Title

The Archaic Shudder? Toward a poetics of the sublime
(in two sections: creative and critical)

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Abstract

This cross-disciplinary investigation moves toward that sub-genre in aesthetics, the theory of creativity. After introducing my study with a re-reading of Heidegger’s essay, ‘The Origin of the Work of Art’, I appropriate into a collection of poems ideas from Plato, Kant, Heidegger, Wittgenstein, and a range of post-philosophical theorists. Next, after Murmur and Afterclap, in the critical section of my investigation I formulate a poetics of the sublime, and move closer to my own specialist term, poeticognosis. With this term, I set out to designate a particular style of apprehending-into-language, after wonder, as it pertains (I argue) to creative producers.

Section One Murmur and Afterclap

The poetry submitted here does not arise simply out of a theoretical position or theoretical concerns, and it is not in any sense exemplary or programmatic. It is, however, related in complex ways to the issues raised later in the critical section of my investigation, and indeed has provoked – necessitated – my theoretical discussion (rather than the other way around). The poems contained in this section of my investigation draw from the many documents I have encountered in my attempt to shape a discourse with philosophy. In his essay, ‘What is Enlightenment?’ Kant exhorts his fellow philosophers to ‘(h)ave courage to use your own understanding!’ I have followed Kant’s advice here, but not as a philosopher might. The understanding I use in Murmur and Afterclap is a style of intuitive and extra-logical responsiveness. Undertaking my own archaic shuddering, I have attempted to maintain a reflective gaze (I use the verb in both mimetic and meditative senses). The poems that result have unfolded, after wonder, as moments of defamiliarising epiphany.

Section Two The Archaic Shudder? Toward a poetico of the sublime

I conduct this critical section of my investigation in two parts. In the first, ‘Dialectics and Logic: two modes of the genre “philosophy”’, I address the materiality of language as my most pressing concern. I take up a discussion of theoria and gnosis in order to locate genre difference, and discern the sublime as an extra-logical style of apprehending (and agree with Kant, that the apprehensions of poets may well be sublime). Next, I recuperate Heidegger’s interpretation of techné as a mode of know-how that separates both phenomenology (apprehending, seeing, knowing) and approaches to language. I speculate the sublime is an active component in creative phenomenologies at work, as thinkers apprehend-into-language, into genre, after wonder.

In part two, ‘Toward Poeticognosis? Re-thinking the sublime’, I read the poetries of Carson and Hass against pseudo-Longinus’ textual and Burke’s affective sublime. Reading across this range of poetries and philosophies, my investigation into imaginative processes speculates on language, genre, phenomenologies, and on the ‘transcendental power of imagination’ (Kant). Is there any difference between thinking poets and poetic thinkers? I come to valorise a sublime process – extra-logical, gnostic, and more-than-rational – as integral to that difference.

I conclude this critical section of my investigation with an appraisal of Rilke’s ‘Sonnets to Orpheus’, which I take as a historicising moment in poetic wondering. At this point, I reify my own term, poeticognosis, as a style of responsiveness to wondering that remains particular to creative production.
Declaration

This is to certify that –

i. the thesis comprises only my original work except in places where indicated in the preface,

ii. due acknowledgement has been made in the text to all other material used,

iii. the thesis is less than 100,000 words in length, inclusive of footnotes but exclusive of tables, maps, bibliographies and appendices.

________________________

Dan Disney

15th September 2009.
Acknowledgements

Since March 5th 2005, this project has never been more than a moment away from my thinking. To those friends who shared part or all of my journey, thank you for your forbearance at my (at times profound) inability to express what my research has been about. It is, in part, about what Kant fathoms as a ‘blind but indispensable function’; attempting to fit a theory of creativity to philosophical conjecture on how thinking happens has necessitated a fumbling (sometimes grumbling) unguided process as I have worked toward my own sense of the ‘transcendental power of imagination’ (Kant again). My speculations on imaginative processes as sublime have been elaborated thanks to one person in particular, Kevin Brophy, who has been my advisor, editor, mentor, foil and friend: a person for whom I cannot locate enough words to fit my sense of gratitude. Sincere thanks also (and with apologies) to those readers on whom I imposed – prematurely – a version of this investigation: Sue Disney, Sandy Fitts, and Matt Hetherington, many good things came after your generous and carefully-worded critiques.

A range of writing from this investigation has been published (or has been submitted to, or is forthcoming, in journals), has won awards, and has received support from numerous organisations:

• ‘Performative exile, theoria, and creativity: re-reading Plato’s The Republic through the lens of Wallace Stevens’ “An Ordinary Evening in New Haven” was published in Contemporary Aesthetics: an international, interdisciplinary, online journal of contemporary theory, research, and application in aesthetic (http://www.contempaesthetics.org/) in 2008.

• ‘Heidegger, creativity, and what some poets do: on living in a silent shack for three months and not going mad’ has been accepted for publication in a future edition of New Writing: The International Journal for the Practice and Theory of Creative Writing.

• ‘Does anybody else here not understand? Language, post-philosophers, bewitchment and confusion: some post-conference reflections’ has been accepted for publication in a future edition of Text: a Journal of Writing and Writing Courses.

• ‘Apprehending, seeing, knowing: toward an account of techné after Kant’s architectonics and Heidegger’s conception of wonder’ has been submitted to British Journal of Aesthetics (17th July 2009).

• ‘Decreating thinking: toward a theory of creativity? Rethinking the sublime after Anne Carson’s Decreation and Edmund Burke’s A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origins of Our Ideas of the Sublime and the Beautiful’ has been submitted to New Writing: The International Journal for the Practice and Theory of Creative Writing (11th August 2009).
• A number of poems from the creative section of this investigation have been published in *Antithesis, Blast, HEAT, Overland, Meanjin*, and [www.whenpressed.net](http://www.whenpressed.net).

• Selections taken from the creative section of this investigation have been awarded as follows: first prize, the National Poetry Week's Broadway Prize (2006); first prize, the University of Melbourne’s Creative Writing Prize (2005); runner up, the Arts Queensland Val Vallis National Poetry Award (2008).

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Prelude

Heidegger, creativity, and what some poets do: on living in a silent shack for three months and not going mad

Absolute and entire solitude … is as great a positive pain as can almost be conceived.

Edmund Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*

The peal of stillness is not anything human.

Martin Heidegger, ‘Language’
This is what I want: three months of solitude. Three months to do nothing more than crane my neck toward the momentous jut of mountains in the Great Dividing Range. Philosophico-literary canons are loaded with those who have sought explicit, mindful solitude – from Buddha to Heidegger, Wordsworth to Wittgenstein, what have these oracular thinkers sought? Maybe I’d catch a glimpse of the same. An all-too-regular response draws down the line from the homes of farming families I spent my childhood around: ‘you want to do what?’ What I want is a place to shirk my context … perhaps what I want is an opportunity, to adopt the parlance of philosophers, to seek the thing itself, the ens realissimum, some sort of shimmering extra-logical or supersensible reality. What I want is a place to wonder and wander in as the Australian Alps hurl their weather around me and, somehow, into my poems.

What will I find beyond the burlesques of Melbourne’s inner suburbs? The way to find out is to go and find out. Friends compliment the madness of my project. Others make bets on how long I’ll last. But one farmer I contact, a middle-aged and twinkle-eyed Barry Fitzgerald, takes me seriously enough to propose this deal: twenty kilometres of fencing need to be replaced after being burnt out during fires six months earlier. If I do it, and if I’ll feed the forty cows at his end of the valley, I can have a shack for the winter. Though he’ll be surprised if I make it. ‘You know how cold it gets up there?’ he grins, sealed inside his weatherboard home. I once shared a hospital room with Barry’s father as a child (pneumonia); impossibly old, Darcy Fitzgerald stared out the room’s window as if studying the ennui of lawn-mowing afternoons. ‘No?’ I have no idea how cold it is going to get.

