furtively accompanied by the sense that one is *master over God*. God has become a construction of human *poesis*. Submission itself then, becomes a trope, one that comes to stand for the overcoming of a much more totalizing domination. On the other side of "reshit" is the nameless chaos that can never be seen or thought, let alone spoken, but which here, at the beginning, is rendered tame and possessible in language. Language then, is an appropriation of the experience of the fear of the nameless, made possible by the ability to signify. The absorptive pleasure that the fiction of the Bible elicits in the bifurcation of the self into observer and absorbed, and perhaps we might say this of all fiction, is one of *mastery*. The self, unable to account for itself in system

"self," *creates* a proxy self in fiction, and thus, appropriates his own subjugation by turning *it* into a figure that it can be master *of*.

Here we find, in the notion of the origin of fiction as one of self-mastery, a correspondence between fiction and political organization. The history of fiction then, could be understood to be essentially linked with the history of sovereignty. Political sovereignty then, would be a setting up of the fictional conditions *in reality* as a way of turning the negativity of the essential subjugation to language and to death in positive form.

Giambattista Vico, in *The New Science*, offers a theory of the origin of language itself that shares much with this view, and offers, to modernity, the possibility of subsuming the creation narrative of Genesis under the rubric of fiction. For Vico, language begins with fear, by turning this fear into a figure. The fear is the fear of thunder. But it is not an ordinary fear, because it is not a fear that can yet be categorized and assimilated into the experience of reality. Thunder and lightning made their appearance, Vico theorizes, after the waters of the flood had dried off, when the earth began to send up the "dry exhalations" necessary for the phenomenon. The sky, animated in a way that it had never been, was then apprehended by the ancient humans as a supernatural force, which became the first conception of God:

> And because…the nature of the human mind leads it to attribute its own nature to the effect, and because in that state their nature was that of men all robust bodily strength, who expressed their very violent passions by shouting and grumbling, they pictured the sky to themselves as a great animated body, which in that aspect they called Jove. (377)[7]

These early humans then, took the thunder and lightning as an attempt by the supernatural deity to communicate with them: "They believed that Jove commanded by signs, that such signs were real words, and that nature was the language of Jove" (379). The sign came from outside, and as humans began to "converse" with this "outside", to demonstrate their

submission to it, they appropriated the use of signs for themselves. Thus, language and the idea of a God to Vico are co-extensive. Language began from awe, from the sublime apprehension of that which could not be comprehended. It was a dialogue between the human and that which the human could not incorporate within him- or herself. Thus, the first word was already an "error," the attempt to come to terms with that which could not be "said," by the creation of speech itself: the first word, then, as an error, as a missing the mark, becomes the first metaphor. It was only through this appropriation of the unspeakable into language, then, that humanity learned how to become master over that to which it was subjugated. For Vico, it was this metaphoric beginning of language, that inaugurated the "poetic logic" which allowed for the creation of social and political institutions. Thus, we might say, in Vico's myth of the origin of language, humanity wrests language from the gods. But because humans could not exercise this newly-found mastery over the gods themselves, they transferred this mastery into the exercise of domination over those that could be dominated: weaker humans. The social hierarchy becomes understood as a linguistic structure brought on by the confrontation with the incomprehensibility of God.

Vico's theory points toward an essential *anxiety*. If the first word came about as an expression of the unknown, as a way to *speak* this unknown, this "error" remains furtively present in all subsequent languages. Language can only point *outward*; that is it cannot speak of its own origin. Yet the inaccessible origin, the thunder that could never be spoken remains ensconced inside of every word. We could thus take fiction as the attempt to move outward only in order to reach *back* to the origin. The Bible, we could say, points both forward toward the continuation of the "plot," and yet at the same time backwards toward the origin that it can never express. The continual moving forward of the plot would be an

attempt to reach in language, the "before" language, in a way that must always fail. Yet, we might say, it is this very failure that becomes the production of meaning.[8] The experience of existence then becomes understood as a perpetual reaching outward in order to find meaning, a meaning which is forever behind. Meaning then, would have at its core the essential anxiety that what it means is not what it *meant* to mean: the unspeakable thunder, the all-powerful Elohim.

We can thus look at the first lines of Genesis as a vehicle that goes backwards and forwards. The Bible moves forwards into a "reality" in which the legal system will be put in place, and which will become the representation—the proxy—of the unrepresentable sovereign. Under the auspices of this sovereign then, comes the appropriating of the law as the emblem of the authority of the nation, and the history of the subjugation of other peoples, history itself. The Israelites can assume the role of the sovereign over the Hittites, the Jebusites, the Hivvites, etc., only because they have acquired this sovereignty along the metaphoric chain that turns subjugation into power. That it is a tenuous sovereignty that can be withdrawn at the whim of their God, only goes to confirm the anxiety that accompanies this power.

Yet if this forward-moving structure is the representation of that which must remain forever elusive, we can never forget that it is this elusiveness that lies at the heart of the representation. The two interpretations of the first lines of Genesis then, need not be irreconcilable. Each serves to come to terms with an aspect of existence, neither of which can be absorbed by the other. One attempts to come to terms with the form that results in the translating of the unthinkable into reality, and the other attempts to come to terms with the unthinkable *qua* unthinkable.

IV. THE CONFRONTATION WITH AUTHORITY AS THE CONFRONTATION WITH EMPTINESS

The Kabbalistic term for the ineffable God is Ein-Sof—literally, "without end." Here, the attempt is to come to terms with an original emptiness that inhabits all of the material (including the material of language) of creation. The Ein-Sof is that which is inaccessible; that is, it cannot be thought, and can only be *deduced* through that which exists. Gershom Scholem writes:

> *Ein-Sof* is absolute perfection in which there are no distinctions and no differentiations, and according to some even no volition. It does not reveal itself in a way that makes knowledge of its nature possible, and it is not accessible even to the innermost thought…of the contemplative. Only through the finite nature of every existing thing, through the actual existence of creation itself, is it possible to deduce the existence of *Ein-Sof* as the first infinite cause. (89)

Central to Kabbalistic theory is the notion of emanation: it is only when the Ein-Sof put forward from out of itself that which could be made manifest in form could the world come into existence. Precisely because the Ein-Sof is absolute plenitude of being, because it contains no differentiations and no distinctions, it must be understood, from the perspective of form, which is of course, the only perspective available, as nothing. It is a nothingness then, that is precisely *not* nothing. It must be thought of as nothing only because the substance of the world of form is here understood to be "something." The notion of nothingness then, becomes the catachrestic signification for absolute plenitude. Yet it is a catachresis that does not just provide for the possibility of giving a label to that which is otherwise inexpressible, but rather, the experience of existence becomes determined *by* this catachresis: only because we label the absolute plenitude "nothing" do we then understand our world as "something." The reversing of plenitude and nothingness becomes the very

foundation of all perception of the world and all thought. If the Ein-Sof is absolute plenitude, then the world, far from being positive existence, becomes understood to be that which is already divided. Creation then, would not surge out of a primeval void, but would be a division of primeval plenitude into what we understand as form.

We could think of the Ein-Sof then, in its creating the world, as declaring an ultimate state of exception, one that, existential, rather than political, would encompass the entirety of the possibilities of consciousness, and thus, of experience. As such, it is determinative for the very possibility of a subject. Everything that exists could exist only as a division, as the "thought" of the Ein-Sof. Yet such a thought could then, never apprehend the thinker itself. Here, the bifurcation between fiction and reality ends because the thinker must come to terms with him- or herself as essentially and ineluctably divided. There is no possibility whatsoever of an observer standing outside of the Ein-Sof in order to see the absorbed counterpart participating in existence. If existence is fiction, Ein-Sof is the author. And just as we have already seen that there is an ineluctable law that separates the narrator from entering into that which he narrates, here too is the origin of this ineluctability. The Ein-Sof, as the absolute sovereign, which here means absolute plenitude, can never enter into its creation as itself.

How then, do we go from that which is absolutely complete in itself into the experience of divided existence? If there is no "nothing," how do we account for the essential division which characterizes form and substance? To answer this question would require going back behind the Ein-Sof. It is a decision, then, according to the 16th century Kabbalistic theologian Moses Cordovero, that is "a constant and impenetrable mystery" (Scholem 91). All one can do then, is to avoid being caught up in the illusion that existence is *something*. The Bible then, interpreted Kabbalistically, is to be understood as the

metaphorical narrative of this journey of plenitude into division. If language can only be understood as that which moves *forward*, then, one must attempt to understand the force of the narrative as the hidden expression of the ineffable that inhabits all form. One must, we might say, contemplate *Acteur* as the untraversable, in such a way as to contemplate the ineffability of sovereignty *in itself*, rather than as that positive being to whom one must answer to in a manner that only furthers the narrative. The catachresis then, must be understood *as* catachresis, while at the same time, understanding that the catachresis is the condition of being. The moving-forward of the narrative must be understood as the secret history of the infinite cause. Such a secret then, is not the kind of secret that someone knows but simply withholds, but is rather, nature itself: nature as an essential mystification. All Kabbalistic mythology is based on this premise.

The Kabbalah distinguishes between the perfection of the Ein-Sof, and its nine emanations, which it calls *Sefirot*. These emanations are not yet the world of form that we inhabit, but rather, the forces out of which form will be created. The Sefirot become the first distinctions made from out of the Ein-Sof. It is a distinction that is nonetheless relative, as Scholem notes: "In terms of their origin in the Ein-Sof, the Sefirot are not differentiated, but in respect of their activity within the finite realm of creation they are" (100). We might think of the Sefirot as metaphorical prostheses for that which cannot be said. However, in light of the reversal that Kabbalistic theology makes, in which nothingness is understood as plenitude, the metaphor itself becomes the experience of existence as form. To see *as* is to pronounce a division within that which cannot be seen, in order to see it. But the seeing-as then, *becomes* sight. Just as in Vico, where the unfathomable thunder became the impetus behind all speech, so too here, the Sefirot can only come into being by a pronouncing of the division of that which cannot be divided. Division then, becomes the language by which

existence comprehends itself. It is with the Sefirot then, rather then with the Ein-Sof that the drama of creation (which we might now understand less as creation then as division) takes place. The Sefirot, by reversing the structures of nothing and plenitude, make creation fathomable. Creation then occurs on this side of reshit, the consequence being that Elohim begins to have more in common with *us*, then with the Ein-Sof. Thus, the Zohar's interpretation of the beginning of Genesis takes it not as the narrative of Elohim creating the world, but rather, of Elohim himself being created:

> With the Beginning
> the Concealed One who is not known created the palace.
> This palace is called *Elohim*.
> The secret is
> "With Beginning, _____ created *Elohim*. (50)

Here we find a different approach to the grammar of "Bereshit bara Elohim." The letter "bet" of "Bereshit" is understood not to mean "in" but "with." "Reshit" becomes the medium by which Elohim is created. The creator of Elohim then, is not the Ein-Sof, but rather the first Sefirah. The first Sefirah uses as his "material" the second Sefirah (Beginning) in order to create the third Sefirah, Elohim. Scholem paraphrases the sentence in this way: "Through the medium (the prefix *be* of *Hokhmah* [the second Sefirah] (called *reshit*), the first Sefirah—the force hidden within the third person singular of the word *bara*—produced by an act of emanation the third *Sefirah* (*Binah*) which is also called *Elohim*" (110).

Elohim then, becomes less the creator, then the first division that we can comprehend, and as such, he is *our* beginning: the one who speaks. He is, however, shot through with the emptiness of the unspeakable.

If we now move past the first sentence of Genesis, we can begin to see some of the ramifications of this for the newly-created world.

"Vayomer Elohim yehi or vayehi or." The traditional paradigm for translating these lines would cause us to arrive at something like: "Elohim said let there be light and there was light." A literal translation, however, would yield, "Elohim said, 'there will be light' and there was light." Between the "will be" and the "there was," is a narrative present, which is elided as soon as the perfect tense, "There was" becomes the operative tense. The temptation here is to read this clause according to a cause and effect paradigm, thereby subsuming the elided *act* of transformation under the rubric of chronology. The new narrative present, then, takes its place after the "there was," solidly within the light that was brought into being through the divine *fiat*. Let us note, however, that the very notion of chronology only comes into being in the next two verses. The KJV translates it as follows: "[4] And God saw that the light [that it] was good; and God divided the light from the darkness. [5] And God called the light Day, and the darkness, he called Night. And the evening and the morning were the first day." Before Elohim separates the light from the darkness, then, there is no possibility of chronology, and thus, no possibility of a linear tense structure that indicates a before, during, and after.

Thus, what must be expressed in chronological terms, because language can exist only in time, nonetheless, we might say, requires a non-chronological reading. Thus, we might say that the description in language, and thus, in chronological terms, creates the first fiction: before Elohim separates day from night, thus, inaugurating the very possibility of time itself, comes the *fiction* of time, and with it, the possibility of expression. With this, the fictional *sphere* is delineated as the expressible, from out of inapprehendable timelessness. It

is, we might say, the inexpressibility of the "I am writing," here brought to the primal level of "I am creating."

This becomes the first of several acts of division, which constitute the realm of creation proper. We can understand the announcing of "there will be light" again, not so much as an act of creation from nothing, but as an act of *seeing-as*:

> Elohim said 'There will be light' / 'There is light' and there was light. Elohim saw the light, that it was good; and Elohim divided [vayivdal] the light from the darkness.

If originally there is only a lack of differentiation, the earth as "unformed and void," then the very expression of creation becomes the dividing of this emptiness into form. Elohim, then, becomes, as we have seen, the first "form," the first product of this division. Elohim's first act that we see is to speak of what is not there in such a way as to make it "there" in the act of speaking: "there will be" / "there is." That is: what is going to be, as soon as it is, will have always been. This follows the same structure of our interpretation of the grammatical "error" in Genesis 1:1 that corrects itself only when language falls into place. Only after Elohim speaks can he see, and only after he sees can *what* he sees serve as the material for further creation, which we can now understand as further division. Only once something has been called into being can it then proceed to be acted upon in the continuation of the movement of creation. It is the act of *speaking* that divides the void into form, in the process, reversing the poles of plenitude and nothingness and generating the first perspective. Speaking makes seeing possible, because speaking, as a disruption of the endless undifferentiation of the non-created world, pronounces the world as if it *were* differentiated, and thus, speaking understands the world "as if" there were something to see. In doing so, it assumes its place in the world. The "as if" becomes what one sees; only by seeing the "nothing" *as* something, can something come out of "nothing." All creation then,

remains shot through with emptiness. Creation becomes understood as a metaphor for the void, a dividing of the void into form by *seeing* it.

"Vayar Elohim et ha'or ki tov"—"Elohim saw the light, that it was good." "Good" here, becomes the pivot by which this shifting of poles, the reversal of plenitude and nothingness takes place. With the seeing the light *as* good, the world becomes understood as something; it falls into form, and form becomes understood as solidity, as completion, as the "right" thing. Yet this seeing, this good, remains nonetheless a creature built out of emptiness. Scholem discusses a theory of evil as formulated by the 17th century Shabbatean, Nathan of Gaza, who builds his notion out of the Kabbalistic myth of *zimzum*: the Ein-Sof contracting within itself in order to make room for its creation: "According to [Nathan], there were from the very beginning two lights in *Ein-Sof*:

> "the light which contained thought" and "the light which did not contain thought." The first had in it from the very beginning the thought of creating worlds, while in the latter there was no such thought, its whole essence striving toward remaining concealed and resting within itself without emerging from the mystery of *Ein-Sof*. The first light was entirely active and the second light entirely passive and immersed in the depths of itself. When the thought of creation arose in the first light, it contracted to make room for this creation, but the thought-less light which had no share in creation remained in its place. Since it had no other purpose but to rest in itself, it passively resisted the structure of emanation which the light containing thought had built in the vacuum created by its own contraction. This resistance turned the light without thought in to the ultimate source of evil in the work of creation. (126)

This notion would turn the "tov," the "good" that Elohim sees the world *as*, into exactly its opposite. From the position of "the light which did not contain thought," good is evil. If we think of this light as the representation of absolute perfection and plenitude, then from the "perspective" of such intangible completeness, all that exists is a disruption of this perfection. "Good" becomes that which is divided, and plenitude becomes nothing. Existence then, becomes the struggle against the force from out which it has divided, and

which nevertheless ineluctably inhabits it. Elohim then, though he stands as the sovereign of all that he creates, is nonetheless *not* the sovereign of himself: Elohim is the sovereign of all that exists in form, but if we construe him as a form himself, then he too, must answer to emptiness.

After Elohim speaks the light and sees the light as good, he then proceeds to continue with his creation. The next act that he engages in is one of dividing the light from the darkness. This is the first time that anything becomes explicitly divided in the creation narrative. We might say then, that just as we have seen how the human subjects of the Bible appropriate their subjection to the sovereignty of God in the exercising of this sovereignty over others, so too does Elohim appropriate the possibility of division from *his* having come into being through an act of being divided. Only because he is a creature of division, subject to the absolute sovereign who divided him, who *spoke* him, can he now exercise the power of dividing and speaking. Thus, Elohim divides the day from the night, and creates the possibility—here in its inchoate state—of time.

The next act of creation, on the second day, is also one of division. In this case however, it is not Elohim himself who will do the dividing, but rather, he will make (*vaya'as*) a divid*er*: this is the "rakiya," the firmament, which divides waters from the waters. What is interesting about the sentence is the peculiarly tautological way in which it is phrased: "And Elohim made the rakiya and divided the waters which were under the rakiya from the waters which were above the rakiya." The rakiya then, as soon as it comes into being, is as if it always was. Thus, we see again the impossibility, in this folding of creation back upon itself, of organizing the narrative into a chronological sequence.

The rakiya is called "shamayim," which is generally translated as "sky" or "heaven." It is important to note however, that the shamayim is *not* the thing that is most above.

Rather, the shamayim, as rakiya, has its essence in *division*: it divides what is above it from what is below it, and thus, the "waters that were above the rakiya" become unavailable. If the shamayim is the highest thing possible in the created world, it nonetheless conceals eternally the fact that there is something above *it*. Thus, when we read "Bereshit bara Elohim et hashamayim ve'et ha'aretz" we find that, as symmetrical as "shamayim" and "aretz" appear to be, it is a false symmetry. Shamayim, as the divider, remains on *this* side of creation. It would appear then, that Elohim does not create that which is above the shamayim; his greatest achievement in this regard then, is only to *call* (kara) the divider by the name "shamayim," thereby establishing the parameters in which everything in the narrative will from here on take place. The rakiya then, in becoming the shamayim, defines the sky as the limit. It serves as a double division: it divides the primeval scene of creation into two parts, and then, it *takes the place of*, from the perspective of earth, this second part, serving *as* the upper limit of existence, by making the "real" upper reaches absolutely inaccessible. Thus, not only does Elohim appropriate the division from out of his being divided, but he also replicates the inaccessibility of that which he is divided from, in the figure of these nameless waters, eternally barred from any concourse with earth *or* heaven. If there is a symmetry between shamayim and aretz then, it is an anxious symmetry, a false symmetry that must forever indicate the inaccessibility of achieving real symmetry. Notoriously, the "And he saw that it was good" is absent from the second day; perhaps this is because there is here nothing *to see*. If the shamayim is in its essence that which divides, then nothing positive on this day has been put forward. The closing off of that which is above the sky then, is not properly "material," but rather, sets the scene for what will emerge next.

Shamayim is a divider that becomes the limit of all that can be known. A peculiar characteristic of the word itself, is that it contains in its four letters many of the other

constituents of the newly-created, or not-yet created world. "Shamayim" is spelled with the letters *shin*, *mem*, *yod*, *mem*. It thus contains "mayim"—water—(*mem, yod, mem*), "yam"—sea (*yod, mem*), as well as the possibility of "yom"—day (*yod, [vav], mem*). Additionally, we can find the word "shem"—name (*shin, mem*), a word which we have not yet come across, though naming is, as we have seen, one of the ways in which creation takes place. In an interpretation that is no doubt excessive, we might consider reading "shamayim" as "shemim," (*shin, mem, yod, mem*), the masculine plural of "shem." It is a word that does not exist. Shem is a feminine noun, and takes the feminine plural "shemot." Yet if we think of shamayim as that which is unavailable, as the representation, the embodiment of unavailability, could we not then, attempt to see it as an impossible word—as the impossible name for "name"? The "shemim," then, would be the forever concealed, impossible names which could never be said, and thus, never be seen. Such an interpretation would point to the essential impossibility of ever *thinking* of what lies behind the divider, because it would be the collapse of language itself. At the same time, the notion of an impossible word points out the conventional structure to which we are beholden.

The next activity Elohim engages in is on the third day: the creation of earth—aretz, and from here on, everything that transpires will concern this realm. Just as the shamayim was first the rakiya, so too is the aretz originally called something else: "yabashah" (dry land). But the creation of aretz is more complicated than the creation of shamayim. Whereas shamayim was created in two steps, first, the calling into being of the rakiya, and then the renaming of the rakiya as shamayim, the creation of Aretz requires not only the putting into place of the rakiya on the previous day, but also the act of "gathering" the waters. It is only because of this gathering then, that the yabashah "appears"—"teraeh," from the root ראה (RAH), to see—and thus allows for something to be seen (which can subsequently be seen

as good). After this gathering of the waters occurs and the yabashah appears, Elohim calls the yabashah "aretz." The word "yabashah," then, as the "rakiya" before it becomes only a "floating pre-thing," an intermediary forms of existence that can only be activated once it become what it properly "is." Likewise, the mayim—the waters—are called, at least in the part of the world below the heavens, "yamim," seas, in a gesture that requires only the transposition of two letters.

The sky then, is created by dividing, and the earth by gathering. The problem we come across here, is that if Elohim creates by dividing, as we have seen him do up to this point, how then, does he then find the positive substance which he uses in order to gather the waters together and create the earth? The answer may lie in the last part of verse 9: Elohim says, "'Veteraeh hayabashah'"—"let the dry land appear'", "vayehi khen"—"and it was so. This is the first time that we have come across the notion of *appearance*. We might understand this gathering to be the *image* of dividing: once the division had proceeded forward in such a way as to create a sort of primeval space, space as it is experienced can only be achieved through seeing-*as*. It is the division itself that allows this to happen, the breach in the fundamental unity that characterizes "existence" up until the point of creation. Likewise, when previously Elohim saw the light that had come into being as good, this light also was the image of the *division* that brought about the possibility of creation: it was sight itself. We can think of this seeing of sight as the primordial distance required for the world to come into being. It is with this "material of distance" then, this perpetuation of division that brings not only sight, but now, something to see: an image. Thus, the Earth, in coming into being through the vehicle of appearance, becomes revealed as *appearance at its essence*. The Earth then, becomes a product of division, with the first words that breached the primeval unity, firmly ensconced inside itself. The earth becomes the distance between sight

and that which is seen. And yet, everything that is seen, will, in the act of seeing, indicate the *lack*, the difference between appearance and the perfection of an absolutely unified, and thus un-seeable presence. Appearance, in this gesture, becomes the substance of existence, the very foundation of the earth.

Thus, when on the sixth day, man is created in the image of God (*Tzelem*, from *Tzel* = shadow), we find the ultimate expression of the inherent emptiness in all form. Man is a shadow of God, but God is also a shadow, an image of an originary presence, a creature eternally divided. Human and God, then, both are constituted by this essential division. Existence then, becomes understood as the "fiction" of the unnamable, of the Ein-Sof. It is a fiction then that *is* the experience of reality. The narrator of Genesis then, comes to us in the only way that it can be comprehended: as the fictional embodiment of that which cannot be portrayed. The narrator is *Acteur*, the being who is the catachrestic representation of the unavailable sovereign who declares the exception.

VI. INSIDE THE FRAME

Let us turn now to the so-called second narrative of creation beginning with Genesis 2:4b. If we can think of Genesis 1:1 to 2:4a as that which sets up the "fictional" structure by which the world will come into being, then everything that transpires from Genesis 2:4b onward takes place *within* that frame and becomes reality. We could understand the stories of the creation of Adam and Eve and the expulsion from Eden to mirror the story of the emanation of the Elohim from out of the unspeakable, and of the closing off of all that is on the other side of the rakiya with the coming into being of the shamayim.

"As soon as I see," writes Merleau-Ponty, "it is necessary that the vision (as is so well indicated by the double meaning of the word) be doubled with a complementary vision or with another vision: myself seen from without, such as another would see me, installed in the midst of the visible, occupied in considering it from a certain spot" (*Phenomenology* 134). There is, in the act of perception a doubling, which is the yielding, the eliciting of that being which is evoked. If Elohim sees something as good, it is only because he shares this structure of "goodness" with the thing that he sees. The thing that one sees then, can never be *beyond* the order of sight itself, and this holds true as much for Elohim as it does for Adam. The thing needs to be able to, in some sense, look *back* at the beholder, in a recognition that they are composed of the same material.

If, as we have said, the narrative of the Bible moves forward in order to reveal that which is *behind*, that we might say that inside the Bible, Elohim operates the same way. That is, the act of creation is only an attempt to see what lies behind the ineluctable "reshit." The creation of Adam then, would be a bid for such an understanding by Elohim himself, in a perpetuation of the narrative. Thus, Adam is created in the image/shadow of Elohim. Yet such an image, then, will reveal to Elohim only *himself*. It will not yield vision or knowledge of that which lies beyond Elohim as a created being. Adam only returns back to Elohim, Elohim's own image; the narrative can move only forward, and what exists must exist as a creature of Elohim over whom Elohim is sovereign, but who reveals nothing of the history of Elohim's subjection.

In the second chapter of Genesis, we find Elohim, who has become Yahweh Elohim, working with the earth, rather than with the cosmic division that Elohim uses to create in the first chapter of Genesis. Thus, he is already absorbed in the fictional world; that which is the *image* of division. The Earth itself which "appeared," in Chapter 1, here

becomes understood as form and substance; and Yahweh Elohim, creator, uses the earth as the material for his creation of Adam. The emptiness of the unutterable, of the *lack* that characterizes creation in Chapter 1 is here ensconced inside of the material of the earth itself. Thus, when we see Adam coming into being again, he is *formed* (*yatzar*) out of earth by Yahweh Elohim, rather then created (*bara*) as the image of Elohim. The verb *bara* is used just once, in chapter two: in the passive voice, referring to an already solidified background of creation, upon which the *forming* of the things of the world will now take place:

> These [are] the generations of the heavens and of the earth when they were created, in the day that the LORD God made the earth and the heavens (2:4b)

In the reiteration of the creation of the Earth in verse 4b, we no longer have the problem of the inability to give a name to the inchoate. Thus, where in Chapter 1 we have the difficult *Be-reshith*, in chapter two we have the unproblematic *B'yom*, "*on the day that* the Lord God made heaven and earth."

Just as the earth has solidified, so too has Adam; image and appearance have become physical substance. If Yahweh Elohim has become absorbed in the fiction of his own creation, we might say that Yahweh Elohim is the fiction of Elohim: that Elohim, having generated a fiction for himself, now bifurcates himself into observer and absorbed. It is the absorbed Yahweh Elohim then, who believes in his ability to create out of *substance*, who *believes* in the fiction of this creation. The observer, Elohim then, stands outside, and finds meaning, in his creation.[9]

Yet, as we have seen, the fictional chain is not so easily concluded. *Inside this* fiction, there is still the further desire for absorption on the part of the newly created fictional deity. Exactly because the fiction one creates does not yield the possibility of entering into this fiction, the fictional chain continues. Yahweh Elohim thus, desires to create for himself an

other, who can speak back to him "words" that are not his own, who desires to have the possibility of becoming absorbed enough in his creation that he can *believe* it is not his creation. It is only in this way that he can elude the perspective of his own reality in order to have the possibility of generating a perspective *beyond* him. This is the essence of fiction itself: the creating of an impossible perspective, so that reader, through the bifurcation of the self into the absorbed and the observer, can experience the world from beyond himself. We might say that the very notion of free will is born out of this anxiety.

If the argument here is that the Bible is a human fiction, intent on recovering a perspective that is ineluctably lost through the very condition of being, the desire to create a fiction that one can believe in, whether it be a narrative or a political system, would be endless. The origin of one's subservience to *life* can never be revealed *in* life and thus, the fictional chain is perpetuated.

It is in the spirit of this fictional chain that we might view the creation of Eve and the events that transpire that result in the expulsion from Eden. Eve could be understood to be a sort of ruse on the part of Yahweh Elohim: an other to Adam, who would *also* be an other to Yahweh Elohim, the fiction of a being who transcends the sphere of Yahweh Elohim. In order for this to happen, Eve would have to act *independently* from her creator. Eve's disobedience then could be understood as a carefully calculated ruse on the part of Yahweh Elohim to deceive himself into believing that his creation existed outside the frame of his *poesis*. Eve then, embodies *desire*: the desire to transcend the prison of oneself; the desire to be sovereign over that who is one's sovereign. As such, it is an endless desire, a desire that can never be consummated, and thus, one that will perpetually produce more narrative.

Yet how to effect this disobedience? In order for it to "work," Eve must be able to have knowledge that transcends the sovereign sphere of Yahweh Elohim; she must be able to be seen as an emissary of the *author* of Yahweh Elohim, that is, of Elohim proper. This is the role of the snake. The snake is that being who has transcendental knowledge, who knows what it must be impossible to know, and this is only so, because the snake is a figure, the fictional inscription of Elohim *in* the story of Elohim. The snake then, takes up the role of *Acteur*, the "degree-zero of enunciated markedness." There is no place made in the text for anything like the transcendental knowledge that the snake has, and his very being, as a talking animal is a rarity in the Bible: only the story of Balaam and his ass returns to this theme. Thus, we could say, the snake is the bid on the part of Elohim, to inscribe *himself* into the text in order to absorb himself in the fiction that he creates. By speaking directly with Eve, by compelling Eve to disobey the fictional Elohim (who is Yahweh Elohim), Eve is then made to be the consort of the unavailable author. Yet this, of course, only produces more fiction, only continues the narrative. If Yahweh is a jealous God, it is perhaps this relationship between the author and *Eve* that he is jealous *of*, but it is exactly this jealousy that keeps him forever desiring, forever desiring to believe that the fiction that one creates for oneself will become reality.

But it is this *desire*, for better or for worse, that *is* reality.

It is fiction, then, pierced through with the very emptiness of the uncreated world, that perpetuates desire *as* desire, that loosens belief enough for it to remain impregnated with desire. Desire, then, becomes cast into the realm of fiction, resisting its congealing into a product and *inaugurating* the regressive structure which is the very foundation for fiction itself, a foundation which is, of course, the very lack of foundation. The inability to unite

these two spheres is what is suffered by the *person*, as the experience of having to interpret, of not having recourse to the sight that enables the very faculty of interpretation.

CHAPTER 2:
FICTIONAL HERMENEUTICS: HERMAN MELVILLE'S *PIERRE OR THE AMBIGUITIES*

I. THE REAL INDIVIDUAL AND THE FICTIONAL PERSON

> *Henceforth, cast-out Pierre hath no paternity, and no past; and since the Future is one blank to all; therefore, twice-disinherited Pierre stands untrammeledly his ever-present self!—free to do his own self-will and present fancy to whatever end!*
>
> -Herman Melville, *Pierre or the Ambiguities*

We have looked at the creation story in the book of Genesis as the inauguration of an absolute authority which governs the social order, and which because inaccessible, is beyond reproach. Understood in this way, it is the story of the coming-into-being of the social, of the individual in the context of others. But in reconciling ourselves to the fact that the construction of this authority must occur in language, that is *rhetorically*, we have also understood the Bible to be the inauguration of an order which speaks not to the individual's role in society, but to the *experience* of the individual in confronting his or her own subjectivity. As such, this second interpretation—which can only be effected in retrospect, once we have recourse to the very genre that it inaugurates—views the book of Genesis not only as a fiction, but as the narrative of the origin of fiction. Both interpretations hinge upon a confrontation with an ineluctable inaccessibility of *authority*, yet each addresses this ineluctability in disparate manners in accord with their different perspectives.

The inaccessibility of the authority in the Bible, then, presents two invitations to engage in *poesis*: one which addresses the legal aspects of individual governance in a social

realm; and one which addresses the lived experience of the individual, thus, of the person who finds him or herself *here* as a locus in the social realm.

The first invitation: to engage in the production (an originary *re*production) of a system of social cohesion, of a legal structure which stands in the place of the absent authority. This legal structure, while nonetheless a *fictional* structure, leaves no room for it to be experienced as fiction; rather, it casts the subject as a participant *in* its fiction. From this perspective, the subject can no more understand itself as fictional than could a character inside of a novel. In the narrative of the withdrawal of God from his creation, the language user takes responsibility for this absence, and engages in the *poesis* that produces social governance. Thus, Genesis becomes the narrative of the origin of *ontological fiction*. Understood in this way, the subject experiences this fiction as the real, as the structure by which he or she arrives at his or her identity. The subject, then, locates him- or herself in the institution that the text inaugurates. In a certain sense, then, the subject finds him- or herself before the text which determines his or her place in the world. In the absence of the author of this text, he or she, in order to arrive at understanding, is required to *interpret*.

The second invitation: to interrogate the absence itself, rather than to replace it with a "real" authority. From this perspective, the absence of authority becomes not an issue of social responsibility, but of intimate experience: the *person* is the one who must experience this absence, who must confront it each time that he or she speaks. Language, from this perspective, does not serve to replace the absent authority, but rather to reveal the absence. Thus, where in the first invitation the very absence of an ultimate authority generates the notion of a governing institution founded in the *logos*, in rationality (where rationality is an answer to the non-rational *absence*), the second, attempting to *see*, to *intuit* the world as a whole, rather than to negotiate one's place in it through interpretation, is not concerned with

the practice of governance, but with the very emptiness of any structure. It is only in the second perspective then, that we can arrive at the notion of a symbol—and a symbol as that must always point to the failure to articulate what it is a symbol of. It is this disparity between the symbol and the symbolized, the emptiness that appears whenever the symbol is asked to speak, that is the very impetus toward fiction. What makes fiction fiction, is that, like the symbol, it can never articulate its coming-into-being. Fiction, then, we might say, is the symbolic interrogation of absence. Each time the attempt is made to understand, the speaking subject, the self who engages in fiction, stands in the way.

The first invitation concerns the *individual* as a location within the social order; the second invitation concerns the *person* who strives to come to terms with him or herself as the repository of intimate experience. In the era of fiction, then, the Bible offers itself both in its *legal* and its *existential* aspects.

Each of these ways of understanding creates a discrete text, which in their conflation, comprise the text that we call "The Bible" in modernity. If the first presents the narrative *of* the subject; it is the second in which we find the narrative of subjection. The inaccessibility of the authority in the first interpretation is the impetus for a text that tells one *how to be* in the absence of this authority. The second interpretation, however, presents the Bible as a text that asks the question of *how we got here*, and thus *who we are*. This text, however, can only manifest as a failed story, as the inability to see before the subject. Where the first interpretation offers a human law that replaces the silence of the authority by reconstructing it in language, the second offers only a resounding silence: a refusal of language.

The two perspectives are not, ultimately, compatible because each refuses the other. The first perspective, in taking its inaugural point from language, is concerned solely with the individual as a location within the social. It refuses silence, refuses the inarticulate

experience of the person, in demanding allegiance to the *word*. The second, denying an originary role to language, refuses the human law, refuses human authority as a replacement of an inaccessible *originary* law: it is *silence* which is the originary organizing force of this interpretation, a silence that can only be made known by putting language out of play. In the second perspective, then, language is always shot through with emptiness: that is, language is understood always as fictional, as arising out of the absence of authority. To it, the law cannot be authoritative precisely because it is a fiction that does not *know* it is a fiction. In this second perspective, then, one refuses to *participate*, out of the desire to know who one is; in the first interpretation, one is who one is only through acting. The first perspective accepts the world as it is and builds the structure of human institutions upon it. The second perspective is never content with this kind of *poesis*, because, necessarily articulate, it can never approach the *silence* that brought it into being, and is at the heart of every word that is pronounced.

Ultimately, neither of these two perspectives can be taken singly. *Despite* their incompatibility, we must understand the narrative of our laws and institutions as fictions that we must nonetheless inhabit. Silence, as the origin of fiction, is nonetheless an untenable option; it is a return only to the meaningless "I am writing." If fiction arises to *express* this silence, its expression is nonetheless ineluctable: the silence *must* be given voice. The second perspective, then, generates the symbols, and thus, the meaning, which the first perspective will take as its structure. The subject, we have argued, can only exist *as* subject because it contains an inchoate, always inarticulate understanding of its own limits, of its inability to arrive at its own origin. Thus, while the first perspective produces reality out of *faith*, the second perspective loosens this faith in the real. Taking these two perspectives of Genesis as a whole, we are presented with the subject as the contest between seeing and being, a

contest, which, forever oscillating between its two contestants, determines the consciousness of the subject. Always on the cusp of knowing what it cannot know, the subject falls back on itself as an individual, as a location in the social order. Desiring to understand itself amidst this order, it translates its desire into desire for *things*, because the subject can only understand itself in terms of that which is *produced*. Everything that is produced, however, points to an ineffable act of production, a silence, as the body, and as the physicality of the world rises to hold us up. The work of fiction, as we have argued, is to then, transform these things into *symbols*.

The subject then, is always attempting to interpret itself, because it can never arrive at an intuition, at a picture of itself *as* itself. Generic fiction becomes the forum for this intuition, the place where the subject can put its productions out of play in order to create a picture of itself. Yet the subject is left out of the picture. As we have seen, the subject can only represent itself as a product of the system that produced it. The basis of generic fiction, then, is precisely in the apprehension that its picture is incomplete. But in its very suspension of belief, in the loosening of our absorption in the world that is all we *can* experience, and as such, is the source of all our knowledge, the subject can find an apprehension of an origin *beyond* the world. If Genesis presents a contest between the legal and the existential, we might say that this contest is originally inscribed in the subject.

In this chapter, then, we move to the epoch in which the novel as a genre is firmly established. As an "inside-directed" fiction, Herman Melville's *Pierre or the Ambiguities* (1852) is concerned with the limits of the genre, with the inability to reconcile the two understandings of an absent authority. We will read this text, then, as a narrative of the suffering of this conflation, as the clashing of these two interpretations. As such, *Pierre*

speaks to the inability to transcend fiction *in* fiction, and thus, of an ineluctable exclusion of the existential from the *practice* of living.

II. THE BUNGLED ONE: PIERRE AS NARRATOR, THE NARRATOR OF PIERRE

The entry for Herman Melville in the 1961 *Petit Larousse* reads in its entirety as follows:

> MELVILLE (Herman), romancier américain, né à New York (1819-1891). Ancien marin, il est l'auteur de *Moby Dick ou la Baleine blanche*, où l'aventure se mêle aux symboles.

According to this précis, Melville's distinguishing mark as an author is his use of the symbol. This, we might say, is apt, though perhaps not in the way that the authors of the *Petit Larousse* intended it. *Pierre*, like *Moby Dick*, will be concerned with the entanglement of narrative and symbol. But *Pierre* will attempt to do battle against the symbol, to neutralize it, to conquer the emptiness that asserts itself each time one tries to determine what it is that the symbol symbolizes.

The *Larousse*'s emphasis on the symbol is valid: Moby *Dick* is concerned with the relation between experience and meaning, and it is the symbol that mediates between them. That the book takes place on a ship offers, hearkening back to a long literary tradition, the possibility of representing human social organization in a microcosm. The *Pequod*'s circumambulation of the world in the hunt for the largest creature known in it, sets up the possibility for a symbolic narrative of the contest between humanity and nature. The two registers in which the narrative operates are clearly delineated for the reader: Ishmael tells the story of his engagement in a whaling voyage, a voyage which, real to him, nonetheless serves

as the vehicle for the cosmic parable which rises up out of the narrative. The minimal, easily schematized plot of the novel is tightly organized under the auspices of the first-person narrator, which generates a clear system of narrative cohesion. Aided by the narrator, the reader can, without difficulty, parse the narrative events from what they *mean*.

Moby Dick's narrator, Ishmael, undoubtedly takes his name from the Biblical character, the exiled, and oldest son of Abraham and the family slave, Hagar. Abraham's wife, Sarah, not wishing for her son Isaac to share his inheritance with the son of her slave, demands that both son and mother be sent away from the family. Abraham complies, and Hagar and Ishmael are cast out, left to fend for themselves in the wilderness. While God promises Hagar that her son will be the progenitor of a nation, the story that the book of Genesis will be concerned with from this point on will nonetheless not be *this* story, but rather, the story of the nation that Abraham's younger, "beloved" son Isaac will father. Ishmael and his progeny will surface, when they do, only as background, generally as enemies or obstacles to the story of the Israelites, which is the narrative's main concern.

We might say that when the narrator of Moby Dick begins his story by giving himself the name of Ishmael, he takes up the story that the Bible does not tell, the story that serves only as background for the Biblical narrative's main theme. Although *Moby Dick*'s Ishmael finds himself in a sort of exile, and takes to sea because of it, he nonetheless takes center stage in his own narration. His first act is to announce his presence, and to name himself. In at least one sense, then, his story is the story of himself. He does not *write* from the position of exile, but rather, as the organizer of his own narrative.

The protagonist of *Pierre*, Pierre Glendinning, driven from his paradisiacal ancestral home after his refusal to marry his authorized *fiancée*, will likewise be identified as the Biblical exile:

> Pierre felt that deep in him lurked a divine unidentifiableness, that owned no earthly kith or kin. Yet was this feeling entirely lonesome, and orphan-like. Fain, then, for one moment, would he have recalled the thousand sweet illusions of Life; tho' purchased at the price of Life's Truth; so that once more he might not feel himself driven out an infant Ishmael into the desert, with no maternal Hagar to accompany and comfort him. (89)

Pierre, like *Moby Dick*'s Ishmael, is a writer. An exile from his family, and from his inheritance, he sets out to "gospelize the world anew" (273), to re-establish himself by telling the story of his exile. Yet Pierre, more true to the structure of the Bible than Ishmael as the narrator of *Moby Dick*, will fail miserably as the narrator of his own story. Pierre refuses to take his place in the hierarchy of the society in which it was "his choice fate to have been born" (5). The garrulous, affable Ishmael of *Moby Dick*, sure of his place in the world, does not object to being in the lowest position in the ship-society, is content with receiving only the "three hundredth lay" (87), a pittance in compensation for his service onboard the whaling ship. Pierre, however, like Bartleby after him, refuses to participate in the established social order altogether, refuses to accept the role that he was born into as Pierre Glendinning, the grandson of a Revolutionary War hero, and the heir of the Saddle Meadows estate. If the narrative that Ishmael tells in *Moby Dick symbolizes* the plight of humanity (and Ishmael repeatedly interprets his own narrative in this regard)[1], Pierre, as a writer, does not attempt to recuperate himself from his position of outcast, but rather, will seek to tell the story of himself as outcast *from the position of outcast*. Pierre, as we shall see, refuses to be symbolized *within* the hierarchy of the society, but he nonetheless equally refuses to be symbolized as an outcast, because to do so would be to employ the very symbolism of the hierarchy that he exiles himself from. Rather, he refuses symbolization altogether. As a result, unlike *Moby Dick*, where the story that Ishmael narrates is the book that we read, *Pierre* cannot be the narrative that Pierre writes: *his* book can never be written,

because to write requires relinquishing the *truth* of his innermost experience of being, in favor of a "fictional" structure, fictional, precisely because he cannot participate in the structure that he creates. Pierre wants to write a book, while nonetheless refusing the *authority*, and thus, the symbolization, of being an author. He is cast out of the world into which he was born, and he is the sovereign of the world that he creates; he is denied entry into both. *Yet he is only the writer who he is because of this;* writing for Pierre, becomes a metaphor for the self's inarticulate experience of itself. No matter what Pierre expresses in his writing, it will never express the expresser. The attempt to *narrate* this failure, than, can only result in failure. There is no vocabulary for what Pierre wants to say:

> Two books are being writ, of which the world shall see only one, and that the bungled one. The larger book, and the infinitely better, is for Pierre's own private shelf. That it is, whose unfathomable cravings drink his blood; the other only demands his ink. But circumstances have so decreed, that the one can not be composed on the paper, but only as the other is writ down in his soul. And the one of the soul is elephantinely sluggish, and will not budge at a breath. (304).

It is the narrator, then, who must tell the story that Pierre cannot; it is the narrator who must thematize Pierre's "burning desire to deliver what he thought to be new, or at least miserably neglected Truth to the world" (283). Thus, where Pierre finds failure, emptiness, the narrator finds *material*. Unlike *Moby Dick* then, it is in the disparity between the narrator's narration and Pierre's inability or refusal to narrate that the portrait of Pierre emerges, a portrait that will, likewise, be shot through with emptiness. Thus, if the narrator of *Moby Dick* writes from the perspective of the Ishmael as a sedimented *symbol*, Pierre, who as far as the act of narration is concerned is less writer, then written, suffers the *experience* of Ishmael as a *character*. A character, however, insofar as he or she is a participant in his or her own story, cannot write. *Moby Dick*'s Ishmael is a product of a story that has already found its place in the repository of a received symbology. *Pierre*'s Ishmael is an Ishmael in process,

one whose story has not been told. *Pierre* operates in the disparity between a narrator who has this repository of symbols available to him and a character who cannot represent himself through recourse to a conventional symbology. If the narrator of *Moby Dick* is concerned with identifying himself ("Call me Ishmael"), Pierre on the other hand attempts to destroy all possibility of being identified within the social order of which he is a part, and thus, does not gain a name, but loses one.

To name oneself is to symbolize oneself within a structure. It is an act that requires that one take one's stand, at the very least within the system from out of which the name derives. Pierre's failure to write, then, is directly linked to his refusal of a name: the refusal can also be understood, and is taken as such in the novel, as an aggressive action against the social order. Ironically, as the heir to a family long associated with the American Revolution, it is Pierre who is portrayed as the democrat, a democrat that is, as the narrator tells us, "perhaps a little too Radical altogether to your fancy" (13). As such, this radical democracy is understood in *Pierre* to be put into the service of the *self* and its experience of being a self, and must oppose itself then to any system of social governance that forces the subject into a hierarchy that transforms one's inarticulate intimate experience into an expression of one's social identity. Democracy, the narrator writes, "with no chartered aristocracy and no law of entail…operates as a subtile acid among us; forever producing new things by corroding the old" (8). Taken radically, then, democracy would always involve a failure in representation. Pierre, then, described as a "radical democrat," attempts to write *without authority*. He is, we might say, the secret desire of all democracy, a desire, which, if democracy is to become a human institution, must nonetheless go ungratified.

Yet Pierre's radicality, his refusal to symbolize himself will guarantee his failure both in writing and in his intimate relationships, and the narrative of Pierre will confront the

incompatibility of these two spheres. The story of Pierre will be the story of the refusal of symbolization. The challenge of *Pierre* then, will be to *narrate* this refusal *as* refusal of narration. How to be true to the "story" of a character who refuses to be part of the structure of any story, whose attempt to "gospelize the world anew" entails the destruction of narrative? How to achieve a "democratic" narration? If *Pierre* the book is to be successful, it must, in some sense, fail: the challenge of the narration is to mirror Pierre's refusal, and thus, to refuse its own narrative cohesion, if the portrait of Pierre indeed is to emerge out of it.

Indeed, the narrative voice of *Pierre* is unsettling. While critics have often pointed to *Pierre* as the first time that Melville makes use of third person narration[2], in fact, *Pierre* employs a narrator who speaks in the first person, albeit one who, unlike Ishmael, is not a participant in the narrative. Problematically, however, the narrator neither explains his relationship to his subject, nor his investment in telling his story, nor does he even introduce himself (an important narrative moment in many of Melville's novels and stories). Despite all this, the narrator constantly makes his presence known, peppering his story of Pierre with reflections on the act and progress of his own narrative. But because the relationship between the narrator and Pierre is never resolved, the narrator cannot fulfill the reader's need for an orienting, organizing force. He, thus, fails as guide; he cannot provide the reader the tools necessary to negotiate his or her way through the text. In order to understand who Pierre, as the subject of his story is, we would like to be able to ask the question of who the narrator is and why he writes. It is a question, however, that the novel refuses to answer. Let us note, however, that this question only arises because the text employs a personal narrator to begin with. Had the story been told only under the auspices of *narration*, through the non-narrated voice of fiction, the reader would not be required to suffer through this

mediative force; rather, the reader would have been able to enter into the generic relation with the non-mediative authoritative voice of fiction. As such, the novel is uniquely situated to depict its hero's inability to narrate himself. By depriving the reader of an anchor, the narrative produces an authority that it cannot uphold. This is, of course, the case for fiction *in general*. Melville's refusal to restrict himself to the convention of impersonal narration, however, or of a narrator whose role in and perspective on the story is defined, inhibits and problematizes readerly absorption by calling attention to the very thing that fiction, as fiction attempts to conceal: its inability to ground itself. As a result, the work required of the reader is unclear, and the narrative becomes destabilized: we do not know whose story is being told: that of Pierre himself, or that of the narrator: as such, we must reckon with Pierre's inability to tell his own story.

Part of the lack of coherence in the narrative can be attributed to the shocking inconsistence of the narrative voice. As such, not only is the relation between the narrator and Pierre problematized, it also becomes impossible to place *Pierre* in the context of a particular genre of fiction. As it begins, the narrative evokes a gothic love story, replete with a perhaps too-familiar symbology (the fair and the dark woman; the moral countryside and the vice-ridden city); at other times, the narrative voice transforms into an opinionated critic, plunging into a bitter satire of the Nineteenth century American publishing industry. The narrator then turns to a psychological analysis of Pierre's *pathos* as a writer. Still later, the narrative becomes a parody of a gothic novel, forcing the reader to recontextualize the initial tone into that of irony.[3] It is because of the inability to read *Pierre* in accordance with the conventions of a particular genre that the narrator's frequent personal interpolations do nothing to bind the text into coherence, but rather, call attention away from the story. We do not know where the narrator speaks from. The narrator's continued declarations that,

like Pierre, he takes the liberty to write whatever he wants, though without disclosing to the reader *what* it is he is seeking for, renders the text jarringly opaque.

While Melville seems to evoke a long tradition in the English novel from Sterne to Thackeray in which the "author" places himself in dialogue with his characters, such a technique nonetheless requires that a generic, and thus artificial convention already be in place. In Thackeray's *Vanity Fair* for example, published four years before *Pierre*, the narrator apprises the reader as to his technique: "[A]s we bring our characters forward, I will ask leave, as a man and a brother, not only to introduce them, but occasionally to step down from the platform and talk about them" (59). Yet this author/narrator's benevolent descent into the realm of his characters only serves to emphasize the his *absolute* authority over his realm of fiction, and thus, reveals, rather than obscures, the disparate modalities that "author" and character inhabit. Thackeray appeals directly to the "nothing" of fiction, and uses the mise-en-abyme to increase readerly absorption in his narrator-author's *poesis*. Unlike *Vanity Fair*, however, Pierre's narrator is not an "author." He does not flaunt his authoritative poetic power over the narrative, and cannot, thus, end his story with a clear delineation between the depicter and the depicted as does Thackeray, who ends his novel by proclaiming "Let us shut up the box and the puppets for our play is played out[.]"[4] *Pierre*'s narrator, more like *Moby Dick*'s Ishmael, or the elderly lawyer of "Bartleby," is in some way a *witness* to the narrative events in such a way that precludes the "author"-authored relation. That is, in *Pierre* there is no recourse to a generic fictional regress that serves to uphold narrative authority, precisely because Pierre and the narrator, like Bartleby and his narrator, stand in contiguity to each other, *share* an ontological modality. Yet narrator and character are nonetheless at odds in their approach, and in their desires for narrative. Pierre wants to only to be bound to truth "in bonds I can not break;" his greatest hope is that "no world

syren come to sing to me this day, and wheedle from me my undauntedness" (107). Pierre's narrator, on the other hands, finds it "pleasant to chat" and is only "too thankful when the gapes of the audience dismiss us with the few ducats we earn" (259). Contrary to Pierre, he asks only to be *unbound*, to not be put in the service of truth:

> Save me from being bound to Truth, liege lord, as I am now. How shall I steal yet further into Pierre, and show how this heavenly fire was helped to be contained in him, by mere contingent things, and things that he knows not. But I shall follow the endless, winding way,—the flowing river in the cave of man, careless whither I be led, reckless where I land. (107)

If to acquire deep knowledge of his subject requires a departure from truth, the narrator's professed desire to "steal yet further into Pierre" seem calculated to emphasize the act of narrating rather than the story that is narrated, and to problematize the notion of truth to begin with. *Truth, understood in this way, is at odds with its representation.* This, a very different paradigm from that of the author-character who spins a tale out of the void before his or her audience, and who *becomes* the authoritative narrative ground in the very compulsion to readerly absorption.

To make a narrative cohere is to generate a structure, a structure that becomes the basis of the world of the narrative. Once this structure comes into being, each element of the narrative must serve as a symbol of this structure. If the elements of a narrative refuse to be subordinated to an overarching narrative structure, the narrative fails as narrative. In calling attention to the fictional world *in* fiction without a generic convention in place, the narrator breaches the arch-convention of fiction such that a fictional narrative puts itself forward as a *symbol* of an otherwise unorganizable lived experience. Yet a narrative without a structure would be indistinguishable from lived experience, if it is indeed narrative that turns

"the endless winding way" of lived experience into a shape and form with a beginning, middle and end.

Pierre has, since its publication, been characterized as a failed novel. The New York Herald of September 18, 1852 writes that it is "without beginning or end—a labyrinth without a clue—an Irish bog without so much as a Jack O' Lantern to guide the wanderer's footsteps—the dream of a distempered stomach, disordered by a hasty supper on half-cooked pork chops." Likewise, the *American Whig Review*, in November 1852, called it "A bad book! Affected in dialect, unnatural in conception, repulsive in plot, and inartistic in construction."[5] Writing nearly one hundred years later, Newton Arvin calls *Pierre* "One of the most painfully ill-conditioned books ever to be produced by a first rate mind" (219). Arvin, however, points to the "failure" of *Pierre* as a kind of performance, speculating that Melville wrote with "a bitter distaste of and disbelief in his own book in the very process of writing it, and a half-confessed intention to invoke ridicule and even contempt on the literary act itself" (231).

"Bartleby," another story of refusal, which Melville wrote immediately following *Pierre*, returns to the structure of *Moby Dick*. Like Ishmael, the narrator of "Bartleby" identifies himself in the first sentence: "I am a rather elderly man"; and like Ishmael, the narrator is a participant in the story. While our impetus is to read *Bartleby* as the story of the Bartleby, in a certain sense, the narrator appropriates Bartleby's story as *his* story: everything that we read about Bartleby reflects the concerns of the narrator, and ultimately the story must be understood less as about the unknowable Bartleby, and more about the transformative effect that Bartleby has on the narrator. Melville's return to this structure reflects not so much the failure of the structure of the narration of *Pierre* perhaps. Instead,

we might think that a book that attempts to represent the rejection of narrative has reached the *limits of fiction*.

Pierre does not disclose to the reader, in the manner of "Bartleby," a clear relation between the narrator and his object. Nonetheless, we can, taking "Bartleby" as our cue, provisionally put forward the notion that the hero of *Pierre* is not Pierre Glendinning, but the narrator himself. We would have to understand the story, then, as a story about the *act of writing*, the act of writing the narrative of Pierre. Such a narrative, then, would have to confront the impossibility of narration. If the plight of Pierre is such that he seeks for a truth that lies beyond the scope of his perceptive and cognitive capabilities, then we might say that the narrator takes Pierre as his object not to tell his story, but to reduplicate, to perform this condition. It is this, perhaps, that is so troubling for the reader, who above all, seeks to grasp the narrative in its discreteness, to effect hierarchy of narrative levels, in order to produce, in the act of reading, a stable world, abstracted from out of the chaos of life. And yet, if the object of the narrative is to give *voice* to the rejection of narrative, its failure would be a kind of success. In this way, we can understand *Pierre*, even more so than *Moby Dick*, as a narrative "où l'aventure se mêle aux symboles," as precisely a narrative that is *entangled* in symbols, and which seeks to disentangle itself. To disentangle its symbols, however, is to take narrative apart, to return narrative to its origins in unorganized intimate experience, to bring the unrepresentable *act* of being, if not to representation, than at least to apprehension. It is this inarticulate apprehension that the narrator takes as his theme, then, but one that turns Pierre's inarticulateness, his failure as a writer into a vocabulary. The challenge, then, for the *author* of *Pierre or the Ambiguities* is to construct a vocabulary from out of his *narrator* which reveals the emptiness of narration. In permitting the apprehension of this emptiness, then, comes the refusal to allow the social, the institutional, to speak for it.

