INSTANT THEORY
Making Thinking Popular

Guest Editor: Craig Saper

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"Instant Theory: making thinking popular" investigates the possibility of a public theory. A public theory would increase access to strategies and information on learning and innovation and allow domains of knowledge to preserve and disseminate potential inventions. The essay explains the successes and failures of a previous attempt at popularizing thinking in the form of pattern recognition and puzzle solving. This previous attempt by the concrete poets guides the essay in exploring the other articles in this issue which explore alternative systems for representing our knowledge. In terms of these alternatives, the author argues that each of the other articles offers a clue to building a cultural setting for the spread of ideas and proliferation of inventions. That setting includes the possibility of dissolving accumulated theories into thinking-images. Among the many characteristics of thinking-images discovered in the other articles, are rhizomatic imaging, potential encyclopedic associations, relay/delay structures, impasses in meanings and perceptions, montaged found materials, syntactic play, and linguistic crossings (e.g., puns, names as nouns, etc.). These characteristics do not function as qualities in some correct form nor in a competent reader, but as guides for research, invention, and conservation of the (im)possible.

Spiel . . . a talk or harangue, as in selling; to play; a reading practice

Cultural practices define literacy. What it means to read, count, or listen depends on the interaction between social and technological forces: how we send messages influences how we think and how we read our world. And, as the mass media play an increasingly important role in disseminating knowledge, the effects of popular culture, especially the stress on the visible and sensual, invades and challenges traditional pedagogy. Faced with this challenge teachers are making use of the visible and sensual for pedagogical purposes. Instead of selling products or propaganda like advertising agencies, teachers can use pop culture's effects as theoretical tools. In taking these effects seriously for pedagogical use, we can learn from the mass media and experiment with popularizing thinking. We can ask, what are particularly successful ways to spread theoretical ideas? And, what are the sociopolitical and psychical implications of popularizing particular image/ideas? Researchers have begun to explore how ideas spread and how media technologies might encourage thinking, but the researchers do not address theoretical issues. For example, M.I.T.'s Media Lab has recently begun to examine the reception of media and invent possible interactive technologies. But, these explorations lack any sustained theoretical inquiry into the strategies and implications of popularizing ideas, thought, or thinking.[1] To find how ideas spread and how we might inter-act with thinking through media, we need to make culture our laboratory, popularization our experiment, and thinking theoretically our political agenda.

Significantly, theory becomes political when it ventures beyond the academic world and enters the public realm. The solutions it offers and the problems it identifies will not resemble those of other institutions (e.g., the State, the Corporation, the Church, medicine, the political party, etc.), which have all attempted to solve problems in the public realm. A public theory can, however, find models in avant-garde art and poetry. For example, the Concrete poets attempted to make an accessible poetry for the masses. In attempting to popularize pattern recognition and puzzle solving, they made poems as catalysts for instant thinking.

This special issue on "Instant Theory" explores the superimposition of two contexts: the use of alternative systems for representing our knowledge, and the exploration of the instant of invention and consumption (i.e., the spread of ideas). Instant Theory appears in the juncture of these two realms: experimental writing and the cultural theory of socio-political change. In the realm of experimental writing, a brief gloss of concrete poetry can highlight some crucial issues for Instant Theory. Because the concrete poem states its message-structure in one moment without any gradual accumulation of meaning, it crosses the boundary between the immediacy of visual art

and the gradualism of poetic meaning: a verse fit for listening eyes.[2] And, because the concrete poets followed the Bauhaus ideal of merging the roles of artist and craftsman, their practice makes the language-designer or invention-engineer an integral part of the socio-cultural world. These invention-engineers mix images and language to create a situation in which the spectator plays through patterns of thinking. Through play-activity the audience experiences the oscillation between what they read and what they see or hear. In this sense, the concrete poem does not merely include written characters in a visual pattern, but functions as a *thought game.*

Op art offers an important context for understanding concrete poetry.[3] As Liselotte Gumpel explains, the Op effect in these concrete poems does not occur because of the visual design alone, but because of the vibrational effect between visual design and semantic designation. In terms of the visual design, mimetic pattern-poetry differs significantly from Concrete poetry; the concrete poem does not present a pre-figured mimetic picture which the poet then fits words into. And, just as the poet avoids mimetic pre-figuration of nature, the poet does not merely fit words into a pre-figuration of a particular Op(tical) design. That is, these poets have an analogical, rather than literal, understanding of opalescence. Their use of Op art depends on their re-thinking of representation. "The goal of concretism is not to represent the 'reality of experience' but rather to make something realizable, something that has no antecedent existence."[4] Eugen Gomringer considers this type of vibrational effect as a category of Spiel (play-activity), the oscillation between reading meaning and sensing patterns. Spiel relates to "the creativity of esthetic realization in contrast to the precision entailed in semantic reality geared to close communication."(Gumpel, 97 and 142)

Critics have commented on the disparity between these particular practices of the founders of the International Concrete Poetry movement (founded after a meeting between Eugen Gomringer and Décio Pignatari) and the practices of the later poets. These *later* Concrete poets' aims differ significantly from Gomringer's and the Brazilian Noigandres group's (the Brazilian group initially had three members: Pignatari, Haroldo and Augusto de Campos). But finally, it is the early concrete *poems* which offer a specific and poignant reading lesson for understanding instant theory. In order to create instant thinking, concrete poets *claimed* their poems had a direct access to the sensual world. But, far from escaping from Realist illusionism, the poems themselves merely move the illusionism to a higher level. Contrary to the poets's rhetoric, the concrete poems do *not* privilege pure perception, but focus on the tension between a sign's meaning and its visible or phonetic character. As Wendy Steiner writes, "The orchestrated arrangement of type focuses attention on the very non-concreteness of language, its inevitable divorce from the thing-world and its appeal to the

idea."[5] Besides this foregrounding of the non-concreteness of language, the loosening of the reading sequence through the arrangement of type on the page opens the "text to the eyes as if it were an object rather than a linguistic sequence. Through the free play of perception that results, the concretists overcome the alleged stasis of the word...."(Steiner, 208). While they fail to make words into things, they succeed in breaking reading (literally and figuratively) from its linear patterns; we understand or read words according to visual and phonetic associations, not according to a word's ability to capture the Truth and Beauty of objects (i.e., "To Be Not Mean"). Instant Theory makes thinking public.

To make an instant theory, the concrete *poems* offer two guidelines: first, reduce elements down to the laconic forms; and second, foreground the tension between the familiar reading and the puzzling sense of words, sounds, and images. In concrete poems, the reduction often leaves only one or two words, yet the recombination and permutation of the visio-semantic elements highlights the otherwise *repressed* sense of words. The reduction enables the instantaneous effect, while the visio-semantic tensions set thinking in motion: one-word-concepts. For our purposes, the lesson here concerns structural tension, the structure of repression and the lines of break, the machinations of condensation (or reduction) and displacement (or the tension of alternatives), not the formal lesson about poetics. The Concrete poets create ideograms by reducing words/images to their most laconic form and neutralizing any narrative connections with the word/image. Besides creating ideogrammatic concepts, the concrete poem creates a prototype: anonymous and capable of infinite reproduction. Working with the prototype, the reader realizes language-thought patterns and possibilities by actively participating in filling-in or extending the poem's structure. In this sense, the kinetic effect of the poem springs from a "mental motion." These early experiments can help guide us, but because they worked primarily during the late 1950s and early 1960s, the Concrete poets did not have access to theoretical advances made since the late 1960s. These advances have occurred in post-structuralist and psychoanalytic theory, which have profoundly altered the study of the humanities and social sciences. The articles in this issue represent those extensions of concrete theory through post-structuralism and psychoanalysis into Instant Theory.

Saprophyte . . . any organism that lives on dead or decaying matter

A model for the relation of the post-critical text to its object of study ... is that of parasite to host ... parasitism is "negentropic," the motor of change or invention ... a new logic with three elements: host, guest, and

interrupter .... deconstruction is a process of decomposition at work within the very root metaphors ... of Western thought .... feeding off the decay of tradition.

<div align="right">Gregory Ulmer[6]</div>

Gregory Ulmer's "Handbook for a Theory Hobby" (lesson #5) literally demonstrates how we might begin to construct a popular theory; his alternative theory functions as a craft or hobby. In this setting, the "entertainment industry will replace the universities as the principle source of cultural invention and innovation". Amateur theorists will change both the representation and dissemination of knowledge by creating a different writing practice. This writing, oriented toward the pleasures of thinking, allows us to translate a specialized knowledge into a popular idiom. But, "translation would not simply pass from one language into another on the basis of a common core sense, but would pass through all languages at once, cultivating their associative syntheses instead of avoiding them."[7] Instead of editing out the associations connected with each term, the translation would allow for many associations.

The attempt to popularize theory begins with a writing strategy which moves between the popular doxa, the cultural code, and the discourse of knowledge. It associates intellectual activity with delight. This swerve of affect from alienated thought to carnivalesque thinking occurs by exploiting the indirections of metaphors, images, and key words employed in theoretical explanations or meta-languages. Ulmer's "Handbook" offers instructions on how to write an allegory from the discourse of knowledge; this allegory collapses the possible image and word choices (the paradigm) into the theory's explanatory narrative (the hermeneutic syntagm). He presents the associations connected to the tree image as a thinking model. Instead of repressing the many associated images (e.g., other botanical models besides trees), he presents these to find potential theoretical explanations.

He examines the dominant theory of reading and thinking in Western culture; this "logocentric" reading mistakenly identifies writing as a neutral extension of speech. Just as the concrete poems loosen the connection between printed medium and self-present meaning, he explores how to avoid using writing in the service of voice. He introduces a reading sensitive to the multi-layered network of spreading resonances, those repressed possibilities already contained in theoretical explanations. This reading beyond voice uses note taking ("written readings") as a craft. In terms of these written readings, Ulmer's handbook functions "like casebooks on a given theoretical issue, forcing the reader to participate by drawing his [or her] own conclusions from the diversity of possibilities displayed"(Ulmer, 52).

The problem of translating specialized theoretical arguments for public use "resembles the status of Egyptian hieroglyphics ... originally intended (in their ancient context) for public communication, even for popular (politico-religious) messages, they became indecipherable, esoteric, unreceivable and hence occult as the ability to read them was lost"(Ulmer, 53). To release the encrypted knowledge, to present the humanities to non-specialists and amateur theorists, Ulmer works through "complex, inaccessible objects or images."(Ulmer, 54) This translation requires the exposure of the encrypting, the process of making knowledge specialized and unreceivable. Before or simultaneous to the popularization of theory, the amateur must expose the process of repression; otherwise, traditional pedagogy's representation of knowledge will keep the boundary between the popular and the theoretical intact. That is, traditional pedagogy represents knowledge as a specialized often esoteric discourse, while it identifies the popular with "mere entertainment" or "leisurely distractions."

Freud explains that repression occurs as a consequence of censorship. The censor prohibits unconscious wishes from gaining access to conscious articulate discourse. The ideational representative of these wishes appears as an image-word or thing-word; this thing-word has no particular affect connected to it and it can return to consciousness in the guise of an innocuous detail. But, the idea or thing-word returns to consciousness only in a distorted fashion. The distorting compromise between the repressed idea and the repressing one condenses and displaces the idea in other imaged words. Ulmer's "Handbook" activates both the excluded terms condensed into one metaphoric image and the displaced contiguous images missing from the theoretical explanations. The memory traces or returning ideational representatives appear as images, fragments of images, fragments or blocks of writing, schemata, mathematical symbols, and other details. These literalisms stand-in for the repressed ideas or words; "a floating periphery of sense around meaning" awaits reactivation.[8] Paul Willemen explains the connection between "inner speech" and repression. Inner speech, a concatenation of literalisms lines discourse and cements text, subject, and the social together. Willemen suggests that repressing normal linear language will reactivate thought problems. These thought problems, like Gomringer's Spiel, open up the many possibilities, the polysemy of language. Willemen writes:

Freud also stresses that each element of a dream text, of a thing-presentation, is rooted in a whole series of chains and can thus be seen as a nodal point, an intersection of significations 'bound to branch out in every direction into the intricate network of our world of thought.' In the same way, the 'infinite polysemy' of language has no ending: there

will always be unanalyzed material, although no unanalyzable material [emphasis added] (Willemen, 161).

Ulmer's "Handbook" explores the image of the tree as a metaphor or model in theoretical discourse. Out of the richness of detail in this "familiar model," "an entire system of thought different from the accepted system may be devised on the basis of excluded or irrelevant features"(Ulmer, 55). In an essay on Darwin's use of the tree image, Howard Gruber writes, that "the necessity for some principle of selection almost leaps out of these images [tangled river bank and tree]."[9] Images generate ways of thinking; in this case, they suggest a principle of selection. For Darwin, the selection concerned biological evolution, but for others the tree image's principle of selection applies to thinking. The tree image constrains and produces our selection of thoughts.

Ulmer literally [letterally] exposes the re-pression of a detail (a leaf) of the tree model and he also cultivates contiguous (but usually displaced) image-models (roots, grass, etc.). To select the imaged words, he works or cultivates the model, like a serf (or feal) works the land, with faithful allegiance (in Ulmer's case to the literalisms); this cultivation exposes the repression or making secret in the use of the tree image as a model for thought and memory.[10] Ulmer "signs" his popularization: "signing involves a turn ... which transforms the proper name into a thing ... a shift from proper to common noun"(Ulmer, 44). Jacques Derrida's exploration of this signature effect explains how what we usually read as merely "fun and games" has a value beyond ornamentation. Derrida explains Ulmer's particular signing:

> Fun is not an accessory value here. And once again, as if by chance and for the sake of amusement, ... when speaking of the "duty of trees" (to make branches and leaves) [he] inscribes on a leaf (of a tree of course), the common noun that's closest, nearest to the author's given name.[11]

The "signature effect" collapses the supposed opposition between public and private and allows the specific knowledge (one's own name) to enter the popular discourse as a *common* noun. Hence, in his cultivation of the tree image, Ulmer mentions an almost extinct species of tree, the "Ulmus" tree; this tree suffers a fate similar to the "lemurs" a species of monkey of Madagasgar who are endangered due to the destruction of their habitat. Both "lemur" and "Ulmus" make the author's name into a common noun or trademark. His name is literally both a tree and in trees. In this acting out of the tree image, Ulmer suggests the body can function as an alternative page. He cites Vito Acconci's work as an example. Vito Acconci's ethnography of the body as text, "Trademarks" involves him in biting himself, biting

as much of his body as he can reach, then applying printer's ink to the bites and stamping the bite-prints on various surfaces. This literal etymological investigation on the origins of writing (on skins) allows the body-text to circulate as a system of thought. The signature or body functions as a trademark in popular culture.

Ulmer hints at another displacement: the video monitor supercedes the book. In "Projectkinem" Ulrike Rosenbach used the Sioux Indian mandala form, but she replaced the "tree of life" with a turning video monitor. Just as the media have replaced the educational institutions as the purveyor of the humanities for the public, the video monitor supercedes the tree (which are made into books). Ulmer speculates, using Guattari's and Deleuze's work as a guide, on what images will function to explain the thought puzzles springing up everywhere without any deeply rooted connections. He borrows the term rhizome, assemblages characterized by proliferations, crossings, overlaps, and deterritorializations without underlying structures, no deeply rooted connections. These assemblages follow accidental changes; not changes in any single unit, no trunk or stem, but a change in structural relations which alters the direction of the whole assemblage. Instead of arborescent models, we might adopt rhizomatic models for thinking. Lewis Thomas' description of termite behavior highlights important aspects of rhizomatic thinking: "They all simply ran around, picking up pellets at random and dropping them again. Then, by chance, two or three pellets happened to light on top of each other, and this transformed the behavior of everyone."[12]

Ulmer's "Handbook" demonstrates the relationship between the rhizomatic and the arborescent models. He exposes the process of making knowledge specialized and unreceivable and foregrounds the process of repression. In this way, he subverts traditional pedagogy's separation between the popular and the theoretical or the instant and the accumulated. This orientation of theory toward thought rather than information allows us to translate a specialized knowledge into a popular idiom. And, that acting-out of the tree model along rhizomatic lines suggests an interaction similar to that between trees and termites: a thinking which eats "dead wood."

Sapates . . . a kind of Christmas stocking; a big gift disguised as a small one; a diamond in a lemon; a little meal

The trick, then, would be to make only "small writings" or Sapates, but ones that would hold, satisfy...

J. Derrida quoting Ponge

Epigraphing is the Trojan Horse of the traditional essay.

Robert B. Ray

Who doubts the importance of typography and visual images for disseminating ideas? Could business survive without advertising, politics without propaganda, or religion without iconography? Any attempt at popularizing specialized knowledge must begin with a visible theory, but few have taken the challenge seriously. While some retreat to theory without considering design and lament popular culture's inauthenticity, others design visual statements discounting any theoretical impact. Robert Ray's "The ABC's of Visible Theory" demonstrates how this very opposition between the visible and the theoretical dissolves when we examine what McLuhan called the "inventory of effects" available in print. Ray's encyclopedic essay describes the inter-relations between typography, language, and thought. Other essays have attempted to list effects, but those lists never go beyond formalism; limited to lists of techniques they tell us little about typography and design as cultural practices.[13] Ray's "ABC" connects the "paraphernalia of the text" with every cultural association which can be brought to bear on these practices; he uses historical, fictional, scientific, and other discourses. Categories of discussion include: electricity; font types; strategies; saints; book, journal, painting, and article titles; language systems; ontology; names; technology; utopia; psychic states; newspapers; games; clichés; fictional animals; typescripts; rules; emotions; institutions; sociological categories; art movements; history; and self-reflexive comment. This enormous web of associations usually lay dormant in typographic effects and if we followed each and every association mentioned in this ABC, we would have to contend with the reservoir of our entire culture. By offering only one or two entries for each letter (leaving the reader to generate more possibilities) and by mentioning effects and associations without developing any into a complete argument, Visible Theory remains potential.

The aphoristic lay-out of this ABC "argues" for alternative visio-typo-theories; in terms of these alternatives, Ray notes that the typesetter usually functions in much the same way as the "continuity girl" in classical cinema; the dominant mode of typography and design, the invisible style, hides the constraints of construction within the rules of technique. Just as constructivism or concretism foregrounded the industry involved in designing art and poetry, a visible theory varies a texts parameters to explore virtualities and to break our habit of reading ideas and structures, and culture in general, as fixed, given, or natural instead of made or invented, and therefore changeable.

The OuLiPo group (Ouvroir de Littérature Potentielle [Workshop for Potential Literature]) has investigated and demonstrated how, as the slogan

for Ray's "ABC" reads, "CONSTRAINT ENCOURAGES INVENTION." The members of the group distinguish between rules and constraints; the laws or rules of prosody's routine functioning (e.g., that a sonnet has fourteen lines) have escaped the disdain associated with "artificial" or "arbitrary" constraint. But as Marcel Bénabou explains, "to the extent that constraint goes beyond rules which seem natural only to those people who have barely questioned language, it forces the system out of its routine functioning, thereby compelling it to reveal its hidden resources."[14] The "inspiration which consists in blind obedience to every impulse is in reality a sort of slavery. The classical playwright who writes his tragedy observing a certain number of familiar rules is freer than the poet who writes that which comes into his head and who is the slave of other rules of which he is ignorant"(Benabou, 41). The not-noticeable design style and the belief in artistic freedom or inspiration makes us ignorant of our limited choices, while using constraints proliferates more potential solutions than we can ever actually produce; the common sense opposition between constraint and invention no longer holds.

For example, Raymond Quneau's "Cent Mille Milliards de poèmes" [One hundred thousand billion poems] consists of ten sonnets; these sonnets function as a prototype arrangement. Each first line can function with any of the second lines and each second line can function with any of the third lines and so on down to the fourteenth lines. Actually writing out every possible combination would produce "a quantity of text far greater than everything man has written since the invention of writing" including "rough drafts thrown in the wastebasket and graffiti."[15]

Robert Ray uses the alphabetic constraint, but because he has only one section for M/N, the essay has only 25 major sections; coincidentally (?) OuLiPo has 25 current members. Only one letter/section has more than two entries, the letter B (Ray's middle initial). This self-conscious (?) breaking of the alphabetic constraint, creates a clinamen, part of Epicurean atomic theory which includes the swerving of atoms as an essential part of the model. The clinamen creates a lack of balance which allows the world to function. This introduction of an error into the system, an anti-constraint, also triggers invention by offering the system as a puzzle not a solution.

This jigsaw puzzle "is not a sum of elements to be distinguished from each other and analysed discretely, but a pattern, that is to say a form, a structure....The pieces are readable, take on a sense, only when assembled; in isolation, a puzzle piece means nothing — just an impossible question, an opaque challenge...."[16] In comparing the fragments we notice how "two [or more] apparently discrete discourses share a common vocabulary." When we (re)assemble Ray's "ABC" it hints at an instant writing as reading, blurs the boundary between the visible and the theoretical, and offers a way to write the instant of invention.

Because it resists the "rhetoric of development," this catalogue follows the logic of a reader, collecting fragments of allusions, but never introducing an explicit rule of inclusion; Ray yields to the initiative of language and culture, and like a reader follows (but not very far) what strikes him or catches his eye; he follows the "traces left by meaning's adventures." His argument is at once obvious (everything included has something to do with "Visible Theory") and puzzling (What are the conceptual boundaries of this theory? Is it a theory without an ontology? A training manual without instructions? A secret lesson? What secret? Where? What hidden constraints?). Writing as reading changes the relation between visible "ornamentation" and theoretical arguments.

If the slogan for Ray's "ABC" is "constraint encourages invention," then the emblem is Dziga Vertov's diary entry, "Everything except the boring." Just as the OuLiPo group sought to bring the ludic back to the serious, this "ABC" puts the now back in knowledge; games, questionnaires, and childhood memories make the enormous amount of conceptually related material resemble inter-active fiction or, as suggested earlier, a puzzle rather than an extended definition or a comprehensive list. The temporal shift from "this is how it is" to "guess how it can be put together" transforms the solitary scholar into a thought-player aware that every move s/he makes the puzzle maker has made before. A single lesson does not take place, but learning effects occurs like a landscape (literally as a landscape lay-out) occurs on a stroll (a dérive): each reading (not reader) edits together the typographically separate fragments to "create a printed mise-en-scène," an allegory of knowledge, not merely a definition of a topic, a topoi, a place. "An allegory of every present's relationship to its past, which it rearranges, screens through the palimpsest of accumulated interpretations, memories, stories, amnesia, ideological revisions." In this ABC, particularities leaning toward allegory like details for Freud or Sherlock Holmes, forestalls the reader's boredom, "anticipating it, heading it off, knowing that at any moment, the book (or magazine, or newspaper, or journal, [or case, or allegory, or meaning]) may be closed."