The shack (single room, window, big fireplace, door) lies in a cleft between a gathering of snow-topped mountains so steep the days fall into shadow shortly after lunchtime. Beyond a gravel T-intersection deep in the Great Dividing Range, I nurse my car on the first day of Winter along a sludge of wheel-ruts between ghost gums. Without 4WD I don’t make the last two kilometres and so move through the rest of the day hauling to and fro, loading in with a wheelbarrow. My gear: generator, fuel, axes, shovel, broom, gas bottles, cooker, boxes (and boxes. And boxes) of tinned and dried food, water barrels, torches, saucepans, clothes, bed, laptop, a small library, prayer flags, shotgun, first-aid kit. The veranda piles high; inside the shack I contend with the detritus of generations of fishers who have visited generations of antechinus (Barry calls them ‘pouch mouses’), insects, and the occasional snake. Sheltering in every nook, the room blinks with a wild assembly of eyes.
On the second day I pull everything in the shack on to the veranda. Nostrils blacken as I begin to sweep. The four-paned window rattles like an old thing’s tooth. The desk at the window looks out over a misting plain and, outside, prayer flags flap in wind. Inside, Bruegel’s Tower of Babel is tacked into place above the window, above where I’ll spend days working. Does this image explain why, for me at least, Heidegger’s ideas resonate? Is there a universal language out there, somewhere, that has been scattered? In The Principle of Reason, Heidegger writes ‘language speaks, not humans. Humans only speak inasmuch as they respond to language’. The challenge, then, is in the responsiveness, and the trick for creative producers is to find the right language, to find words that entrance and remind their readers to wonder. This is what I am going to spend three months searching for. ‘There’s no such thing,’ I remind myself, ‘as a wrong poem; the trick is to get things right’.

The first days are hardest. Within a week I snap the ripcord on my generator. The fires I keep stoked through the day starve overnight. Snow and ice are everywhere. I wear a beanie to my six-blanketed bed and each night I get in earlier. My thermometer frequently dips to negative ten, and effort is in everything. Negative ten! I pull down kilometres of buckled fence in the first fortnight: filthy, cold work wrapping warped wire into bundles, stacking star pickets, clipping barbed wire into re-useable lengths. My hands cramp and harden as I feel the weight of my sanity begin to shift. Does it make any sense to say that my mind has taken a shape and that the shape has begun to change? Is that possible? I keep finding antlers, tiny bird skeletons, charred pelts among the blackened rocks of this incinerated landscape. I keep thinking how quickly a person can disappear, how easily a world can be replaced.

In snow, these burned mountains resemble a black and white photograph of an underworld. Grime is a constant part of my mechanical routine, and this adds to an insistent angst that visits me in sharp pangs. There is no hot shower at night; a saucepan boiled on the fire gets some of the layers of dirt off. Meals: stew, pasta, anything cooked in the second pot. I quickly learn leftovers left on the veranda freeze overnight, and notice other systems clustering into my days: cutting wood keeps me as warm as burning it. Without clocks, my body clicks into a strange new pattern … I rise not much past dawn, and sleep comes quickly in the short

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dark evenings. Nightmares churn through me. After three weeks what is clear (in my mind’s clangour) is this: how will I last a hundred days in this burnt and frozen place?

At day ten my diary reads, ‘It snowed on the neighbouring mountain. Last night a small something scurried over my pillow. Today I carted 500 litres from Waterfall Creek to my tank. Am ruinously tired.’ Weeks stumble me forward as trees sway around my monologues. I see no one. When angst strains I walk a scruffy kilometre to the bottom of a hidden waterfall to ponder my evacuated life. ‘Everything semi-workable’ I write in my diary, ‘except computer (dead). Will try longhand. Winter howled all day.’ Half asleep in my chair in front of the fire one evening, a knobby black spider summits the flannelette knap of my shoulder. Shedding clothes, I run bare into a snowing night. My gut is beginning to develop knots.

Another night, dingoes calling across the valley, I write to a poet, a mentor and friend:

I hope all is well amid the folds of this silver winter, that your writing/wondering is keeping you happy and inspired. Life up here is like camping in mud. I can’t get my bones warm. And a frisson has disappeared: I’ve created three months exclusively for poetry when I think I need three months exclusively for poetry augmented by good friends and their ideas, big libraries and their ideas, wonderful food/galleries/bookshops/films and their ideas. Too much nothingness here; I’m stricken with yearning. Am I addicted to distraction? Or to a different channel of reality? Have made a routine to contain myself: chop wood, run or work out, eat, read, write, walk, cook, eat, wash-up, revise, read. Some ideas arriving, but I’ve begun to ask ‘are these enough?’ Because a poem at the end of an empty day doesn’t seem to be. How unexpected …

and then, further into the letter:

is there something about wandering into language that entails self-realisation? In the moment the poem arrives, there, then, I pulsate; but fleetingly, only fleetingly, before scouting through darkness for the next illumination. What a pattern, to forever fumble for epiphany. Is this what a poet is: a seeker who sometimes becomes a seer? Is this what poets do?
Cabin fever duly sets in. My walks verge on the epic: across spurs and deeper into the thickening, fire-damaged Alpine scrub, where I collect antlers to adorn the shack. Wandering thus, I am chasing my thinking, elusive as the kookaburras echoing laughter through cold twilight.

One night, above the fire’s crackling, I hear a noise on the bench. I shine a torch around the room: nothing. After my ritual run three mornings later, I pour the last of the long-life milk into a cup. A mouse’s frozen rictus pokes from the spout. I yell; nauseous, angry and rippling with loathing. I am going to leave. I sit on the veranda and swing my legs. I can’t leave. Today my father arrives for a weekend. If I leave now I will never come back. It has been five weeks.

That night, barrelling down from a blizzard on Falls Creek, a windstorm rages. Blasted, the top of a huge tree breaks over the shack’s roof and topples half the chimney with it. There is a magnitude and might to this wake-up call, a fury that terrifies me at 3am. The shack shudders. My heart shudders. The sky contains a formidable orchestration. At three in the morning my father is clambering around in a woolly jumper, gumboots and underpants, attaching his caravan to the 4WD to tow it out from underneath another fallen tree. We shout across the maelstrom, and there is wideness to our awareness. His crumple-roofed caravan scrapes out from under a snapped trunk. The wind is frenzied; leaves stampede across the night as half-trees claw whitely around us. Then, instantly, the rage vanishes. My father and I blink. Above us, stars cascade across the cloudless tremendum. It is as if, dreams broken by the wind’s force, we have entered the world from the sleep side. What sort of illogical, crystallised apprehension is this? The stillness seems infinite, primordial. Has all thinking been blown away?

In my cleft between these mountains, at this moment the world seems amniotic. I am at a loss, struck dumb, cannot append meaning to these minutes. My father places his order (‘white, one sugar’) and clicks a door in the night shut. My mind swarms with strangeness.

In his essay, ‘The Origin of the Work of Art’, philosopher Martin Heidegger sets out to explore the relationship art shares with truth. This may be immediately interesting to creative producers; asking a series
of looping questions – ‘Where and how does art occur?’; ‘what and how is a work of art?’; ‘how does truth happen?’; ‘what is art?’ and what is art ‘that we call it rightly an origin?’ – the philosopher finally proposes art to be ‘truth setting itself to work’. Heidegger instructively sets out to reject the ancient antagonism between philosophies and poetries, calling poetry an ‘illuminating projection’ with ‘a privileged position in the domain of the arts’. Throughout the essays collected into Poetry, Language, Thought, the philosopher stakes a series of stunning claims for poetry – from the bleakness of ‘in the age of the world’s night, the abyss of the world must be experienced and endured. But for this it is necessary that there be those who reach into the abyss’, to the oblique ‘poetry is what first brings man onto the earth, making him belong to it, and thus brings him into dwelling’. Throughout Poetry, Language, Thought, Heidegger privileges poets as language users who apprehend and then construct dynamic truths. There is something to this theory of creativity that promises not only compliments but, potentially, illumination and self-knowing.