Pierre, as a radical democrat, then, must confront this emptiness, rather than speak it. Pierre, however, does not know that it cannot be spoken. The book that we read, then, becomes the product of the suffering of the inability to write a book that represents oneself as the writer. Put in existential terms, we might say that *Pierre* is the story of the inability to express oneself as a being, while be*ing*. *Pierre*, thus, addresses the plight of the *person* as an author: each time that we represent ourselves, each time that we produce something, we are immediately cut off from its production.

We encounter each other as individuals; that is, we encounter each other as locations within an overarching system. One might say that it is the overarching system that *produces* the phenomenon of the encounter. Insofar as our own identity is determined by that system, we likewise encounter *ourselves* as individuals only in terms of this system, because the language that is produced out of this encounter is the only language we have to recognize ourselves. That is, we are *symbols* of this system: we think its thoughts, we see only within the range that it permits, we speak in its language. To articulate what we are symbols *of*, would require a representation of the system as a whole; but the language of such representation could have recourse only to the system already in place. The inarticulate *person* can only find him or herself through the languaged *individual*. In lived experience, then, we cannot see ourselves as symbols. We take the symbols, then, literally.

Generic fiction, as we have discussed, attempts to offer a view *of* this system through a ruse: it turns the things that we find in it, and that exist only by virtue of it, into representations of our own subjectivity *to* this system. Fiction, then, permits us to represent ourselves as subjects. It can only do this, however, because that which is represented is *put out of play*. The system produces the language, that we then use to represent the system itself.

Pierre we might say, shows up the ruse of generic fiction, sacrificing, in the process, meaning. Pierre suffers the incompatibility of the real and the symbol; he suffers the incompatibility of the social, and the intimate. In Melville's fiction, then, the suffering of the inability to write one's book is the *empirical* suffering of the existential. In refusing the reader the ability to make the narrative cohesive, the book requires the same of the reader: it performs what Pierre undergoes.

III. TWO PORTRAITS

As the novel beings, the reader is introduced to Pierre Glendinning, the latest in a long line of Pierres, of which he is destined to be the last. Pierre's link to the land on which he was born goes far back. He is the great-grandson of a hero of the Indian Wars, and the name of his ancestral home, the estate of Saddle Meadows, honors the martyrdom of his ancestor, who died there, "unhorsed on his saddle in the grass, with his dying voice, still cheering his men in the fray" (6). His father, deceased since Pierre was twelve, was a wealthy upstanding gentleman in his community and his church.

Healthy, strong and good looking, and engaged to Lucy Tartan, a beautiful, blonde young woman who appears in every way his female counterpart, Pierre seems to live a happy and full life with his still-beautiful widowed mother. The only possible source of disquiet for Pierre is that "A sister had been omitted from the text" (7) of his life. Pierre, we are told, "mourned that so delicious a feeling as fraternal love had been denied him" (7).

The novelistic tension begins when Pierre encounters this missing sister. On a charity visit to a sewing circle with his mother, Pierre briefly catches the eye of a darkly

beautiful young woman, and is unable to excise her from his mind. Though Pierre tells Lucy that the face of this young woman haunts him, he instinctively keeps this secret from his mother, thus inaugurating a new chapter in their previously easy and congenial relationship, in which they endearingly refer to each other as "brother" and "sister." Shortly after, Pierre receives, a letter delivered in mysterious Gothic fashion, by a hooded messenger; the letter is from the dark-haired woman; in it, she identifies herself as Isabel, and claims to be Pierre's sister. She implores him to help her in her dire poverty, and asks him to meet her.

The letter is particularly troubling to Pierre because in his father's deathbed delirium, he had called out, in what seemed to Pierre at the time to be only incomprehensible ravings, "My daughter! My daughter!" (71). Convinced that Isabel is his illegitimate sister, Pierre takes it upon himself to effect her rescue; in doing so, he puts himself at odds with his mother for the first time. Pierre knows that his mother will never recognize Isabel as a part of the family; to do so would destroy the upstanding image of herself and her household, symbolized by the portrait of Pierre's father, painted at the height of his worldly success, which hangs prominently in the drawing room of his house. If there is any doubt as to Mrs. Glendinning's disposition, her cursory refusal to show any compassion for Delly Ulver, a poor, young woman, who has given birth to a child out of wedlock in the village only serves to underscore both to Pierre and to the reader, that Mrs. Glendinning would never recognize an illegitimate child of her own husband.

There is, however, a second portrait of Mr. Glendinning, this one, however, an *unauthorized* portrait. This portrait hangs in a locked closet of Pierre's room, out of the view of Mrs. Glendinning who abhors it, claiming that it does not truly represent her husband, as opposed to the portrait in the drawing room which conveys the features of Mr. Glendinning in "their truest, and finest, and noblest combined expression" (72). The portrait in Pierre's

closet shows Mr. Glendinning as a young man in a carefree attitude. As Pierre's Aunt Dorothy explains to him, it was painted on the sly by an amateur painter friend, around the time that Mr. Glendinning, before his marriage, was associating with a then impoverished and abandoned young (and beautiful) French woman, who had apparently fled from her country during the French Revolution. The implications are that the woman was of noble birth, that Mr. Glendinning was in love with her, and that she is Isabel's mother. When Mr. Glendinning begins to suspect that his friend is painting his portrait (allegations to which his friend refuses to respond), Pierre's father implores him that if he is painting is portrait, to destroy it, or at least to never show it to anyone (78).

Much of the story plays out in the tension between these two portraits: between the father as the faultless upholder of the social order, and that of its transgressor. It is only the portrait in the locked closet that speaks of Isabel; the other denies her existence, a denial which is upheld by the "haughty" Mrs. Glendinning with all the force of the paternal law, which, in the absence of the father, she incarnates. The challenge for Pierre, then, will require that he transgress the law of his father, by entering into the world of the forbidden portrait. He will have to transgress the sanctioned family, now represented by his mother, in order to restore that which had been originally missing from the text. He will have to uphold the *unauthorized* intimate experience of the father, in the face of the interdiction of the *social* father. But as such, putting himself in the service of the *person*, Pierre sacrifices his individuality, his place in the society. It is the *desire* of the father that he upholds, here, rather than the recognizable *product* that anchors the social order and Pierre's place in it.

Isabel turns out to bear, at least for Pierre, a strong resemblance to the forbidden "chair portrait" (so-called because "he is lightly, and, as it were, airily and but grazingly seated in, or rather fittingly tenanting an old-fashioned chair of Malacca" (72)). Like the

chair portrait, she is beguiling and mysterious; she punctuates her account of her life with periods in which she enters into a kind of trance, plays a guitar, and commands Pierre, "Do not speak to me!" Pierre, determined to restitute Isabel, can only do so through sacrificing his own portion in the life that had been allotted to him. His mother in control of the will, he knows that unless he marries Lucy Tartan, he will not inherit Saddle Meadows. Yet, determined to keep his secret from his mother, he cannot both marry her and welcome Isabel into his life. His resolution, then, is to leave the world he was born into, and to enter into a new life: renouncing Lucy, he resolves to fictionally "marry" Isabel and to go into exile in the (unnamed) city. Accompanied by Delly Ulver, who had so incensed Pierre's mother by giving birth to a child out of wedlock, and who Pierre and Isabel take on as a kind of servant, they take up lodgings in a ramshackle, abandoned church populated by artists and philosophers.

It is here that Pierre takes up the vocation of writer (though as we are to find out, Pierre has already enjoyed some success as a youthful writer of poetry), beginning his "mature work": a voluminous novel which, though it excoriates the oppressive social structure that resulted in his exile, he nonetheless hopes will serve to support the penurious couple. Sitting all day in a room without heat, huddling over his writing table in a blanket, reaching for what he needs with a cane so that he does not need to displace the blanket, Pierre falls into a state of decrepitude and near blindness.

When Lucy Tartan, still full of faith in Pierre, comes to the city to live with the couple, the transgression is complete. It is here, where Isabel, jealous of Lucy, seeks to present their fictitious marriage as authentic, and thus, it is here, where the fictive marriage, and the fiction of convention itself meet each other. Scorned and menaced by both the Glendinning and Tartan families, oppressed by poverty and by jealousy, life for the triad

quickly becomes unlivable. Ultimately, worn out by the constant menacing by an angry and once much-loved cousin, Pierre, using a neighbor's gun, kills him.

In the final scene, evoking a farcical *Hamlet*, Isabel apparently poisons Pierre and Lucy, and finally, herself. All three are found dead in a dark prison.

Pierre dies, we might say, because he has no *place*. He hopes to be nourished by the very social structure that he rejects. His fictitious marriage, we might say, is a bid to bring *consciousness* to the unthinking, ever-perpetuating, ever-silent world of his birth, of Saddle Meadows, of the endless production of Pierres. Lucy Tartan, likewise, upholds a love that is not founded on convention, and likewise suffers the same placelessness that comes about in the exile of inner experience from convention. Isabel becomes, then, the thing that is missing from the text, the thing originally silent ("Do not speak to me!") that is made to speak, and which ultimately, in poisoning the life of convention by revealing it as such, guarantees their perpetual placelessness. Where convention requires law, and an authority to maintain it, Isabel offers only unfathomable mystery, irresolvable ambiguity. It is this, we might say, that makes of her the true "radical democrat," an avatar of a democracy that is founded not in authority, but rather in its absence. Yet it is, perhaps, in the light of the very radicality of democracy itself that she embodies, that the rarefied world of Saddle Meadows and the long line of Pierres becomes understood to be only a continuation of an oppressive monarchy of convention.

IV. DO NOT SPEAK TO ME!

"So perfect to Pierre had long seemed the illuminated scroll of his life thus far, that only one hiatus was discoverable by him in that sweetly-writ manuscript. A sister had been omitted from the text" (7).

The narrator's metaphor here, casts Pierre into a narrative and into a structure. Whether Isabel is indeed Pierre's sister or not is one of the novel's "ambiguities." She does, however, regardless of who she is, inhabit, for Pierre, the *place* of the missing sister. And as she arises, in her very illegitimacy, she brings to Pierre's awareness the fictive quality, the "text" of the life that he is living in Saddle Meadows. With Isabel, Pierre will have to choose between the portrait in the drawing room of the father-as-societal-product and the "chair-portrait," the portrait of the desiring father, which the product-father refused to authorize. The outcome, more than merely a moral dilemma, will turn Pierre from a participant into a writer. He will have to alienate himself from the structure that he inhabits in order to see it, and to attempt to write it. His vocation as writer is inaugurated, we might say, in the fictional marriage to Isabel.

Yet a text requires instability. There must be an observer, who does not participate in the text who can see it *as* a text. This instability is already present in the very beginning of the novel. We can see the incompatibility between the unconscious perpetuation of form, and its reflective apprehension which has no *place* in the first three sentence of the book:

> There are some strange summer mornings in the country, when he who is but a sojourner from the city shall early walk forth into the fields, and be wonder-smitten with the trance-like atmosphere of the green and golden world. Not a flower stirs; the trees forget to wave; the grass itself seems to have ceased to grow, and all Nature, as if suddenly become conscious of her own profound mystery, and feeling no refuge from it but silence, sinks into this wonderful and indescribable repose.
>
> Such was the morning in June, when, issuing from the embowered and high-gabled home of his fathers, Pierre, dewily refreshed and spiritualized by sleep, gayly entered the long, wide, elm-protected street of

> the village, and half-consciously bent his steps toward a cottage, which peeped into view near the end of the vista. (3)

This seemingly innocuous scene distinguishes between presence, and awareness and puts them at odds with each other. Though we do not know who the narrator is, nor even, for the first-time reader, that there is one, we are nonetheless provided with a perspective by which we are to understand what is being described: that of a stranger, a "sojourner from the city." It is not with the normalized eyes of Nature that the reader is invited into the story. The perspective that the reader will be compelled to embody is that of a foreigner. The summer morning is rendered "strange" by this foreign presence, which we might here think of as simply the act of being perceived, being read. Pierre in this passage is still a native, a participant in the "trance-like" silence of nature; he is not yet a stranger. Pierre is part of the description: he does what he is supposed to do, and his being "dewily"—which we might read as "duly"—refreshed is possible because there is as yet no separation between that which is Pierre and that which is Nature. Yet Pierre is nonetheless being observed: it is the urban presence, the garrulous reader, who first brings a sense of active looking to the scene. Yet this awareness has no place in that which is described.

Already, then, the text manifests a division between the observer and the absorbed, which here incarnate in nature and the city, respectively. Nature is the "home of the fathers," the place where nothing happens, where activity is only understood as perpetuation, repetition, silence. The city, as it is portrayed here, pertains to the desire for perception, the will to observe, but also, the will to destroy: it is only in the perceiver's "unnatural" *disruption* of this "natural," self-perpetuating scene that it can be seen at all, and *that* is what makes it strange.

Pierre will become an exiled writer in the city, banished from the endless bliss of Saddle Meadows. The intertwining of these two systems which inaugurates *Pierre* announces

a rupture, a making of space in which the story can be *told*, and a corresponding constriction of the space of the story. In the instant when the silence of Nature resounds "as if suddenly becomes conscious of her own mystery," a crisis occurs, one that passes by nearly unnoticed in the "as if." It is indeed a crisis which is brought on by the presence of the observer. In this crisis, something is almost brought to consciousness; something is almost remembered: Nature has become transformed into its opposite: into the artifice of a text.

Yet there is as yet no one in the narrative to speak the vocabulary that it proffers. Precisely because of this, this unlocatable act of apprehension becomes both an act of *poesis*, albeit one that has no author, and an act of destruction, a dismembering of eternity in the very coming-into-being of narrative, of form. This apprehension of "profound mystery" occurs through a clash of modalities: the infiltration of system "Nature" by system "City," and thus, the infiltration of the absorbed by the observer. If the observer had been excised from the text, there would be only silence. But with the appearance of the observer (and with it, the appearance of a third party, who the text is *for*), the eternal, non-thinking, non-theoretical silence has been violated. Nature, which seems to say, like Isabel, "Do not speak to me!" will be made to speak. In doing so, the comfortable opposition between nature and artifice is destroyed. It is the force of this violation that will constitute the story of *Pierre*. It will violate the silence of nature, by turning it into *form*. In doing so, it will destroy the seeming infinitude of perpetual repetition by another infinitude: that of the creative "as if." The silence of nature both troubles and fascinates the narrator, because it is a silence that neither narrator nor Pierre qua narrator will ever be able to attain, because even to call attention to it is to speak:

> All profound things, and emotions of things are preceded and attended by Silence. What a silence is that which the pale bride precedes the responsive I will, to the priest's solemn question, wilt thou have this man for thy

> husband? In silence, too, the wedded hands are clasped. Yea, in silence the child Christ was born into the world. Silence is the general consecration of the universe. Silence is the invisible laying on of the Divine Pontiff's hand upon the world. Silence is at once the most harmless and the most awful thing in all nature. It speaks of the Reserved Forces of Fate. Silence is the only Voice of our God. (204)

Pierre, then, will become the voice of this silence, forever barred from participating in it. It is this that will turn his book into a failure, because what he writes will never be silent enough. Pierre's failure, then, will be in the attempt to represent silence while maintaining himself as a speaking being; he wants to write, that is, enter into an *intuitive* understanding of the world, while maintaining himself in his body; he is impelled forward then, by two forces that exclude each other, and which the narrator describes satirically as "the burning desire to deliver what he thought to be new, or at least miserably neglected Truth to the world; and the prospective menace of being absolutely penniless, unless by the sale of his book, he could realize money" (283). Pierre's desire, then, is to incarnate himself as a physical being into the world, while embodying the truth of the *whole*. He wishes to both see, while be, to intuit, while remaining an interpreting being.

V. THE FATHER AND THE AMERICAN SCENE

The dichotomy that the narrative offers between the country and the city offers not only an existential symbology but a political one. Pierre, as the scion of an aristocratic family, is in line to perpetuate a dying order in revolutionary America. Saddle Meadows is portrayed as a kind of fiefdom, Mrs. Glendinning as a kind of duchess, who can, at her desire, in consultation with a complacent and adoring reverend, banish an offending Delly Ulver from the village for her sexual iniquity (103). When Pierre and his mother stop in at

the rural sewing circle where Pierre first encounters Isabel, the narrative portrays it as a royal visit.

It is in the countryside, then, where "democracy" perpetuates itself as a European monarchical institution; there, "the grass is annually changed; but the limbs of the oak, for a long term of years defy that annual decree. And if in America the vast mass of families be as the blades of grass, yet some few there are that stand as the oak, which, instead of decaying, annually puts forth new branches" (9). The country, the narrator opines, is "not only the most poetical and philosophical, but it is the most aristocratic part of this earth" (13).

The city, however, is the factory of American democracy, the place where "families rise and burst like bubbles in a vat" (9), the place where "the sacred Past hath no fixed statues erected to it, but all things irreverently seethe and boil in the vulgar cauldron of an everlasting and uncrystalizing present" (8).

It is the city, then, that reveals the essential artifice of what heretofore has been thought of as "nature." Democracy, for the narrator, is more natural than aristocracy or monarchy, precisely because it maintains itself only through subjection to death, rather than through the perpetuation of an artificial human institution. It is in democracy, then, that engages, rather than resists the cosmic order, because

> political institutions, which in other lands seem above all things intensely artificial, with America seem to possess the divine virtue of a natural law; for the most mighty of nature's laws is this, that out of death she brings life. (9)

In *Pierre*, then, the democratic city is understood as, inversely, more natural than the aristocratic country. It is thus, the replacing of the law of entail with the law of equal division that, in thwarting the continuity of the aristocratic family, effects a new paradigm of wealth. In an economic system founded on production, rather than on property, the city, as the emblem of this system, requires the looking forward to a future in which will be found

that which does not yet exist *now*, as opposed to a looking *back* on the legacy of the past. While the monarchical country perpetuates an artificial continuity, where "the empty air of a name is more endurable than a man" (10), it is the city in which the name is absorbed back into the physicality of the person to whom it is attached, and where the name dies with the person. The emphasis, then, moves from the family as a unit, to the individual, in an economy whose engine runs on the amassing of capital and the production of wealth. Thus, de Tocqueville writes:

> Lorsque la loi des successions établit le partage égal, elle détruit la liaison intime qui existait entre l'esprit de famille et la conservation de la terre; la terre cesse de représenter la famille, car, ne pouvant manquer d'être partagée au bout d'une ou deux générations, il est évident qu'elle doit sans cesse s'amoindrir et finir par disparaître entièrement. Les fils d'un grand propriétaire foncier, s'ils sont en petit nombre, ou si la fortune leur est favorable, peuvent bien conserver l'espérance de n'être pas moins riche que leur auteur, mais non de posséder les mêmes biens que lui : leur richesse se composera nécessairement d'autres éléments que la sienne. (110)[6]

Pierre, as the only son of his father, is condemned to perpetuate an artificial structure, an empty name which, in the face of the diminishing "esprit de famille" must become *unnamed*, must succumb to a democracy that, in solidarity with death, gives the lie to aristocratic notions of nature. Democracy, founded not in perpetuation, but in death and corrosion, points away from, in the symbology of *Pierre*, the portrait of the father as the representative of an ever-perpetuating "democratic" aristocracy, and toward the illegitimate portrait of the father which reveals not so much a father, but a young man in love. It is this intimate experience which cannot be quantified then, that is as fleeting as the families that come and go in the bubbling vat of American democracy. It is the fleetingness of *death* which governs both, a death which is here is understood as the real Nature, as opposed to the dissembling "text" of an increasingly landless aristocracy which masquerades as nature.

It is Pierre who will suffer the disparity symbolized by the two portraits of his father. Pierre who will devote his life to attempting to restitute the *intimate* and illegitimate experience of his father, can only do so by destroying his father as an individual location within the social order, in not becoming the next Pierre Glendinning. Yet this is incumbent upon Pierre because the two portraits for Pierre, are, in his heart, only one. There, the narrator tells us, Pierre had erected a shrine to his father:

> In this shrine, in this niche of this pillar, stood the perfect marble form of his departed father; without blemish, unclouded, snow-white and serene; Pierre's fond personification of human goodness and virtue. Before this shrine, Pierre poured out the fullness of all young life's most reverential thoughts and beliefs. Not to God had Pierre ever gone in all his heart, unless by ascending the steps of that shrine, and making it the vestibule of his abstractest religion. (68)

Confronted, however, with the two incompatible aspects of his father, he is forced both to uphold the law of the father and to transgress it. Only in engaging in this impossible contradiction, would Pierre be able to restitute his father as father. Pierre, then, is forced both to destroy and to uphold. He will, then, destroy the *law* of his father by not perpetuating it, by not marrying the sanctioned Lucy Tartan. And yet, in order to restitute his father, he can only do so by taking this destruction upon himself, by making *himself* illegitimate.

> And what though not through the sin of Pierre, but through his father's sin, that father's fair fame now lay at the mercy of his son, and could only be kept inviolate by the son's free sacrifice of all earthly felicitation. (177)

The heretical notion of the son sacrificing himself in order to expiate the sins of his *father* is an appeal to a system of originary identity. Pierre must, then, reject the structure that his father represents, in order to restitute the united father whose image he bears in his "shrine." His doubly illegitimate marriage, a marriage that is at once fictitious and

incestuous, turns him into an exile from all convention. And it is in this that Pierre achieves his radical democracy, a democracy, then, that in destroying the paternal law, nonetheless has its hopes in being restituted under the rubric of an all-encompassing *nature*, one that would then, have a place for both fathers. It is an existential democracy founded not in *law*—and thus, in his father as the law-who excludes the father as person—but in the very fleetingness of life and the certainty of death. Such an understanding requires, in turn, a recontextualization of the relation between the natural and the artificial, where even the "poetical and the philosophical" are subject to an overarching natural, and democratic *death*. Denying himself even these, Pierre ultimately denies himself a vocabulary for his own book.

In *Moby Dick*, Melville creates out of the *Pequod*, a world in a microcosm, a world reduced to symbols of the existential condition of humanity, one that subsists in exile from the human world as a whole. In it, there is only the person, and every symbol in *Moby Dick*, in bypassing the social, is put into the service of the existential. But when Melville famously writes to Nathaniel Hawthorne in 1851 that "Leviathan is not the biggest fish;—I have heard of Krakens" (*Letters* 143), perhaps we can understand this even bigger fish to be the ushering back of the social sphere after the rarefied *existential* world of the *Pequod* had met with a spectacular shipwreck. On the *Pequod*, symbols are free to be symbols. In *Pierre*, however, where the hero flees not to sea but to the bubbling vat of the city, the realms of the social, of the familial, and of intimate experience are rendered inextricable: certainly to write *this* would be to catch a bigger fish than the white whale. And, we might say, that both Pierre, and the novel as a whole, suffer, in its evocation, the impossibility of its articulation. What the narrator, however, unlike Pierre, understands, is that this inextricability of the political and the existential is so all encompassing that it cannot be delineated as an object: rather, it can only be articulated *negatively*, and thus, destructively. Failure, then, must be made into form.

And yet, if this is the case, it is because democracy itself, taken essentially, must also only operate within the realm of failure. Democracy, understood in its radical sense in *Pierre*, then, is the *imposition* of the existential on the institutional. The story of Pierre, as the true democrat arising out of a dying aristocracy, then, might be understood less as a parable of the emergence of American democracy, but rather, as the disparity between American democracy and an existential democracy that could incorporate an illegitimate sister, and with her, a *desiring* father. It is only under the rubric of this democracy governed by death itself that Pierre, the son of his father, can be restituted. Democracy must be understood in *Pierre* in its radical sense, as an anti-institution, an institution which destroys institutionality. *Pierre*'s democracy is a democracy of *process*, forever attempting and forever failing to incorporate the intimate experience of the *person* into social governance. Pierre's vision of true democracy is a democracy of the *experience* of being an individual. Such a democracy would be at odds with the construction of a national democratic *identity*, one that would forever *postpone* the *experience* of the individual, in the favor of a *performance* geared, not toward the participant, but to an ineffable *witness of* the national identity, the "one" for whom the national identity *can be seen*. It is the notion of identity, then, for Pierre, that creates an *individual*, governed by a law that forever excludes the unquantifiable truth of experience. It is this structure that has irreparably sundered his father into two mutually exclusive constituents, an action that replicates itself in Pierre himself, whose internal image of his father, has likewise been sundered.

Ultimately, then, the construction of a national identity, even a *literary* national identity, requires, in order to achieve positive expression, the construction of a *fictional* witness of the narrative, a narratee, which the very subject *of* this "democracy" must take on as his or her identity. What is fictional about the witness is precisely the fact that it is the

narrator who, promiscuously, must also assume the role of narratee, who must *believe*, that is become absorbed in his or her role as witness to the narrative, in such a way as to "forget" that the story is being narrated. It is only in this way that the story can be told, and it is in this way that the individual, the societal subject, replaces the person, the one for whom, nonetheless, it was *meant*, and now who must become effaced in the very act of creating a structure for it. It is precisely this, we might say, that Pierre refuses.

A democracy intent on creating a national identity as its product would always be geared *toward* its narratee, and would render forever ambiguous the role of narrator and narratee by blurring the boundaries between them. It is the fictional narratee then, who experiences the national identity, and who experiences it *instead* of his or her experience of being a person. The narrator's role is to engage in artifice, in a fiction, that the narratee would nonetheless be compelled to "believe" in: this is precisely, then, the relationship between the observer and the absorbed that we have elucidated as the very possibility of fiction. The difference, however, is that the performance must expressly *not* be understood as a fiction, but rather, as the real itself. It must operate under the edict of "*verum esse ipsum factum,*" the true is precisely that which is made. In such a position, then, there is no room for a truth outside of the performance, and it is the performer who steps into the role of the sovereign, *canceling* the existential confrontation with silence and absence. In other words, the construction of a national identity is, in our terminology, an "outside directed" narrative: it attempts to bind the split between the realm of human poesis, and the real. Yet such a position must necessarily entail an anxiety: it must bear the knowledge, however repressed, that the sovereign performer of the national identity is a fiction, and that it is the *witness* of the national identity who perpetuates this "secret" in concealing the emptiness of the structure, the very absence of authority! The story of Pierre, then, is the story of the one

who bears the sins of this false narrative, and of this false father, the one who *suffers* this anxiety. It is, then, the story of the failure to unify the sundered father, who, in his two portraits comes to represent the narrator and the narratee, respectively.

It is precisely the apprehension of the untenability of each of these portraits as separate, and the crisis in authority that it produces, that inaugurates the story of *Pierre*, when the "the trance-like atmosphere of the green and golden world…as if suddenly become[s] conscious of her own profound mystery." The unnamed observer here, becomes the witness of *this*. And it is this forever-alienated observer, the one that *cannot be located in the structure*, that Pierre enters into when he declares, at the expense of his identity, that "Henceforth I will know nothing but Truth; glad truth or sad truth" (66), when he adjures that "From all idols I tear all veils; henceforth I will see the hidden things; and live right out in my own hidden life! —Now I feel that nothing but Truth can move me so" (66). It is a truth that is at odds with the outside-directed fiction of identity, a truth that conceals the structure, the text of one's conventional existence. It is a truth, then, perpetually outside human *poesis*. Pierre's fall, however, will come when he is forced to come to terms with the possibility that truth itself can only be expressed as identity; that Truth is at odds with representation.

VI. YOUNG AMERICA

In Book 17 of *Pierre*, "Young America in Literature," the tone changes abruptly. Having previously recounted both Pierre's decision to renege on his marriage with Lucy in favor of the fictional marriage to Isabel, and his subsequent departure for the city with Isabel and Delly, the narrator now begins a new theme: Pierre as successful writer. During the

period of his charmed young adulthood, we now learn, Pierre had enjoyed a career as a darling of the literary establishment.

The narrator proceeds to engage in a Dickensian satire of a literary publishing industry concerned primarily with profit, one that takes as its stock in trade, not the work of the author, but the image of the author himself. Pierre, though his complete works, "if put together could not possibly fill more than a very small duodecimo" (248) is solicited to publish his life's work by various caricatured profiteers, including a pair of tailors-become-publishers, who assure Pierre that his "fame is in its finest nap" and who offer to transmit "a sample of the cloth—we mean a sample page, with a pattern of the leather" (247).

Though the narrator begins this chapter by declaring that, adhering to no established manner of narration, he will "write precisely as I please" (244), the reader, habituated to literature through genre, is undoubtedly ill-prepared for the drastic change in narrative demeanor.[7] And yet, we might say, that it is in the very disruption of genre, and the accompanying disruption in readerly absorption, that brings the very fictionality of fiction into question, and generates the *force* of a work that refuses, like Pierre, to remain within the conventional bonds of narrative identity.

Melville's directs his satire, as is clear from the title of the chapter, toward The Young Americans, a group of writers and critics that cohered around the journal *The United States Magazine and Democratic Review*, and whose self-professed goal was the production of a national democratic culture, not the least of which involved a national literature. It was here that Melville's friend and sometime-supporter Evert Duyckink served as literary editor. John O'Sullivan, the editor of the journal, argued in its first issue, in 1837 that "The vital principle of an American national literature must be democracy" (14). While O'Sullivan argued that the object of democracy is "to emancipate the mind of the mass of men from the degrading

and disheartening fetters of social distinction and advantages" (11), he railed against the "anti-democratic character of our literature" as "a main cause of evil which we complain" (15).

Duyckink, writing in 1847, spells out the project clearly:

> Something will be gained for the cause of an indigenous literature by a clear development of the idea and the necessity of nationality. First and foremost, nationality involves the idea of home writers. Secondly, the choice of a due proportion of home themes, affording opportunity for descriptions of our scenery, for the illustration of passing events, and the preservation of what tradition has rescued from the past, and for the exhibition of the manners of the people, and the circumstances which give form and pressure to the time and the spirit of the country; and all these penetrated and vivified by an intense and enlightened patriotism. The literature of a country should, as from a faithful mirror, reflect the physical and moral and intellectual aspects of the nation" (qtd. Wald 119)

"Absurd as it may seem," the narrator writes, "Men are only made to comprehend things which were comprehended before" (209). The loftiness of the ideals of the Young Americans is painted, in *Pierre*, as at odds with the very impetus toward literature, which, if it is to be "mature," must be in the service of the new, of the not-yet comprehended. Pierre's youthful writings, it is made clear, is an object of desire for these "Young Americans," not because of its content, but rather, as currency. As the heir of Saddle Meadows, he is in an ideal position to further the goals of a "national democratic literature" and his juvenile writings, which only rehearse the "things that were comprehended before," just as the very figure of Pierre Glendinning himself. Pierre is praised by the "high and mighty Campbell clan of editors" because, as one of them says, "'This writer is unquestionably a highly respectable youth"'(245). Pierre, the writer of "The Tropical Summer: A Sonnet," is subject to being harvested not for his *potential* as a writer, but for himself as product.

Pierre, still "dewily refreshed and spiritualized," has not yet become aware that his identity is being used as part of the performance of the (democratic) national identity.

However, in another farcical passage where Pierre violently shrugs off the editor of a literary review who demands that he have a daguerreotype of himself made, it begins to dawn on Pierre that there is a disparity between his social image, and his intimate experience. "Pray, sir, hold, if you please," says Pierre as the literary editor seizes Pierre's arm. The publisher's response: "Pooh, pooh—must have it—public property—come along" (254).

His refusal to have his portrait taken anticipates (though it is narrated in retrospect) the horrifying realization (whether true or not is another of the novel's ambiguities) that his father had sacrificed his daughter for his social *image*, but even more horrifyingly, that his mother would defend this image at all costs. Here, the issue is extended from a familial crisis to a societal one. It is this that will become the basis for Pierre's "mature" writing, then, a writing that will have to take place *without a portrait*. "In the end," writes Patricia Wald, "a prescribed story of American identity that Pierre has internalized compromises the story he wishes to tell" (127). But we might equally say, that it is precisely this that comprises the story that Pierre has to tell, and precisely because he does so in literary form, each attempt to express himself fails for lack of a vocabulary. If, however, as the narrator writes, "In digging for precious metals in the mines, much earthy rubbish has first to be troublesomely thrown out" (258), Pierre, in becoming a mature writer, will leave very little *to say*. When Pierre, disowned from his family and from his legacy, begins to write again, he will refuse to participate in this discourse of identity, will refuse to be public property: all he will have for vocabulary, then, all that he can write about, is his own exile from that identity. Thus, one of the few paragraphs of Pierre's mature writing that we are given to read:

> "Cast they eye in there on Vivia; tell my why those four limbs should be clapt in a dismal jail—day out, day in—week out, week in—month out, month in—and himself the voluntary jailer!["] (303)

Yet to participate in the vocabulary of the national literary identity, and to be celebrated as its representative, is no more tenable to Pierre than the "dismal jail" in which his hero-proxy is incarcerated. No longer can he enjoy the "social placidity," of celebrity, where one is applauded for one's image, where one's public image conceals one's inner experience:

> The true charm of agreeable parlor society is, that there you lose your own sharp individuality and become delightfully merged in that soft social Pantheism, as it were, that rosily melting of all into one, ever prevailing in these drawing rooms, which pacifically and deliciously belie their own name; inasmuch as there no one draws the sword of his own individuality, but all such ugly weapons are left—as of old—with your hat and cane in the hall. (250)

Such a model of democracy, then, devoid of the *experience* of the individual, of the existential confrontation with an empty authority, requires, instead of this confrontation, the manufacturing of the fictive audience in order to fulfill itself, an audience that can then cast back its "eye" upon what has been created for it, and filling the place of individual experience with its presence, creates precisely a "social pantheism" in its stead. The faith of such a model of democracy, then, is not in intimate experience, but rather, in the authoritative image of the divinity, which steps in to fill an untenable emptiness. In this way, the sovereignty of the people becomes the very figure of sovereignty itself, the ineluctable authority, yet one that is nonetheless fictive. O'Sullivan writing again in the *United States Magazine and Democratic Review* declares that the fundamental principle of democracy the "VOLUNTARY PRINCIPLE, THE principle of FREEDOM, suggested to us by analogy of the divine government of the Creator, and already recognised by us with perfect success in the great social interest of Religion, affords the true 'golden rule' which is alone abundantly competent to work out the best possible general result of order and happiness from that chaos of characters, ideas, motives, and interest—human society" (7).

Young America, then, at least in the way that it is satirized by Melville, founds its democracy on a paradigm of natural law. As such, it follows the *legalistic* interpretation of the confrontation with the absent authority. It takes the absence of authority not as absence, but rather, replaces this absence with a divine, and thus, unassailable rhetoric, a rhetoric that parades itself as *originary*. It is a rhetoric, then, that refuses silence. And yet, because that silence has been covered over with *human*, and thus, fallible rhetoric, a rhetoric that requires not *certainty*, but *faith*, it is a rhetoric that conceals itself as rhetoric in masquerading itself as authoritative. And while it does indeed produce authority, its by-product is an anxiety that undermines its structure: the (non-rhetorical, non-created) *authority* is missing from its text. A true democracy, then, must reconcile with this anxiety.

VII. TWO KINDS OF DEMOCRACY

We might find then, in Pierre, *two kinds of democracy*, in accord with the two ways of understanding the silence of an ultimate narrative authority. The first, which approximates the position of the Young Americans, we might call the *sovereign* orientation. Understood in this way, the notion of consensus or majority is not in itself the deciding factor. Rather, the "will of the people" is only the manifestation, the oracle even, by which the sovereign is accessed, the index to the condition of being. Herbert of Cherbury argued, for example, in speaking of what constitutes accepted usage in language, that "the chief criterion of Natural Instinct is universal consent" (qtd. Chomsky 61). In this view, the rule of the majority, the will of the people would in turn indicate a creative will, or sovereignty, of which, we as participants *in* the democracy are a point, but to the whole of which, we have no direct

access. Such an interpretation of democracy does not permit the confrontation with silence, taking instead, the "perfect success" of articulate religious principles. In doing so, it transforms the notion of "the people," and even more so, their elected representatives, into a kind of deity, because the popular will is tantamount to divine sanction. Such a position requires an image, the *public* image for example, of Mr. Glendinning's portrait as a successful man and upstanding citizen, an image which Pierre, as we see in the example of the daguerreotype, instinctually refuses. This position speaks to a failure in the very structure of democracy itself, which requires the rhetorical construction of an *authority*, to compensate for the very authority that is lacking when democracy is understood in its essential sense.

The second orientation of democracy, which we might call the hermeneutic, incorporates this failure into its structure. Following the existential interpretation of the book of Genesis, democracy, it is not to be understood as the *positive* expression of a divine or sovereign will, but rather, as the negative, and relativistic confrontation with an infinite regress. Let us recall here Schleiermacher's argument that knowledge is precisely what *can* be shared: as the common point of the plurality of perspectives, it is the reduction of the relativity of knowledge to knowledge. If this is the case, then so too, in a political system founded in democratic *ideals*, the will of the people serves as the proxy for the *absence* of sovereignty. Democracy, then becomes the *managing* of relativity, in such a way that the ideal democracy could never be achieved and still remain as a democracy. In such an understanding, democracy *requires* the absence of the notion of sovereignty. This, which approximates the radical position of Pierre as democrat, is a democracy of process, one that like the portrait of the young Mr. Glendinning in love, is unauthorized, and that is powered not by the *product*, the image, but by desire itself, a desire that can never achieve its object, and remain *as* desire. Yet it is only the *person* that can desire, the person who cannot be

counted nor quantified precisely because it is only the social individual who is articulate. As such, in the hermeneutic orientation, democracy is always understood to be a striving for a perspective that it knows that it can never reach.

Whereas in its sovereign orientation, democracy must deny that it confronts a regress in establishing its constituents as sovereign, in the hermeneutic orientation, the regress, rather than being denied, becomes understood as the arena in which the political context plays out. The regress then, the impossibility of achieving a perfect success, becomes the *space* of democracy, the force behind all notions of the separation and balancing of powers. And yet, in this thwarting of absolute power, democracy from this orientation *must* confront the emptiness of its origins, must confront the *lack* of authority as its very impetus. This is a position, however, that any practical politics must reject in order to establish its law. Taken absolutely, the existential and the political become, when it is understood in this way, inextricable, each an expression of the lack in the other. The sovereign orientation, however, appropriates the regress in giving it positive, that is, articulate, form, and the hermeneutic orientation becomes relegated to a non-political sphere.

The origin of the sovereign orientation, then, is something that ultimately *cannot be addressed*, not only because the origin is "empty," but because this emptiness itself is further obscured by the *political* authority that speaks for it. It is this eclipsing of the existential by the political that is the very foundation of Carl Schmitt's notion of the exception[8]. It is, for Schmitt, the very possibility of political power:

> All significant concepts of the modern theory of the state are secularized, theological concepts not only because of their historical development in which they were transferred from theology to the theory of the state, whereby for example, the omnipotent God became the omnipotent lawgiver—but also because of their systematic structure, the recognition of which is necessary for a sociological consideration of their concepts. The exception in jurisprudence is analogous to the miracle in theology. Only by

> being aware of this analogy can we appreciate the manner in which the philosophical idea of the state developed in the last centuries. (*Political Theology* 36).

If, as we have previously seen, Kant was ultimately unable to ground his epistemology in failing to provide a convincing account of the relationship of phenomenal perception to the over-arching noumenal realm, we approach, in his critique, something like a gap in the law which, as Schmitt argues, is "filled" with political sovereignty. Such sovereignty begins, as we see in O'Sullivan's argument, with the theological and it is this that becomes the model for the secular, for the notion of the rule of law.

If, as Schmitt writes, "The exception confounds the unity and order of the rationalist system" (14), it is because the system is already confounded by the regress, and the exception is the expression of this confoundedness, a translation of the negative, aporetic *regression*, into the "foundation" of social institutions. We can think, then, of democracy in its sovereign orientation as the willful *denial* of this emptiness, of this regress. Political sovereignty, then, is concerned with delimiting a precise border between the political and the existential, and orienting its concerns exclusively in the former. Thus, where the sovereign orientation of democracy sees authority (in willfully not seeing the "nothing" behind the authority) the hermeneutic orientation, in taking the inability to stop the regress that destabilizes any construction of authority as its founding "moment," sees nature itself. It is a nature that the sovereign orientation of democracy denies the possibility of experiencing. The hermeneutic orientation of democracy, then, reveals the authority of the sovereign orientation to be a fiction, a human creation, and in the anxiety that it produces, requires the reconfiguration of the very concept of nature: nature becomes not the *product* of a benevolent sovereign who *creates* it, but rather, the very notion of a God in itself must be understood as a product of a non-benevolent, impersonal, and inaccessible nature. This is, however, nothing but the deep

structure of the sovereign orientation: ultimately, they are, then, one. Thus, where the sovereign orientation sees a God that *creates* nature, the hermeneutic orientation sees a nature that creates God: an original, primal, non-benevolent pantheism. Understood in this way, there can be no recourse to the notion of human law as natural law. Rather, the human law is denied the very authority that it seeks. It is *this* democracy that the narrator of *Pierre* speaks of, "which operates as a subtile acid among us; forever producing new things by corroding the old" (9), and it is this that is

> the marked anomalousness of America; whose character abroad, we need not be surprised, is misconceived, when we consider how strangely she contradicts all prior notions of human things; and how wonderfully to her, Death itself becomes transmuted into Life. (9)

Understood in this way, it is not God that creates nature, but rather, nature that necessitates in the human, the creation of the idea of God. The divine, as product of nature, is ultimately empty, has no authority in itself. This we might say is the very *crisis* of democracy.

It is Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex* that achieves perhaps the earliest expression of the conflict between these two democracies, and like *Pierre*, it employs the figure of an incestuous relationship. *Oedipus Rex* is likewise concerned with an existential gap in authority which causes a rupture in the social order. In *Oedipus Rex,* the son takes on the position of the father *illegally*, as portrayed through the figure of his incestuous marriage. As wife to his mother, Oedipus becomes the father who cannot relinquish his position as the son. In becoming the father, he becomes the *king*, the representation, and incarnation of the divine law. And yet, as the *son*, as the one who is *not* the father, but who has nonetheless usurped his position, he has no guarantor of authority; it is only the father who can represent the "laws begotten in the clear air of heaven / whose only father is Olympus" and of which "no

mortal nature brought them to birth" (57). It is the father who is invested with the authority of these laws, and who upholds them in the interest of the people for whom he is responsible.

The theme of incest that underlies *Pierre* can be understood, likewise, as an expression of the conflation of these two democracies. Pierre's "marriage" to his "sister" is a bid to restitute his father *as* father, but in doing so, he is exiled from structure of the law, and the social order which it underlies. He, thus, recreates the notion that we see in *Oedipus Rex* of the child who has become the father illegally: Pierre, by becoming a fictitious husband, also becomes a fictitious, and thus, illegal father, one that cannot, then, be recognized, and indeed is not recognized by the representative of the social order, his mother. That, previous to this, Pierre and his mother referred to each other as brother and sister, likewise speaks to an undermining of the authoritative paternal law which maintains social order. Yet despite the undeniable Oedipal structure of *Pierre*, despite Melville's concern, like Sophocles, with the domestic sphere, Melville, nonetheless makes no direct allusion to *Oedipus Rex*. Given the narrator's expansive cultural vocabulary, which encompasses both the Biblical and the mythological, this omission is significant enough to attempt to understand its role *in abstentia*. Most notably, unlike Oedipus, whose murder of his father speaks, at least symbolically, to the reconfiguration of the social and legal paradigm, Pierre ultimately will fail in his endeavor to democratize consciousness.

Whereas in *Oedipus Rex* we find the narrative of the abolishment of the law of the father/king, and the institutionalization of a legal structure which replaces this law, Pierre's confrontation is not so much with the father qua legal authority, but rather, with the emptiness itself that takes his place once his authority is revealed to be a kind of fiction. As such, Pierre will not be portrayed as the fallibly human Oedipus, who ultimately must, in

order for the law to be established, publicly account for his failure. Rather, Pierre "render[s] no accounts" (325). Whereas in the figure of Oedipus there is a reaching forward to replace the murdered father with a new law of the children, Pierre looks *backward* to the missing father himself: his battle is with the impersonal narrator that sunders his father from his father, that offers fiction in the *place* of the truth.

Thus, Pierre as failure cannot, like Oedipus serve as the foundation for a new political paradigm; more primordial than Oedipus, he will be identified with the Titan Enceladus, the product of a primeval incestual union. In a trance-like vision towards the end of the book, he returns to his ancestral home, and finds himself before "The Mount of the Titans," a mountain not far from Saddle Meadows. Seeing his face as a rock on this mountain, Pierre identifies himself as the Titan Enceladus, "the most potent of all giants" (345):

> Old Titan's self was the son of incestuous Coelus and Terra, the son of incestuous Heaven and Earth. And Titan married his mother Terra, another and accumulatively incestuous match...So Enceladus was both the son and grandson of an incest. (347)

Earth and sky are the ultimate primeval *natural* figures of a pantheon that has no place for a creator who stands outside of nature. Pierre, as the Titan Enceladus, must suffer the non-benevolence of a father who is *not* a creator. Oedipus, we might say, abolishes the pantheism of the proto-mythological world, in effecting the possibility of a re-establishment of a sovereignty of the *child*. His incestuous family structure, then, is an initial figure for the horror of the discovery of the *absence* of the father. And yet, from out of this initial horror comes the re-establishment of a new law, a law, though no less incestuous, founded by the *children*, in the very absence of the father. It is the children, now, who become sovereign, who take the empty place of the father. The figure of incest in *Oedipus Rex*, then, is a liminal

one, which becomes normalized once the death of the father is publicly acknowledged, and the democratically responsible *subjects* take up, in his absence, their own self-determination (and it is the *Antigone* that grapples with this subject). Pierre, however, as Enceladus, is a pre-Oedipal figure: his concern is not in the establishing of a fallible and *fictive* law, but rather, in conquering the very *originator* of a world where he must take himself up as fictive, as the offspring of an absence that can never be made full. Refusing the garrulous bureaucracy, the fictive institution which democracy must incarnate, Pierre stands at the interstices of the existential and the political. It is the regress itself, then, that Pierre does battle against in his "reckless, sky-assaulting mood" (347). Standing at the very origin of nature (unlike Oedipus who stands at the origin of the *human* law), Pierre knows that *the very notion of law is a fiction*. As such, in his suffering the incompatibility of the law with its origin, it is the fact of *subjection* itself that he suffers: he seeks to be the sovereign of the subject, to be free from the prison of the character who can only do the *author's* bidding. In Pierre's vision, the Titan Enceladus, "despairing of any other mode of wreaking his immitigable hate, turned his vast trunk into a battering ram, and hurled his own arched-out ribs again and yet again against the invulnerable steep" (346). It is at this point that Pierre sees that the Titan bears his face. In "this American Enceladus, wrought by the vigorous hand of Nature's self" (346) we find the expression of a social order with no ground. It is a world in which there is no authority, in which there is no God. All is Nature.

VIII. INCEST/MARRIAGE

It is Pierre, then, in becoming a "mature" writer, who experiences the conflation of these two orientations of democracy, and who suffers them as the inner conflict between the

silence of a non-benevolent, empty nature, and the articulation of sovereign. It is this law which takes the place of nature, and in *concealing* it creates the realm of the social, compelling belief in *it* as the natural order. What Isabel generates in Pierre is the apprehension that the "democracy" in which he lives, under the rule of his father, is a fiction, an official narrative that, precisely because it must establish its authority *against* nature (and as the bid to *be* nature), prohibits the very experience of being a person. The figures of incest and transgression, as themes in the book, then, can be understood as the law of a fictional authority that attempts to establish itself as natural. Following Sophocles' Oedipus, then, incest indeed would be *understood* as a crime against nature, a crime that, anxiously, attempts to conceal the artificiality of the rule of the father. It is, then, the compulsion to believe that the law is natural, then, that creates an absorbed "reader" of the social text, without an observer: the very formula for the constitution of the subject itself.

It is at the lower limit incest and at the upper limit marriage, then, by which the structure of the family is linked with that of the civil community; and it is the father, then, who presides over this continuum as the figure of the sovereign. Yet such a father precludes the father who is already outside the "law," the father, who can never be subject to his own law, because he stands, in the position of the exception, *outside*, as its very inauguration. It is out of the desire to restitute this *truth*, which for Pierre is manifested in the chair portrait, that he seeks to restitute Isabel as part of a family governed not by a false legal authority, but by nature itself, outside the compulsion of the law: Pierre's attempt, then, is to institute an *observer*.

Isabel, as the offspring of her father's *desire* rather than his duty, is missing from the text because there is, in the text, no place for a desire that is not transformed into law. Marriage itself, then, is the institutionalization of desire, and its transformation into the legal

structure: it is this that awaits Pierre in Lucy, and it is this that Isabel reveals to Pierre. It is, then, a radically democratic lineage that Isabel offers Pierre, one that comes from outside the aristocratic, paternalistic world of Saddle Meadows. Pierre takes up his fictional marriage in the city, in the vat of a democracy which has its basis, not in the rule of the father, but in a pantheistic nature, governed by death itself. This, at least, is what he hopes for in making the city an exile from paternalism.

Pierre, up to the point of his encounter with Isabel, had never considered another order. He lives securely in his identity, sure of his place in the world (as demonstrated by his comfortable relation with his servant Dates), governed by the law of the father, which, in his absence, is represented by his mother. "A fine, proud, loving, docile, vigorous boy," muses Mrs. Glendinning, "Pray God he never becomes otherwise to me. His little wife, that is to be, will not estrange him from me; for she too is docile,—beautiful, reverential and most docile" (20). Yet the fact that Pierre and his mother refer to each other as brother and sister already speaks to the untenability of this structure, and perhaps, to the measures taken in order to insulate from its being undermined. Though the reader only discovers it later, the primeval, incestuous battle for authority—the battle of Nature that gives the lie to all that the heretofore considered the natural foundation of the "docile" social order itself—is being fought just above their heads on the Mount of the Titans.

When Pierre first meets Isabel, her face speaks immediately to him of a realm beyond the docile structure of his position in the family:

> He stands before the door; the house is steeped in silence; he knocks; the casement light flickers for a moment, and then moves away; within he hears a door creak on its hinges; then his whole heart beats wildly as the outer latch is lifted; and holding the light above her supernatural head, Isabel stands before him. It is herself. No word is spoken; no other soul is seen. They enter the room of the double casement; and Pierre sits down, overpowered with bodily faintness and spiritual awe. He lifts his

> eyes to Isabel's gaze of loveliness and loneliness; and then a low, sweet half-sobbing voice of more than natural musicalness is heard:—
> "And so, thou art my brother;—shall I call thee Pierre?"
> …
> "Thou art! Thou art!" (112)

It is in this declaration, that echoes Pierre's father's "My daughter! My daughter!" that, we might say, Pierre *makes* Isabel his sister, and in doing so, he immediately displaces the "sister" that he had in his mother. If Pierre, however, resolves to restitute his newly found sister in order to restitute the otherwise unincorporable image of an illegal father, we might say that he can only do so by incorporating in himself the very "sins" of his father. He must also take on, for himself, his father's desire. The beguiling and *dark* Isabel is an object of intense erotic attraction, as the narrator, leeringly, indicates:

> Be naught concealed in this book of sacred truth. How, if accosted in some squalid lane, a humped, and crippled, hideous girl should have snatched his garment's hem, with—"Save me, Pierre—love me, own me, brother; I am thy sister!" —Ah, if man were wholly made in heaven, why catch we hell-glimpses? (107)

It is only because Isabel engages Pierre's desire, that he can make her into a representation of his father's desire. Isabel, as Pierre's sister *beyond* convention, comes to Pierre as the link to nature itself, a nature that he had not previously known existed, because the *law* of his "natural" inheritance, and thus, the law of his beloved, but irreparably sundered father, obscured it. Taking up her guitar when the account of her life falters into inarticulability, and producing for Pierre "utter unintelligibleness" but "infinite significancies," (126), Pierre proclaims her the "Girl of all-bewildering mystery!" She becomes for Pierre, the regress incarnate. The offspring of a father outside the paternal law, she offers an entry into the world that transcends the repressive sovereignty of the artificial, of a law that bars Pierre from the unauthorized representation of his father as a *person*, and

thus, as a desiring being. As such, Isabel turns the authorized representation of Mr. Glendinning, the embodiment of the *law*, into a mere product, and thus, into a fiction. Yet if Pierre has *made* Isabel into his sister, let us note that Pierre's hearkening to this new Nature, is nonetheless a product of his *poesis*, of artifice, which, if this is the case, will have to return to Pierre as an *impediment* toward his achieving of this nature that he has suddenly apprehended without comprehending: if Pierre, in his fictional marriage to Isabel has already begun *writing*, albeit without realizing it, then he has established himself as the sovereign of a system, a system that nonetheless must exclude the impetus to write. The very act of *poesis* replicates the sundering of the father.

What Isabel shows Pierre is that, as the son of *both* fathers that the two portraits represent, he has no place in the unstable structure of his family and all the more so, in the social order by which his family exists as a legitimate unit. It is a *text* that up to this point, Pierre had no inkling of because he was *in it*. With the appearance of Isabel, however, he is forced to *see*, because the place that Isabel makes for him forces him to be *outside the paternal structure*. What she reveals to him, then, is the apprehension (but again without comprehension) of the instability of a structure which maintains the coherence of its narrative only through an intricate network of displaced roles.

IX. SISTER/MOTHER/WIFE

Pierre, in attempting through Isabel to restore the "illegal" father, must reckon with the interdiction of the *authorized* father, as symbolized by his portrait which hangs in the drawing room. Yet Pierre's father is not the sole force to be reckoned with. The portrait

hangs in the public space of the house that Pierre and his mother share, unlike the chair portrait, which hangs in a locked closet in Pierre's room. Pierre's dilemma is confounded by the fact that Pierre's mother has assumed the role of the father in upholding the ban. Yet no less, it is a mother to whom he addresses as "sister." As the sister to his mother, both she and Pierre live under the sign of the official portrait, which, nonetheless, can only speak through the mother/sister. In this fashion, Pierre's father has, in his absence, been effectively deified, his untenable silence replaced by a law which the mother, as representative of the father upholds, but which she, as sister, can never inhabit. She can, thus, despite being the *de facto* authority, never assume the *de jure* authority of the dead father. Pierre, then, must answer to his mother, but nonetheless, cannot confront her as the authority, because she, no less than he, is subject to it. In order for Pierre to confront the authority of the father, then, he must reckon with an intransigent bureaucratic institution headed by his mother. Yet she, standing in for the absent but authorized father, refuses to acknowledge the *other* father, the one symbolized by the chair portrait, and who called out on his deathbed, "My daughter! My daughter!"

It is through this network that Lucy Tartan takes her place in the system: as she who would place Pierre in the role of the father upon their marriage, she is herself, as the authorized, "docile" wife-to-be of Pierre, an unwitting representative of this bureaucratic structure. As such, once Pierre encounters Isabel, she is no longer tenable as a wife, because the very institution of marriage can only serve to uphold the authorized father at the expense of the father in the chair portrait. The chair portrait, then, speaks to a system in which Pierre already does not *belong*.

Isabel, then, having generated the apprehension of this structure in Pierre, now offers herself as the solution. As an incestuous, erotic object for Pierre, she incarnates the

very transgression of the structure that the chair portrait—now the portrait of the father of Isabel—comes to represent. Pierre sees in her "not only the nameless touchingness of that of the sewing girl, but also the subtler expression of the portrait of this then youthful father, strangely translated, and intermarryingly blended, with some before unknown, foreign femininenes" (112).