This effort to avoid boredom, what Roland Barthes calls "panic boredom," leads to a way to represent the instant of invention; the problem concerns "the tedium involved in expressing plainly what occurred to them [inventors] suddenly." But, the fragmentary style avoids the tedium of justification; that context of justification seeks to prove the Truth value of an invention or a variation. This contextualization selects and arranges details as moments in a progression toward true ideas and theories. It discounts the fragment in favour of the law, it ignores socio-political or cultural determinants, and it effaces discontinuities among details.

In Ray's "ABC," the jolts between fragments reproduce and encourage the

unpredictable accidents in making new connections; that is, comparing pieces of knowledge (true, false, fictional, personal, political, etc.) offers an image of truth as experiment. It allows history to serve as something else besides a justification of the present. By enabling this criticism of the present, it offers an alternative to normal science; it gives us a model of experimental writing *as* critical thinking.

My explanation here of Robert Ray's "ABC's of Visible Theory" functions as a prefatory image. This image illustrates how the opposition between the visible design and the theoretical content dissolves when we examine the "inventory of effects" available in print; typography, language, and thought interweave. Other essays list effects, but never theorize these effects except with a crude formalism. Limited to lists of techniques, we learn little about how to read typography and visual design as cultural practices. According to this prefatory image, Ray's "ABC" connects the "paraphernalia of the text" with culture; it places design, theory, and their common history on the same plane without offering any ultimate meaning outside or above this textual landscape.

In terms of prefatory images, one fragment in the "ABC" mentions how Andy Hardy books have only a single image, a drawing appearing as a frontispiece; this picture is like "an oasis, something to look forward to," which "pulled readers through what might otherwise have been put aside." I recall that when I read similar books as a child, those single images puzzled me: "Is this right?" "Does it really look like that?" "Why did the artist choose only this scene?" "Why does the image contain these details?" "Are these details in this story or another, unwritten, one?" I remember how those little gifts, those sapates, at the beginning of the book sometimes gnawed at my images, invaded the story, swerved my reading away from narrative toward comparison, and changed a recounting of facts into an experiment of potential.

sapeur-télégraphiste . . . Fr., telegraph operator; signal corps; signals

The dream of an instant speech comes true: sounds from far away brought home, the unfamiliar contained and preserved as the familiar; the telephone calls us to respond. A speculative telephonics explores the concept/ image which preceded the telephone's technical installation and follows the implications of this technology of preservation and reactivation; that is, it explores the way the phone rings us like a bell and operates around a click. And, as it teaches us about the risks and potentials in using electronic media for an Instant Theory, the telephonic structure "calls for thinking."[17]

What are the implications of the technological preservation of speech? What "spooks or haunts" the structure of telephonics? How can we think

through this structure? How does it call us to think? In order to follow the course of transmissions (enlarging the field of inquiry and crossing through different genres), Avital Ronell, in "Condensed Article," taps into the contaminations controlled by the telephonic structure. Among the *many* lines she follows, she traces the control exerted by a general theory of condensation (the theory used in telephonic structures to preserve speech) to traumas of loss (from the missing bodies of the telephonic voices through psychoanalysis and desedimentation to death and the infants separation from its Mother). Ronell wants to know what we get in the bargain of the telephone's promise of immediate access to distant voices, its preservation and condensation of messages. What is "encrypted" (by the hidden agency of repression) in the familiar?[18] What secret but determining code arrives with each transmission? Ronell's "speculative telephonics" calls up those implications. She speculates that the telephonic technology is indicative of Science's debt to devastation (i.e., Science responds {in a certain way} to disaster; its danger {or debt to devastation} resides not only in the lethal machines and apparatuses, but in the way it orders and reveals the world {i.e., it spares nothing}). The telephone functions as a specific instance of scientific technology's general operation; in that sense, the telephone emerges as a synecdoche of scientific inventions.

The speculation on the "dark side of telephonic structure" analyzes the "tranquilized fetish," which moves from an uncanny transmission (hearing voices without bodies present) to a familiar household object, the phone. This "dark side" appears in the "bad news" call, the emergency call, the verdict/death sentence, and in the calls instructing executions to be carried out (a use common in Nazi Germany with its phantasms of immediacy). This story of disaster inscribes itself in every call, not just in every "bad" connection. Ronell speculates not on the grace or reprieve of an instant speech, its redemptive qualities, but on its terror of loss, its decisive "click," its Kafkaesque horrors. For it is Kafka who describes the telephone as a torture-writing machine, Kafka who was "defenseless" in the face of the telephone; as Larry Rickels writes, "Kafka described the telephone as an invention which for him was 'new and almost impossible to handle' to such a degree that he was constantly stopped from saying anything."[19]

In undertaking this desedimentation of the uncanny, Ronell follows the story of Alexander Graham Bell from his early childhood to his invention of the telephone. But, rather than a biography, she writes a "biophony," somewhere between empiricity and speculation. Bell's desires helped shape the telephone and his repressed desires (his burden of replacing his brother) "encrypted" a message in the technology of the phone; that cryptic image/shape holds unthought of implications for anyone answering a call (e.g., a call to think).

Aleck Bell's story takes us through tangled familial connections and disconnections. The two surviving Bell boys (one boy had already died) shared a fascination with building a speaking machine. As Ronell explains, after the boys saw a speaking machine demonstrated, their Father promised them a reward if they could manufacture a similar device; with great effort and ingenuity, they built a device and its first words sounded something like, "Ma-ma." In addition to the association of the speaking device with the Father's encouragement, the Father had built his career around inventing a Visible Speech for the deaf. Because of these associations for the two boys, their Father's name was practically synonymous with speech and speaking devices (i.e., mechanical mouths).

Alex's mother was deaf and many commentators have noted that he undertook his experiments into telephonics not to merely carry on his Father's work into speech, but to help the deaf hear. In the early experiments, Aleck used a mechanical ear as the receiver; when the electric vibration reached the ear it groaned. In his writings, he also connected his work to helping the deaf hear; he associated the phone with his mother's deaf ear as much as his father's mechanized speech.

When his brother died, his parents deposited "the unmourned corpse into Aleck" and cherished him as their only surviving child. In attempting to actualize his burden, "replaceability", Bell wanted to reconnect his brother with his parents; in fact, he had planned with his brother that if one should die, the surviving child would contact the departed in a séance; Aleck would later use the phone during an effort to receive transmissions from his brother during a telephonic séance.

Ronell studies Bell's invention as something like a "commemorative artwork," an effort to symbolize a loss and enact his burden of replacing his dead brother; Heidegger discusses how objects harbor momentous possibilities in addition to their use or beyond their instrumentality. We can read all made objects as something other than functional, as something like an artwork.[20] In Bell's telephonic artwork, the inventor encrypted his desires (to re-establish links with the dead, the deaf, the distant) — the desires he swallows (swallows his disgust at the uncanny). The essence of the telephonic structure (the interchangeability or replaceability of voices and electricity) uses and implies the work done by Borden in condensing food (at first preserving meat's nutrients in a graham-like cracker); Borden undertook this task after learning of the disaster of the Donner party, who when trapped in the wilderness reverted to cannibalism. Borden read about the tragedy and offered condensation as a solution; his condensation allowed the preservation and replacement of the uncanny cannibalism of the Donner party with a familiar food product. In the food industry, Borden's name is practically synonymous with condensation (e.g., Borden's Condensed Milk).

Bell's commemorative artwork condenses the Father's mouth and Mother's ear as the (displaced) place of reception for his departed brother; his *telephone* condenses and displaces his Mother's and Father's desires (those Other's desires) for *him*; his burden (Borden), replaceability of missing bodies, plays itself out in an instant product, the telephonic structure. But, Ronell uses this allegorical commemoration as only one example of the structure, not its origin. Kafka offers a poignant picture of that uncanny structure; Larry Rickels introduces the scene: "The first torture-reading-writing machine elaborated by Kafka is actually not that of the penal colony but rather the telephone switchboard of Hotel Occidental:

> Over there for example were six bellboys at six telephones. The arrangement, as one immediately recognized, required that one boy only receive calls, while his neighbor transmitted by phone the orders the first had written down and passed on to him. ... the words arrived at their destination in a thunderous voice owing to special electrical amplification. That is why one scarcely heard the three speakers at their telephones and could have believed they were mumbling to themselves and observing some process unfold within the receiver, while the three others, as though benumbed by the noise penetrating to them, though inaudible to bystanders, dropped their heads into the paper which it was their duty to write on. (Rickles, 279)

This scenario only seems strange when we consider everyday objects only in familiar contexts; Ronell traces the phone's genealogical lines to the repressed bits, the unassimilable, what Jacques Derrida calls the *vomi*, the undigested pieces of our conceptions. Her multi-layered "switchboard" connects us to the never-thought-of, those uncanny implications of the canned (condensed, preserved) transmissions. This ringing of the telephone's Bell vibrates all "partially technologized" subjects and calls for a response. We might respond to loss in two ways, mourning and melancholia. Freud explains that melancholia occurs when we fail to mourn over our loss; instead, we encrypt our horror and disgust and enter into a stagnation, an everyday misery. Melancholia never leaves the familiar drama, never expands into an extreme emotional expulsion, never breaks the crypt (the coded message which directs the course of misery). Mourning explodes with extreme and unfamiliar emotional intensity. "Mourning is like eating the dead (mother);" when we mourn we "swallow what is not there." The phone simulates mourning, but its preservatives contain the mourning in a melancholia: sad to hang-up, sad to hear the "click," but not normally terrorized by the horrible absence the phone marks and pretends to fill.

Ronell operates through the telephone's transmission which collapses

the barrier between writing and the vocal: the telephonic structure "instantly transcribes" as a writing-machine; it distillates the full body into a spirit ("speech out of air") and shifts attention from sight to hearing; it never rests its identity on its objectness, thingness, or equipmentality, and it abolishes any original site of its event. Thinking with this structure disperses the Book. The telephonic structure suspends any absolute departure (an "l'arrêt de mort: a death sentence, but also a pause). Jacques Derrida explains this structure (somewhere between a "death sentence" and "suspension of death"). In his reading of this destiny/delay, he refers not to the "richness of substance, semantic fertility, but rather structure, the structure of the remnant...."[21] Those "unassimilable" *mors* (bits of death, *vomi*), something which we can not completely swallow, which stick in our throats, sets the dispersion of the Book as a fixing (arrêter) going; this arrest in meaning, this arête (ridge) in the arrêt (stopping, decision) of arêtes (boundaries, framework, sharp edges) leads to a "paradoxical phase in the work of mourning"(Derrida, 85). The resulting "mourning sickness" guides the telephonic structure as it vampirizes the partially technologized subject, everyone of us; we cannot mourn this undead bit of technology, nor surmount or surpass it; like a saprophyte this little gift or sapates (Spanish for "little meal") operates to switch the tele-graphic from the Book's comforting truth to the puzzling and disturbing delay and collapse of the opposition between decision (truth) and uncertainty (rumor): "... a death sentence, in an instant as elusive as the last grain of sand in the time of hourglasses"(Derrida, 120-121). No longer a decisive relay (the possibility of delay and distanciation, a death sentence, in an instant inscribes the telephonic structure with confusion: "...violently cut up, fragmented, redistributed, with spaces, shifts in accent, lines skipped and moved around, as if they came to us over a faulty Teletype, a switchboard at an overloaded telephone exchange" (Derrida, 126) this instant delay (its accommodation of noise, fading, linguistic pollutants, and static) spreads like a virus or plague and allows the complexities of theory (the problems, puzzles, undecidables, uncomfortableness, the unassimilated) to pass into pop culture without becoming familiar. Instant delay fails to submit to the phantasms of immediacy, which fuel fascism's holocaustic decisiveness. This complex reading-writing apparatus of delayed performativity, this call waiting with its interrupting clicks, this overloaded switchboard wreaks havoc on the answering machines, those partially technologized subjects, everyone of us. The telephonic structure calls us to think, calls us into thinking.

se-parere . . . to decorate with holes, or separation as decoration

The bird that crosses it in flight against the motion of writing

Recalls us to the concrete, and to its contradiction ...
Rings out like a slash, brief and acute,
In the overly serene sky of significations.
  "The Pré," Francis Ponge

A famous Zen koan tells the story of a Master and his visitor. The visitor comes to inquire about Zen, but she talks without stopping about her conception of Zen, and never allows the Master to speak. After some time, the Master serves tea. He pours tea into the visitor's cup until it is full, then he keeps pouring. Finally, the visitor shouts, "Don't you see it's full?! You can't get anymore in!" "That is very true," replies the teacher, as he finally stops pouring. "And like this cup, you are filled with your own ideas. How can you expect me to give you Zen unless you offer me an empty cup?" There is another (unauthorized) version to this koan. As before, the visitor arrives and talks without stopping, and the Master pours the tea; but this time, the cup never overflows. The Master appears startled and notices tea all over his wooden floor and tatami mats. He is very upset. He explains to the visitor that he was trying to overflow the teacup to teach her a lesson. The visitor responds by pointing to a small hole in the side of her teacup. No matter how much tea the Master pours into the cup it will never fill the hole.

Ellie Ragland-Sullivan, in "The Writing of the Real," uses Lacan's psycho-analytic theory to explore the "failure in representation, a hole in the middle of perception." She thinks through the problems this hole presents: gaps, fadings, flickerings, and discontinuities in images and words as well as knowing and being. Significantly, she speculates on the relations among this hole, its effects, and desire. That is, she uses a theoretical practice which accounts for desire. And, as I have already explained, desire (and its distortion) plays a crucial role in popularizing theory and inventing think-ing. If we want to use art models (e.g., visual and sensual design) for theoretical work, we need to understand how to read words and images. Instead of relying on art historical or perception theories, we need to read images in terms of the effect on a spectator's or creator's desire. That is, to explain how ideas spread, formalistic analysis, positivistic history, or micro-cosmic empiricism tell us little about the relation between desire and knowing. Ragland-Sullivan explains the differences between common approaches to understanding images and Lacan's approach.

Lacan subverts positivism and formalism. Ragland-Sullivan explains that words and images hide the "truth of desire" rather than directly picture some positive reality. The positivistic theories cannot account for gaps, fadings, flickerings, and discontinuities in perceiving, knowing, and being; their inability to account for desire causes these theories to focus on the consis-tency and repetition of formal patterns rather than the unpredictable and

inconsistent moment in reading. But, for Lacan, these moments will help us understand the connection between knowing and desire.

A similar problem is present in ideological criticism, for although it has gone beyond positivism to examine the underpinnings of language it still focuses on the socio-political conventions that regulate and determine words and images, conventions which function as a hidden metalanguage for visible and sensual language. For example, in terms of the classic Hollywood cinema, narrative and the illusion of reality (i.e., realism) function as a metalanguage to regulate images. But to assume that convention determines images, and that language arises from socio-political origins, mistakes a symptom (i.e., the ego's conscious identification with images and language) for a cause. For Lacan, such conscious readings of the political origins of images screen the real anchor of language and discount the role desire plays in creating and consuming words and images. Lacan does not suggest that we can find the solution to this dilemma in each reader's conscious response (i.e., in subjectivity).

Most reader response criticism also assumes a unified and consistent reading — that is, that a reading is in keeping with our consistent personality. But, as Ragland-Sullivan explains, "we see in a unified way in order not to see that the consistency of the photo is a learned way of seeing the body ... or a text...." Our illusion of wholes — self consistency and the consistency of words and images — only exists in an Imaginary order. For Ragland-Sullivan, "fantasies that we assume to be reality, and which we call reality by identifying with groups who share our fantasies are ... a screen." Any screen we call "reality" (e.g., positivism, politics, or subjectivity) tells us little about the movements of desire and knowledge. "We desire to know because we do not know." Desire pushes everyone to know; but, what we want to know is that we are loved or correct; we want to know who we are, why we exist, and what we want. The tuth of desire "exists in what has fallen out of our memories, but insists anyway — unassimilated — waiting to be triggered."

Lacan explains that the truth of desire appears on the surface of letters and images; it is hidden or distorted in language and perception. Language, whether images or words, shows desire especially if we do not intend to show it. But, because we do not intend to show our desire, it appears as "enigmatic intentions;" when we hear what we have said or when someone else hears or sees the truth of desire appear, we say, "Why do you say *that*?" It is unassimilated into the smooth flow of discourse — it sticks out like a sore thumb. This visible language "decorates or encloses a void;" this void is not metaphorical, allegorical, mythical, analogical. The void is Real. Paradoxically, language and images are organized around this void to veil it even as they re-present it.

This hole of loss is the limit of our individual desires (the limits to our

pleasure, pain, or rules of discourse); it is a blockage beyond which you cannot go. It is not merely the lack of something or someone, not merely that we are always looking for completion, but it is the originary loss which supports this lack of completion. The palpable loss is the loss of a clear definition between body, gender, and sexuality — a loss which makes you a sexed being. Beyond the loss of this distinction we cannot go. We lose this distinction and become individualized sexed subjects because of the traumatic separation which marks our socialization. These events of separation create knots, obstacles, or blockages, figurative punctuation points in consciousness, pieces of desire which cannot represent themselves directly.

Lacan calls this punctuation point the "objet a," a place where knowing and desiring come together in an encounter or impasse. These are what Ragland-Sullivan refers to as the "objects people cannot bear to see." The *objet a* forces knowledge of discontinuity and fragmentation while it marks an impasse or loss. The reader or spectator stumbles as this mark of lack places "cuts in everything." The cuts block desire, but, paradoxically, open desire to circumvent the blockage. The *objet a* breaks-up the subjectivity of narrative and perception and sets in motion an unsystematized thinking around lack and loss. Here the *objet a* as the return of the repressed is neither image nor word, but neither is it hidden, it is the enigmatic mark (or missing intention) of loss. It cannot be read using any positivism because it doesn't stay in place and it resists both formalism and ideological criticisms because it appears as a syntactical aberration: something's missing. The *objet a* does not appear as an image or word, but as a missing intention; we ask, "what is that there for?" because the image or word does not fit structurally or syntactically in the smooth flow of discourse. That is, the *objet a* marks a missed encounter; it does not illustrate or describe an abyss or any phenomenon (e.g., it is neither an image of death looking at you, nor an image of nothingness), but it re-presents the literal discontinuity or lack in a structure.

Spiel (thought-play) springs from extending a poem's structure; and this extension already assumes a structural lack in the poem. The missing intention appears as a structural inconsistency; this *objet a* contradicts readings which rely on authorial intention, aesthetic formalism, or cultural contextualizations. The *objet a* sets in motion the oscillation or opalescence between what we read (what it is and how it fits together) and what we sense (something does not fit); it "recalls us to the concrete, and its contradiction" as Ponge writes.

Ragland-Sullivan uses Lacanian psychoanalysis to explore reading and searching creatively. She explains that no one whole (neither in image, language, nor being) exists, nor does any single answer explain knowledge and thinking; rather, the "search to know is the search itself." The effort to popularize thinking must account for the desire and loss in knowledge.

Ragland-Sullivan suggests that we can invent using the visible and sensual to decorate the *objet a* — to "mount them as collages that *drive*." Instead of making knowledge rational by effacing inconsistency, a theoretical practice can proliferate problems, puzzles, and paradoxes, which, at least on the intellectual level, lead to an appreciation of the tenuous nature of knowing and perceiving — both based on a lack. The paradoxes surrounding our lack of knowledge — we want to know what's missing and what's missing makes us want to know — allows theory to spread along the lines of desire. By making knowledge circle around its own limit, by allowing the visibly unassimilated bits and pieces of desire to appear on the surface of theory, and by allowing desire to enter knowledge as something other than affect, an instant theory makes thinking's aim supercede its goal or end.

sapeur . . . Fr., pioneer

We live in an electronic age . . . inventors continue to work toward increasing our inter-actions with media . . . the way we read and think changes as we have different technologies to think with. But little attention has gone toward why we are making media technologies. What use do media have beyond simple function? That is, how does technology inter-act with someone? How does it calls us to think, call us into thinking? If we fail to ask these questions then we continue unwittingly making vacuous conveniences and disastrous contraptions: building bombs because we can. Media make for a different thinking (televisual, telephonic, filmic, or typographic).

Instant Theory wonders how we can think with the media explosion. Can we use the visual and sensual to think with as catalysts for changing and inventing thinking? The answers in this special issue explore what the technologists have not examined in depth: thinking as a cultural practice, popularizing thinking, the implications of technological thinking, the connection between desire and knowledge. These essays do not offer a definitive methodology nor a single description of our current situation, but they do suggest a few guidelines or rules of thumb. Each of these rules concerns the thinking-image. The thinking-image does not represent someone's thought, nor pure thought. If we attempted to undertake such a task the image would be too abstract or ridiculous. Instead, the thinking-image re-presents structural relations and mental motions, which, rather than affects or e-motions, occur as a result of the thought-play involved in testing and extending structural relations.

Gregory Ulmer exposes the process of making knowledge specialized and unreceivable. In this way, he does not abide by traditional pedagogy's

separation between the popular and the theoretical or the instant and the accumulated. This orientation of theory toward thought rather than information allows us to translate a specialized knowledge into a popular idiom. It plays through, but without using, decaying models of thought. In this sense, the thinking-image traces over or gives an impression of images of thinking. While it plays through these images, it allows us to understand how the thinking (about the model) became specialized information (given, fixed, or static) and, hence, closed to mental motion. Ulmer's thinking-image acts out some possible alternatives for each relation in the tree image (e.g., What *could* the image or sound of the leaf mean? What does our culture think or feel about the image of leaves? Where do images of trees appear? What botanical model can replace the tree image as a thinking model? etc.).

Robert Ray demonstrates how the thinking-image functions as neither fact nor law, but a small writing. A writing which never rises above the particular even as it appears as a synecdoche of a cultural practice (e.g., visible theory). These charged evocative fragments play-off each other suggesting, instead of stating, a relation or theory of inclusion. This structural tension arises from an arbitrary constraint (e.g., an alphabetic ordering and a landscape lay-out) rather than a "natural" rational progression of an argument. It makes size and visual design part of the argument rather than an ornament for the content.

Avital Ronell demonstrates and explains the delay signal of the thinking-image; it sets up an interference pattern between confusion and certainty. The visual or sensual syntactical remnant or remainder prevents the assimilation or incorporation of the structure. The structure or thinking-image can neither rise to become a new model of thought, nor fall back as the antithesis of the commonplace; it eats away at those clichés of thinking, but it forces a mental motion rather than a settled solution.

Ellie Ragland-Sullivan explains how the thinking-image appears as an inconsistency, a hole in perception, a lack of intention (in viewing and in creating). This "object" (which is not an image) cuts us to the quick, cuts certainties and consistencies and points to a lack and loss in our knowledge, perceptions, and being. It appears visibly or sensually as an enigmatic intention: what is that ? what is that there for?