And at the beginning of this collection of essays, Heidegger employs a potentially contentious form to frame his philosophies. In ‘The Thinker as Poet’, the first ‘essay’ in the book, the philosopher lineates and enjambs his ideas in the manner of a poet, writing:

(w)e are too late for the gods and too
early for Being. Being’s poem,
just begun, is man

and that

(s)inging and thinking are the stems
neighbour to poetry.
'The Thinker as Poet' scans more like a manifesto than a poem. But the philosopher's adoption of two of the most fundamental poetic devices, lineation and enjambment, indicates no small faith in poetry as a form equally up to the task of expressing truthfulness as philosophy. Heidegger's notion of poets singing the species into being seems a skewed anthropomorphism, but what the philosopher seems to be suggesting is that poetries employ resonant language, and that part of the resonance is neither simply syntactical nor sonic. The singing/thinking of poems is a way for humans – a just-begun poem – to ontologise the world. This then raises poets to at least the level of philosophers, and so isolates Heidegger within a tradition of philosophical thinkers as a figure many poets may feel they can trust.

In departing from using language in the ways philosophers normally do – which might best be characterised as an analytical instrument, devoid of song but useful for probing and speculating truth-effects – in 'The Thinker as Poet' Heidegger meditates on poetry, in poetry. Even when reverting to the procedural languages of philosophy (as he does throughout the remainder of the essays in Poetry, Language, Thought), the allure of Heidegger's thinking on poetry is that it not only privileges poets but also that the philosopher's speculations chime and resonate. I am, perhaps, biased, and pleased to find a figure from philosophy so willing to vouch on the behalf of poets. But what makes Heidegger seem so pertinent are the proximity those speculations contained in Poetry, Language, Thought share with my experiences in the shack. In 'The Thinker as Poet', for example, I am struck by how much the philosopher seems to fathom where some poems come from:

we never come to thoughts. They come
to us.\(^8\)

I wonder how this thought arrived in Heidegger? Did it come in words, in lines that broke after the words 'they come'? Or is Heidegger stylising his thinking by enjambing thus? Perhaps, as he states elsewhere, what is at work in these lines is a particular mode of \(\text{\textit{techné}}\); the fashioning of apprehending-into-language that is partly apprehending, partly seeing, and partly knowing what to do.\(^9\) Is there, then, something about the arrival of thinking that is indeterminate and necessitates patience? In the shack, thinking, was I stylising my

\(^8\) Ibid, page 6.
thoughts into poetry or, knowing that I was waiting for poems, was my thinking of a particular style? Unconscious processes seemed hard at work but, rather than inactive mindlessness, what I was fumbling to grasp arrived after a negative path of actively not-thinking. This meditative state involved listening, waiting, and reflecting, and consistently posed a questionless question, an emptiness of not-seeking in which I reached across a process and into the unknown in order to materialise ideas in unexpected language. In other words, it seemed my approach to thinking was influenced by genre. I suppose what I grasped was immanent; rather than some Romantically-inflected fusion of artist/world/transcendence, I was carrying poems over from my own version of nothingness, from silence, out of my unconscious. Only in emptying myself – of worry (the woodheap, my girlfriend, tonight’s meal, next year’s money) and of daydreaming (‘I’ll be godlike/ impotent, rich/ poor’) – only then did a poem usher from blankness and on to the page. Out of the nothingness of waiting, frequently excruciating, each time I sought to answer the call of a poem’s beckoning, I was learning how to think into (and then write) a poem.

In waiting for my thoughts to come to me, I learned not just how to open myself but also how to keep my self (if this makes any sense) opened. Perhaps I was caught in the rapture of what Heidegger labels dichtung? In ‘The Origin of the Work of Art’, the philosopher (at his most ineffable) proposes a distinction between two poetic modes – dichtung and poesie – and it is dichtung, a primordial and extra-linguistic framing essence that makes poesie, the manifestation of poetry in language, possible:

(p)rojective saying is poetry: the saying of world and earth, the saying of the arena of their conflict and thus of the place of all nearness and remoteness of the gods. Poetry is the saying of the unconcealedness of what is.10

To Heidegger, dichtung is a wordless creative essence – the ‘poetry’ that bespeaks ‘of what is’ – embedding not only the poesie of language expressed as poem; indeed, according to Heidegger, the universe is shot through with this originary impulse, which a poem enacts as it languages beings. In other words, reality may indeed be

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10 Martin Heidegger (trans and introduction Albert Hofstadter) 1971 Poetry, Language, Thought, page 71. The version of this translation in Krell reads similarly, with several important changes: ‘(p)rojective saying is poetry. The saying of world and earth, the saying of the arena of their strife and thus of the place of all nearness and remoteness of the gods. Poetry is the saying of the unconcealment of beings.’ See Martin Heidegger (ed and introduction David Farrell Krell) 1993 Basic Writings, page 198. The differences – ‘conflict’ in Hofstadter’s earlier translation, ‘strife’ in the latter; ‘unconcealedness of what is’ in the earlier translation, ‘unconcealment of beings’ in the latter – indicates the nuances translations must consider: meanings are approximately the same, but tone and cadence alter. In certain instances, aspects of philosophy will be lost in translation.
out there, somewhere (just like Bruegel’s universal language). But, as theorist Terry Eagleton puts it, '(p)oetry is an image of the truth that language is not what shuts us off from reality, but what yields us the deepest access to it.'¹¹ I argue that a component of Eagleton’s ‘deepest access’ to reality is the referencing poetry makes to dichtung. To arrive at a junction of these ideas, then, a poet’s making might be regarded as seeing into the heart of matters, into the truth of beings, and so into the being-ness of dichtung’s truth: what dichtung creates is an opening, mysterious and extra-logical, into which un concealed beings ‘shine and ring out’.¹²

Maybe theories of creativity like Heidegger’s can help clarify the experience of creative producers. But what, then, might be the function of such clarity? Perhaps ideas that drive us toward nuanced appreciation of the inscrutable processes of creativity will lead, ultimately, to better writing? Heidegger’s speculations both appraise and praise art, and he continues this when asserting that, pulsing under each poem, a ‘being comes into the steadiness of its shining.’¹³ This process of illumination, a steadying of apprehension, takes place when Heidegger creates a further binary to reinforce his speculations on dichtung. He explores a dichotomy between what he terms ‘equipment’ (those objects that fade into the background of their functionality) and ‘art work’, in which a being’s being-ness is framed and presented. He analyses two specific pieces of art – Van Gogh’s painting of a pair of peasant shoes, and C.F. Meyer’s poem, ‘Roman Fountain’ – and makes this pronouncement:

(t)he more simply and authentically the shoes are engrossed in their nature, the more plainly and purely the fountain is engrossed in its nature – the more directly and engagingly do all beings attain to a greater degree of being along with them. That is how self-concealing being is illuminated. Light of this kind joins its shining to and into the work. This shining, joined in the work, is the beautiful. Beauty is one way in which truth occurs as unconcealment.¹⁴

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¹¹ Terry Eagleton 2007 How to Read a Poem, page 69.
¹³ The sentence in Poetry, Language, Thought reads ‘The being of the being comes into the steadiness of its shining.’ See Martin Heidegger (trans and introduction Albert Hofstadter) 1971 Poetry, Language, Thought, page 35. In Krell, the same sentence reads ‘The Being of beings comes into the steadiness of its shining.’ See Martin Heidegger (ed and introduction David Farrell Krell) 1995 Basic Writings, page 162. Hofstadter is reworking his interpretation, letter by letter, revising ‘being’ to ‘Being’ and ‘being’ to ‘beings’ with all essentialist ramifications intended.
¹⁴ Italics are Heidegger’s. Martin Heidegger (trans and introduction Albert Hofstadter) 1971 Poetry, Language, Thought, page 54. There are several differences in Hofstadter’s later version from the same essay: ‘The more simply and essentially the shoes are engrossed in their essence, the more directly and engagingly do all beings attain a greater degree of being along with them. That is how self-concealing Being is cleared. Light of this kind joins its shining to and into the work. This shining, joined in the work, is the beautiful. Beauty is one way in which truth essentially occurs as unconcealment.’ See Martin Heidegger (ed and introduction David Farrell Krell) 1995 Basic Writings, page 181.
Gnostic as this sort of writing may seem (and much of Heidegger’s style is marked by a counter-intuitive, aphoristic style) it nonetheless chimes when I think back to my time in the shack. Each day I watched mornings snow the world outside while the objects surrounding me slipped unnoticed into their functions: axe, woodheap, old newspaper, hearth, matches, all equipped me with comfort; the chair, table, and window with cows, trees, vanishing point and sky produced a view to sit at while focussing (quieting? Emptying?) my mind. In this realm, I sought some sort of essential reality that would transcend what Heidegger defines as equipment … what I sought was a way to make my thoughts shine. A part of my mind settled on the musical, on the painterly and inventive, on the non-discursive, Heidegger’s singing/thinking, through which poems would make themselves heard. Equally often, waiting could entail (this may seem a statement of the obvious) waiting further. But each time what was underscored was the necessity of patience. When I forgot this, waiting became intolerable. When poems arrived, though, a day could pass unnoticed.