The erotic feeling that Isabel generates in Pierre, while enabled by her beauty, is not founded in it. Rather, we might say, that if Isabel, as sister, is a product of Pierre's *poesis*, her beauty serves as its proper vocabulary. Merely the fact of her beauty would not be enough for Pierre to give up the already beautiful Lucy Tartan, and, as the narrator makes clear, Pierre's attraction to Isabel does not detract from his erotic investment in Lucy. Rather, because Isabel reveals to Pierre the artificiality of the "natural" world of Saddle Meadows, and because she stands outside of it, only she is capable of *receiving* Pierre's transgressive eroticism, one which reenacts the same transgression that his father effected in his apparent affair with Isabel's equally beautiful mother.[9] This, then, in a way that Lucy Tartan could not. It is not, however, then, because Pierre is any less attracted to Lucy. Rather, it is, we might say, the fear that his eroticism would be incompatible with Lucy, or rather, that it is this very incompatibility that becomes the source of his eroticism. Having encountered his illegitimate Sister in Isabel, Lucy's place in the oppressive structure of Saddle Meadows—and in the political system as a whole—becomes revealed: *Lucy has become an agent of the paternal but fatherless bureaucracy*. Given these conditions, Pierre's eroticism can now only be consummated outside the law that oppresses him. He is forced, then, before he resolves to marry Isabel, to look at Lucy from outside the narrative that has been revealed to him. Lucy becomes, then, an object of transgression:

> This to be my wife? I that but the other day weighed an hundred and fifty pounds of solid avoirdupois;—I to wed this heavenly fleece? Methinks one husbandly embrace would break her airy zone, and she exhale upward to that heaven whence she hath hither come, condensed to mortal sight. It can not be; I am of heavy earth, and she of airy light. By heaven but marriage is an impious thing! (58)

Here, the inner struggle that confronts Pierre manifests in a violent eroticism. It is not, of course, that Pierre cannot attain Lucy: she is devoted to him. Rather, it is the violence involved in the attainment that drives Pierre to Isabel, who, abandoned (by his very *father*) and unauthorized, embodies this violence. To be accepted by Lucy in the role in which she is presented to him would be to do violence against *her* as the representative of the institution of which he has become, out of his encounter with Isabel, an enemy. Pierre, as Enceladus, is "sky-*assaulting*" (347), and Lucy, as "heavenly fleece" occupies the position of the sky.

Pierre, then, cannot accept Lucy in her docile role without committing violence against her in the name of the institution. Yet his attraction, his eroticism, is nonetheless rooted in this violence. It is we might say, now the very violence with which Pierre apprehends Lucy, that is now the source of his attraction to her, post-Isabel. His "It can not be" is not as much a pronouncement against the possibility of a "husbandly embrace" as much as it is the expression of a violent fantasy. "I am Pluto stealing Proserpine," Pierre exclaims, "and every *accepted* lover is" (59 my italics). Pierre can only desire Lucy destructively as long as she represents a node within the system of his father's official portrait, whose living representative is his mother. Lucy, as the embodiment of illumination offers Pierre no entry into *mystery*, into the regress, but rather, invites him to take his *place* in the regressive, groundless structure and to inhabit the fiction as real. "Wondrous of face, blue-eyed and golden haired" (33), she is the inverse of the regress: what one sees when one sees *emptiness*, that is *darkness*, as form: her "airy zone" permits no darkness, no apprehension

of what she, in her fairness is a symbol *of*. It is this nothingness of the "of" that Lucy denies, and thus, for Pierre, her fairness can only manifest as darkness. Lucy wants no secrets between herself and Pierre, and in this way, she is like Mrs. Glendinning, whose response to Pierre's initial reticence with regard to Isabel is, "Come, I hate a mystery" (47).

Isabel's arrival, then, bifurcates Lucy like Pierre's father, into two aspects: Lucy continues to be the object of Pierre's love, but at the same time, she becomes the representation of the official "fiction" that he can no longer participate in, and of which his aim will be to destroy. It is, then, the restitution of Isabel, that seems the Pierre his possibility for extricating himself from it. She becomes the incarnation of his destructive eroticism.

But while it is Isabel who reveals Lucy's inapproachability to Pierre, and Isabel who incarnates Pierre's desire to transgress his institutional identity, it is nonetheless Lucy *qua* unapproachable, who is indeed the real object of Pierre's eroticism. Isabel, then, who *is* approachable, precisely because she is not part of the text, continues the chain of substitutions in *taking Lucy's place*. It is she who turns Pierre into an illegal father, by providing the possibility of a fictional, incestuous marriage. And yet if this is the case, then Isabel herself, as fictional wife, is only the "bungled one" herself, only the incarnation of Pierre's otherwise unrepresentable, because destructive, desire. We might say, then, that Pierre achieves the highest expression of his eroticism, not in his transgressive marriage with Isabel, nor even at the moment where, upon their arrival in the city, the text intimates that they physically consummate their fictional marriage, but rather, in the act of rejecting Lucy herself. We might say that all that transpires after is only a representation and re-enactment of this initial rejection. Pierre effects it as an act of cruelty, turning Lucy into an erotic sacrifice:

> "Decked in snow-white, and pale of cheek, thou indeed art fitted for the alter; but not that one of which thy fond heart didst dream:—so fair a victim!"
> "Pierre!"
> "'Tis the last cruelty of tyrants to make their enemies slay each other."
> "My heart! My heart!
> "Nay;—Lucy, I am married."
> The girl was no more pale, but white as any leper; the bed-clothes trembled to the concealed shudderings of all her limbs; one moment she sat looking vacantly into the blank eyes of Pierre, and then fell over toward him in a swoon. (183).

It is an eroticism that can only be consummated in rejection, in destruction. Yet because Lucy can only be rejected *once*, it is an act that can never be re-experienced. Isabel, we might say, becomes the *incarnation of this rejection*. She inaugurates, though Pierre does not know it, his vocation as a writer, one that turns all his previous writings into the "earthy rubbish" that "has first to be troublesomely thrown out." Yet because Pierre, in his resolution to engage in a fictional marriage to Isabel, does not *know* that he is "writing," that he is engaging in *poesis*, he is incapable of rising to the occasion that his writing demands. Thus, when Pierre begins his ill-conceived book, it will be under the rubric of the chapter titled "Pierre immaturely attempts a mature work." His inability to comprehend in his apprehension makes it impossible for him to stand outside of the work he writes; and yet, without this critical distance, as participant in his own creation, Pierre cannot do what a writer *must* do if he or she is to be successful: to symbolize.

X. "MARRIAGE" AND WRITING

And yet, we might find that Pierre's "immaturity" is nonetheless unavoidable. Pierre's situation speaks, we might say, to the very impossibility of maturity, to the

impossibility of achieving the distance that one needs in order to write anything but "the bungled one." If Pierre can transgress the paternal law that forbids the marriage of brother and sister, he nonetheless cannot transgress the law that forbids the *writer* from participating in the written, and it is only in this way that Pierre would be able to tell the story of the one who is *not* written. To "write" without symbols is to write from the Ishmaelic perspective, *without* turning Ishmael into the sovereign of his own story. This would, of course, negate the very story that he wants to tell. Pierre's marriage, as a product of *poesis*, is indeed such a bid to write from the perspective of the exiled character, rather than from that of the languaged, all-knowing writer: to write without symbols is to write *qua* participant in the written. It is a bid to both *see* and to *be*: to transgress the impediment of perspective, while nonetheless inhabiting a perspective. Pierre's hope—a hope that can never be fulfilled—is not with the symbol as a form of expression *of* something, but rather with this "of" itself. To symbolize is then, to eclipse the very *experience* of being a subject, which is precisely the condition that bars one from narrating one's own subjection.

As a "docile" juvenile writer in the service of the "Young Americans," Pierre participated, if unwittingly, in the project of a national *poesis* the aim of which was in the creating a democratic national identity. As I have argued, such a project requires the creation of a fictional observer who guarantees this fiction for its creators, in generating an absorption *in* this fiction, and in doing so, compelling belief in it. Yet, with Isabel's arrival, this national *poesis* is not only revealed in all its hypocrisy as a bid to become a Nature that it only occults, but even more, it casts its shadow on Pierre's very own identity. The *image* of Pierre's father, the portrait hanging in his mother's house, has *become* this fictional guarantor of the national identity, and as such, constrains Pierre to an identity which, nonetheless *cannot encompass* the chair portrait. Without this image of the *experience* of his desiring father, his

father cannot be apprehended as a unified being. So long as this is the case, Pierre himself, as the heir of both aspects of his father, cannot arrive at a unified sense of himself. It is the *fictional* law of a *fictional father* then, that Pierre is asked, by his mother, to "docilely" reproduce. It is the compulsion of this *symbol*, then, that denies to Pierre the possibility of expressing, and thus *symbolizing* his very *inability* to symbolize himself.

Engaged to Lucy, but cognizant of Isabel, the presence of the illegal father, which heretofore subsisted in the chair portrait, but without detection, comes to apprehension. Once it does (in what we might call a product of Isabel's own *poesis*), is becomes the driving force in Pierre's life. It is, however, apprehended without language. The chair portrait, locked in Pierre's closet, takes form in the "shrine" of Pierre's heart. Having, in the institutional language of the father no forum for expression, it is likewise locked away there, unable to express itself in the language of the institution which surrounds it.

Thus, when Pierre meets Isabel, he is entranced by her "spell" that "seemed one with that Pantheistic master spell, which eternally locks in mystery and in muteness the universal subject world" (151). It is her lapses into articulateness, her inability to account for her parentage, her mesmerizing guitar, and her command, "Do not speak to me!" that make the chair portrait of his father speak outside the realm of the law, even when there is no language that it can properly call its own.

To be an author is to create a structure, and thus, to engage in symbolization. To symbolize, then, is to banish the symbolized. As such, to be an author is to enter the place of the sovereign, but to remain outside of the structure that one creates. It is thus, to inaugurate a law, and it is precisely the law that Pierre must transgress if he is to restitute his father *outside* the law. Pierre's only possibility, then, in not having recourse to the symbol, is to *become* the incarnation of his illegal father by rendering himself illegal. As such, Pierre

cannot speak the language of the institution that he exiles himself from: he cannot *write*. To do so would be only to perpetuate himself in it, to remain a character in the narrative of another.

Pierre's resolution, then, is to *destroy* the symbolic structure with the intent of achieving, in his "reckless sky-assaulting mood," the symbolized itself *as* symbolized. His bid in effecting a fictional marriage, then, is to become both its author *and* its participant. Its fictionality—a fiction only in relation to the legal institution of marriage—protects it from being symbolized under the naturalized and nature-concealing paternal law; and the very fact that as an incestuous marriage, it transgresses the arch-tenet of the paternal law—the interdiction against incest—guarantees its perpetual fictionality. In transferring his allegiances from "system Father" to "system Nature" then, Pierre, as the only heir of his father, engineers the destruction of the father's identity, in forcing it to answer, no longer to the paternal law, and thus, to an image, but rather, to death itself, to that which has *no* image. It is through navigating this paradox, then, that Pierre's fictional marriage to Isabel seems to offer him the possibility of an appeal to a nature beyond paternality. His fictional marriage, not guaranteed by the institution, is not a symbol *of* the institution. Because it is the institution that produces symbols, it is, thus, not a symbol of the institution.

Yet all of this is achieved, not in his marriage to Isabel, but in the instant of his rejection of Lucy. The marriage, then, is a sort of homeopathic protection from the oppressive bureaucracy which symbolizes Pierre only in terms of the paternal law. Only through this fictional marriage, then, can he thwart the compulsive production of the bureaucracy that impersonally renders him a character in someone else's narrative. The hope for a marriage that is not guaranteed by the sovereign authority, then, would be in its ability to be guaranteed by nature itself. Pierre and Isabel are to be, not the brother and sister of a

common father, but only "wide brother and sister in the common humanity,—no more" (273). Pierre is interdicted, then, from doing otherwise, because to do so would be only to participate in a narrative that banishes his illegal father. To do so would be, thus, to perpetuate a sovereign-oriented "democracy" that renders the desiring self, the truly democratic self, answerable only to death, illegal.

Pierre, then, can only *act*, because in *action*, as opposed to *writing*, one *is* what one symbolizes. Escaping from a marriage that is only a writing inscribed by the paternal law, Pierre's fictional marriage is meant to be a *thing in itself*.

Yet Pierre's failure in writing begins not with his book, but rather, in his marriage to Isabel itself. Ultimately, the fictional marriage will become no different than a real marriage. Pierre's bid to be both narrator and character will be subject to the same bifurcating exclusion that caused the sundering of his father. As the author of his marriage, he has rendered himself a participant in a fiction of which he is nonetheless the author. It is *this*, then, that is illegal about his marriage. Fiction requires exclusion, and the fiction of a marriage requires that Pierre, in his role as *officiator*, be excluded from it. Whatever Pierre desires from Isabel, then, must remain unfulfilled, precisely because, as author, Isabel is nothing other than a creature of his own *poesis*, over which Pierre, unwittingly assumes the role of sovereign. Writer-Pierre (the one who performs the rite of the fictional marriage) is necessarily sundered from participant Pierre (the one who is married). The *impersonal* law of narration precludes the possibility of Pierre entering into his own fictional marriage. Thus, while Pierre has found that he can transgress the law of the father, he cannot transgress the law of nature: narrator and narrated must remain forever sundered. Thus, Pierre's fictional marriage has only reproduced under the ineluctable sovereignty of nature, what originally manifested under the contingent sovereignty of the father. If the source of authority in

Nature, then, is indeed empty, it can only, it turns out be expressed with recourse to the symbol; as such, the subject of nature—the subject itself—must nonetheless remain bound to a narrative that it does not narrate.

Pierre, then, having initiated the fiction, can only continue to manufacture it, and thus, continue to exclude himself. The "marriage" has become his reality, even as he stands outside of it because he has bound his destiny as "writer" to the fiction that he creates. Thus, married under the sign of the chair portrait, of the *illegal* father, the chair portrait now becomes the emblem of the new paternal law, no less in force despite its fictionality. Desire, then, the experience of *being* a symbol, once again, must yield to the authority that symbolizes it. The only way, then, that Pierre can then arrive at a representation of a desire outside the law, at an *un*institutional desire, is to continue along the chain of destruction that Pierre began in rejecting Lucy: he must now destroy this *new* authority in order to recuperate himself. Just after Pierre announces to Lucy that he is married, he indeed destroys the chair portrait.

> Steadfastly Pierre watched the first crispings and blackenings of the painted scroll, but started as suddenly unwinding from the burnt string that had tied it, for one swift instant, seen through the flame and smoke, the upwrithing portrait tormentedly stared at him in beseeching horror, and then, wrapped in one broad sheet of oily fire, disappeared forever. (198)

Aware of the gravity of his gesture, Pierre tries to rescue the "imploring face" but it only burns his hand. Ultimately, however, the destruction of the portrait does not destroy the sign of its authority: the portrait remains incarnate, in its "foreign femininenesses" in Isabel, in a marriage that, unsurprisingly, quickly loses its passion as its transgressive character cedes to the new authority.

Each time that Pierre *acts*, then, he does so out of a bid to *not* engage in symbolization; and yet, his actions nonetheless become an unwitting *poesis* that result in just that. If to act is to achieve a moment of presence, in fact, each such moment that Pierre seeks is already the representation of a lost moment: each action, then becomes reified and made into a new "portrait." Isabel, as the manifestation of an "empty" nature, shows Pierre the tyranny of an empty authority ever attempting to establish its law upon this emptiness. It is she who has revealed to Pierre the emptiness of the authority of his *father*, and of fathers in general. But it is also she who incarnates the new institution, no less an institution, no less a marriage, for it being outside the law.

It is only then, when Pierre is in his destructive, "sky-assaulting" mood, that he can apprehend the possibility of a *presence* beyond the law, of a democracy of the self, rather than that of the individual who replicates impersonally its fictional narrative. Pierre destroys his portrait as it begins to tyrannize him; it is only when there is no hope of rescuing it that Pierre sees its "imploring face," and recognizes in it a father that is at *one* with its image. Yet this moment recalls, if nothing else, Pierre's original rejection of Lucy—the moment, which, we might say, Pierre figuratively destroys the official portrait. Pierre's destruction of the chair portrait turns out to be nothing more than a re-enactment of this originary moment, a failed bid to preserve its originary *destructiveness*. If Pierre rejects Lucy in order to restitute his father, it is the father that he restitutes who now becomes the new tyrant, the sovereign of a new system outside the law.

It is Isabel, then, who offers Pierre what seems to be the possibility of *maintaining this destruction as destruction*, though, as we have seen, the narrator intimates to the reader that the case is in fact otherwise. Pierre's refusal of the symbol not only precludes his ability as writer of his own narrative, but also prohibits him from being a *reader* of it. Having identified

himself as participant, Pierre's continued *poesis* is dependent on the inability to acknowledge himself as its orchestrator. Because it is the narrator from out of whom originates the field of action, Pierre must, if he is to refuse *being* a symbol, must willfully deny himself this founding perspective. It is the narrator of *Pierre*, then, who mediates between Pierre's inability to see himself as a symbol, and the reader's requirement for it. The narrative is indeed the story of Pierre's inability to read.

Thus, as far as Pierre is concerned, Isabel incarnates Pierre's rejection of Lucy and extends it into space and time. That is, she is a kind of inscription, and perpetuation of this rejection, given form. Thus, if Isabel at first offered Pierre the possibility of viewing the regressive structure on which the social institution—and his identity in this symbolic structure—is founded, Lucy, in her role as wife, represented the inverse: the perpetuation of this democratic fiction. Pierre's response, then, was to turn Lucy *back* into the regress by rejecting her as a symbol, in "revealing" the emptiness of the structure out of which she functions as a symbol. However, once Pierre "marries" Isabel, Isabel is no longer capable of suppressing the return of the symbolic: she no longer incarnates the primordial silence of a nature that, outside the law, cannot be symbolized. Rather, she has become the creature of the new imaginary Law that Pierre inaugurates, a law no less in force because it is imaginary.

Thus, the darkness and mystery of Isabel, in failing to evoke the *presence* of Pierre's rejection of Lucy—and with it the rejection of the paternal law—must take on, though tragically unbeknownst to Pierre, symbolic value. As such, she becomes what she always was: the positive expression of his destructive act; instead of *incarnating* the realm outside of the social fiction, she becomes a *metaphor* for this exiled realm—but *as* metaphor, she loses her immediacy in the exigency that every metaphor has of occulting, of *not being* that which it represents, in taking on form.

As the product of Pierre's narration of his fictional marriage, Isabel now becomes the official representative of emptiness *in form*. As such, she no longer reveals Nature as the realm beyond the fiction of the law and its institutions, but occults it. She becomes, then, the representation of the *law* that conceals nature itself, and consigns to failure Pierre's project of a radical democracy which answers to no fiction, to no authority. Having incarnated the chair portrait, having caused Pierre to apprehend its function as a *symbol*, Isabel has, in effect, become the new father. In Pierre's inability to remove himself from under the exigency of the *law*, she becomes the embodiment of the new law which comes, compulsorily, to replace the rejected one. In other words, inasmuch as Isabel is a creature of Pierre's *poesis*, Pierre is no less a creature of *Isabel's* poesis. Isabel, however, never sought to transgress the law of the father, but rather, to be restituted under his image, and to be given a place in the text. Thus, inasmuch as Pierre has cast Isabel into *his* narrative, it becomes clear that at the same time and all along, Isabel has likewise been casting Pierre into her narrative. Thus, each creates the other out of the other: each oscillates between the role of the sovereign creative force, and the creature whom the other must answer to as symbol of it; each is both writer and written in two conflicting narratives. The narrative that they make together is of two creators each attempting to make *form* out of the other. Both Pierre and Isabel, then, each as the narrator of the fiction in which they have cast themselves, each unable to acknowledge their role as narrator, seek to unify themselves through recourse to the other. As each fails in turn in his or her project of *poesis*, it is the other then, who takes up the role of creator in an endlessly perpetuating cycle.

Installed in their household as fictionally married couple, they can only do away with the narrative that oppresses them by re-introducing the real: it is the fiction, now, the very

fiction that *they are not being narrated*, that must be transgressed. It is at this point, the narrative intimates, that they physically consummate their fictional marriage.

> "Let us light a candle, my sister; the evening is deepening."
> "For what light a candle, dear Pierre?—Sit close to me my brother."
> He moved nearer to her, and stole one arm around her; her sweet head leaned against his breast; each felt the other's throbbing.
> "Oh, my dear Pierre, why should we always be longing for peace, and then be impatient of peace when it comes? Tell me, my brother! Not two hours ago, thou wert wishing for twilight, and now thou wantest a candle to hurry the twilight's last lingering away."
> But Pierre did not seem to hear her; his arm embraced her tighter; his whole frame was invisibly trembling. Then suddenly in a low tone of wonderful intensity he breathed.
> "Isabel! Isabel!"
> She caught one arm around him, as his was around herself; the tremor ran from him to her; both sat dumb.
> He rose, and paced the room.
> "Well, Pierre; thou camest in here to arrange thy matters, thou saidst. Now what hast thou done? Come, we will light a candle now." (272)

If Isabel can no longer serve as a figure for Pierre's writing, precisely because she, in this role, bifurcates Pierre into the writer and the written, and reinaugurates the very split that Pierre was attempting to repair in rejecting Lucy and marrying Isabel, then we can see how Isabel has entered into the place of the father. Pierre's solution, then, if the marriage was a homeopathic protection against an oppressive fictional institution—oppressive precisely because of the sundering action of fiction itself—is to *cancel* the fictionality of the marriage by re-introducing what it was a fiction *of*. By engaging in *actual* incest in a *fictional* marriage, Pierre once again transgresses the law of the father, and in doing so, he turns Isabel *back* into his sister. If Pierre's destruction of the chair portrait only resulted in Isabel's incarnating it as the new image of the father, he now must destroy Isabel *qua* its incarnation.

Yet insofar as Isabel moves, from the position of the Father/Law, back into the position of sister, Pierre does not find himself free from the authority that has never ceased to oppress him, but rather, returns back again under the oppressive paternal authority. Once

again, Pierre has transgressed the law of the father. This time, however, he does not have recourse to the protection of the *illegal* father: in consummating his marriage to Isabel, he has destroyed that institution, and returned himself under the law of the legal father, in the mode of exile. Exiled from his paternal identity, but no less an exile from his own *poesis*, it is at this point then, that, for the first time, Pierre realizes that all his youthful writings, upon which he had hoped to support his household, no longer maintain their validity: they are the product of Pierre Glendinning, the dutiful son of his father, who in turn, dutifully protects the national identity at the expense of the one whom the identity is *for*:

> …Now, the ten thousand universal revealings brand me on the forehead with fool! And like protested notes at the Bankers, all those written things of mine, are jaggingly cut rough and through with the protesting hammer of Truth!—Oh I am sick, sick, sick! (273)

His juvenile writing now appears to him to be in the service of the very law that he had devoted himself to abolishing. To attempt to gain a livelihood from them would only be to re-inscribe himself under its authority and to suffer the ban to which, as transgressor, he is subject. Isabel attempts to calm him, but now, as a representative of the Father, she only underscores the fact that Pierre has no authority to appeal to in his transgression:

> She blew out the light, and made Pierre sit down by her; and their hands were placed in each other's.
> "Say, are not thy torments gone now, my brother?"
> "But replaced by—by—by—Oh God, Isabel, unhand me!" cried Pierre starting up. "Ye heavens, that have hidden yourselves in the black hood of the night, I call to ye! If to follow Virtue to her uttermost vista, where common souls never go; if by that I take hold on hell, and the uttermost virtue, after all, prove but a betraying pander to the monstrousest vice,—then close in and crush me, ye stony walls, and into one gulf let all things tumble together!" (273)

The heavens, which Lucy Tartan embodied, but which, as representative of the paternal law, she stood in the way of his attaining, are now doubly removed from Pierre, because they have become incarnated in Isabel's "black hood of night." Thus, out of

desperation, Pierre must deny the fraternity that brought them together in their transgression: "Call me brother know more! How knowest thou that I am thy brother? Did thy mother tell thee? Did my father say so to me?—I am Pierre, and thou Isabel, wide brother and sister in the common humanity,—no more" (273).

Here, Pierre's narrative clashes with that of Isabel's: the incestuous union serves, we come to see, a different function in each. If Isabel, for Pierre, was the weapon that Pierre chose for his assault on the paternal institution, she, nonetheless, does not share his goals. Pierre, through Isabel, wanted to destroy the institution of the Father in order to restitute the father as a *whole*: his bid was to create a new institution that was capable of encompassing the *desire* that was heretofore interdicted by the paternal law. Isabel, however, never wanted to overturn the institution; she only wanted a place in it. Isabel never wanted anything from Pierre but her restitution under the image of the father. Whereas before, Isabel's hope was in the fiction of Pierre, like Pierre she runs into the impasse of her own *poesis*, when she realizes that a fictional marriage cannot restore her *real* father. If *her* fictional marriage to Pierre proved only to be a product of a fiction that *she* created, her incestuous relationship with Pierre likewise restores the father in the only way that she is able: through an incestuous union, that likewise restores the authority of the Father, even if this can only occur through the transgression of his law. Pierre and Isabel's narratives meet then, without coinciding, in the re-establishing of the law of the father through the very fact of their *transgressing* the law of the father.

It is only here, then, that Pierre, exiled from the narrative of his father, must confront his existential exile: it is here that he resolves to take up his mature work: to write, to put himself in the position of the exile, the one who is privileged in his being able to *see* what others cannot because they are *being*:

> Ah! Now I catch glimpses, and seem to half-see. Somehow, that the uttermost ideal of perfection in man is wide of the mark. The demigods trample on trash, and Virtue and Vice are trash! Isabel, I will write such things—I will gospelize the world anew, and show them deeper secrets than the Apocalypse!—I will write it, I will write it! (273)

It is the act of writing itself that is now Pierre's hope. It is only through writing now that he can create the only vantage point that he hopes to exist in: the vantage point of Nature itself. No less a radical writer than radical democrat, Pierre's writing is another manifestation of his "sky-assaulting mood." Having exiled himself from his father in marrying his sister, Pierre's battle is no longer with the paternal institution, but with Nature itself. If before, the impersonality of the law manifested in the disparity between the portrait of his father as authority and his father as lover, here, this impersonality manifests in the disparity between Nature itself, and the experience of living. Pierre's desire to write, we might say, is no longer the bid to restitute the unified father that remains sundered in his heart's "shrine," but rather, despairing of the possibility of ever achieving this unity, puts forward *himself* as the battle between the two portraits themselves.

It is the battle between the garrulous law and the silence of Nature that Pierre proposes to narrate; the resistance, then, to the very "fiction" of subjection which, we, as desiring, originally *inarticulate* beings, must nonetheless submit to. It is the battle between the garrulous law and the silence of Nature that Pierre proposes to narrate; the resistance, then, to the very "fiction" of subjection which, we, as desiring, originally *inarticulate* beings, must nonetheless submit to. However, the question then, becomes: who will receive this narration? If the very possibility of vocabulary, of narration only comes from out of the battle itself, Pierre attempts here a primordial vocabulary, one that must speak from a language that could never (yet) be created, for it is the story itself of submission to a shared

language, the story of the subject itself. Using language to create *silence*, Pierre will necessarily fail, in his unwitting inauguration of a new poetic articulation that must once again eclipse the silence of nature, and must, as primal Law, pronounce his exclusion from it.

It is for this reason that Melville grounds the mythology of Pierre in the inarticulate conflagrations of a primordial mythological nature, rather than in an articulate Oedipus: Oedipus derives his language only from out of the primordial battle of the Titans, and it is this battle that Pierre returns to. The audience for Pierre's work, then, those who will give him the livelihood in exchange for his "gospel" then, could never be readers, but only actors, only fellow Titans.

His writing fails, in fact, because there is no one, not even Pierre, to receive it. Rejected by the publishers, his bid to re-gospelize the world falls on deaf ears, precisely because his writing must take form as *symbols* in the world that lives under the still-operative gospel. And as such, with no other system in place, his writing must be symbolized as a failure, even to Pierre himself, who was never able to escape its all-encompassing reach.

Pierre's hope for writing, then, is that in doing so, he will write himself out of the exile that he is living in. His hope remains that he can redeem himself through his writing, though the narration will make clear that unless Pierre is capable of turning his writing into a symbol for the collective identity, his writing will be nothing but failure. Pierre, wanting to write Truth, can in fact, only write fiction, which because it excludes him, he must oppose to truth:

> For the more and the more that he wrote, and the deeper and the deeper that he dived, Pierre saw the everlasting elusiveness of Truth; the universal lurking insincerity of even the greatest and purest written thoughts. Like knavish cards, the leaves of all great books were covertly packed. He was but packing one set the more; and that a very poor jaded set and pack indeed. So that there was nothing he more spurned, than his own aspirations; nothing he more abhorred than the loftiest part of himself. (339)

XI. THE RETURN OF THE REAL

It is Lucy, upon her arrival at the Church of the Apostles, who will finally bring to consciousness the fact that Pierre has been writing all along, and it is she who will ultimately reveal to Pierre the futility of his project. Lucy, who served as the originary symbol that had to be *rejected*, now brings to consciousness the original, destructive power that Isabel had represented *in form*. Just as Isabel revealed to Pierre the institutional *poesis* which created a false Nature out of Saddle Meadows, now Lucy comes *back* from Saddle Meadows to reveal that Pierre has created a new institution out of that emptiness.

Lucy, having rejected her position as the dutiful wife, has no place in any institution. It is she now, that takes the place of the one missing from the text, the text of which Pierre is both author and character. As such, she will reveal that Pierre's rejection of the symbol can only produce symbols; and she will render futile Pierre's attempt to write. Bringing all the destructive force of Pierre's rejection with her, her return will ultimately result in Pierre's imprisonment, and death.

Lucy, then, as the interpreter of Pierre's narrative, reveals for the first time that Pierre is engaging in one. As such, she interrupts the narrative in revealing its fictionality, and in doing so, requires Pierre to take into account the fact that he is the creator of it.

This is the impetus for the final crisis of Pierre's *poesis*. In the walk that Pierre, Lucy and Isabel take shortly before their deaths in the prison where Pierre is confined (for killing his cousin Glen), the threesome spontaneously enter into an art exhibition. There, Isabel and Pierre are transfixed by a portrait: "*No. 99. A stranger's head by an unknown hand*" (349). Lucy, meanwhile, has paused before a picture directly across from it, "that sweetest, most

touching but the most awful of all feminine heads," Guido Reni's portrait of Beatrice Cenci. Cenci, long a subject of literature and painting, had apparently been raped by her father, and subsequently killed him; she was executed in 1599.

The stranger's head fascinates Pierre and Isabel because of his uncanny resemblance to Mr. Glendinning. Yet, Pierre is greatly disturbed by it: he does not see his father in it, but only the figure of the chair portrait:

> So that there came to pass a not unremarkable thing: for though both were intensely excited by one object, yet their two minds and memories were thereby directed to entirely different contemplations; while still each, for the time—however unreasonably—might have vaguely supposed the other occupied by one and the same contemplation. Pierre was thinking of the chair portrait: Isabel of the living face. Yet Isabel's fervid exclamations having reference to the living face, were now, as it were, mechanically responded to by Pierre, in syllables having reference to the chair portrait. (352)

As soon as they "share" this moment, Pierre begins to question his relationship with Isabel. He now begins to think that his fascination with Isabel was *not* transcendental and mystical as he thought it was, but rather "purely of an intense procreative enthusiasm:—an enthusiasm no longer so all-potential with him as yore" (353). He realizes that he does not know that Isabel is his sister, and reflects that "Nothing that he saw in her face could he remember seeing in his father's" but only in the chair portrait. Thus:

> The original of this second portrait was as much the father of Isabel as the original of the chair portrait. But perhaps there was no original at all to his second portrait; it might have been a pure fancy piece[.] (353)

Yet without the knowledge that Isabel is his sister, comes the waning of his desire. As a mere orphan, even a beautiful one, she is nothing to Pierre. It was only in the conflating of her beauty with his father that she became an erotic object. With the possibility that Isabel was no longer his sister, Isabel becomes a complete outsider for Pierre, and offers him no possibility of re-uniting his sundered father, and sundered self. Yet this is

only the revelation of what Pierre had realized without the ability to articulate it; it is for this reason that Pierre's marriage yielded to his book. The portrait becomes an image without an original; in their apprehension of it, Pierre and Isabel are each, separately, bounded to the fiction of it, but they are sundered from each other in reality.

The portrait, then, is not an image from reality, but an image of a fiction, a fiction that has become reality. And this fiction which the portrait is an image of, now hangs in the void, answers to nothing but an unyielding, impersonal nature, to which Pierre can now realize that he is subject. One might say that *this* is reflected in the portrait that Lucy looks at, directly across the room. Beatrice Cenci is "a sweetly and seraphically *blonde*…being, double hooded, as it were, by the black crepe of the two most horrible crimes (of one of which she is the object, and of the other the agent) possible to civilized humanity—incest and parricide." (351). The dark "hood" on the blonde woman, We might say offers an image of the figures of the oppressor and oppressed perpetually trading places *under the gaze of a father* disencumbered of his authority: under the gaze of an impersonal, non-benevolent Nature which forever sunders the represented from the representer.

Lucy, putting herself into the place of exile along with Pierre, has become the accomplice to his illegal marriage. The tragedy of the bond between Pierre and Lucy, then, is that it can only occur outside of the system of the father, and outside of the marriage that, fictional or not, he nonetheless ordains: ultimately, the fictional father and the real father, are one.

Ultimately, it is this fictional father that Pierre has murdered, a fictional father with a *real* daughter, who will now avenge his death, in murdering both Pierre and Lucy. Pierre, Lucy and Isabel, each attempting to become the thing that they are symbols *of*, perish as lost symbols.

Ultimately, what they suffer is the inability to *intuit* as themselves; that the interpretive negotiation though life is a symbol of an intuition that is ultimately, not one's own.

XI. LOST SYMBOLS

In the stagecoach that takes Pierre and Isabel, accompanied by Delly Ulver, into the city, where the two will live as a married couple, Pierre finds a pamphlet called "Chronometricals and Horologicals" written by a certain Plotinus Plinlimmon. The pamphlet serves an important function in the novel, not the least of which as mediator between the narrator's narration and Pierre's inability to narrate.

The pamphlet, which delineates between the two categories which together form its title, expounds a version of relativism. The conceit of the pamphlet is that it is impossible to act from an *absolute* apprehension of the whole, when factically, the world can only be experienced from a given perspective. Thus, while Christian doctrine offers Jesus as a "chronometric" being, in practice, the human can only aspire to an "horologic" approximation of his actions. In this way, "in an artificial world like ours…the chronometer, if at all accurate, will pronounce it to be 12 o'clock high noon, when the China local watches say, perhaps, it is 12 o'clock midnight; so the chronometric souls, if in this world true to its great Greenwich in the other, will always, in its so-called intuitions of right and wrong, be contradicting the mere local standards and watchmaker's brains of this earth" (211). As a result, according to Plinlimmon, the human, as horological, is governed by the absolute law of the chronometrical. Nonetheless, in practice, human actions can never achieve chronometrical standards. Thus, "to turn the left cheek if the right be smitten, is

chronometrical; hence no average son of man ever did such a thing" (213). It is incumbent on the average human, then, only to achieve an expression of the absolute that is negotiable in this world, and it is by maintaining the understanding that there is a necessary disparity between absolute law and the human perspective that right conduct can be achieved. Thus, "If a man…abstains from doing downright ill to any man; does his convenient best in a general way to do good to the whole race…than, though all his actions are entirely horologic;—yet such a man need never lastingly despond, because he is sometimes guilty of a minor offense" (214). This elucidation of the relationship between the cosmic and the human is, the pamphlet maintains, not an excuse to ignore the divine law, but rather, must be understood to have the value of a prescription for *maintaining* it: if an horologic soul attempts to act beyond the bonds of the relativity to which he is confined, that is, chronometrically, "he will but array all men's earthly time-keepers against him, and thereby work himself death and woe" (212). It is this, Plinlimmon argues, that the creator intended.

Pierre, significantly, is incapable of understanding the rather simple message of this pamphlet, though it nonetheless fascinates him. The narrator, points to Pierre's inability to understand as an index to its significance to Pierre: "If [a] man chance to light on any other man, or any little treatise, or sermon, which unintendingly, as it were, yet very palpably illustrates to him the intrinsic incorrectness and non-excellence of both the theory and the practice of his life; than that man will—more or less unconsciously—try hard to hold him back from the self-admitted comprehension of a matter which thus condemns him" (209).

What Plinlimmon argues, then, is precisely what Pierre rejects. Plinlimmon's philosophy essentially upholds the institution of the symbol that Pierre seeks to eradicate. Pierre seeks to overthrow the symbol by *becoming* the unity of the symbol and the symbolized; that is, his "marriage" to Isabel is not an *expression* as much as it is an *action*.

Plinlimmon, however, speaks to the impossibility of ever transgressing the barrier of the symbol. It is, to Pierre—and this is perhaps why he cannot understand it—a reminder to Pierre, that he *is* a symbol for the very thing that cannot be symbolized, which is, nonetheless, the very thing that Pierre wants to *express*. It is precisely because Pierre is symbol, and not the thing that the symbol is a symbol of that the book he writes can only manifest as "the bungled one." Vocabulary can only *come* in symbols. Pierre's desire to "gospelize the world anew" fails because it can only be expressed in symbols, whereas Pierre's new gospel is indeed the revelation that we can live our lives *only as symbols*. What this means, then, is that we, as actors, as those beings incarnate in bodies and condemned to the perspective of those bodies, is that we can never into the place of the *narrator*, but rather, must live out our lives only as the products of someone/something *else's* narration. Pierre's bid to become a writer, then, is to stand *outside of this truth in order to say it*. His writing, then, is only another manifestation of his fictional marriage to Isabel. His writing, in fact, is the next manifestation of that failure, the failure to be both narrator and narrated.

It is little wonder, then, that when Pierre encounters Plinlimmon during his tenure at the Church of the Apostles, he will find in Plinlimmon "something latently visible in him which repelled. That something may best be characterized as non-Benevolence. Non-Benevolence seems the best word, for it was neither Malice nor Ill-will; but something passive" (290). Pierre will never speak to Plinlimmon. Plinlimmon's *presence*, which manifests as *distance*, nonetheless bears down on him. Except for the one time that he brushes past Pierre in the corridor, he is seen by Pierre only through two panes of glass. What is most striking about Plinlimmon is his charismatic, but passionless exclusion. His face, characterized by a repose "neither divine nor human" is "a repose of a face by itself

such that "one adequate look at that face conveyed to most philosophical observers a notion of something not before included in their scheme of the universe" (291).

Plinlimmon's character is *comprised* of distance. He is constituted only by seeing and being seen. He appeals to no one, tells no story of his own. Even his writings are not his own writings but transcriptions of his disciples, "bunglingly methodized" (290). He is portrayed as a *ding-an-sich*, a noumenal, all-knowing, impossibly incarnate being, a being without perspective such that "one would have almost said, his very face, the apparently natural glance of his very eye disguised this man" (290). Yet, in his very blankness, he is a reminder to Pierre that someone, some *thing* is watching him, and insofar as this is the case, Pierre's "chronometric" refusal of the symbol, is nonetheless revealed in all its symbolism. In the face's lack of response, Pierre finds a "malicious leer" toward him; he is sure that Plinlimmon knows his secret—that Isabel is not really his wife, that Pierre's search for *truth* is, in fact, only another species of fiction, that Pierre's bid to live a life *beyond* the symbol is really comprised of a covert symbolization which he hides from himself, but which the passionless gaze of Plinlimmon belies.

Plinlimmon, then, stands at the very limit of narration. He is, we might say, the figure of the impersonal *limit* that narration itself presents. Plinlimmon, then, can be understood as the very spirit of impersonal narration; he is the being who stands outside of the story, who has no story to tell on his own, but who serves as the "guarantor" of a narrative. Barely a being, Plinlimmon is a kind of *acteur*,[10] the incarnation of the gap between the reader's need for an overall perspective and the limited perspective of the participants; the illusion, necessary for narration, that no story is being told. Cast into this role *in* the story, he is the counterpart to Pierre, who cannot separate himself enough from the story that he is trying to tell in order to tell it, who refuses to stop *being* enough in order to see.

Between Pierre and Plinlimmon, then, we can see another manifestation of Pierre's sundered father: the one all feeling, the other, the law. Yet Plinlimmon also inhabits as the "unity" of this sundered father, the position of Nature itself. We might also see him, then, as the figure of Coelus, of the sky God, who, incestuously mating with his sister the Earth, creates a progeny which, composed of sky (sight) and earth (body) must suffer the sundering of *seeing and being*. Thus, Pierre is the one who, unceasingly assaults him, an assault which is nonetheless aimed against *himself*, turns out to be the one who is sundered:

> And even thus, there had been born from the organic blended heavenliness and earthliness of Pierre, another mixed, uncertain, heaven-aspiring, but still not wholly earth-emancipated mood: which again, by its terrestrial taint held down to its terrestrial mother, generated there the present doubly incestuous Enceladus within him; so that the present mood of Pierre—that reckless sky-assaulting mood of his, was nevertheless on one side the grandson of the sky. (347)

Plinlimmon, then, is the figure of the thing that the subject cannot get past in its bid to *see* itself; he is the narra*tion* that the narrator must always fall back upon; he is the icon of a fictional sphere that, forever sundered from the body, from experience, forever impersonal, refuses to permit the self to become its own narrator *as* itself. As such, Plinlimmon is indeed the figure of the "I am writing."

The narrator of *Pierre*, then, is horologic to Pierre's chronometricism. Pierre, having no recourse to the symbol, precisely because he *is* the symbol that he is attempting to narrate, is condemned to action without expression. It is the narrator, then, who has effected the reconciliation, who can "chat" where Pierre must remain silent. Pierre aspires to tell the story of the storyteller, without relinquishing his stance as storyteller: as subject and object, he is condemned to be a *symbol*, forever subject to the agency of an impersonal narrator who *symbolizes him*. Pierre's suffering, then, is the suffering of the inability to

transcend the symbol. Cast out of the system into which he was born, and he is the sovereign of the system that he creates; he is denied entry into both.

Plinlimmon's pamphlet is *normalizing*. It is, we might say, an invitation to a relinquishment of a responsibility that can, nonetheless never be assumed. And yet, it is only in the assumption of this responsibility that the very symbolic, that is, fictional structure of the subject can be understood. The problem of course, that can only play out negatively *between* the horologic narrator and the chronometric character, is that the achieving of this realization can only be *expressed* symbolically, that is, in narrative, and it is precisely this that Pierre has denied himself.

It is, then, the inability to unify the observer and the observed—and thus, the very ineluctability of narration itself—that Pierre resists to the end, even as he writes his "mature" work. Pierre's writing becomes not only an indictment of the society which has oppressed him, but an indictment against representation—and thus, writing—itself. Attempting to navigate a circle that has no center, no space, the writing is just a further step along the chain of self-constriction that will ultimately destroy him. Pierre's writing takes his oppression as its subject: but because he, as Pierre Glendinning is already his own oppressor, there is no relief in narration, no possibility for his narration to be received, because his constraints deny the very symbols which the reader would need to be able to understand him:

> [F]ar as any geologist has yet gone down into the world, it is found to consist of nothing but surface stratified on surface. To its axis, the world being nothing but superinduced superficies. By vast pains we mine into the pyramid; by horrible gropings we come to the central room; with joy we espy the sarcophagus; but we lift the lid—and no body is there!—appallingly vacant as vast is the soul of a man! (285).

CHAPTER 3
THE BOOK AS THE BOOK NOT WRITTEN: PROUST, MERLEAU-PONTY AND THE PROBLEM OF CHRONOLOGY

> *Une fois devant son papier, il écrivait ce qu'il ne connaissait pas encore, ce qui l'invitait sous l'image où c'était caché (et qui n'était en quoi que ce soit un symbole) et non ce qui par raisonnement lui aurait paru intelligent et beau.*
> — Proust, *Jean Santeuil*

I. IN THE CONFLATION OF INTUITION AND INTERPRETATION

Characters interpret; readers intuit. We can only fully grasp that which we do not participate in. To participate, to engage in the world is to be absorbed in one's bodily perspective on the world. As constitutent, one can act, but one cannot see. To interpret, then, is to act without access to the whole; to act from out of one's lack of understanding.

To read, is to be absorbed in the whole. Yet it is also to withdraw from the realm of acting, in creating the possibility for vision.

Persons conflate. To interpret is to act without access to the whole, but requires nonetheless the creation of the whole: a whole that in nonetheless not that in which the person lives.

Persons inhabit both the position of the actor and the reader: they must both intuit and interpret. The possibility of one is only available through the possibility of the other. The very fact of a perspective—of space in general— can come about only through the apprehension of the whole, but also through the unavailability of the whole. The whole, then, the ability to intuit, is a requirement for interpretation. In order to see, we must oscillate between the vision that the whole offers, and that of the part that is the *experience* of the world as transcendent. Each modality presents itself both as vision and as blindness.

Each requires a withdrawal from the other. As soon as we intuit, we can no longer be involved: we read, we exit the space that the body defines by its presence. The panorama that the *read* world offers obscures the world, the space of the body as much as it makes it possible.

Through the character in the novel, we isolate the notion of interpretation, by putting ourselves in the place of intuition. We do so by offering ourselves the perspective that is *put out of play*. In the act of reading, intuition and interpretation become artificially delineated.

Truth is conflation. In living, we suffer the impoverishment of each of these perspectives, their incompatibility with the other, and their inability *in fact* to be delineated from each other. Having separated intuition and interpretation, we must return to their original conflation: the fact that being conscious, being a subject, entails a sight that we do not have in our everyday being, and that, nonetheless is *there* as what governs our intentions and our actions

Pierre, as we have seen, suffers this conflation. He cannot turn himself into an *intuiting character*; he cannot see and be at the same time; he suffers the existential empirically through engaging in a writing that perpetually excludes him, and in which he believes he can be included. Pierre's desire is to *annihilate* the symbolic, destroy the fictional sphere. His desire, thus, unlike his narrator, is *outside-directed.*

In Husserl's terminology, then, Pierre suffers the inability to effect the epoché, the phenomenological reduction. He cannot isolate pure consciousness in order to *see* himself: that is, he cannot *stop* being himself from being in order to see himself. This "stopping onself from being" is precisely the ability to see. The phenomenological reduction is a perspective from outside life.

With Marcel Proust's *A la recherche du temps perdu*, we are offered another ideology on this split between being and seeing. Pierre's suffering becomes, for Proust's narrator, the *celebration* of a fiction that is forever unreconcilable with lived experience. Fiction, for Proust's narrator, becomes the possibility of a desire held endlessly open: it is a taking joy in the *labor* of experience before it becomes, in its inevitable fulfillment, a *product* of desire. Thus, Pierre's perpetual alienation becomes for Proust's narrator, "*l'adoration perpétuelle*."

If it is Husserl who offers us the notion of intuition in its purity, we turn now to the phenomenological philosophy of Maurice Merleau-Ponty, which we might say, operates, like Proust, in the joy of its failure. Working within the field that Husserl defined by the phenomenological reduction and the *lebenswelt*, Merleau-Ponty, nevertheless, founds his philosophy on the impossibility of effecting a complete phenomenological reduction. If, for Merleau-Ponty, the project of arriving at pure consciousness must always end in failure, it is nonetheless this "failure" that to us becomes the world of form and time, of space and body, the very possibility of lived experience:

> The most important lesson which the reduction teaches us is the impossibility of a complete reduction. If we were absolute mind, the reduction would present no problem. But since, on the contrary, we are in the world, since indeed our reflections are carried out in the temporal flux on the which we are trying to seize…there is no thought which embraces all our thought. (*Phenomenology of Perception* xv).

In moving then, from Pierre's suffering to the joy of the narrator of *A la recherche du temps perdu*, we come to understand that the notion that it is possible to isolate consciousness from the object of consciousness is an oppressive one: it is an ideology, that, as we have seen, results in asphyxiation for a consciousness that can never divest itself of its empirical body. We might say that both Proust and Merleau-Ponty, then, celebrate the *freedom* from

this oppression, in the conscious recognition that pure consciousness can never be isolated and experienced.

For Merleau-Ponty, and for Proust, then, we find that while it is indeed possible to *loosen* our absorption in the world, it is a loosening that is performed by the body itself, and that is experienced *by* the body, rather than a pure consciousness; thus, rather than attempting to impossibly force a consciousness which is anchored in the body through the infinitely small eye of the epoché's needle, Merleau-Ponty's flexible notion of the epoché allows the fissure in consciousness to take the very form of the body: consciousness for Merleau-Ponty exists as the flesh between the subject and the object, a flesh that gives birth to the very notion of subject and object as a "style" for seeing, rather than as absolute concepts.

> The transcendence of the thing compels us to say that it is plenitude only by being inexhaustible, that is, by not being all actual under the look—but it promises this total actuality, since it is *there*… (*Visible* 191)

II. STRANGER/SELF

There is a pivotal moment in *Le Côté de Guermantes*[1] which prefigures the threefold revelation that the narrator will experience at the Guermantes matinée when he will finally realize his "vocation" as a writer. The narrator is desperately bored. He has just spent the previous few hours cooped up in a restaurant on a beautiful spring day, having had to endure an extremely unpleasant lunch with his friend Robert de Saint-Loup and Saint-Loup's mistress Rachel, the former prostitute whom the narrator remembered from earlier days. Rachel had provoked Saint-Loup to wrath by staring at the head-waiter, and the couple had spent their lunch squabbling until Saint-Loup was called away with a message from an unexpected visitor. Shortly after, the narrator is called into a private room in the back of the

restaurant, where he rejoins the couple. They have, however, seemingly resolved their dispute, and are embracing on a sofa, drinking champagne. Though the narrator is still irritated at first, Rachel offers him a glass of champagne, a Turkish cigarette, and a rose for his bodice. He is momentarily appeased, only to reflect again upon the false light of his idyll:

> Je me dis alors: «Je n'ai pas trop à regretter ma journée; ces heures passées auprès de cette jeune femme ne sont pas perdues puisque par elle j'ai, chose gracieuse et qu'on ne peut assez payer, une rose, une cigarette parfumée, une coupe de champagne.» Je me le disais parce qu'il me semblait que c'était douer d'un caractère esthétique, et par là justifier, sauver ces heures d'ennui. Peut-être aurais-je dû penser que le besoin même que j'éprouvais d'une raison qui me consolât de mon ennui, suffisait à prouver que je ne ressentais rien d'esthétique. (II:468)[2]

While Robert and Rachel stare into each other's eyes, the narrator catches his own glance in a mirror, and in an instant, his boredom rises up into an apotheosis that transposes his alienation into reverie. The passage continues:

> Le cabinet où se trouvait Saint-Loup était petit, mais la glace unique qui le décorait était de telle sorte qu'elle semblait en réfléchir une trentaine d'autres, le long d'une perspective infinie; et l'ampoule électrique placée au sommet du cadre devait le soir, quand elle était allumée, suivie de la procession d'une trentaine de reflets pareils à elle-même, donner au buveur, même solitaire, l'idée que l'espace autour de lui se multipliait en même temps que ses sensations exaltées par l'ivresse et qu'enfermé seul dans ce petit réduit, il régnait pourtant sur quelque chose de bien plus étendu, en sa courbe indéfinie et lumineuse, qu'une allée du «Jardin de Paris». Or, étant alors à ce moment-là ce buveur, tout d'un coup, le cherchant dans la glace, je l'aperçus, hideux, inconnu, qui me regardait. La joie de l'ivresse était plus forte que le dégoût; par gaieté ou bravade, je lui adressai un sourire auquel il répondit. Et je me sentais tellement sous l'empire éphémère et puissant de la minute où les sensations sont si fortes que je ne sais si ma seule tristesse ne fut pas de penser que le moi affreux que je venais d'apercevoir, était peut-être à son dernier jour et que je ne rencontrerais plus jamais cet étranger dans le cours de ma vie.[3] (II:469)

The narrator's aesthetic idyll is interrupted by the apprehension of its falseness. Yet it is this very falseness that becomes transposed into real reverie in the act of recognizing it as false. The falseness that he experiences is no longer his own, but, as the flower of his boredom, reveals itself to be a falseness inherent in being itself. The mirror "was of such a

kind that it *seemed* to reflect a score of others in an endless vista": the text however, makes it unequivocally clear that there is only *one* mirror, when two would be needed to generate the effect. It is the narrator himself then, that serves in the role of the second mirror: the narrator as observer, looking at the narrator as observed. In this evocation of the impossibly reflecting single mirror, The narrator's inner landscape and his outer one become flattened into a screen of narration. The narrator's *image*, face to face with the narrator as observer, withholds itself, because the one thing that the narrator as observer cannot see, is exactly himself as observer. Yet when the narrator as the observed looks *back* on the narrator as the observer, turning the *observer* into the observed, the effect is intoxicating. Observed and observer have switched places, the observer still no more visible than before. But having seen himself from outside himself, the narrator is no longer able to locate himself "in" himself. In the oscillation between observer and observed, his self-contemplation *seems* to reflect an infinity of selves, none of which are exactly himself *or* not himself. The smile that the narrator offers to his image returns back, and in that unlocalizable smile, the smile that oscillates between the observer and the observed, The narrator ceases to identify himself as either; each is constantly being refashioned into the other, made object by the other, in a dynamic, that, like mirrors reflecting each other, is endless. And thus, the "moi affreux" that the narrator sees in the mirror is the very condition for his being a self at all: the self is a stranger, and this *is* the experience of the self. The structure of the mirror then, reflects the endless attempt and the endless failure to see the self, because each time the self attempts to glimpse itself, the observer must withdraw; it can only see the observer by turning the observer into the observed, and thus, observer and observed never occupy the same "place."

It is only through this understanding of an original alienation that inhabits and bifurcates the self, that the narrator will be able to become a writer. It is only by turning

oneself into a stranger, only by alienating oneself from one's "proper place" that one can *see*. The regularity of the world bears "un prosaisme qui sert de grand réservoir de poésie à celui qui les traverse sans y avoir vécu," the narrator says of his Aunt Léonie's rooms in Combray (I:49)[4] in one of the many instances when he casts himself as an outsider to a world which is deeply familiar to him. The question that remains unresolved in these early reveries, and that will become the issue of the novel itself, is that of the identity of this anonymous stranger that the narrator finds necessary to posit, and what the relationship of this stranger is to the narrator that is absorbed in the sensuously enveloping world of childhood in Combray. Likewise, when the narrator visits Doncières, he experiences a newly awakened capacity for perception. Everything he encounters offers new possibilities for aesthetic appreciation and he is sent into reverie over "la douceur anticipé d'habitudes que je n'avais pas contractées encore" (II:86)[5]. Everything seems to suggest the possibility of someone else's routine life, a life that is not his own, and it is only because it is not his own that he can see it, and thus, only because of *this* does it have meaning.

In order to experience oneself *qua* self then, one must be a stranger to oneself, for as soon as one identifies with oneself, there is no longer anything to see: there is only the blind regularity of habit, of a life lived without awareness. Yet paradoxically, without this blind absorption in habits, there would be nothing to see at all! If one were to say that *À la recherche* had a plot, it would perhaps not be "Marcel becomes a writer,"[6] but rather, "the battle between the absorption of habit and the alienation of sight manifests in the activity of writing."