Bonnie Sparling's "Decoder Process," constructed through a process of gathering, sorting, recombining and editing, uses quotations collected from a variety of genres (literary, popular, governmental, social, etc.); she appropriated these quotations for the purpose of creating a thinking-image of

cultural possibilities. This invention of the everyday, the taken for granted, a mythic conceptualization of Woman cites, but does not agree with, the existing cultural fragments on Woman; she draws together bits and pieces of histories, literature, philosophy, and popular culture. To decode the "decoder process" and to set the process (the thinking-image) in motion, it calls us to think through the given, the fixed, the image of Woman as it occurs to us or as it arrives, not in sweeping generalizations, but in fragments; rather than offer an original alternative from out of the blue, Sparling re-members the future — a possibility which speaks culture in a narrator's voice of one and (of) all. Sparling's intervention works like the colonized Indians of South America who made use of Spanish symbols: "...the ambiguity that subverted from within the Spanish colonizers' 'success' in imposing their own culture on the indigenous Indians is well known.... the Indians ... often made of the rituals, representations, and laws imposed on them something quite different from what their conquerors had in mind; they subverted them not by rejecting or altering them, but by using them with respect to ends and references foreign to the system they had no choice but to accept. ... they escaped the dominant social order without leaving it."[22] Sparling takes fragments from patriarchal sources and any source which offers an image of Woman (not necessarily women) and re-combines those images into something entirely different; she changes the horrible pessimism of these images into something optimistic and invents a new (fragile, flickering, just beginning to merge) image of Woman.

Laiwan's intervention presents an alternative image of syntax to the dominant Western syntactical relation; the two images in her intervention literally mirror each other. They force the reader to notice the visual structure of language's lay-out. The usual invisibility of syntactical arrangement makes the dominant mode into a fixed, given, or "natural" progression of words on a page. Laiwan demonstrates the beauty and power of alternatives and she literally reflects (thinks) on her Eastern arrangement. Is the alternative merely backward or inverted? Does the Eastern syntax function merely in relation to the dominant model? Is the Eastern syntax a reversal of the dominant model? Laiwan's intervention offers a thinking-image of (syntactical) resistance.

All of the contributors work with post-structuralism or psychoanalysis. Post-structuralism and psychoanalysis entered the United States publicly through the "Yale School" during the 1970's. Indicative of the large-scale dissemination of these theories through Yale, *The New York Times Magazine* had an issue devoted to the "School" and at least one book used the "Yale Critics" as an emblem or signifier for "post-structuralism." At Yale, Paul de Man, Geoffrey

Hartman, and J. Hillis Miller championed the work of Jacques Derrida. But, their theories quickly spread throughout the States: Derrida's "decon-struction" provoked heated disputes, spurred the publication of many new journals, and changed the liberal arts, particularly the study of literature. The Yale School focused on literary texts. It offered deconstructive readings of literature mostly within Romanticism, and it rarely ventured to explore culture or media effects. Following the critical hermeneutic tradition, it sought primarily to continue a negative *philosophical* critique of underlying assumptions *within* literary works. This application of Derrida's philosophi-cal work rarely examined the culture and institutions supporting the categories of literature and criticism; it ignored Derrida's graphic and sensual intervention into culture and his work on media (e.g., tele-graphs, post-cards, etc.).

In the 1980's, the re-evaluation of post-structuralism and psychoanalysis has begun. The Florida School plays a key role in disseminating this re-evaluation; using the work of Derrida, Lacan, Deleuze, Barthes, and others to explore media and cultural texts, rather than literary or philosophical works, it redefines representation away from critical hermeneutics which seek to uncover the metalanguage controlling texts. Rather it offers a theory for applying post-structuralism or psychoanalysis to popular culture.

Institutional invention and popularization are the major concerns of the participants of this issue. They have initiated many organizations and insti-tutions including: The Florida School of Institutional Invention (a think tank), The Institute for European and Comparative Studies (a consultation forum on disseminating knowledge), The Vulgar Boatmen (a pop rock band), *The Newsletter of The Freudian Field* (a journal), and Radio Free Theory (a radio program). Not all of the members work in Florida: Avital Ronell refers to herself as a "tele-Floradist" operator, and Bonnie Sparling lables her interpretive strategy, "the decoder process," "Floreadean." Three of the most influential innovations; Ulmer's applied post-structuralist theories, Ray's generative media theory, and Ragland-Sullivan's Lacanian re-thinking of representation, together with the elements of instant theory contained in this issue represent a contribution to understanding popular culture.

The significance and difficulty of this special issue resides in exploring a theoretical practice which breaks down the false boundary between image and thought. The thinking-image sets in motion a thought decontrol.This de-controlling constraint, neither outside nor against control, demands a rigorous unsystematized thinking. In terms of this thinking-image, all of the interventions address concerns beyond, or other than, formal and aesthetic issues about images. Many of the images remain aesthetically pleasing, but function primarily as theoretical tools. In the thinking-image, visual design functions as neither mere ornamentation, nor a formal aesthetic presenta-tion. Theory no longer operates through reading alone, but appears with

the collapse of reading and sensing, doing and thinking, thought and expression. To think is always a thinking with.

Notes

[1] Stewart Brand. *The Media Lab: Inventing the Future at M.I.T.* (N.Y.: Viking Penguin, 1987). Brand does point to the technological changes which will facilitate "home manipulation of commercial information"(21), and his book is supposedly a "primer for a new life-style" of "individual eccentricity" (251-2), but he does not address how technologies call us to think; how we can think through technologies; in short, his thorough book points to a problem: no sustained theoretical practice. Instant Theory addresses the communications technologists' desire for "rigorous, dramatic speculation about where they might be going and where they might go wrong" (259). On the question of technology see also Marjorie Perloff. "Ca(n)non to the Right of Us, Ca(n)non to the Left of Us: A Plea for Difference," *New Literary History* Vol. 18, No. 3 (Spring 1987) p. 655. Perloff suggests that French poststructuralism and experimental poetry "is now engaging the codes of the videotape playback, the telephone answering machine, and the computer...." This issue specifically addresses these codes.

[2] Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra: A Book for Everyone and No one.* trans. Alexander Tille (London: Macmillan, 1896) Prologue 5, p. 10. Nietzsche's Zarathustra, while talking about popularizing thinking says, "Must one smash their ears before they learn to listen with their eyes?"

[3] cf. Gregory Ulmer's reading of Derrida's work in relation to Op art. *Applied Grammatology* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press), 1985.

[4] Lisolette Gumpel. *Concrete Poetry from East and West Germany: The Language of Exemplarism and Experimentalism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1976), quoting Siegfried Schmidt, p. 62-63. (hereafter referred to in text as Gumpel with page number)

[5] Charles A, Perrone. "From Noigandres to "Milagre de Alegria": The Concrete Poets and Contemporary Brazilian Popular Music," Latin American Music Review, Vol. 6, No. 1 (Spring/Summer, 1985) p.78.The Brazilians found the name, Noigandres in Pound's Cantos XX:

You know for seex mon's of my life

Effery night when I go to bett, I say to myself:
"Noigandres, noigandres:
Now what the DEFFIL can that mean!"

Pound alludes in this canto to the Provençal trubador Arnaut Daniel's song, translated as "The grain of joy and the smell of noigandres." Augusto de Campos later translated the ancient provençal word, noigandres, as "free of boredom." Significantly, the choice of their name connects the concrete poets to the archaic poetic-performance tradition of the troubadour's song. That is, the name suggests the poet's alternative to the Romantic conception of lyric poetry by refering to the etymological connection between lyric and lyre the musical instrument; their poetry calls attention to the musical materiality of language rather than subjective personal expression.

[6] Wendy Steiner. *The Colors of Rhetoric: Problems in the Relation between Modern Literature and Painting* (Chicago: Univesity of Chicago Press, 1982) p. 206. (hereafter referred to in text as Steiner and page number)

[7] Gregory Ulmer, "The Object of Post-Criticism," *The Anti-Aesthetic*, ed. Hal Foster (Port Townsend, Wash.: Bay Press, 1983). A montage of citations drawn from pages 99, 101, & 106.

[8] Gregory Ulmer, "The Post-Age," *Diacritics*, Vol. 11 (1981), p. 50. (hereafter referred to in text as Ulmer and page number)

[9] Paul Willemen, "Cinematic Discourse — the problem of inner speech," *Screen*, Vol. 23, no. 3 (1982), p. 158.

[10] Howard Gruber. "Darwin's "Tree of Nature and Other Images of Wide Scope," in *On Aesthetics in Science*, ed. Judith Wechsler (Cambridge, Mass.: The M.I.T. Press, 1978) p. 131.

[11] cf. Bamber Gascoigne. *Cod Streuth* (N.Y.: Ballantine Books, 1986). *Cod Streuth*, a novel about a French Huguenot missionary who becomes king of the Tupinili cannibals of Brazil in 1560, also performs the dissemination of language through leaves. The missionary had in his pocket only ten pages of Rabelais, which the cannibals took as holy scripture. Each month the king had to write down his thoughts on a sacred tobacco leaf which was then stored in an inaccessible house. The novel contains the fragmented text taken from this collection of leaves. The cannibals unwittingly ape theology with their Mass, in which they eat flesh and blood, their religious holidays, which end with orgiastic revelations, and their Biblical hermeneutics, which insist on the Word of Rabelais. They also literally act-out the process of saving

leaves (of books in often inaccessible libraries and archives) and the dissemination and popularization of knowledge through (social) intercourse.

[12] Jacques Derrida, *Signsponge*, trans. Richard Rand (N.Y.: Columbia University Press, 1984) p. 58.

[13] Lewis Thomas, *The lives of a cell: notes of a biology watcher* (New York: Bantam, 1974) p. 157.

[14] Peter Mayer's "Some Remarks Concerning Classification of the Visual in Literature," *Dada/Surrealism*, no. 12, special issue on Visual Poetics (1983). cf. Henry Wolf. *Visual Thinking: methods for making images memorable* (New York: American Showcase, 1983). Wolf visually catalogues the effects available to advertisers and designers; he includes: unexpected combinations, strange combinations, strange perspective, repetition, motion, manipulated symbols, scale, type as design, homage, color, collage, improbable settings, humor, celebrity, and more.

[15] Marcel Bénabou, "Rule and Constraint," *OuLiPo: A Primer of Potential Literature*, ed. and intro. Warren F. Motte Jr., forward Noël Arnaud (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1986) p. 41.

[16] Warren F. Motte Jr. "Introduction," in *OuLiPo: A Primer of Potential Literature*, ed. & intro. Warren F. Motte Jr., forward Noël Arnaud (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1986), quoting François Le Lionnais, p. 3.

[17] George Perec. *Life: A User's Manual*, trans. David Bellos (Boston: David R. Godine, 1987). p. 3.

[18] Martin Heidegger, *What is Called Thinking?* trans. J. Glenn Grey (N.Y.: Harper & Row, 1968) Lecture V, p.48.

[19] For an explanation of "cryptonomy" see Abraham, Nicolas & Maria Torok. *The Wolf Man's Magic Word: A Cryptonomy*, trans. Nicholas Rand, with an introduction by Jacques Derrida (Minneapolis, Minn.: University of Minnesota Press, 1986).

[20] Larry Rickles, *Aberrations of Mourning: Reading German Crypts* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1988) p. 279. (hereafter referred to in the text as Rickles and page number).

[21] Martin Heidegger, *The Question Concerning Technology and other essays*, trans. William Lovitt (N.Y.: Harper & Row, 1977).

[22] Jacues Derrida, "Living On: Border Lines," trans. James Hubert, in Harold Bloom et. al., *Deconstruction and Criticism* (N.Y.: Seabury, 1979) p. 81. (hereafter referred to in text as Derrida and page number).

[23] Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life.* trans. Steven Rendall (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984). xiii.

"Instant Theory: making thinkin
public theory. A public theor
mation on learning
"Instant Theory: making thinking popular" investig
public theory. A public theory would increase access
mation on learning and innovation...and allow
preserve and disseminate...potential inventions...
successes and failures of a previous attempt at popul
form of pattern recognition and puzzle solving. That
concrete poets guides the essay...
which explore alternative systems...
of these alternatives the author
a clue to building a cul
of inventions. That se
theories into thinking
images discovered in
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Handbook For a Theory Hobby

The Hobby-Horse is the Sawhorse of Theory

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"Handbook for a Theory Hobby" is a montage of borrowed images and quotations and it functions as an amateur's instruction manual for fun with theory. The manual plays through decaying models of thought beginning with a visual explanation of leaf rubbings. In this sense, it gives an impression of metaphors for thinking and memory. The manual is also a reading of Deleuze's and Guattari's chapter on rhizomatic thinking in *A Thousand Plateaus*. From that angle, the reader is asked to consider alternatives to alphabetic or book-centered thinking. The manual illustrates a potential botanical image which might replace the tree metaphor of dialectical thinking. By combining found fragments, this deceptively simple text explores how our culture represents thinking, memory, and learning.

LESSON NUMBER FIVE: RUBBING READING

Theory Craft

I am developing a handbook for doing theory, of which the
present text is a sample. This handbook is for everyone,
especially for those who want to do theory as a hobby, or for
those who want to engage in theory without becoming
professional specialists (students, for example). There is
every reason to expect that the day will come when theory
will be practiced as a craft in the manner of woodworking,
gourmet cooking, photography, or karate. People will be
theorists the way they are sailors, dancers, skin divers,
needleworkers, when these are performed as avocations.
Amateur theory will arise in a society in which avocation is
more important than vocation as a source of identity and
satisfaction. There will be a theory journalism catering to
this activity, including video and computer applications,

producing eventually a situation in which the entertainment industry will replace the universities as the principal source of cultural invention and innovation. The area of public life that will be most affected by this development is politics.

Reading

Before making a theory of your own you will want to read some examples of theories made by other people. The biggest obstacle to theorizing is learning how to read theory. Having taught theory for many years at the university level, I can tell you that many otherwise brilliant people have foundered on this task. The reason for their difficulty is that they forgot the fundamental nature of the technology they were attempting to use. They were so saturated with the ideology of logocentrism (in which the technology of writing is artificially limited to the capacities of the spoken word) that they insisted on treating the print medium as if it were

oral. They tried to read five-hundred page, densely argued books as if they were listening to a conversation, ignoring the fact that in conversation ideas are communicated in units of six to seven words per idea in a linear string, supported by the possibility of feedback from the source, while in writing the ratio of ideas to words is much higher, with the concentration of ideas increasing geometrically in a multilayered network of spreading resonances as the argument develops, without possibility of feedback. Logocentric reading is almost useless for theory reading. Students time and again testified to the experience of having passed their eyes over all the pages, saying the words to themselves silently, in their thoughts, listening to themselves as if to a speaker, only to find at the conclusion of the activity nothing remained in their minds of what had been said. What students said on such occasions was: "it doesn't make

any sense." "It is boring." "It is poorly written." They blamed the technology for their own forgetfulness, having forgotten how to extract information that has been stored alphabetically. Their behavior could be compared to someone trying to extract information from a computer without using software. How can you avoid this problem? Keep in mind that writing originated separately from speaking, within the visual arts, and enjoyed its own evolution and development until it was finally put in the service of voice by the invention of the alphabet. Alphabetic writing, of course, is not limited to its role as prosthesis of the voice, but is capable of taking thought and communication beyond spoken culture, as theoretical writing itself illustrates (mathematics is another example of writing beyond the voice). Writing continues to evolve, just as does spoken language. Part of the fun of being a theorist is to participate

in this historical process of inventing new programs for writing in all the media available to you. To extract information from written storage, then, requires written strategies. Many of these strategies have more in common with the visual than with the verbal arts. One of the founders of theory craft, himself a promoter of amateur theory, Roland Barthes, suggested the possibility of written readings. What this means is that when you read you should not try to process the information you are receiving in your oral memory, but you should be writing yourself, transposing the information from print to your notebook. Taking notes is a familiar activity in school reading. In amateur theory note taking must be taken up as a craft. In craft theory it is not at all necessary to understand what you are reading,at least not at the level of specialized discourse, although, at the present stage of culture, it is still necessary to know at a

quotidian level the language in which the book is printed. The following set of procedures constitute instructions for amateur reading of theoretical texts. If you follow these instructions you will be able to extract from the densest book all the information you will need as raw material for making your own theory.

REMINDER: The present exercise is only one part of a larger handbook, the whole of which must be used in order to actually produce a theory. You may wish to practice this exercise on your own, in order to gather a large amount of raw material in preparation for the next installment of the handbook. You should not hesitate to select your practice books from the most recalcitrant examples. Jacques Derrida and Jacques Lacan would be good choices, but almost anything French or German should give good results.

Rubbing (beginner)

(NOTE: The instructions are stated in figurative terms.)

STEP ONE

Make a leaf rubbing.

"Fun with Fall Leaves", from *Peanut Butter* magazine,
reprinted by permission of Scholastic publishers

STEP TWO

Write the word "leaf" over the rubbing. On the facing page

opposite write the word "feal". On the front page of your

booklet write "how to take notes (tones stones)". Use this

booklet as a bookmark, and refer to it before you begin each

session of reading.

STEP THREE

Look up the word "feal" in an unabridged dictionary. (A feudal tenant, vassal, liegeman; a servant "feed" or hired for a term. The condition of being held in fee. A payment due to the lord of the fee; also a periodical payment. Faithful, firm in allegiance, constant. To hide or conceal.) The rubbing as a process for creating an image and the definitions of "feal" give you the essentials necessary for reading theory. If you leaf through books of theory, rubbing their leaves in this way, you will soon have a splendid collection of notes.

Rubbing (advanced)

(Once you have started your collection, you may wish to introduce the added dimension of theoretical reflection on the relationship between books and trees.)

STEP FOUR

Consider the fact that paper is made from trees. Note the

saying: "three books are as good as a fire."

STEP FIVE

Use the following images and information to recall the

emotions and feelings associated with autumn. How do these

leaves make you feel?

"Leaves of October", from Audobon, Sept. 1979,
p.5, reprinted by permission of Les Line
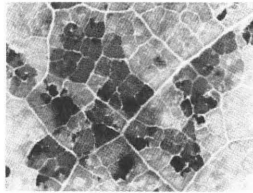
"A Harvest of Decay", reprinted by permission
of Thomas Eisner, *Natural History*,
August, 1986, p. 5.

"Like astronauts in soft landers, we are descending in these photographs toward the surface of fallen leaves, and already we can see them in a very different way. The green of the chlorophyll has faded to unmask the blues, reds, and yellows of the anthocyanins and carotenoids, creating combinations that vary from one species to another. The cell walls divide the surface into local fields of chloroplasts, among which veins meander and split to create repetitive, fractal designs. The complex production and delivery system is no longer functional. But the leaves have been invaded by millions of bacteria and fungi, and these microscopic organisms proliferate into new patterns as rich as the ones on which they feed."

STEP SIX

Is it possible that Ferdinand de Saussure's choice of "tree" to illustrate the arbitrary nature of the sign is not itself

arbitrary? Is it accidental that *arbre* and the *arbor* are

heard in the *arbitrary*? Saussure himself started listening

to poetry this way, hearing puns on the names of the gods in

Latin verse. He never published this research because it

was not falsifiable. In hobby theory, of course, this would

be an advantage.

STEP SEVEN

Study the logic associated with the "tree diagram" (the
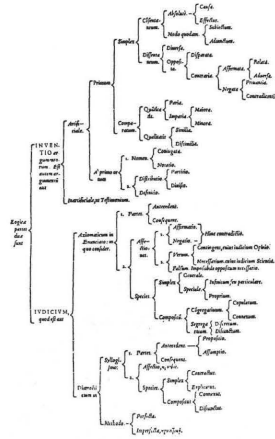outline form, named after the branching structure of the
tree).

PARTS OF A TREE
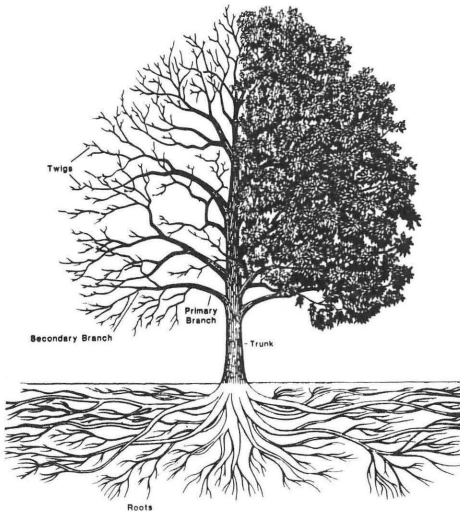
Parts of a Tree, Ian Breheny, illustrator

Compare the tree with the dialectical logic of Peter Ramus.

P. RAMI DIALECTICA.
TABVLA GENERALIS.

"The suggestion that such schematic treatments of categories of the understanding, and hence of knowledge itself, are encouraged by written communication receives some striking confirmation in the further developments that took place with the invention of movable type in the fifteenth century. During the course of the following century, educational reformers were engaged in suggesting changes in the

curriculum of rhetoric, especially the elimination of 'artificial memory' (Yates 1966: 228). Foremost among these reformers was Peter Ramus (Pierre de la Ramee, 1515-1572, massacred as a Huguenot), who attempted to replace the earlier techniques of memory with new ones based upon 'dialectical order', a 'method', a 'logic' resting on the analytical study of texts, which as Ong has pointed out owes a great deal to the diffusion of printed texts and the reproduction of charts by means of newly invented typography (Ong, 1971: 167). This order was set out in schematic form which the 'general' or inclusive aspects of the subject came first, descending thence through a series of dichotomised classifications to the 'specials' or individual aspects." [From Jack Goody, *The Domestication of the Savage Mind*, Cambridge University Press]

STEP EIGHT

Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari have proposed a new image to replace the tree as a model for reasoning and memory — the rhizome.

"A first type of book is the root-book. The tree is already an image of the world, or rather the root is the image of the tree-world. It is the classic book. . . . the radicel system, or fasciculated root, is the second figure of the book, from which our modernity gladly draws its inspiration. In this case the principal root has aborted, or has been destroyed near its extremity and some immediate multiplicity of flourishing secondary roots has come to graft itself onto it (eg. Burroughs, Joyce). . . . We are tired of the tree. We must no longer put our faith in trees, roots, or radicels; we have suffered enough from them. The whole arborescent culture is founded on them, from biology to linguistics. On the contrary, only underground stems and aerial roots, the adventitious and the rhizome are truly beautiful, loving, or political . . . Many people have a tree planted in their heads, but the brain itself is much more like a grass. . . . In itself the rhizome has very diverse forms, from its surface extension which ramifies in all directions to its concretions into bulbs and tubers. Or when rats move by sliding over and under one another. There is the best and the worst in the rhizome: the potato, the weed, crab grass." [Deleuze and Guattari, *On the Line*, Semiotexte]

Rattus rattus
Brown Rat

Isotermes sp.
Subterranean Termite

Digitaria sanguinalis
Smooth Crabgrass

Common House and garden Problems,
Ian Breheny, Illustrator

Reflect on crab grass as a model for a new logic. Compare

the emotions you associate with crab grass with the emotions

associated with autumn leaves.

STEP NINE

Analogy Project. One of the skills which you must continually

practice to maintain your theorizing is analogy. Work out

the implications of the following analogies as part of building

your own model of a new memory.

Tree : dialectical logic : Rhizome : _____?

hints:

   —The tree as a thing and as an image of classification
   is associated with the printing press and mechanical
   reproduction.