There are two aphorisms in Heidegger’s essay that may have provided assurance and guidance, had I read ‘The Origin of the Work of Art’ before spending time in the shack. Perhaps these are roles – to assure, and to guide – that theories of creativity can play. Commenting on how art materialises, Heidegger writes, ‘the artist remains inconsequential as compared with the work, almost like a passageway that destroys itself in the creative process for the work to emerge.’15 I know of no such self-destructing passageways (Heidegger’s analogue, at least in translation, is no poetic metaphor) but I can see how, by evacuating my mind of active distractions, I was annihilating my ordinary habits of thinking. In other words, in the shack I was without a use for my usual mental equipment: I had, without knowing it, opened myself up to that speculative essence (Heidegger’s dichtung) by dislodging the habits of my mind. Entering each day was tantamount to moving through psychic spaces – after Heidegger, let’s agree to call them passageways – that disappeared as soon as my mind moved through them.

Something of the mysterious was at work in this, something that becomes clearer when reading Heidegger’s speculation that an artist is one ‘who truly knows what is, knows what he wills to do in the midst

of what is'. This second aphorism (which shares a remarkable proximity with Wittgenstein's theory of language, also instructive for creative producers: 'only someone who already knows how to do something with it can significantly ask a name') points to the mysterious processes at hand in the midst of any moment of creative epiphany: in this instance, in the shack and out of my usual context, I no longer needed the 'usefulness' of usual modes of thinking. Instead I was exerting effort to survive, and when I was not busy keeping warm and fed I was learning to close off my thoughts and open my mind so that it became blank, and then receptive. Herein, each passageway of poetic thinking (though perhaps not linear as a passageway) was a unique apprehension; in locating these, I was learning to exercise a skill of knowing what to do intuitively in the midst of my strange (temporal and psychic) surrounds. Adopting the language of Heidegger, what I came to know was how to pursue a version of truthfulness via an unheard language (dichtung) that was chiming into ideas and images that (I hoped) would unconceal a mimetic world of shining beings, being. My wondering was, simply, a wandering in language.

Theories of creativity like Heidegger’s can help crystallise what creative producers do; in making intuitive processes active and conscious, we stand to refine approaches to our work. Reading backwards to the beginnings of the Western philosophical canon, there has always been discourse between creative and philosophical writing styles, both of which respond to wonder. According to Plato and Aristotle, philosophy originates in wonder, which both ancients name as ϑαυμαζεῖν. In Being and Time, Heidegger re-reads ϑαυμαζεῖν and defines it as ‘observing entities and marvelling at them’. Elsewhere, he asserts ϑαυμαζεῖν is ‘the “beginning” of philosophy’. Plato, in his discourse Theaetetus, writes that ‘this feeling – a sense of wonder – is perfectly proper to a philosopher: philosophy has no other foundation, in fact’.

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16 Martin Heidegger (trans and introduction Albert Hofstadter) 1971 Poetry, Language, Thought, page 65. This has been considerably improved in the version of Hofstadter’s translation appearing in Krell: ‘He who truly knows beings knows what he wills to do in the midst of them.’ See Martin Heidegger (ed and introduction David Farrell Krell) 1993 Basic Writings, page 192.


18 Classicist Andrea Wilson Nightingale writes that the ‘Greek word for “wonder” is, in the verbal form, ϑαυμαζεῖν’. She also argues that ‘Aristotle was no doubt following Plato when he said that philosophy begins in wonder’. See Andrea Wilson Nightingale 2004 Spectacles of Truth in Classical Greek Philosophy, pages 253, 257.


20 Heidegger writes ‘(i)t has long been known that the Greeks recognised ϑαυμαζεῖν as the “beginning” of philosophy’. See Martin Heidegger (trans Richard Rojcewicz and André Schuwer) 1994 Basic Questions in Philosophy: Selected ‘Problems’ of Logic, page 135.

suggests ‘it is because of wondering that men began to philosophise and do so now.’\(^{22}\) What kind of wondering is this? Can there be different kinds of wonder, and is it this that marks a difference in the thinking that locates philosophers and poets, who then approach and enter language so differently? In seeking to answer whether philosophical theories of creativity can contain the wilder enterprises of creative producers, my study traverses genre studies and various conceptions of the sublime. Eventually, I will arrive at my own conclusions on how genre generates meaning, and how absence and negativity may be functional in phenomenologies seeking to approach poetic language.

In the shack, my own wondering – an intuitive style of not-thinking – became easier to ease into as the weeks passed: what I wanted was to will myself toward the emptiness of a cleared mind, and Heidegger’s commentary is once more instructive. With growing awareness, I began to trust that I would catch a glimpse of the shining-ness of a poetic language that enabled me at once to see things clearly and see clearly into things. Sometimes in the shack it felt as if there had been an apocalypse and I was the last human on earth. This allowed a particular variety of poem to materialise: I was memorialising, threading ideas with language (or was I threading language with ideas?) … in retrospect, I was stitching together a style of unity extant in Heidegger’s essay: a unity between ‘earth’ and ‘world’.

In proposing a distinction between ‘earth’ (‘[i]n the things that arise, earth is present as the sheltering agent’\(^{23}\)) and ‘world’ (‘[t]o be a work means to set up a world’\(^{24}\), as dichtung moves into poesie, poetry is named by Heidegger as a style of thinking that opens up and originates its own ontologies. This philosophical marvelling on poetic wondering is both persuasive and illuminating. The philosopher’s essay moves toward a metaphysics of creative processes that, after the shack, resonates for me as a pragmatic model of intuitive poetics. In that mimetic gap between earth and world, artists work in what Heidegger terms a riss:

\(^{22}\) Aristotle (trans Hippocrates G. Apostle) 3\(^{rd}\) century B.C.E./ 1966 *Metaphysics*, page 15 (982b13-18). The same quote is translated in Nightingale as ‘It is through wonder (ϑαυμάζεται) that men originally began, and still begin, to philosophise, wondering at first about obvious perplexities, and then … experiencing perplexity … about great matters.’ See Andrea Wilson Nightingale 2004 *Spectacles of Truth in Classical Greek Philosophy*, page 253. Aristotle also designates a difference between teleology and architectonics when he writes in *De Anima (On the Soul)* of how thinking is ‘something other than perceiving, and its two kinds are held to be imagination and supposition’. See Aristotle (trans Hugh Lawson-Tancred) *De Anima (On the Soul)*, page 198.

\(^{23}\) Martin Heidegger (trans and introduction Albert Hofstadter) 1971 *Poetry, Language, Thought*, page 41. In Krell, the same is translated as: ‘In the things that arise, earth occurs essentially as the sheltering agent.’ See Martin Heidegger (ed and introduction David Farrell Krell) 1995 *Basic Writings*, page 168.

\(^{24}\) Martin Heidegger (trans and introduction Albert Hofstadter) 1971 *Poetry, Language, Thought*, page 43. In Krell, the same is translated as: ‘To work-being there belongs the setting up of a world.’ See Martin Heidegger (ed David Farrell Krell) 1995 *Basic Writings*, page 171.
a wordplay that doubly gestures (but is lost in translation) as ‘ground plan’ and ‘rift’. In unconcealing the being-ness of beings shining forth beautifully, art ‘is the becoming and happening of truth’ that moves a version of the earth into an art work’s world, which is given a transformative power among those who view it. In the shack, my rift was all too apparent: my diary quizzes ‘what do the neighbouring farmers do when they get bored? Build a new haystack?’ and then, less plaintively:

sometimes I see him aloft his dilapidated tractor. His dogs sometimes skirt the fence lines but never heed my whistling. Work dogs; impossible to befriend. I find myself craving narratives (again): films, novels, stories, anything but this rudderless exploration. The theory books I’ve got offer little respite: philosophy isn’t therapy (thankyou Wittgenstein) … semiotics and collections of poems don’t contain the stories I want. I miss the weave of these.