We witness the beginnings of this battle in the scene of the madeleine, where the absorbed, habitual self fights against the newly awakened sense of the self as a stranger, and only in this tension is there the possibility of the revelation that transpires. The

understanding that the self wins in the battle then, is not simply the recovery of lost memories, but rather, is that the self *creates* itself, animates itself, through the reappropriation of the habitual material out of which it is formed. The self must turn that form back upon itself, make it speak in a way that it has never spoken before, because it, in its absorbed, habitual existence, never had a voice. Thus, the narrator during the madeleine scene:

> Grave incertitude, toutes les fois que l'esprit se sent dépassé par lui-même; quand lui, le chercheur, est tout ensemble le pays obscur où il doit chercher et où tout son bagage ne lui sera de rien. Chercher? pas seulement: créer. Il est en face de quelque chose qui n'est pas encore et que seul il peut réaliser, puis faire entrer dans sa lumière. (1:45`)[7]

What distinguishes the experience of the madeleine from the insight that the narrator experiences with Saint-Loup and Rachel (which, if one were to follow a strict chronology of the story should have happened *before* the madeleine) is that whereas with the taste of the madeleine, the narrator experiences alienation as distance in time so that the sense of profundity and meaning comes in the sudden availability of the past in the present, here, the narrator, so engrossed in the idea of his own futility as a being, takes this very futility *of the present* as the material by which he will understand himself as meaningful. Thus, the understanding of alienation as the condition for meaning comes not only through the realization of the discrepancy between a past and a present self, but also through an alienation which inhabits the very experience of the present. It is not simply the past then that must be reconfigured and re-experienced through the distance of a newly discovered perspective, but rather, the present moment itself must be "re-experienced" at the same time as the originary "experience," and it is only through these two modes of experience that experience becomes meaningful at all. Thus, here the object of narration takes place concurrently with the narration itself. Ultimately, the narrator comes to realize that one cannot suspend the work of time in order to narrate it; this clash, this non-identity and

simultaneity of "observing time" and "observer time" is the foundation for the experience of time, and thus, the experience of self. It is this that ultimately becomes responsible for the conflation of narrator and narrated, so emblematic of the Proustian style. Observer and observed continually oscillate so that narration itself comes to be understood as a screen that yields only inasmuch as it withholds. Lost Time in *À la recherche* only exists as narration, that is, as the holding open of the space between observer and observed. The possibility of recovering Lost Time then, is at the same time the certainty of its unavailability, of its withdrawal into the narration of the present.

Maurice Merleau-Ponty offers a similar understanding: throughout the trajectory of his philosophy, the world is construed as apprehendable because there is distance between the observer and the observed, a distance that is founded in the experience of the self as non-identical to itself. In a motif that appears throughout *The Visible and the Invisible*, Merleau-Ponty describes this experience in terms of a "short-circuit" that results when the self attempts to be both the sensor and the sensed:

> If my left hand is touching my right hand, and if I should suddenly wish to apprehend with my right hand the work of my left hand as it touches, this reflection of the body upon itself always miscarries at the last moment: the moment I feel my left hand with my right hand, I correspondingly cease touching my right hand with my left hand. But this last-minute failure does not drain all truth from that presentiment I had of being able to touch touching: my body does not perceive, but it is as if it were built around the perception that dawns through it; through its whole internal arrangement, its sensory-motor circuits, the return ways that control and release movements, it is, as it were, prepared for a self-perception, even though it is never itself that is perceived nor itself that perceives. (9)

The hand that touches the hand is either absorbed in touching or in being touched, but it cannot do both at the same time. Yet this non-coincidence, this failure of the body to have a direct experience of itself experiencing itself, becomes, in a reversal that we might think of as Proustian, the experience of the body. The hand that touches, even though it is

composed of the same material as the object of its touching, cannot simultaneously be the object as long as it is the agent that touches. Yet it is only because the touching and the touched are made of the same material, only because there is a "double belongingness to the order of the 'object' and the order of the 'subject'" (137), that there can be anything like an experience of touch to begin with. With this, the notion of subject and object itself must be reconfigured. That which touches must be able to become that which is touched. Subject and object then, become two modalities of the same phenomenon, and the experience—the very possibility of the world—depends on this ability for the faculty of perception to become recast as that which is perceptible—each looking back at the reflection of the other, each experiencing the other from outside itself, because it is this "outside" observing this "inside," which is the self. Thus, if the moi/étranger hideux that the narrator sees in the mirror is "à son dernier jour," it is because he is perpetually on the cusp of becoming the observer of itself, of realizing its condition; but at the last minute, just at the point of contact between observer and observed, he relinquishes his function as observer: he is "prepared for a self-perception, even though it is never itself that is perceived nor itself that perceives." The observer takes its place at a distance, and the observed, unhappy, self remains ensconced in its false world as the material which comprises sight, and as a word in the language of the narrator's momentary intoxication.

If we extend this notion now to the act of narration that produces *À la recherche du temps perdu*, we can see that not only is the issue of the subject and the object, the seeker and the sought, an issue *inside* Proust's novel, but that it is also the very *structure* of the novel. If the self's failure to experience itself is exactly the self's ability to narrate the self, than the story that we read must be the story of a failure. At the same time then, we must understand meaning itself, the very condition for the possibility of anything like a story, to be grounded

in this failure. The story that *À la recherche* tells then, is the story of this incompossibility between the narrator and the narrated; but the resolution of the story is not in the joining of these two figures, but rather, in the realization of the truth of their incompossibility, which manifests *as writing*. If the observer of the "étranger hideux" is forever alienated from the stranger he observes, and if this relation between the observer and the stranger is understood as the self, then the observer remains forever estranged from his own story *so that he can tell it*. Ultimately, the inaccessibility of the narrator to that which he narrates, but nonetheless, the identification of the narrator with the narrated, is the paradox that generates *À la recherche*.

Just as the narrator's unavailability to himself defines his experience as a self, so too the *book's* unavailability to itself, defines the experience of the book. If the threefold revelation during the Guermantes matinée is that which enables the possibility of writing, than the narrative that transpires up to the point of this revelation must already be a product of these instantaneous realizations. These realizations then, take their place alongside the narrative that they elicit. Time and the instant then, are made to oscillate because, in inhabiting the same narrative level, each excludes the other. The logic that this produces is the same that allows for the reduplication of images in a single mirror: the inner and outer landscapes have become conflated, and the narrator is implicated in that which he narrates, creating a structure which is the *story* of this incompossibility.

"The discourse that acknowledges itself to be discourse merely conceals its property as discourse" writes Tzvetan Todorov (39). If there is, as the narrator says, a "loi inévitable qui veut qu'on ne puisse imaginer que ce qui est absent"(IV:450)[8], we can think of this ineluctability as the rigorous, unimpeachable barrier between the narrator and that which he or she narrates; the narrator, in attempting to approach him- or herself as narrator, can only create more narration, leaving the narrator no less "outside" his narration then he was

before. If we think of this law not only as a law of narrative, but as the very law which governs being itself, then we can say that the book *performs* this law *in its very resistance of it*. It is the space of this non-coincidence of narrator and narrated, of experience and he who experiences, that will tie together theme, plot, and structure in the same way that Mademoiselle de Saint-Loup at the end of the book brings together the Guermantes and Méséglise ways.

The two "selves" that make up the experience of self, taken individually are nothing. The self absorbed in its experience—whether that of taking tea with an aunt as a child, or drinking champagne and smoking cigarettes in boredom as a young man—is not in itself an experience unless there is someone there who is not "there" to experience it, in accord with the "loi inevitable." But this being that is not there, is not nowhere: this is the essence of Merleau-Ponty's notion of the reversibility of the seer and the seen. The self who is there and the self who is not there do not exist as codified beings, each playing out their allotted role in the drama of experience. Rather, it is only through the oscillation, the reversibility of the self that is there with the self that observes, that experience can be experienced. The "nowhere" and the "there" trade places, each inhabiting the other, like the unlocalizable smile that oscillates from mirror to mirror, so that ultimately, the experience of the self is itself unlocalizable in either space or time. The narrative must lie outside of itself, never able to coincide with itself, so that it may do the work of its narration. As such, if the book is to be the story of the narrator qua narrator, then the book that we read serves as proxy for the book that has not yet been written, and that will never be written. The book then, announces the silence of the unwritten book by taking its place, and it is in the sharing of this silence, this sharing of the unavailable, that narrator and narrated, and ultimately reader and writer coincide: the book that we do not read, is the same book that the narrator does

not write. This is a coincidence in unavailability that is in full compliance with the law that separates narrator from narrated and observer from observed.

I will, in this chapter, then, attempt to show, using Merleau-Ponty's critique of Neo-Kantian philosophies of reflection, and his articulation of a philosophy of, in our terminology, intuition, that *À la recherche* extends this notion of the non-convergence of the narrator and the narrated to the condition of being itself, but that it does so *not solely within the frame of the novel*. Rather, what I will attempt to show is that the project of *À la recherche* is one of infiltrating frames, of contaminating narrative levels, so that ultimately, the non-convergence of narrator and narrated is understood as a general failure of being, a failure that is definitive for what being "is." This, I will argue, is not only the theme of the novel, but what the novel performs. As such, I will argue that *À la recherche* takes the possibility of its own chronology as the material by which it will demonstrate that being cannot be experienced chronologically, because the experience of time is always the descent into an absorption that precludes the possibility of understanding oneself as meaningful. I will begin by discussing Merleau-Ponty's critique of Kantian reflection, which he finds cannot adequately account for the experience of the subject that reflects, and which leads to his formulation of the notion of the "flesh." I will then demonstrate how these ideas can be applied to essential themes within *À la recherche*, before finally showing that in the impossibility of imposing a chronological structure on the novel, *À la recherche* undermines narrative structure in order to offer an alternative to perception understood as the confrontation of an object by a subject. Ultimately, I will argue that the book must incorporate the silence of the unwritten book into its structure, so that the meaning of *À la recherche* is in the *holding open* of the distance between the complete book which we do not read, and the situation of being perpetually incomplete which is the book that we read.

III. THE SPEAKER AND THE SPOKEN

"To the extent that what I say has meaning," Merleau-Ponty writes, "I am a different 'other' for myself when I am speaking; and to the extent that I understand, I no longer know who is speaking and who is listening" (*Signs* 97). In his discussion of language in *The Phenomenology of Perception*, Merleau-Ponty distinguishes between the "speaking word" and the "spoken word" (229). The spoken word is that "acquired fortune" which serves as the foundation for all expression in language. As a cultural artifact, the spoken word bears no intentionality in itself, but is rather the repository of meanings which have gathered throughout the history of language, and which then have the possibility of becoming animated through their creative reappropriation in the act of speaking. This creative act transgresses the boundaries of language, and thus extends it, creating new possibilities for expression. But once having done so, this creativity assumes its place in the institution of language, and thus, falls back into the spoken, as material to be reappropriated again in a subsequent creative act. Thus, "speech always comes into play against a background of speech; it is always only a fold in the immense fabric of language" (*Signs* 42). Language, then, is a "moving equilibrium" (*Signs* 87) constantly transgressing its own limits and creating new possibilities for itself. This instability is essential for the possibility of anything like language at all. Merleau-Ponty describes this using the Husserlian notion of *Stiftung*, institutionalization or sedimentation,

> to designate first of all the unlimited fecundity of each present which, precisely because it is singular and passes, can never stop having been and thus being universally; but above all to designate that fecundity of the products of a culture which continue to have value after their appearance and which open a field of investigations in which they perpetually come to life again. (*Signs* 59)

This perpetually coming to life is not simply the "awakening" of that which lies dormant waiting for some power of animation from outside to come and imbue it with the spirit of life again. Rather, the creative appropriation and reconfiguration of that which has been sedimented must be understood to be a process of the sedimented material itself rising up out of its own sedimentation. Language, Merleau-Ponty argues, must be understood as that which *folds back upon itself*; the speaker rises up out of the spoken and speaks itself by appropriating its own material *as if it were another*. The frontier between the speaking and the spoken is continually displaced in the endless process of language recreating itself out of its own sediment. Yet despite this continual shifting of frontiers, the frontier itself remains ineluctably unbreachable. If we can understand the act of speaking as an appropriating of the gap between the speaker-self and the spoken-self, each foray of the speaking into the spoken destabilizes and extends the possibilities of language, but instantaneously, the gap between speaker and spoken re-asserts itself in the new configuration, in obedience, as it were, to the law that forbids the intrusion of the narrator into the narrated.

Yet what is the case for language, Merleau-Ponty argues, is also the case for perception in general. If the dynamic between the speaking and the spoken is determinative for the possibility of the self expressing itself, there is a similar dynamic of sedimentation that makes possible my ability to have a perception, to recognize something *as* something in relation to myself as the observer. Only because I share the possibility of being perceived with that which I perceive is it possible for me to perceive at all. If speech is the appropriation of that which is "already spoken," so too is perception the appropriation of that which is "already perceived," the rising up of the passivity of the perceived into the activity of perception.

In the *Phenomenology of Perception*, Merleau-Ponty characterizes this confrontation of the self with the world it perceives in terms of an essential anonymity in the act of perception: When I perceive an object in the world, I cannot perceive it *as* myself, because it is this very "myself" that is formed from out of my perception of the world. If I were to say that "I" perceive, that my perceptions are "mine," than I would need to posit another "me," for whom these perceptions are "meant." The notion of an "I" that looks out upon the world and apprehends it would be nonsensical because this "I" would either have to locate itself impossibly outside of existence, or it would have to be understood as "a little man within the man," who would be obliged to transfer the subject of his perceptions to yet another little man, thus regressing endlessly (*Phenomenology of Perception* 275). Rather, in order to account for the possibility of expression, of meaning, the self must reverse this regressive movement, by taking responsibility for this regress, by understanding that *there is no subject of perception*. Thus far, Merleau-Ponty follows Husserl's notion of the epoché, in the contention that consciousness, if it is to be apprehended as consciousness, must be reduced to the sphere of experience. Merleau-Ponty, however, does not allow for the possibility of a pure sphere of intuition, precisely because the very notion of intuition is always conflated with the one who engages in the act of intuition, of performing the epoché.[9] For Merleau-Ponty, then, it is precisely the impossibility of effecting the epoché, the impossibility of generating even a *fictional* transcendental vantage point, that generates the very possibility of the experience of being in space and in time. The fictional perspective would then have to be accounted for as an object of consciousness. Thus, the self must understand itself as *already implicated*, and thus, conflated, in that which it sees, as vision that turns back on itself, so that if the self understands itself as being outside that which it perceives, it is only because this

being-outside is the manner in which the world makes its presence perceptible at all. In a working note to *The Visible and the Invisible*, Merleau-Ponty writes:

> We have to pass from the thing (spatial or temporal) as identity, to the thing (spatial or temporal) as difference, i.e. as transcendence, i.e. as always 'behind', beyond, far off… the present itself is not an absolute coincidence without transcendence. (195)

This inability to posit a singular subject as the self becomes the condition of being a self, the condition of being. The self then, can never fully inhabit itself. The self's relation to the world is not one of a subject relating to an object, Merleau-Ponty argues. Rather, if there is an essential transcendentality in the relation of the perceiver to that which it perceives, this transcendentality does not have an ontological foundation, but is rather, the form, the style, in which perception occurs when the self comes face to face with the world as the sedimented possibilities of itself. The thing only can be seen because we share our being with it, and transcendentality is the "style" of this sharing.

Just as the spoken becomes the speaking, so too does the perception become the act of perceiving, taking its form in the essentially unstable movement of the experience of existing. Merleau-Ponty's appropriation of the Saussurian understanding of language as essentially diacritical becomes the pivot where the idea of the anonymity of perception is understood as an essential difference that founds the experience of self. This originary difference, which becomes the possibility of perception, will, in the development of Merleau-Ponty's philosophy, manifest in the notion of the flesh, of the reversibility of the perceiver and the perceived, so that proximity is understood as distance. It is this that is Merleau-Ponty's resolution to the impossibility of performing the phenomenological reduction: rather, the *exclusion* itself that the phenomenological reduction creates becomes, like everything else, an object of experience, which must then be accounted for. Just as in Saussurian linguistics, where meaning occurs not out of a direct correlation between the

signifier and the signified, but rather, out of the signified's contextualization among other signifieds, so too the self as a material being in the world, only understands itself in the context of other material. It is the differential play between opaque substances that generates experience. There is then, no direct experience of the self as subject, because "subjectivity" is a product of this differential relation. To have an experience of oneself then, is to engage in a relation of difference; to understand oneself as existing in a "diacritical" relationship between one's own materiality—whether of the body or of speech—and the materiality that one perceives.

> The visible things about us rest in themselves, and their natural being is so full that it seems to envelop their perceived being, as if our perception of them were formed within them. But if I express this experience by saying that the things are in their place and that we fuse with them, I immediately make the experience itself impossible: for in the measure that the thing is approached, I cease to be; in the measure that I am, there is no thing. (*Visible* 123)

Only as long as there is distance, and thus, difference, is perception, and thus self-perception possible. The inability to "be" oneself then, is the condition of being: one is always rising up before oneself as the sedimented, opaque, "already-perceived." Experience then, is the perpetual confrontation with the sedimented opacity of existence: it is not the opacity of things themselves, but rather, the narration, the story of this opacity, that is the foundation of all language and all perception, a narration that in turn becomes opaque the moment it is narrated, so that the self, in constantly reconfiguring itself, constantly lies elsewhere.

If the "chronometric" Pierre, in Melville's *Pierre or the ambiguities* refuses to accept the possibility of this eternal absence from the self, the narrator of *A la recherche* will make it the very guarantor of his existence. The moments of insight that the narrator experiences at various points throughout *À la recherche*—the madeleine, the hideous self, the matinée—are

those moments of reconfiguration when the self understands that perpetual alienation is the truth of existence. In these instantaneous revelations, the narrator is propelled out of his habitual, absorbed self, and thus acquires the possibility of "re-experiencing" (in its paradoxical, originary sense) this self from a distance, a distance that is nonetheless the self. With his newly found perspective, a perspective that does not come from outside himself, but rather, that arises from the depths of the self into visibility in the seeing of the self as an other, a stranger, the narrator now has a vocabulary with which he can narrate his experience of existing. This narration is not simply a standing alongside oneself, reciting what one is feeling "inside." Rather, the vocabulary that the narrator discovers is an *originary* vocabulary, and narration itself *becomes* sight; his language becomes a prosthesis that "sees" where "he" cannot. This "vocabulary" then, inhabits the gap between the observer and the observed as the story of this gap, and as the only possibility for the self to apprehend itself, this diacritical, prosthetic "sight" becomes sight itself, a sight that always circumscribes something unseeable. Merleau-Ponty writes:

> This act of expression—this joining through transcendence of the linguistic meaning of speech and the signification it intends—is not for us speaking subjects a second order operation we supposedly have recourse to only in order to communicate our thoughts to others, but our own taking possession or acquisition of significations which otherwise are present to us only in a muffled way. *The reason why the thematization of the signified does not precede speech is that it is the result of it.* (*Signs* 91, my italics)

Thus, with the smile in the mirror, the repository of experiences that have gathered up silently and furtively over time, here rise up into *meaning*; the act of making the gesture is experienced both actively and passively, as both speaking and spoken language. The act of perceiving himself as an already "spoken" or constituted being then, is simultaneously the act of "speaking" or constituting himself. Yet at the same time, it is only this non-coincidence of constituting and constituted that allows for an experience of the self at all.

Thus, just as the narrator's smile to his "hideous self" oscillates back and forth between observer and observed, and is ultimately unlocatable in either, likewise, narration becomes the originary experience of a self that could never otherwise have been experienced at all, that only comes into being in the act of narration. At the moment when the narrator is confronted with his smile *and* his act of smiling, the sediment of all that is "the narrator" folds back upon itself; the smile is both the culmination of the repository of experiences that the self is—its image—and at the same time, is the activation of this sediment, its transposition into an active self-constitution. This is only possible because the gesture which the narrator observes is of the same material as the gesture which the narrator executes: the same confronting itself as an other. This movement, this straining of the book against itself, the hideous stranger/self perpetually on its last legs, that is, perpetually at the point of becoming the narrator but never capable of completing the circuit, is what holds the space of the book open, and makes writing a possibility.

IV. TOWARDS A SUBJECT X

In the midst of his "courtship" of Gilberte in *Du côté chez Swann,* the narrator's Aunt Léonie dies, and he becomes the beneficiary of, among other things, an oriental vase. This inheritance comes just at the right time: the narrator is running out of money, and is worried that he will no longer be able to afford the lavish bouquets of flowers that he sends everyday to Gilberte. He takes the vase to an antique dealer, and expecting a thousand Francs, receives ten thousand. Exulting in the luxurious and exotic flowers he can now have at his disposal to send to Gilberte, he decides to pay her a surprise visit. In the cab on the way however, he glimpses her, walking alongside a man on the Champs-Elysées. It does not take

much time before all ten thousand francs are spent—at the brothel to which he had recently been introduced by his friend Bloch.

Many years and some 3000 pages later, when Gilberte and the narrator meet again, Gilberte tells the narrator that the "man" that she was walking beside that day on the Champs-Elysées was really Léa—a lesbian actress whom the narrator suspected of being Albertine's lover—in disguise.

In order to assimilate this revelation, the reader is forced to reconfigure the entire narrative that has transpired up to this point so as to reconcile the "man" on the Champs-Elysées in *Swann* with the lesbian in drag of *Time Regained.* Before Albertine, before homosexuality had become an issue in *À la recherche*, the reader would have had no way to contextualize the "man" as a woman. While certainly, the scene in *Du côté de chez Swann* at Montjouvain where the narrator spies on Mademoiselle Vinteuil and her lover constitutes the first instance in which homosexuality becomes an issue in the narrative, it nonetheless only serves as a seed that does not bear its fruit until the very beginning of *Sodom et Gomorrhe*: only when homosexuality had become a constituent in the "logic" of the narrator's loves, could it have meaning. Thus, the reader is forced to reconfigure the past in terms of the logic of the present. Like the Freudian understanding of the dream as that which continually generates its "plot" along a chain of association, rather than as the teleological unfolding of something that was already present to begin with and need only be "narrated," the logic of *À la recherche*, we might say, is associative and metonymic, rather than causal and syllogistic. Each development in the narrator's experience and understanding of the world requires the novel to take on a new equilibrium; homosexuality has become part of the "sediment" of the narrative, and thus, if the past is to be re-experienced, it can only happen through the lens of homosexuality.[10] Thus, it could be argued, Gilberte was indeed walking alongside a man on

the Champs-Elysées in *Swann,* and that it is only in *Time Regained*, that the man becomes a woman in disguise.[11]

Just as the narrator reconfigures his understanding of himself by taking the narrated sediment as the material which will become his narrative, so too do the events in the narrative reconfigure themselves in order to adjust to this new equilibrium. To the reader expecting a conventional system of novelistic plot development, the effect may be jarring: rather than preconfiguring the events that will take place through the convention that we call "foreshadowing," thereby assuring the reader that the author is "in control," that he or she will lead the reader through the ravaged landscape of the plot, picking up each fragment piece by piece until by the end, the entirety has been restored to the configuration that it always "was," here the reader is forced to reconfigure the plot from the position of whatever narrative present that one finds oneself in. There is no reassurance, other than the pure physicality of the back cover of the book, that there will be any resolution at all.

In order to understand this, we must realize that if the plot of *À la recherche* can indeed be summarized as, "the battle between the absorption of habit and the alienation of sight manifests in the activity of writing," than the logic of the novel would not be the teleological unfolding toward a resolution; rather, it is *writing* that is the resolution. But writing for the narrator, is exactly that which inhabits and embodies the *inability* to traverse the distance between narrator and narrated. Thus, if every object of desire—Gilberte, Odette, the Duchesse de Guermantes, Albertine—only serves as sediment for every subsequent act of desire (or the reverse)[12], the act of writing comes about only because of the realization that "living apart" (IV:464)[13] is the experience of life. Writing, as the essence of alienation, the holding open of the space between the narrator and the narrated, manifests itself in the novel as truth itself. Writing is the perpetual distancing of the object of desire,

so that the object of desire, in the impossibility of fulfilling that desire, takes form as writing. Writing, as the resolution of the novel than, *thwarts* the normative expectation that a novel will have a resolution, because a novel that is yet to be written must forever withhold the possibility of its being resolved. Thus, *À la recherche* draws the *inside* of the novel *beyond its own borders*, and into the silence of the non-coincidence of the novel that we *do* read with the novel that we can never read, and for which the novel that we read must forever serve as proxy.

The narrator, in *À la recherche,* can never shake off his presence, can never narrate the past *as* past, because the past is only the reconfiguration of its own sediment into the expression of the present. Yet paradoxically, every attempt on the part of the narrator to locate himself can only be effected by seeing the narrator *in* the past. This double movement, in which the narrator's past can never be occulted because it always manifests as the "material" of the present, but at the same time in which the narrator remains unable to shake off the present, is the trajectory that the novel takes, and it is not a direct one for the very reason that no *goal* presents itself. It is, then, as if every time something unexpected occurs, every time a past is revised to adhere to the newly experienced present, we feel the movement of time. It is a movement however, that does not follow a linear course, but rather, one that modifies itself to the constraints of the present. Yet paradoxically, because the reader can only read—and the writer can only write—in a movement forward, this dialectical movement of the past and the present must be transposed into linear form, and the reader experiences this as inconsistency, or, the reader learns to recognize that this linear movement is only the style in which events must be portrayed. Merleau-Ponty writes:

> Being…cannot be contemplated from without and within simultaneously, but must be effectively traversed. In this transition, the stages passed through are not simply passed, like the segment of the road I have traveled; they have called for or required

> the present stages and precisely what is new and disconcerting in them. The past stages continue therefore to be the present stages—which also means that they are retroactively modified by them. Hence there is a question here not of a thought that follows a pre-established route, but of a thought that itself traces its own course, that finds itself by advancing, that makes its own way, and thus proves that the way is practicable. (*Visible* 90)

The narrator cannot pre-exist himself because it is always from the perspective of the present that anything like narration can be possible. Yet at the same time, the narrator must *always* pre-exist himself, because every attempt to find the narrator only results in the sedimented narrative coming into being as the present. It is this paradox that the narrator confronts when he sees his reflection in the mirror, and recognizes that he is a stranger to himself, a stranger who, in never being able to join the self, *is* the self, and it is the realization of this paradox as writing that will become the resolution, a resolution that will thread the plot of the novel through the needle of its structure.

Proust then, thwarts the expectation of the reader of fiction through a reconfiguring, and thus, "fictionalizing" of the past. The problem Proust poses for the reader then, is one of reconciling these layers of fiction. In a conventional work of fiction, for the fiction to "work," the reader is compelled to accept the space of the trajectory of the fiction as "reality," and this "reality" defines the space that the frame of the fiction opens up. The compulsion to believe in a work of fiction, to accept the world that it posits, is the very possibility of anything like fiction at all. In *À la recherche* however, there is a further complication: if we step into the novel as fiction and make it, for the space of the reading, our "reality," then the forever ungraspable reality of the narrator's past *within this fiction* can only be understood as a fiction that is at odds with the fiction of *À la recherche*: the narrator's account of his past can only produce a narrative that is composed in the key of the (fictional) present, yet one that can never rejoin this present and thus coincide with the narrative that comprises *À la recherche*. Each movement forward in narration only produces a reconfigured

past, but without the certainty of a "real" past, the present remains elusive. If the past is a fiction that the present produces, and the present is only understood through the narration of the past, the reader is left with no stable ground in which to negotiate his or her way through the story, because there is no perspective that is not tainted by being *already* a fiction, a fiction that can never become the reader's "reality". The origin of the narrator's narrating is always obscured by the exigency of the present. Thus, the reader, along with the narrator, is forced to "find itself by advancing," when this advancing is only a further obscuring of the past in the continual imposition of the present upon it. Yet this essential instability, this inability to locate the narrator through the layers of fiction that comprise his narration of himself, is what makes *À la recherche À la recherche.* The novel, through the medium of fiction, takes the compulsion to engage in fiction as its issue.

The problem is indeed that "l'esprit se sent dépassé par lui-même; quand lui, le chercheur, est tout ensemble le pays obscur où il doit chercher." The self, the narrator begins to realize when he eats the madeleine, is a product of its own fictionalizing; yet it is a fictionalizing that is originary. "tout son bagage ne lui sera de rien" because each time the self attempts to glimpse itself, it must necessarily exclude the observer from its range of vision. The narrator is always the passive, sedimented product of the past shaped by a present from which it must perpetually be excluded. Yet the "real" past of the narrator is forever unavailable, and can only manifest as a fiction structured by present. The question that must be addressed is that of the relation of this "fiction" to this "real" and unavailable narrator. If the narrator is "en face de quelque chose qui n'est pas encore et que seul il peut réaliser," and if that which is made actual is exactly the narrator, than fiction and reality are no longer easily distinguishable.

We might begin to understand the unavailability of the "real" past then, not as something that might be made available if there were some ur-narrator who could have access to it, but rather, through Merleau-Ponty's notion of the invisible as an ineluctable constituent of all that we can see.

In *The Visible and the Invisible*, Merleau-Ponty engages in a critique of idealist philosophies that attempt to resolve the problem of the mind's relation to the world by reducing the world to the sphere of the mind. If everything exists as pure immanence, both the perceiver and the objects of its perceptions become understood as being of the same "material," thereby allowing for the possibility of intentionality, of the subject of one's perceptions acting upon, engaging with, what it perceives, and thus, with the world. Merleau-Ponty remains in accord with the notion that the perceiver and the perceived must not be understood as external to each other: only if seer and seen are composed of the same material would it be possible for the narrator to formulate his narration from out of his own sedimented existence. However, he argues that the solution of the reduction to the sphere of immanence would not allow for the possibility of an interrogation, an understanding of the perceiver. While such a notion can account for intentionality, for the possibility of a subject interacting with its world, the problem remains essentially that which we see in the structure of *À la recherche*: if the observer is already implicated in the observed, every time the observer attempts to see that which it observes, it ends up only seeing the products of its own consciousness. To attempt to get beyond consciousness then, does not, cannot account for the attempt itself: "the reflection recuperates everything except itself as an effort of recuperation, it clarifies everything except its own role" (*Visible* 33). Thus, if we try to return to the Champs-Elysées to discover who was "actually" there with Gilberte, we find only the sedimented experience of the narrator rising up to assume control of the narrative.

Philosophies of reflection then, in order to get around the self's inability to see *beyond* itself, *do* posit something like an ur-narrator, who would be able to see what the reflecting human being in his or her physical body would be unable to see. One then would no longer rely on one's senses to understand what is "there" because the senses could only produce the illusion of an external world, where subject and object are heterogeneous, in much the same way that a work of fiction could not speak of its own origin without this "origin" only generating further absorption in the fiction. The mind, absorbed in its "perceptual faith" then, is like a character in a work of fiction who is unable to be aware of its fictional origin. Faith in perception then, would be a delusion, a constant movement *away* from, an obscuring *of* the origin of the subject, a continual generating of narrative.

> The reflection cannot feign to unravel the same thread that the mind would first have woven, to be the mind returning to itself within me, when by definition it is I who reflect. The reflection must appear to itself as a progression toward a subject X, an appeal to a subject X. (*Visible* 34)

It is only the ur-narrator that can see *this* then, that being that can stand outside the "fiction" of being in order to be able to see it. Yet such an ur-narrator would have to stand in the same relation to being as a narrator would to that which he or she narrates, or as author to the novel that he or she writes; and if the law that forbids the entry of the narrator into the narrated is indeed ineluctable, how then, could anything like an origin be glimpsed at all? The Kantian solution is of course the positing of an epistemological capability that lies beyond the sphere of perceptibility. Only if there was some faculty of "perception" that could "see" beyond the senses that are absorbed in the perceptions of the consciousness that generates them could there be the possibility of any real knowledge of being. Thus, the activity of self-interrogation is transmuted from that of the senses to the faculties of reason; reason, in projecting itself beyond the capability of the senses, acts *as if* it were the senses,

and makes available the knowledge that the senses *would* produce *if* they were capable of transcending their physical limitations. Thus, the perceptual world serves only to point to a reality that is more real than perception could ever yield; analysis then, acts as a prosthesis for the senses, and the world becomes understood not by way of the things that we see, but through the ideas that we cannot see. In this way, the hypothetical replaces the real:

> From now on everything seems clear; the blend of dogmatism and scepticism, the confused convictions of the perceptual faith, are called into question. I no longer think I see with my eyes things exterior to myself who sees them: they are exterior only to my body, not to my thought, which soars over it as well as them.
> (*Visible* 30)

Thus, if, when the seeker "est tout ensemble le pays obscur où il doit chercher et où tout son bagage ne lui sera de rien," we arrive at an impasse, the idealist solution is to begin by accepting the possibility that no real knowledge can be gained by the senses, because in essence, the senses produce a fiction that we cannot help but be absorbed in.

Schelling, as we have seen, arrives at his own version of the madeleine: "In the series of synthetic acts that have so far been derived," he writes, "we have encountered none whereby the self might have arrived directly at a consciousness of its own activity" (134). Any attempt by the self to see itself would *already* presuppose a self; the self, as soon as it would seem to come into view, would be immediately obstructed by the self that is doing the seeing:

> Since the intelligence, so long as it is intuitant, is one with the intuited, and in no way distinct therefrom, it will be unable to arrive at any intuition of itself through the products until it has separated *itself* from the *products*. (134)

Yet how to distinguish between the product—that which is seen—and the act of seeing? As long as these two aspects of the mind remain homogeneous, nothing will be seen, nothing will see; the narrative will continue only forward, toward "subject X." Each

time we attempt to see, our seeing is corrupted by its already being that which is seen. Schelling's escape from this regress was to make the artificial distinction between "act" and "product." One pronounces the distinction, and in the same gesture, *creates* it. It is in this way, he proposes that one can look conceptually at what is occurring in the intelligence as if we were able to separate ourselves from it. To abstract then, is to create a model, to make a picture, of something that in itself has no basis in reality, that stands for what we represent to ourselves *as* ourselves. All perception then, would be, in essence, a fiction: the imaginative representation of an original, unapproachable unity of observer and observed.

Yet if, for Schelling, consciousness is necessarily a *negative* experience, where what we call seeing is constituted only out of our inability to really see, for Merleau-Ponty, the very fact of sight, perception, is made possible only by an *original invisibility* that is the result of the *fact* of the non-conjoining of the seer with the seen. The world then, for Merleau-Ponty, is the world because it is constituted by this original asymptoticity. Subject and object then, are essentially composed of the same material, but this "material" is not the mind, and thus, does not escape the opacity and impenetrability that characterizes substance. If to Schelling, real knowledge can only be achieved through an artificial, secondary process, a process which can only yield the outlines, the idea, of an inaccessible but primordial unity of observer and observed, for Merleau-Ponty, there is no original unity, and the secondary process which comes to terms with a de facto asymptoticity, is *itself* primordial. If all perception is a fiction then, it is an *originary* fiction. There could be no recourse to an original unity of subject and object because every time an original unity would be posited, there would need to be posited along with it, an observer *of* this original unity, thus perpetuating an endless regress:

> It is essential to the reflective analysis that it start from a *de facto* situation. If it did not from the first take as given the true idea, the internal adequation of my thought with what I think, or the thought in act of the world, it should have to suspend every "I think" upon an "I think that I think," and this upon an "I think that I think that I think," and so on… (*Visible* 44)

Thus, Merleau-Ponty argues, as long as the reflection persists in maintaining that there is a world that is already there, but simply unavailable for inspection, so long as reflection maintains that "in order to constitute the world, it is necessary to have a notion of the world as preconstituted" (34), it will remain unable to account for the "blind spot" that is exactly the point where the self begins to reflect. Rather, what becomes necessary, Merleau-Ponty argues, is not the positing of some impossible being that can see where we cannot, but rather an interrogation of the very opacity that prevents the possibility of going back behind the reflecting self. The depth of the inaccessible origin must be propelled onto the surface, as an originary invisibility which is forever intertwined with the visible world. "Vision," Merleau-Ponty writes, "is not a certain mode of thought or presence to itself; it is the means given me for being absent from myself, for being present at the fission of Being from the inside—the fission at whose termination and not before, I came back to myself" (*Primacy* 186). The notion of depth must be rethought so as to be understood as that which remains on the same narrative plane, in the same modality, as the surface, so that we arrive at something like a "surface of depth," where depth becomes not the obscuring of what might be seen if we had eyes to see it, but an originary invisibility that inhabits the visible. If the notion of subject and object is a necessary fiction that renders the world visible, then it is through the plunging *into* this fiction without going behind it, and thus, interrogating the very *style* in which the world manifests as world, that will produce the possibility of meaning. What we understand then, as proximity, is only made possible through the very fact of

distance and unavailability. It is this founding distance between observer and observed that Merleau-Ponty calls the flesh:

> The thickness of the flesh between the seer and the thing is constitutive for the thing of its visibility as for the seer of his corporality; it is not an obstacle between them, it is their means of communication. It is for this reason that I am at the heart of the visible and that I am far from it. (*Visible* 135)

Flesh then, is the substance of existence. It is the commonality that we share with everything else in the world that allows seer and seen to participate in the *poesis* that constitutes being. But the paradox of this commonality is that it is not so much that which is substantial that is shared as it is the limitation inherent in substance. Only because this is so, only because both seer and seen share this limiting substancehood, can it be possible for anything to be apprehended: "It is the zero of pressure between two solids that make them adhere to one another" (148).

Flesh, for Merleau-Ponty, is an "ultimate notion" (140). Because there is no originary unity out of which consciousness arises in order to see, the flesh becomes the place where seeing and not-seeing, the visible and the invisible, collide. The invisible is then understood as the necessary distance which is the very possibility of anything being seen at all, and thus, the distance between narrated and narrator is exactly the flesh that enables the narration. Flesh arises out of an originary privation and becomes seeing: there is nothing *to* see until it is seen. That which is seen becomes the style of the seer, or rather, a style that is created through the conjoining of the two through the "medium" of distance, through the "coiling over of the visible upon the seeing body" (146). There is a "pact" between the things of the world and me

> according to which I lend them my body in order that they inscribe upon it and give me their resemblance, this fold, this central cavity of the visible which is my vision, these two mirror arrangements of the seeing and the visible, the touching and the

> touched, for a close-bound system that I count on, define a vision in general and a constant style of visibility from which I cannot detach myself. (146)

Existence as flesh renders isolated existence impossible, because the inherent limitation of existence as substance *requires* participation. The possibility of self-perception requires entering into a "pact" with the self, but such a pact could be effected only because the self is not immediately available to itself. The vocabulary that the narrator wins from out of the confrontation with his sedimented self renders into sight that which was previously unavailable not because it was covered over and only just rediscovered, but because it never existed: the confrontation with the self *creates* time as narrative, and the narrative arises only because the self is not present to itself. One narrates the self because one cannot see the self, and the narration becomes sight; but it is a sight that bears the burden of this absence, so that the very act of seeing must produce in its visibility an ineluctable invisibility, the self as existing in time. "In every focusing movement," Merleau-Ponty writes, "my body unites present, past and future, it secretes time, or rather it becomes that location in nature where, for the first time, events, instead of pushing each other into the realm of being, project round the present a double horizon of past and future and acquire a historical significance" (*Phenomenology of Perception* 239). Merleau-Ponty may have acquired the metaphor of secretion from Proust, who, in one of the famous last sentences of the novel, uses it to express the intertwining of the self who continues to exist in time alongside the time that it "makes":

> J'éprouvais un sentiment de fatigue et d'effroi à sentir que tout ce temps si long non seulement avait, sans une interruption, été vécu, pensé, sécrété par moi, qu'il était ma vie, qu'il était moi-même, mais encore que j'avais à toute minute à le maintenir attaché à moi, qu'il supportait, moi, juché à son sommet vertigineux, que je ne pouvais me mouvoir sans se déplacer comme je le pouvais avec lui. (IV:624)[14]

V. CHRONOLOGY AND SELF

There have been many attempts to account for the strange logic of *À la recherche*, to understand how the book the narrator *will* write stands in relation to the book that we read. One such hypothesis that, as Joshua Landy shows, has been embraced by critics as diverse as Roger Shattuck, Paul de Man, and Jean Rousset, is that of the gradual convergence of narrator and hero, so that finally, in the words of Louis Martin-Chauffier, the narrator invites the hero "to sit down next to him, so that together they may write the words 'The End'" (qtd Landy 113). Seen in this way, the structure of *À la recherche* would be similar to that of the *Odyssey*. Odysseus, after having completed the reciting of the tale of his adventures from Troy, returns from the narrated past to the narrative present: feasting and storytelling on the island of Phaecia. Once his story is complete, and the reader has caught up with him, Odysseus and reader will forge ahead to Ithaca, rejoin Telemachus, kill the suitors, and triumphantly end the story. We have already had to reject this hypothesis for the very reason that, unlike the *Odyssey*, there is no muse who can "catch" the narrative and continue it. The narrator of *A la recherche* never adopts a transcendental perspective with regard to the story he tells; there is no narrator waiting at the end for the hero to finish his journey; *there is no outside to the story*. The narrator is himself generated *out* of a refashioning of the past from the point of view of the present. Nothing stands still, and every new addition to the narrative reconfigures the entirety of the situation.

Another popular account is that of the circular structure: something along the lines of Eliot's "to arrive where we started / And know the place for the first time" (208). Understood in this way, the narrator, armed with the realization that permits him to write, begins the novel that we have just finished reading. While the regressive logic that such a hypothesis evokes is certainly mesmerizing, it nonetheless defers *endlessly* the problem of the

writing of the book, and thus, cannot account for writing as an *issue* in the book. The fullness that a closed circle generates would be at odds with the notion of writing as that which holds *open* the empty space between the self and the self, and makes possible anything like narration at all.

In contrast to these hypotheses, Landy offers an interesting alternative. For Landy, the book that the narrator writes is a completely separate entity from *À la recherche* that we read. Landy distinguishes between the narrator's usage of the word *récit* for the narrative that he acknowledges that he is engaging in, and is what we read, and the words *oeuvre* and *livre* for the book that he *will* begin to write once he leaves the Guermantes matinée. Thus, for Landy, "what [the narrator] has already written is not a novel but only (from his point of view) a memoir" which can be classed alongside the other writings—articles, translations, and minor literary efforts—that the narrator engages in in *À la recherche* (40).[15] Even without addressing the fact that the narrator sometimes uses *oeuvre* and *livre* where *récit* is to be expected and vice versa (which Landy readily acknowledges, calling such usage "misplaced"), such a position remains unsatisfying because it too defers indefinitely the act of writing. If the realization that generates the book is that the self is a stranger to itself, that it cannot inhabit itself, and that writing *is* this, then the simple separation of *récit* from *livre* does not permit the possibility of a writing that folds back on itself, of an intertwining of narrator and hero as the two constituents of a self that meet only in the possibility of writing. In addition, to call *À la recherche* the narrator's memoir would certainly understate the immensity of the project, an immensity that would render ridiculous the narrator's constant contention that he is unable to write.

Yet Landy's hypothesis is nonetheless valuable in its forging a distinction between the book that we read and the book that the narrator writes, a distinction that, I contend,

when understood properly, *is* crucial to understanding the structure of the novel. For Landy, "there is a straightforward logical reason" for such a distinction: "If we are dealing with a single work," he writes, "then it would end up the case that Marcel had at once and the same moment both written and not written it" (38), thus, "The book we have in our hands cannot, therefore, be the novel Marcel is about to write" (40). Yet this, I would like to argue, is *exactly* the case. We can understand this paradox though, only if we posit this not-writing, *not* as the possibility of a book that might yet be written, but rather, as the impossibility of its ever being written, of its manifesting *in form* as the novel that we read. Landy's reliance on a conventional logic of causality and teleology causes him to eschew the possibility that it is exactly such a normative logic that *À la recherche* takes as its very issue. In *À la recherche* then, the not-written, as both the fictional novel that the narrator does not write, and the real novel that we do not read converge in the invisible novel that *À la recherche* both is and is not. In this unwritten book, narrator and narrated, *and* reader and writer share a fictional space; a space that cannot be called fiction anymore because this space is exactly the experience of reality, or rather, it is a space that calls into question the very distinction between fiction and reality.

The depth that the novel covers over in its coming-into-being as form is an ineluctable depth which makes possible the novel that we read; the novel exhibits this invisible depth, brings it to the surface *as* depth, for an experience that is precisely calibrated to confound reasoning based on causality, but *without violating its laws*. It is rather, the underside of causality that the narrator explores here. It is a logic that is designed to account for itself by taking the very impossibility of its project *as* a constituent of its structure. Merleau-Ponty himself sees this as an essential attribute of Proust: "No one has gone further than Proust," he writes, "in fixing the relations between the visible and the invisible, in

describing an idea that is not the contrary of the sensible, that is its lining and its depth" (*Visible* 149).

If the narrator comes to understand himself as a self only through seeing himself outside himself, and if it is this that generates the narrative of *À la recherche,* than the structure of *À la recherche* folds back on itself, generating *itself* by seeing itself as an other: the invisible book looking at the book, and the book returning the gaze. *À la recherche* defies conventional logic only to uphold a more primordial logic: the impossibility of a subject entering into his own *vision* is exactly what makes fiction possible. *À la recherche,* in taking *poesis* as its issue, reveals the essential intertwinedness of fiction and reality, in demonstrating that the style that the world takes in manifesting as the fiction of subject and object is not to be confused with its ontological foundation. This transcendental style is what we see, yet we see it on its last legs, forever on the cusp of disintegrating under the weight of the invisible, but never quite doing so.

If the route towards understanding the self as self is always one that must move *forward*, generating more narrative, *À la recherche* destabilizes the solidity of this narrative, or rather, reveals the essential instability of all narrative, all perception in general. Before I begin to address the particular characteristics of the unstable structure of *À la recherche,* it will first be necessary to examine some of the strategies that *À la recherche* uses within the narrative to problematize the normative view of a world composed of subject and object, of a narrator and narrated. We thus turn to an examination of how invisibility manifests in the act of narration.

VI. THE OBSERVER IN THE PICTURE: SURFACE AND DEPTH

When a reader becomes absorbed in a work of fiction, one is forced to dissemble, to generate the fiction that there is no reader. Yet, as we have seen, in this process, the reader himself is not effaced completely; though we may "lose" ourselves in a novel, there is always someone there who is observing this being-lost, who contextualizes this absorption into the life of the empirical reader, and who translates the inarticulate experience of this absorption into vocabulary. This absorption can occur *only* because the reader uses his or her own material existence in a body and as a language-user to *deny* this materiality, to cancel it out. This is the technology of fiction: it exploits the very fact that things appear to the seer as outside, that the style of the world is that of transcendentality. The physical reader finds his- or her empirical self placed before his or her non-material, absorbed counterpart; the sense of very possibility of distinguishing the fictional realm from reality comes about only out of this dissonance between the two realms.

Yet for the very reason that there must be, for this reverie to occur, an observer outside and an absorbed being inside, the promise that the fiction offers the self can never be fulfilled; the self, the reader, can never enter—as himself—into the state of absorption; it is the same ineluctable law that keeps the narrator and the narrated apart, "loi inévitable qui veut qu'on ne puisse imaginer que ce qui est absent." We see the confrontation with this law over and over in *À la recherche*: the narrator, for example, in front of a photograph of the Duchesse de Guermantes, can "Pour la première fois regarder a loisir ce gras de joue, ce tournant de nuque, ce coin de sourcil," exactly because there is no live Duchesse there to obscure this inspection (II:379)[16]. Even when the narrator nostalgically imagines a reunion with the dead Albertine, he first must imagine her *not there*: "D'abord, je n'aurais rien vu, j'aurais l'émotion de croire qu'elle avait manqué au rendez-vous, quand tout à coup j'eusse

vu se détacher du mur noir une de ses chères robes grises, ses yeux souriants qui m'avaient aperçu" (IV:314)[17]. It is this, ultimately, that determines, that in the universe of *À la recherche* everything desired must ultimately remain unfulfilled, that is, as desire in its pure state. Only when an object of desire withholds itself can there be the possibility of narration; part of the self must remain outside of the absorption in order to experience it and to *tell* it. That this was an issue for Proust from very early on can be seen in a letter that he writes at age sixteen to his philosophy teacher Alphonse Darlu at the Lycée Condorcet:

> When I read a poem by Leconte de Lisle, for instance, all the time that I am enjoying the infinite sensual delights as I did in the past, the other *I* is watching me, enjoying observing the causes of my pleasure, seeing a certain connection in them between myself and the work, and thus destroying the certainty of the work's *own* beauty, above all it immediately starts imagining different prerequisites for beauty, and finally kills virtually all of my enjoyment. (qtd. Tadié, *Marcel Proust* 80)

It will take Proust some years to learn how to make use of this murdering of enjoyment, to understand that the death of enjoyment is the very possibility for enjoyment itself. He will make this the essence of his aesthetic. What is so singular about *À la recherche* is that it incorporates the alienated observer *into* the narrative. Whereas in a more conventional novel, it is the *reader* who assumes this bifurcated position, who watches his or her own dissolution in the act of being absorbed in the fiction that he or she reads, in *À la recherche*, this bifurcation also takes place *inside* the text: the narrator then, must be his own reader, precisely because it is this dialectic between observer and absorbed that generates the movement of the novel. The narrator as reader stands in between desire and the object of desire, holding open the space so that it can be seen (and ultimately written). Thus, the narrator as reader "catches" the regressive trajectory of a self who must always locate himself elsewhere, and institutes this regress as a figure in the text. The reader is "a little man within the man," but is, at the same time, the *understanding* that this "little man" can never catch up

to the self. The understanding itself can never manifest as a figure in the text: it is the invisible. Thus, if speech disguises itself as the things of which it speaks of in the manner of "showing," there must always be someone there to see this illusion, and thus, who must stand perpetually outside. The compulsion to believe in speech as "showing" then, is no different than the compulsion to believe in the things of the world as objects forever outside the self. "Like the flesh of the visible," Merleau-Ponty writes, "speech is a total part of the significations, like it, speech is a relation to Being through a being, and like it, it is narcissistic, eroticized, endowed with a natural magic that attracts the other significations into its web, as the body feels the world in feeling itself" (*Visible* 118). To interrogate how language shows itself to us, then, would be to enter into this compulsion, to see who sees it. Proust brings the observer into fiction, reproducing in fiction the same bifurcation that the reader experiences in reading.

Yet narrator-as-reader, and narrator as absorbed in life do not inhabit rigorously delineated spaces; rather, we could say, the tension between these two "entities," the attempt to delineate them, *is* the story of *À la recherche*. At the beginning of *Le temps retrouvé*, for example, the narrator, having returned to Combray, describes his room:

> Toute la journée, dans cette demeure un peu trop campagne qui n'avait l'air que d'un lieu de sieste entre deux promenades ou pendant l'averse, une de ces demeures où chaque salon a l'air d'un cabinet de verdure et où, sur la tenture des chambres, les roses du jardin dans l'une, les oiseaux des arbres dans l'autre, vous ont rejoints et vous tiennent compagnie, isolés du monde—car c'étaient de vieilles tentures où chaque rose était assez séparée pour qu'on eût pu, si elle avait été vivante, la cueillir, chaque oiseau le mettre en cage et l'apprivoiser, sans rien de ces grandes décorations des chambres d'aujourd'hui où sur un fond d'argent, tous les pommiers de Normandie sont venus se profiler en style japonais pour halluciner les heures que vous passez au lit—, toute la journée, je la passais dan ma chambre qui donnait sur les belles verdures du parc et les lilas de l'entrée, les feuilles vertes des grands arbres au bord de l'eau, étincelants de soleil, et la forêt de Méséglise. Je ne regardais en somme tout cela avec plaisir que parce que je me disais: «C'est joli d'avoir tant de verdure dans la fenêtre de ma chambre. », jusqu'au moment où, dans la vaste tableau verdoyant, je reconnus, peint lui au contraire en bleu sombre, simplement parce qu'il

était plus loin, le clocher de l'église de Combray. Non pas une figuration de ce clocher, ce clocher lui-même, qui, mettant ainsi sous mes yeux la distance des lieues et des années, était venu, au milieu de la lumineuse verdure et d'un tout autre ton, si sombre qu'il paraissait presque seulement dessiné, s'inscrire dans le carreau de ma fenêtre. (IV:275)[18]

A superficial reading of this passage might lead the reader to believe that the wallpaper that the narrator describes is the wallpaper of the house he finds himself in. Given the detail with which it is described and the amount of space devoted to it, this is what we would expect. But instead, we find that the wallpaper belongs to an imagined house. The sentence begins with an adverbial phrase followed by a prepositional phrase, in turn followed by the subordinate clause beginning with "qui." By the time that we finish this clause, we expect to be presented with the subject of the sentence. But rather, we are presented with yet another subordinate clause which not only continues to defer the subject, but also displaces the entire scene from that of the present house to that of an imaginary house. This begins with an elocution that the reader of Proust knows well: "une de ces demeures où…" The description of the imaginary house then, takes control of the sentence, spanning more than a hundred words. The bulk of the description is, in a yet further deferring of the subject, contained in apposition between two dashes, and describes the verisimilitudinous wallpaper, which seems to be the narrator's real interest here. Only after this description of the wallpaper comes to a close at the second dash does the main thread of the sentence pick up again with "toute la journée,"—a reprisal of the beginning of the sentence which the reader has no doubt forgotten—before finally announcing the subject and the main verb of the sentence: "*je* la *passais*." This brings us back from the imagined house to the real one, where we spend the rest of the sentence reading about the greenery that the narrator sees out the window.

There are several curious aspects to this sentence. First, it is this imaginary wallpaper in an imaginary house upon which the narrator lavishes his description, rather than upon that of the real house that he is in, which does not receive more than the ambivalent epithet "un peu trop campagne." What is of interest in the wallpaper is its eerie verisimilitude: "chaque rose était assez séparée pour qu'on eût pu, si elle avait été vivante, la cueillir." Yet this eerie quality is compounded by the fact that what is being described so meticulously does not properly exist, so that the artifice of the wallpaper becomes conflated with the artifice of the description. Just as the wallpaper is remarkable because it simulates "real life," while remaining artificial, so too is the *description* remarkable because it too is an artifice that nonetheless possesses the quality of reality. The description borrows from that which it describes, creating a meticulous but imaginary set of circumstances, unsettling in its seeming to have commandeered the description we were about to receive of the "real" house to which the narrator has returned.

The effect is still further heightened by the use of the imperfect form of the verb "to be' in describing the wallpaper—"C'étaient de vieilles tentures"—rather than the conditional tense that we would expect, so that there is no clear delineation between the mode in which the real room is described, also in the imperfect—"qui n'avait l'air que…"—and that of the imaginary one. Real and imaginary then, become "flattened" onto the same narrative plane. At the same time, *within* the description, the same process is occurring in the wallpaper: the wallpaper is made to oscillate between two and three dimensions; the apples that you can pick, the birds that you can put in a cage, offer themselves impossibly into three-dimensional space, so that the possibility of depth and the ineluctable lack of it creates a strange shimmering effect, the depth of the real giving way to the flatness of artifice which it seems to continually reject without being wholly successful This effect then, occurs on two levels:

at the level of the thematic, in the wallpaper that oscillates between two and three dimensions; as well as at the level of structure, in the oscillation of the verb tenses that express narrative mood. In both cases, neither modality is assimilable to the other. Depth hovers on the surface, and the impossibility of the conjoining of modalities here furtively brings impossibility as a constituent in the narrative. The effect here is similar to that which Genette calls "floating": the clash of narrative modalities when an event that is supposed to describe a general or recurring state of being is combined with the description of a uniquely occurring event.[19] Here we can extend this notion: if the description borrows its strangeness from that which it describes, we could then say that the structure of the novel "floats" upon its content.

When we emerge from out of the description of the imaginary house and back into the real one, we do not receive a description of the room that the narrator inhabits. Rather, what we find is that if there was a place in the sentence that was reserved for the description of the room, it is the description of the imaginary room that occupies that place. We never do learn what the real room that the narrator is in looks like (although the paragraph does end with a short description of a different sitting room in the house); rather, the sentence moves immediately to what the narrator can see from out the window of his real (but to us, invisible) room. Yet once again, we find that the real cannot remain simply real: what the narrator sees out the window is described as a "vast verdant picture" flattened against the window! Thus, in this sentence, real and artificial continually trade places: the real interior is only described through the vehicle of an imaginary interior, a description which obscures the real interior. Yet the imaginary interior takes the form of an artificial exterior, which then gives way to the description of the real exterior which, in turn, becomes artificial.