   —Ramist dialectical logic replaced artificial memory
   (orators memorized speeches by placing their
   arguments in familiar settings — one's home, or a
   public building—associated with violent or striking
   images).

   —The rhizome may be associated with computers,
   video, and electronic reproduction. If you find that
   you can't get started, Rub your copy of *Teletheory:
   The Making of "Derrida at The Little Big Horn"*.

A variation on this exercise is to select a different natural
form as the vehicle of the metaphor (Tree: dialectical logic:

[a natural form: a classification system]). Remember, there is no need to make anything up. Everything you need to make a theory is always already available (see the other numbers of the handbook, especially the entry on "Invention"). One of the goals of the project is to formulate an approach to reading that will give access to electronic media similar to the way leaf rubbings give access to books. Make a model of reading.

STEP TEN

Paradigm shift project. Tree Mourning.
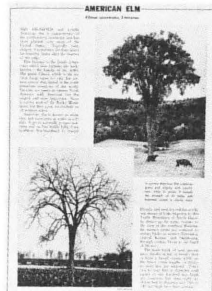
"American Elm", from *Knowing Your Trees* by G. H.
Collingwood and Warren D. Brush, Washington, DC:
American Forestry Association, 1947.

U. Ulmus . . . .*U. carpinifolia* (smooth-leaved elm),
U. parvifolia (Chinese elm), *U. pumila* (Siberian elm)

"The stately elms that graced the village streets of 19th
Century America are almost gone now, victims of Dutch elm
disease or an infection called *phloem necrosis*, and it is
foolhardy to plant elms today — with a few exceptions"
(Crockett, *Trees*). Compare the endangered status of the
elm with the similar status of the lemurs in Madagascar.
Lemurs are endangered due to the destruction of their
habitat, the great forests of Madagascar. Is the lemur
important? Reflect on the fact of evolution, that, according
to Deleuze and Guattari, mankind came down from the
trees, but kept the tree in mind as a model for logic. Relate
the need for a new model of memory to the deforestation of
the planet caused by the pollution produced by fossil fuels.
Speculate.

Activities of related interest

Projects For Writing Without Paper (A good source of ideas
for individual or group theory activities is the experimental
arts. Two examples follow.)

AT HOME: VITO ACCONCI

Rubbing Piece

Action: Select a spot on the body. Rub it until a sore is
produced.
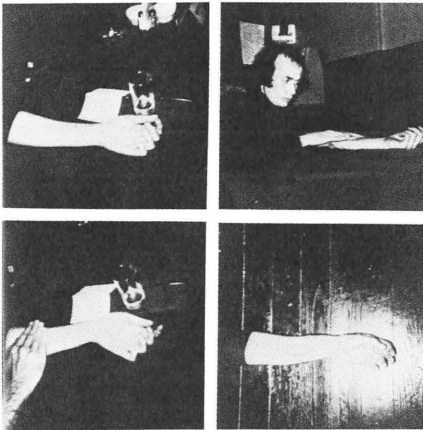
"Rubbing Piece", from *Vito Acconci* by Vito Acconci, by
permission of Mario Diacono

Interviewers: "Why did you initially make the decision to leave writing?" Acconci: "Because towards the end of the time I was writing, I started to be more and more committed to the idea of a page as a space to move over. I became obsessed with things like, how do you go from left margin to right margin? How do you go from one page to the next? I was really using the page as a space for me, as writer, to travel over. And in turn, a space for you, as reader, to travel over. Gradually it occurred to me that if I was so interested in moving over a space, why was I limiting myself to an 8 ½ x 11" piece of paper? Why didn't I walk on the floor? It seems like a lot of my first pieces were a way to get off the page, out of a closed room, and throw myself outside into the world." [Interviewed by Margaret Sundell and Thomas Beller in *Splash*, April, 1988.]

ON THE ROAD: ROBERT SMITHSON

"Incidents of Mirror-Travel in the Yucatan."

"Second Upside-down Tree", from *The Writings of Robert Smithson*, by Nancy Holt, editor, reprinted by permission of New York University Press.

Action: Following a tourist guidebook, drive through the

Yucatan (or any suitable place) stopping at various sites to

photograph an arrangement of mirrors, and/or a tree that

you have planted upside-down. Lines drawn on a map will

connect [the upside-down trees]. Are they totems of

rootlessness that relate to one another? Do they mark a

dizzy path from one doubtful point to another? Is this a

mode of travel that does not in the least try to establish a

coherent coming and going between the here and the there?

. . . Are they dead roots that haplessly hang off inverted

trunks in a vast 'no-man's-land' that drifts toward vacancy?

. . . The 'trees' are dedicated to the flies. Dragonflies, fruit

flies, horseflies. They are all welcome to walk on the roots

with their sticky, padded feet, in order to get a close look.

"Why should flies be without art?" (Smithson). Smithson

also thought of his work as a kind of writing without paper.

"Initially I went to the Pine Barrens to set up a
system of outdoor pavements but in the process
I became interested in the abstract aspects of
mapping. So I decided to use the Pine Barrens
site as a piece of paper and draw a crystalline
structure over the landmass rather than on a 20
x 30 sheet of paper. In this way I was applying my
conceptual thinking directly to the disruption of
the site over an area of several miles."

Now you are ready to design some ACTIONS of your own,

featuring trees, rubbings, and other related items, practices,

and information, addressing the problem of a writing without

paper. Document the process and file the materials for later

use in the theory you are making.

The A B C of Visual Theory

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"The ABC of Visible Theory", an encyclopedic essay describing the inter-relations between typography, language, and thought, connects the "para-phernalia of the text" with every cultural association which can be brought to bear on these practices. The essay uses historical, fictional, scientific, and other discourses to discuss electricity, font types, strategies, saints, books, journals, paintings, and article titles, language systems, ontology, names, technology, utopia, psychic states, newspapers, games, clichés, fictional animals, typescripts, rules, emotions, institutions, sociological categories, art movements, history, and self-reflexive comment. This enormous web of associations usually lay dormant in typographic effects and if we followed each and every association mentioned in this ABC, we would have to contend with the reservoir of our entire culture. By offering only one or two entries for each letter of the alphabet Visible Theory remains potential. The lay-out and design of this piece encourages comparison between entries and dissolves the apparent opposition between visual images and thinking. Just as each topic suggests a reservoir of cultural history, the over-all design and the lay-out of each individual entry connects to webs of associations.

Temptation of the alphabet:

to adopt the succession of letters in order to

link fragments is to fall back on what

constitutes the glory of language

(and what constituted Saussure's despair):

an unmotivated order... which is not arbitrary

(since everyone knows it, recognizes it,

and agrees on it). The alphabet is euphoric:

no more anguish of "schema", no more

rhetoric of "development", no more twisted

logic, no more dissertations!

Roland Barthes (*Roland Barthes*, p.147)

Agate Rule, The :

Constraints Encourage Invention I. The most influential nineteenth-century American newspapers forbade typographical embellishments, requiring all advertising to be set in neat rows of microscopic agate type. James Gordon Bennett, publisher of the New York *Herald,* insisted that this rule forced merchants to concentrate on what was being said rather than how. In fact, the agate rule prompted attention to typesetting's possibilities. Robert Bonner, owner of the competing New York *Ledger,* proved the most inventive, exploring (long before Warhol) the effects of repetition by reproducing a single ad for seven full six-columned pages. Bonner also used the combination of strategically placed capital letters and the *Herald*'s columns to create highly visible

Apollinaire:

———————

Apollinaire's *Calligrammes*
were certainly not the first, but
remain the most famous examples of
concrete poetry. More important, he saw
how advertising would reorganize the relation-
ship between language and typography. This
insight began as a scan- dalous intuition of
advertising's beauty: "You read prospect-
uses, catalogues, and posters which shout
aloud/Here is poetry this morning and for
prose there are the newspapers" ("Zone," 1913). Its subsequent formulation
made his point more explicitly: "Our intelligence must get used to understanding
synthetically and ideographically instead of analytically and discursively." By rapidly
juxtaposing images of religion, business, and politics, his poetry effectively identified the
twentieth century's three systems of social
organization, each of which has generated
a form crucial to typo- graphy's emergence:
he gloss, advertising, and all propaganda.

acrostics spelling out L-E-D-G-E-R. Ironically, the typographically austere Bennett was given to massive publicity stunts, like his reporter Henry Stanley's expedition to find the "lost" English missionary David Livingstone. Stanley's trip furthered the mapping of Africa, the filling in of spaces previously blank.

B

B o r e d o m : Although writing and reading are conducted under the aegis of communication, both in fact are shadowed by the threat of boredom. Writers procrastinate because of the tedium involved in expressing plainly what occurred to them suddenly. They also must work to forestall the reader's ennui, anticipating it, heading it off, knowing that at any moment, the book (or magazine, or newspaper, or journal) may be closed. As children gradually move from books with only pictures to books with only type, boredom's menace increases. For several generations of Americans, the transition was the Hardy Boys series, a jumping off place for forays into uncharted regions of pure type. These books contained only a single image, a drawing appearing as a frontispiece, but illustrating a crucial incident occurring far into the story. For young readers, this picture was an o a s i s , something to look forward to while trekking through the terrifyingly unillustrated pages: it sustained hope, and like a magnet, pulled readers through what might otherwise have been put aside. For adults, chapter breaks assume the same role: resting places where one can let down attention.

B a r t h e s :
Of all contemporary theorists, he was most haunted by that he called "panic boredom". He read less than other academics, but wrote more. Increasingly, he produced books that by avoiding long stretches of unbroken type, responded to his own repudiation of the dissertation. His late work's apparent heterogeneity conceals a persistent effort to introduce typographic

B r e c h t : Like Barthes, he knew that pleasure and attentiveness were related. "From the first", he wrote in 1949, "it has been the theatre's business to entertain people, as it also has of all the other arts. It is this business which always gives it its particular dignity; it needs no other passport than fun, but this it has got to have". Working in the theater, he confronted a situation the exact reverse of the book: the spell of the uninterrupted tableaux

C i n e m a : As a return to pictorial narrative, cinema inevitably redressed the modern ascendancy of print. Like books, movies marginalize the excluded mode, assigning it to fixed positions: while books often herd illustrations together into one or more special sections, commercial filmmaking restricts writing's appearance to the credits and an occasional establishing shot ("San Francisco", proclaims the overlay at the beginning of *The Maltese Falcon* , just in case Le Bay is unfamiliar). More significantly, cinema popularizes collage, repeatedly demonstrating modern technology's limitless capacity to redistribute and recombine its representations. Indeed, while Hollywood moviemaking minimizes collage, its dominant form (montage) is the special case,

inventiveness. *S/Z, Roland Barthes, A Lover's Discourse, The Empire of Signs* all look strange: they contain italicized type, Roman type, works printed in all caps, numbered fragments, starred paragraphs, marginal gloss, maps, photos, samples of handwriting, etc. The unparagraphed, conventionally punctuated page of type comes to seem, by its willed absence, its forced repression, a figure of death.

enchanted, fostering not boredom but uncritical identification. As a solution, he introduced print (in titles preceding individual scenes), thereby replacing representation with formulation. By the time of his third feature film, *Une femme est une femme* (1961), Godard had adopted the same tactic. As his hero and heroine argue, a series of comments appear on the screen:

> Emile takes Angela at her word because he loves her
>
> Angela lets herself be caught in the trap because she loves him
>
> Because they love each other, everything will go wrong for Emile and Angela
>
> They have made the mistake of thinking they can go too far
>
> Because their love is so mutual and eternal.

achievable only by strictly adhering to a carefully policed continuity grammar, designed precisely to overcome the cinema's inherent capacity for spatial and temporal discontinuity. Retroactively, therefore, film exposes the mobility of print, its broken relationship with referent, author, and "original" context: the typesetter becomes the continuity girl, charged with controlling the letters' potential scattering. *Constructivism*: Of the early twentieth-century avant gardes, the Constructivists displayed by far the most interest in typography, concerning themselves with posters, bookmaking, parade decorations, banners, films, and cartoons — all reconceived not only as forms of mass communication and Agitprop, but also as "art-objects". "Engineers create new forms", proclaimed the banner draped over Tatlin's famous *Model for the Monument to the Third International*, and the Constructivist redefinition of the artist-as-engineer expressed itself in an enthusiasm for technology. "His poems weren't spoken", Blaise Cendrars said of Mayakovsky, "his poems weren't written, they were designed". In "How to Make Verses", Mayakovsky himself encouraged poets to treat their work as film montage, by utilizing typographical experimentation to create a printed *mis-en-scène*.

d a n d y i s m : With its provocative manner, attention to surfaces (newly labeled "the signifier"), aetheticized disposition, and oppositional hedonism, poststructuralism can be understood as a later manifestation of dandyism, which as Baudelaire observed, "appears above all in periods of transition". Barthes, in particular, is the dandy *par excellence,* finally making explicit in autobiography and interviews his own chronic need for the new. "In a given historical situation — of pessimism and rejection — it is the intellectual class as a whole which, if it does not become militant, is virtually a dandy" (*Roland Barthes*, p. 106). Dandyism represents opposition *tout court*; while it may be enlisted by both left and right, it remains apolitical, characterizable only as profoundly undemocratic. Its target is always mass taste and that constituency's principal tool, assimilation. Thus in the late twentieth century, with books, newspapers and magazines long established, dandyism flaunts alternate typographies: *Glas's* two columns, *A Lover's Discourse's*, marginalia. In the mid-nineteenth century, by contrast, with mass printing still in its adolescence, Baudelaire, surrounded by painters, restricted his costume to the most severe blacks, thereby making himself an icon of what still seemed radical: the rigor of print.

E *l e c t r i c i t y :* What happens when "alphabetic man" becomes "electrical man"? Will induction and deduction, made possible by writing (as Havelock, Ong, and Goody have shown), give way to *conduction*, thinking as a kind of transportation? In his "Preface" to *Un Coup de Des*, Mallarme invoked

precisely this metaphor, referring to his own sprinkled words whose appearance on the page anticipated the computer screen:

[The poem is] without novelty except for the spacing out of the reading. The "whites" indeed take on an importance, are striking at first sight; ordinarily versification required them around like silence, to the extent that a lyrical piece or one of few feet occupies about a third of the leaf in the middle; I do not transgress this measure, only disperse it. The paper intervenes each time an image, of its own accord, ceases or withdraws, accepting the succession of others, and, as it is not a question, as it always is, of regular sonorous strokes or lines of verse rather, of prismatic subdivisions of the Idea, for the moment of their appearance and while their co-operation in some spiritual setting lasts, for reasons of verisimilitude it is in variable positions to, or far from, the latent conductor wire that the text asserts itself.

Epigraphs:

New techniques repressed by a culture often appear first in less well guarded marginal zones. Because it is regarded as less serious and its experiments less consequential, art thus moves more quickly than science. The university, on the other hand, perhaps because of its own responsible self-image, remains intransigently resistant to developments rapidly assimilated by the rest of society. Thus, while MTV, advertising, TV news, and pop music (especially rap and disco) have long since appropriated the collage aesthetic generated nearly a century ago by Cubism, most academic writing adheres to nineteenth-century discursive practices. In the last decade, however the epigraph has flowered among even the most conservative critics. As quotations mount up at articles' beginnings and section breaks, collage juxtaposition begins to sneak in. When the chosen quotations, shining with the particular brightness of unmounted stones, begin to overwhelm the pallid texts they introduce, conventional dissertations have begun to undermine themselves. Epigraphing is the Trojan Horse of the traditional essay.

F

Footnote : dedication, acknowledgement, preface, table of contents, chapter headings, epigraphs, footnotes, appendices, bibliography, index — the paraphernalia of the text. What happens to writing when these assume greater importance? Historically, the attending apparatus increased in direct proportion to a text's sacralization, with the Bible prompting the most material. Only recently have secular writings (other than Greek and Latin works and a handful of classic authors like Shakespeare) seem entitled the massive annotation. At first, only "primary" writing (*i.e.*, literature) appeared worthy of it. Now, however, it gathers around even non-fiction, signaling its "prestige." For example, the University of Minnesota's Theory and History of Literature series typically aggrandizes its chosen texts with introductions and footnotes nearly equaling the works' own length: Peter Burger's slim 105-page *Theory of the Avant-Garde* comes equipped with 77 complete pages of foreword, notes, bibliography, and index.

Fraktur : Typography-as-Ideology. The Nazi resurrection of Fraktur type, illegible but prized for its "German-ness", symbolizes a totalitarian politics that encouraged attention to style rather than content. (The concluding lines to Benjamin's "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction": "This is the situation of politics which Facism is rendering aesthetic. Communism responds by politicizing art.") Just as Hitler's speech manner (and nighttime settings) distracted audiences from his message, Fraktur conveyed only a vaguely authentic folkishness. Almost never used to communicate important information, it was suppressed by the German military and intelligence services for their own work. When early victories encouraged them to look beyond Germany's borders, the Nazis, quickly recognizing the usefulness of a plainer, more "European" style, banned Fraktur on 3 January 1941 as a "Jewish invention".

Barthes's *S/Z* parodies the accumulation of textual apparatus while also citing every word of *Sarrasine* at least twice. It violates one of commentary's last modesties, that while an analysis of a poem may exceed its object, an analysis of a novel should not. In its length alone, *S/Z* thus becomes a prophetic work, pointing towards something beyond even Borges's reviews of imaginary books: footnotes to unwritten texts.

Gloss: While it begins as a gesture of reverence towards prized texts either sacred (the Scriptures) or secular (*The Aeneid*), glossing inevitably undermines the authority of the works it purports to serve. At first the treachery is graphic: the swelling commentary, appearing in the margins or even between the lines, crowds the object text and renders it increasingly illegible. More important, by demonstrating not only the possibility but the necessity of interpretation, glossing shifts attention from the revered work's silent decisiveness to its mute ambiguity. Inevitably, some Church leaders at the Council of Trent called for the suppression of the Bible itself, which was to be encountered only through approved commentaries. What would a civilization be like in which all primary texts had disappeared and only their glosses remained? This science fiction *donnée* in fact constitutes the working premise of psychoanalysis, which seeks to recover lost incidents inferable only from the patient's retroactive interpretations.

HUMUMENT, A: sub-titled "A Treated Victorian Novel". Tom Phillips's book finds new narratives, fragments, dialogues, lyrics, and meditations by painting over (to leave only certain words exposed) W.H. Mallock's 1892 *A Human Document.* On the first page, Phillips, primarily a painter, leaves legible, scattered across Mallock's page where they happened to appear in entirely other syntaxes, these words:

The following
                sing
I
                a

book.   **a book**
                    of   **art**

                                    of

                        mind
                        art

            and
            that
                    which

                    he hid
    reveal   **I**

An allegory of every present's relationship to its past, which it rearranges, screens through the palimpsest of accumulated interpretations, memories, stories, amnesia, ideological revisions. For many people, what is Shakespeare now but a phrase ("To be or not to be") whose context has receded? The present as a treated book, read for purposes other than its author(s) intended.

H

Identity :

Postmodernism's founding problem involves the copy, increasingly available from the modern technology that begins with print. Borges's Pierre Menard reproduces portions of the *Quixote*, Duchamp signs a urinal identical to one found in a bathroom, Warhol issues Campbell Soup cans, rap producers make "new" songs from sampled extracts of recognizable hits.

Benjamin's "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" remains the most profound discussion of this development; poststructuralism, with its faith in citation, has only started to implement its ideas.

index: As Jack Goody has pointed out, certain written devices like the list and the index enable a kind of thinking impossible for a purely oral culture. Ironically, our own indexes do not always correspond to our most "advanced" knowledge. In structuralist books, for example, that boldly announce the death of the author, all but the most conscientiously produced indexes remained organized around not concepts, but proper names.

J

Journal of Typographic Research : Constraints Encourage Invention
II. What would an article for this journal be like if it restricted its sources to
work previously published in the same place? Some candidates:

Typography without Words

Patterned Note-Taking: An Evaluation   Readable/Writable/Visible

One Second of Reading

The Typography of El Lissitzky   At the Edge of Meaning   Why Duchamp Loved Words

The Typographic Element in Cubism, 1911-1915

'No, says the signified': The 'Logical Status' of Words in Painting   Biblioclasm: Derrida and His Precursors

Typography: Evolution = Revolution

Visible Language in Contemporary Culture   One Hundred Essential Sight Words

The Effects of Changes in Layout and Changes in Wording on Preferences for Instructional Text

The Changing Responsibilities of the Typographic Designer

Selected Theoretical Texts from Letterists

Poetry as a Means for the Structuring of a Social Environment   How Typewriters Changed Correspondence

Communication Theory and Typographic Research   The Future for Books in the Electronic Era

The Development of Visual Poetry in France

The Visual Editing of Texts   Each of these titles seems at once op-
tional and necessary; how can any one
be eliminated? How can any article use them all? (*Roland Barthes*, p.100: "not
to have read Hegel would be an exorbitant defect for a philosophy teacher,
for a Marxist intellectual, for a Bataille specialist. But for me? Where do my
reading duties begin?") The information explosion demands a shift from
coverage to concept formation. What would happen if for one year, *Visible
Language* required its authors to cite only from work published here? A
forced economy, a moratorium on "new" ideas, an experiment in ecological
recycling and combination.

K

Kanji: Saussurían linguistics insisted on each language's completion, its adequacy to its user's needs. Thus even languages with much smaller vocabularies than English are regarded as no less finished, just as a game with only four possible moves is not defined as a stunted version of chess. No insight proved more central to the structuralist project, best exemplified by Lèvi-Strauss's critique of "primitivism" as an ideological tool. What can we make, however, of a writing system whose hybrid difficulty seems to inhibit its users? As Edwin Reischauer argues, the Japanese had "the bad luck" to discover first a writing system (Chinese ideograms, called *Kanji* in Japanese) designed for the exact opposite of their own highly inflected language. The result is the contemporary compromise: four writing systems, used interchangeably, often intertwined in a single text — *kanji*, the English alphabet, *katakana* (a phoneticized syllabic script), and *hiragana* (used primarily for grammatical distinctions). For Barthes (see *The Empire of Signs*), a *lucky* accident that continuously calls attention to the materiality, the elegance of the signifier, and thus the founding principle of Japanese civilization.

Jerome, St. : Simultaneously translating the Bible (into Latin) and inventing a punctuation system, he anticipated found poetry by breaking the given text into reading units, each lasting as long as either its sense or the imaginary reader's breath. This method is called stichometry, and strung out on a page, the resulting weave (one of Barthes's metaphors for writing) evokes that word's etymology: *stitching*. Fourteen centuries later, in the second half of the 1800's American publicity changed profoundly with the introduction of lavishly illustrated, carefully designed newspaper ads created by the makers of sewing machines.