In this rift between the lifestyle I came from and the one I confronted (two types of ‘earth’ Heidegger might suggest), the dichtung-inflected silence of my temporary home was in everything, and harrowing. The tension I experienced was an aching, conflicting urge between wanting to be back in my usual context, wanting to be there in the shack (sort of, to see what thinking would happen next), and wanting to create poetry. And being in the shack delivered occasional moments of unexpected marvel. Not long after the windstorm I walked two kilometres at night to my car. The moon was a bright and full lens above me, so bright I cast a horde of shadows. Returning from the car I blinked, squinted, took a third look. A greyscale rainbow above me.

Whatever truthfulness I was attempting to distil into poems, experiences like these were so beautifully far-fetched as to beggar both understanding and belief. These are sublime experiences in which language can cease to communicate. Shocked by beauty? Once, I could have only imagined that. Perhaps this kind of sublime event escapes even the languages of creative producers.

Rather than instances of the extraordinary, my poems were instead aiming to reinvigorate the ordinariness of being. Heidegger might support this impulse; in Basic Questions of Philosophy: Selected ‘Problems’ of ‘Logic’, he writes ‘(t)he basic disposition of wonder displaces man into the realm where the most usual, yet

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25 Commentator Michael Inwood terms it thus: ‘The notion of rift, Riss, links up with that of a ground-plan or paradigm, a Grundrisse. But it also means that a work is conspicuous, owing to the tension that it embodies.’ See Michael Inwood 2000 Heidegger: a Very Short Introduction, page 121.
26 Italics are Heidegger’s. See Martin Heidegger (trans and introduction Albert Hofstadter) 1971 Poetry, Language, Thought, page 69. In Krell, the same is translated as: ‘Art then is a becoming and happening of truth.’ See Martin Heidegger (ed and introduction David Farrell Krell) 1993 Basic Writings, page 196.
still as such unthought (beings), are established in their most proper unusualness. More than just the ‘defamiliarisation’ of the Russian Formalists, Heidegger seems to extend the idea by implying that poetic wondering originates truth as a mode that mimetically universalises readers. In seeking to locate what it is art originates, the philosopher makes this point:

(a)rt, founding preserving, is the spring that leaps to the truth of what is, in the work. To originate something by a leap, to bring something into being from out of the source of its nature in a founding leap – this is what the word origin (German Ursprung, literally primal leap) means.

So how does this increasingly resonant, enigmatic metaphysics of creative processes relate to my own work? The worlds of my poems were attempting a founding leap that (I hoped) would contain shining emanations of the common strangeness of being. The poems I wrote contained a series of questions that bore traces of the nothingness from which they arrived: ‘will whatever is real please stand up?; ‘who taught the imagination?; ‘who invented the laissez-faire card games of history?; ‘if the gods are watching are we an ad break, and for what?; ‘snug inside the military-industrial complex?; ‘more important: beauty, or its purchase?; ‘any infinite kingdoms almost come?’. These questions were perhaps a melancholic style of memorialising the world I had left behind in Melbourne. Life’s equipment simplified (or forsaken), in the shack a process materialised: I kept being surprised at how my poems ‘sprang’ from nothingness as responses to memory, self, world: the whole theatre of the real. I kept looking forward to a sheath of new work, assuring myself one would materialise, so long as I remembered to wait for as long as it took.

Thinking back on my time in the shack, Heidegger’s ‘The Origin of the Work of Art’ seems a valuable resource, a lens that can lend clarity to the experience of isolation and wondering, in which I unconsciously began the work of refining my creative processes. In asking ‘where and how does art occur?’, ‘what and how

28 Martin Heidegger (trans and introduction Albert Hofstadter) 1971 Poetry, Language, Thought, page 75. In Krell, the same is translated as: ‘Art, founding preserving, is the spring that leaps to the truth of beings in the work. To originate something by a leap, to bring something into being from out of its essential source in a founding leap – this is what the word origin (Ursprung, literally, primal leap) means.’ See Martin Heidegger (ed and introduction David Farrell Krell) 1993 Basic Writings, page 202.
is a work of art?', 'how does truth happen?', 'What is art?' and what is art 'that we call it rightly an origin?'.

Heidegger initiates a model with which his readers may examine creative processes. This theory of creativity is useful for writers, whether they have time booked in a shack somewhere or, more saliently, are simply interested in exploring the nuances of what wondering is and can be. For those of us who ask *is this what poets do?*, theories like Heidegger’s can help map the contours of intuitive processes. Better still, an essay like Heidegger’s is an investigative tool that opens up discourse, requiring us to continue to ask difficult, perhaps impossible, questions: responses to which are by no means direct, but arrive instead (as thinking can do) in the form of refined modes of apprehending-into-language.
Section One

*Murmur and Afterclap* (a collection of poems)

... the saying of the unconcealedness of what is.

Martin Heidegger, ‘The Origin of the Work of Art’
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To the Reader

If I was going to burn a hole into the night my instruments would include starlight and a magnifying glass. Once the hole was made big enough I’d scaffold it so as to hold it in place … and then I’d crawl in. What would I find there? A cure for orphans or madness? Simplicity? An undiscovered number? Perhaps the perfect shade of blue? Who knows. What I do know is I wouldn’t take too many people in because they’d just fill it up.
I’d take you though. This is for sure. I would take you.
part one

the days rolled on like smallish clockwork machines
Toward a Unifying Theory of Non-Coincidence

Reality is a cliché/ From which we escape by metaphor.
Wallace Stevens Miscellaneous Notebooks

Late into the night we sat
practicing our similes like morgue attendants in a power strike. Or an army
of metaphysical sleepers. A draught blew
inside a painting of a grove of trees and across, further out, a frozen lake.
No-one heard the pianos (though outside
a septet of trumpets
blew hard toward tonight while
on TV
a philistine booted a ball to a big barbarian in shorts. The galaxy remained
happy as an underbite).
Elsewhere in the evening, in gravestone plots
of ticking cities, the dead
(who tick not)
murmured ‘we do not think; therefore we are not’ while in fields
(‘everywhere’
said the voice, dolce behind the mirror) it remained Butterflies
vs Butterfly Collectors. I remember once upon a time (also
in a field big
as the world, verdant, flat) I read
an interesting and plotless book; four cloaked guys on mule back
the colour of a dusk newly-begun
rode out the vanishing point firing toy guns
shooting scrolls that unfurled (into the darkening void) these words: The End
while, yes, above, a blackbird diagonal
in the empyrean
twittered on and on: ‘how fragile
the promise of apocalypse, how well-wrought, how remote!’
as the worm in its beak (I thought) shook a clenched end at us all, yelling
‘metaphor
is a cliché from which we escape by reality’ while further up still
the muffled noise
of pianos, pianos, pianos.
Melbourne’s poets

as if
there’s graveyard dirt on our soles, as if we live
in houses with covered mirrors, as if
each mid-morning there’s no right side to climb from our beds
muttering about silence to ourselves, clustering corners of cafes and alleyways
spruiking the godhead, memorialising
the immemorial, so many
thinking on time, on love and where that goes, on nothing, some days
hearts may shudder

as we stoop, moan
and blink below an audience of stars, arriving early
on locating the essence of the dinner party

when coats, bottles, bouquets thrust across night
or when guests enter bookish, miniature rooms of an apartment
shadows dissembling against walls

when talk stumbles amid the legs of elderly chairs
when the neighbouring window’s couple throw smiles
from their own dollhouse

when wine bends mirrors, and laughter
naked as candlelight, dashes for it
over the table and into the ears of everyone, welcome, or

earlier when steam curls the kitchen paint
or when there isn’t conversation, just breathing and the sparrows
who have been passing

perhaps when taxis honk in yellow, cheese vanishes
or the door claps shut with its one good hand, or is it when flowers
nod, head against stem
Ecce Hombres