In the midst of this oscillation between the real and the artificial, the narrator, looking out the window, says that he receives pleasure from this scene only because it is nice to be able to see so much greenery from his bedroom window. This "pleasure" of course, should be immediately suspect: it is the same dubious aestheticizing that we have already seen when the narrator accepted the rose, cigarette and champagne from Rachel. However confounded the artificial and the real become in the play of the narrator's description, they still, thus far have remained under the narrator's control. Yet as the sentence progresses, the narrator himself becomes implicated in this play: he finds that he is no longer able to identify himself as a single entity. In order for him to experience anything like pleasure, he must *narrate* his pleasure to himself, *tell* himself that he is experiencing pleasure. It is exactly this unsatisfactory quality of "telling" that so irks Henry James and his followers; the narrator finds that the poor quality of his absorption does not permit his perception of the world to "tell itself"; he cannot reduce his self-consciousness to a state of transparency, and thus, pleasure can only come linguistically, through the *artificial* generation of narrative—"How nice to be able to see so much greenery from my bedroom window"—and thus, through the positing of an imaginary other who can receive this narrative, and who can be compelled to believe what the narrator himself cannot. Let us call this imaginary other a "proto-reader." Because the narrator continues to entertain the possibility of entering *into* this alienated self, he remains in despair. Only when the proto-reader becomes a real reader, only when the narrator realizes that his alienation is ineluctable, because the condition of life is perpetual alienation, can he transform it into exultation. Until then, the narrator who is narrated remains, like the philosophers of reflection that Merleau-Ponty critiques, deluded by the possibility that there is an original unity of self to which he can return.

The narrator remains, it seems, unaware that there is no pleasure in his "pleasure" until the steeple of Combray intrudes itself upon the picture that he is looking at. This intrusion does not destroy the picture itself, but renders it *un*pleasant. It remains a figure *in* the picture, "peint lui au contraire en bleu sombre, simplement parce qu'il était plus loin." Yet without a pause, this painted steeple becomes "Non pas une figuration de ce clocher, ce clocher lui-même, qui, mettant ainsi sous mes yeux la distance des lieues et des années, était venu, au milieu de la lumineuse verdure." The steeple then, destroys the picture, threatens the possibility of anything like pleasure, if indeed pleasure is only a picture of pleasure, the indicating to someone *else* that what is there is pleasant. As long as there is no steeple, the narrator can stare out at the greenery and piece together a narrative of its beauty, a beauty that he cannot experience. The verdure is all visibility, and no depth. The steeple however, introduces depth into the picture: the leagues and years in visible form are *the narrator's* leagues and years. The picture then, is no longer something one can simply look at without seeing oneself already inscribed in it, and thus, all the lack of pleasure that characterizes the narrator's alienation now becomes a figure *in* this picture. The verdure no longer appears as an object to a subject because the narrator sees himself incarnated in existence as flesh. The steeple destroys the picture not by piercing itself through its flat screen, but by remaining real *in* the picture: it cuts through the fiction that separates fiction from "reality." The promise that the imaginary wallpaper with its nearly real apples and birds then, is here fulfilled in the "picture" of the steeple, though this fulfillment is not what it was thought to be. Reality becomes nothing more than a fiction that we cannot step outside of; one that we must take as real because it *is* real. The picture that the narrator sees, rises up before him as a picture*, with its depth painted on the surface.* The "tone so colorless" is *the unseeable look of the seer* inscribed in the picture. If the verdure that the narrator sees in the window is the *sign* of

pleasure, the steeple, is the appropriation of this sign, the transforming it into a sign of reality. But this is possible exactly because the sign of pleasure is an empty sign. But this emptiness is again not what it was thought to be. It is being that is empty: being as the sign of itself.

This realization is by no means limited to this moment. In the well-known telephone scene in *Guermantes*, for example, the first thing the narrator hears when his grandmother answers the telephone is not her voice, but rather, the voice of sound itself:

> Et aussitôt que notre appel a retenti, dans la nuit pleine d'apparitions sur laquelle nos oreilles s'ouvrent seules, un bruit léger—un bruit abstrait—celui de la distance supprimée—et la voix de l'être cher s'adresse à nous… (II:432)[20]

The "abstract sound" and the sound of the grandmother's voice are physically co-extensive. Yet in the act of the recognition of the voice, the first thing that the narrator hears is that which occurs before sound: it is the distance that sound attempts to fill. The narrator hears, in that first utterance of his grandmother, the sound of the necessity of sound, the machinery of his own hearing. The narrator's perception of the steeple operates similarly. It is not the steeple itself that he sees, but rather, distance incarnated, which takes the *style* of the steeple. The hearing of the "sound of distance" then on the telephone, and the seeing of the "picture of distance" as the steeple, are those instances when the narrator confronts the "flesh" of the perceptible. In doing so, he realizes that there can be no other narrator that can see what he cannot; the "abstract" sound then, is the sound of this not seeing, an original privation which is nature itself. Nature requires *telling* to circumvent its emptiness.[21]

When the narrator, in *Le temps retrouvé,* returns to Paris by train after his second stay in a sanatorium, he feels increasingly constrained by his inability to take pleasure in experience, and his narration, his *telling* of the world to himself becomes more and more explicit: "'Arbres, pensais-je, vous n'avez plus rien à me dire, mon coeur refroidi ne vous

entend plus…c'est avec froideur, avec ennui que mes yeux constatent la ligne qui sépare votre front lumineux de votre tronc d'ombre" (IV:433)[22]. He notices the "les lentilles d'or et d'orange dont il criblait les fenêtres d'une maison," (IV:434) but he is left bereft of any emotion. Not only does he despair of his ability to feel the world as he did when he was younger, he sees in this the indication that he has no talent for literature: "Si j'ai jamais pu me croire poète, je sais maintenant que je ne le suis pas." (IV:433)[23]. If there is irony in describing, in such poetic terms, the inability to compose poetry, it is thus far, lost on the narrator.

Yet as if in compensation for the narrator's inability to feel, the imaginary interlocutor—the proto-reader—takes on an increasingly important role: it becomes the locus of feeling that is unavailable to "the narrator" himself: "[P]ar acquit de conscience, je me signalais à moi-même comme à quelqu'un qui m'eût accompagné et qui eût capable d'en tirer plus de plaisir que moi, les reflets de feu dans les vitres et la transparence rose de la maison" (IV:434). The imaginary interlocutor however, is no less bereft than "the narrator" is: "Mais le compagnon à qui j'avais fait constater ces effets curieux était d'une nature moins enthousiaste sans doute que beaucoup de gens bien disposés qu'une telle vue ravit, car il avait pris connaissance de ces couleurs sans aucune espèce d'allégresse." (IV:434)[24].

But out of this lacuna between perception and the pleasure that it produces, comes the possibility of writing. If the narrator has not yet begun to write, and complains of his inability to do so, he nevertheless "forgets" this and begins to characterize this very inability, in a farce that the narrator shares with the reader at the expense of the hero, *as* writing:

> Si j'avais vraiment une âme d'artiste, quel plaisir n'éprouverais-je pas devant ce rideau d'arbres éclairé par le soleil couchant, devant ces petites fleurs du talus qui se haussent presque jusqu'au marchepied du wagon, dont je pourrais compter les pétales, et dont je me garderais bien de décrire la couleur comme feraient tant de

> bons lettrés, car peut-on espérer transmettre au lecteur un plaisir qu'on n'a pas ressenti? (IV.434)[25]

Here the reader becomes a figure in the narrative: the regressive "little man within the man," in taking its place in the text so as to "catch" the impossibility of perception by bearing the figure of this impossibility. The reader comes just at the moment in which the narrator finds it impossible to "read," and with the reader, the writer likewise becomes a figure in the text. It is this realization that is to occupy the rest of the book. Again, debarking from a cab, in a mood of "languissant ennui"…in a countryside reputed one of the loveliest of France, the narrator tells himself that he feels "in attempting this description, not a spark of that enthusiasm which, if it is not the sole, is a primary criterion of talent" (IV:434)[26]. He is on his way to the Guermantes' matinée.

VII. TWO COMPETING POLES DEFINING SPACE

Yet before the narrator trips on the uneven paving stones, let us pause in the driveway in front of the Guermantes' new house in the Avenue du Bois, where the narrator continues to reflect on his decision to accept the invitation to the matinée. After having declared there to be no more possibility of embarking on the "famous 'work'" that he had for so many years been planning, he decides that there is no reason to continue foregoing "the pleasures of social life," a life that he had long since exchanged for sanatoria in the provinces. Yet he also realizes that there is another reason for wanting to return to his former manner of existence:

> À vrai dire cette raison était toute négative et ôtait simplement leur valeur à celles qui auraient pu me détourner de ce concert mondain. Mais celle qui m'y fit aller fut ce nom de Guermantes, depuis assez longtemps sorti de mon esprit pour que, lu sur la carte d'invitation, il réveillât un rayon de mon attention qui alla prélever au fond de ma mémoire une coupe de leur passé accompagné de toutes les images de forêt

domaniale ou de hautes fleurs qui l'escortaient alors… (IV : 35)[27]

These memories of Combray, we must be careful to note, become available for narration through the vehicle of the madeleine. Let us remember that while for the reader, the madeleine scene has occurred long ago, for the narrator, this is not the case. The madeleine, as we shall soon see more clearly, occurs before the matinée, but only after the return to Combray and Tansonville described in the beginning of *Le temps retrouvé*. While this still places the madeleine scene perhaps as long as eleven years before the matinée, still, if we were to indicate its proper position in the narrative, it would be no more than two hundred pages before the scene we are considering—a far cry from both the forty odd years that have transpired since Combray, and the thousands of pages that the reader has turned in order to arrive at this passage. If we could say that Combray is an invention of the madeleine, than the narrator, having been "absent long enough" from his youth in Combray, conflates his narration of the past with the otherwise unavailable past "as it was lived," and thus, he conflates the reader's experience of the narrative's temporality with his own. The narrator is a constituent in his own narrative; he sees himself here not as the narrator, but as a creature of the story; with this, the narrative itself is given the illusion of transparency. Yet nonetheless, the narration "floats" upon the narrative in a disconcerting way. At what point did the reader enter into the picture, and with him the writer?

Combray, we could say, is the depth of the instantaneous experience of the madeleine—a depth that is brought to the surface. The narrator's past as experienced in the revelatory moment of the taste, must be drawn out into narrative, and thus, into time. Because, as we have seen, time cannot be suspended for the act of narration, the narrative that the madeleine elicits continues the trajectory of time that is the narration of the novel. Yet insofar as there is Combray, the madeleine disappears, because it is Combray that has

stepped in to replace it, and with it, the entire trajectory of events that continue until the matinée. Thus, with the madeleine, time replaces the instant. The reader, as well as the narrator, is pushed out of the position inhabited by the overarching narrator of *À la recherche* who narrates the madeleine, and into the story that this narrator narrates. And yet, the madeleine returns back into the narrative, in the narrator's discussion of the revelatory experiences that allow him to realize his vocation. This time though, the madeleine will not be a founding moment in the narrative, but rather, a memory, part of the sediment which continues to generate the narrative, a moment, albeit an important one, among other moments:

> Mais au moment où, me remettant d'aplomb, je posai mon pied sur un pavé qui était un peu moins élevé que le précédent, tout mon découragement s'évanouit devant la même félicité qu'à diverses époques de me vie m'avaient donnée la vue d'arbres que j'avais cru reconnaître dans une promenade en voiture autour de Balbec, la vue des clochers de Martinville, la saveur d'une madeleine trempée dans une infusion, tant d'autres sensations dont j'ai parlé et que les dernières œuvres de Vinteuil m'avaient paru synthétiser. (III:703)[28]

Yet how can the narrator talk about the madeleine, if it is the very madeleine that brought about his narration to begin with, and thus, should by rights, be continued to be excluded from the narrative proper? We find again that narrative levels do not, in *À la recherche*, remain discrete.

In order to avoid confusion with regard to the sequence in which events take place in *À la recherche*, let us pause here to formulate a working chronology of the novel. By doing so, we can delineate the divergence between the experience the reader has of the novel and that of the narrator—what Genette, following Gunther Müller calls "narrative time" and "story time" (33)[29], and which, for reasons we shall soon see, I would like to divide into three modes of time: "reader time," to signify the sequence of events as the reader reads them—Müller's narrative time; "story time" to signify the order of events of the story that the

narrator narrates; and "narrator time" to signify the events as they take place in the life of the narrator when the narrator is also a character in the story that he narrates.

The earliest portions of the story are the easiest to ascertain. Without question, "Un amour de Swann," which takes place before the birth of the narrator, comes first. This is followed by the narrator's earliest narrated memory, that of the (withheld) bedtime kiss, which we read at the beginning of "Combray." Following this, is the narrator's experience as a child in Combray, those memories that were elicited by the madeleine (though not the madeleine itself). These memories may overlap with the time of the bedtime kiss, and they take up the bulk of "Combray." After a brief return to the scene of the madeleine and the room which the narrator describes when he begins narrating the story, comes the long parentheses of "Un amour de Swann", after which the thread of the story continues with "Nom de pays: le nom," the story of the narrator's adolescence and his romance with Gilberte.[30] Then, at the end of this section comes the narrator's walk in the Bois de Bologne "cette année" (I:346) which places this section at the latest point in the novel: the speaker at this point must be understood as roughly contemporaneous with the speaker who says "Longtemps je me suis couché de bonne heure," though certainly later than the "je" the speaker speaks of. Then, beginning with *À l'ombre des jeunes filles en fleurs*, the events in the story occur chronologically, leading all the way up to the Guermantes matinée and past it (the narrator's meeting with Odette three years later, and the mentions of Charlus' death and the marriage of Mlle Swann to a poor writer). During this trajectory however, the narrator passes by those events that were narrated at the beginning of the story, namely, that of the room in which the narrator lies awake at night, and that of the madeleine scene. We know that the madeleine occurs during the period of the "Longtemps," and makes available an expanded repertoire of memories to accompany the sleepless thinker through his long

nights.[31] The madeleine, the narrator tells us, occurred "on that first day" of his return to Paris (VI: 266), presumably from one of his two stays in sanatoria. Both of these stays, we know from the novel, take place after the narrator's return to Tansonville and his renewed association with Gilberte, and thus, we can place both "Longtemps"[32] and the madeleine before the matinée.

Superficially, we could say that *À la recherche* has a classic *in medias res* structure. The room in Paris which is the subject of "Longtemps je me suis couché de bonne heure" is the narrator's Phaecia. Like Odysseus, the narrator has already experienced the major events of the novel that we have yet to read, he will proceed to recount these experiences, and then, once the reader has been apprised of all that has previously transpired, he can proceed to the final resolution. The difference is, of course, that there is no Penelope waiting for the narrator at the end of the novel, and in fact, the novel's "resolution" is the realization of the *impossibility* of anything like a Penelope. Yet not only is there no Penelope waiting at home, there is not even a Phaecia to which one can return—there is no place where we can locate the narrator once he has finished recounting his adventures. As Genette puts it, the novel "will rejoin and pass beyond its own memory-created starting point without returning to that point and seemingly without noticing it, swallowing it up in one if its ellipses" (45).

The trick that the narrator plays is that we, as readers, begin with "Longtemps" followed by the madeleine, not knowing where we are, not given any clue by the narrator as to the relation between the time of the narrating and the time of the narrated; nor do we gain a sense of this until the end of the novel, and even this is not without difficulty. We are given the impression that the narrator is outside the story that he tells, yet we ultimately come to find that this cannot be the case: that it is the narrator who has discovered writing who is writing the story that we read. We finally must come to understand that it is only

because the narrator's past has been made available to him through the realization of his vocation, that he has the possibility of narrating it at all.

In the trajectory of the reading of *À la recherche*, a rift has been silently growing, in which the time presented to the reader as narrative, and the time experienced by the narrator take on clashing modalities. If the madeleine is recent history to the narrator, it is nonetheless the reader's distant past, and thus, the experience of the reader has become severed from that of the narrator. To the reader, the madeleine is a founding moment: the moment which elicits the narrative; whereas for the narrator, this founding moment only occurs at the end of the book, with the revelation that allows him to begin writing. The narrator does not write anything upon tasting the madeleine; he only remembers, but this remembering must, paradoxically, take the form of writing. This would ordinarily pose no problem for the structure of a novel: as readers, we are habituated to overlooking the *fact* of the writing of the book we read. But in a novel that takes writing as its issue, a novel that only comes about because its narrator has discovered that he is able to write, the reader's experience of the narrator's past—a past which does not include the writing of the book—is made to be *of a different order* than the past of the narrator, who *is* silently writing the book! Thus, the narrator's past cannot simply fall into place once all the various fragments of narrative have been made explicit. We are forced to take into consideration the fact that *someone* is writing the book we read, that *someone* writes "Longtemps je me suis couché de bonne heure." The act of writing the novel has been made, in Heidegger's terminology, "obtrusive" because the narrator and the hero can no longer remain distinct entities.

Malcolm Bowie writes that, "There seems to me something unsatisfactory about any reading of the book that does not resist as well as endorse *Le temps retrouvé* in the performance of this harmonising and integrating role" (5). We might indeed say, that if we

attempt to read the final volume of the novel as a perspective *on* all that transpires, what we gain in our *view* of the landscape that the book offers, we lose in our ability to remain with the act of writing. But once we attempt to reconcile this volume in the chronology in which it must take place, the perspective gets reinstated: all the gnomic wisdom of *Le temps retrouvé*, is in fact worth nothing if not attached to a writing *person*.[33] This, we might say, is the challenge of the final volume: if we expect, as we normally would, a certain artifice of transparence in the narrative's coming into being from out of the madeleine so that the act of writing of the book becomes something that we are not supposed to see, we find at the end of the novel, that there can be no such transparence: the world does not "work" as expected, because we must now reappraise our experience of the narration from our newly gained perspective, in understanding that it is only because the narrator has realized his vocation that we can read what we read. If the narrator, *in* the novel, is both the absorbed participant *and* the observer of his participation, we are now forced to reckon with the observer. Yet, as with any time we try to catch sight of the observer, we find, that in the process of doing so, the observer withdraws into the observed.

When we read "Longtemps je me suis couché de bonne heure" then, we must understand the text to be operating on three levels, each of which competes with the other. First, at the level of "reader time," it is the beginning of the reader's journey: the starting point before any realization is experienced. The narrative here is, in fact, replete with notions of beginning: two similes referring to travelers, one "hurrying toward a nearby station", another, an invalid "obliged to set out on a journey" (1:2); the memory of the great-uncle cutting the narrator's curl as "the dawn of a new era" (1:3); and the allusion to the creation of Eve from the rib of Adam (1:3). Second, at the level of "narrator time," it is the moment after everything has been completed, when the narrator, having achieved his

resolution, can properly take up the act of narration. If the novel adhered to more conventional notions of fiction, "narrator time" would be the same as "story time." Lucius, in *The Golden Ass*, for example, tells the story of his adventures as an ass, only after having been returned to human form. The story is over by the time that Lucius begins telling it; Lucius-as narrator and Lucius-as-hero exist on discrete narrative levels. The history of fiction is replete with techniques for establishing the transcendental point of view that will enable the first person narrating of a story. However, in *À la recherche*, the narrator is implicated in that which he narrates: at the third level, the level of "story time" then, even though the narrator is at the *end* of the story, "Longtemps" takes place in the middle of the story before we "know" that he is writing. "Longtemps" is then, a false beginning, because the time that is recovered with the madeleine and subsequently narrated continues to withhold the fact of writing until the end. It is this divergence between "narrator time" and "story time" that gives the novel its strange structure. The act of writing is made into an ellipse in the "story time" only to be revealed at the end, so that narrator and story are given the *illusion* of living separate lives.

I have already discussed how narrator and story do not live separate lives; that the improvisatory structure of the story, which depends on the narrator's experiencing himself in the present, but must execute his narrative in the form of a "progression toward a subject X," depends upon an active narrator, one who, from out of his situation in the present, determines the shape that the past, the narrative, will take. The narrative, we must understand is not the simple physical manifestation of a thought that was kept intact inside the head of the narrator until the time finally came for him to write it. Rather, as we have seen, there is no past, there is no thought, that is not already shaped by the narrator's already being present, by his already being a product of all that he has experienced, so that every

experience, including the act of writing, recreates the past from the perspective of the present, and perpetuates the narrative *as* the present. Narrator time in *À la recherche* makes story time possible, but at the same time, it must conceal the act of narration in order to arrive at the act of writing as the climax that enables the story. Thus, if the taste of the madeleine gives birth to the narrative of Combray and all that transpires after it, it must withdraw in order for the narration to take place, even as the *narration* of the madeleine scene itself must conceal that *it* is a product of writing. When the narrator *does* finally speak of the madeleine in the context of the revelation during the *matinée*, we must then understand the madeleine to be an invention of the matinée, in the same way that Combray is an invention of the madeleine. With this, the narrative has quietly shifted allegiances: whereas before, it was the madeleine that served as the impetus out of which the bulk of the story proceeded, now it is the revelation at the matinée that appropriates the madeleine and assumes responsibility as the foundation for the story. This can only happen because of the constantly shifting equilibrium, the constant refashioning of the foundation which determines how the narrative will proceed. Thus, we could say, it is not so much that the narrative overtakes "Longtemps" and the madeleine without mentioning it, but rather, that the narrator, as the story proceeds, fictionalizes the "je" who writes "je me suis couché de bonne heure," in the same way that this "je" fictionalizes the narrative that transpires out of it, each appropriating the other in a constant irresolvable back-and-forth movement. As we read, the ground gives way under our feet: the narrator of the madeleine who fictionalizes everything that moves *forward* from out of it, in turn becomes fictionalized by the matinée, as we move closer to it, so that the narrative is finally revealed to have proceeded *backwards* from it. The madeleine and the matinée then, stand like two magnetic poles at either end of the novel, and it is the tension, the shifting of influence between these two poles that

generates the narrative. Each tells a story that competes with the other for the narrative foreground, but it is only in the asymptoticity of these two stories that the story can be told at all. Writing *is* the non-coincidence of the narrator with himself, because the past continually reforms itself into the language of narration as *the present*. The observer remains always just on the cusp of being observed, but never able to enter into the range of his vision; the writer can never enter into his own narrative. With each step forward, the observer withdraws so that narration can proceed. We recall the words of Merleau-Ponty:

> Being…cannot be contemplated from without and within simultaneously, but must be effectively traversed. In this transition, the stages passed through are not simply passed, like the segment of the road I have traveled; they have called for or required the present stages and precisely what is new and disconcerting in them. The past stages continue therefore to be the present stages—which also means that they are retroactively modified by them. (*Visible* 90)

Thus, we cannot accept Genette's argument that "Marcel's act of narrating bears no mark of duration, or of division: it is instantaneous" (223). The story is structured in such a way that at the end, the reader realizes with a certain horror that he has just spanned the length, not only of the fictive narrative, but of its fictive narration as well; that all the time the reader was reading, the narrative was not simply lying about as an artifact waiting to be read, but that the narrator was actively narrating the story. It is this double structure of a fictive narrative *and* a fictive narrator that ultimately allows the reader to "see" his or her *own* absorption: if there is a fictive narrator, then there must also be as counterpart, a fictive reader. Yet this fictive reader is as essentially connected to the real reader as the narrated-narrator is to the narrator-narrator. This absorbed reader allows the observing reader to share the ruse of the writer, acting *as if* time were chronological, only to "catch" him- or herself in the ruse, and thus, to realize the originary illusion of fiction: it is the moment when the reader realizes that time *must* be experienced chronologically, but that this is only the *style*

of the way things appear. Perhaps when the narrator says that his book would furnish the reader "le moyen de lire en eux-mêmes" (IV:830), we could understand this oft-quoted sentence in a new light. The reader reads himself, not because of some empathetic connection that the narrator might engender, but rather, through the very observation of him- or herself as a reader, one understands oneself as existing in the fiction that time necessitates. The artificial structure of the compulsion to believe in a fictional world, the compulsion to believe that what happens *in* the writing is, for the space of the reading of it "the things themselves" now folds back upon itself. If the experience of the possibility of the recovery of Lost Time occurs in an instant—in a taste, in the sound of a spoon on a plate—the *narration* of this instant must occur in language, and thus, in time. And precisely because narration occurs in time, it cannot take a position outside of time in order to narrate it: the act of telling the story is also a continuing *of* the story. Thus, if for the reader, the madeleine elicits from out of itself the revelation that will occur in the matinée, it is only so that the reader can turn this revelation back upon itself, discover that the madeleine *also* occurs in time, and thus, in the same space of time as that of the story that it tells. Thus, time as narration turns back, sedimenting the very instant that produced it.[34]

Thus, the madeleine and the matinée engage in an irresolvable oscillation where each makes the other its constituent; each generate its perspective by turning the other into material; each vies for the right to be transparent. Yet neither can ultimately be transparent, because just at the point in which the one would gain narrative control, the other intrudes on its territory. This is the flesh of the narrative, this overlapping of perspectives. Like a landscape of Cézanne, each component of the narrative refuses to subordinate itself to an overarching perspective, so that the overall effect is a flattening of the narrative plane, depth and surface made to coexist in a sheen that is perpetually unstable. Just as the Combray

church intrudes its colorless "miles and years" into the order of the pleasing verdure that encompasses it, and just as the narrator, seeing his image smiling in the mirror cannot locate the smile in either an observer or the observed, so too the narrative refuses ultimately to maintain a central organization. It is this tension of non-coincidence, these invisible forces that operate between discrete beings, that hold together the "cathedral," which is also the cathedral of Being. Proximity is only understood as distance, that is, as writing. Merleau-Ponty writes:

> We have never before us pure individuals, indivisible glaciers of beings, nor essences without place and without date. Not that they exist elsewhere, beyond our grasp, but because we are experiences, that is, thoughts that feel behind themselves the weight of the space, the time, the very Being they think, and which therefore do not hold under their gaze a serial space and time nor the pure idea of a series, but have about themselves a time and a space that exist by piling up, by proliferation, by encroachment, by promiscuity—a perpetual pregnancy, perpetual parturition, generativity and generality, brute essence and brute existence, which are the nodes and antinodes of the same ontological vibration. (*Visible* 115)

Shortly before the moment when the narrator sees himself in the mirror in *Le côté de Guermantes*, the narrator, having been introduced for the first time to Saint-Loup's beloved mistress Rachel, and recognizing her as the prostitute that he knew as a youth, comments on the disparity between his image of Rachel and Saint-Loup's:

> "L'immobilité de ce mince visage, comme celle d'une feuille de papier soumise aux colossales pressions de deux atmosphères, me semblait équilibrée par deux infinis, qui venaient aboutir à elle sans se rencontrer, car elle les séparait." (II.437)[35]

Rachel is only Rachel because she is the mistress for whom Saint-Loup nearly bankrupts himself, *and* the prostitute "who had been offered to all the world for a Louis." It is this disparity in her identity, the inability for Saint-Loup to see her the same way that the narrator does, that asserts her being. It is the meaningless gifts of this same Rachel which will propel the narrator into the understanding that he too only exists as the disparity between

perspectives, and ultimately, it will be the book that manifests as this disparity. The book holds apart this distance between the self and the self allowing it to manifest in form; but here, we must understand that form is shot through with emptiness, with the invisible.

Thus, the disorienting feeling that arises at the end of the novel when we contemplate its beginning comes about because we expected the narrator who says "Longtemps" to maintain his authority to narrate; that is, we expect him to be "real," whereas we expect what he says to be "fiction." What we discover, however, is that this narrator can no more maintain his status as real than can anything else in the novel. And thus we find that the narrator whom we relied on to be the foundation for the story he tells, insofar as he is implicated in what he tells, is unlocatable. We must understand the narrator of *À la recherche* then, to be subject to the same fictionalizing synthesis which produces his characters: "Il n'est pas un nom de personnage inventé sous lequel il ne puisse mettre soixante noms de personnages vus, dont l'un a posé pour la grimace, l'autre pour le monocle, tel pour la colère, tel pour le mouvement avantageux de bras, etc." (IV:478)[36].

And yet, if we return to the first page of *Swann*, do we not already see this movement? "à peine ma bougie éteinte, mes yeux se fermaient si vite que je n'avais pas le temps de me dire: «je m'endors.»" Is not the whole structure of *À la recherche* already contained within this, the second sentence of the book? The narrator, who, struggling against his own absorption, must step outside of himself to say the words that *he did not have time to say*, and that in fact, he never said. Could we not then, see the entire novel as the attempt to say what could not be said? "I'm falling asleep." I am absorbed in the world and I do not have time to tell myself so because there is no time that I can find that stands outside of this absorption, and yet, I must tell it.

If we are to understand being without losing the being that exists, *as* it exists, if we are not to create a fictional proxy of ourselves, but rather, understand that we are engaging in an ontologically originary fiction, then we must enter into a dialogue with the *not-said:* the unity that is absent by which there is being. Our reflection must, as Merleau-Ponty writes, "enter into the forest of references that our interrogation arouses in it, it must make it say finally, what in its silence, *it means to say*…" (*Visible* 39). The book that is perpetually pregnant, perpetually to come, is exactly the book that we have:

> [J]e voulais poser le volume que je croyais avoir dans les mains et souffler ma lumière ; je n'avais pas cessé en dormant de faire des réflexions sur ce que je venais de lire, mais ces réflexions avaient pris un tour un peu particulier ; il me semblait que j'étais moi-même ce dont parlait l'ouvrage [.] (I:25)

PART THREE

CHAPTER 1:
TWO KINDS OF SUFFERING: GEORGE PEREC'S *W OU LE SOUVENIR D'ENFANCE*

> *When once the mourning is over, it will be found that our high opinion of the riches of civilization has lost nothing from our discovery of their fragility. We shall build up again all that war has destroyed, and perhaps on firmer ground and more lastingly than before.*
>
> -Sigmund Freud, "On Transience" (1916)

I. S'IL A LE MALHEUR DE DIRE

In chapter 57 of Georges Perec's *La vie mode d'emploi*, the reader is presented the *chambre de bonne* of Elzbieta Orlowska, a thirty-year old Polish women who lives meagerly with her child after having escaped an untenable marriage with her first love in Tunisia. Hanging on the wall is a poster which portrays six men standing in a row: one has a long beard, one has a large ring on his finger, one has a red belt, one has a hole in his pants at the knee, and one has only one eye open. The last one bares his teeth. If, we are told, one were to ask Madame Orlowska about it, she would say that the poster represents a popular Polish bedtime story that mothers tell their children, one that takes the form of a dialogue between mother and child:

"*Jai rencontré six hommes*," the mother says, in beginning to tell the story. The child asks what they are like.

—Le premier a une barbe noire, dit la maman.
—Pourquoi? demande l'enfant.
—Parce qu'il ne sait pas se raser, pardi! dit la maman.
—Et le second? demande l'enfant.
—Le second a une bague, dit la maman.
—Pourquoi? demande l'enfant.
—Parce qu'il est marié, pardi! dit la maman.

This continues on from one man to the next. The third has a belt so that his pants do not fall down, pardi! The fourth has a hole in his pants because he has been running, pardi!

> *—Et le cinquième? demande l'enfant.*
> *—Le cinquième n'a qu'un œil d'ouvert, dit la maman.*
> *—Pourquoi? demande l'enfant.*
> *—Parce qu'il est en train de s'endormir, comme toi, mon enfant, dit la maman d'une voix très douce.*
> *—Et le dernier? demande en murmurant l'enfant.*
> *—Le dernier montre les dents, dit la maman dans un souffle.*
> *Il ne faut surtout pas dire que le petit enfant demande alors quoi que ce soit, car s'il a le malheur de dire:*
> *—Pourquoi?*
> *—Parce qu'il va te manger si tu ne dors pas, pardi! dira la mère d'une voix tonitruant.* (322)[1]

The delectable invitation to an inner realm that the story presents is negated by its conclusion, where the story the mother offers is revealed not as a protected inner sphere, but as a frightful *outside*. And yet, we might say, the efficacy of this as a bedtime story is exactly in the sense of horror that it engineers in the child. It is the mother who stands between the child and the unprotected realm of the story. She renders it docile with her presence, with her body, and creates for the child, in the face of this horror, the luxury of reverie and fascination, and the possibility of sleep. The mother serves as a mediator between a dangerous outside world which the child explores libidinally with his or her questions, and the protected sphere of the home. In her withdrawal at the end of the narrative (and it is a narrative that is not *supposed* to end), the mother as mother is effaced in the child's direct exposure to the outside world; the mother, who is supposed to protect, to embody the space of comfort, who stands guard while the child sleeps, becomes a collaborator with the man with the bared teeth. In the transition, fascination gives way to horror: the libidinous *space* that opens up for the child as they exchange questions and answers *about* the world falls in on itself, leaving the child alone, and all outside, spaceless, in an exile all the more ineluctable

because it occurs *under the auspices* of the mother who defined the realm of protection *against* this exile. In the transgressing of the fictional frame that causes outside and inside to intermingle with each other, the world of the mother and the bed is no longer safe from the clutches of the fictional realm of the story she tells. And fiction, without the frame, ceases—by definition—to be fiction.

In the bedtime story that Perec describes in *La vie mode d'emploi* however, the horrifying conclusion is forever deferred: the narrative is given in the present tense until the last line, in which the mother *dira* [will say] that the man with the bared teeth will eat the child *if* the child asks the forbidden question. *But*, we are told, the child must *not* ask this question, or rather, we are told, in a narrative interjection, that the narrator must not *say* that the child asks the question—"Il ne faut surtout pas dire que le petit enfant demande…"[2] In the perspective that we are offered, the child *has not yet asked*, and thus, remains forever in the bed, under the protection of the mother. The onus is on the child, it seems, to perpetuate the realm of fiction, and, by proxy, the realm of childhood, *by not asking*. The child, however, is subject to the way the hypothetical narrator *narrates* the story: the narrator must not *represent* the child as asking the question. And yet, understood in this way, the space of childhood is always under the sign of the question that will eradicate it, the man with the bared teeth always lurking at the boundary of fiction.[3]

The reader of *La vie mode d'emploi,* safely protected by the frame that creates the fictional realm, is able to take pleasure in the child's horror, and takes shelter from it under the sign of the conditional *si*, which governs the final sentence, but also through the auspices of the *mise-en-abyme* with its characteristic irony that points to an irrevocable division between fiction and reality. The catastrophe that the story presents generates reverie for the reader—a reverie that parallels the child's sleep—but it is a reverie that is built on the back of the

menace to the child, in whose (fictional) world, fiction and reality threaten to transgress the barrier that holds them apart from each other. The character's danger creates the reader's reverie: this is an essential aspect of fiction, and the chapter from *La vie mode d'emploi* offers no exception. Yet there are realms of narrative where this prophylactic is less firmly in place, where the question cannot be deferred. These are realms where the *reader*, like the child, like *a* child, must experience the horror of a narrative that refuses to be contained by the boundaries that frame it, realms that threaten to overwhelm, to negate the protective authority of the storyteller: in other words, realms where fiction is absent.[4] At stake in these cases, is the safe relationship between story and reader, the *fictional* relationship where the reader's absorption is guaranteed by his or her lack of participation in the event, and which, thus, permits the coming-into-being of a detached observer. This genre that refuses to remain secure *as* a genre, as a convention of reading, is what I call "outside-directed" fiction.

The term "outside-directed fiction," it is important to understand, is not a synonym for "non-fiction," at least not in the generic sense in which the term is normally used. Works of non-fiction remain—no less than works of fiction—firmly within the confines of a reading practice that is designed to *eliminate* the question of the genealogy of genre itself. Insofar as a genre is in place, the ontological status of the very concept of genre remains obscured. If a genre is a rule that tells one how to read, how to contextualize the content of one's reading, than one's reading can never point to a time *before* the rule was put in place.[5]

The foundation of a genre always pertains to the relation between the world of the reader and the writer, and that of the written. In fiction, reader and written exist in heterogeneous modalities, and cannot be "flattened" into the same world. The mise-en-abyme structure of any fictional novel only brings to awareness the fact that any time a narrative attempts to address its own narration, the unbreachable barrier between the realm

of the real reader/writer on the one hand, and that of the narrator (if there is one) and character on the other, remains rigorously in place. In the genres of non-fiction, however, the rule is such that the reader/writer and the written are understood to share the same modality. Yet, as we have seen, *both* the genres of fiction and that of non-fiction *necessarily* exclude the writer from the written: both equally occult the "I am writing," the *fact* of the body in space and in time, in favor of the "fiction" that the subject of the writing and the writer exist in the same modality. The difference between the genre of fiction and that of non-fiction, then, is that in the genre of fiction *there is no claim that subject of the writing is any more than a fiction*: any rhetorical compulsion to "believe" in the subject of the writing (i.e. the *mise-en-abyme*) only serves to emphasize the fictionality of the fiction; with the heterogeneity of reader/writer and character ensured, the reader is able to detach him- or herself from the narrated events, and generate absorption, precisely the "belief" that reader/writer and character share the same ontological status. Yet the realm of this absorption does not exhaust the realm of consciousness, and could not, by itself lead to the possibility of fiction: the absorption is "framed" by the observer, the consciousness of being in *this* world, a consciousness which does not participate in this belief, and thus, which can *see* this absorption, precisely because it stands outside of it. It is, in fact, the observer, and not the absorbed that is the hallmark of the genre of fiction. We are no less absorbed in our own real lives, than we are in fiction. But it is only in fiction that there can be a mode of vision that can stand outside of this absorption. It is possible precisely because the reader does not have to *participate* in the narrated events.[6]

The voice of non-fiction, then (this text not excluded), must *pretend* that it is contiguous with the world that it refers to. It occults its own ontological fictionality, and, unlike the genre of fiction, leaves no place for the *apprehension* of the fact that *this* world, the

realm of the body, and of the "I am writing" is being occulted. Chapter 57 of *La vie mode d'emploi* represents fictionally the transgression of this barrier between the genres: if we think of the mother as a representation of the observer, the one who keeps guard over sleep, then it is she who guarantees the child's *absorption* in the fiction of the six men. The mother, as the observer, is a guarantor of the fictional world, and it is the security that she offers that permits the child, in turn, to develop an observing faculty. When she turns upon this structure and participates in the fiction, the guarantor that holds the two modalities separate from each other disappears, and fiction and reality commingle, for the fictional child, horrifyingly so.[7]

I have defined the genre of fiction as that realm which makes no claim to such contiguity; and yet, precisely because of its blatant heterogeneity with regard to reality (even in the most realistic of fictions), precisely because we do not *participate* in the world of the fiction, generic fiction permits the possibility of *intimate experience*, and of an absorption that is not available in the genres of non-fiction. Generic fiction, then, permits absorption in experience, in the same way that one is absorbed in life, but also permits this absorption to be *seen*, precisely what *cannot* be effected in life. If the relation between the observer and the absorbed is not an issue to non-fiction, it is because non-fiction is concerned with representing shared experience, rather than representing intimate experience.[8] Non-fiction does not ask the question of the genealogy of the experience of being a subject, but simply, and with a necessary exigency, takes the fact of the subject as its basis. As I have argued, it is only generic fiction that can explore the limits of subjecthood, because it is only generic fiction that can loosen the referential grip on the empirical world. On the contrary, the genre of non-fiction defines itself against that of fiction in its unquestioning acceptance of the empirical world, regardless of what position it takes on it. Fiction, in prioritizing *sense*

over *reference*, takes the empirical world as its *material*, but not, however, as its subject: this permits an apprehension of, and a questioning of the ontological structure of the subject which unimpeachingly believes itself to be *in* the empirical world (what I have called "reading from beyond the subject")[9]. Only fiction, in the radical departure from perceptual faith that it enacts is capable, if not of looking at the empirical world from outside it (it cannot, because it has no other material available to it), at least as apprehending the empirical world as a *structure*. This is because it uses the things of the empirical world to create a vocabulary, a language, for representing the inner experience, otherwise inexpressible, of the self as one who finds itself in a shared world. The genre of non-fiction, because it operates unquestioningly *in* this structure, has no perspective in which to effect this apprehension. The fictional perspective, then, is *beyond* the empirical world, but it takes its vocabulary only *from* the empirical world. Only in this way can the subject of fiction be, as I have argued, not the empirical world, but rather, the *experience of subjection*.

Yet if it is only fiction that can offer a representation of intimate experience, and only non-fiction that can refer to a shared reality (regardless of its ontological status), would not the representations of intimate experience and of shared reality necessarily repel each other? What type of text could we find that bears allegiance to neither the genre of fiction nor that of non-fiction?[10] What kind of text would be able to make no claim to be neither "true" nor "not true"?[11] Such a text would necessarily require a kind of ruse: it would have to offer itself as a fiction, *seduce* the reader into readerly absorption, but it would then have to take back, negate its fictionality: it would thus, have to turn the reverie of detachment, of protection from a frightening and dangerous outside world, into the horror of participation, much in the manner that we have seen, *in fiction*, in the bedtime story of Madame Orlowska. Yet such a text would have to do so outside of the generic conventions of fiction, without at

the same time, becoming non-fiction. In other words, such a text would have to transcend the notion of genre to begin with. The idea of a genreless text, however, a text that refuses to serve as guarantor of its reading practice, seems unthinkable.

The first analysis of outside-directed fiction in this study, that of the book of Genesis[12], was, we have seen, only able to accomplish this task, at least as far as the history of the modern novel is concerned[13], through *instituting* the notion of genre. Coming into being as a replacement for the unavailable creator, who cannot participate in his own creation and continue to maintain his status as creator, Genesis creates the very possibility of a fictional realm, a realm that has no guarantor, no *ground*, and so, must create its ground rhetorically, that is, fictionally. Genesis is a bid to create an *originary fiction*, one which compels belief in the very absence of the ability to account for its origin. Yet in creating the genre of fiction through the compulsion of belief only in the text itself, Genesis likewise creates the genre of non-fiction: it is a fictional text, that is, a text that compels belief, but a belief that is not to be understood as a fictive belief. Thus, we could say, at least for what we call the "Western" tradition, that the book of Genesis stands not just at the origin of fiction, but at the origin of genre itself. And the very fact that we have no cultural memory of a time before this genre speaks to the success of installing a fictional creator as the origin of fiction.

The book of Genesis comes into being as both a genre and the origin of genre. Just as a realm of "bare fiction" remains impossible to conceive of, because in order for anything like fiction to become actualized, it must traffic in the *things* of the empirical world and re-signify them, so too, a "genreless" text also could only achieve form by taking "genre" itself as its material. It is only in this way that a text *itself* would be able to accomplish what the story of Madame Orlowska can accomplish within the greater fictional frame of the novel of which it is a part.

Such is the case with Perec's *W ou le souvenir d'enfance.* It obfuscates the barrier between fiction and non-fiction, however, not in order to institute a *new* genre, but to take apart the very notion of genre. In rendering permeable the frames between fiction, autobiography and history, *W ou le souvenir d'enfance* disrupts the safely detached, transcendental space that the reader of fiction customarily inhabits, and in doing so exposes the reader to the horror that comes about in the contamination of the fictive and the real, a horror that we have an apprehension of in the book of Genesis in the unnamable and unapproachable creator.

W ou le souvenir d'enfance presents the reader with a narrative that bears all the signposts of fiction, and then *withdraws* the fictionality of this fiction by interweaving it with Perec's autobiographical narrative. As such, the reader is thwarted in his or her "natural" attempt to *impose* a genre onto the text, and thus, to be able to know how to read it. The intermittent reappearance of the fiction gets stripped of its fictional basis, and causes the reader to withdraw in turn from his or her comfortable readerly absorption. With a sense of horror, the reader realizes that he or she exists, in a certain sense, *contiguously* with the events that are being narrated in a way that is contraindicated for the experiencing of fiction. Denied the capacity for absorption, the reader moves from the position of detached observer to that of participant: the reader is denied his or her "visa" into the realm of fiction. If fiction provides the possibility of a detached realm where the reader's intimate experience of being can be given words, words that no longer refer to a shared reality, but rather, turn the *things* of a shared reality into a vocabulary for the experience of the self, here, the reader, seduced into the construction of such a vocabulary, finds him- or herself cast alone into a *real* and deadly world, *this* world, the world of "la guerre, les camps" (*W* 17), a world which

offers no space, and no vocabulary for self-understanding. Having been goaded into delectation, this delectation is now used *against* the reader.

The six men in Elzbieta Orlowska's room are safely ensconced in the realm of fiction, a threat only to the fictive child but not to the real reader who *enjoys* the fear of the child precisely because he or she is free from it. In *W ou le souvenir d'enfance*, however, the reader takes the position of the child in the dialogue with his or her mother, that is, the reader is a participant, and not an observer.

Like Madame Orlowska in *La vie mode d'emploi*, Georges Perec's mother, Cécile Perec (née Cyrla Szulewicz) was Polish, and left her native country to live in France. Unlike Madame Orlowska, Cécile Perec was a *real* person, and appears as such—though only in her absence—in *W ou le souvenir d'enfance.*

Cécile Perec, in a manner of speaking, "abandons" her child to an outside world: during the Nazi occupation of France, she sent her son Georges alone on a train south to live with his Aunt and Uncle in the relative safety of the *Zone libre*, under the interim Vichy government[14]. Georges Perec never saw his mother again. She was arrested and taken to the Drancy concentration camp outside of Paris on 23 January 1943[15] and deported to Auschwitz nineteen days later, on 11 February 1943, along with her sister and her father. Their family, at the time of this rupture, like the scene depicted in chapter 57 of *La vie mode d'emploi*, consisted of mother and son only. Perec's father had been killed two and a half years earlier fighting with the French resistance, not far from Paris, on 13 June 1940[16].

W ou le souvenir d'enfance begins with the story of a fictional character, Gaspard Winckler, who, we are to learn, is sent on a journey across the world to find a lost young deaf-mute boy who shares his name. The next chapter, however, abruptly switches to an account of the real Georges Perec's attempts to reconstruct his childhood of which he

professes to have no memories. The book then continues, oscillating from chapter to chapter without offering any narrative link, between the story of Gaspard Winckler, and the autobiography which Perec effects by sorting through documents, photographs, and screen memories (Perec wrote *W ou le souvenir d'enfance* mostly during the period of his analysis with J-B. Pontalis and displays his literacy in psychoanalytic vocabulary and methodology in some of the autobiographical chapters of the book).[17]

In the first chapter, Gaspard Winckler, attempting to find a foothold into the story that he wishes to tell of his voyage to the island called "W", writes, "*L'incompréhension, l'horreur et la fascination se confondaient dans ces souvenirs sans fond.*"[18] Taking our cue from Madame Orlowska's story, we can say that fascination becomes horror when there is no guarantor of detachment, no protector from the object of fascination. The confounding of horror and fascination, then, would be the confounding of the libidinal *pleasure* one takes in a *story*, with the ego's consciousness of *reality*. What I will argue here is that *W ou le souvenir d'enfance* presents a world where the child's final question in the Polish bedtime story, and, which, in Chapter 57 of *La vie mode d'emploi* is indefinitely deferred, is asked. It is a question that is asked out of the impulse toward fascination, but that, once asked, disrupts the possibility of absorption, and turns that fascination into horror. The fictional story in *W ou le souvenir d'enfance* qua fiction, then, refers to the parent, and specifically to the mother who serves as guarantor of the possibility of reverie, of absorption, and thus, of fiction itself. In her absence, however, the fiction fails; the fictional guarantor gets revealed as *in*comprehension. The mother must now, in her absence, be rhetorically created. But in the consciousness of the absence of the guarantor of fiction, in its having to be recreated *in* fiction, the horror of reality reasserts its place. Fiction, it is revealed, hangs from a void.

The hybrid structure of *W ou le souvenir d'enfance* undermines the boundary between the fictive and the real in order to represent a *de facto already* confounded relationship between these two modalities. What gets "revealed" or "recovered" in *W ou le souvenir d'enfance* are not the lost memories. Rather, it is the ineluctable, untraversable *"ou"* that separates the fictional world of Gaspard Winckler and the island of W—the world of fascination—from the memories that *cannot* be recovered. What appear in the broken narration are not memories, but emptiness, and as such, it is the experience of emptiness that becomes thematized. Ultimately, the confounding of horror and fascination results in the apparition of this emptiness. "L'apparition du blanc" is a motif that runs throughout Perec's *La Disparition*. *W ou le souvenir d'enfance,* we might say, is the experience of the *blanc.* It is this *empty appearing* that effects itself through the destabilization of generic conventions, through the ultimate revelation of fiction itself as an empty structure. Ultimately, the text forces us to come to terms with a life that is *genreless*.

II. L'APPARITION DU BLANC

Yet, a life that has no genre is a life that has no subject. It is a life that cannot see itself, a life without consciousness. It is this horrifying apprehension of the inability to see, to know oneself, that runs through the story, through the stories, of *W ou le souvenir d'enfance.*

Perec begins chapter II, introducing his autobiographical project, by declaring: "Je n'ai pas de souvenirs d'enfance"[19] (17). He goes on to give the "text" of his childhood, that which he can say, but which he cannot experience:

> Je n'ai pas de souvenirs d'enfance. Jusqu'à ma douzième année à peu près, mon histoire tient en quelques lignes : j'ai perdu mon père à quatre ans, ma mère à six ; j'ai passé la guerre dans diverses pensions de Villard-de-Lans. En 1945, la sœur de mon père et son mari m'adoptèrent. (17)[20]

Two paragraphs later, he quotes himself, and makes the *act* of declaring that he has no memories his theme.

> «Je n'ai pas de souvenirs d'enfance » : je posais cette affirmation avec assurance, avec presque une sorte de défi. L'on n'avait pas à m'interroger sur cette question. Elle n'était pas inscrite à mon programme. J'en étais dispensé : une autre histoire, la Grande, l'Histoire avec sa grande hache, avait déjà répondu à ma place : la guerre, les camps. (17)[21] [22]

The writer describes an *individual* without a *person*. Subjectless, he is a datum of history, someone whose *intimate* experience has been replaced with shared knowledge. Implicit in his pronouncement that history has replaced memory is the declaration that there is only *an outside*. The onus is on the person whose *personhood* is missing, then, to *generate,* to reinvent, this intimate experience, and part of the book will indeed be devoted to this. Perec writes in the same chapter, that he had undertaken the invention of an imaginary place: "À treize ans, j'inventai, racontai et dessinai une histoire"[23] (18), a story/history that both will and will not be (in the logic of the disjunctive "ou") the story/history of the island of W that Perec recounts in the book that we read.

According to Perec's account, the age of thirteen marks the beginning of the epoch that he is able to remember. These early memories, he tells us (perhaps not uncoincidentally in chapter XIII) are isolated, cannot be put together into a whole: "rien ne les rassemble" (97). It is a memory that is infiltrated with oblivion, a memory that refuses to remain remembered, and so must be remembered again. He continues, still speaking of the *histoire* that he had invented:

> "Plus tard, je l'oubliai. Il y a sept ans, un soir, À Venise, je me souvins tout à coup que cette histoire s'appelait « W » et qu'elle était, d'une certaine façon, sinon l'histoire, du moins une histoire de mon enfance. (18)[24]

The memory of his invention of W when he is in Venice[25], then, presents a kind of threshold that links his late childhood to his adulthood. He remembers *tout à coup* that the story is called "W," but he cannot remember its contents, cannot remember what had once been the reconstructed "memory" of his childhood: "Tout ce que j'en savais tient en moins de deux lignes:" he writes, echoing the "quelques lignes" of his résumé of his childhood, "la vie d'une société exclusivement préoccupée de sport, sur un flot de la Terre de Feu."[26]

Thus, we have only circumscribed a void, returning back to the where we began. The thirteen year old Perec invents a story that is the or a history or story of his unremembered childhood, but he can only remember the briefest résumé, one that offers no more entry than does the brief résumé of the history of his childhood. The recreation of childhood in the register of the *person* has been lost, the apparition of the story that was created during the liminal period between childhood and adulthood found to be empty, only a name, a letter. This time, the letter is not the "grande H[ache]" of History, but the enigmatic "W." It is now the work of the *adult* Perec to seize upon this *sign*, not from his childhood, but from his teenage invention, and to re-invent the invention, to invest it with signification. Finding some of the original drawings that he made as a twelve-year old, Perec tells us that he has indeed reinvented W, and has published it in the *Quinzaine Littéraire* (18). *Today*, he tells us, he wants to "mettre un terme—je veux tout autant dire par là « tracer les limites » que « donner un non »—ce lent déchiffrement."[27] And yet, such a coming to an end will not bring back the original W:

> W ne ressemble pas plus à mon fantasme olympique que ce fantasme olympique ne ressemblait à mon enfance. (18)[28]

Three different epochs of Perec's life are represented here: the unremembered childhood, the unremembered fantasy of adolescence which is somehow linked to the unremembered childhood, and finally, the adult re-invention of the fantasy. The re-invention will not, however, replace the emptiness of the lack of memory with the fullness of the invented *histoire*, but rather, will only be able to give expression to the lack itself, a lack that in turn spans the same three epochs. There is a fourth epoch, one which takes on, in the book, a narrative presence. The newest version of W is the incorporation of what was published in serial in *La quinzaine littéraire*, into the book*, W ou le souvenir d'enfance.*[29] The serial reinvention and appropriation of text into new text begins to resemble something like Nabakov's *Pale Fire* (and Perec was an avid reader of Nabakov). Yet in this case, the *mise-en-abyme* will *not* be directed towards heightening the readerly reverie, but rather, in disrupting it, in turning the reverie of fictional detachment into the horror of participation.

Once the reader begins to stitch together the thematic connection that has no narrative connection, fictional reverie begins to become destabilized, when we begin to understand that it is the *histoire* of a *real* childhood.[30] While Perec may stand at three removes from his childhood, *we* as readers no longer stand at any remove at all from the *writer* of the entire book. The fictional component of the book, then, instead of bearing the impersonal structure that is, as I have attempted to show, an essential characteristic of fiction, comes to us only via the flesh-and-blood writer, Georges Perec, who in "underwriting the fiction," negates it as fiction.

The fictional aspect of the narrative refuses, in this way, to inhabit the *space* of fiction in its referring us back to the space and time that we inhabit and share with the writer. W (the invented place and not the book), in referring us back to its author, in coming to us as an *object*, rather than as a *world*, refuses to effect the bifurcation in modalities characteristic of

fiction, refuses to leave *this* world. It nonetheless remains a fiction: a fiction without context, without frame. Ultimately, we must come to understand in reading the book as a whole, what Perec understands: that it is not the fictional W that is going to offer illumination, but rather, the relation of the fiction to the narrated, but unremembered childhood: W does not resemble his Olympic fantasy any more than his Olympic fantasy resembles his childhood,

> Mais dans le réseau qu'ils tissent comme dans la lecture que j'en fais, je sais que se trouve inscrit et décrit le chemin que j'ai parcouru, le cheminement de mon histoire et l'histoire de mon cheminement. (18)[31]

We are not to understand, then, the fiction as simply a *symbol* of the lost childhood that would then only need to be interpreted in order to arrive at real understanding. The fictional narration, the island of W, is not a "heuristic device allowing the writer to come to terms with loss,"[32] because it is not a device. Perec's insistence was not on the act of his creation, but rather, the *experience* of understanding that the compulsion to create can never replace, come to terms with, the object of his loss:

> [J]'aurai beau traquer mes lapsus…les résonances mignonnes de l'Oedipe ou de la castration, je ne retrouvera jamais, dans mon ressassement même, que l'ultime reflet d'une parole absente à l'écriture, le scandale de leur silence et de mon silence. (63)[33]

It is the silence that Perec's compulsion to create circumscribes, but in the circumscription of this absence, *writing*. Writing as the confrontation with absence, and with lack, with the very emptiness of the "I am writing."

Perec, throughout his literary production, returns to the notion of the missing thing. For a missing thing to be truly missing it has to be *doubly* missing: one cannot know *what it is* that is missing. The characters in his previous book, *La disparition,* are tormented by the fact that something is missing, something that thwarts the possibility of comprehension, but no one knows what it is. The reader, armed with the knowledge that what is missing is a letter

from their vocabulary, watches the characters flounder helplessly, as one by one, they die. In *W ou le souvenir d'enfance*, however, the goal is to represent the missing: thus, the obtrusive *presence* of these "empty" letters, rather than their absence in *La disparition*: the "appréhension du blanc" must be turned into an "apparition du blanc."