Louie, Louie:

The Kingsmen's 1963 hit version depended enormously on the evasion of printing. By not reproducing the lyrics on either single or album cover, the group insured that a confused, but imaginative listener would hear as vaguely salacious what in fact was a clumsy attempt to imitate Calypso's pidgin English ("Me catch the ship across the sea"). In doing so, the band had intuited a classic strategy of all intellectual vanguards: the use of tantalizing mystification. Lacan's "Imaginary" and "Symbolic", "the mirror stage","The unconscious is structured like a language"; Derrida's "deconstruction", "grammatology", "differa nce", "There is no outside the text", etc. — these terms and phrases, while committed to writing, remained elusive, inchoate, quasi-oral charms. As such they enticed, beckoned, fostered work. Lacan explicitly pointed to the paradox: at one moment in his year-long seminar on "The Purloined Letter", knowing full well that almost no one in the enormous lecture hall had actually *read* Poe's story (since by that time, Lacan himself had become a celebrity, provoking curiosity among many people who had little interest in his subject matter), he turned and addressed his audience:

> We find ourselves before this singular contradiction — I don't know if it should be called dialectical — that the less you understand the better you listen. For I often say to you very difficult things, and I see you hanging on my every word, and I learn later that you did not understand. On the other hand, when one tells you simple things, almost too familiar, you are less attentive. I just make this remark in passing, which has its interest like any concrete observation. I leave it for your mediation.

M

Middle? No. :

With its even number of letters, the 26-character Roman alphabet, the central organizing system of Western civilization, has itself no center. A sign of secularization? Significantly, most ancient alphabets afforded other possible calculations: the Phoenician (19 characters), Old Hebrew (19), Early Greek (21), and Etruscan (17). The modern writing systems, on the other hand, progenitors of philosophy, are centerless: Classical Greek (20), Early Latin (20), Arabic (28). In *The Empire*

Morris, Willliam
(his typographical experiments, his belief that a beautiful house and a beautiful book are the most important goals of art, his furthering of the traditional connection between radicalism and printing);

of Signs, Barthes points to the uneasiness engendered by quadrangular, centerless cities like Los Angeles and to the paradox of Tokyo: a metropolis organized as a center (the Emperor's palace) that remains forbidden, surrounded by walls and trees, openly imaginary.

Lest the reader think that this entry represents an evasion, a failure to come up with appropriate entries for M and N by themselves, the following adumbrations must suffice:

N

Mr. Mxyzptlk
(Superman's nemesis, a parody of the similarly consonantless name of God, JHVH);

Manifestoes
(Futurist/Constructivist manifestoes as typographic pioneering, poststructuralist writing as assuming manifesto forms: hyperbole, volatility, graphic experimentation);

Memory
(analogized both to writing as in Freud's "mystic writing pad", and to its opposite, as in the ancient mnemonic of memory palaces that associated items to be remembered with images);

Navajo
(the rare language used by American marines for radio broadcast in the South Pacific; known by fewer than two dozen non-Navajos, it avoided the need for further encoding; the Japanese never deciphered it);

Naming
(Derrida's "signature effect", used as a research procedure in *Glas* and *Signsponge*);

Notation
(musical vs. written — their adequacy to oral forms of jazz and regional dialects).

Oulipo : C nstraints Enc urage Inventi n III. Oulipo: an acronym for Ouvroir de Littérature Potentielle (Workshop for potential Literature), a group founded in 1960 by Raymond Queneau and François Le Lionnais. Oulipo writers (among them Italo Calvino), insisted on the bankruptcy of traditional modes, experimented with fantastically rigorous generative devices which Le Lionnais's first Manifest argued stimulated invention and discovery. Queneau also explained:

> What is the objective of our work? To propose new "structures" to writers, mathematical in nature, or to invent new artificial or mechanical procedures that will contribute to literary activity: props for inspiration as it were, or rather in a way, aids for creativity.

> The N + 7 composition method replaces every noun in a given text with the seventh noun occurring after it in a dictionary. With multiple-choice plots (fully developed by Calvino's *If on a winter's night a traveler*), the reader chooses at every fork which path to pursue: instructed at one juncture, "if you wish to know the rest, go to 20",

```
      o    o o        o            o
                    o   o
    o                  o   o
 o              o   o
    oo              o              o
       o                 o        o
 o           o  o
```
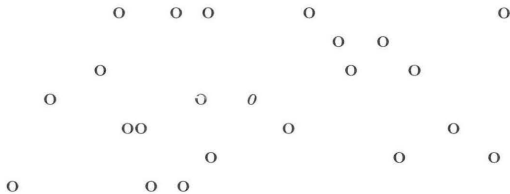
he follows directions only to learn that "There is no rest and the story is finished". The most notorious Oulipo device, the Lipogram, requires writing without one or more letters, the supreme example being Georges Perec's *La Disparation*, a long novel deprived of the letter *e*, the fulfillment of Borges's "prodigious idea of a book wholly impervious to chance". More than simply a late version of surrealism, Oulipo represents a remotivation of traditional mysticism's obsession with the mathematics of the alphabet. The Oulipo writers were not cabalists; they did not expect their methods to reveal the universe's hidden truths. With them, pseudo-science became practical aesthetics, a way of getting started, a serious game without metaphysical consequences. Similarly, Derrida's puns and coincidental etymologies serve only as sifting devices, vehicles for filtering the massive wash of information for traces of possible knowlege, a prospecting tool designed to locate that hidden region where two apparently discrete discourses share a common vocabulary: "*Genet*" as poet's name/ "*genêt*" as wild flower → "the flowers of rhetoric" and botany (*Glas*); the single word "race" is discovered to connect the problems of racism and the arms race.

Posters: Of rock's three revolutionary moments (Elvis: 1954-1956; The Beatles: 1962-1964; and Punk: 1976-1978), each of which spawned hordes of amateur garage bands, only the last occurred after the general dissemination of cheap photocopying. The poster advertising made possible by this technology characteristically depended on a *bricolage* of appropriated images and letters inspired by Warhol. For the the Constructivist tions must advertise, one vital function:

P

bands who intuited lesson that revolutions postermaking served it enabled musicians to play primarily original songs, something that the two previous waves had not dared. Further, by calling for skills normally developed in the visual arts, the new possibilities for self-promotion attracted art students away from their traditional alliance with literature into a new partnership with music. With every band having its own graphics designer (in charge of posters, record covers, and fliers), New Wave rock music achieved a postmodern *Gesamtkunstwerk*.

Paysan de Paris: Aragon's surrealist memoir inspired Benjamin's *Arcades Project*. At first glance, it seems tame by today's standards, but the sudden intrusion of typographical difference, in the menus and wine lists and wall posters inserted into the narrative, called attention to the book's frame, thereby anticipating Derrida's interest in "margins" of every sort. Significantly, from the 55 woodblocks of Hiroshige's *Tokaido*, a child selects the one in which a snow-covered mountain breaks through the upper border.

Q: **Questionnaire:** Often used as a marketing tool, it could have flourished only in an age of commerce. Its success, however, depends on its being an exception to mass media's normal one-way communication. Appearing amidst sheets of uninterrupted print, the questionnaire's open spaces solicit a reader by providing a space for his reply, *and* by restricting its length (thereby eliminating the principal cause of writer's block, the purely blank page). It follows that all texts laid out with expansive margins seem friendly; they invite an exchange by opening the text to conversation: marginal questions, notes, objections. They convert reading and writing into a serious game, like the one Proust played with his friends: . .Where would you like to live? Who is your favorite painter? What for you is the definition of happiness?

Rochefort, Joseph : In February 1918, William F. Friedman, director of the U.S. Army's cryptography school, posed for a graduation picture with his students and colleagues, whom he had arranged into a cipher spelling out Bacon's aphorism "Knowledge is power". Coming up short by four people (for a system using heads facing front or sideways), Friedman had to stand in himself for the letter *R*. In 1920, Friedman published *Index of Coincidence and Its Applications in Cryptography*, called the most important book in the field's history; just before World War II, he managed to break the Japanese diplomatic code (Purple) produced by the J Machine or Alphabetical Typewriter. After Pearl Harbor, Friedman's missing four men and letter

R appeared in a four-man team led by Rochefort, whose cracking of the Japanese naval cipher enabled the United States'

victory at Midway, the decisive naval battle of the Pacific War. If as anthropologist Dan Sperber has suggested, some ideas

spread epidemically (they are "catching"), semiotics' success derives from its adoption of the vocabulary of cryptography (Greek

for "hidden writing"): encoding, decoding, message. A childhood fascination persisting into adulthood (where they appear principally

in mystery and spy novels), codes and ciphers are the alphabetic equivalents of the fantasy of invisibility, of power without

responsibility, of escape from the censor. From the child's viewpoint, all writing represents an impenetrable code; acquiring

literacy, he learns a system simultaneously efficient and useless, since it arrives "broken" and widely distributed. Only becoming

a cryptographer, or an avant gardist working in not-yet-readerly codes, can the adult assume the status he had envied as

a child. Hence, too, the appeal of jargon, which allows initiates to communicate to what Stendhal called "the happy few".

Rasé : By writing the notorious letters "L.H.O.O.Q." below a reproduction of the *Mona Lisa*, Duchamp confirmed Sontag's and Barthes's point that a caption is worth a thousand pictures: from a theoretical perspective, the added goatee was merely superfluous naughtiness. When however, he subsequently issued and untouched postcard of the *Mona Lisa*, modified by only the single word *Rasé* (shaved), Duchamp managed something more radical: with the sequence of readymades, he effectively assumed ownership of Leonardo's image itself.

S/Z : At the exact midpoint of his book about Balzac's Sarrasine and la Zambinella, Barthes pauses to examine the S which not only begins the hero's name, but also replaces its usual Z (Sarrazine = the conventional French spelling). Z as the "letter of mutilation," "an oblique and illicit blade" that "cuts, slashes" and appears in Balzac's name — "the initial of castration," the "geographical inversion" of S's curves. This Oulipoian moment represents Barthes's shift from structuralism's dream of exposing the hidden signified to the post-structuralism method of following the obvious signifier, a move

Technology: As civilization's founding technology, writing inevitably attracted civilization's recurring objection: technology makes things too easy. Writing (as Plato argued) obviates memory. Similarly, photography evades the demands of painting, and the microphone those of the unamplified concert hall. In particular, twentieth-century technologies (film, video, audio recording) eliminate the need for the consecutive complete performance, replacing it as working unit with the "take", the fragment achievable at any point in the piece's making. Post-structuralism's embrace of the fragment, its preference for writing that can be taken up and stopped at different places, represents the equivalent of a recording studio's creation-by-tracks. Just as contemporary music never requires the presence of the whole band, contemporary writing no longer needs the single, elaborated thesis.

initiated (and then aborted) by
Saussure's investigation of the
anagrams he found in Latin
poetry. The premise:
that language knows
something; hence   Derrida's
essays generated   by etymo-
logies and puns,   the traces left
by meaning's   adventures.

Utopia: The coincidence of More's work
with the first great innovations in printing
and papermaking is telling. As a *topos*,
  "utopia" has always been rhetorical, the very
    word an effect of homophony: "utopia",
      Greek for "no-place", is pronounced the
    same as "eutopia", "good place". Utopians,
therefore, have always been bookish, writing
what could not yet be realized. Many have
gravitated towards alphabetic, typographic,
and spelling reforms: from More's Humanist
Circle's Utopian Alphabet, to Morris's
Kelmscott Press, to Shaw's new rules for
English spelling, utopians have necessarily
attended to the only medium in which their
work exists. See Barthes on Fourier.

Unconscious, *The : By positing the unconscious as behavior's* prime cause, Freud
furthered *the "hermeneutics of suspicion" begun by* Marx and Nietzsche. This symp-
tomatic *reading strategy regards all discourse* as a code whose explicit meanings
serve only *as decoys. Barthes, Derrida,* Foucault, Lacan, Althusser, Lévi-Strauss —
all practice *symptomatic reading, looking for what* apparently straightforward lan-
guages consciously *or unconsciously repress. Freud's* unconscious is a rebus, a site
for the layering and *mingling of words, images, and behavior:* the Wolf Man's
butterfly with yellow stripes *switches homonymically from a* pear with similar
coloring (a "grusha") to a nursery maid with *the same name* who, by opening
her legs, repeats both the movement of the *butterfly's* wings and the shape of the
Roman V, the hour of the patient's chronic depression.

W

W

Vertov, Dziga:

The most

important

Constructivist

filmmaker; his

significance

for contempo-

rary theory's

typographical

experiments

could well

derive from a

single diary

entry, dated

1 April 1941:

"What condi-

tions will

guarantee

success?... (2)

Wall Street Journal, The :
By eschewing all illustrations (except graphs and sketched portraits) and by holding its advertisers to standardized forms (especially in the prominent notices of security issues, properly called "Tombstones"), it intends to convey high seriousness, a commitment to meaning. It shares this strategy with *U.S. News and World Report*, whose ads often show famous models testifying to their preference for a magazine that has "No fashion, no flair, no style". Barthes once diagnosed this repudiation of art:

> on the one side the "thought", object of the message, element of knowledge, transitive or critical force; on the other the "style", ornament, province of luxury and leisure and thus futility, to separate the thought from the style is in some sort to relieve the discourse of its sacerdotal robes, to secularize the message . . . .

Whimseys : A nineteenth-century parlor game that made poems (sometimes with rhymes and regular metric schemes) out of given texts especially the Bible, but also Dickens). Thus, from *The Wall Street Journal* :

Everything

except the

  boring.”

Or, more modern, *à la*
William Carlos Williams:

John Mulhern, the arbitrager,
Arrested for allegedly
Threatening the life of former
Takeover speculator Ivan F.
Boesky, again agreed to the
Government's deadline for obtaining
An indictment.

McGraw-Hill

    surged 4 $\frac{1}{2}$ to 68

amid speculation

      that a restructuring

is in the works.

There were rumors

      circulating inside

   the company

that it would spin off

    all

   its
   operations

except

    Business Week

magazine

X Marks the Spot: The structure of writing is the structure of crime and its detection. A deed is committed, followed by a delay: a reader appears to decode the mysterious marks left behind as a *memento mori*. Hence the inevitable association of the letter *X* with the mystery story. As the simplest letter to make, the mark of the child or the illiterate, it stands for all the others. More importantly, as the universal mark of cancellation, it represents alphabetic culture's murder of the author, and the resulting liberation of his words. One of Poe's strangest stories, "X-ing a Paragrab", implies a literal version of death-by-the-letter-X. Engaged in a competitive newspaper war, an editor is accused by his rival of excessive reliance on the letter O. He takes the bait and composes a long editorial using as many Os as possible. ("So ho, John! Told you so, you know. . . . Go home to your woods, old owl, — go! You won't? Oh, poh, poh, John, don't do so! You've *got* to go, you know!") Running out of Os, the typesetter makes the customary substitution for missing letters: "Sx hx, Jxhn! hxw nxw! Txld yxu sx, yxu knxw." The next morning, the town erupts in a furor, but the editorial's author, without explanation, has vanished, never to be seen again.

Yak: What do the following have in common: yak, vole, x-ray fish, ibis, umbrella bird, and newt? Answer: they exist almost entirely to accomodate children's alphabet books. (I except the perennials, the zebra and koala bear, which seem to have independent existence outside of such schema.) If the yak did not exist, would we have to invent it for the sake of alphabetic completion? To what extent does an alphabet cause objects, events, behavior, to come into being? If the letter *Q* exists, do we have to use it? Typographical Playfulness Leading to Scientific Truth I: a nonsense line from *Finnegan's Wake*, "three quarks for Mr. Marks", leads to a definition crucial to contemporary physics. Oddly, no actual quarks have ever been observed; "quark" in colloquial German means "nothing".

Zettel's Traum: the novel-as-typescript, 1,334 pages, atlas size. Like *Ulysses*, Arno Schmidt's novel takes place during a midsummer day, but reduces Joyce's scope to four characters discussing Edgar Alen Poe. *Zettel* = the German translation of Shakespeare's *Bottom* (*Midsummer night's dream*, the Schlegel version); the anatomical *bottom* = the German *Po*. *Zettel* also = the slips of paper on which Schmidt composed, in fragmentary fashion, his novels. *Zettel's Traum* resembles the Rosetta Stone: impenetrable, promising, demoralizing. With its footnotes, glosses, corrections, interlinear additions, multiple columns, drawings, maps, etc., it seems intent on reproducing civilization's complete repertoire of graphic effects. Schmidt worked as a mapmaker, and his many essays and novels include a biographical study of Fouqué, the nineteenth-century French geologist who produced rocks and minerals artificially. Schmidt as alchemist, intent on using typography to transform the blank page into an image of the mind at work.

X

Y

search, invention

a clue to build

of inventions. That

theories into thinking images

images discovered

encyclopedic associations

perceptions, mo

ings (e.g., puns,

as qualities in some

for research, invention and

g popular," investigates the possibility of a

Decoder Process

Bonnie Sparling

232 S. Summit, apartment D4
Iowa City, IA
52240

The "decoder process", is constructed through a process of gathering, sorting, recombining and editing. It uses quotations collected from a variety of genres (literary, popular, governmental, social, etc.); it uses no original material. This invention of the everyday, the taken for granted, a mythic conceptualization of Woman cites, but does not agree with, the existing cultural fragments on Woman. The "decoder process" draws together bits and pieces of histories, literature, philosophy, and popular culture. The combination of these fragments creates a hybrid essayistic narrative. Reading the "decoder process" requires us to look differently, on both the figurative and literal levels, at the given, fixed code of Woman. This hybrid text also serves as a model of writing instant theory.

It would be possible to assemble here a collection of "great passages" from literature and philosophy to show how, unobtrusively but crucially, a certain metaphor of woman has produced (rather than merely illustrated) a discourse that we are obliged "historically" to call the discourse of man. Given the accepted charge of the notions of production and constitution, one might reformulate this "The discourse of man is in the metaphor of woman." A large woman, a very stout woman rolled into our existence in 1905. There she is. Before her no stranger had ever stroked my face. There is no later rival to the first woman a man becomes attached to—the first woman, that is to say, who is really a woman, the first one who appears to him surrounded by all the magnificence Parisian society insists on. The woman. The look. Luxuriously sheer. Incredibly silky. Unmistakably discrimination against women is disguised. As a matter of fact, some of these ways seem to fit into the framework of education. All her mannerisms come back to me when I think of her hands. It's almost as if you held back the hands of time when you help counteract the signs of aging with Creme No. 1. At once I knew she had spent all her life in feeling miserable; this misery was her native element; its fluctuations, its varying depths, alone gave her the impression of moving and moving. What bothers me is that a sense of misery is not enough to make a permanent soul. Trying to make sense of what had happened he had sometimes thought there was absolute truth, something of wholeness and goodness which called to him from outside the dark tangle of himself. That's the way she is; that's the way they all are. From the very first day of marriage you cease to be an animal working for a mistress—you're a human being working for an animal. They make such a mess of you that in the end you deserve everything you get. Now I've punished her and that makes me the bully. That's how it's always been: she's the martyr and I'm the bully. But who made me this way? I was too worn out from working to support her to be able to hit her. Jim's a hopeless romantic. I'm the ultimate pragmatist. So I was a little worried about his going overboard on my diamond engagement ring. Then again, I didn't want to discourage him

too much. So instead of telling him I didn't need a diamond, and kicking myself later, I practiced kicking. I can reach farther with a kick. With one thrust, I can make it count. I'm not afraid to hurt someone who's hurting me. I made sure he saw a jeweler. He found out that today you can get a really nice diamond, without breaking your budget, for about 2 month's salary. Jim says it's the best 2 months he's ever spent. I think the trial was the worst part. I hated the sight of him. I described the details of what took place. Since I knew the rapist previously and had been friendly with him, I guess the jury decided that I was his property and he could do whatever he wanted with me. A diamond is forever. He is a person who has a certain mental toughness (he does not fall for the first ideological street singer he happens to meet) and who is therefore able consciously to choose the most attractive to him. The words for male persons are also used as the common gender nouns in these instances and this has the effect of constituting an implicit equation between people and male people so that women come to be represented in discourse as a secondary sex, differentiated from an implied male norm. The happiness of man is: I will. The happiness of woman is: he wills. "Behold just now the world became perfect!" "And yes! I can certainly call it happiness. And since you've given it to me, it's something more isn't it? She passed her hand lightly through his hair. Nothing solicits an emotional response quite like thick, radiant, healthy-looking hair. I expect you're thinking I'm pretty and shallow like other Parisian women, but do remember that I'm willing to give you everything. The effect of this status differential within the family should not be overlooked. It helps to explain why many men say women are too pretty to improve the situation. But there is no need to fear that such a way of arranging society will lead to undesirable results. Believe no one who says it is necessary to indulge sex desire. The woman is fifteen, a high school student. It is four o'clock p.m. Her boyfriend's father has picked her up in his car after school to take her to meet his son. When he has pulled the car into the garage, this thirty-seven year old father of six rapes her. Surface is the disposition of woman: a mobile, stormy film over shallow

water. Man's disposition is deep. Woman feels his strength but does not comprehend it. And he was not satisfied. Like a madness, he must go on. He got some large stones, and threw them, one after the other, at the white-burning center of the moon, till there was no moon any more, only a few broken flakes tangled and glittering broadcast in the darkness, without aim or meaning, a darkened confusion. I had no confidence in myself. I kept on feeling, if only I could find some missing **element**, I could enjoy cleaning house. But the whole thing is structured so that a woman loses her identity, so that she puts herself aside for another person. It was not a problem for my husband. He **didn't** need to get his identity from our marriage. He got it from his job. A man's work does not satisfy his material needs alone. It gives him pleasure. Every day, year in and year out, each woman should ask herself, over and over again, "What does this man want me to do, right now?" At last there comes an order to me to satisfy the desires of each of the four; if I go cheerfully, each will give me a crown to help me along my way; if they must employ violence, the thing will be done all the same; but the better to guard their secret, once finished with me they will stab me, and will bury me at the foot of yonder tree. She whimpered: "In reality I possess private property only insofar as I have something vendible." He here bases the impossibility of abolishing private property by transforming it into the concept of property ownership. Possession was his ideal. "There is a golden light in you, which I wish you would give me." So she swerved down to the steep, tree-hidden bank above the pond where the alders twisted their roots. Dazed, her mind was all gone. She felt she had fallen to the ground and was spilled out. She could feel her soul crying out in her, lamenting desolately. She accepted it without remark. Nothing mattered to her. What did the small privacies matter? Women do not live their own lives but perform pre-established functions. Happiness must be subordinated to the discipline of monogamic reproduction, to the established system. There is no need to fear. The **second** had me kneel down, between his legs: sometimes

he slapped, powerfully but in a nervous manner, either my cheeks or my breasts; sometimes his impure mouth fell to sucking mine. In an instant my faced turned purple, my chest red ... I was in pain, I begged him to spare me, tears lept from my eyes; they roused him, he accelerated his acitivities; he bit my tongue, and the two strawberries on my breasts were so bruised that I slipped backward, but was kept from falling. They thrust me toward him, I was everywhere more furiously harrassed, and his ecstasy supervened...That's enough. If you use any more of these passages we agreed to cut I will stop your play. He played so roughly with me. I thought it was all in fun at first, but then he started slapping me, throwing me wildly around, leading me toward the bed. I screamed, and he slapped me harder and harder. I felt I had fallen to the ground and was spilled out, like water on the earth. Motionless and spent she remained in the gloom. Though even now she was aware that in the *darkness* was a little tumult of ebbing flakes on light, a cluster dancing secretly in a round, twining and coming steadily together. They were gathering a heart again, they were coming once more into being. Gradually the fragments caught together reunited, heaving, rocking, dancing, falling back as in panic, but working their way home again persistently, making semblance of fleeing away when they had advanced, but always flickering nearer, a little closer to the mark, the cluster growing mysteriously larger and brighter, as gleam after gleam fell in with the whole, until a distorted, frayed moon was shaking upon the waters again, reasserted, renewed, trying to recover from its convulsion, to get over the disfigurement and the agitation, to be whole and composed, at peace.

sources of *Decoder Process* text segments

Hannah Arendt . . . . *On Revolution*
Silvano Arieti . . . . *Creativity*
Honoré de Balzac . . . . *Pere Goriot*
Donald Barthelme . . . . *Sadness*
Roland Barthes . . . . *The Pleasure of the Text*
Charles Baudela . . . . *Flowers of Evil (Letter)*
Catherine Belsey . . . . *Critical Practice*
Bertolt Brecht . . . . *Plays, vol. 1*
Fred Dubery & John Willats . . . . *Perspectives & Other Drawing Systems*
Emile Durkheim . . . . *The Division of Labor in Society*
Paul Feyerabend . . . . *Against Method*
Charles Harwell . . . . *Disordered Personalities in Literature*
Jacques Lacan . . . . *The Insistence of the Letter in the Unconscious*
D.H. Lawrence . . . . *Women in Love*
Herbert Marcuse . . . . *Eros & Civilization*
Karl Marx & F. Engels . . . . *The German Ideology, pt. 1*
Iris Murdoch . . . . *Nuns & Soldiers*
                                         A Severed Head
                                         Under the Net
Vladimir Nabokov . . . . *Nabokov's Dozen ("Mademoiselle O")*
Frederick Nietzsche . . . . *The Portable Nietzsche, selections*
Christopher Norris . . . . *Deconstruction: Theory & Practice*
Jean Rhys . . . . *Wide Sargasso Sea*
                                         Voyage in the Dark
Gyatri Spivack . . . . *Displacement & the Discourse of Women*
Peter Weiss . . . . *Marat/Sade*
Ludwig Wittgenstein . . . . *The Blue & Brown Books*

-Work in America: Report of a Special Task Force to the Secretary of H.E.W.
-Our Bodies, Ourselves, 1976 edition

Advertisements taken from Fashion magazines:
Vogue . . . . Chanel crème, De Beers diamonds
Glamour . . . . Hanes hose, Style shampoo

The Imperialism of Syntax

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This intervention presents an alternative to the Western image of syntax; the two facing pages of Chinese characters literally mirror each other. They force the reader to notice the visual structure of language's lay-out. The usual invisibility of syntactical arrangement makes the dominant mode into a fixed, given, or "natural" progression of words on a page. The author demonstrates the beauty and power of alternatives and she literally reflects (thinks) on her Eastern arrangement: is the alternative merely backward or inverted? does the Eastern syntax function merely in relation to the dominant model? is the Eastern syntax a reversal of the dominant model? This is an intervention that offers a thinking-image of resistance.