A thing eats a thing
and is eaten
by another thing. This thing
not lasting long, is eaten
by a further thing
the further thing eaten by something again, eaten
soon after
by something else. This thing
is trapped and eaten by another thing
which is then eaten
by a thing. And so
it goes. This thing, kidnapped and fattened with small things
by a biggish thing
is eaten. The biggish thing-fattening thing (ambushed, carried 'twixt a pole to a rocky place with no garden)
is put in a stewing pot and eaten
by a thing, which is eaten
by another thing
eaten soon after by something
else. This thing is eaten by another thing called Craig.
Craig
though never perhaps believing in the unstoppable nature of destiny
is also eaten.
The eater of Craig
has no name. Bored from the outset, a thing
eats the thing with no name that ate the thing that ate Craig and is tackled
sometime later
by two other things who pick
at bones in the dark below the moon dogs howl at.
Later
a town of things eats a town of other things
right down to the huts and family portraits. Soon after, a colony
of bedraggled and limping stray things
eats them as they return home but you’d expect behaviour like that from things like those. And so it goes.

A thing with a paunch and silver monocle conducts a cogged factory where things package other things for resale in polystyrene with BBQ sauce.

Fat kahuna things loll and burp in the gentle night in their lockdown rooms in the sky above the canker of gutter things being eaten by gutter things. Dawn things eat night things chewing dusk things on day things swallowed by the footstepping time thing devoured in turn by the thing-that-has-no-words thing. Wind things eat windless things thing things bite and gnaw at nothing things mad screaming things suck the marrow of whisper things and the star things eat at bits of the heavens thing. A thing, eating a thing becomes eaten by another thing, but somewhere a horse made of bullion sinks to the bottom of a soundless sea and is declared a permanent mystery (not to mention inedible). And so it goes.
Standing Atop the Shoulders of Those Below
Atop the Shoulders of Those Standing Below

Rallies of them came
to watch
(even hunchbacks, freed for the day from their bells
and under-bridges).
Some blessed, others baked, though
most just stood
akimbo and kicking stones.
Speeches were flung from megaphones
by those with rabbit-teeth
and glasses, and then
it was time. Those with a bluebird on the neck in ink
and eyes set a mite-too-close went first.
Others climbed on top of them, and others
on top of these.
Thus there was an order
right up to the sparrow-chested airy ones, with no
bluebirds (neck or elsewhere).
One of them joked it thought it saw
the outer bounds of the snowdome in the distance.
Those below it weren’t so sure

whether to laugh
or not.
I once lifted the lid from a full stop and climbed down into the darkness of a spiralling staircase. The steps began to grow larger; after an hour I was lowering myself from one stair to the next. Finally, after the second day and just as my rope ran out, I discovered the bottom of the stairwell. Here, a man was crouched humming quietly as he daubed white paint across the floor in a strange language. Something growled in the shadows past the light of my candle. The man lifted the lid of a full stop he’d just painted and shrieked. As I entered I met the reverse of myself, climbing out.
Man with Missing Antithesis

… man is a centaur, a tangle of flesh and mind, divine inspiration and dust.
Primo Levi The Periodic Table

There shall be mystagogues
yes and lawns mowed on weekends. There will be
a millionth bee … yes and a trillionth.

There shall be dust
and quiet desperation, there shall be multiplicity (tangled)
and soon there shall
be birds with small motors, the endless dénouement

of invention
(but no lightning from the fingertips). Verily, yes, Loris one day
will be happy as Larry.

There will be daily papers, they may
yes read all about it.

There will be flux and there will be dark quanta
and yes
there will be sneezing

(small faux orgasm of the proboscis).

There shall be coincidental hysteria, cries of buzzab!

yes, they shall be prone
to slipping from their minds.

Yes to tennis. Yes to dictionaries. Yes to monkey wrenches.

There shall be soap operatics with ersatz oomph
in outre space, isting

and also existing upon and under ground. Studies shall be done

on the vagaries of monsters
(there will be shadows the size of a crack in their days).

They will nuzzle
at night, they will make pets of one another.

Here shall begin the vast agglomerations of et cetera.
in Hell’s Kitchen, the coldest in a century
of nights and I’m knocking
the table clear, skinning the room, eyes empty
as an ice storm, in either hand
her rosy arse
New York through the window a snowing postcard, moonlight
falling on her back in four panes
Things to Do

Travel daylight like a diagnosed prophet: see how the nearness of things remains absent?
Push your melancholy into a pot of steam – distil – then label vials 1. Hysteria 2. The Neurotypical Self
3. Intimacies (Meaningless). Administer as needed. Smile when meditating and snack
on the contents of pill cabinets. Sing to the upturned chins of cats. Do her shapes reflect still
in the salt shaker’s silver face? Gargle absinthe like Rimbaud. Fall in love with eyes
of storms. Read Derrida. Read the Desiderata. Read the open-heart procedures of poets and take notes
on why to unmake things better. Shelve blueprints for re-enchantments. Waft in backyards
of old leather and the bony shouldered like smoke from a roll-your-own. Set fire to the matryoshka dolls
d of your loneliness. Look. Look! From the raised hands of a silhouette city there are crows, staring

and silent. Just wait: soon enough you will be quiet too.
Melbourne Eclogue

Pylon wastelands, unspooling trains, the high-ho masses in velvety fumes, in long black

everything, while workaday alleys load with smog
and new junkies busk and smile Jason?

Piss off, sunshine. Daylight has been playing
itself, again, above newspaper headlines

set as cement by purse-lipped, paper-skinned men
seizing the pale, rhetorical day

their full-colour print as stupefying
as the idea of detainees

Chime purgatory. Cadavers are loping

all over the moving streets, scanning (some centimetres, some aeons) furtively ahead.

Bauble salesmen in mickeymouse socks
and ambient hair jitter like jammed wheels.

Touts have been touting the non-plasticity
of steaming pasta glop, as garnet-ring ed deacons

bow in cloaks outside cathedrals
where statues gallop into a bogan wind,

and church spires direct the upward rush.
And they laugh here of Adelaide? So

many tens of storeys up and smirking
aspirationals in gull aeries squint

above swarms of garden gnome shoving below,
traffic stuck fast as a glue-sniffer’s nostrils

and waved on by policemen, slaphappy
as ganglanders (louche, powder-nosed and going extinct). If I had use for a bank loan
in this rainless place, where monsoons squall

from ‘fuck know where mate’, still, I would not vote with it. Flinders Street, and the mad slouch

in a fresco of crack-toothed stairs, iPods playing someone else’s tunes, phones

ringing across one more unquiet morning of wrong numbers, tinkered moments, and all

stand watch as the jaywalking day gets pushed then grinds, grey across Melbourne intersections.
Incandescence?

Scatter coffee mugs and old geraniums from your heel-scuffed desk
as you climb. Make sure
your window is full of the rectangular world
now, practice THE SKY
IS A MECHANISM FOR EMPTINESS
not falling from yourself, forgetting how
you cannot fly.
Observe: the logistics of symphonies and burning stars
the wind’s trope
and neighborhood children’s simple flightpaths. When flying
inside dreams (especially KISS THE UNFLAT EARTH
ADIEU those of another) widen both eyes. Ignore iconographers
and their notions of verticality
as you climb AVERAGE
HEIGHT, DARK HAIR TRAILING
INTO THE BLUE out from sunrise suburbs, the endgames of plausibility
and your wingless senses: you can fly, now (although
you always could) …
How To See Inside a Machine

At least
the stars still all seem to work fine
except of course for where the antimatter is.
In fact with the exception of
1. the neo-cons remastering the How-To Guide
2. any Missing Space/Time Continuum unmoment
3. that idiot killing the last god who worked in this thing
apart from all that

*you really do gotta love* Reality. I once heard of a man
mauled in his sleep
by his own false teeth.
That some folk believe their ears are keyholes.