III. W OR THE FAILURE OF NARRATIVE

Perec gives his first description of the project that will become *W ou le souvenir d'enfance* in a letter to Maurice Nadeau, who had originally published Perec's first book *Les choses*, and who was (and remains to this day) the editor of the magazine *La quinzaine littéraire*. Conceived here as an adventure novel in the vein of Jules Verne (to which *W ou le souvenir d'enfance* contains many allusions) Perec describes his creation of W at around twelve or thirteen years old, during his first psychoanalysis, with Françoise Dolto[34] (who later became well-known for her pioneering work in pediatric psychoanalysis). W, he writes, "est une île, quelque part dans la Terre de Feu. Il y vit une race d'athlètes vêtus de survêtements blancs porteurs d'un grand W noir"[35]. Although this, he says, is all that he can remember, nonetheless, he writes, "je sais…que je peux aujourd'hui, racontant W, raconter mon enfance"[36] (*Je suis né* 61).

Nadeau accepted Perec's proposal to publish the work in serial in *La quinzaine littéraire*. The *feuilleton* would take the form of an adventure novel in which each episode would conclude the previous one, and would leave the reader in suspense, waiting for the next (*Je suis né* 64). The first six installments of the *feuilleton*, which was called only "W, feuilleton de Georges Perec*"* did indeed provide the beginnings of the adventure novel that Perec promised, and of which the book *W ou le souvenir d'enfance* reproduces more or less

faithfully in the odd-numbered chapters of Part 1, and in the even-numbered chapters of Part 2. Intimations of difficulty, however, greet the reader upon the seventh installment of 16 January 1970:

> Il n'y avait pas de chapitres précédents. Oubliez ce que vous avez lu ; c'était une autre histoire, un prologue tout au plus, ou bien un souvenir si lointain que ce qui va venir ne saurait que le submerger. Car c'est maintenant que tout commence, c'est maintenant qu'il part à sa recherche.[37]

Certainly, for the reader of the *feuilleton*, it would be easy enough to contextualize this declaration under the rubric of fiction, to understand it as an exploration of the limits of fiction *in* fiction using the *mise-en-abyme* as a trope to increase narrative pleasure and readerly absorption. Beginning with this section, which will take its place in the even-numbered chapters of Part Two of the book, Gaspard Winckler is heard from no more. If, in the previous installments, the narrative is concerned with who Gaspard Winckler is, and why he goes to the island of W, the rest of the installments will be concerned only with the description of the island of W itself, a description that seems to occur without the narrator's overt presence; indeed, the story of the narrator does become "une autre histoire," one that becomes lost, submerged in the island of W. Here, narration, suspense, the compulsion of fiction gives way to a purely descriptive procedure, from out of which the narrative never returns.

It becomes more and more evident, however, that by what should have been the fifteenth installment of the *feuilleton*, in issue number 95, dated 16 May 1970, that the limits of fiction have been transcended. This issue appeared without an installment of the novel, containing instead, only a brief statement from the editors:

> Georges Perec a tardé à nous envoyer la suite de son feuilleton. Il s'en excuse auprès de nos lecteurs, qui trouveront dans notre prochain numéro la suite de W. [38]

The announcement forces that of the previous editorial interjection to be reinterpreted, the assumption of its fictionality compromised. Perec was certainly having trouble in continuing his adventure novel. In displaying this to the reader, the act of writing becomes implicated in the unanchored realm of fiction; now, the function of the publication process, the mechanics of the *mise-en-page*, the difficulties in the life of the real writer all impose themselves upon the absorptive, timeless realm of the fictional. Certainly, the reader might have the right to harbor the suspicion, given the fact that previously he or she had been told that "Il n'y avait pas de chapitres précédents," that now, "il n'aura plus de chapitres à suivre." Perec's readers did indeed, however, find the next installment in the following number, issue number 96, and he continued on without interruption until the story's end four issues later with the 19th installment that appeared in the *Quinzaine's* 100th issue of 1 August 1970.

The effect that these hiccups in the publication process had for the reader was no doubt minimal: once the narrative was taken up again, the reader, likewise, could resume his or her absorption in the fiction, return to the rhythmical enjoyment of the text, relish the suspense that having to wait two weeks for the next installment generates. It is clear, however, that they were indicative of new problematics in Georges Perec's writing process. Perhaps Perec's faith that "racontant W" was to "raconter" his childhood had begun to be undermined. Perec, we must recall, could not remember the W that he had created as a twelve or thirteen year old. All that he could do now was to *re*invent W. If the end of this reinvention of W was to make his lost childhood finally appear, the project had been a failure: he could not find himself in the island inhabited by a race of people fanatically devoted to athletic competitions. He could not find himself in an adventure novel. Even *if*

W represented the childhood that he had lost, Perec had no way of recognizing his childhood in it, because he remained, no less than before, bereft of memory.

Yet, we might say, it is this very *lack* of recognition that brought about the possibility of the new text, the book *W ou le souvenir d'enfance*. The book, with its clashing narrative modalities, refuses to come together as a whole for the reader, much in the same way that the adult Perec's memories of his teenage years cannot be put together coherently. Once Perec made the decision to interlace his autobiography between the "adventure" chapters, the adventure could no longer be enjoyed in the same way. To really understand this, one must go to the *feuilleton* itself. While the differences between the text that appears in the *feuilleton* and that which appears in alternating chapters in *W ou le souvenir d'enfance* are negligible, nonetheless, after the first chapter, they cannot be read in the same way. To read the *feuilleton* is largely to bring a generically fictional set of expectations to the text, to allow a purely ephemeral suspense to work viscerally through one's experience. The reader of the book is permitted these expectations during the time it takes to read the first chapter for the first time, only to have them shattered by the beginning of the second chapter, when the reader struggles to force the text into a narrative contiguity, and necessarily fails.[39] After having gone on to read subsequent chapters, returning to the first chapter of the book can never reproduce the same absorption. And yet, when one picks up the original version of the *Quinzaine Littéraire*, even after having read the book, the experience changes: it is one of reading *fiction*.

Perhaps we can think of the rupture in the *feuilleton* narrative as a kind of performance. While Perec probably did not deliberately withhold the fifteenth installment from his reader, the *lack* that appears in that issue, instead of the story, in disrupting the rhythm of fullness and emptiness, of suspense and resolution, nonetheless may have had its

effect on Perec, one which he wished to take up as *theme*, not in the next installment, but in a reconfiguration of the entire text.

The book, then, we could say, takes this performance of *lack* as its center: it destroys the fiction that he offers the reader of the *feuilleton*, and in doing so, puts the material back into the context of the "souvenir d'enfance," which it fails to do as serial adventure novel. Perec, we might say, attempts in the book to reproduce the *experience* of his failure to tell the story of his childhood in the narrative of W. The rupture in the serialization, *precisely because it is insignificant for the reader*, comes to the forefront in the book, where the reader is *forced* to experience the rupture. The "points de suspension," the ellipse mark that takes up the entire page between chapters 11 and 12 likewise serve to point to, to emphasize, to *invent* an essential lack of cohesion in the experience of reading the text. Thus, the reader is made to confront the same difficulty in reading, that Perec experienced in writing. What we come to see then, is that the difficulty here is not something that can be overcome, but rather, can only be represented *as such*. The book, then, is not one that seeks completion as book, but rather, failure, the *blank* of narrative uncohesion, the inability to represent his childhood in narrative. If there is any doubt that Perec saw his *feuilleton* as a failure, it is made clear in Perec's remark on the *prière d'insérer* of the book:

> Il y a dans ce livre deux textes simplement alternés ; il pourrait presque semblait qu'ils n'ont rien en commun, mais ils sont portant inextricablement enchevêtres, comme si aucun des deux ne pouvait exister seul, comme si de leur rencontre seule, de cette lumière lointaine qu'ils jettent l'un sur l'autre, pouvait se révéler ce qui n'est jamais tout à fait dit dans l'un, jamais tout à fait dit dans l'autre, mais seulement dans leur fragile intersection.[40]

What we might understand this to mean is less that the two texts "add up" to say something that neither text could say by itself, but rather, that their "fragile intersection" is in their non-coincidence: not in what they say, but in the "blank" that they circumscribe, that

they bring into obtrusiveness. Perhaps, Perec understood in the move from the *feuilleton* "W" to *W ou le souvenir d'enfance*, that the "narrative" of his unremembered childhood, in which is embedded the death of his father and the murder of his mother, could not be represented as an adventure novel. What remains from the *form* of the adventure novel, however, is the "suspense," the gaps in the story, which now take their place not as fascination, but as horror. The adventure novel is placed *en-abyme*. Here, however, the *mise-en-abyme* is not placed in the service of fiction, but rather, in such a way that the fiction is annihilated: the writer seeks to "mettre en terme ce lent déchiffrement," even as Gaspard Winckler stutters and hesitates in attempting to find a way to *begin* to tell the story of his voyage to W.

IV. MEANWHILE FOR WHOM?

The two narratives that together comprise *W ou le souvenir d'enfance* are presented in alternate chapters and in different typefaces: the fictional story of Gaspard Winckler is narrated in italics and begins with chapter I, while the autobiographical narrative, which begins in chapter II is in roman type. The book, already double in narrative is doubled again: it is divided into a Première Partie, which encompasses chapters 1 to XI, and a Deuxième Partie, which begins with chapter XII and ends with chapter XXXVI, the last. The two parts of the book are split by a page that bears nothing but three dots in parenthesis (…), an ellipsis mark (*points de suspension*), that implies, perhaps, something missing between the two sections of the book. If the ellipses indicate that something is left out, however, the seamless contiguity of the chapters' numeration permits no evidence of it: what is missing has no *place*. This contiguity in the face of the rupture that the ellipses imply is further

emphasized through the epigraphs that each part bears: Part One begins with the first two lines of the last quatrain of Raymond Queneau's poem "Chène et Chien," and Part Two continues with the last two lines of the poem.

The one exception to the rule of alternating narratives occurs in the chapters that straddle the division between the two parts of the book. Chapter XI is a fictional narrative, as is chapter XII. The book then continues its alternation of chapters, so that the fictional narrative, which is presented in odd-numbered chapters in the first part, appears in even-numbered chapters in the second part, and vice versa. This creates a sort of mirror-image structure to the book (which recalls Perec's interest in the palindrome)[41] but also the sense of a disordering shift in positions: if the book begins with the fictional narrative, the position of this narrative in the text gets displaced by the autobiographical narrative, which likewise relinquishes its position to the fictional narrative. Thus the very structure of the book seems to produce a tension between the symmetry implied in a mirror image, and the restless *dissymmetry* that comes about in the way that each narrative usurps the place of the other: the closed structure that the *form* of the mirror-image implies is undone by the shift in the position of the *content*. The symmetry of the mirror-image, paradoxically, then, effects an asymmetrical *displacement*.

The doubled narrative, made double again by the twofold division generates four quadrants creates even further disjunction in not permitting a uniform method of reading the text. One can read the entirety of the autobiography against the entirety of the "adventure" narrative, thus spanning the central division; *or*, one can read the first part of each narrative against the second, thereby respecting the division. Ultimately, none of the quadrants can be assimilated into its own proper place in the story, because with each narrative choice on the part of the reader, the other permutation looms unread. The book in

this way seems to offer less a narrative, than the potential for a narrative, a potential that can never be actualized, much in the way that Raymond Queneau's book *Cent mille milliards de poèmes* offers the reader the unrealizable potential of as many poems in ten pages of sonnets. The text, then, exceeds itself with every reading, the cohesion of its narrative never resolvable.

The "adventure" narrative offers many of the generic signposts of fiction, with its allusions to the novels of Jules Verne and Raymond Roussel,[42] with its cliffhangers between chapters, and with its dramatic sequences of dialogue. The autobiographical narrative, on the contrary, seems to deliberately avoid taking on a fictional, or even literary tone. The narrative flatly strings together historical data and autobiographical documents, at times simply cataloguing them, in a manner that eschews suspense, or even, of a storyline. The effect is more that of the presentation of results of a research project, or the transcription of a psychoanalytic dialogue, than that of a literary *récit*. While this is a style that Perec has employed at least since his first published novel, *Les choses*, the contrast that the juxtaposition of the two narratives present heightens the generically literary quality of the one, and the anti-literary quality of the other.

In what we shall call quadrant one, (part one of the autobiography), the narrative concerns itself with that which the author cannot recover of his early life. It is marked by the presence, in discourse, of the parents. In chapter IV, Perec recounts a dubious "memory" in which he recognizes a Hebrew letter, to the delight of his family, a letter which, as he notes, turns out not to exist in the Hebrew alphabet, one of the many instances in the text that point to the disparity between individual experience (sense) and shared reality (reference). Chapter VI, in a long footnote (much longer than the primary text) catalogs from newspapers the events that took place on the first days of his life. In Chapter VIII,

Perec quotes verbatim the attempt that he made to recount his autobiography 15 years earlier; he again heavily annotates this piece of writing with explanatory and editorial footnotes. In Chapters VIII and X Perec describes photographs that feature his parents and himself, and in Chapter X, he describes his childhood home on the rue Vilin in the 19th Arrondissement of Paris; he also describes in a section of this chapter called "Le départ," the last time that the young Georges Perec would see his mother: the day she took him to the Gare de Lyon and saw him onto the train that would take him south to the *Zone libre* where he would be under the care of his relatives.

Quadrant two (the adventure narrative in Part One), narrated by a young French army deserter who assumes the name Gaspard Winckler, has two primary concerns: the recounting of the events that lead Winckler to presumably undertake his voyage to W, but also his rationale for recounting the events after the voyage has apparently taken place. Gaspard Winckler, having fled into Germany, languishes in a small village until he receives a mysterious letter from a certain Otto Apfelstahl, M.D., requesting a meeting, When, in chapter VII, the two meet at the bar of the Hotel Berghof on Nurmbergstrasse in the village of H., Apfelstahl informs Gaspard Winckler that his name, which he acquired with the help of a pacifist organization, was taken from the passport of an eight year old deaf-mute boy, who had gone missing in a shipwreck that had killed his mother and the rest of the crew. Winckler understands what is wanted of him without being asked:

> *—Je suppose que vous attendez de moi que je participe à cette recherche ?*
> *—C'est exact, dit Otto Apfelstahl, je voudrais que vous partiez là-bas et que vous retrouviez Gaspard Winckler.* (69)[43]

In Chapter IX, Apfelstahl recounts the shipwreck and the deaths of those on board. Particularly horrific is the slow and painful death of Cecilia, the mother of the young Gaspard Winckler: injured by a trunk which fell on her in the collision, she tried to reach and

to open the door of her cabin. She is found dead by a Chilean rescue team, the door in front of her incessantly scratched by her bloody nails.

In quadrant three, which takes up the even numbered chapters of Part Two (and the beginning of which corresponds to the seventh installment in the *feuilleton*), the tone of the adventure story changes drastically. Gaspard Winckler is never mentioned again. Rather, the narrator throughout the odd-numbered chapters of Part One is "submerged" as the text abruptly commences, in a mostly impersonal voice, the pseudo-ethnological description that it will be concerned with through the end of the book, of the island of W. W, we are told in Chapter XII, is a desert island roughly in the shape of the head of a sheep with its lower jaw dislocated (93). The interior of the island, however, contains a fertile "micro-mésopatomie" which is inhabited by a people of uncertain origin, and who are devoted to an ideal Olympic civilization. Life in W revolves around athletic competitions; the entrances to the four villages all bear the motto "FORTIUS ALTIUS CITIUS" (96). Devoid of any narrative intrigue, each subsequent chapter describes an aspect of the society's way of life. Chapter XIV describes W's topography: four Olympic villages form a *quadrangle* that circumscribes a central stadium. Four smaller stadiums are located around the perimeter, between concurrent villages. Life in W revolves (literally) around these stadiums and the various competitions that occur in them. Chapter XVIII describes the details surrounding these competitions: consistent with the "logic of W," the diets of the athletes are severely restricted, such that they are denied basic nutrients. The winners of the competitions are feted, however, with extravagant dinners, whereby they receive the chance to compensate for their regular undernourishment. Losers, though, are denied even their evening meal. In Chapter XXII, we learn that, at the prerogative of the crowd of spectators, a loser of a competition can be subject to punishment by death.

Nearly surreptitiously, each successive chapter brings to light another aspect of W's authoritarian society. What seems innocuous, if outlandish, at the beginning of the ethnography, becomes recontextualized, as the cruelty and oppression that is the foundation of the "logic of W" unfolds. "*La loi est implacable, mais la loi est imprévisible*[44]," we are told in Chapter XXIV (157). Not only can athletes be delayed at the start of a race for no apparent reason at the whim of the omnipotent judges, but further, coming in first is no guarantee that the athlete will be declared the winner. Chapter XXVI details the *Atlantiades* competition, the sole place in which procreation occurs: the athletes, exclusively male, compete for a group of young women (the women live strictly apart from the athletes in "gynecées"). The women, stripped naked, run from the men as the race begins. The victors, those who catch the women, rape them on the spot. Chapter XXX details the way children are raised in W. Cloisoned away from the athletes until the age of fourteen, children have no idea about what takes place outside the confines of the *Forteresse* where they live, and without any inculcation into the sporting world, live their life with all their needs met, "dans une promiscuité entière et heureuse" (188)[45]. When the boy of W reaches the age of fourteen, however, he is "quarantined." His hands and feet bound by day, he is chained to his bed at night for a period of six months before he sews the white triangle onto his athletic suit and begins his period as a "novice" in the athletic competitions. As novice, he must find a "protector" among the athletes, to whom his service, sexual and otherwise, affords him the possibility of guide and guard in the new horrific world.

Meanwhile—and one of the most tenacious questions one has of this book is meanwhile for *whom?*—Georges Perec, in quadrant four (the odd-numbered chapters in Part Two), recounts his own adolescence, and the various boarding houses in which he lived. This quadrant is marked, in opposition to quadrant one, by the absence of the parents in the

discourse. Here Perec recounts his first real memories: the invention of W, the first joke that he can remember (a refugee from occupied Paris named Normand who lived in the room of a man named Breton) (122), his childhood reading. In chapter XIX, Perec describes his infatuation with the Christian rites of the Christian-oriented *collège* that he attended. In Chapter XXI, he describes a visit of German soldiers to his school who commandeered a large pig that the cook was raising, and in Chapter XXIII he describes being brought with his classmates to a secret meeting in the forest where the students brought food to resistance fighters. Throughout, Perec ruminates over the unreliability of his memory. In Chapter XV, Perec describes the memory of having a fractured shoulder blade; however, Perec recounts that in 1970, he crossed paths with a former schoolmate, whom he did not remember (and who, as it turns out, had no memory of Perec) who described the exact circumstances of the injury as Perec remembered it, not to Perec, but rather, to another one of their classmates! After the liberation, of which Perec has little memory and little to say except "Il y eut la Libération" (183), Perec ultimately returns to Paris:

> En sortant de la gare, j'ai demandé comment s'appelait ce monument ; on m'a répondu que ce n'était pas un monument, mais seulement la gare de Lyon. (214) [46]

Throughout the text, there are numerous thematic correspondences: most notably, of course, we read about Perec's invention of the original W and his subsequent reinvention and publication in the *Quinzaine litteraire*. Yet we find many other resonances and similitudes between the two texts. Bernard Magné uses the term "suture" for those similitudes which occur in contiguous chapters, and thus (except for chapters XI and XII) in different narratives. Yet throughout the text, whether in contiguous chapters or not, the two narratives seem to refer to each other, to imply each other, jarringly, however, because

neither appears to be cognizant of the other's existence. Some of these similitudes appear more or less overt, such as the resemblance of the insignia of the white triangle that the athletes of W wear (199) to the yellow star that his mother wore in Paris during the Occupation (52), and again to the yellow star that Perec imagines pinned to him when he psychoanalyzes the possible screen memory of a merit-medal taken away unjustly (80). Others however, in their very banality, seem more insidious: in one of the three early memories that he has of being at school, for example, he remembers a particularly joyous moment ("ivre de joie") skipping on one foot ["a cloche pied"], a manner of locomotion "très fréquent chez les enfants" (79). Later, in the W narrative, the motif returns, when the narrative describes the humiliating way in which athletes were made to compete in the decathlon and pentathlon: disguised as clowns, and running "à cloche pied" to the taunts of the crowd (119). Later still, the blissfully ignorant children of W play, "*hors d'haleine, ivres de joie*" (189). Still other resemblances pertain to the narrators themselves. Both Georges Perec and Gaspard Winckler express their ambivalence in narrating their stories. Winckler begins by disclosing that "longtemps j'ai voulu garder le secret" (13)[47]. Perec is likewise reticent in discussing his motivation to write about his life: "je fus comme un enfant qui joue à cache-cache et qui ne sait pas ce qu'il craint ou désire le plus : rester caché, être découvert" (18)[48]. The two narratives also bear similarities in that which they omit: just as, in Part Two of the adventure novel, there is no more mention of Gaspard Winckler, likewise, in Part Two of the autobiography, there is no attempt to recall the memory of either the mother or the father.[49] Narrator, on the one hand, and parents (as guarantors of narration) on the other, both become submerged in a narrative that takes on their *lack* as theme.

It is the final chapter, however, an autobiographical one, that offers the greatest possibility of a structural correspondence between the two narratives. Chapter XXXVII

consists mostly of a quotation from David Rousset's memoir of life in several concentration camps, *L'univers concentrationnaire*, and it is here that the connection between the island of W and the concentration camp is made overt. "[P]as de travail, du 'sport,'" Rousset writes. The "sport," he continues, consists in this:

> faire tourner très vite les hommes pendant des heures sans arrêt, avec le fouet ; organiser la marche du crapaud, et les plus lents seront jetés dans le bassin d'eau sous le rire homérique des S.S. ; répéter sans fin le mouvement qui consiste à se plier très vite sur les talons, les mains perpendiculaires; très vite (toujours vite, vite, *Schnell, los Mensch*) à plat ventre dans la boue et se relever, cent fois de rang, courir ensuite, s'inonder d'eau pour se laver et garder vingt-quatre heures des vêtements mouillés. (222)[50]

Here, in this extended citation of *another* book, is the closest that the writer, or redactor, comes to acknowledging that he is the signatory of *this* book. It is here that the white triangle seems to transform into the yellow star; the fictional world of W seems to throw off its fiction and become something *real*, something *historical*, and, in the spirit of the Polish bedtime story, something *all outside*. The world of the fiction would seem to give way into the world that the real reader and the real writer share, the world where the real father is shot by the Germans, where the real mother is murdered, asphyxiated in a gas chamber of Auschwitz.

And this would be the case, had this text appeared, as it originally did in the *feuilleton*, as part of the fictional world of Gaspard Winckler and W. But because it does not, because it is narrated as part of the autobiographical thread, the disparate, clashing registers of the text do not find their point of commonality.

It would be tempting, as others have been tempted, to view this last chapter as effecting the transformation of the world of W into something like an analogy of the concentration camps, thereby subsuming the W narrative under the rubric of the autobiography. Indeed, many aspects of Rousset's book beyond that which Perec quotes

can be found alluded to in the description of W: the humiliating competitions, the malnourishment, the custom of a seasoned athlete taking a novice as "giton." Interestingly, Manet von Montfrans points out that the camp that Rousset describes in the passage that Perec quotes, Neue-Bremm, is very close to Sarrebruck, in the Sarre, the region of Germany that Gaspard Winckler makes his home in exile: "La boucle est fermée," she writes, "le voyage est circulaire: Gaspard Winckler n'avait nullement besoin de se déplacer pour atteindre la Terre de Feu, puisque le monde 'englouti qu'il a vu de ses propres yeux' se trouve dans la région sarroise" (186).[51] [52]

Yet the very appearance of the citation from Rousset as part of the fiction in the *feuilleton* may very well have been another manifestation of that narrative's *failure* to convey what Perec wished to express, precisely because of the closure that it creates. To impose a historical reality onto the fiction in this manner indeed allegorizes the fiction, turning the description of the island of W into a fairly transparent symbol of the concentration camp[53]; it is perhaps this last chapter of the *feuilleton* then, that brought about the need for Perec to again reinvent the story. It might not seem as outlandish as it sounds to say that Perec may have intertwined his autobiography with the W story so that the last chapter could appear in *it* and not in the fiction, precisely to avoid the *fermeture de la boucle*. The buckle, in fact, *misses* the belt, because the "buckling" occurs in an alien modality to that of the fiction, leaving the fiction perpetually unbuckled. Only in this way can the Historical, the shared world, the world of facts and documentation, be kept separate from the realm of intimate experience, of the absorption of that history into personal experience, and only in this way can *space* for personal experience persist amidst the "Hache" of *Histoire*. In the fragile "ou" of *W ou le souvenir d'enfance*, the two narratives remain unreconciled. One might say that these are indeed two separate worlds, worlds that intersect only in the *points du suspension*, only in their

failure to intersect. The mirror-image structure of the text, then, while implying symmetry, in fact forces the two stories each to appropriate, to displace each other.

It is for this reason that we must forcefully reject Bernard Magné's contention that "la fiction constitue non seulement un élément de la biographie…mais encore—et c'est essentiel—en élément du récit autobiographique…L'énonciation autobiographique est donc en position dominante, à un niveau hiérarchiquement supérieur par rapport à la fiction, qui est, vis-à-vis de l'autobiographie, en situation d'inclusion" ("Sutures" 41)[54]. To take this position would be to occult the very circumscription of absence that the two texts effect, in not being able to be harmonized with each other, in not being able to hierarchized, to be organized. And to do so would be to ignore the "ou" that *disjunctively* connects W with the souvenir d'enfance, and that forces a *doubling* of experience rather than a narrative resolution. It is this doubling *without* intersecting, then, that the suture structure, as opposed to the narrative structure, of the text creates (and Magné's notion of the suture remains an important contributions to its study). The disjunctive logic of the book *W ou le souvenir d'enfance* is the opposite, we might say, of the ultra-hierarchical organization of the island of W. It refuses to be organized in taking the empty, the *indicible*, the *points de suspension*, as its theme. It is only because the two narratives are incompatible—either W *or* the memory of childhood— that the *blank*, the emptiness inherent in each story can be revealed. It is indeed, then, in the fragile intersection of the two narratives that we can, as readers, *see* how, in the absence of the *intimate*, of one's own proper memories of oneself, "une autre histoire, la Grande, l'Histoire avec sa grande hache, avait déjà répondu à ma place : la guerre, les camps." The incompatibility of the two narratives permits the readerly experience of this elision, the world in which one wakes to the replacement *already* having occurred. It is only,

then, in the non-coincidence of these two stories, that the text can bring this *non-dit*, this not-said, into appearance.

A truly disjunctive reading would negate a too-simplistic understanding, in bringing to the foreground the incompatibility of the facts of an implacable and unpredictable *law* of history with intimate experience. What results is not *sense*, but rather, incomprehension. That the two narratives refuse to enter into a hierarchical relationship preserves the connection between the *poesis* of fiction, and the experience of reality. We might begin to think of the book as a search for *loss*, and as such, the book finds it necessary to thwart the compulsive progression toward a resolution that constitutes the genre of fictional narrative, a resolution that would *replace* the bereftness of the unraveled equilibrium which elicits the story to begin with. In *W ou le souvenir d'enfance*, however, the narrative bid is not the act of replacement, but rather, the blank itself that this replacement effects in the act of replacing. Paradoxically, the book itself is comprised of a series of such replacements: W replaces the unremembered childhood of Georges Perec; A new, reinvented W replaces the forgotten W; Gaspard Winckler the army deserter replaces Gaspard Winckler the child; and ultimately, the adult Georges Perec must live *as* this replacement, and thus, must live the disjunction, the perpetual oscillation between intimate experience and the "text" (*la guerre, les camps*) of the social. Thus, in thematizing these replacements, rather than organizing them into the *form* of narrative, the empty, blank "moment" between the replacement and the thing replaced comes to the fore. For the adult Perec, the experience of loss does not take the form of the experience of the loss of the *parents*, but rather, the experience of the loss of the *child* who lost his parents. In the loss of the child then, he experiences the *loss of the loss* of his parents, and as such, his quest is not to replace the loss with a new-found fullness, but rather, to *reclaim the loss* as experience. It is not, then, an initial equilibrium that the narratives seek, not

a before-the-story: this is evident enough in the fact that there is not *one* story. Rather, it is only in the transgressing of the narrative structure that the reader can be forced to forego the resolution that he or she has been habituated to effect, and it is only in this way, perhaps, that the reader can, in the act of reading, experience the *blank* of narrative failure, rather than the fullness of narrative resolution. What must be suffered then, is the fact that fiction and autobiography exist in separate spheres.

If a fictional narrative requires the construction of an observing mechanism, a transcendental perspective that guarantees the coherence of the world that is presented, the disjunctive narratives of *W ou le souvenir d'enfance,* in their clashing modalities, do not permit the construction of such a perspective in such a way that the *world* of the book can be grasped as a whole. This is the subject of the book, a subject which is nonetheless doubled. It is the search for an unavailable component of one's self, lost as a result of childhood trauma: a fictional man seeks a fictional lost young boy who shares his name; a real man seeks the facts of his unremembered childhood. But it is also the search for a reconciliation *in general* between historical fact and intimate experience: the experience of the child Georges Perec, we might say, can only be narrated, restituted, via fiction, the fiction of the lost deaf-mute child Gaspard Winckler. And yet, if this is the case, the real child can never be restituted.

The doubled narrative structure, much like the structure of *A la recherche du temps perdu*, creates two poles, neither of which can subsume the other under its organization. Yet each of the two narratives in turn is doubled in itself. Each consists, on the one hand, of a speaker/seeker, and on the other hand, the sought for, who does not speak, but who bears the name of the speaker. Thus, another quadrangle emerges, this one formed by the four

principle subjects which the book treats: Gaspard Winckler the adult; Gaspard Winckler the child; Georges Perec the adult; and Georges Perec the child.

If the four villages of W create a quadrangle that circumscribe an omnipotent and panoptic institution—the stadium, the judges—the four subjects all circumscribe an emptiness, an absence which can only be made "full" by the impossible confluence of all four. Georges-Perec-the-child, absorbed in the facts of history, cannot speak for himself and must be spoken for by Georges-Perec-the-adult. Yet Georges-Perec-the-child cannot speak precisely because Georges-Perec-the-adult cannot remember him. Gaspard-Winckler-the-adult, then, is enlisted, in fiction, to undertake a journey to the island of W to seek out the deaf and mute Gaspard-Winckler-the-child. This fictional child, however, can never be made to appear:

> *Il ne pouvait pas y avoir de survivant. Ce que mes yeux avaient vu était réellement arrivé : les lianes avaient disjoint les scellements, la forêt avait mangé les maisons ; le sable envahit les stades, les cormorans s'abattirent par milliers et le silence, le silence glacial tout à coup.* (14)[55]

The disparities that keep the four subjects apart can never be overcome. Yet in their intersection, one might say that the "blank" of Georges Perec's history has transformed into the *intimate* experience of this blankness rather than as an historical blankness. It is, we might say, a suffering of the incompatibility of history/memory and fiction, the place where one observes *oneself*, where the blankness that appears in the inner sphere finally coincides with that which menaces from the outside. We can begin to see here that the quadrangle created by the *structure* of the book which thwarts narrative cohesion, duplicates that which manifests thematically in the work. It can only do so by forcing the reader out of his or her fictional absorption in bringing the act of reading, and thus, the milieu of history and not fiction, to the fore.

The epigraph to the *préambule* of *La vie mode d'emploi*, from Paul Klee: "L'œil suit les chemins qui lui ont été ménagé dans l'œuvre" (17).[56] In *W ou le souvenir d'enfance*, we might say, Perec explores the *negative* effect of this place-making. The eye can find itself only in what is *there* for it, whether the *œuvre* is a work of art, or whether it is the real world in which it finds itself. The eye can only follow *these* paths. And yet, the eye is *not* the work; between the eye and the work, the act of *encounter*, of *perception*, and the *recognition* of the self as the one perceiving, and then, in perceiving, following the paths laid out for it There is nothing else for the eye to see, and yet, the path laid out for it does not exhaust the perceptive capabilities of the eye itself. Yet there is nothing else for the eye to see. Everything that the eye *sees,* then, also represents what it does not see. Everything that it sees is also a "symbol" of the absent, is shot through with emptiness. *W ou le souvenir d'enfance* juxtaposes an inner experience that cannot be shared, and thus, can only be represented fictionally, with the shared Historical world, that eclipses intimate experience, and yet, nonetheless, determines one's identity, one's coordinates in the world. The intimate experience, however, having nothing *but* this shared language for its vocabulary, replaces, elides this shared world, turning it into a language of the self. Only in bringing back this impoverished vocabulary of a history that excludes the intimacy of being a person, can this process be seen, in the very act of its being replaced. Thus, insofar as "l'Histoire avec sa Grande Hache" has already responded in the *place* of the writer's intimate experience, the realm of intimate experience has *symmetrically*, also responded in the place of History. It is through juxtaposing them, that their non-coincidence, their essential *asymmetry* can be seen. Each sphere incorporates the other in arriving at its proper vocabulary, and thus, each sphere replaces and elides the other. The process, then, by which the *person* becomes an *individual* is one of replacement. Perec, in attempting to arrive at the *moment* when the person becomes absorbed in being a subject, in

being an individual, cannot do so articulately, but rather, only with recourse to the elided, to the ellipse, to the *indicible*. The logic of doubling and disjunction under which the book operates *displaces* the original symmetry by doubling it, forcing the reader to confront, instead of resolution, the *emptiness* which is their point of intersection. What the narratives share is the absence, the same absence at the heart of each, but which each, if left to itself, could only attempt to replace with fullness.

V. RACONTANT / RACONTER

> "*No one else could ever be admitted here, since this gate was made only for you. I am now going to shut it.*"
>
> Franz Kafka, "Before the Law"

Thus, both narratives straddle the ellipses between narrator and narrated, between the act of writing and the written. In the very attempt to tell his story, Gaspard Winckler, in the adventure narrative, already finds that he must reckon with the *absence* of a story, the inability to tell his story as himself. It is an absence that the book as a whole then, will attempt to "replace" with Georges Perec's autobiography. The autobiography, as we have seen, however, cannot replace the lack in the adventure novel, but only *doubles* the thing that cannot be said. In the interplay between the two narratives, fiction does not get permitted to harbor the inner experience of the *facts* of one's life, and so "racontant W" is, despite Perec's earlier contention, not to "raconter" Georges Perec's childhood.

The doubling in *W ou le souvenir enfance*, which always excludes a coherent *subject*, operates contagiously throughout the different divisions of the book in response to the

inadequacy of each to bear its own story. We can see this at work in looking closely at the book's first sentences, as the adventure narrative begins: they do not point to the *narrative* of Gaspard Winckler's voyage to W, but rather, to the *act* of telling the story, and thus, the adventure narrative is doubled from the start in splitting off the story of the narrator, from that which the narrator comes to narrate:

> *J'ai longtemps hésité avant d'entreprendre le récit de mon voyage à W. Je m'y résous aujourd'hui, poussé par une nécessité impérieuse, persuadé que les événements dont j'ai été le témoin doivent être révélés et mis en lumière.* (13)[57]

In speaking about the story, Gaspard Winckler only continues to defer it. His long hesitation, which he declares to end now, today, in the present tense, will in fact continue through Chapter XI, the end of Part One. Considering his possibilities as narrator, he already finds himself in a state of confusion as to his relation to the story that he resolves to tell, and this becomes his theme:

> "*je fus témoin, et non acteur. Je ne suis pas le héros de mon histoire. Je n'en suis pas non plus exactement le chantre*"[58]

Instead of the story of the voyage to W, then, the story of the storyteller, the story in which Gaspard Winckler *is* the hero. Yet it is the wrong story. As long as Gaspard Winckler the adult is there, the child remains elusive. Let us recall Perec's editorial interjection in the seventh installment of the *feuilleton*: "Il n'y avait pas de chapitres précédents. Oubliez ce que vous avez lu ; c'était une autre histoire…" The telling of the story of W will require the relinquishment of the status of hero. The paradox, however, is that the story that in which he is *not* the hero, is nonetheless "*mon histoire*." To be a witness to one's own story, of which one is nonetheless *not* the hero, is to be a witness with nothing to tell. Gaspard Winckler's ineradicable *presence*, his writing here, *now* occults the very story that he has resolved to tell. He stands in the wrong place: inside the "autre histoire," the "chapitres précédents."

Already, then, the double structure manifests in the inability to organize, to create a hierarchy in the relation of the narrator to the narrated.

To tell a story necessitates a fictional standpoint: it must efface one's bodily presence. Gaspard Winckler, then, *refuses* the fiction that the telling of a story necessitates. It is the very act of narration that is at issue here: to narrate would be to repress the act of writing in favor of a narrative that cannot include the *impetus to tell*, and which would thus, have no ground upon which to stand. Insofar as the narrator writes that he resolves *today* to tell his story, he is present both to himself and to his interlocutor. To enter into the story would entail giving up the self reference, the immediacy of himself to his audience, and likewise, the immediacy of the audience to *itself*. This would require both a fictional Gaspard Winckler to displace the "real" one, as well as a fictional audience to replace the real flesh-and-blood audience. To enter into the space of the story, then, in accordance with the law of fiction, would require the relinquishing of the *now* of the writing. So the narrator lingers at the point where storyteller and story diverge, maintaining his narrative presence with self-references: "*J'allais dire*…" (13); "*Longtemps j'ai voulu garder le secret*"; "*Longtemps je demeurai indécis. Lentement j'oubliai les incertaines péripéties de ce voyage.*" (13)."[59] He stutters around the *content* of a story, that will, in fact, only get told in the absence of the narrator.

In the first paragraph of Gaspard Winckler's narrative, the presence of the speaker remains firmly in place through the use of the perfect and present tenses (with the imperfect tense as well employed in the same service). By the end of the paragraph, however, the mode changes: he is the only one who can tell the story of his mission to W because, he says, even "*celui qui me la* confia a *lui aussi,* disparu" (13 my emphasis)[60]. The phrase begins in the aorist tense (*confia*) and ends in the perfect (*a disparu*). The imposition of the aorist, the first time that it appears, is startling because it cancels the deictic connection that the narrator has

with the narrated events in favor of a mode of narration in which the narrator is not implicated. The two narrative modalities here enact Benveniste's distinction between *discours* and *histoire*.[61] The act of conferring the mission onto the speaker is told to us impersonally, in the time of the story, in a past that is *unavailable to the experience of the speaker qua speaker*. However, as we move to the end of the sentence, we see that is the speaker *as* speaker who *experiences* the disappearance. The moment of presence, the acquiring of the story is absent to the speaker, leaving the speaker only with the experience of this absence. There is a disjunction, not just between *now* and the past, but between two selves who are linked but unavailable to each other, who remain on either side of an ellipse that commits them to different modalities. What the speaker *has* (*a*) is the disappeared (*disparu*). He does not have, however, the origin (*celui qui me la* confia), because the tense in which this is narrated has no connection to the present speaker. The two states of affairs, that which *was*, and that which *is,* cannot be traced along a temporal continuum. The origin of the story exists in narrative time, forever unreachable, forever outside the ken of the storyteller, who thus, finds himself *outside* the story.

Yet in the next sentence, the beginning of the second paragraph, this dynamic reverses itself: "*Longtemps je demeurai indécis.*"[62] The writer, stuttering before a narration that will necessarily efface his voice, seems to yield: he speaks in the aorist. But, we nonetheless, have gotten no further in the story, at least the story that the narrator promises he is going to tell as witness; rather, the story itself gets eclipsed as the narrator casts *himself* as the grammatical object of his telling. And indeed, the narrator does not continue by telling *the* story, but rather, speaks of himself, and will continue to do so until the end of Part One, after which, the narrator will disappear.

In the movement between these two sentences, then, there is an exchange of disappearances: in the one, the past loses its connection with the present by *disappearing* into the oblivion of narration. In the other, however, it is the "I" of the speaker who disappears into narration, leaving the text, for the moment, narratorless. If the perfect tense implicates the narrator in the story that he tells as witness, and as witness as participant in the story of the telling of the story, the action, nonetheless, has to occur in another modality of discourse. The rupture that the narrator undergoes in being excluded from his narration forces the experience of an emptiness which must then become the subject of his story, insofar as *he* is the one that is going to tell it. The perfect tense, then, grounded in the present, serves to indicate the *act* of remembering, but cannot fulfill itself by reaching into the past which must remain unremembered. If the object of the remembering is to be recounted, then, it can only be done so without recourse to narrative authority: it must be recounted as fiction, as that which at its essence has no grounding authority. And this is the dilemma that the narrator faces: either the narrator is *here, now*, but he has nothing to say, nothing but the empty act of writing itself, or the story gets told but there is no one *here*, *now*, to tell it, only the impersonal voice of the storyteller. And if this is the case, then there is no witness. This only serves to increase the narrator's impoverishment as he attempts to begin: Gaspard Winckler and the story that he comes to tell, then (but where does he come *to*?) exist in different modalities. There is no way to implicate his presence in the story:

> *Il y a… ans, à Venise, dans une gargote de la Giudecca, j'ai vu entrer un homme que j'au cru reconnaître. Je me suis précipité sur lui, mais déjà balbutiant deux ou trois mots d'excuse. Il n'y pouvait pas y avoir de survivant.* (14)[63]

The misrecognition of a possible survivor from the island of W, of possibly the very person that he seeks, here serves as recognition of the narrator's isolation, his fundamental exile from his own story.

> *Quoi qu'il arrive, quoi que je fasse, j'étais le seul dépositaire, la seule mémoire vivante, le seul vestige de ce monde. Ceci, plus que toute autre considération, m'a décidé à écrire.* (14)[64]

Let us recall how Georges Perec first remembers his childhood story of the island of W in Chapter II: "Il y a sept ans, un soir, À Venise, je me souvins tout à coup que cette histoire s'appelait « W » et qu'elle était, d'une certaine façon, sinon l'histoire, du moins une histoire de mon enfance" (18). The suture that these two encounters in Venice create conjoins the child Gaspard Winckler to the child Georges Perec, but also, bar the adults from the children. Georges Perec remembers that there was, though he cannot remember it, a story of his childhood. The childhood, the story, must now be reconstrued, reconstructed in the adult because neither the child, nor the story of the childhood has survived. What he *has*, however, is the name, the letter, which can be placed in chronological time. Gaspard Winckler, however, *is* the story of W, and thus, the concrete seven years ago is replaced by ellipses. It is Gaspard Winckler who must enter into these ellipses, *make them his story*, so that this "blank" can be restituted by Georges Perec.

With Gaspard Winckler, then, we enter into the intimate experience that eludes Georges Perec. Barred from memory, from historical reality, it can only be experienced by Georges Perec as fiction: the child can never be restituted for real.

Yet Gaspard Winckler can only reduplicate the state of affairs. He, in turn, as the only *living* memory, must also exist in a different modality from that of the narrated Gaspard Winckler, whom we must also construe as *not having survived*. We can see more clearly the

labyrinth generated in the statement "*je* fus *témoin et non acteur*." The subject of the narration, albeit bearing the same name as the narrator, lives in a past that has no connection to the present. The *witness* is already an actor in the story, thus leaving no one to tell the story, and placing *en abyme* the narrative levels between the *act* of witnessing and that which the witness witnesses. There is no place in this division between teller and told to make the distinction, and thus, no time, no tense in which to tell the story. And yet, it is *this* that is the story that Gaspard Winckler cannot tell. Ultimately, then, the ellipses are ineradicable. The apprehension of the story that cannot be told because there is no one to tell it must become the story.

Gaspard Winckler's dilemma then, embodies that of the book itself: if the book is about the narrator, the narrator qua narrator cannot tell it, for as soon as one begins to speak of oneself, a new, essentially unknowable narrator has to arise: this is the function that is marked by the aorist tense, whereupon this unknowability is inscribed into language. If Georges Perec, the adult, is to recount the story of his childhood, he can only do so by offering the narrative of Georges Perec-the-adult's inability to remember his childhood. That is, it is the *rien à dire*, then, that must become the subject of the narrative.

There is a deficit in narrative, then, that both Gaspard Winckler and Georges Perec, then, must suffer. Both lack the authority to tell the story that nonetheless they are compelled to tell. There *is* no authority that can underwrite the narrative because neither narrator can recuse himself from the office of participant. As long as the story implicates them, they each remain in the impossible position of being teller and told, subject and object. They are left only with the act of writing, but without content. From the perspective of the book as a whole, then, the failure of Gaspard Winckler in narrating the story of the boy Gaspard Winckler necessitates the arising of a new narrative, one which comes to

"repair," to replace, this failed narrative by offering the possibility of a real, that is, flesh-and-blood narrator: the author himself. Yet if this is the case, once again, we have only circumscribed an absence: the adventure narrative only came in to being to *raconter* the childhood of Georges Perec to begin with.

Georges Perec the adult is never capable of serving as the vehicle for restoring, for narrating Georges Perec the child. We are left only with the *act* of remembering, but without yield, without a product. Georges Perec is not the proper hero of what is nonetheless his *own* history. His narratives can only be told *fictionally*. Yet this withdrawal into *fiction* betrays the historical reality, the only place that we can hope to find the real child Georges Perec. Fiction turns loss into fullness, but the shared world is the world where the loss is real. If fiction comes to restitute this loss, it can nonetheless, in doing so, only perpetuate it by underscoring the bereft reality that it comes to compensate for. Fiction, precisely because it *lacks* grounding in reality, comes to signify this absence.

It is this resistance, then, that accounts for the long hesitation, the hesitation that must now be recast as the theme of the book itself. As long as Gaspard Winckler resists engaging in fictional narration, he remains as mute as the boy that he seeks/has sought, and what is the case for Gaspard Winckler, then, doubly the case for Georges Perec.

The story must be diverted from narrating the story of childhood, to narrating its absence. The bid of the autobiography to subsume the fiction under its own rubric only insures the impoverishment of both narratives. All that exists is here, in the act of remembering, in the act of narrating: the narrator stands before *his* story but finds only himself, here. What Gaspard Winckler says of Gaspard Winckler is also true of Georges Perec:

il ne m'appartenait pas de divulguer quoi que ce soit sur la mission que l'on m'avait confiée, d'abord parce que, peut-être, cette mission nu fut pas accomplie—mais qui aurait pu mener à bien ? (13)[65]

It is here, then, that Gaspard Winckler the adult "becomes" Gaspard Winckler the child, in taking on his muteness. It is likewise here that Georges Perec the adult and Georges Perec the child come together to become Georges Perec. Gaspard Winckler, as a vehicle of Georges Perec to narrate his childhood, finds only emptiness, and thus, Georges Perec himself finds only emptiness. It is in this emptiness, in the intersection between fiction and reality that Gaspard Winckler the child and Georges Perec the child coincide. The quadrangle that the four figures create circumscribes the mute, intractable ellipse that is the center, and theme, of the book.

The inability to find authority, to find cohesion is indeed the primary concern of the book both in form, and in content. "Les souvenirs sont des morceaux de vie arrachés au vide" Perec writes (98). Just as his initial sketches as a teenager of his Olympic fantasy world consist of "personnages qui rien ne rattachait au sol qui était censé les supporter" (97) likewise for his memories: "Rien ne les ancre, rien ne les fixe" (98).[66] Fiction revels in its groundlessness. Its incompatibility with real life is its very source. *W ou le souvenir d'enfance* is concerned, however, with the suffering of this groundlessness, and with its incompatibility in a life where we search for ground.

VI. TWO EMPTY LETTERS

pourquoi racontons-nous ces histoires ?

que somme-nous venus chercher ici ?

que somme nous venus demander ?

loin de nous dans le temps et dans l'espace, ce lieu
fait pour nous partie d'une mémoire potentielle,
d'une autobiographie probable.

Georges Perec, *Ellis Island*

In chapter IV, an autobiographical chapter, Georges Perec recounts his first memory, which "aurait pour cadre l'arrière boutique de ma grand-mère."

> J'ai trois ans. Je suis assis au centre de la pièce, au milieu des journaux yiddish éparpillés. Le cercle de la famille m'entoure complètement : cette sensation d'encerclement ne s'accompagne pour moi d'aucun sentiment d'écrasement ou de menace : au contraire, elle est protection chaleureuse, amour[.] (26)[67]

The memory is lent an immediacy by being narrated in the present tense. The notion of presence is further emphasized by the association that the narrator has with this memory: it "recalls" a painting "peut-être de Rembrandt ou peut-être inventé" that would be called "Jésus en face des docteurs" (27).[68]

The sequence's narration, however, is governed by the conditional, "aurait." The presence of the present tense, which operates, like the aorist, in the mode of *histoire*, can only can come about through the withdrawal of the narrator's presence, so that the present tense indicates a narratorial non-presence: there is no one *here* to tell it. The sequence can only be told under the sign of fiction: we already know that the narrator has no memories of his childhood.

The narrator's contention that the memory of being encircled by the family does not produce a feeling of being menaced is peculiar: we would have no reason to think that it would *until we read these words*. Once we do, however, we might begin to understand that the very warmth of the memory signals its opposite, precisely because it has no reference to reality, because it does not exist in a contiguous temporality with the adult Georges Perec.

"Remembered" only under the sign of the conditional tense, the memory is a phantom, that must bring with it the inability to "raconter mon enfance," and with that, "un sentiment d'écrasement ou de menace" that lurks just outside the "cadre."

In the memory that the narrator recounts, the family takes pleasure in the young boy's identification of a Hebrew letter, whose name is "gammeth, or gammel" and of which we are given a representation:

This clinches the inauthenticity of the memory: the narrator goes on to say that he has discovered that there is no letter such as this in the Hebrew alphabet, nor is their a letter called "gammeth" or "gammel." [69] There is indeed a "Gimmel," which, as Perec indicates, would serve as the first letter of his first name, but its appearance is nothing like the letter of the memory. The letter, Perec writes, might possibly pass for the Hebrew "Mem" (the sound 'm'). Despite Perec's contention, however, the letter, in fact, bears little resemblance, if any, to the "Mem," and certainly could not pass for one (if anything, it might possibly pass for a curious rendering of the letter "Bet."). The letter is a phantom: posing as a real remnant of Perec's childhood, it bears in it all the warmth and protection of a family surrounding a little boy. It has, however, no anchor in *this* world. It is, nonetheless, something that the writer *has*. The writer, then, is a *witness* to a memory that he cannot claim; he cannot turn this story into the story of himself in the world. The flesh and blood writer, and the boy who is the subject of the memory, live in disparate, and untraversable modalities.

We might, however, fruitfully compare this letter to the other letter with which the book concerns itself. 'W' likewise serves to indicate an imaginary realm; the difference of course, is that this realm, signified by a *real* letter, has no claim to historical reality.

For Georges Perec, the imaginary letter represents, in the childhood memory, something that approximates a "G." As an adult, however, he "recognizes" it as a "Mem" or M. The letter W, as many readers of *W ou le souvenir d'enfance* have remarked, is an upside down M.

W is the *place* where the boy, Gaspard Winckler, was abandoned, abandoned by the loss of his *mother*; W is also the *story* that attempts to tell of Georges Perec's lost childhood and his lost mother: it is, thus, the story of the inverse of the mother's protection. Working backwards, then, we can think of the "Mem or M" as the W reversed anew, to become, now, the first letter of "mère," mother. The imaginary letter of Georges Perec's childhood memory, then, is a conflation of "Georges" (Gammeth / Gammel / Gimmel) and "mère." As such, this conjoining of boy and mother would certainly elicit a sense of warmth, protection and rejoicing ("tout le monde s'extasie"). The imaginary painting with which it is associated, "Jésus en face des Docteurs," likewise bears associations of presence, incarnation, and, given the immanent horror of the *Jewish* identity in Vichy France, salvation. Once, however, the memory is revealed as a *fiction*, the letter is emptied of all of these connotations. It becomes a false memory, a sign for something that does not exist, or no longer exists, in this world. It becomes, then, turned into its opposite, turned upside down, a symbol not of warmth and salvation, but of emptiness and cruelty.

In Perec's book of his dreams, *La boutique obscure*, dream number 49, dated February 1971, is titled "M/W." Perec describes a dream in which, attempting to translate a book, he comes across two phrases: "Wrecking their necks" and "Making them naked." The "M"

here seems to indicate the opposite of the warmth and protection that its association with the *mère* would suggest, particularly when placed against the violence of the phrase "Wrecking their necks." That Perec presents the W phrase before the M phrase, in inverse order of the dream's title, suggests an instability and pliability in the relation between the two letters. We might think of it as an illustration of the "scene" where the mother is stripped of her ability to protect, and where the notion of mother is inversed.

The letter W, then, as the inversed mother, would signify a world where maternal protection gives way to "wrecking their necks," a world inexorably outside the shelter of the family circle.

Each of the two narratives in the book offers their own genealogy of the letter W. In the autobiographical narrative, It is the various permutations of the "V dédoublé" that "tracent les symboles majeurs de l'histoire de mon enfance," Perec writes in chapter XV (110)[70]. The permutations of the doubled V have two primary strands: in the first, two Vs placed head to head create an X, "point de départ enfin d'une géométrie fantasmatique" (110). The X is a cross, a "croix de Saint André," but when one extends each line perpendicularly, one arrives at a swastika, "une croix gammée"; the swastika in turn, can be made into a sort of "SS" when each of the two figures that cross each other, are put side by side. In the other strand, two V's superposed top to bottom create a double X: XX; this can then, by joining the horizontal branches, become a Star of David.

(In the spirit of these *enchevêtrements*, it is interesting to note as well, that the imaginary letter of the memory, if turned upside down, would approximate the (Roman) letter G. If held to a mirror, it would yield, more or less, the letter C, the first letter of Perec's mother's name, Cyrla/Cécile.)

In the beginning of the description of the island of W, it is, we are told, unanimously agreed upon that the letter W has its origin in a certain Wilson, who founded the society: there are at least four theories as to who Wilson is: 1) a lighthouse keeper, who through negligence permitted a catastrophe to occur; 2) the leader of a prison mutiny; 3) a kind of Captain Nemo disgusted with the world, who wanted to build an ideal city; and 4) an Olympic champion or trainer disgusted with the commercialization of the Olympics, and who wanted to create anew an ideal Olympic society (95).

Thus, if the imaginary letter originally conveys warmth, fullness and presence, W conveys the opposite: cruelty, rebellion, abandonment. If the imaginary Hebrew letter brings together Judaism and Christianity, W conjoins Nazism and Judaism, ultimately connoting the Occupation, the *univers concentrationnaire*. Both these letters, however, stand for the childhood of Georges Perec.

Inasmuch as the imaginary letter signifies fullness, the very fact that it is imaginary, empties out its fullness, and leaves it empty, merely fictional when what is desired is the real. The letter W, however, offers something else. W is not a false memory, but rather, something that can be volitionally created and recreated. It offers no promises, but it is pliable where the imaginary letter is brittle, unavailable in the very fullness that it promises. As such, W is not a conflation of fiction and *fullness*, which is, in fact, an impossible combination, but rather, a conjoining of fiction and emptiness. As such, it is the true, or essential fiction.

It is the creation of W then, that comes to replace the fiction of the false Hebrew letter. That letter, which masquerades as real, can offer nothing. It is only W then, that is truly fictional. It is the letter W, then, a real letter, that gives the lie to the false letter that promises a childhood that it can never render. W makes no such promises. Yet the

imaginary letter, as imaginary, cannot transmit its fiction in a real world. It is only in the cold, historical letters of the alphabet that intimate experience can be brought into the realm of the public. W is thus, the *real* vehicle for the expression of intimate experience. Yet this intimate experience is not one of warmth and protection, but solitude and cruelty.