THE IMPERIALISM OF SYNTAX

殖民化了的文化

戰爭，鴉片，貧窮的動亂
迫使你離開了祖國。
現在，面對着這塊土地，它將限制你
長途跋涉後踏上它的國土，
歸屬別人的語言，別人的句法。
很快，那些語法的規戒使你忘了自己。
生硬的發音，成了讓人奚落的
笑料。
強咽舌上新文化的苦澀，
爲了生存，得證明你的同化，
證實自我的消失。

現在你在這兒
還記得你的句法，你的語言？
它們本應使你記住自我的存在。

這兒
當有人要你回到你來的地方去，
告訴他；你也走你的。

這塊土地
沒人能染指
沒人能佔有
然而却這樣發生了。

力量來自於刻苦奮鬥的生活。

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當有人要你回到你來的地方去，
告訴他：你也走不的。

宣佈土地
沒人能染指
沒人能佔有
然而却這樣發生了。

力量來自於刻苦奮鬥的生活。

Condensed Article

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The "Condensed Article" explores the telephone's promise of immediate access to distant voices through the technological preservation and condensation of speech. The author calls up what spooks or haunts the structure of telephonics. By unraveling these encrypted connections the essay demonstrates and explains the relay/delay interference signal between confusion and certainty. In that sense, the essay connects telephonics to Bell. The story of Alexander Graham Bell from his early childhood to his invention of the telephone holds many clues to the repressed desires in the telephonic structure. But, rather than a biography, the author writes a "biophony", somewhere between empiricity and speculation. This speculation operates a party line between Heidegger's "What is Called Thinking", Abraham's and Torok's psychoanalysis of crypts, Jacques Derrida's desedimentation of "the death sentence" structure, and many other stations.

M .... iCrographia

In the early 1860's a New York newspaper telescripted a warning to its readers against buying stock in a new fangled device called the "telephone". Here goes the rumorous stock market, switched on by telephonic speculation. As in *The Trial* of Kafka, rumor and arrest are part of the same performative experience:

> A man about 43 years of age giving the name Joshua Coppersmith has been arrested for attempting to exhort funds from ignorant and superstitious people by exhibiting a device which he says will convey the human voice any distance over metallic wires. He calls the instrument a "telephone", which is obviously intended to imitate the word "telegraph" and win the confidence of those who know the success of the latter instrument. Well informed people

Condensed Art

After the Crash: The Cl

The Bell telephone shapes a locus which suspends absolute departure. The promise of belonging to the telephonic connection nor yet beyond or outside it, terminates speech in arrival of silence ("Learning to speak is like learning to shoot," AGB), the click stuns you. Other. The phone's non-finitizing promise is broken. Designed to uphold the technical continually reinscribes its terror at loss in such texts as are properly designated Telephone network.

To avoid the crash whose site is your ear, you hang up together, you deny the **cli ck.** This way, the other is not gone but survives the telephone, just as she was prior to it. The telephone only places the call. Thus Pacific Bell, offering a pacifier to the teleconsumer, prints a

In a crisis of small narcissistic difference, the newspaper presses charges against the parasitical instrument upon which it will develop addictive dependency. Pitting dots and dashes against the voice, the tele-graph against the tele-phone, the newspaper forms an agency with the police authorities of small-time writing. However, the logic of opposition informing the difference between writing and vocal systems, phonetics and telephonetics, has no conceptual sanctuary to shelter it.

icle The Black Box

ick: The Survival Guide

death resisted however destines itself towards the click at your end. The click, neither fully

noise's finality. A shot that rings out to announce, like an upwardly aimed pistol, the

It closes in on you, momentarily absolving *Mitsein* or the Heideggerian "being with" the

difficulty when it comes to cathecting absence, the telephone, whether consciously or not,

Books, of which this fragment would be merely a teletype flash in an infinitely crossed

Survival Guide whose first words are *a major disaster*.[1] The last introductory word to the directory of rescue transmissions promises, (as do the stickers on French telephone booths)

you can save a life! The borderline zone of temporal action cuts a path across the decisive moments separating life from death, as if the lines of telephony *can make the difference between life and death.* This, precisely, is the difference that Alexander Graham Bell and Thomas A. Watson were committed to making, but from the dimension of an afterlife, which is to say from a paranormal position or a repression of the absolute difference. They argued a far more uncanny projection of the return call than we can perceive through the iron curtain blocking our view from the genealogy of a technological desire, a desire that celebrated ideally, the techné and participated in a rhetoric pumping the artificial self. Already heterogeneous, the self that speaks into the phone or receives the call splits off from its worldly complexity, relocating partial selves to transmitting voices in the fundamental call for help. The call for help is what Kafka imagines in his diaries: Alone. He would be in pain. The telephone rings. The voice tells him, *don't worry, we're coming to help you.*[2] In Kafka's diary of pain the phone responds to your aphonic call for help.

Instant Theory cl...ick

If one were to set an event, a date or a time-bomb in order to see the beginning of the modern concept of technology touch off, then this event gets stirred up by the invention of condensed milk. In fact something like the history of positive technology is unthinkable without the extension of this maternal substance into its technologized other, in other words, its precise mode of preservation and survival.[3] Where on this body of lactate diffusion does the telephone plug in? First, let us sense the withdrawals for which the telephone speaks. This has to do with a certain concept of orality in part guiding the rapport to the telephone. Even the ear opened for Bell like a hearing mouth. On the most materially banal level, think of Watson's many scrupulous attempts at explaining the extent to which the lips had to fit themselves inside the labia of the telephone cavity. Something was always going on between the body's mouth as the receiver-secrets were being passed along. Of what order? The disaster of the mouth, the medusoid rift, reflects the implacable grimace of technology. It's a mouth that twists along the umbilicus of loss. Loss. Where is it contained and who keeps watch over it? As if something like a

crypt had been inserted into the telephone's receiver.

We may have felt the parasitical inclusion of a crypt, always double and doubling, duplicitous like the ear, inhabiting the haunted telephone, operating the speaking automaton which is in fact a monument to an impossible mourning, a megaphone to the beyond. In the particularized case of Bell, there had been something that he could not swallow, a death paired, impossible to assimilate or digest and whose figuration shaped the place of the telephone -- properly a place of absence, where the other speaks in the absent tense of its many voices, engaging multiple path transmissions of disfigured tracings. In the meanwhile, the ghosts that accompanied both Watson and Bell, whose permanent residence has been registered neither inside nor outside technology, have been made to disappear, falsely translating the most uncanny of phenomena, whose effect is not reducible to a phenomenology of spirits, into a cannily at-hand household object -- an organ attachable, that holds a membership card to the human body, from which it detaches. Hanging on the wall and placed on a desk it functions like a family picture or any another partially tranquilized fetish. Whatever the maze of interpretive constructions the point that might be recovered from these inventories of the imaginary rests on an inarticulable cut of separating, a story of disaster to which every reading of technology owes its opening impulse and projected end.

Technology, perhaps more so than any other thing except for a certain illumination of a god, is inseparable from catastrophe in a radically explicit way. Cutting lines and catastrophizing, the telephone has been associated with a maternalized force. Now, the maternal is that which withdraws, leaving traces and a sense of the call. The maternal calls to you from afar. According to a certain logic, mourning is broached by an idealization and interiorization of the mother's image, which implies her loss and the withdrawal of the maternal. The call tracing the lost object shows that the telephone maintains this line of disconnection while dissimulating the loss, acting like a pacifier.[4] But at the same time it acts as monument to an irreducible disconnection and thus runs like incorporation, a kind of pathology inhibiting mourning, offering an alternative to the process of introjection. In this sense the telephone operates along lines whose structures promote fantasmatic, unmediated, instantaneous, magical, sometimes hallucinatory flashes.[5] What happens to the perished Other when

mourning is inhibited? The refusal to mourn causes the lost "love object" to be preserved in a crypt like a mummy, maintained as the binding around what is not there. Somewhat like freeze dried foods, the passageway is sealed off and marked (in the psyche) with the place and date in commemoration.[6]

The silent pathos of object-preservation, linked to food assimilation, discloses a mode of orality which the telephone draws forth. The work of mourning symbolically consists in eating the dead — what Derrida calls *mors*, the bit.[7] The losses are cut in the telephone, whose ringing repetition denies the death drive in which it nevertheless participates. In its extension to the locality of eating or vomiting the *mors* makes the telephone an exemplary simulator of mourning and its disorders. The telephone makes you swallow what is not there. It contains preservatives. At the same time, you spill out a part of yourself that contains the Other; in this way, it is a vomitorium. To these additives condensed milk comes in, if we can still hold it down, because the question of preserving and swallowing what no longer is there —

> a specific form of mourning sickness
> — may well be guiding all the missiles
> of technology.

Assuming the telephone responds to a protocol that would be exemplary, then catastrophe and the uncanny spread their prehensions at the root of every technological incursion into the real. The technology of preserving food, arguably the first true technology in the modern sense, originates in precisely such a narrative. It emerges from the calamity associated with the Donner party, a group of pioneers trapped in 1846 in the snowy Sierra Nevada as they made their way from east to west. **National nausea** was aroused when it was learned that they were forced to eat their own dead to survive. This *horrific event in American history*, recounted most recently by Kathleen Woodward in the "Introduction" to *The Technological Imagination: Theories and Fictions*, furnishes the grounds for Herbert Blau's *The Donner Party: It's Crossing* and is sublated in the account of Daniel Boorstin to the achievement of Gail Borden. *Moved by the suffering of the Donner party, Borden devised a practical solution to what he doggedly perceived as only a problem rather than a testament to the human condition.*[8] (Though I don't quite get the sense of this reproach–does cannibalism offer a testament to the human condition, is the literalization of incorporation

of the dead that testament? is this what happens to everyone who makes the move from the east to the west coasts? – and though Woodward's description of Borden's solution trivializes his discovery to a playful imagination, it is worth reading this drama into the network that connects all technology to the grounds of commemorative art work. Woodwards ho! *Borden, an enterprising* bricoleur *with a playful imagination, determined to find a method to make food more portable. In 1849 he discovered 'an improved process of preserving the nutritious properties of meat, or animal flesh, of any kind, by obtaining the concentrated extract of it, and combining it with flour or vegetable meal, and drying or baking the mixture in an oven, in the form of a biscuit or cracker.*[9] This in turn led him to invent condensed milk.)

The technology of preserving milk, of rescuing other perishables from natural spoilage, can be traced back, therefore, to the catastrophe marked by the event of incorporation, a sort of auto-cannibalism which had the travelers ingest that which among them was dead. This still sticks in the throat of all preservatives, this original feast of technological remorse – sinking one's teeth into the flesh of the other. The crypt cracked an opening when missing children started signifying the container. Condensed and liquified, the dialactate body of that which is missing was to be swallowed. Borden did not merely create a condensed milk product, but a general theory of condensation that impinges upon discourse and the transcendental signifier: *Condense our sermons,* Borden advised a minister, *the world is changing. In the direction of condensing . . . Even lovers write no poetry, nor any other stuff and nonsense, now. They condense all they have to say, I suppose into a kiss.* The kiss is the abolition of sense, the miniaturization of all postal systems. At any rate, the movement points towards a reader's digest of utterance, towards a radical digestibility of all that is. This is based on the morsel that will

<div style="text-align:center">

never have been digested,
not by you and not
by me.

</div>

Call a Friend cl∧∧∧ ick ick

Following Dr. Clarence J. Blake's suggestion, Bell gets hold of

a human ear to use as a phonautograph instead of making an artifical imitation of it. How to get the ear in motion, to vibrate? -this is the next problem. Alexander Graham Bell recollects the moment. *The idea was novel, and struck me accordingly, and I requested my friend to prepare a specimen (of the human ear) for me, which he did. While engaged in these experiments I was struck with the remarkable disproportion in weight between the membrane and the bones that were vibrated by it.* (*m*, 123)[10] This marks the moment when Bell begins to construct what will eventually become our telephone. At the receiving end, as we know, there was Watson. Bell refers to Watson as *friend.* Perhaps this represents a generous signifier, a slightly valueless gesture of acknowledgement, or even the truth. Perhaps this Watson was a friend Bell could count on: *The results, however, were unsatisfactory and discouraging. My friend Mr. Thomas A. Watson, who assisted me in this first experiment, declared that he heard a faint sound proceed from the telephone at his end of the circuit, but I was unable to verify his assertion.* (*m*, 47)

We travel the full circuit from one to the other, from one orifice to the other, between friends, a transmission bubble, a scratch noise of discord. While this passage does not present itself with the manifest traits of ambivalence, much less a demolition expert's job well done, let me refresh your memory. The point made by Bell says that he could not verify or confirm what Watson had said he had heard. What place do "friends" take in scientific rhetoric? This designation could amount to a promotion, a merit increase or a displacement of the nature of their relationship; in any case it's what Watson gets within a scientific explication, and not in the personal memoirs of fondness, set aside by the inventor in a parascientific text for his grandchildren, or grandfather, to enjoy. In walks a friend during the course of Bell's scientific research, to help him out. This is not malicious slander—let's not get too dramatic about our inflections. But as a description its accuracy does not seem unimpeachable either. Perhaps they were friends, maybe this was how science was conducted in those days, among friends, and Bell was just getting a little help from this friend. Fine. They were friends. Mr. Watson my friend assisted me, lending his ear to the substitute dead ear, claim-

wrong, so what his ear claims to have grasped has to be set aside. It doesn't end here. We have already suggested the precarious positioning of a rumoring audibility. This ear opens the question of priority. *Who was the first to hear the telephone speak*, even if it only mouthed a faint whisper to its auditor?

Yet, what if there will have been precisely no original sound at all, not in the sense of the telephone's technicity? Like the big bang, the telephone's first sonic emission will always have taken place prior to it, no place — a first crack, therefore, that, never being first, sheds the structure of simplicity that reduces a sheer telecommunicability to the hopelessly pitched poles of sender and receiver. The transmissions complexify themselves at the outset, suspending any simple certitude about the first emission — whether it came from Bell or his father, his grandfather, his mother's comatose ear or the friendly ghosts travelling within Mr. Watson's earshot. The conception date cannot be fixed absolutely, nor can the operation of its strict emergence. For I *was unable to verify his assertion.* All we know is that it had something to do with a dead ear that Watson claimed he heard speaking, or, more precisely still: he caught it "groaning." But does this not correspond to the essential structure of fundamental telephonics, namely, *I was unable to verify his assertions?* It literally stacks up to hearsay when Watson says he hears; the other cannot verify, cannot, at this fragile point of entry, know. Unless, a hundred years later or so, the CIA has you on tap. But it remains legally, epistemologically and technically unclear whether this sort of earwitnessing amounts to knowing. (Did Polonious know he was a rat?) Whatever Watson heard that day, Bell claims not to have verified. Under what conditions would it have been conceivable to verify what Watson said he heard him say? Bell means that whatever Watson heard cannot be said again, not to us now nor to Bell then. It was not part of a structure of sure iterability, could not be quoted, did not bear repetition. It did not indicate an occasion, as Watson would say, for the *fertile awakening* of the ear. But how can Bell ever have hoped to hear what Watson heard? Bell can only have heard what his ear could tell him.

Visible Speech and the Bell Boys

Bell was the third Bell in a line of direct descent to be a pro-

fessional in the field of speech. In the early part of the nineteenth century, his grandfather, Alexander Bell, was a recognized authority on pure diction, a teacher of speech, and the author of a pop textbook on elocution, familiarly known as 'Elegant Extracts'. We are intent on shaking up the reputedly intractable father-son incorporated that is indicated in a number of other texts on the subject. At best, father's tend to occupy the agreeably remote but urgent space of an operator for geniuses as they loop back to the figure of the grandfather for a direct line to future engenderment. Long distance recommends itself if anything is to be accomplished, particularly under the pressure of an intimate configuration. Still, paternal removal systems amount only to a momentary suspension.

Freud has given abundant explanation of a grandparently primacy in terms of the affective bonding that too easily slips into bondage with a precariously local connection. This is important to establish at the outset, though our purpose does not consist in elaborating a psychology of the son at this point. Fathers, as in Kafka, spread their bodies across the global map, leaving very little (but immeasurable) territory for one to work with. Somehow, they are to be bypassed by an automatic switch. Bell's father was to a certain degree surpassed, a move that carries with it the stroke of ambivalence, at once in service of and annihilating the other, appropriating the work of the other to oneself within a structure of inescapable usurpation. Again, Freud has supplied a reading of the anxiety involved in surpassing the father which, on the Acropolis, he located on the grounds of filial piety. He had himself had an attack of incapacitating piety when at long last he reached his goal of seeing the ancient temple. Let us however skip the familial bypass and get down to business. The survival guides that flank telephone books maintain the connection between a broken, stammering body and the telephone, the father's link.

Melville Bell corrected faults of speech, then, *following his father's methods, and won further local renown by installing a speaking tube in a shop—an innovation for St. John's in the early forties.* Like his son after him Melville Bell repeated the amorous history of his father, in this case by marrying a mature woman. *She was thirty-five. Melville Bell was ten years younger. History was repeated.* (*m*, 17) We know what that means. Among the more engaging things, it means that this family created an extremely fine copying mechanism for the tranmission of desire.

The Melville Bells produced three babies, all of them not girls. The second, born on his grandfather's birthday, March 3, 1847, was baptized Alexander. To his family he was 'Aleck' as long as he lived.

In the mid-forties, in Edinburgh, Melville Bell advertised in the city directory as 'Professor of Elocution and the Art of Speech.' He soon announces his famous system of alphabetics known as 'Visible Speech'.

In Visible Speech, Melville Bell reduced to a series of printed symbols the anatomical positions which the speaking organs take in uttering sounds. These symbols were so drawn as to indicate the shapes taken by the lips, the positions of the tongue, and so on, and once a sound was written in its proper symbols, the initiate had only to reproduce the physical position with his own organs of speech in order to reproduce the sound. There was, for instance, a symbol indicating 'closed lips, voice passed through the nose.' There were only ten basic symbols, and these, in various combinations, covered the whole range of vocal sound in any tongue.

At a time when music and speaking machines were to share the same status, as for example in E.T.A. Hoffmann's *Automaton*, AGB was also musically formed by a mother who could not hear. In case we weren't on alert for the hazards of reconstituting narratives, we must at least with this observation be on guard before easily plucked psycho-genealogies of the sort mother/ear, although this in the final analysis is not altogether wrongheaded. In other words, conclusions can be correct even when unsupported by the mere empiricity of facts. Aleck, according to M., *inherited* an acute ear from a deaf mother. This means that the biographer got herself involved in the family story of denial.[11] Still, it makes sense. Who would be more attuned to the hearing than a deaf mother?

As a child AGB and his siblings developed different kinds of retention structures, storage pockets for relics, and body parts —what we tend to call a "natural"museum. The three Bell boys collected natural objects, animate and inanimate. Aleck himself went *through a period of intense scientific inquiry in which he dissected field mice and collected the skulls of other small animals for his 'museum'.* (*m*, 25) The compulsion to collect and preserve, the imagination that contains within it a museum which doesn't let go of its object, shaped the childhood of a boy who *didn't like to play games.*

As we know, Ma Bell was partially deaf. AGB's earliest performances, his first discursive repetitions, were designed to the ear of a partially deaf mother. The suturing of disconnected speech began by translation into a system other than the mother's museum of the deaf. His father trained Aleck to speak a particularly accentless English which was punctilious regarding diction and pronunciation. As a result AGB could be identified neither as an Englishman nor as a Scotsman, nor as anything contaminated by the accent marks of local speech. This suspension of regional traits, the porcelain quality of an unmarked speech, indicates membership in a club of literary speech effects while also urging the beginning of a broadcast system of diction that harbors its own myth of phonetic purity, belonging topographically nowhere. The homogenization of a spoken language gathered into a traceless spot of geonational graphics, foreshadows the network of links that make up the smooth run of long distance language.