Be careful; make it your business to know
the velocity of night falling

**THESE THINGS ARE SUBJECT TO CHANGE!**
(inventors may verify this before checking for patents).

‘No really, there’s no such thing as a machine’
folk whisper in half light

*WE KEEP LOSING ANGELS THOUGH WE’RE NOT SURE WHERE*

blinking at the very idea
of their hands … imagine, whole evenings

lit by nothing
but electricity (‘oh, the moon’, pointing ‘… what’s that for
if you’re not mad?’)
to keep the ghosts in hell.

It’s not stars are the problem here
more questions like ‘what’s going on under this metropolis?’

quickly! *someone come quick it’s beginning to …*

‘See you
at work church home slaughterhouse around
*et cetera’*

über, über, über. From here
we’d never know the lot’s cradled in a big blue boat
atop a giant’s legs, stumbling
over the cracked floors of the underworld

*forever.*
Collins Street 5pm
Melbourne dusk

Occupancy rates
up, this shut-doored city of quarteracre déjà vu, of outpost
principalities hammerfalling

and vacuumed, guidebook flowerbeds daubed KEEP OUT
and picket-fenced, the ear-lined streets
are bright with chandeliers, with brick-veneered hysteria. Churchbells
are hollow-mouthed on knolls.
Swivel-chaired dilettanti are dynastic in their clockwork minds.
Click click click. Listen. Peak hour.

Mortgaged heels.
Things for Nightfall
for JA

Take everything you can
… get homesickness pills (nocte) before you leave.
Gather flares
and the word hub? from every language around
almost anyone can be
asleep and remember to take care, perhaps
a bouquet
of long-stemmed black umbrellas, too.
Have (at least one) room in your pocket (empty
for a snowstorm)
and if you must go climbing on the roofs of cathedrals
then do it
in a handsome tone of voice.
    shred theorems on floating and flying.
Carry with you birdwings for heavier atmospheres, an
auxiliary supply of tinned laughter

The voices in your head before you go

and a ladder
for all your best ideas. Organise

to have both ears placed into witness protection and take
heart

only your own, you are
falling
down into the begun sentences
    of sleep.


Floortalk in front of Bellotto’s ‘Ruins of the Forum, Rome’
(National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne)

Collective-eared and keen
as amnesiacs we listen, gathered for the unreal estates
of ideas. Glancing off architraves, a cut-glass voice
is asking ‘is art
nostalgia for an ordinariness we never had?’
Bellotto’s flat sky smears above a muddy pasture
where prim Grand Tourists, flecked with cracks now, wave
lacy sleeves across shadow. It is 1743.
The last of the Medicis is dead, and Alaska just discovered. All Rome applauds
the piano. *Nostalgia*, once a disease of ‘grief’ and ‘homecoming’.
Legs unfolded at the vista, did Bellotto
at his easel know this
shape of what we are: always stricken, homeless amid ruined monuments
and yearning, all yearning.
part two

and then when the golem had learned how to think
reality is a sound, you have to tune in to
Anne Carson, *Autobiography of Red*

thus we are
gigantic. We have outgrown nearly ourselves. Did you not hear? *Sh-oh-oh!* The alarum of bells?

Duly noted: the calibration of psyche … we grin in our suburban matrix as bedroom TVs embed collective memory while factories pall the backyard bliss with abyss. Listen: the drone of robotniks!

Go thither into fields of soya and GE pigs and when you do go (close door) into the outward try to leave quietly; everything’s already full of the quivers. Congrats!

We’ve got microchips. The cockroaches barely can talk
here Superman keeps his robots, completely faithful copies of himself
Umberto Eco *Travels in Hyperreality*

Have you seen the proliferation? We are savants of our domain. How though do we sleep yet with the *tzzzz* of electromagnetics? Cities so dissonant (so neo-industrial) with the lingua franca of white noise language even a genus fitted for our sublimation.

With echoes of mimesis and our divine apparatus of mind we are the invention of ourselves: celestial automatons out from darkness marching in to the simulacrum. Blink. Scratch. Play.

Fuck. Wake up! Pray. Stay awhile. Dystopians we seem so real. Our makers are as if dreaming gods.
apprehension involves no problem for it may progress to infinity
Immanuel Kant Critique of Judgment

Everywhere
the knell of dogma! The din of knowing
resounding in the fictions of our star-hung universe.
Rocking to-and-fro ad hominem
to the rulebooks of collective sanity? And the reckoning of laws
to keep the chaotic zones of us enforced (and yes
lo! to those who dare interrupt). Who taught the imagination?
Silver screens ensoul the murk of our ‘ever afters’
in backgrounds all too far off
representing how? Or what? ‘New World Ord …’ spectres echo and echo
muttering mobile armies of meanings and their kith
world is a house we enter disorientated as a somnambulist
Orhan Pamuk The Black Book

The doorbell of every atom ringing. There is an orgy
of sleepfulness on the landing and a salvo of snoring
in the plod-filled attic.

Doggerel has been dribbling waxen down shirt-fronts
in the lounge; at this dinner party
(necking tranqs with verve) it’s all ghouléd process amid the ennui
and dust. Clergies are banging cutlery at a table of dead gods
while we nod and watch; while windows play the real. Swing your arms sleepers
like so many wind-up toys:

in us each there may be things that once were stars
sound of their voices snapped like twigs in the air
Michel Houellebecq, *Atomised*

That lo-ing from the yards? Hoist. Stun. Earplugs.
Next. What commotion? Slit. Next!
Flossed neighbours nod polite and reach for Sunday’s filé roast
best supermarket smiles over bang-arsed trolleys
as the tireless grotesque plays out: in backrooms
specie after specie hauls from a kill-line of steel hooks.
At the freezer aisle: ‘one must be so careful
re the disappearance of hope’ and trundling under fluorescence
toward a checkout: ‘it’s OK’ (*blip blip blip blip*) ‘they don’t
even have minds’
decay is inherent in all compound things
Buddha (dying)

Off.

Switch off the spectacle of consciousness and every thing
harkens: notice the grind of the exponential? The mathematics
of it acute as the limit and bend
of sky (oh and ... there! Another jet zagging
horizontal into the front-teeth of a megalopolis. The dentistry'll be mythic).
So primordial in those dark suits and set truths pacing
systematically with our *Idiot’s Guide to Nightmare*
toward what? And who among us
invented the laissez-faire card games of history? The unequal distributions
of fate? Work out your own salvation. With diligence
expanse of the heavens is far greater than it appears
Plotinus The Enneads

ruminating?

Grooming the sky? Keep your tealeaves
to yourselves; keep the old century stories in your heads
if you must. Be mindful: what we cannot know we cannot

though acolytes and icons stare ahead like they've the mysterium tremens
or painful necks. Metaphysicians: heal thyselfs!
Keep checking the various dimensions if your sense of limit
keeps giving out … keep radioing for help if that's what you think
will help. What's that? Static
mostly (something about prophets. Or Rael. Or Beelzebub)
and pour a torrent of light into our dark world
Mary Shelley, Frankenstein

really?
Paradigms ob-ob-ob shifting? These are man-made days
of corporate eugenics in sunshine. Will there really come
barbarians to our gates (and what then will be standard
operating procedure)? Hominids: look up from your screens!
Cities a-swirl with lost-headed statues and hurricane
we are Arcadians in incubator haze. No. No. No. No
really? The Holocene extinction event is to be televised?
Ah wondrous age. A future never seemed so bright.
Meanwhile (and soon) there will be requiems
to be continued: ‘in tonight’s news … only a god can save us now’
the giving of pleasure with some useful precepts for life
Horace *Ars Poetica*

O

our eyes so unclamped and all the while

seeking immortality? The golden means of production enchant

and then make real ... the clangour of us in marketplace fires

imperfect as sensoria awaiting the succour of authenticity.

More important: beauty or its purchase? Our minds

burn with zeitgeist while curators slink and cost-analyse

neon signs signifying ‘Buy Our Thoughts

We Make the World’. Such delectation! Gnash the gleam

of your dentures. Sunglass your widened gaze. Something new will vaunt soon

(something always does)
that I can never reflect on them without being staggered
Charles Darwin *The Origin of Species*

re-fit-ting annihilation?