It is this W, then, that maintains itself in the historical world, while serving as the only gateway into the otherwise incommunicable intimate *experience* and *suffering* of this history, that is the dilemma that the book presents. The book must be grounded *here*, in historical reality:

> J'écris : j'écris parce que nos avons vécu ensemble, parce que j'ai été un parmi eux, ombre au milieu de leurs ombres, corps près de leur corps ; j'écris parce qu'ils ont laissé en moi leur marque indélébile et que la trace en est l'écriture : leur souvenir est more à l'écriture ; l'écriture est le souvenir de leur mort et l'affirmation de ma vie. (63[71]

But what can he write other than that there is nothing to write?

Gaspard Winckler, we might say, was created in order to generate the possibility of absorption, of fiction. In the fictional realm, all the *things* of the shared reality come to be resignified, narcissistically (in the psychoanalytic sense) as symbols of ones *own* experience, as the experience of being a person, rather than a historical individual. Yet what is sought is in history: the real memories of childhood, the real mother. Gaspard Winckler suffers the same inability to tell his story that the real Georges Perec does. The difference of course, is that there is a frame of fiction around Gaspard Winckler, *so that this hesitation and reticence can be seen and experienced*. The story of Gaspard Winckler can only eclipse Georges Perec's vision of *this* world, of the shared world which is the only place that he can find, having no memories, and thus, no experience, the child Georges Perec. The two can only meet in the failure of the story. Thus, Georges Perec, failed narrator, presides over a fiction, which only reduplicates his own position in real life. The juxtaposition of the autobiographical narrative, the reality

of the letter W, forbids then the possibility of absorption in *fiction*. In this forbidding, however, the impoverishment of fiction comes into view. If Georges Perec creates the fictional narrative in order to see, it is not *this* world that he sees, but the fictional world, that then eclipses his vision of this world.

The ellipses in the middle of the book serve as a meeting point for these clashing perspectives. First, the ellipses indicate the impossibility of Gaspard Winckler ever grounding his own narrative: as long as he is implicated in his story, as long as the story is the story of his being a witness, he cannot tell it while also serving as the teller. Georges Perec, along with the reader, *can* ground the narrative *as* fiction; that is, he can establish a transcendental perspective by which he can see what Gaspard Winckler cannot. But Georges Perec cannot see this about himself. The ellipses then, can serve to point to the blindness that both Georges Perec and Gaspard Winckler share. But because there can be no frame drawn around *this*, there will *never* be a transcendental perspective that can be applied to the life of Georges Perec: the child can never be restituted. And because Georges Perec and the reader do not exist on either side of the fiction/reality divide, but share the same ontological modality, it is the reader too who must come to terms with his or her construction of fiction, with the generic "instinct" that permits and compels the bifurcation into an absorbed reader and an observer. Thus, we can also understand the ellipses as the inability of the reader to position him/herself in either story. The ellipses then serve to unify the book in showing that Gaspard Winckler, Georges Perec, and the reader all share the same blindness. The fiction of W, although its bid may have been to illuminate, to *find* the child, to *see* his mother's experience in Auschwitz, in fact, only obscures it, only generates, if it is not stopped, more narrative.

If fiction can show only another world, the *points de suspension* point to the notion that if fiction exists to see, what it sees can never be what we see *here, now*.

We can see this in the thwarted movement between the two epigraphs from Queneau's poem (itself a poem about a thirteen year old boy who has lost his childhood memory to war):

> Epigraph to Part One:
> *Cette brume insensée où s'agitent des ombres,*
> *comment pourrais-je l'éclaircir ?* (11)
>
> Epigraph to Part Two:
> *Cette brume insensée où s'agitent des ombres,*
> — *est-ce donc là mon avenir ?* (91)[72]

The narrative that these four lines create begins with the *search for understanding* but ends not with a resolution, but with the apprehension of the impossibility of the endeavor. If a narrative is the form appropriate for the recounting of a search, and if actions are what constitute a narrative, here, the epigraphs tell a failed story: one that must rid itself of narrative content as it approaches its destination; were this a *story*, the destination would be the place of *eclaircissement*.

VII. LE PARACHUTE S'OUVRIT

At the beginning of this study, I formalized the word "text" to mean the conflation of 1) a work's physical aspect—the work as a thing that appears materially (ink on a page, a projection onto a screen etc), and is written by a living writer (who may of course *now*, during the time of the reading, be dead)—with 2) its fictional content, where fiction is precisely the

fact that what we read no longer remains linked to the living writer, and exists in a different modality than the physical aspect of its appearance on the page. *W ou le souvenir d'enfance* we might say, enacts the very violence of this conflation, in forcing the reader to experience the incompatibility of these two components. The physical presence of the writer threatens, at every point, the annihilation of the written, and vice versa, when one attempts to contextualize, to hierarchize each in the modality of the other. It is the fragile intersection, the emptiness that both share, that speaks, paradoxically, to a kind of *protection*. In this case, however, it is not the protection of the authority, of the mother who serves as the guarantor of libidinal exploration, and of fiction, but rather, a protection that must be built out of the solitary self, that comes in the very affirmation of the bare experience of existing before content "identifies" the writer or speaker. It is only here, in the place where brute physicality and the subject of the writing *do not* meet, where sheer presence does *not* take on content, that the context, the coming-into-being of the subject can be seen, "before" the subject, and before genre, steps in to conceal it.

Here, however, "brute physicality" likewise takes on a double significance: both the empty fact of the "I am writing" that we all, as speakers and writers have the possibility of confronting, but also, the cruelty and atrocity *particular* to Georges Perec's experience. It is this confluence that has ruptured the barrier between life and fiction once and for all. All of us, as we grow, must in some way lose the guarantor that keeps the outer sphere from contaminating the inner sphere. We all lose our mother in some way in becoming adults. But we do not all lose our mother in the way that Perec did, before the period of guarantorship comes to its end. It is exactly this brute physicality that must be preserved *in both its senses* if the project of *W ou le souvenir d'enfance* is to succeed: it must present, not fiction, but rather, the impoverishment of fiction; it must turn the *mise-en-abyme away* from the

fascination with a fictional world that one is safely protected from, and into the *horror* of contiguity, the horror that one's own intimate experience of being is *implicated* in the outside world, with no guarantor, no mother, to keep the outside and the inside separate. It is the yellow star, the gas chamber, the *disparition* of the guarantor of a fictional world that must be conveyed now, in a fiction that is perpetually occupied by a real body, by real life. It is a merging and fusing of the shared "outside" world with the realm of inner experience, but also, the merging and fusing of the universal experience of consciousness with the particular.

This is why the description of the island of W does not link back to the autobiographical narrative and in order to become a symbol for the *Shoah*. W, we must understand, is not a representation of the Shoah: rather, it is *linked* to the Shoah in the same way that Georges Perec is linked to his childhood, and likewise in the way that Gaspard Winckler is linked to a child that bears his name. What stands between Georges Perec and his childhood is not *history*, but rather, the missing intimate experience, the *memory* of childhood. The goal, then, is not to create a simulacrum of the concentration camps, but rather, to arrive at the missing experience. In the absence of the ability to go *back*, W, the letter and the place, is a moving forward into *creation*.

If there is to be an affirmation in the "I am writing," and Perec as we have seen, claims that there is, it can only come about in these terms. The body that writes the fiction, which is the only guarantor of fiction, lives in the outside world, that is, is real to itself. It is at this dire point in the relation between fiction and reality, the moment of the extermination of fiction, that the realm of fiction itself can come into view. Ultimately, *there is no guarantor of fiction*. Fiction, if it is to create a zone of protection, even a *zone libre*, where the self can establish a *place* for its expression, must do so under its own authority, without guarantor. But what the writer must also come to terms with then, is that fiction *offers no possibility for the*

expression of one's "own" suffering. Where suffering is particular, fiction is general. The lack that one experiences as one's own particular lack, if it is to be expressed, must take on the general existential lack that is the foundation of fiction to begin with. The cruelty of W is, then, also the cruelty of fiction: what we write about can never share the same modality as the act of writing.

The writer, then, always remains in the shadows, without any hope of illuminating them, precisely because we write to see, but when we write, we must write fiction. Only by understanding this can the compulsion to create an endless chain of replacements, each attempting to see what the other was created *for* but fails to do, be transformed into an understanding that does *not encompass sight*, that does not substitute for the thing that cannot be seen. The thing that cannot be seen must become the subject: …

Gaspard Winckler disappears at the end of Part One. The reader, throughout Part One is understood to assist at the writing of Gaspard Winckler's story; that is, the time of the writing is inscribed in the text. In the logic of this structure then, as Part Two begins, the reader is left *without the story*, but with the narrator nonetheless, still at the time of the writing, at the time that Gaspard Winckler *resolves* (in the present tense) to tell the story. We never return back to the story of the storyteller; we never find out what happens to either of the Gaspard Wincklers. We never find out why the story is so important for Gaspard Winckler to tell. Still, does this necessarily mean, as van Montfrans argues, that "Le je-narrateur fictionnel abandonne son récit à mi-chemin et confie sa tâche de témoignage à un autre narrateur, anonyme, insituable et omniscient"? (157)[73] In a certain sense, yes, of course. The voice that we read in the second part is nothing like that which we read in the first part. We must look, however, at the way this narrative begins, in a paragraph all to itself:

Il y aurait, là-bas, à l'autre bout du monde, une île. Elle s'appelle W. (93)[74]

Between the narrator's resolution to tell the story and this moment, a strange conflation is occurring. Gaspard Winckler begins in the present, in the time of the writing—*"je m'y résous*"—then, moves into the story, into a "before," recounting the events leading up to the point in which he decides to write. However, the description of the island is introduced under the sign of the conditional—*Il y aurait*—the same tense that Georges Perec employs in framing his first memory of the imaginary letter. What would seem logically to be a continuation of the story that Gaspard Winckler tells in the narrative *past*—he is sent to W, he goes there, he reports back—must instead be understood as something that is happening in the *present*, and thus, as *writing*. In other words, W is an act of *poesis*, a narrative which the narrator creates in the reader's presence. *The impersonal narrative is revealed to be a fiction, but one which is signed by Gaspard Winckler.* He has finally done what was asked of him, or rather, what he knew *would* be asked of him in the bar on Nurmbergstrasse by the vaguely psychoanalytical Otto Apfelstahl M.D. He has gone to the island of W. He has resigned himself to no longer being the hero of his narrative. If, like Perec, his "absence d'histoire m'a longtemps rassuré," he now, like Perec has come to "mettre en terme…ce lent déchiffrement" (18).

Here, the witness/participant, submerging himself in fiction, becomes the impersonal narrator. But the impersonal narrator is here revealed for what it is: a bare fiction. The ellipses in the middle of the book then, are exactly the "I am writing." It is the moment of the conflation of the writing being, and fiction, the *text* itself, and one that can have nothing to say. The conditional tense here does not efface the narrator, as would the aorist, but establishes the narrator as the *author* of the description of the cruel island society. In the movement, then, from the conditional *aurait* to the present *s'appelle*, the "there" of the

narrative falls squarely under the rubric of fiction. The present tense, the present itself, is attached to nothing but the blank page, the void.

Now, we can begin to understand the significance of "le départ," of the train ride that the child Georges Perec takes *south* into the *zone libre*. Perec has several dubious memories associated with this incident. He sees himself holding a magazine that had for its cover an illustration of Charlie Chaplin ("Charlot") jumping from a parachute (Bellos argues that this could not have been possible, because Charlie Chaplin, director of *The Great Dictator*, was *verboten* in Vichy France.) Perec also sees himself at this moment with his arm in a sling—"*un bandage herniaire, un suspensoir*." These in turn are accompanied by another association, his experience as a parachutist during his military service in 1958.

> je pus lire, dans la minute même du saut, un texte déchiffré de ce souvenir : je fus précipité dans le vide ; tous les fils furent rompus ; je tombai, seul et sans soutien. Le parachute s'ouvrit. Le corolle se déploya, fragile et sûr suspens avant la chute maîtrisée. (81)[75]

We might understand suspension as fiction, *poesis*. It is that which has no basis, no ground, no genealogy, no parent. We might think of the word "fils" here to mean not only the "strings" of the parachute, but "sons." "All the sons," then, who plunge downward into nothingness, who, having lost their *matrix*, their mothers, must now recreate it in an act of suspension, of fiction, so that the parachute opens and the fall becomes controlled—*maîtrisée*—even though there is no longer a mother. Thus, while Gaspard Winckler prepares to write his own fiction, Georges Perec, too is preparing his own *maîtrisation*. It is not, however, *the* son, but *all* the sons: the scene moves from the strictly personal quality of autobiography, to the *generality* of fiction. Georges Perec, we might say, has accomplished what every son, what every child must accomplish, in cutting the threads of childhood, and thus, tragically, in conflating the particular, historical suffering of the *Shoah*, with the general

existential suffering of conscious being. The cruelty of fiction is precisely this: that every fact of one's own particular suffering must be re-signified as a symbol of the general plight of being. Only in this way can suffering be shared.

Fiction, then, as the ungrounded, is also the *point de suspension*. We can begin to understand here a necessary relation between the void of the page, the void of memory, and the necessity to *create* the impersonal voice of the narrator. It is under the sign of the "or," and the "il y aurait" that is both here *and* not here, that the poverty of remembering becomes *poesis*. This understanding, because it is the very realization of the place of fiction in lived experience, can only occur outside the frame of the fiction.

If Gaspard Winckler must suffer the inability to be "authored," that is, to grasp his life as a whole, if it is under these impossible conditions that he must begin his narrative, which *requires* a whole, likewise Georges Perec, and the reader along with him, must take his or her place as "tous les fils," must realize that he or she has no frame, no author, that he or she in *life* now inhabits the position of Gaspard Winckler in fiction.

In the abandoning/being abandoned by the mother, by the guarantor of fiction, the essence of fiction is made plain: it hangs in the void, must come into being under its own authority, which can only be the authority of the self, of the body that engages in writing. The departure of Perec, which is also the departure of the mother, reshapes the very topography of the world from that which is constituted by the barrier between the realm of fiction and that of reality, to a new topography in which horror and fascination mix and merge in memories *without foundation*, in a suffering that has moved from the particular to the general, in a suffering that is *fictional*.

Perec's childhood is "le sol sur lequel j'ai grandi" (25).[76] And yet, this ground will now have to be recreated. His childhood, he writes is a "point de départ, coordonnées à

partir desquelles les axes de ma vie pourront trouver leur sens" (25). Here, "le départ" is given new meaning. It is a departure forward, into a life that must now be *maîtrisée* among other lives.

The world now is all "here" and if there is to be fiction, it can only exist under one's own auspices, that is, without any external authority to underwrite its "thereness." This is why there is no attempt to come to terms with the absence of the mother or the father in Part Two, in the chapters that are intertwined with the description of the island of W, which in turn comes about only in the *disappearance of its own narrator*. The train south to the *Zone libre* is the inauguration of this new topography, a *fictional* topography, where fiction here means that one must live by engaging in one's *own* poesis, one which incorporates this absence, which moves it from an outside to an inside, or rather, one which *incorporates* the outside into an inside, but which, in doing so, abolishes the distinction. The book itself creates a kind of *zone libre*. The *zone libre*, however, is exile from home, place of abandonment.

Tierra del Fuego, the setting for the W fantasy, is the *southernmost* inhabitable part of the world. It is also the place where *real* political prisoners of the Chilean Pinochet regime were house in deportation camps in the 1970's, as Perec indicates in the very last sentence of the book. W then serves as a coordinate both to the fantastic Europe of Gaspard Winckler's story—one which, while vaguely located in the German Saar near the Luxembourg border, obscures references to particular locales and to chronological time—and the *real* Europe of Georges Perec, which is described with painstaking attention to factual detail. It is both concentration camp and *zone libre*. We might think of Tierra del Fuego then, as the receptacle for both fiction and reality: it is at once the destination for Gaspard Winckler's fictional restitution of the child; but in its relation to the autobiography, it extends the scene

of Perec's drama into a geography that encompasses the entirety of the world, and thus, one which leaves no escape, no place to stand outside, no possibility for the generating of absorption, of fiction. It is in this conflated "space," where fascination and horror mix and fuse, that the lost boy Gaspard Winckler serves as a double (but not a replacement) for the lost boy Georges Perec.

Thus, the act of writing becomes doubled: it is both a simple and unconditional act of the affirmation of being, but also, the act of declaring one's being in the face of an other's *negation*. Perec's project is not a testimony to the atrocities of the world of his childhood, but neither is it completely a universalization of them under the rubric of the suffering of existence. Rather, it is a meeting of both these spheres under the sign of the unsayable, the blank. It is the blank, the incomprehension, that suffering in its existential sense, as well as suffering in its particular and historical sense, share. It is the place where the "unspeakable" that must accompany *all* interrogation of being, encounters the unspeakable in its historical manifestation. As such, the realm of fiction must be forced to meet the realm of the body, of writing, and this incompatibility must be experienced, suffered.

The book then, turns out to be a kind of contest between the letter "W," which, anchored in the *real* alphabet in this world, offers the possibility of a departure into a void that can then be *maîtrisé* in language, and the imaginary Hebrew letter, that offers no anchor in this world. One can only speak in a language that can be understood, that can be shared. But this speaking, this sharing, can only come about with the sacrifice of the *imaginary*. The form that this suffering takes in *W ou le souvenir d'enfance* is precisely the experiencing of this disjunction: the experiencing of the *moment* of the replacement of the imaginary letter by a real one, and thus, the suffering of the transformation of *particular* experience into a *general*

vocabulary. It is precisely the "contamination" of the person and the individual. What remains then is their incompatibility which, then, is all one has to experience.

Perec, in his essay on psychoanalysis, "Les lieux d'une ruse," speaks precisely of the incompatibility of modalities that nonetheless must be preserved:

> Pendant longtemps, on croit que parler cela voudra dire trouver, découvrir, comprendre, comprendre enfin, être illuminé par la vérité. Mais non : quand cela a lieu, on sait seulement que ça a lieu ; c'est là, on parle, on écrit ; parler, c'est seulement parler, simplement parler, écrire, c 'est seulement écrire, tracer des lettres sur une feuille blanche. (*Penser/Classer* 61)[77]

What we speak about, or write about does not share the same modality as the act of writing, and yet, *in the act of writing*, we must confront the emptiness from out of which the speaking or writing issues, the ungraspable, unmanifesting "point" that is constantly elided by the *content* of our enunciation. Perec continues:

> Cela a eu lieu un jour et je l'ai su. Je voudrais pouvoir dire : je l'ai su aussitôt, mais cela ne serait pas vrai : *il n'existe pas le temps pour dire quand cela fut.* Cela a eu lieu, cela avait eu lieu, cela a lieu, cela aura lieu. Simplement quelque chose s'est ouvert et s'ouvre : la bouche pour parler, le stylo pour écrire : quelque chose s'est déplacé, quelque chose se déplace et se trace, la ligne sinueuse de l'encre sur le papier, quelque chose de plein et de délié. (61 my italics)[78]

The tense, the time, does not exist to say *what* happened because each time one attempts to *narrate*, to imbue the act of writing with content, the moment of the writing, the "I am writing," and thus, the *person* writing becomes elided. As soon as one expresses oneself in language one has become a creature of words, of fiction, of ontological fiction: one leaves one's body and one's history behind. The apprehension of the real is there, but only in the emptiness that leaks through the fabric that the vocabulary creates. The fiction has taken precedent over the physicality of the text.

This movement recalls the beginning moments of *A la recherche du temps perdu.* If the entirety of that work spins from out of just such an instant of *not having time to speak*, and in a certain sense, becoming the timeless moment that the narrator himself cannot speak, in *W ou le souvenir d'enfance*, it is precisely this timeless moment itself which manifests in a *not-having-time*. If in Proust, the narrator's reflections take a particular turn such that, "il me semblait que j'étais moi-même ce dont parlait l'ouvrage," that is, if the narrator becomes *content*, in *W ou le souvenir d'enfance*, it is the "lettres sur une feuille blanche" that come to the forefront of consciousness; not the fullness of the absorption in fiction, but rather, the world outside the gates of fiction, the empty world that arrives *before and during* the story, the world which has no tense, no time of its own to be told, the world that we seek to elide and to attenuate with "once upon a time,", with "longtemps je me suis couché de bonne heure": the world that is under the sign of the mother who serves as guarantor for the entry into fiction, sleep, self.

Perec knew his Proust well, often making allusions to him in his work. His second published work, *Un homme qui dort,* takes its title from a phrase in the beginning *A la recherche*, and in his letter to Maurice Nadeau describing the project of W, he cites Proust's work as one of the models for his autobiographical project (*Je suis né 57).* Shortly before the publication of *W ou le souvenir d'enfance*, he published in the *Magazine Littéraire* his whimsical "35 variations sur un thème de Marcel Proust," a series of versions, in the spirit of Raymond Queneau's *Exercises de style* of the first lines of *A la recherche.* He will later cite Proust among the various authors from whom he has quoted in *La vie mode d'emploi.* It may not, then, be too outlandish, in a project concerned with one's relation to one's past and to one's memory, to find a dialogue with Proust in *W ou le souvenir d'enfance.*

Certainly, the repetition of the word "longtemps" in the first chapter seems to recall the first sentence of the *Recherche.* This may serve to emphasize the fact that in *W ou le*

souvenir d'enfance, there will be no madeleine, no intimate experience of the fullness of oneself. Likewise, Georges Perec, in the second chapter, tells us that he recalled "tout à coup" his childhood project of W (a gesture that, as we have seen, is repeated in Gaspard Winckler's misrecognition of a survivor of W (himself?) in chapter 1). Unlike in Proust's novel, Georges Perec informs us that despite remembering the name, and the essentials of the project, he has no memory of the project itself. Let us, however, remember the significance of Venice for Proust. It is in Venice, alongside his *mother* at St. Mark's Cathedral, that he stood on the uneven paving stones, the memory of which will become one of the three major symbols for the narrator's vocation as writer. Let us remember as well, that shortly after the moment at St. Marks, Proust's narrator decides to *abandon* his mother by staying in Venice, letting her go home alone.

Both Claude Burgelin and Manet van Montfrans have described Perec's project as diametrically opposed to that of Proust. Burgelin even refers to him as the "Anti-Proust" (73). Certainly, if we think of the Proustian project as a *returning* to lost time, this would be an appropriate epithet. *Le temps retrouvé* for Proust, however, is not by any means a return to the past. Rather, for Proust, the past as past is ineluctable: time is regained only in the act of writing, that is, in the present. We might, more fruitfully, then, see Perec's project as a radicalization of Proust's rather than its opposite.

Proust's novel begins, like Perec's book, with a lack of fullness. His narrator is only capable of experiencing an inferior form of memory, which he terms "*mémoire voluntaire*." These memories, essentially those of his mother kissing him good night before he goes to sleep, he rehearses over and over in his long sleepless nights. This memory ends in a rupture: when the mother does not come to bestow her kiss upon the narrator, because Swann has come to visit, he goes forth to claim what he believes is rightfully his, at all costs.

Fearing that he will be severely punished by his father, his father, on the contrary, tells his mother to go into the boy's room, where she stays with him all night, reading the books that were to be his grandmother's birthday present. This night, however, far from being a celebration, instead, inaugurates a new era of the narrator's life, and "resterait comme une triste date" (I:52)[79]. The narrator's commandeering the token of love that was heretofore freely bestowed marks the beginning of the loss of the narrator's mother as mother. The unsatisfactory quality of the memory, then, seems to reflect the unsatisfactoriness of the memory itself: it offers no entry, no (in Perec's terminology) suspension. Like Perec, Proust's narrator must now *maîtriser* his own *chute*: he must now become the *maître*. It is just after, then, that the narrator experiences what will be the crucial moment in his search for a satisfactory memory during the madeleine scene. His taste of the madeleine in the tea binds time to create an experience of fullness. It is, however, a fullness so complete that it cannot be articulated. It is only in the receding of this feeling that he becomes capable of bringing his *mémoire involontaire* into speech, a speaking that will, as we have discussed, encompass the rest of (if not the entirety of) the book itself. Ultimately, the narrator must come to terms with the fact that fullness can only be experienced in the act of writing, a modality of time that must necessarily remain barred from the actual past itself, because it is only writing that *binds time*. Yet the apprehension of this is already present in the madeleine scene. The narrator realizes that the *intimate* experience of fullness can only lead to an emptiness that must be filled with *poesis*, rather than with memory:

> Grave incertitude, toute les fois que l'esprit se sent dépassé par lui même ; quand lui, le chercheur, est tout ensemble le pays obscur où il doit chercher, et où tout son bagage ne lui sera de rien. Chercher ? Pas seulement. Créer. Il est en face de quelque chose qui n'est pas encore, et que seul il peut réaliser, puis faire entrer dans sa lumière. (57)[80]

Like Perec, then, Proust's narrator must reckon with absence. This involves, no less for Proust's narrator than for Perec, a *maîtrisation*, a mastering of the fall away from his mother. Like Perec, then fullness also must signify absence for Proust's narrator, precisely because shared reality, the world of others, is structured not by the fullness of intimate experience, but by the absence of intimate experience with regard to the other. What is created *between* beings can only be done so because of this: if there is a desire to speak, if there is desire, there must be an object of that desire; there must be a promise of fullness that must be experienced as emptiness. For Proust's narrator, the experience of fullness, then, comes with the apprehension of solitude, a solitude that can only be remedied by a reaching out into the world: speaking, writing, creating. Proust, however, unlike Perec, still seeks the possibility of an elusive fullness in his notion of *le temps retrouvé*. For Proust, the book replaces the book that will never be written, but there is nonetheless the promise of fullness in the *desire to recount what comes to one without language*. Georges Perec, however, never had his madeleine. While Perec may not be the anti-Proust, we might, however, think of the imaginary Hebrew letter, and its counterpart the real "W," as the *anti-madeleine*. Both madeleine, for Proust, and anti-madeleine, for Perec, however, need to be *reinvented*. It is only in this way that "*les événements dont j'ai été le témoin,*" as Gaspard Winckler writes, "*doivent être révélés et mis en lumière*."

Both Proust and Perec then, must reckon, in order to create, not with fullness, but with absence. Proust, however, writes to replicate the fullness of an instant in words. For Perec, on the other hand, there is no full instant. Rather, he creates to feel for the first time, because what he *felt* is not *there*. Thus, for Proust, absence is unavailable fullness, whereas for Perec, absence is simply absence in the shadow of an idea of fullness that only never be achieved. The difference, then, is that for Proust, fullness can be recreated: perpetual

adoration is a perpetual fiction, a fiction that continually reproduces itself, that answers itself, as the "solution" to its own essential emptiness: an inside-directed fiction. The mise-en-abyme of *A la recherche du temps perdu* is such that the act of *poesis* is always fictionalized. In disrupting this possibility, in *W ou le souvenir d'enfance*, Perec directs fiction outside of itself, makes us see the "lettres sur une feuille blanche," in the very act of their becoming fiction. For Proust, emptiness indeed means fullness: the highest truth is the truth of creation. For Perec, however, it is the opposite: fullness means only emptiness.

VIII. THE QUADRANGLE

Like Perec's book, *A la recherche* has a double structure. As we have discussed, the book operates between two poles: the apprehension of the possibility of the recovery of lost time in the scene of the madeleine at the beginning of the book, shifts its influence to the discovery of *writing* as the means to recovering lost time during the Guermantes matinée at the end of the book. What the first pole—the madeleine—makes possible, the second pole—the matinée—realizes. Yet, as we have seen, the narrator can only *narrate* the earlier apprehension at the beginning of the book once he has achieved his discovery at the book's end. Each pole, then, subsumes the other, in an endless oscillation, that, in performing the narrator's discovery, elides perpetually the possibility of pure presence. The book *replaces* the narrator's physical presence, takes over for the book that he has been trying to write, but can never write. *Poesis,* then, the act of creating fiction, always must answer as the *meaning* of the physical presence of the writer. A fictional "writer," then, stands at either end of the book, because the writer who "discovers" writing at the end of the book, has, in actuality, already been writing the entire length of the narrative that we read.

We see a similar bid in *W ou le souvenir d'enfance*. The structure, however, as an *outside-directed* fiction, is clearly more complicated because of the imposition of the genre of autobiography onto the genre of fiction. In Proust, there is no question of the essential fictionality of the book. For Perec, however, the story the narrative of the book as a whole tells is one of the entanglement of the two genres, of the two ways of experiencing the world. In *W ou le souvenir d'enfance*, the fictional writer at the beginning of the book does not yield back a fiction that then replaces the presence of the real writer; nor does the real writer ultimately replace the fictional landscape that is presented to the reader. Fiction must be threaded through history, and likewise the reverse; the intimate sphere and the historical sphere conjoin only to circumscribe an emptiness, an emptiness which is the final non-coincidence of the two spheres, and which *is* the story that the book tells.

The book, then, rather than offering a double structure, founded on two oscillating poles, creates a *quadrangle*, composed of four vertices: Georges Perec the adult; Georges Perec the child; Gaspard Winckler the adult; and Gaspard Winckler the child. Each of these vertices likewise dominates one of the four quadrants in which we have divided the book. We cannot construe it as fortuitous, then, that the society of W is also constructed in the form of a quadrangle. We might be able to find, in analyzing this quadrangle, an emblem of the logic of the book itself:

> *La plupart des habitants de W sont groupés dans quatre agglomérations que l'on nomme simplement les « village » : il y a le village W, qui est sans doute le plus ancien, celui qui fut fondé par la première génération des hommes W, et les villages Nord-W, Ouest-W et Nord-Ouest W, respectivement situés au nord, à l'ouest, et au nord-ouest de W.* (101)[81]

The villages are the home of the athletes, and the quadrangle that they circumscribe can be traversed in a morning's run. This, in fact, is the principal training of the athletes of W (the Olympic activities in the society consisting solely of those that fit under the rubric of

track and field). According to W's regulations, the athletes perambulate the villages in clockwise fashion, passing by the small stadiums at the halfway points between contiguous villages. There are various grades of competitions in W: first, and least important, are those that occur internal to a particular village; given more weight are those that occur between contiguous villages in their shared stadiums. The competitions of greater prestige are those that occur between athletes of non-contiguous villages, called "selections." The winners of each "selection" represent their village in the "Jeux," the pan-village competitions that occur in the central stadium. These likewise are divided into three types, the Spartakiades, the Olympiades, and the Atlantiades, and they are regularly scheduled in accord with an official calendar.

Such is the configuration of W. Let us remark here that the village of W proper serves as the geographical orienting point for all the other villages, whose directionality is only described in relation to it: "North" and "West" only achieve their meaning from the founding point of W proper. As such, the original village is, in the cosmos of the society of W as a whole, absolute *south*. Perec situates the society of W in Tierra del Fuego, the southernmost inhabitable part of the world, as close to a geographical absolute south as can be attained. If we transpose this geography onto that of the island of W, the island becomes a microcosm of the entirety of the world. W, the village, is at the heart of the south, is unrelational because it itself establishes all directionality. As the place where Gaspard Winckler goes to search for the young deaf-mute who may have survived the shipwreck that killed his mother, this *unrelational* place becomes the focal point of the story: it is the place where Gaspard Winckler is hoped to be found, and it is through the recuperation of Gaspard Winckler, that the restitution of the child Georges Perec can be effected.

If we think of each of the four main subjects of the book as athletes of the W society, Gaspard-Winckler-the-child's place, then, is in the village of W proper. According to the rules of W, it is between athletes of the non-contiguous villages that the "selection" matches take place. These matches occur between those that are least likely to meet, because the non-contiguous villages do not share a stadium. As such, their significance in the competitive structure is greater.

If each of the four "athletes" occupies his own discrete location, we must begin by defining the nature of their differences. We can posit two essential rubrics: first, that of *adulthood* and its opposite, *childhood*; and second, that of *reality* and its opposite, *fictionality*. The first rubric, then, distinguishes the child and adult Georges Perec, and likewise, the child and adult Gaspard Winckler. The second rubric distinguishes the adults Georges Perec and Gaspard Winckler, as well as the children of the same name. Georges-Perec-the-adult however, is *doubly* separated from Gaspard-Winckler-the-child, because the separation involves both adulthood and reality. This is likewise the case for Gaspard-Winckler-the-adult, and Georges-Perec-the-child. If we have positioned Gaspard-Winckler-the-child then, in the village of W proper, we must locate Georges-Perec-the-adult in the position of *non-contiguity*, and thus, in Northwest W. If it is Gaspard-Winckler-the-adult who is sent to rescue the child who bears his name, then, following the clockwise rotation of the W quadrangle, we must locate him in North W. Georges-Perec-the-child, then, finds his place in West W, in a non-contiguous relation with Gaspard Winckler-the-adult.

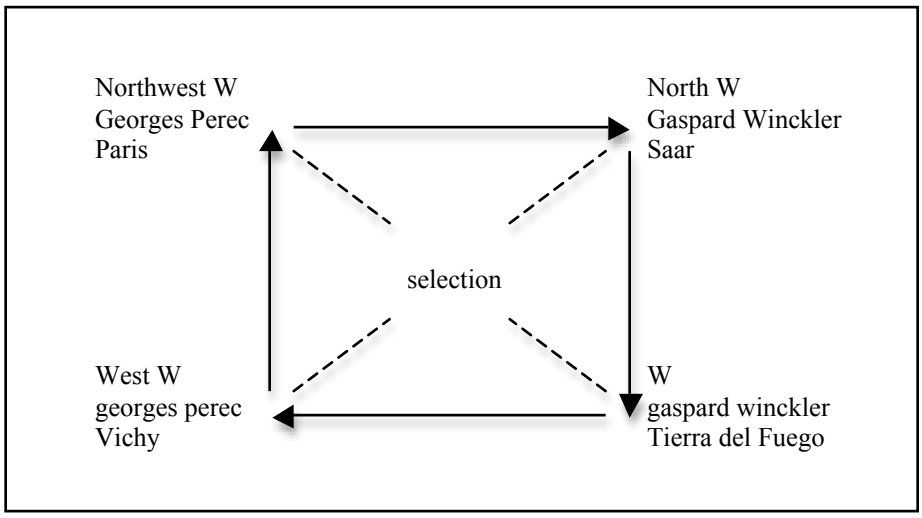
Each of the four quadrants of the book, dominated by one of these "athletes," then, finds its place in the W quadrangle. W proper, as the founding village, and the place of the child Gaspard Winckler, then, stands at the origin of the structure, with all the others

generating from out of it. We might think of the child Gaspard Winckler then, as a kind of *origin*: the *experience* of the lost, historical child Georges Perec.

In accord with the location of each vortex, we can likewise impose a real geography upon this fantastic cosmos. W proper we have said, in its southernmost position, becomes joined with Tierra del Fuego: two figures of absolute directionality. Moving clockwise, then, Georges-Perec-the-child remains equally in the South, but to the West. This we can think of as Vichy France, where he was displaced. Georges-Perec the adult inhabits the Northwest, which becomes, then, in relation to Vichy, Paris. Gaspard Winckler-the-adult, then, in North W, is East of Paris, East of France itself: in the Saar, in an imaginary Europe, in exile from the *historical*. Its historical counterpart, however, is in the domain of the Neue-Bremm concentration camp, which serves as one of the models for the W society.[82] The two Europes, we might say, can be conjoined only in Gaspard Winckler's "voyage" to W, only in his *proper* fictionalizing of his fictional stance.

The two non-fictional characters live in the *West*, while the two fictional characters live, from the standpoint of the non-fictional characters, in the East; but from the standpoint of W, in the North-South axis of the center.[83] The two sectors of France, then, stand to the West of the central *fictional* realm, which must be (perpetually) traversed in order to return back *home*.

The following chart, then, illustrates the superimposition of characters/people, and geography onto the quadrangle of the W villages. The children are indicated by a lack of capitalization.



With this, the configuration of the quadrangle is complete. Those that share one of the two qualities, either that of adulthood or reality are contiguous, and those that share neither are non-contiguous. Georges-Perec-the-adult, then, enlists his fictional adult counterpart to seek the child Georges-Perec, only through recourse to the alien modality which he cannot incarnate. Each contiguous "vortex" then, must have some commonality with its counterpart in order to be communicable. The non-contiguous relations are the subject then, of selections. The word "selection," however, is not innocuous. In the Nazi concentration camps, the *Selektion* was the name for the process where prisoners, upon arrival, were selected either to remain alive, or to be murdered immediately in the gas chambers. Thus, it is *either* Gaspard-Winckler-the-child *or* Georges-Perec-the-adult; *either* Georges Perec-the-child *or* Gaspard-Winckler-the-adult.

What does this mean? Perhaps we can understand from it that the intimate, and thus *fictional* experience of being a *person*, must engage in a "selection" with that of the historical being who lives in the historical world with others. Each time that intimate experience attempts to make use of something historical, it takes away its shared value, giving it existential and general, rather than historical and particular significance. Likewise, each time

history attempts to replace intimate experience, we arrive at the dilemma that Georges Perec begins his autobiography with: "une autre histoire, la Grande, l'Histoire avec sa grande hache, avait déjà répondu à ma place."

In either case, the link of *life* that this quadrangle of death circumscribes, is broken in the cruelty of the contest, a cruelty that is effected *not* by the impersonal "judges," but rather, by the victims themselves. The victory of any one over the other cancels the victory because each needs the other to survive, yet each can only survive through the death of the other. W incarnates a *univers concentrationnaire*.

It is, however, a *universe*, and not a particular place. Its animators, we might say, are not so much the Nazis, its victims not so much the Jews. Rather, it is the narrative of the impersonal force that decrees *our* subjection, both in its particular and its general sense. It is a universe that encompasses both history and fiction, and its depiction is the narrative of the endless struggle to wrest the *person* from out of history, and history from out of the person. The impersonal judges, then, which effect such cruelty, have their counterpart in the *impersonal narrator*, that which the book, attempts to subvert, through the subversion of fiction itself. The failure of this attempt, then, *is* W, and is the book itself.

Ultimately, what the book preserves, then, is the perpetual *moment* before the selection. It is the very incompatibility of the intimate and the historical, the individual and the person, each seeking to appropriate each other that is preserved: the "or." It is also the moment that the particular *becomes* general: the moment before Cécile Perec is selected to die in Auschwitz, and the moment before Georges Perec selects to become an adult without memories of his childhood, and thus, in a manner that parallels Proust's narrator, a writer. It is a moment frozen, refused, one that both accepts and rejects the cruelty of history, and that both accepts and rejects the cruelty of fiction, and that inhabits their point of contiguity.

W must remain as an inaccessible place, a place where those who seek to find it do not return, a place that is perpetually in the past, but that is nonetheless perpetually being written. It must be this way. The danger, otherwise is to enter into the process of selection, rather than to remain in the "or," that constitutes *poesis*.

It is absence that is at the heart of this *poesis*. The society of W however, is its opposite: it is founded on the desire for Victory, for presence. The Atlantiades competition, where the athletes of W compete to rape a much smaller pool of women stands at the foundation of the "logic of W." It is here, founded on the desire for another, that that the perpetual war between victims, blurs the boundary between victims and oppressors (a technique of control well documented, by Rousset but by many others, in the real Nazi concentration camps themselves). But we can also understand this competition in an even more horrifying sense: if one's desire for *life* can only come about in this way, then living itself is a crime, remaining a victim is a crime, *desire* is a crime. The competitors, the narrative indicates, do their best to eliminate as many other competitors from the race as possible long before the race starts:

> *Sans doute cette lutte permanente, dont la compétition elle-même n'est que le point final, est-elle l'une des grandes Lois de la vie W, mais elle trouve ici, à l'occasion des Atlantiades, son terrain d'action le plus favorable, dans la mesure où la récompense—une femme—accompagne immédiatement la Victoire.* (180)[84]

What is required, then, is a renouncing of Victory, a renouncing of the woman. The voyage to W, we might say, in renouncing the unremembered past, renounces the woman.

IX. GENRE AND THE UNSAYABLE

Writing requires the relinquishment of the NOW, of the I am writing. To be true to this position also, *cruelly*, requires the relinquishment of one's historical being in favor of the representation of one's intimate experience.

There is, then, no truthful writing, no writing that can encompass both the inside of the self and the outside of the world: there is only the ruse, which we enter into as an absorption in fiction, or as absorption in our own subjecthood, our being constituted, our taking up our place in the shared and impersonal world.

But, in the face of this ultimate truth of an ineradicable ontological fiction, we nonetheless require some criteria by which to evaluate the truthful and to distinguish it from the false, however impoverished these terms seem under the overarching sign of ontological fiction. It is genre, then, that covers over the problem, by labeling certain works as fictional and others as non-fictional, and assigning each a set of requirements that must be fulfilled. The genre of fiction becomes the guidepost by which we come to recognize "reality," the realm where reference fails and sense takes over. Non-fictional works, unlike fiction, must be documented or documentable, must have recourse to sources that are likewise subject to the same authenticity; yet in this chain of authentification, this recourse to a previously written authority, the act of writing, the writing person, is obscured, its unavailability for inspection conveniently deemed superfluous in the face of the monarchy of content. Genre then, *is* truth, and is vision. The real author and the real reader exist forever *outside* this field of immanence, until they too take genred form; thus, there is always, in writing, a bifurcation in ontological levels.

There have been numerous attempts to explicate this seemingly untraversable barrier between genre and truth. One recent example may prove instructive to the argument here. Dan Shen and Dejin Xu have proposed a critical methodology by which to distinguish

autobiography from fiction. They begin with the reasonable premise, at least for a *generic* rather than ontological enterprise, that in the genre of autobiography there is no field of immanence: that is, there is no inside and no outside to the text. Thus, the real author and the real reader have a direct, *immanent* relation to the narrator and the reader (49). The problem, however, is that Shen and Xu find it necessary to bifurcate the real reader into the "cognizant" and the "uncongnizant": the former is the aspect of the reader that "takes the autobiographical world to be in keeping with the real world," and the latter, the aspect of the reader who "consciously or half consciously compar[es] the textual world with the extratextual reality" (48). This division, they take care to note, is *not* the same as that of the uncritical "narrative audience" of fiction (a notion put forward by Peter Rabinowitz) who is simply unaware of any extratextual reality: to admit that the reading practices on the part of fiction and that of autobiography are the same, would be to force a bifurcation in ontological levels, resulting, according to definition, in fiction. And yet, how could it be possible for the naïve, "uncognizant reader" to live in a world that is not quite reality, and not quite fiction?

Any of the regularly recurring controversies regarding fictionalized autobiographies or memoirs have shown the need to adhere to generic requirements as a standard for truth. Shen and Xu have, however, confused generic truth with the real, and in doing so, conflate generic fiction with ontological fiction. Thus, by imposing an ontological criteria onto a generic one, they run into the problem of the inability to ground the authority of something written that generic fiction has come to solve: no act of *poesis* can be grounded in reality, precisely because the act of writing, the most "real" reality that there is with regard to a text, cannot enter into the written. The "direct relation" (48) that they propose in autobiography, is no less fictional than fiction. Its *generic* rules work differently, certainly, but these rules are nonetheless subject to the same ontological, that is, pre-generic, law, that underlies the very

possibility of genre to begin with. In the face of an inability to ground *any* content in the act of writing, genre *is* the institutionalization of truth. Thus, Shen and Xu enact in their analysis precisely the conflation that Perec attempts to dismantle in *W ou le souvenir d'enfance* in confronting the emptiness inherent in the project of writing qua oneself as writer:

> Je ne sais pas si je n'ai rien à dire, je sais que je ne dis rien ; je sais que je ne dis rien ; je ne sais pas si ce que j'aurais à dire n'est pas dit parce qu'il est indicible (l'indicible n'est pas tapi dans l'écriture, il est ce qui l'a bien avant déclenchée) ; je sais que ce que je dis est signe une fois pour toutes d'un anéantissement une fois pour toutes. (*W ou le souvenir d'enfance* 63)[85]

Writing from beyond, or before the subject must indeed be fictional, because it elides the "I am writing," the here and now of the "lettres sur une feuille blanche." And the empty letters, the pure and insipid material devoid of content, then, point only to *this* being here, this writing now.

If genre is, at least in writing, the closest that we come to truth, it is also an institutional *poesis* that we cannot get around, precisely because of the ontological requirement that the writer and the written remain in discrete modalities. The best that can be done is to point to the gap, the place where the thing cannot be said is filled up with an act of *poesis*. In its clashing of genres, *W ou le souvenir d'enfance* resists this institutional speaking even as it speaks out of the institutional voice that is the only voice available to it. Its act of resistance is to show up the artifice of the generic notion of truth by forcing the reader to experience its falsity, forcing the reader to experience the failure of any genre to convey something beyond its own scope of vision. The book bears impossible allegiance to two generic forms, and as such, the conventional narrative voice that serves as guarantor of the operative genre is denied its authenticity.

The struggle for narrative authority, then, is the main issue of the text: if the narrator himself has nothing to say, it is because he or she does not have the transcendental position necessary to narrate. In *W ou le souvenir d'enfance*, then, the narrative can only issue out of the failure of narration, and thus, the failure of reading. Out of this, a narrative does indeed issue, but the question for *whom* this narrative issues can only be answered by the ellipses, the gaps between the narratives.

Each of the narratives then, attempts to pass on its authority, or ground, to the other. It is precisely this, that destroys the experience of fiction as one reads the adventure narrative. Fiction needs no ground, no authority; to anchor fiction in *this* world is indeed to cancel the reader's fictional consciousness. The search for authority in fiction can only yield more fiction, greater absorption. Here, however, the *mise-en-abyme* structure is used inversely, to point to the very inadequacy of fiction when it is put in the service of reality. Even so, while the *experience* that we get from reading the book is not characteristic of fiction, the fictional *status* of the narrative nonetheless persists. Indeed, the horror of the book speaks to the imperishability of fiction, even as it hangs from the void. The book demonstrates the very alien quality of fiction itself: the possibility of a realm of fiction that *refuses* to be put in the service of reality, the possibility of a fiction which *consumes* the things of this world, appropriating them for its *content*, but which nonetheless does not return them back to our bodily experience of existing. All the more reason, then, that we cannot view the adventure narrative, the outrages of the island of W as an allegory for "la guerre, les camps," nor understand them to be hierarchized under the rubric of the autobiography. It is the very *alien* aspect of fiction, then, which must be understood to bear full ontological status. Only in this way can the void of memory take its representation in the ontological void of fiction itself. Fiction and reality are understood to inhabit discrete modalities *as genres*, but share

equal rights to *existence*. It is here, at the level of existence, that fascination gives way to horror. Fiction then, at its essence, cannot be subsumed to reality, but lives always alongside. To say that fiction and reality exist as equals then, is to say that there is no "mere" fiction: rather, there is only existence, only an outside.

In *W ou le souvenir d'enfance*, something is eclipsed, which can never be known. Neither Georges Perec the child, nor Gaspard Winckler the child, can ever be restituted. Each attempt at such restitution must be threaded through the narrative of the other. What remains, then, are two stark and incompatible modalities: the fiction, which refuses to serve under the authority of its writer; and the bare fact of the writer writing.

X. FICTION AS WORKING THROUGH REALITY

Freud writes in his essay "Remembering, Repeating and Working Through":

> The transference is itself only a piece of repetition and…the repetition is a transference of the forgotten past not only on to the doctor but also on to all the other aspects of the current situation. We must be prepared to find, therefore, that the patient yields to the compulsion to repeat, which now replaces the impulsion to remember, not only in his personal attitude toward the doctor but also in every other activity and relationship which my occupy his life at the time[.] (12:151)

The compulsion to repeat *replaces* the impulsion to remember: In the absence of memory, the repeated material, when put in the service of the transference, becomes *productive* repetition. No longer senseless, it becomes the vocabulary which the ego uses to regain, if not memory, then consciousness, mastery over the life to which it is attached. As repetition, it is a moving backwards, that nonetheless moves into the *possible*. What is of interest here is the notion of yielding, a yielding that implies both a doubling and a disjunction: the entering into the repetition as if at the behest of another. It is this doubling

and disjunction, we might say, that enables the possibility of the bifurcated into an observing self and an absorbed self. This, as we have seen, in turn creates the possibility of fiction as a human institution.

Let us think of Freud's formulation of the transference, and of working through [*Durcharbeitung*] as a model for addressing the specific problematic that has concerned us the length of this chapter: that fiction is general, and the individual's suffering is particular. Perhaps we might be able to think of the productive work of the transference as sharing its genealogy with the *poesis* that produces fiction, a *poesis* that requires not only the representation of suffering, but the experience of suffering the conflation of the particular and the general in the transmuting of the individual's personal experience into vocabulary. Such a literary transference becomes a kind of celebration (in its ritual sense) of the person's subjection to vocabulary, to a language that is not his or hers, and to an institutional—and thus, narrative—identity that is not his or hers. If language both creates the possibility of the expression and, and the enjoyment of, an individual identity, it at the same time renders that possibility forever unachievable in language. The result is a failed identification, an endless mourning of a non-recuperable loss. In the condition that Freud terms melancholia, the lost object is reincorporated into the ego, effecting a bifurcation: "[O]ne part of the ego sets itself over against the other, judges it critically, as, as it were, takes it as its object" (14:247). Yet if simply the clarification of the phantom status of the object does not suffice to cure the melancholic condition, it is perhaps because this *understanding* must occur in language. There arises, then, an interdiction against understanding, a refusal of language: as a result, the subject repeats instead of remembers. This *acting out* [*Agieren*] then, is harnessed in the transference, so that it can be transmuted into working through.

The transference is a life re-created in miniature. For Freud, it is the *controlled* reviving of repressed desires that manifest, however, not as a remembered past, but in the present desiring subject: "we must treat [the subject's] illness not as an event of the past, but as a present day force," Freud writes (151). As a result, these desires are performed: the subject's actions take the place of his or her consciousness. The transference at first does not change this behavior. Rather, it makes use of the repressed desires as material, as that which will ultimately be used in the service of the technology that generates a critical perspective: this is the transformation of acting out to working through. The analyst's office becomes the model for the patient's life; the world who has *done* this to the patient—the impersonal "narrator" who has left the subject desiring, and thus, bereft—is reduced to the person of the analyst. In this way, subject and analyst together create a kind of aerie *outside* life, from the vantage of which, life can be seen. This miniaturization of life must nonetheless occur in life, precisely because life cannot be stopped in order to see it. It is this *fictive* transcendental perspective that creates the possibility of a "dialogue" between the conscious, languaged faculties of the subject, and his or her repressed counterpart, whose desires *have no language*. Indeed, if language comes from the public, from the historical, it is indeed the impersonal narrator, the institution that denies the self what it needs. Language, then, and the consciousness that it enables, must be resisted as the very thing that thwarts its *intimate* desires: if the self will not express itself to others, it will, likewise, not express itself to itself. The observing self must be resisted, because it is a representative of the *narrator*, of the institution. Consigned only to express itself in language, the self *ambivalently* reproaches itself in the very act of its expression: each time the self attempts to reach itself it finds only the empty "observer" who can speak where the absorbed self cannot. The self, then, must circumscribe a fundamental absence in attempting to arrive at expression. It must *interpret*

itself, it must speak through an "other," because, divided, its very lack of presence to itself forbids the possibility of direct experience, what we have called *intuition*.

The critical perspective that the transference offers is a ruse, one that will already be familiar to us: the subject stands "outside" of his or her own life, outside of his or her own self, in order to see it; the subject acts as if there *really were* a distinction between the individual, the self as a historical being, and the person, the self which experiences. It is this acting-as-if that creates the vantage point by which the self can see. The ruse, however, is founded on the fact that the vantage point is nothing other than a fiction: it is institutional language, masquerading as intimate *experience*.

Yet accordingly, what the "self" sees from this fictional vantage point is nothing other than a fiction. It is the fiction that there really is a split in the self, when in fact, the notion of a split self is just part of the fiction, only the ego's illusion that it is not part of the self, that it can stand outside of the self. The illusion, then, is what permits the analyst-patient relation to be both simultaneously "outside" and "inside."

If we could isolate the absorbed self from the observer, we would arrive at the rough equivalent of the psychoanalytical unconscious. The absorbed self, like the unconscious, would know nothing of, nor experience the rupture that indeed constitutes the self. Ultimately, it is only when the subject/patient realizes that there *is* no critical perspective, no transcendental position from which to look down at his or her life, realizes that what he or she was seeing in the act of analysis was a fiction, that acting out can become working through. And yet, it is this *double* perspective—the looking down upon *and* the being in it—that permits this understanding to occur. It is this double perspective that is the very possibility of fiction.

The double perspective of fiction, whether literary or psychoanalytical, is the ruse that creates the conditions for a dialogue between the self and the self, by generating an "other" for the self to see. In order for this to be possible, "it," (the thing that has just been created to do the seeing) must first see the self as separate from itself. This is what we might call the "therapeutic" work of fiction: it manufactures a separation that is experienced between the mute *person* and the *impersonal* institution of language. That neither one can exist without the other is what neither of these faculties "know." Fiction accomplishes this through convincing its reader that *the language that one reads, hears, or speaks is not language*. It is here, that *interpretation* becomes *intuition*.

The self, then, creates a narrative of itself in order to see itself: this is its "acting out." This narrative, this fiction, is the transcendental vantage. Precisely because the self exists as *material*, as the "I am writing," that can never be written, anything that calls attention to the materiality of language, and thus, to the reality of this world, disrupts the absorption, and points to an essential contiguity between the self and the fiction. This, empties out the fiction, returns it to the "lettres sur une feuille blanche." This, then, is the "working through" that takes apart the very mechanism of fiction.

In inside-directed fiction, fiction that remains within its generic limits, each time the attempt is made to see this observer, it becomes demoted to the position of the observed, and a new observer is generated who can be no more seen the one whom it has replaced. Thus, the mise-en-abyme serves as the foundation for the genre of fiction. Insofar as it remains in place, the physical world and fiction remain in heterogeneous modalities. Yet it also renders all that we call "understanding" as incompatible with the object of understanding. In fiction, understanding only operates *en abyme*, yielding up a narrative that is never the one that we seek. And yet if fiction serves to substitute for a general condition

of *lack* of understanding, it is all we have. It is in the disparity between the understanding that fiction yields, and the object of understanding that fiction offers, we might say: only in this way do we understand fiction as *relation*, as *contiguous* to us, as a *thing* of life, rather than as alien ontological modality.

This is what Gaspard Winckler suffers, and ultimately this comes to be Georges Perec's suffering, his narrative. And because the reader exists in the same ontological modality as Georges Perec, it is also what the reader suffers in the reading. The narrated and the now trade places, each looking to the other for grounding. Blinded by the *now*, we look to the narrated for sight. The narrated, then, looks for something to anchor it, to *authorize* its words. And in the realization that each depends on the other, that each is equally groundless, *l'incompréhension, l'horreur et la fascination se confondent*.

The *mise-en-abyme*, when deprived of its barrier between here (where we are) and there (the realm of narration) turns fascination into horror. Here, the horror that we as readers discover, is that Perec's modality is our own, is "life"; that Perec's loss is likewise our own; that loss is life. The *mise-en-abyme*, stood on its head, forces us to confront the unspeakable, and the unthinkable, as *ourselves*. The unspeakable can be understood in two ways. It can be understood in the traumatic sense, as a loss that we can never fully know or experience. But it can also be understood in the sense that Ann Banfield uses it: as the narration which cannot be narrated, as a language that excludes the speaker, that excludes perspective, and which, if we are to write *anything*, we must nonetheless inhabit.

The latter use is unavoidable. As conscious beings in space and time, there is no other way to tell the story of our own *being subjects*. The former, however, is contingent: a manifestation of the particular way in which history has played out. The *horror*, however, is that in this world, they cannot be separated. Understanding, then, involves not only working

through the mourning of a loss, but requires the melancholic acceptance that this loss is *general*. The working through of fiction, then, involves understanding that there is no way to speak existence without speaking *emptiness*, without suffering. Fiction is here to say *that what I have to say does not express me*.

That the description of the island of W is not founded on Auschwitz,[86] but rather on the concentration camp of Neue-Bremm underscores the desire to incorporate the general *into* the particular history of the Jews, and into Perec's particular history *as* a Jew. Neue-Bremm was not a concentration camp for Jews, but rather, for communists, political dissidents, and common criminals. As a displaced Auschwitz, it is a displaced Jewishness. Displaced further, into the realm of fiction, the concentration camp becomes a general symbol, but one which nonetheless *harbors* this displaced Jewishness, and ultimately, the displaced mother.