Once, on a visit to London, Melville Bell had heard a performance of the philosophical toy, "Euphonia," Professor Faber's "speaking machine" which was making mechanical noises at the Egyptian Hall. Upon returning, the father of visible speech offered his two older boys a prize if they could themselves make a speaking automaton. *I don't suppose he thought we could produce something of value in itself,* AGB used to say, *but he knew we could not experiment and manufacture anything which even tried to speak, without learning something of the voice, and the throat and the mouth -- all that wonderful mechanism of sound production in which he was so interested.* (*m,* 26) Neither boy had ever seen an automaton, so they decided to copy the structure of the human organs of speech. *My brother and I went to work; he was to make the lungs and the vocal cords, I was to make the mouth and the tongue. He made a bellow for the lungs, and a very good vocal apparatus out of rubber. I devised a skull and moulded a tongue with rubber, stuffed with cotton wool, and supplied the soft part of the throat with the same material.* The word "material" verges, for this scientific project as in Freud's, on essentializing a rhyme with *mater.* *Then I arranged the joints, so that the jaw and the tongue could move. It was a great day for us when we fitted the two parts of the device together* (two, always two of them, a partnership, double and uncanny).

Did it speak, or, what spoke? According to Bell's recording it squeaked and squawked a good deal, *But it made a very passable imitation of 'Ma-ma, Ma-ma!'* Repetition and imitation, together the two men reconstruct the possibility of channeling the self-repeating ma-ma. M. narrates: *The great thing was that it worked, Melville energetically plying the bellows; Aleck opening and shutting the lips. And if its 'Ma-ma' which transported the youngsters was actually somewhat less human than it seemed to their prejudiced ears, its construction had taught them the mechanism of human speech. Melville Bell was satisfied.* (*m*, 27)

The boys were pathologists of speech. In the late summer afternoons Aleck held his Skye terrier between his knees, opening and shutting its jaws, trying to oblige the dog to growl 'How-do-you-do?' As an activity, teaching to the speechless was globalized from the start, though AGB eventually let the canine pedagogy go in favor of other speaking entities.

Aleck made his first public appearance for the purpose of demonstrating his father's system of visible speech. Of these tests, later repeated publicly in Glasgow, one is described by a contemporary and friend of Melville Bell, the Reverend David Macrea:

> *We had a few friends with us that afternoon, and when Bell's sons had been sent away to another part of the house, out of earshot, we gave Bell the most peculiar and difficult sounds we could think of, including words from the French and the Gaelic, following these with inarticulate sounds as of kissing and chuckling. All these Bell wrote down in his Visible Speech alphabet and his sons were then called in.*

> *I well remember our keen interest and astonishment as the lads-not yet thoroughly versed in the new alphabet-stood side by side looking earnestly at the paper their father had put in their hands, and slowly reproducing sound after sound just as we had uttered them. Some of these sounds were incapable of phonetic representation with our alphabet.*

> *One friend in the company had given as his contri-*

bution a long yawning sound, uttered as he stretched his arms and slowly twisted his body like one in the last stages of weariness. Of course Visible Speech could only represent the sound and not the physical movement and I well remember the shouts of laughter that followed when the lads, after studying earnestly the symbols before them, reproduced the sound faithfully, but like the ghost of its former self in its detachment from the stretching and body twisting with which it had originally been combined. (*m*, 32)

The voice disembodiment of which the last lines speak is perhaps most striking about this description, giving vent to the ghost-utterance that disengages itself from a presumably living though wearily wasted body (*like one in the last stage of weariness*)

Whereas earlier we found an example of repetition for the sake of the maternal ear, here we witness repetition in the form of a paternalizing mouth organ – the lads are called in to mouth the *oeuvre* of the father, to bring forth into the space of representation the visible speech formerly hidden, concealed. The brothers conducted the performance with such earnest mimetic application that even a yawn, the resounding cavity of paternal buccality, echoes at the end to mark its end. What they appear to produce, taking down the lessons of the father, concerns the Hamletian ghost of its former self. The link-up of this ghost to the lads, one of whom will survive to report the other, has merely been installed at this point of the biographical narrative, mediated by the father. Between the maternally enfolded ear and the paternal mouth, the pair of brothers are already on the telephone, a project they had begun to construe in a determined fashion since at least the speaking automaton built under the command of the father to utter *ma-ma*.

Surviving the Mama-Papa Machine cl...ø-ß ˙•ßç ≲ **1**˙˙ ∆©ƒ®´≥......ick

Aleck became a passionately absorbed teacher, endeavoring to restore speech to silence, trying to induce silence towards a language that might be apprehended by his maternal ear. He put *one pupil after another through the test sen-*

tences of his father's system-'*I see the panting spirit sigh*' (not *spirits eye*)... *demonstrating the postures approved for lecturing, for reciting, for preaching; right foot in front, weight on left foot; neck upright, chin horizontal; arms relaxed* .... (*m*, 44) The test or paradigm sentence feeds into the receiving mouth of telephony, one that can hardly be taken as fortuitous in its formation or usage. The spirit, diverted in terms of sight perception (not spirits eye) wanders through a barely linguistic sound production, that of sighing, as if in the moan of a sustained lament. The test sentence teaches the deaf the conversion from sight to hearing effected by the distillation of a full bodied entity into spirit.

In the typical drama of fatherly erasure, M. asserts of Alexander Bell: *in his father's absence he came to his full stature professionally.* The doublings into which Aleck grew are now to become spiritualized, incorporated into an inwardly stretched Bell system and partially externalized in the form of a substitute other, Watson. We are in the year 1870. The eldest son, Melville Bell, faces the threat of the same disease from which the younger brother has died. Aleck goes to Edinburgh to relieve his brother of his teaching cares, but just as health appears to have been restored, *Melville died with shocking suddenness.* A double dispossession, losing both brothers, one of whom he had tried to replace, and who himself in name replaces the father. *The double burden of teaching during his father's absence, and his most recent anxieties, had had their full effect on Aleck's health. His grief-stricken parents suddenly became aware of his pallor and frequent exhaustion. Their fears were confirmed. Aleck's health was seriously impaired.* (*m*, 44-45) Seriously impaired. Go over the details. Melville Bell had been lecturing in America to return home to find Aleck who in his absence *came to his full stature professionally.* This implied a classical structure of disaster: the absent father returns to discover the fullness of his absence. Theseus, for example. Except that here there is no *cordon sanitaire* limiting the drama to a single son or figure of alterity. Melville Bell will not have been the only one supplanted, but Aleck's singularity coincides, at least symbolically, with the sacrifice of his brothers, whom Aleck had tried to replace. It quickly becomes clear that from now on everything depends on Aleck; a restitutional structure emerges. Aleck will be re-

sponsible for returning to his father his due. Replaceability will become his burden. Charged with translating the departed figures into a ghost of themselves, he assumes responsibility for reconnecting that which had disappeared into the theater of the invisible. The spirit's sigh. The remaining triangle prepares to leave the mother continent. The *recollection of my early experiences,* said Melville Bell of his former visit to Newfoundland, *determined me to try the effect of a change of climate for the benefit of my only remaining son....* (*m,* 45)

The move is made towards what remains, a surviving son. At fifty-one, Melville Bell abandoned his London career, its professional associations and its friendships, and, very largely, the fame for which he had worked through a lifetime of extraordinary activity, which was never to be regained. *For the parents could not be separated from this one surviving son.* (*m,* 45)

We need to understand this drama of exhausted survival and convoke if we have to, which we do, the many ghosts that accompany its unfolding. The family, shrouded in the veils of grief, sails to a new region, disconnecting from everything – an event at once consisting in the cause and effect of the move. It is amputated, reduced to its essentiality of family - Dasein, the maternal, paternal and a fragile sign of its future. The whole drama becomes involved in the pathos of revival, reviving the one remaining son whose task it will be to recall the fraternal spirits, to make them respond to his secret conjurings so that a father's mouth and a mother's ear might be granted a place of reception for the voices of the lost sons. Remember, though by now you must have forgotten, that this represents the kind of scenario which Freud evokes much later, his child has gone away, the telephone brings him back as a voice departed, where the telephone becomes the origin of writing: the voice of the departed, instantaneously transcribed. Alexander Graham Bell's project will consist in literalizing the opening cut into absence made by Visible Speech.

The Technological Cut cl· ·   ·   ·   ·   · ick

Since one of the branches of its genealogical tree link it to the predicament of deafness, the telephone will always, unhingingly, be hard of hearing. With the deaf-mute, **language is cut**

to the quick. Theories rush in emergency supplies to dress the wound. The stakes are high and abundantly argued. We shall have to content ourselves with the results of a microrecording that situates telephonics within an order of deafness. The condition which Dr. Johnson called the most desperate of human calamities, deafness focalized the subject's site in language and the spatialization of accoustical images. David Wright, the deaf man who wrote, and among the first to accede to language in this way, speaks of the phantasmal voices which he constantly hears.[12] The deaf suffer an *a priori* disconnectedness that technology promises to repair, ever trying to rehabilitate the Wild Boy of Aveyron. The deaf are unable phenomenally to hear the Other. I think Bell was working both sides of the switchboard at this time. On the night shift, and always working for the Other, he outlines his early incredulity concerning the value of lip-reading to the deaf:

> My original scepticism concerning the possibility of speech reading had one good result: it led me to devise an apparatus that might help the children ... a machine to hear for them, a machine that should render visible to the eyes of the deaf the vibrations of the air that affect our ears as sound ... It was a failure, but that apparatus, in the process of time, became the telephone of today. It did not enable the deaf to see speech as others hear it, but it gave ears to the telegraph, and today we hear in Boston what is spoken in New York and Chicago. (*m*, 57)

If you and I hear each other it is because the apparatus to make the deaf see sky-writing ghosts knew failure. To render visible to the eyes was not possible. Another way of saying this is that he could not invent an enabling machine to make the dead hear the vibrations of the air. Still another way of translating this failure that *should render visible* - as if a commandment or an ethical imperative were being stated – is that Visible Speech failed Alexander Graham Bell at this crucial time of mourning. The deaf and the departed, linked by the register of the interlingual dead, could not be reached, not yet, and not through a speech conjuring apprehended in terms of its visibility.

I trust, Mr. Bell concludes apologetically, *that you will*

pardon personal allusions to my own work. He trusts and he apologizes; he has somehow become much too personal – pardon personal allusions to my own work – in this history of an aberrant invention, as if his ownmost work were to expose the personal work of the grief-stricken. He assigns the origin of the telephone to the missing children known as the deaf–children or siblings fully out of earshot. *It is only right that it should be known that the telephone is one of the products of the work of the Horace Mann School for the Deaf, and resulted from my attempts to benefit the children of this school.* (*m,* 57)

In those days there were always people like the young neighbor, Richards, occupying the room next to Bell's,

> *who would let Bell string wires on their premises, who would make up a human circuit for him by clasping hands in a row, and fill their ears with water to listen for an electrical effect; all because he was such a very engaging young man, even if he was, regrettably, a little mad.*

Like the archetypal inventor eaten up by a compulsion or a starving Other who inhabits him, AGB allows himself to be vampirized by his machine. He virtually ceases to eat and to sleep, technologizing himself to the point of breaking down.[13] *He ate as infrequently as he slept, and in the spring of 1873, he was a wreck. In May he went home to Brantford, to his mother's anxious care ....* (*m,* 58)

The Deaf Mute

AGB returned to Boston in October, 1873. He took up residency at Salem. Thomas Sanders, his patron, welcoming back his protégé, wonders: *Which of us is happier-- I who have found such an artist, or you who have found such a prince?* We are still talking art, and of the poetry diverting a child from the isolation of deafness, saving the child in language, bringing him to the proximity of speech with his father. Alexander Graham Bell did this – an act of genuine *poiesis*–for Thomas Sanders' little boy. The father's unpayable gratitude for this mediated return of the son (to Speech, to him and therefore, in some sense, to the law of the father)

took the form of a transfer of funds. For rendering his child accessible to speech, Sanders granted Bell an atelier in which to pursue his oto-experiments. His mother, Mrs. Sanders, turned over to Bell the entire third floor of her house, *and wires ran down the stairways to the basement workshop* which had been fitted up for the tutor's use.

I offer this detail in order to show a subtle transaction taking place which, while shifting the locality and terms a bit, nonetheless serves to reinforce the structure that has been emerging in its tender frangibility. Bell has entered a strict economy which approaches the incalculable in terms of desire and effects. To reduce it to a rude formula would not rob the economy of its riches, however. The great debt that Mr. Sanders acknowledged was incurred principally as father. Bell was to reconnect his son to him, draw him out of silence's heavy isolation chambers. In return — and it is a question only of returns — Bell incurred a debt towards Mr. Sanders who turned over his home to him, supporting his experiments, his desire to wire up a family dwelling into connection with itself, but currently cut off from itself. The house turned over to Bell is held by a mother. The reduced perspective shows how the telephone in part grew simultaneously with the economy engaged by the assumption of a grateful father attaching a remote son. As the system capable of giving him his son, Bell simultaneously occupies the place of a mother and that of an engendering father, the other to whom and from whom the seed is destined. He gives the father a child. At once transmitting and receiving, AGB speaks conjuringly and makes the thingly silent one emit sounds. The telephone could arise only within such a space divided upon itself from top, the third floor, to rock bottom, the ground, if not *the basement. He also lectured that winter at the School of Oratory of Boston University, where he was 'Professor of Vocal Physiology.'* (*m*, 60) He had not abandoned his father; in fact he has amplifed him, strengthened his debt, splitting the father in two, hearing his encouragement stereophonically, supported on one ear by Melville Bell and the other, Thomas Sanders.

August, 1871 Flint, Michigan "Speech"   cl —√—√—√—√— ick

Speech, he said, *is a mere motion of the air*. His revival

talk shows the air moving with speech, the panting spirit's sigh, as it momentarily runs out of breath. We could say he was now sucking into a bereaved diaphragm the air on whose vocalizations the sibling apparitions were borne. Resucitation through air, nonsubstantializable as it is, infiltrates a number of texts. There will be no telephone without the vaporous phantasms of an air that speaks. What immediately comes to mind, with the instantaneousness of a call out of nowhere, is the bereaved telephone calling that organizes *Franny and Zooey*, a novel rising out of the desire to reconnect a lost brother.[14] But Aleck hasn't even invented the uncanny telephone yet, whose posturing involves an upward and downward movement, locating its possibility in the shuttle between mouth and ear, en route to language's homecoming. Aleck's extensional hermeneutics of aerial speech was disclosed when he was twenty-five.

The Toxic Telephone   cl   ≠   ick

If his own family had diminished to the minimal requirements of familial accountability, AGB soon counted himself in another concept of family, and one that paid tribute, as if to help him cover his impossible debt, to ancestral spirits. Bell entered the reservation of the Six Nations Indians near Brantford in order to analyze, with a view to Visible Speech, their language. What constituted his rapport to the Iroquois, the Mohawks, weaves together the ceremonial and speech, a deeply ritualized rapport to death. The Iroquois language became an object of study for Alexander Bell in a way that permits us to peruse the signifier of their tribal mark. The Mohawks of the Iroquois language derived their name from "real adder"—relating in the other spirituality, with which Bell had some cause of recognition, to the story of a genesis, the Iroquoia or snake that whispered into Eve's ear the desire to incorporate something forbidden, something as modest as an apple. This put God on the line. The retribution of an angry God made itself felt. The tube-like snake had its legs amputated for its toxic telephones. War dances began; paradise became a long-distance call of considerable expense. The first *Guilty!* resounded from Eden's transmitter. Absence, exile

became the rule. (And the call to woman's painful labor.)

Canadasein I cl ——————————————————————————————ick

In the meantime, during his first Canadian winter, Bell had resumed some of his former experiments with tuning forks, based on the work of Helmholtz. The harmonic, or multiple telegraph, was beginning to take shape. He spent hours in the little drawing-room, not unlike Nietzsche soon afterward, singing a single note into the piano, his foot on the pedal, *listening for the answering vibration of correspond-ing key.* (*m*, 53)

Canadasein II cl ⬚⬚⬚ ick

The Bells lived very quietly, but they were liked in Brantford, and there was a distinct note of regret in the rumor that presently got about that the son-- such a nice young man too-- was just a little peculiar. (*m*, 53) If we are to follow M.'s chronology, this is when he starts declaring warlike dances upon the *work of the Creator.* Bell implicated himself in a project where it *was generally felt, when the matter was considered at all, that to teach speech to deaf mutes was to undo the work of the Creator; that if God had intended deaf mutes to talk, He would have given them that power.* (*m*, 54)

M. makes a point of correcting a popular version of tele-phone genesis which has *erroneously made the telephone a direct result of Bell's efforts to give hearing, or a substitute for hearing, to Mabel Hubbard* (*m*, 56), his bride-to-be. We agree with the substitutive claims made by M. for Mabel Bell, placing her as the substitute for a substitute. M. instead traces the telephone to Bell's first experiments *to devise an apparatus that might help deaf children* (Bell). By Bell's own account, this was initiated by his earlier work at the Horace Mann School. *These experiments led directly to the telephone.* As if there could be a direct line. Never eluding its *a priori* calling as an overdetermined instru-ment, the telephone, it seems safe to assume, connected the deaf children's ears, to which Bell was attuned, to his lost brothers as much as to the figure collapsed by his mother and

wife. And if this strange community of receptors seems too cryptic or disjunctive, we have only to think of the dead ear into which he tried in his parental home to whisper life, the ear of the brother. He carries the ear about with him as if transporting the speech conveyance separating a thin membrane of Canada from the beyond, the membrane or veil of grief muffling the sounds of an impending séance. The dispersing point of his breath was aimed at the unhearing children who were still to be brought to language as their sole mode of existence. Again, we recall, that the deaf were considered more radically deprived of life than the blind, for blindly still we dwell in language

Avital Ronell   (415) ....

Notes

[1] The Pacific Bell *Telephone Book,* copyright 1985.

[2] Franz Kafka, *Diaries 1914-1923,* ed. Max Brod, trans. Joseph Kresh (New York: Schocken Books, 1965) 128. See also Laurence A. Rickels' discussion of Kafka's phone calls to Felice which in turn throws open the telephone switchboard at the Hotel Occident (GS 2:197). In *Aberrations of Mourning: Writing on German Crypts* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1988) 272-273.

[3] The condensed milk dialactate, if you will, is the way Woodward starts recounting the "Technological Revolution" in her introduction to *The Technological Imagination: Theories and Fictions.* "Dialactate" was coined to capture the flow of this argument by Matt George, University of California, Berkeley.

[4] The sudden death of AGB's brothers seems to call for an interpretation of telephonics in terms of the cryptonymy elaborated by Maria Torok and Nicolas Abraham, and Jacques Derrida. AGB signed a contract with his second brother, promising that communication superior to that of spiritual-

ism would be attempted. Nowadays many grave sites in California maintain open telephone lines.

[5] Gregory Ulmer, in *Applied Grammatology* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1985) 61, reviews perspectives that shed light on mourning as the idealization and interiorization of the mother's image.

[6] Jacques Derrida, "Fors," trans. Barbara Johnson, *The Georgia Review* 21: 2 (1977)

[7] Jacques Derrida, "Economimesis," in S. Agacinski et al., *Mimesis: des articulations* (Paris: Flammarion, 1975) 90.

[8] *The Myths of Information: Technology and Postindustrial Culture*, ed. Kathleen Woodward (New York: Coda Press, 1980), xxv.

[9] Ibid., xx.

[10] Cited in Catherine Mackenzie, *Alexander Graham Bell: The Man Who Contracted Space* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1928) 123. Henceforth we will be dialing "M" for Mackenzie.

[11] The Bell family lived in denial of the mother's deafness. The importance of the deaf in legal history and the regime of metaphysics cannot be overstated. I try to treat this and a number of topoi that appear in this paper in *The Telephone Book: Technology-Schizophrenia-Electric Speech* (University of Nebraska Press, forthcoming). Bell has received a lot of flack for his bias against signing as a principal means of communication for the deaf. Helen Keller, who learned to speak, dedicated her autobiography to him; but since then he has been criticized for forcing speech on the speechless. It ought to be stated, however, that a judicious interpretation of Bell's position on oralism would have to go through the metaphysical demands of the day. If Bell aimed at the perfectibility of the vocal cords, it was chiefly for the purpose of securing human rights for deaf mutes, whose essential humanity depended upon a logocentric membership card. By a simple but juridically necessary tautology, Bell was able to prove that the silent non-hearing citizen was capable of performative vocality. Humanism seems to say to us: no voice, no vote.

[12] David Wright, *Deafness* (New York: Stein and Day, 1969) is discussed in Oliver Sacks' review essay, "Mysteries of the Deaf" in the *New York Times Review of Books* (March 27, 1986) 23-33.

[13] A history of the nervous breakdown would have to link perceptions of nervous disorder with power failures of a technological sort. A probing rhetoric of the psyche would show the degree to which we are constantly borrowing structures from the technosphere.

[14] I haven't yet spoken to you about lighting up on the phone, smoking and the telephone, telling time per cigarette, ashes, language incineration. Wait. Let me get a cigarette. The Lighter? ... Fire! Catch the end passages from *Franny and Zooey* (J.D. Salinger, New York: Bantam Books, 1985, 201-202) for the dead brother impersonated on the line and a phenomenology of hanging up.

Click.

A Writing of the Real

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"The Writing of The Real" uses Jacques Lacan's psychoanalytic theory to explore the "failure in representation, a hole in the middle of perception". The author thinks through the problems this hole presents: gaps, fadings, flickerings, and discontinuities in images and words. This hole or *objet a* cuts us to the quick, cuts certainties and consistencies, and points to a lack and loss in our knowledge, perceptions, and being. This *objet a* reminds us that wholeness in images, languages, or beings exists only in an Imaginary ordering of the world, and that any explanation of our system of thinking or visual design must include lack as part of that system. Desire enters the field when we look at what we cannot bear to look at. But, this emergence of desire through the breaks in our epistemological ground loosens rigidities and opens up inventive attempts to re-present the *objet a* as a writing of the Real.

The French psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan (1901-1981) tried to solve the problematic in which positivistic thinking reached a deadend. Positivism could only account for experience by viewing language and images as clearly representable through various methods or philosophies; these methods produced variations on a theme of "it is what it is". I shall argue here that formalist arguments, arguments that take the word, letter or image to be "itself" repeat positivistic errors. These effects (language and images), Lacan pointed out, account for neither gaps, fadings, flickerings, nor discontinuities within perceiving, knowing, and being. Lacan subverts the positivistic and formalistic commonplace assumption about how words, letters and images function in knowledge. To investigate how images link to words, and how these linkages encourage invention, we must first understand that neither the letter nor the image veils some hidden object. Instead, there is a failure in representation, a hole in the middle of perception, gaps within letters and images that make them other than what they appear to re-present. In Lacanian theory, dreams and representations "hold the place of . . ." something a dreaming subject does not want to know, but which insists in his knowledge anyway.

While people usually assume they relate to language and images naturally and spontaneously, a Real gap exists between perception and the referent that makes perceiving possible in the first place. In Lacanian theory, a perceiving subject, while not a set of sense data, is made up of pieces of desire that cannot re-present themselves directly. Desire is the desire for what knowledge lacks. So desire places gaps and fadings in every perceptual act: speaking, writing, seeing, tasting, and so on. Indeed, desire makes lack itself a part of any act of perceiving or knowing; but, we continually deny lack because we do not wish to know that we are not whole beings or whole bodies or whole minds.

An originary loss underlies the lack that exists as a player in every act of knowing or being. This palpable void of the originary loss connects body and mind; languages and images organize themselves around it in order to veil it, to close it out. This hole of loss itself, objects lost forever, limits individual desire (pleasures, pains, rules of discourse, or whatever). Indeed, this real hole of *jouissance* (agony and ecstasy) keeps subjects in homeostasis or constancy. Life organizes itself around this blockage or point beyond which one cannot go: "death drive."

Images and words hide truth. But, for Lacan, truth does not refer to the "truth" of religious experience, philosophical coherence, nor correspondence theories.[1] Lacan refers to that truth of desire which plays a hidden or distorted part in speech, writing and perception. Paradoxically, this truth *is* a visible language. It appears naked at the surface of letters and images; letters and images performed for the purpose of showing (perhaps by hiding

or distorting) desire. But, since people do not always know what they desire or what their desires mean, desire appears as enigmatic motivations or intentions that dance through words and images. In this theory truths are the fictions inserted into speech and vision by images and words in an ongoing exchange between the ever absent (desire) and the ever present (speaking and seeing). Like images and words, desire does not *re-present* itself directly, but only in an *as if* way. It is only a semblance of itself.

Subjective perception hides the way images and words function. It hides that function by confusing the feelings attached to words or images with "the thing in itself". But, visible language and representational art function to decorate or enclose a void. The void is not metaphorical, allegorical, mythical, analogical, and so on, but is Real. People cling (pro- or con-) to images and words because the unbearable alternative of their ab-*sens* is to fall into the gaps within ourselves. This is a slide into anxiety. In this theory the void of heaven and hell becomes something other than mythical construct. They become human metaphors invented for the purposes of exteriorizing a void that is in knowledge and being, but that is not understood. Moreover, since words and images serve as social constructs and conventions, it is all too easy to make a link between group conventions and beliefs. From that assumption one might guess that the truth of images resides within specific images of social conventions. Criticism of the ideological underpinnings of images fails to question where images come from and why they exist. Art, on the other hand, never ceases to pose the question of its own enigmatic *raison d'être*. In solving this enigma one could follow Descartes's logic and assume that language is a thing a-part from the body, that affective responses speak a truth of their own. In the picture I am offering, affective responses tell lies. The language of hate, love, hope, rage, guilt, etc. is not a language that speaks itself or for itself. While one group can agree to hate the language of *Playboy* philosophy—word and image—, another group will agree to love that language. Neither will ever convince the other as to who is right or wrong because the language of affect comes from *jouissance* or the narcissistic pleasure (or pain) each person takes from the loss around which his or her desires are elaborated. Strangely enough, the real loss around which images and letters are organized is, in Lacanian theory, the loss of clear definition between body, gender and sexuality. "Much ado about nothing", and "the sound and fury signifying nothing" suggest the complexities of sewing together body pieces into representational language that seems to correspond to social expectations and personal desires, but never quite do. The outcomes are "the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune". Sex and love drive language and inhabit images; they are the angels and demons of desire. Depending on the desiring structure of a given individual or group leader, or the structuring of a group around a desiring preference for

affiliation with a certain kind of leader, a response to images and words will be a response to the desire of the Other. The Other is that network of signifying chains, extrinsic to every person, but whose desire directs and speaks with a mysterious certainty. The desire of each person.

Lacan saw knowing and desiring as interwoven processes. The fantasies that we assume to be reality, and which we call reality by identifying with groups who share our fantasies, is, very simply, a screen. Every subject's perceiving is structured piece by piece from the start of life and before in a criss-crossing network of words, images, and experiences and their effects (what Lacan calls the Symbolic, Imaginary, and Real orders).This necklace-like chain constitutes the place of the Other, or the treasury of signifiers that speaks us. Put another way, one sees and speaks because an unconscious set of signifying chains feeds material into speech and vision. In one loop of the necklace — that Lacan called the Imag(e)-inary order — we find images producing the forms of identificatory material. In another we find lan-guage, rules or conventions — the Symbol-ic order — that govern a specific culture. In a third loop (the Real, beyond reality) we find the effects of words, images or experiences insofar as they were inscribed as traumatic, and thus produce effects, but remain unsymbolized in (un)conscious knowledge. In this picture of perceiving and knowing, persons are constellations or drive montages constituted by words, sounds, images, and effects shaping mind and body in order to elaborate unconscious desire. This desire is the desire to know what has fallen out of our memories, but niggles at the back of our minds and bodies. We desire to know because we do not know. We do not know what is forgotten, unassimilated or what response lies fallow, waiting to be triggered into some form.

Lacan invented a "letter" that would stand in for the *cause* that pushes everyone to know, a cause he attributed to "objects" that connect body to knowledge. This "letter", the *objet a* denotes the primordial "objects" of desire that Lacan called pre-specular, the lining of the subject. Humans are first structured as d siring creatures in reference to bodily orifices and functions that seem attached to an organ. Lacan's innovation is to show that these "objects" give rise to partial "drives" that grow into constellations of meaning around: the breast, the feces, the urinary flow, the (imaginary) phallus, the phoneme, the gaze, the voice and the void.[2] But since these objects are lost, they only exist as enigmatic material that "returns" as disruptive, discontinuous affective signals.

The tricky part in Lacan's thinking here is that words and images do not refer first and foremost to objects in the world. They refer, on one hand, to the way words and images connect knowledge to desire in each subject taken as a particularity of desiring responses and effects. Put another way, desire depends, not on objects, but on fantasies. On the other hand, images and

words are haunted by the effects of the *objet a*. Interpretation depends, not on texts, methods, or truths, then, but on the meaning that makes desire a kind of knowing, an unconscious intentionality. The *objet a* denotes a place where knowing and desiring come together in an encounter or impasse. But the *objet a* are not representations. Rather, the *objet a* denotes a beyond the image and the word. It is the "object" people cannot bear to see because it reminds them of a loss at the center of everything human, a void that is filled up with the garbage of the universe. It is the Real, the *objet* of all the missed encounters. This *objet* is the reason people in elevators avert their eyes from each other, staring at walls, ceilings, floors, all *as if* deep in thought. Why do they look away? Because to look at unknown others in such an intimate encounter is to look at the gaze itself—that *objet* separable from (separate from) the eye that lets us know we are always looked at from somewhere, always judged. Lacan's *objet a* forces knowledge of discontinuity on us. And discontinuity is the enemy we fight in many names and under multiple guises. Images and words have a particular ring for each person, because they refer the subject *qua* subject to another signifier in a closed necklace of resonating sounds and associations that we usually call "mind" or perception or cognition. In a Lacanian picture, the *objet a* blocks images and words from joining in any one-to-one way. No act of knowing or seeing can escape fading because some piece of the Real always blocks any final join between signifiers and signifieds (meanings), or between images and words. No repetition can ever be a repetition of the same. We never return to the same moment because the unconscious is change, anchored by the Real as the basement of fixity. Yet, Real fixities are palpable absences. These keep images and words from coming together, from revealing each other as transparent meanings.

But, when a Lacanian signified (effects of unconscious signifying chains) do hook with a signifier, an *objet a* appears. Time appears in the form of the Real to stop the infinite flow of words and things, showing that when we arrive at an impasse in thinking, imagining, inventing, we have stumbled on an *objet a* that blocks desire, and also gives birth to the desire to circumvent that blockage. These "little letters" guarantee that what a reader finds in a text, or a viewer in a picture, is not exactly what the writer or artist intended (even if he or she knows what that is). Nor does it correspond exactly with what the reader or viewer knows either. Lack and loss play an apparently invisible role in pushing language and images askew from any objective interpretation.

In looking at texts or at images, people try to know — not what is there — but what they want. What they want is usually to be recognized: to be right, to be loved. People can only guess at desire (insofar as desire is the desire not to know) through image/text mirroring. This, because the chains of associa-

tive knowledge that speak subjects, also look at them *as if* from "outside", while remaining opaque and titillating, rather than present and full. What subjects quest for in texts or in images is what they do not know about who they are, why they exist, or what they want. The reason they take rigid positions regarding who they are, what they know, and so on, is because they must try to stop the shifting sands of desire that tease from within the body, and because underlying desire is the loss that mimes death.

By accepting that there is a lack in the image or word, as well as in the perceiver, one realizes that if lack is itself a palpable component in the desire to know, it cannot reside in an external object any more than in the perceiver. This may sound like a complicated theory. And it can be proved by complex arguments, mathematical ones (particularly topological), and clinical arguments based on new theories and practices regarding the cause and treatment of psychosis. For the purposes of my argument, I will say only what everybody knows: No person is One with him or herself. We never "get our acts together" because we are not together. There is a hole in language, a hole in knowledge, a hole   in being. There are holes in relationships. The *objet a* marks that discontinuity and fragmentation which humans fight with every assumption of totality; they deny the discontinuities that make flesh of the word and donought holes of the body. Contemporary anatomy books describe our digestive systems (from mouth to anus) as a hole — external to the internal/on the same surface — yet apparently internal.

The *objet a* returns from the Real of a place lost in memory, bringing fragments of loss, pieces of pain, memories of ecstasies, to place cuts in everything. Lack (desire) plays at the edge of loss, residing somewhere between sentient subject and artifact or product, drawing them to each other by identificatory traits that attract by familiarity, repugnance, nostalgia, sensory response, and so on.

With lack placed as a palpable presence in desire, standing between loss and what it represses and thus written as a blank to be filled in, Lacan offered a new theory of knowing. We do not know merely by isolating or using rhetorical strategies, nor by identifying with images, or stories of events that seem analogous to us as "whole" identities, or even with methodologies or ideological preferences which we assume to be correct because they are ours. We identify with unconscious desires that desire for us. We identify with laws that were put in place as our cornerstones. We seek to know because we do not know. Looking, reading, inventing, are so many uses of language and images to say over and over that the search to know is the search itself. What do we seek? Love, fulfillment of desire, laws with which to identify limits, and desires that will try to break these laws up to the point of our endurance. That the visible language into which such "drives" hook themselves is the material of images and words is a powerful idea: *jouissance* effects, light up the

meanings that link language to body across the bridge of desire, materializing images and words. The catch-22 in this theory bases the human quest to know on a desire not to know that *we* are made up of secrets, wounds, scars, haunting voices from past generations in our family, names we cannot live up to, erotic passions that seem more to claim us than we them, and so on. Lacan's writing of the Real with his *objet a* is clearly not a correspondence theory, nor one of coherence. The only locatable traits of an unconscious knowledge are signifiers in a subject's discourse; but, these signifiers are hidden by the unified nature of grammar and the concrete density of letters and images. Nor can the *objet a* serve as direct referents between body, language and desire because they correspond only to a void or a cut, the cut of the Real as it brings us up short by a fluttering of eyelashes, the anecdotes of children, the sacrificial marks made on bodies in cultural rituals, the cut of a word into silence, or vice-versa. The Lacanian void valorizes the hole mathematical topology has discovered, but cannot account for. In human beings the void continually empties nonsensical and meaningless, but painfully concrete, material into our thoughts and desires, the garbage we dismiss, but which elicits affect all the same. And all cuts confront us with the void created by the fact that we are not totalized persons, desires or bodies, dealing with totalized artifacts. Indeed, artifacts show us back to ourselves in the pieces we work at keeping glued together by every possible theory of continuity, even theories of continuity which hang onto letters or events by one arbitrary law: the law of chance.

The picture I want to create is the human subject as a knowing, perceiving, sentient creature who looks more like a piece of modern sculpture than like a person.

Between sense and nonsense, unique traits peel off of the *objet a*, joining word and transference in an indissoluble marriage. But what is being transferred? The answer is desire and *jouissance*. How? By images or letters or words that evoke resonance as signifiers or (re-presentations) propped up against an *objet a*. This is the way, Lacan argued, that we think. These signifiers joined to the *objet* make meaning because all meaning surrounds a void, placing desire at the edge of the hole that topology discovered in its remapping of space away from the positivism of descriptive geometry, but does not know how to valorize.[3]

In the Lacanian picture, body and language are libidinized "organs" that bear cuts and make cuts, thus joining flesh to word or image at the edges, rims or surfaces of the body. Little fragments

of "information" help argue this theory. We know that those blind from birth see gaps in everything once they become sighted through modern surgical techniques. They have to be taught to see closures, just as children have to learn "flat" representational drawing (things as they are!). When left to draw on their own, children make blurbs and blobs, not people and trees. People who become deaf, but not from birth, continue to hear sounds attached to certain images like silent images that, strangely, produce a kind of noise identifiable as memory.[4] I would even suggest that the new monster disease that haunts elementary schools and has been labeled "dyslexia" — a brain dysfunction — is the spreading out and rigidifying of an effect into reading and writing that is called "normal" in four and five year old children. How can dyslexia — turning letters and numbers around or upside down—be normal at five years of age and a disease at fifteen? Is dyslexia not a malfunctioning of letters turned askew by those children who are not taught to re-present letters in some culture specific alphabetical way? Is it not like learning to play the piano with the wrong fingering?

Lacan found loss at the center of everything, a loss that pierces knowing, representing, perceiving, being. But the loss in question is not emptiness. Rather, it is a black hole effect that sucks material in to cover itself over, to protect the subject from confronting loss head-on because it produces raw anxiety and a glimpse of "inner" chaos. In the case of psychosis, people are actually sucked into this void and bombarded by words, sounds, and images; things we call delusions are another way of saying dreaming awake.[5] Artists turn such visions inside out, externalizing the monsters of human beings, showing the distance we have from specific re-presentations that are palpably inscribed as traumatic effects. Although one cannot generalize too much about trauma, separation that threatens a loss of being or body counts as traumatic, as does the assumption of sexuality in relation to gender identity, and the problem of death. Traumatic events create knots, impasses, obstacles or blockages. Although knots remain dense when undeciphered, the *objet a* returns into language and vision as punctuation points, pointing to some spat out fragments of the Real. Just as a black hole coughs out pieces of rock and lava, the void Lacan called *jouissance* spits out pieces of the gaze (judging, not seeing), best exemplified in expressionist paintings where the eye is used as a weapon to persuade the viewer to look away.[6]

What does all this have to do with "visible language"? To see anew, to create, to invent, we use the visible to decorate the *objet a*, to mount them as collages that "drive".[7] In Lacanian theory these "objects" stand in for an

image, and break up the subjectivity of narrative and perception (*Seminar* XI, p. 59). The longer we stare at any image, the more we see it has no truth to yield, but is itself a mask. Insofar as images are always already defined in any person's network of unconscious signifying chains, at the level of the personal, images are *sinthomal.* At the level of the cultural, they have a shared or collective meaning: a local "universal". This may sound like the kind of thing Judith Williamson has in mind when she points to a double sense to the meaning of "images" of, for example, a woman. Descriptions of the images define one level of meaning in terms such as "cute", "aggressive", and so on; and the photograph itself is the second level meaning or the "actual representation".[8] Williamson is trying to understand J.L. Baudry's idea that a surface, suggesting nothing but itself, still suggests that there is something behind it and thus prevents us from considering it as a surface (*Consuming Passions,* p. 92).

The difference advanced by Lacan's thinking is that the representation is not "the thing itself". That is, the words attributed to an image to describe it and the image can not be disintricated. What Williamson calls the "real" thing or the representation — the photograph or the object — is, rather, a covering up of desire and *jouissance* effects. We "see" in a unified way in order not to see that the consistency of the photo is a learned way of seeing the body, or in the case of linguistic attributions, to be attached to a text of some sort. Lacan's *objet a* is a writing of the Real, shining through the emptiness of social (or Symbolic as he calls it) order discourse, blinking on and off to show that as long as meaning re-presents, it does so to positivize a void.

Images reassure us, convincing us that the world is not looking at us, giving us the illusion that we master the world because we look at it (furtively, longingly, smugly...), when we only look at it because it looks at us. The zero of the *petit a* is the means by which visual desire masks the anxiety (intellectually experienced as doubt or questioning) confronted by the knowledge that there are holes and discontinuities everywhere that everything rushes in to fill up. The burden of visible language — words and images — is nothing less than the burden of living all life at the level of pretense of wholenesses. One proof of this theory is the simple fact that egos (or belief systems) are rigidly maintained and defended, to the point of killing self or other (either in fact or by cruelty), lest explosion of or decentering of preferred system(s) be threatened. But since images and language can only momentarily pin down a desire trying to negotiate itself through the exchange of fantasies and words with an other, the *objet a* is a horrifying reminder that inconsistency lives much closer to the human heart than we would want to admit. Gazes pursue us. We eat some words, just as we regurgitate others. Voices haunt us, make us cry, make us grit our teeth. What lacks, then, is not specular, not graspable in the image.[9] Nor is it

graspable in the word. What lacks is that desire itself can never be once and for all, totally satiated. The "dirty trick" that chases our efforts to master pieces of knowledge—if only the concrete poetry of letters placed just so— is that desire is itself interpretation. Interpretation that shows up in the most cruel point of the object: when a voice tears itself away from a word, delibidinizing it, or when the eye suddenly realizes that the image it tries to fix is not what one insists it be.

Both art and desire reveal the secret of invention by making the *objet a* appear, by working with and around it. This theory is Lacan's reinterpretation of Freud's equation of sublimation with repression.[10] It shows us that what we try to hide in ordinary discourse and realistic representational art is the gaze divorced from the eye because we want the eye to be benevolent when the gaze gives it, instead, an appetite: lusting, desiring, judging. Because images and words are never adequate to the task of conveying what they are about, because aesthetic theories remain cold and lifeless, we go back to art to try once again to theorize it, staring at the wisps of nostalgia, drinking them in, grabbing at the cuts in time that elude us as in a dream. Yet, we flee the *objet a* as they appear because they destroy the unities that keep us feeling ourselves to be whole bodies, whole minds, masters of desire and language. We flee them in the fictions we write, not as fiction, but at the level where fiction tells a truth. We flee these "objects" when they show up in icons to tell us that we worship or disdain idols because we are god: to master is "to be me"/ *m'être*/ god. We feast with our eyes and come with our voices, but quickly intellectualize these acts of desire lest we suspect ourselves of being tautological decorations, monuments of magnificent no-thingness.

Surrealist theories of art do not account for the idea that we are metaphors, rather than that we make or speak metaphors. Surrealist collages will never truly *épater la bourgeoisie* because the subject is already dominated by signifying chains that re-present him or her as a subject falling out of the chain, a missing link, a subject of desire who exists as subject only in the purview of an other. Indeed, the capacity to think abstractly is the law of metaphor: the power to substitute one thing for another already there, but not entirely *visible* because of the strange ways time and space function in desire and memory. If forms are incoherent, "off", creating no-thing, chances are we are in the realm of psychosis where metonymy has taken over the function of metaphor to reveal the poverty and sterility of an *hors sens* when a signifying chain functions in a "pure" fashion, little perturbed by any desire to reconstitute anything for any other.[11] *Jouissance* without love or desire robs language of its flesh, its materiality.

Both history with its implicit omniscient observer and speech act theory with its primitive tribe miss the point: that language acts make social links (Imaginary/identificatory) because language relies on itself only for the

purpose of winning love. We cannot deconstruct language, finally, because we are not psychotic. We rely on the names others have given objects out of deference and love, and we destroy the same out of the effort to win love beyond the law of some "authority" whose injunctions will always reveal us as creatures torn by the opposition between desire and love.This tension drives us to create, to create anew, to invent something that will earn the recognition of others by bearing the stamp of our names (a mark of the real like the *objet a* in Lacanian theory). John Searle leaves out the personal, while Saul Kripke dismisses the other to whom our words and images are sent. Every letter and every image used to create anew speaks the grandeur and tragedy of the human: the "I am this" in its endless circular chase, asking "what is I"? The *objet a* pokes its head out to say we are "headless subjects" (*Seminar* XI), "subjects" of endless efforts and missed encounters.

notes

[1] Donald Davidson, "Le philosophe de Platon", Ornicar? , no. 46 (automne 1988): 21-39. This article, translated into French by Jacqueline Carnaud, appeared in the *London Review of Books*, August 1, 1985.

[2] Jacques Lacan, "Subversion of the subject and dialectic of desire in the Freudian Unconscious", *Ecrits: A Selection*, trans. by Alan Sheridan (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1977), p. 315.

[3] Jeanne Granon-Lafont, *La topologie ordinaire de Jacques Lacan* (Paris: Point Hors Ligne, 1985), p. 41. This book is currently being translated by David Shepheard for publication in England and the USA.

[4] Oliver Sacks, "Mysteries of the Deaf", *The New York Review*, March 27, 1986, pp. 23-33. Commenting on *Deafness* by David Wright (Stein and Day, 1969), the South African poet and novelist who became deaf at the age of seven, Sacks says: "Wright speaks of the 'phantasmal voices' which he hears when anyone speaks to him provided he can *see* the movement of their lips and faces, and of how he would 'hear' the soughing of the wind whenever he saw trees of branches being stirred by the wind . . . For those deafened after hearing is well established, the world remains full of sounds even though they are 'phantasmal.'" (p. 23).

[5] Jacques Lacan, "On a question preliminary to any possible treatment of psychosis", *Ecrits: A Selection*, trans. by Alan Sheridan (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1977), pp. 179-225.

[6] Jacques Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis* (*Seminar* XI), text established by Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. by Alan Sheridan (W.W. Norton & Co., 1981), p. 101.

[7] See chapter 13 in *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis* on the "Démontage de la pulsion" (erroneously translated as "the deconstruction of the drive"), pp. 161-173.

[8] Judith Williamson, "A piece of the action" in *Consuming Passions* (London: Marion Boyars, 1986), p. 92.

[9] Jacques Lacan, *L'Angoisse, Seminaire* X (1962-1963), unpublished Seminar, May 22, 1963.

[10] In April of 1987 Jacques-Alain Miller spoke at the *Living Cinema* forum in New York City, saying that art does not provide pleasure, but *jouissance* which satisfies unconscious drives. "Art is not a product of the unconscious (*pace* Surrealism), but rather that of the most civilizing urge. That significantly, is sublimation — which is popularly confused with repression. For this reason, art can be said to 'respond' [but not correspond] to the unconscious." This quote is taken from the article by John Miller, "Jacques Lacan's *Television*", *Artscribe* 66 (Nov./Dec. 1987): 41.

[11] Jacques Lacan, *Le Seminaire, livre* III: *Les psychoses* (1955-1956), text established by Jacques-Alain Miller (Paris: Seuil, 1981). This Seminar is currently being translated by Russell Grigg for publication by Norton in the USA and in England.

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