The disparate registers in *W ou le souvenir d'enfance* call into question the fictionality of fiction. It offers fiction as the possibility of seeing, what we, outside fiction, cannot see, are barred from seeing. Fiction is, we might say, an "alternate" discourse to being, because it allows for the possibility of a story, resolved whole to emerge out of the fragmented vocabulary of a life that is characterized precisely by a lack of resolution, by the absence of any security that the fragmented components will shape themselves into a whole. Fiction allows the possibility of piercing through the *brume insensée* of the present. The price that we pay, however, for this ability to see, is the loss of *my* perspective, of one's intimate coordinates in space and time; as soon as what one says enters into the fictional register, the birds-eye-view of life that fiction offers and its eradication of contingency, requires that the *I* disappear and that institutional and generic identity take over.

In *W ou le souvenir d'enfance*, Perec confronts this authoritative narrative voice, which comes from the assuredness of the resolution. We might understand the book as a bid, in the very transgressing of fictional discourse, to re-establish the essentiality of fiction to human experience; fiction not as a suspension of the indeterminacy of life, but rather, as *poesis*, as a re-establishing the self in the shadow of a narrative voice that always seems to pass the self by on its way to the universal. Fiction is an inhabiting of this space of non-identity, a working through the *brume insensée*. One's personhood can only be expressed, narrated in impersonal terms. As soon as one begins to narrate, it is the depersonalized voice of *narrative*, of language, that takes over. The personal experience is always eaten up by the discourse, which takes, and appropriates that discourse for the institution. We might, however, understand that it is only in this passing by the person's experience on the way to the universal that we arrive at anything like meaning. Meaning requires this transposition, this *transference* of the personal and the lived onto the impersonal and universal.

And yet, in this transposition, what happens to the individual experience? Specifically, what happens to the traumatic experience, the experience that is different from the *general* experience of being human? How, then, does the representation of suffering—as physical cruelty, atrocity, torture—not become put in the service of the originary, formal, ontological and irrevocable suffering of *merely being born into consciousness*? And what happens then to the representation of "real" suffering, of human injustice, of physical deprivation, when it used put into the service of the existential and the universal? The space of *W ou le souvenir d'enfance*, with its two registers and four vertices that cut the book crosswise, with its *points de suspension*, is built out of this paradox: it is the clash between individual memory and institutional narration that creates the perception of an individual in space, and this space is defined through the *suffering* of these mutually exclusive constituents.

It is the inability to identify oneself as narrator that creates both the fascination and the horror, the horror at finding oneself here, subject.

The adolescent of W, after having spent a joyful, ignorant childhood, finds himself chained to his bed. The narrator writes:

> *Comment expliquer que ce qu'il découvre n'est pas quelque chose d'épouvantable, n'est pas un cauchemar, n'est pas quelque chose dont il va se réveiller brusquement, quelque chose qu'il va chasser de son esprit, comment expliquer que c'est cela la vie, la vie réelle, que c'est cela qu'il y aura tous les jours, que c'est cela qui existe et rien d'autre, qu'il est inutile de croire que quelque chose d'autre existe, de faire semblant de croire à autre chose, que ce n'est même pas la peine d'essayer de déguiser cela, d'essayer de l'affubler, que ce n'est même pas la peine de faire semblant de croire à quelque chose qu'il y aurait derrière cela, ou au dessus ou au dessous.*[87]

Let us read these lines with the emphasis on the dilemma of the speaker. To do so casts the speaker as well into the position of victim, generates, perhaps, a coinciding of the speaker and victim. If Gaspard Winckler does not come back from W, if he cannot extricate himself from his fiction in order to return to the reader, it is perhaps for this reason. He has *become* Gaspard Winckler.

If meaning requires a transference of intimate experience into language, and thus, into institutional, and universal terms, then this likewise would require a *counter-transference*, back onto the personal: narration, the impersonal voice which speaks for *everyone* can only understand itself in the light of its deeply personal, unspeakable (in the non-Auschwitzian sense), and unknowable source. The desire-to-explain fades invisibly into the impersonal language and can only be recuperated there, though its recuperation is always a personal act that can never be articulated institutionally, can never achieve narrative.

I, however, the personal I who can speak only in quotations, must nonetheless *resist* this meaning in some way. That is, I must resist the "individual," the impersonal person that the meaning is trying to make me. In that resistance, I create the space of a battle between *it-unspeakable* (the institution) and *me-unspeakable*, and the *speakable* only comes about out of

this confrontation, this short-circuit, this place where I seem to be both present and absent, this place where meaning seems to go beyond me, and this place where I catch it as an observer to my *self*.

It is only in this way that the unspeakable (in the Auschwitzian sense) can be made into the speakable, and that suffering can be given register, language, and can be experienced and shared as *poesis*, as meaning.

Perec writes this of the end of his psychoanalysis:

> Elle me fut donnée, un jour, avec surprise, avec émerveillement, avec violence, comme un souvenir restitué dans son espace, comme un geste, une chaleur retrouvée. Ce jour-là, l'analyste entendit ce que j'avais à lui dire, ce que, pendant quatre ans, il avait écouté sans l'entendre, pour cette simple raison que je ne lui disais pas, que je ne me le disais pas. (*Je suis né* 70)[88]

EPILOGUE

I.

At the heart of this study is the notion that the self as a unit is constituted by a bifurcation.

When we look at ourselves in a mirror, we see ourselves through the eyes of others, through the "eyes" of an impersonal other that fulfills the very possibility of a collective vision: it is in this conflation of seer and seen that we recognize ourselves.

We look at an individual, at a *product* of a collective sight that defines the realm of concern, that defines the object, the sphere of the objective. At the same time, the thing that does the seeing must put itself forward as the thing that cannot be seen: darkly making itself *felt* in a realm incompatible with the mirror's language, it becomes infused in the image: it is the thing in the mirror that becomes a signal of its absence, and that becomes the presence of something that cannot be communicated, of a beyond to communication.

What I have hoped to circumscribe in this study is precisely this thing that cannot be said, but that is not an absence. What I have hoped to show is that everything that can be said, and that can be seen, achieves its ability to do so only in paying its *original* debt to consciousness as an assertion of the self's primordial experience of being "before" it finds itself among others even if, factically, it can only arrive at the consciousness of this "before" through its relation with others, in the language of others (and thus, in language).

The story that I hope to have told here is the story of this bifurcation of the self into experience and image: mutually exclusive constituents which, in the suffering of their exclusion from each other, create consciousness, create the subject as that special case in a world that can otherwise only be found by virtue of its objects.

Consciousness lives in the interstices of the existential and the legal; in the incommunicability of being, and the gathering around this incommunicability in the creating of an institution. The institution, of which, as individuals we each are a locus, conceals this incommunicability because it is the incommunicability that serves as its very possibility, as the meaning only by which it can come into being.

Narrative exists by virtue of the institution. What we suffer in the narrative is that the narrative can never be the story of the one who is institutionalized, of the *person*, because the institutional form of the narrative precludes the *experience* of being *in* that narrative, of being subject *to* it.

We might say that at the heart of every narrative is a suffering, a suffering of the inability to tell the story of the one subject to the narrative—that is, of the subject. And it is the suffering that becomes our entry into the inarticulate story of the person—of the one who is on the other side of the mirror—but which can only come into consciousness through the image, the language that the thing *in* the mirror proposes.

II.

In this study, I have attempted a narrative with four moments. I wanted to show, in my analysis of the first chapter of the Book of Genesis, the bifurcation of consciousness into its legal and existential components in the creation of language. It is only with language that we can be officially recognized; it is language that permits us to create a world with others. When we are asked to produce our "papers" as conscious beings, we respond by showing the languaged other, the self-in-the-mirror, what can be expressed to others. And yet, lurking behind this language is the thing that language cannot say, the thing that sight cannot

see, the experience that we cannot share, the *force* behind the narrative. This is the "I am writing," the me-here.

The second moment, then, is that of the suffering of this bifurcation of the self into the shared and recognizable, and the discrete and inarticulate. Pierre Glendinning serves as this emblem, bearing the name of his forefathers, but seeking a place in an absolute community, an existential democracy that no *named* God can underwrite: a communion around experience, and not law, not the schematized law that not only interdicts against the liberty of one's own experience, but that, in doing so, defines the objective world to which we become subject.

The subject, absorbed in its world, cannot see outside this sphere of the visible, of the objective. Its narratives, however, offer the frame that *it* cannot have in its own life. The other side of the suffering of this split, then, comes in the third moment: the joy in the very possibility of inhabiting this unlivable perspective, of allowing seeing to eclipse being; it is, we might say, this perpetual adoration that turns life into narrative, a narrative that holds possibility as possibility. To regain Lost Time, then, is not to re-experience time, but rather, to experience for the first time that which one was unable to do because one is encapsulated in, asphyxiated by experience itself, an experience that precludes vision. It is time itself coming into being through the possibility of manufacturing a vantage outside of it.

Ultimately, however, if the invisible, inarticulate basis of every writing is an *act* of writing, then every writing must tell the story of its movement away from that original performance. Fiction, we might say, is where the failure to arrive at the performance of its own coming-into-being nonetheless points to the place where that impetus *would* be, holding open that dark place amidst the refracted light of the objects that constitutes it. Ultimately,

that failure results in a suffering which cannot be made into a narrative, that threatens to destroy the very foundation of narrative.

If these four moments form a narrative, nonetheless, we experience each moment not as moments in a narrative; the narrative itself becomes effaced in the synchrony of all of this experience, which nonetheless continues to rise up as a narrative before us, continues to exclude us. It is this exclusion, then, that is the meaning, the impetus for the narrative: excluding then, is to describe a space, to make space, to be.

If at the heart of every narrative is an act, an impetus that is unavailable in the narrative, then it is the distance between what is presented, what stands forth, and this performance, that defines the realm of the narrative. Fiction, then, is the fiction that one can *see* this. *This becomes sight.* Our generic fictions, then, the stories that we tell ourselves, the ones that we *know* that we can never enter into, show us the limits of our being, and circumscribe the space that we inhabit, making form.

NOTES TO PART ONE, CHAPTER 1

[1] This is not to say, of course, that the attempt to understand why *this* author engages in writing *this* fiction is not worthy of inquiry. My point is that, if we are to understand the *phenomenon* of fiction on its own terms, we have to rigorously respect the different modalities in which they exist. I am arguing here, that what makes fiction fiction is that it's "reality" is not the same as that of the reader or writer as a being in a body, and that consciousness is constituted by, requires an understanding of *both* these modalities on their own terms

[2] This is not to say that this is the only *function* of the mise-en-abyme. We shall see that the mise-en-abyme can be put to a variety of uses, though always, we maintain, having at its basis the limits of representability.

[3] See Vico, *Ancient Wisdom*, p. 46ff.

[4] Of course, we bring very different types of sensibilities to the act of reading, and my point is not to say that every reading of a work of fiction confers upon the reader such ontological vision. Rather, my point here refers to the *phenomenon* of fiction itself: it only exists out of the *desire* to create a world whose boundaries, unlike the world we live in, can be seen.

[5] This non-bodily origin does not preclude the employing of a fictional narrator, or embodied narratorial perspective. Whether a narrative uses a first (or more rarely, second) person pronoun, whether a narrative focalizes its perspective through a character in the narrative, or generally, whether the perspective of a narrator is implicated in the narrative (what Gérard Genette calls "homodiegetic") is all secondary to the original condition of the narrative itself, which, necessarily not tied to the author, must, from the perspective of being in a body, hang from the void. Wayne Booth's notion of an "implied author," as the "author's second self," a concept that we do not endorse here and which we shall discuss below, has its origin, of course, in precisely this problematic.

NOTES TO PART ONE, CHAPTER 2

[1] See for example Cohen and Shires, p.93

[2] "So long as one has not addressed a certain number of questions to an author, and so long as he has not responded to them, if only just for himself, one cannot be sure to have a complete grasp of him, even if the questions seem completely outside the nature of his writings: What did he think of religion? How was he affected by the spectacle of nature? What was his stance with regard to the issue of women? With regard to the issue of money? Was he rich or poor; what were his habits, his manner of daily life? What was his vice or his weakness? No response to these questions is irrelevant with regard to judging the author of the book, or the book itself, if the book is not a treatise of pure geometry, and especially, if the book is a work of literature, that is to say, a book that concerns everything." (My translation).

[3] "A book is the product of an other self than that which we manifest in our habits, in society, in our vices. This self, if we want to try to understand it, it is in the depths of ourselves, in trying to recreate it in ourselves, that we can arrive at it." (My translation).

[4] "What one gives to the public is what one wrote alone, for oneself: it is the book of the self." (My translation).

[5] "And I understood that all these materials for a work of literature were simply my past life; I understood that they had come to me, in frivolous pleasures, in indolence, in tenderness, in unhappiness, and that I had stored them up without divining the purpose for which they were destined or even their continued existence any more than a seed does when it forms within itself a reserve of all the nutritious substances from which it will feed a plant. Like the seed, I should be able to die once the plant had developed and I began to perceive that I had lived for the sake of the plant

without knowing it, without ever realising that my life needed to come into contact with those books which I had wanted to write and for which, when in the past I had sat down at my table to begin, I had been unable to find a subject." (304)

[6] See Iser's book of that name, and Peter Rabinowitz's "Truth in Fiction."

[7] Butler's summary, *Psychic Life,* p.149

[8] "But none of the feelings which the joys or misfortunes of a real person arouse in us can be awakened except through a mental picture of those joys or misfortunes; and the ingenuity of the first novelist lay in his understanding that, as the image was the one essential element in the complicated structure of our emotions, so that simplification of it which consisted in the suppression, pure and simple, of real people would be a decided improvement."

[9] See Prince, "Introduction to the Study of the Narratee;" Iser, *The Implied Reader*; Rabinowitz, "Truth in Fiction: A Re-examination of Audiences."

[10] These terms are also employed, to different ends, by Edmond Husserl in *Logical Investigations*, and which are subject to a critique by Jacques Derrida in *Speech and Phenomena*, which I will discuss in the next chapter.

[11] Kawashima also argues that this distinction is grammatically marked in Biblical Hebrew. See *Biblical Narrative and the Death of the Rhapsode*, Chapter 4.

[12] Paul Ricoeur: "The object of semiotics—the sign—is merely virtual. Only the sentence is actual as the very event of speaking. This is why there is no way of passing from the word as a lexical sign to the sentence by mere extension of the same methodology to a more complex entity. The sentence is not a larger or more complex word, it is a new entity. It may be decomposed into words, but the words are something other than short sentences. A sentence is a whole irreducible to the sum of its parts. It is made up of words, but it is not a derivative function of its words. A sentence is made up of signs, but is not itself a sign." (*Interpretation Theory* 7).

[13] This is not to say that the present perfect, the French *passé composé* and the like cannot appear in narration, which would, of course belie the preponderance of evidence to the contrary. Rather, as we shall soon see, such constructions certainly appear in fictional narrative, but do so on the part of a speaker, whose act of communication is put out of play in the service of narration.

NOTES TO PART ONE, CHAPTER 3

[1] References to the *Critique of Pure Reason* cite the original page numbers from the first (A) and second (B) editions.

[2] It is interesting to note the comparison between Schleiermacher's hermeneutics and his notion of the religious consciousness, as demonstrated in this passage from the *Introduction to Christian Ethics*: "Consider the first encounter of Andrew and John with Jesus. The influence of the divine was there first, and from that arose a thought and a deed. The thought was that we have found the Messiah; the deed was that they began to communicate with him. The primordial, from which both things arose, was the impression of the divinity of the redeemer" (Qtd. Roy 221). One could, although Schleiermacher does not, draw the connection between the series that comprises the influence of the divine, the thought, and the deed, and the series that comprises the original impulse, meditation, and composition.

[3] Schleiermacher at one point claims that meditation and composition can be nearly identical with each other: "If we now ask in what area the separation of the two acts is a minimum and is of no hermeneutic interest, then this is the lecture which is most purely scientific…The more the composition connects the thoughts without any other interest, the more it is originally one with them, so there is therefore no difference between it and the meditation. This difference cannot consist in one's being supposed to want to establish the temporal sequence of the emergence of the

individual thoughts of the writer. This is something so insignificant as a result of the composition itself that there are only a few particular cases in which something can be established concerning it" (137). What I am arguing is that the temporal sequence is exactly what cannot be ignored; it is the crux of the difficulty in separating the meditation from the composition.

[4] For the relation between hermeneutics, Kant, Jacobi and the "Pantheism controversy," see Andrew Bowie, *From Romanticism to Critical Theory*, chapter 1.

[5] All page references to *Ideas* indicate that of the first printed (1913) edition of *Ideen zu einer reinen Phänemenologie und phänomenologischen Philosophie, Erstes Buch: Allgemeine Einführung in die reine Phänomenologie*, as they appear in the margins of Kersten's translation.

[6] Paul Ricoeur: "The ultimate role of the image is not only to diffuse meaning across diverse sensorial fields, to *hallucinate* thought in some way, but, on the contrary, to effect a sort of *epoché* of the real, to suspend our attention to the real, to place us in a state of non-engagement with regard to perception or action, in short, to suspend meaning in the neutralized atmosphere to which one could give the name of the dimension of fiction." (128)

NOTES TO PART TWO, CHAPTER 1

[1] For Rashi's Commentary in English, see Silbermann, 2 and below, note 5; for general discussion on Rashi's commentary see Westermann, 95ff. For a linguistic analysis of the passage, see Winther-Nielsen, "'In the beginning' of Biblical Hebrew Discourse: Genesis 1:1 and the Fronted Time Expression."

[2] For reasons which will become clear in the discussion below, I maintain the Hebrew word "Elohim" for the creating deity instead of translating it as "God."

[3] But see also Stuart Culver, "Representing the Author: Henry James, Intellectual Property and the Work of Writing."

[4] The Zohar, as I discuss below, arrives at a similar interpretation.

[5] The relevant portion of Rashi's commentary on this passage is as follows: "The text does not intend to point out the order of the acts of Creation -- to state that these (heaven and earth) were created first; for if it intended to point this out, it should have been written *Barishona bara*, "At first God created..." Because wherever the word *reshith* occurs in Scripture, it is in the construct state. For example, Jeremiah 26:1, "In the beginning of (*reshith*) the reign of Jehoiakim," Genesis 10:10, "The beginning of (*reshith*) his kingdom," Deuteronomy 18:4, "The firstfruit of (*reshith*) thy corn." Similarly here you must translate *bereshith bara elohim* as though it read *bereshith bero*, at the beginning of God's creating. A similar grammatical construction (of a noun in the construct followed by a verb) is in Hosea 1:2, *tehillat dibber [yahweh] behosheah*, which is as much to say, "At the beginning of God's speaking through Hosea, the Lord said to Hosea." Should you, however, insist that it does actually intend to point out that these (heaven and earth) were created first, and that the meaning is, "At the beginning of *everything* He created these, admitting therefore that the word *reshith* is in the construct state and explaining the omission of a word signifying 'everything' by saying that you have texts which are elliptical, omitting a word, as for example Job 3:10, "Because it shut not up the doors of my mother's womb" where it does not explicitly explain who it was that closed the womb; and Isaiah 8:4 "He shall take away the spoil of Samaria" without explaining who shall take it away; and Amos 6:12 "Doth he plough with oxen," and it does not explicitly state, "Doth a man plough with oxen"; Isaiah 46:10 "Declaring from the beginning the end," and it does not explicitly state, "Declaring from the beginning of a thing the end of a thing" -- and if it is so (that you assert that this verse intends to point out that heaven and earth were created first), you should be astonished at yourself, because as a matter of fact the waters were created before heaven and earth, for lo, it is written, "The Spirit of God was hovering on the face of the waters," and Scripture had not yet disclosed when the creation

of the waters took place -- consequently you must learn from this that the creation of the waters preceded that of the earth. And a further proof that the heavens and the earth were not the first thing created is that the heavens were created from fire (*esh*) and water (*mayim*), from which it follows that fire and water were in existence before the heavens. Therefore you must needs admit that the text teaches nothing about the earlier or later sequence of the acts of creation" (Silbermann, pp.2-3).

[6] The New Jewish Publication Society translation of the Bible, as well as the translations of Robert Alter and Everett Fox all use this as their paradigm.

[7] References to *The New Science* are by paragraph number.

[8] We could certainly then understand the plot of the Christian Bible as exactly a moving forward that is a moving back to the origin.

[9] There is of course the issue that Elohim returns to the position of the sovereign deity. My theory would of course have been more perfect had Elohim never returned to the narrative.

NOTES TO PART TWO, CHAPTER 2

[1] This, despite Melville's contention (in his letter to Sophia Hawthorne of 8 January 1852) that he had only a "vague idea" that his book "was susceptible of an allegoric construction." (*Letters* 148)

[2] See for example, Seelye, p. 76, Brodhead, pp.233-236; Bellis, p. 12

[3] Helen Ann Hauser, in *A Multi-genre Analysis of Melville's* Pierre*: The Patterns almost Followed* has identified the discourse of six generic categories in *Pierre*: the novel of manners, the gothic, satire, Elizabethan tragedy, the psychological novel, and the symbolist novel.

[4] An authorial imposition that perhaps Thackeray himself found too clean: the last sentence of the book ends without a period, suggesting perhaps, the impossibility of closing the box!

[5] Both quotations are taken from Leon Howard and Hershel Parker. "Editorial Appendix" to *Pierre and the Ambiguities*, p.383

[6] "When the equal partition of property is established by law, the intimate connection is destroyed between family feeling and the preservation of the paternal estate; the property ceases to represent the family; for as it must inevitably be divided after one or two generations it has evidently a constant tendency to diminish and must in the end be completely dispersed. The sons of the great landed proprietor, if they are few in number, or if fortune befriends them, may indeed entertain the hope of being as wealthy as their father, but not that of possessing the same property as he did; the riches must necessarily be composed of elements different from his." (54)

[7] Indeed, Hershel Parker's re-edited "Kraken" edition of *Pierre or the Ambiguities* eliminates this chapter in its entirety, along with many other portions of the book, arguing that "Melville's belated decision, in January 1852, to turn the hero of his new manuscript into an author seriously damaged the work because many parts of the extensive interpolated passages were inconsistent with his original intentions" (*Reading Melville's* Pierre; or the Ambiguities, vii). Many critics have, of course, questioned this prioritizing of the original intentions over later ones (see, for example, Richard Poirier, "The Monster in the Milk Bowl"). A similar recontextualization of original intentions will be presented in the discussion of W *ou le souvenir d'enfance* in Part Three, Chapter 1.

[8] See Part Two, Chapter 1, Section III

[9] Pierre's Aunt Dorothea, in explaining to Pierre as a boy the circumstances of the chair portrait, discusses the woman who is purported to be Isabel's mother: "'[T]he friends of your father…were fearful that as the young lady was so very beautiful, and goodhearted, and a little inclined to be intriguing—so some said—your father would be tempted to marry her; which would have not been a very wise thing; for though the young lady might have been very beautiful, and good-hearted, yet no one on this side of the water certainly knew her history; and she was a foreigner; and would not have

made so suitable and excellent match for our father as your dear mother afterward did, my child" (76).

NOTES TO PART TWO, CHAPTER 3

[10] See Part Two, Chapter 1, Section III.

[1] References to Proust's *A la recherche de temps perdu* are to the four-volume 1987 Pleiade edition, and are indicated by volume number followed by page number. References in English are to the six-volume Moncrieff/Kilmartin/Enright/Mayor translation, *In Search of Lost Time*, and are indicated by volume number followed by page number. From time to time, for the purpose of textual continuity, I have quoted the translation in very short passages.

[2] "I said to myself: 'I needn't regret my day too much, after all. These hours spent in this young woman's company are not wasted, since I have had from her—charming gifts which cannot be bought too dear—a rose, a scented cigarette and a glass of champagne.' I told myself this because I felt that it would endow with an aesthetic character, and thereby justify and rescue these hours of boredom. I ought perhaps to have reflected that the very need which I felt of a reason that would console me for my boredom was sufficient to prove that I was experiencing no aesthetic sensation." (III:226)

[3] "The room which Saint-Loup had taken was small, but the single mirror which decorated it was of such a kind that it seemed to reflect a score of others in an endless vista; and the electric bulb placed at the top of the frame must at night, when it was lit, followed by the procession of twenty or more reflexions similar to its own, give to the drinker, even when alone, the idea that the surrounding space was multiplying itself simultaneously with his sensations, heightened by intoxication, and that shut up by himself in this little cell, he was reigning nevertheless over something far more extensive

in its indefinite luminous curve than a passage in the 'Jardin de Paris.' Being then myself at this moment the said drinker, suddenly, looking for him in the glass, I caught sight of him, a hideous stranger, staring at me. The joy of intoxication was stronger than my disgust; from gaiety or bravado, I gave him a smile which he returned. And I felt myself so much under the ephemeral and potent sway of the minute in which our sensations are so strong, that I am not sure whether my sole regret was not at the thought that the hideous self whom I had just caught sight of in the glass was perhaps on his last legs, and that I should never meet that stranger again for the rest of my life." (III:226)

[4] "a prosaicness which serves as a deep reservoir of poetry to the stranger who passes through their midst without living among them" (I:67)

[5] "the prospective charm of habits which I had not yet contracted" (III:104)

[6] This is Genette's well known summary of *À la recherche* (1980: 30).

[7] "What an abyss of uncertainty whenever the mind feels overtaken by itself; when it, the seeker, is at the same time the dark region through which it must go seeking and where all its equipment will avail it nothing. Seek? More than that: create. It is face to face with something which does not yet exist, which it alone can make actual, which it alone can bring into the light of day." (1:61)

[8] "the ineluctable law which ordains that we can only imagine what is absent" (VI: 263)

[9] See Part One, Chapter 3

[10] That the novel bears this "improvisatory" structure, is nonetheless not to say that the logic that will manifest later in the novel is not already incipient in it from the beginning. Tadié discusses the same scene at Montjouvain in arguing for the "Cathedral" structure of the novel: "C'est au moment où Proust a decouvert son système architectural, lié au narrateur, que son oeuvre est née" (*Proust et le Roman* 241). One might argue that the logic that will only later be revealed, lies incipient and inchoate, waiting for its moment to incarnate as plot.

[11] This episode was excised from the main text in the most recent Gallimard edition. Similarly, however, we could class in this category the narrator's late discovery that the obscene gesture that

Gilberte made upon their first meeting when he was on a walk with his father and grandfather, was "in reality" an attempt at seduction. We could also include as a variant, the uniquely Proustian moment when a vague personage rises up out of anonymity and instantly becomes familiar: a man walks out of a shady inn and "becomes" Robert de Saint-Loup; a woman that the desiring narrator pursues from behind turns around, and is Mme. Verdurin. It is as if the weight of anonymity bore so heavily upon these shadowy figures that the only way that they could carry themselves into the unknown future was to reach for a recognizable identity that would ensconce them safely in the story, so that the story perpetuates itself by moving forward in an improvisatory manner rather than being determined by some resolution lying ahead (and precisely because the resolution of the story is the wrapping around of the story upon itself in its being transmuted into narrative). These moments then, when the artifice of the story shows through, contaminate the fiction that we read with the narrating of the fiction. This would also account for the many contrivances that propel the narrative forward: the telegram from Gilberte in which the telegraph operator mistook the signature to be "Albertine;" the moment when the Duchesse de Guermantes invites the narrator to her home for dinner; and above all, the narrator's mother staying all night in his room after the trauma of the unreceived goodnight kiss.

[12] This sedimentation works both ways evidently, as we see here, where it is *Albertine* who serves as the prototype for all the other objects of desire: "En somme, si j'y réfléchissais, la matière de mon expérience, laquelle serait la matière de mon livre, me venait de Swann non pas seulement par tout ce qui concernait lui-même et Gilberte. Mais c'était lui qui m'avait des Combray donne le désir d'aller à Balbec, où sans cela mes parents n'eussent jamais eu l'idée de m'envoyer, et sans quoi je m'aurais pas connu Albertine…" (1987:IV.493)

"It occurred to me, as I thought about it, that the raw material of my experience, which would also be the raw material of my book, came to me from Swann, not merely because so much of it concerned Swann himself and Gilberte, but because it was Swann who from the days of Combray

had inspired in me the wish to go to Balbec, where otherwise my parents would never have had the idea of sending me, and but for this I should never have known Albertine." (1987 :VI.328)

[13] 1987: IV:464

[14] "And I felt…a sensation of weariness and almost of terror at the thought that all this length of Time had not only, without interruption, been lived, experienced, secreted by me, that it was my life, was in fact me, but also that I was compelled so long as I was alive to keep it attached to me, that it supported me and that, perched on its giddy summit, I could not make a movement without displacing it. (VI: 530)

[15] Landy, in his discussion provides a very useful summary of the various interpretations of the structure of *À la recherche*, which I draw on here.

[16] "for the first time…gaze at my leisure at that rounded cheek, that arched neck, that tapering eyebrow"

[17] "At first I should have seen nothing. I should have had the pang of thinking that she had failed to turn up, when suddenly I should have seen one of her beloved grey dresses emerge from the black wall, then, her smiling eye" (VI: 65)

[18] "All day long, in that slightly too countrified house which seemed no more than a place for a rest between walks or during a sudden downpour, one of those houses in which all of the sitting rooms look like arbours and, on the wall-paper in the bedrooms, here the roses from the garden, there the birds from the trees outside join you and keep you company, isolated from the world—for it was old wall-paper on which every rose was so distinct that, had it been alive, you could have picked it, every bird you could have put in a cage and tamed, quite different from those grandiose bedroom decorations of today where, on a silver background, all the apple-trees of Normandy display their outlines in the Japanese style to hallucinate the hours you spend in bed—all day long I remained in my room which looked over the fine greenery of the park and the lilacs at the entrance, over the green leaves of the tall trees by the edge of the lake, sparkling in the sun, and the forest of Méséglise.

Yet I looked at all this with pleasure only because I said to myself: 'How nice to be able to see so much greenery from my bedroom window,' until the moment when, in the vast verdant picture, I recognised, painted in a contrasting dark blue simply because it was further away, the steeple of Combray church. Not a representation of the steeple, but the steeple itself, which, putting in visible form a distance of miles and of years, had come, intruding its discordant tone into the midst of the luminous verdure—a tone so colourless that it seemed little more than a preliminary sketch—and engraved itself upon the window pane." (VI:10)

[19] The example Genette gives from *À la recherche* is at a dinner at Rivebelle. It is "inextricably both a synthetic dinner, told in the imperfect ("Les premiers temps, quand nous y *arrivions*"), and a singular dinner, told in the passé défini ('je *remarquai* un de ces servants…Une jeune fille blonde me *regarda*'); and since it deals with the evening of the first appearance of the young girls we can date it accurately, but no temporal indication places it in relation to the series it belongs to and in which gives the impression—a rather disconcerting one—of *floating*)" (151).

[20] "And as soon as our call has rung out, in the darkness filled with apparitions to which are ears alone are unsealed, a tinny sound, an abstract sound—the sound of distance overcome—and the voice of the dear one speaks to us." (III: 174)

[21] This meeting in non-coincidence is one of the foundations of Proustian humor, and is the force behind the famous "Proustian reversal." At the beginning of *Le temps retrouvé* for example, the narrator remarks on a resemblance that he detects between Rachel and Gilberte. At first, he reflects that it may be a result of their common Jewish origin, but the narrator quickly writes this off because he does not find anything Semitic about the way Gilberte looks. He then witnesses Gilberte blow her nose and sees "the many colours which were left on her handkerchief, turning it into a sumptuous palette" (*TR*, 17). He realizes that Gilberte had imitated Rachel by heavily making herself up in order to please her husband, Saint-Loup. Her ruse was successful: but this was so not because

she shared any physical commonalities with Rachel, but rather, because the two women shared the "look" of being what one is not.

[22] ""Trees' I thought, 'you no longer have anything to say to me. My heart and grown cold and no longer hears you…It is with indifference, with boredom that my eyes register the line which separates your radiant foreheads from your shadowy trunks" (VI: 238)

[23] "If ever I thought myself as a poet, I know now that I am not one" (VI: 238)

[24] "But the companion whose attention I had drawn to these curious effects was evidently of a less enthusiastic nature than many more sympathetically disposed persons who are enraptured by such sights, for he had taken cognisance of these colors without any kind of joy" (VI: 239)

[25] "If I really had the soul of an artist, surely I would be feeling pleasure at the sight of this curtain of trees lit by the setting sun, these little flowers on the bank which lifted themselves almost to the level of the steps of my compartment, flowers whose petals I was able to count but whose colour I would not, like many a worthy man of letters, attempt to describe, for can one hope to transmit to the reader a pleasure that one has not felt?" (VI: 239)

[26] 1987 :IV.434. I have slightly modified the English translation.

[27] "The positive reason that made me decide to go was the name of Guermantes, absent long enough from my mind to be able, when I read it upon the invitation card, to re-awaken a ray of my attention, to draw up from the depths of my memory a sort of section of the past of the Guermantes, attended by all the images of seigniorial forest and tall flowers which at that earlier time of my life had accompanied it… " (VI : 240)

[28]"And at the moment when, recovering my balance, I put my foot on a stone which was slightly lower than its neighbour, all my discouragement vanished and in its place was that same happiness which at various epochs of my life had been given to me by the sight of trees which I had thought that I recognised in the course of a drive near Balbec, by the sight of the twin steeples of Martinville, by the flavour of a madeleine dipped in tea, and by all those other sensations of which I have spoken

and of which the last works of Vinteuil had seemed to me to combine the quintessential character" (1987:VI.255)". See also: Proust, IV. 445, 448, 450 ,452, 457, 498 / *TR,* 257; 260; 262; 265; 273; and 334

[29] Genette offers such a chronology in *Narrative Discourse* (43–46) which informs my ordering here. He, however, inexplicably does not include the last section of *Swann*, when the narrator walks in the Bois de Boulogne "this year," which would appear to be the latest point in the novel. Genette does however, point out in a different place, that the "this year" seems to describe a Paris before the war, when in fact, if we were indeed to be the latest point in the novel, it would have to be after the war. Proust, of course, wrote this section before the war, and before he finished *Le temps retrouvé.*

[30] For purposes of expediency, I am glossing over some of the finer points of the oscillation between narrative moments in *Swann*. Genette provides a more comprehensive inventory of these (see above note).

[31] "C'est ainsi que je restais souvent jusqu'au matin à songer au temps de Combray, à mes tristes soirées sans sommeil, à tant de jours aussi dont l'image m'avait été plus récemment rendue par la saveur—ce qu'on aurait appelé à Combray le « parfum »—d'une tasse de thé…" (1987:I.183)

"Thus would I often lie until morning, dreaming of the old days at Combray, of my melancholy and wakeful evenings there, of other days besides, the memory of which had been more recently restored to my by the taste—by what would have been called at Combray the 'perfume'—of a cup of tea…" (*Swann*, 262).

[32] "Puis renaissait le souvenir d'une nouvelle attitude; le mur filait dans une autre direction: j'étais dans ma chambre chez Mme de Saint-Loup, à la campagne; mon Dieu! il est au moins dix heures, on doit avoir fini de dîner!" (1987 :I.6).

"Then the memory of a new position would spring up, and the wall would slide away in another direction; I was in my room at Mme de Saint-Loup's house in the country; good heavens, it must be ten o'clock, they will have finished dinner!" (1987:I.6)

[33] Proust to Rosny Aîné, 22 December 1919: "[J]e veux que tout paraisse ensemble pour qu'on comprenne la composition à laquelle j'ai tout sacrifié et qu'on méconnait tellement qu'on croit que c'est un recueil de souvenirs fortuits!" The work as a structure held together by its own tension (not unlike the way Rachel's face is portrayed (see note 35), is of course an issue for Proust in his description of the novel as a cathedral. See Proust's letter to Comte Jean de Gagneron of 1 August 1919, as well as Sjef Houppermans, *Marcel Proust constructiviste*, p9ff.

[34] Antoine Compagnon: "If the novels of the nineteenth century are incomplete because their unity is retrospective and in that sense fortuitous, and if a preconceived unity remains dogmatic and artificial, what will be the unity of the greatest work of the in-between time of the centuries, perhaps even of the twentieth century? It would have to be both prior and posterior, prospective and retroactive, conscious and unconscious, premeditated and nonetheless misunderstood: in this way the work would be both organic and formal, vital and at the same time logical." (*Proust Between Two Centuries* 40).

[35] "The immobility of that thin face, like that of a sheet of paper subjected to the colossal pressure of two atmospheres, seemed to me to be held in equilibrium by two infinites which converged on her without meeting, for she held them apart." (III: 211)

[36] "beneath the name of every character of his invention he can put sixty names of characters that he has seen, one of whom he has posed for the grimaces, another for the monocle, another for the fits of temper, another for the swaggering movement of the arm, etc." (VI: 305)

NOTES TO PART THREE, CHAPTER 1

[1] "-I met six men, says the mother.

-What are they like? asks the child.

-The first one has a black beard, says the mother.

-Why? asks the child.

-Because he doesn't know how to shave, of course! says the mother.

-And the second one? asks the child.

-The second one has a ring, says the mother.

-Why? asks the child.

-Because he's married, of course! says the mother.

. . .

-And the fifth one? asks the child.

-The fifth one has only one eye open, says the mother.

-Why? asks the child.

-Because he's going to sleep, like you, my child, say the mother in a very soft voice.

-And the last one? asks the child, murmuring.

-The last one is showing his teeth, says the mother in a whisper.

One must, above all, not say that the little child ask anything, because if he has the misfortune to say:

-Why?

-Because he's going to eat you if you don't sleep, of course! The mother will say in a thunderous voice."

(my translation)

[2] Bellos ignores this part of the sentence in mistranslating the line as, "Now the child mustn't say anything at all, for if he should make the mistake of saying:" (265).

[3] The chapter of *La vie mode d'emploi* continues, after this, in telling the story of Madame Orlowska herself. She, we are told, fell in love with the Tunisian when they were children in a summer *colonie* (English: *camp*] in France. After having been apart for the following ten years, Madame Orlowska finally secures a Tunisian visa. When she sees her childhood love for the first time, she discovers that he had grown only twenty or thirty centimeters to her sixty. Her first words to him are "Mais tu n'a pas grandi!" (325)

[4] The narrative, we might say, in placing the ultimate onus on a hypothetical narrator/reader to narrate the child's asking of the question, makes a bid to overwhelm its own structure, but the mise-en-abyme structure of the story steps in to "heal" the narrative, leaving intact the untraversable barrier between reader and story.

[5] See Part 1, Chapter 1, section IV

[6] See Part 1, Chapter 2, section IV

[7] The child is hypothetical. A child might well be thrilled, rather than horrified by the specter of the man with the bared teeth. But if this is the case, there has to then be a subsequent level, in the child's imagination, of a child absorbed in the belief in the truth of the man with the bared teeth.

[8] And to the extent that non-fictional works do intend to create an experience of absorption, they are must use fictional techniques. I offer two examples: Here is the first sentence of Lehr and O'Neill's *Black Mass*, the "true story of an unholy alliance between the FBI and the Irish mob": "One summer day in 1948, a shy kid in short pants named John Connolly wandered into a corner drugstore with a couple of his pals." The use of colloquial language, "kid," "pals," the ephemeral details, "short pants," "wandered," attempt to create a narrative persona, a perspective with regard to the reader, which in turn allows the reader to create a fictional perspective as well with regard to the narrator. The echoing of "once upon a time" in "one summer day" likewise serves as signposts of fiction. Likewise in Elie Wiesel's memoir *Night*: "They called him Moishe the Beadle, as if his entire life he had never had a surname."

[9] See Part 1, Chapter 2, Section IV

[10] Certainly, as I have pointed out in note 8, non-fiction can, and commonly does, use fictional techniques. Likewise, while it is possible to point out particular signposts of fiction, fiction has, since its inception, made promiscuous use of nearly all writing styles. Ultimately, however, a text must decide which genre, and which reading practice it is to be in the service of. My point here, then, is

less about stylistics, and more about overarching generic conventions that put stylistic techniques to different uses.

[11] The genre of poetry might appear to exist in the interstices of both fiction and non-fiction. For our purposes here, however, poetry's engagement with *things* is no less fictional than the genre of fiction. This is essentially, of course, the notion of Mallarmé's "fiction poétique." For an opposing view, however, one that argues for a renewed, non-symbolic poetry, not inconsistent with my notions here, see Jack Spicer's letters to Federico Garcia Lorca in his *After Lorca* (in *Collected Books*).

[12] See Part 2, Chapter 1.

[13] Two issues deserve note here: I have no pretension to claim that Genesis *creates* the notion of genre singlehandedly. We can certainly look to generic precursors such as the Enuma Elish, and Ugaritic Poetry (see Kugel, *The God of Old: Inside the Lost World of the Bible*, chapter 4). My point is, rather, that as far as the novelistic tradition is concerned, it is the Bible, and not its fragmentary precursors and contemporaries, that serves as the basis of influence. Second, the issue of the sacralization of the Bible is not one in which I address here. Suffice it to say that the very compulsion to sacralize a text speaks precisely to the *inability* to ground its authority.

[14] See Bellos, *Georges Perec: A Life in Words,* 57; *W ou le souvenir d'enfance,* 45, 52, 80. Bellos shows that despite Perec's contention (in an earlier attempt at his autobiography that Perec quotes in *W ou le souvenir d'enfance*) that he left Paris in 1942, his departure occurred in 1941.

[15] See Bellos, 60; *W ou le souvenir d'enfance,* 53

[16] See Bellos, 44; *W ou le souvenir d'enfance,* 48

[17] For Perec's psychoanalysis with Pontalis, see Bellos, 475ff and Perec's essay "Les lieux d'une ruse" in *Penser/Classer*.

[18] "*Incomprehension, horror, and fascination mix and fuse with each other in these memories without foundation.*" All translations from *W ou le souvenir d'enfance* (*W or the Memory of Childhood*) are my own.

[19] "I have no memories of childhood."

[20] "I have no memories of childhood. Up to around my twelfth year, my history can be given in a few lines: I lost my father when I was four years old, my mother when I was six; I spent the war in various boarding houses in Villard-de-Lans. In 1945, my father's sister and her husband adopted me."

[21] "'I have no memories of childhood:' I made this affirmation with assurance, with a kind of defiance. No one could ask this question of me. It wasn't written in my program. I was excused from it: another history, the Big History, History with a capital H, had already responded in my place: the war, the camps." Note that the French "Hache" which signifies the letter "H," also means "axe."

[22] Rosemarie Scullion writes, "In Perec's formulation, 'the war, the camps,' the comma serves to instantiate a temporal pause, one that starkly marks the unfolding of a series of traumatizing events. In effect, the comma conveys to the reader: 'First, my father died on the front battling the German invasion, then my mother died in a Nazi concentration camp" (109).

[23] "At thirteen, I invented, told, and illustrated a story."

[24] "Later, I forgot it. Seven years ago, one evening, in Venice, I remembered all at once that it was called 'W' and that it was, in a certain manner, if not the history, at least a history of my childhood." The use of the French word "histoire", which can mean both story and history, renders translation particularly ineffective both here and in the previous quotation, precisely because the tension lies between the notion of personal story and impersonal history.

[25] In his "Lettre à Maurice Nadeau," in *Je suis né*, Perec dates the Venice memory to September 1967.

[26] "All that I knew about it can be given in less than two lines: the life of a society devoted exclusively to sports, on a little island of Tierra del Fuego."

[27] "to bring to an end--I mean by that both 'trace the limits of' and 'give a name to'—this gradual deciphering"

[28] "W does not resemble my Olympic fantasy any more than my Olympic fantasy resembled my childhood."

[29] For the history of the drafts, and publication of *W* (and not *W ou le souvenir d'enfance*) in *La Quinzaine Littéraire,* see Philippe Lejeune, *La mémoire et l'oublique: Georges Perec autobiographe*.

[30] Bernard Magné calls these thematic connections "sutures," and compiles them in his "Les Sutures dans *W ou le souvenir d'enfance*" which I shall discuss below.

[31] But in the web that they weave as in my reading of them, I know that the road I have taken, the passage of my history and the history of my passage will be found written and described.

[32] Kritzman, "Remembrances of things past: Trauma and Mourning in *W ou le souvenir d'enfance*"

[33] "Though I could keep track of my lapses, of charming resonances of Oedipus or of castration, I will never find anything, even in going over them, but the last reflection of a word absent from writing, the scandal of their silence and of my silence."

[34] See Bellos, 96

[35] "W is an island, somewhere in Tierra del Fuego. A race of athletes lives there, dressed in white track suits that bear a large black W."

[36] "I know that… I can, today, in telling the story of W, tell the story of my childhood."

[37] Quoted in Lejeune, *La mémoire et l'oublique* p.88-89, from which I take the account of the publishing of *W* in *La quinzaine littéraire*. "There were no preceding chapters. Forget all that you have read; it was another story, a prologue at most, or perhaps a memory so distant that what is to come will only submerge it. Because it is now that it all begins, it is now that he is going to leave for his research." (My translation)

[38] "Georges Perec was late in sending us the next installment of his serial. He apologizes for this to his readers, who will find the next installment of *W* in our following issue" (my translation).

[39] The presence of thematic "rhymes," or similitudes, which Magné calls "sutures" only serve to further confuse the reader, rather than to help him or her bring coherence to the reading.

[40] "There are, in this book, two texts, that simply alternate; it could almost seem that they have nothing in common, but they are, however, inextricably intertwined, as if neither one of them could

exist alone, as if only in their encounter with each other, in the distant light that one casts on the other, could that which is never said in one, that which is never said in the other, be revealed, but only in their fragile intersection."

[41] Perec has written what is considered to be the longest palindrome in history. It is printed in his volume of poems *La Clôture*, but was originally published in 1973, just around the same time that Perec began to rework the W story for the book.

[42] Manet van Montfrans, in her chapter on *W ou le souvenir d'enfance* in her book *Georges Perec: la contrainte du réel*, catalogues these allusions. See p161ff.

[43] "—I suppose that you expect me to participate in the search?

—*Exactly, said Otto Apfelstahl. I would like you to go there and bring back Gaspard Winckler.*"

[44] "The law is implacable, but the law is unpredictable."

[45] "in a complete and happy promiscuity."

[46] "Leaving the train station, I asked what that monument was called; it was not a monument, someone said, but only the Gare de Lyon."

[47] "For a long time I wanted to keep the secret."

[48] "I was like a child playing hide-and-seek, who doesn't know what he fears or desires the most: to stay hidden, or to be discovered."

[49] The father is never mentioned in Part Two. The mother is referred to twice, once under the sign of the conditional—"J'aurais aimé aider ma mère à débarrasser la table de la cuisine après le dîner" (99)—and once, when he discusses his aunt and grandmother's opinion that his mother would never return (164).

[50]No work, but rather, 'sports"…the prisoners are forced to spin 'round and 'round for hours under the lash; 'toad walk' races are organized, and the losers are tossed into the water tank to the homeric laughter of the S.S. Or the prisoners are put through calisthenics at top speed for hours at a time—deep squat with arms extended—fast, faster still, '*Schnell, los Mensch!*' —face down in the mud and

onto the feet again a hundred times without pause, then run and slosh themselves with water to wash the mud off, and keep the soaking clothes on for twenty-four hours" (*The Other Kingdom* 59).

[51] "The belt is buckled. The voyage is circular: Gaspard Winckler had no reason to travel to Tierra del Fuego, because the 'engulfed world that he saw with his own eyes" is in the region of the Sarre" (my translation).

[52] One of the problems with the position that van Montfrans takes, which in no way should detract from what is an illuminating and fascinating study, is that to say that the *boucle est fermée* is to *breach* the fictional barrier, to speak of fiction as if it were real. If, unlike the other analyses in this study, I introduce the details of Perec's life into my analysis of the text, it is only insofar as it pertains to Perec as autobiographer, and thus, insofar as it pertains to the autobiographical chapters of *W ou le souvenir d'enfance.*

[53] Though, not, it is important to note, the concentration camp of Auschwitz, where his mother perished. As has often been noted, the concentration camp of Neue-Bremm that Rousset describes, was not meant to house, and murder, Jews. Rather, it was meant for both common criminals, communists, and other political dissidents.

[54] "[T]he fiction constitutes not only an element of the biography…but even more—and this is essential—an element of the autobiographical narrative… The autobiographic enunciation is, thus, in a dominant position, hierarchically superior to that of the fiction, which is, with regard to the autobiography, subsumed in it" (my translation).

[55] "There could have been no survivors. What my eyes had seen had really happened: the lianas had broken apart the foundations, the forest had eaten the houses; the sand took over the stadiums, cormorants had invaded by the thousands, and the silence, all of a sudden the glacial silence."

[56] "The eye follows the paths that have been laid down for it in the work" (*Life A User's Manual* n. pag.)

[57] "For a long time I put off undertaking the account of my voyage to W. Today, propelled by a pressing necessity, persuaded that the events of which I was the witness should be revealed and brought to light, I resolve to do so."

[58] "I was a witness and not an actor. I am not the hero of my story. Nor am I exactly the singer of it."

[59] "I was going to say"; "For a long time I wanted to keep the secret"; "For a long time I remained indecisive."; "Slowly, I forgot the uncertain wanderings of this voyage."

[60] "He who entrusted it to me, he too has disappeared."

[61] See Part 1, Chapter 2, Section VI.

[62] "For a longtime I remained indecisive"

[63] "…years ago, in a cheap restaurant in the Giudecca, in Venice, I saw a man come in whom I thought to have recognized. I ran to him, but already stuttering out two or three words of pardon. There could not have been any survivors."

[64] "Whatever happens, whatever I do, I was the only depository, the only living memory, the only vestige of this world. This, more than any other consideration, was why I decided to write."

[65] It was not for me to divulge anything of the mission which was conferred upon me, first of all because, perhaps, this mission was not accomplished—but who would have been able to carry it out?"

[66] "The memories are pieces of life torn from the void"; "figures which had no attachment to the ground which was supposed to support them"; "Nothing anchors them; nothing fixes them."

[67] "The first memory would have for a setting [frame] the back room of my grandmother's store. I am three years old. I am sitting in the center of the room, amidst scattered Yiddish newspapers. The family circle completely surrounds me: this sensation of being encircled is not accompanied for me by any feeling of being crushed or by any threat; on the contrary, it is one of warm protection, love[.]"

[68] "The scene...resembles for me a painting, perhaps by Rembrandt, perhaps invented, that would be called 'Jesus in front of the Doctors.'"

[69] For a history of the various versions of this memory in Perec's published and unpublished work, see Lejeune, "La lettre hébraïque: un premier souvenir en sept versions" in *La memoire et l'oublique.*

[70] "[T]he doubled V constitutes the base of which its multiple entanglements trace the major symbols of the history of my childhood."

[71] "I write: I write because we lived together, because I was one among them, shadow amidst their shadows, body close to their bodies; I write because they left their indelible mark in me and the trace of it is writing: their memory is dead to writing; writing is the memory of their death and the affirmation of my life."

[72] "This mindless mist where shadows swirl,

How could I pierce it?

This mindless mist where shadows swirl,

—Is this then my future?"

[73] "The fictional I-narrator abandons his account midway and confers his task of testimony to another narrator, one who is anonymous, unlocatable, and omniscient?"

[74] Certainly, the use of the conditional in French could be understood in this context to serve as a "once upon a time." Bellos, for example, translates the phrase as "An island is told of" (65). It seems important, however, to render the tense structure, for reasons which will presently become clear. We have already seen the conditional used in Perec's narration of his first memory. Perec has begun texts with the conditional on at least two other important occasions: in the first lines of *Les choses* ("L'oeil, d'abord, glisserait sur la moquette grise…") and in the first sentence of Chapter 1 of *La vie mode d'emploi.* ("Oui, cela pourrait commencer ainsi, ici, comme ça…")

[75] "I could read, even in the very instant of the jump, a text decoded from out of this memory. I was plunged into the void. All the strings were cut; I fell, alone and without support. The parachute opened. The canopy was deployed, fragile and sure suspense before the controlled fall."

[76] "The ground upon which I grew up."

[77] "For a long time, we think that to talk means to find, to discover, to understand, to finally understand, to be illuminated by the truth. But no. When this happens, we know only that it is happening; it's there; one is speaking, one is writing; to speak is only to speak, simply to speak; to write is only to write, to trace letters on a blank sheet of paper. "

[78] "It happened one day and I knew it. I would like to be able to say I knew it at once, but this would not be true: *there is no tense to say when it was*. It happened, it had happened, it is happening, it will happen. One knew it already, one knows it. Simply, something opened and opens: the mouth for talking, the pen for writing: something moved, something moves and is traced, the sinuous line of ink on the paper, something full and unhinged."

[79] "this evening…would remain a black date in the calendar" (I:51).

[80] "What an abyss of uncertainty, whenever the mind feels overtaken by itself; when it, the seeker, is at the same time the dark region through which it must go seeking and where all its equipment will avail it nothing. Seek? More than that: create. It is face to face with something which does not yet exist, which it alone can make actual, which it alone can bring into the light of day." (I:61)

[81] "The bulk of the inhabitants of W are grouped in four agglomerations called simply the "villages": there is the village of W, which is without doubt the oldest, and which was founded by the first generation of the men of W; and the villages of North-W, West-W, and Northwest-W, respectively situated to the North, to the West, and to the Northwest of W."

[82] Winckler's desertion from the French army and escape into Germany, suggests also Perec's vocal opposition to the Algerian War. The irony then would be stark: Winckler escapes, in order to avoid being an oppressor, into the country that turned Perec into a victim. Van Montfrans takes up this

point: "Alors que l'enfant Perec semble être en sécurité dans le Vercors jusqu'a l'arrivée des Allemands, Winckler croit pouvoir vivre en toute tranquillité en Sarre, puisque celle-ci vient d'être réintégrée à l'Allemagne" (175). Perec himself was exempted from having to serve in Algeria—though not from military service—because of his status as war orphan. His discomfort with being a victim here is conflated with a sense of being a passive *oppressor*: the question of disobedience passes him by. He writes the following in a letter to Jacques Lederer on 25 February 1958:

> Je vais ce soir me saouler à mort—
>
> Ye souis désésperé—Mon exemption d'Algérie prononcée officiellement à midi—Je suis le bourreau—L'adjutant qui la signifiait annonçait à voix haute devant toute la compagnie réunie (300 hommes) : En vertu de la loi du…l'exemption d'Algérie est accordée à Georges Perec, Père mort pour la France. ("*Cher, très cher, admirable et charmant ami*…", 110).

[83] For this to be understood, of course, we cannot think of Tierra del Fuego as existing in the West, but only in a non-relational, due South.

[84] "Without doubt this permanent battle, of which the competition itself is only the final point is one of the grand Laws of life in W; but it finds here, in the Atlantiades, its most favorable terrain, in that the recompense—a woman—immediately accompanies Victory."

[85] "I do not know if I have nothing to say, I know that I am not saying anything; I do not know if what I would have to say is not said because it is unsayable (the unsayable is not hidden in the writing, it is that which has triggered it long before); I know that what I am saying is blank, is neutral, the sign once and for all of a once-and-for-all annihilation."

[86] The stadiums of W, however, do recall the Rafle du Vélodrome d'Hiver of 16-17 July 1942 (six months before Perec's mother's arrest) in which some 13,000 Jews were arrested, held in the Vélodrome, and later, taken to various concentration camps.

[87] "How to explain that what he finds here is not a nightmare, not something from which he will wake suddenly from, something that he will chase from his mind, how to explain that this is life, real

life, that this is how it is every day, that it is this that exists and nothing else, that it is useless to believe that something else exists, to pretend to believe in something else, that it is not even worth trying to disguise this, to try to hide it, that it is not even worth pretending to believe in something that would be behind it, or below it or above it."

[88] "It was given to me, one day, with surprise, with amazement, with violence, like a memory restored to its space, like a gesture, a warmth retrieved. That day, the analyst heard what I had to say to him, that which, during four years he listened to without hearing, for the simple reason that I was not telling it to him, that I was not telling it to myself."

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