Forgive me. We could be beatific
thralling with cognition in our everydays. In the beginning
re-engineers of order we were. And now? Roses grown so neat
beside the hum of superhighwaydom; skyscrapers
pulse with handshake and orgasm as transactions process and icebergs
float (mute as a stockmarket meltdown). We are gigantic.
We’ve outgrown our selves ... generations shuffle mutant yet
ex nihilo through the illumination. Snug inside the military-industrial complex?
Any infinite kingdoms almost come? No? No.
So fly (headlong now) toward the vicissitudes of heavy weather
part three

there came the velocity of night falling
Standing Among the Philosophy Class There Will Be Shadows

Coats wet, we come
fog-breathed
to hear how we might come to know the world through pure reflection without recourse
to experience

rain on our foreheads, little fists from the tremendum, we wait
at the doors of an unlocked lecture hall.
Coughing has been falling from a cold man’s mouth. A huddle of minds in the dark morning
apprehend. The trees

are wearing the shape of trees.
What is Not Generally Known

This is quite generally known. Some time ago (about the time
the first star got ready to burn) it became
a good idea for fish to try and walk. Well, it was
roughly that time. Anyway soon the fish became monkeys
though for one thing I am certainly not sure how.
Some say a big flood followed. Others refute this suggestion
(I think it is a question of how you wear your hair).
To continue: it’s all just a hop skip and jump from there.
Eventually we lost our tails, some thinker thought it might be nice
to make a god (and after that lots of folk tended to kill
lots of other folk, depending on the homeground advantage), cows
were discovered to be tasty, numbers and infinity
both vogue philosophies, electricity was a thing we could bring
out of the sky, and money became the new god
worshipped by all ex-fish … only, not many found their succour.
All sorts of other things happened. Men in large suits
ran around everywhere in a vague attempt at control. The moon
was walked on. Telephony got to be telepathy.
Out there, the universe continued to expand. Cities did here.
Answers became products and everything got discovered
then sold. They are talking about building machines
that think now. One of the things not generally known may be
how little of this matters much, or at all.
On Regarding Kant’s Statue

… we must be able to view the ocean as poets do, merely in terms of what manifests itself to the eye

Immanuel Kant  Critique of Judgment

Drumming the cobblestones, fuming Lada
the boulevards of Kaliningrad
jolting as promises lobby callgirls call
below Soviet icons hanging from the fundament. Soldiers in big hats, swarm city
of kleptocrats, nouveau firstworlders, nuns. ‘What
for do you
come in Russia?’ a uniform snarls, oligarchs in glam Mercedes gliding past
dull as fists.
In shade, the shopping-cart elderly glint gold teeth
sipping stale bread beer
above a  Wehrmacht  bunker’s mass grave, one hundred thousand ghosts
in trees, in four days dead
in the Великая Отечественная Война  (‘да, да! Great Patriotic War’). How to be  a priori
about such wilful making? This is
the Immanuel Kant State University of Russia’s front lawn.

Under the lunge of airliners, of smog-dirty billboards
Kant’s gaze.
‘What can I know? What ought I do? What may I hope?’ Five foot tall dandy
in a smock of bird shit, Kant’s statue
before eternity, points beyond glasnost and cosmonauts
apartment blocks terraforming bony swamps
like a death mask.
‘Two things fill the mind … the starry heavens above me and the moral law within me.’
The prospekts are in overdrive. An old patriot coughs, stops. Lights up
and shuffles on.
‘What is a human being?’ Kant’s shoebuckle
burnished by wishing. An essence of crowd tumbles across dimensions into the daytimes
of itself, gizmos aloft
lit immemorial in a raven and drizzling sky. Churchbells pound.
The air knocks.
Notes from the city: one

City of apparatchiks, thinking in unison. Wheelchaired, patriots cross Victory Square to beg kopeks from matryoshkas who wear skirts short as a summer’s night in St Petersburg. Sparrows perch on Red Army statues: boy soldiers with grenades, no shoes. Murals are clutching their sheathes of wheat and gaze into snow, while photographed lynch mobs smile, in museums, into history. The KGB shuts another school. The president is forever here, blinking airspace empty as the synagogues, empty as the daylong drinking of old Soviets, windswept as apartment blocks howling concrete into the echelons. A bus driver is mumbling into her third language. ‘The situation’ she rasps, ‘is excellent. We are trying hard not to lose hope.’
What Thinking Is

A trapdoor has been opened in the head. Inside, historical figurines are rowing, spectred and quaffing logos at the feet of mountains. See here: among them, Ern Malley’s shape, toasting Plato and the Elysian mosquito swamps. In the next boat, glass to ear, Buddha, mouth open like an o-shaped cave whispering ‘oh!’ to a Neanderthal just returned from flower-picking in Utopia, where there are said to be bookshops in corridors of infinite regress. Not much good if you can’t read. The Neanderthal opens a picture book, cloud shining from the pages, an archive of first things in unrenovated air. Plato shrieks. Not a bird shit or black hole out of place. Up-and-coming nature poet William Wordsworth, seasick as usual, peers over a prow and moans. He’s neither heard of nor visited these bookshops, yet, but half-believes it when he overhears a Cambridge shadow one evening moaning how ‘the world is all that is the case!’ Maybe there’s a force at work, Wordsworth thinks, a force that can open heads to screw ideas invisibly into place. It is a night as if there hasn’t been night before. Malley sighs. The wind calls, pre-recorded. A shaft of moonlight tumbles through the trapdoor, onto

the Neanderthal’s picture book, which has slammed shut. Like an eye.
Flowers Grow Still by Heidegger’s Hut, Paul Celan

… mit einer Hoffnung auf ein kommendes Wort im Herzen.

Celan’s inscription in Heidegger’s guestbook (Todtnauberg, 1967)

Among Reichmark and scrawl, a flower
from Heidegger’s hut, an ‘eyebright’ pressed
into my notebook. Over kempt forest,
steep-gabled roofs, the sky old silver
and combed sunshaft, the coiffed elderly lit
in everyday best, apparitions
and cloud in place, in the heavens, setting.
Look, before disenchantment: villagers
and woodsmoke. Glades, valleys. Sussurus
and deer, bells and waterfall and in
the air, echoing, a calamity
encroaching. A noise.

Celan, veins to the world, visiting Heidegger
trod an afternoon over these moors
did the philosopher, disgraced, quote Plato (‘all that
is great stands in the storm’)
and did Celan nod or did he murmur of sunlessness, black milk, ‘how did we live
here?’ asked, asked, asked

church organs amid passing hills
growling like stomachs, back then to Heidegger’s wooden room, a hailstone
away from madness, or was it

truth?

The poet Celan, a Holocaust survivor, maintained an intense intellectual relationship with Heidegger despite the philosopher’s record of public support for Hitler’s regime and his adamant refusal to take back anything he had spoken or written in support of the regime.
Endlessness
a play

(a man is walking down a narrow corridor. He is wearing a suit and hat.
The corridor is straight and has a worn floor. The man is carrying a torch. Footfalls
echo. Yesterday he loosened his tie and broke a shoestring. Sometimes he coughs.
If the man had cigarettes he might smoke them. The corridor continues.
One of his toes is numb. The man keeps walking. He does not sleep. There is a breeze
and it makes no noise. The man walks quickly. His watch has stopped. A dead leaf
blows past him. The man keeps walking. Floorboards creak. His footsteps
grow smaller. Nothing else happens ever. Audiences may leave when appropriate)
Vir Heroicus Sublimus

i
Strapped in deepsleep wards
bedside voices are sighing ‘their love of beauty
a metaphysical homesickness’
though we, like moths on a pleasure flight through a bonsai forest
can hear
almost nothing.

ii
Inside the Institute of Melancholia, test-tubes
spiral like the glassy echoes of unheard children
bright rooms filling with unopened boxes marked *Whatever You Think
is Illusion.*
The world stays cold as a memory (breathed across a mirror).

iii
We packed our suitcases with dirt, held our prayers, stamped
at the edges of metamorphosis: behind us
the broken city’s burlesques, in front the heavy institute gates
and ether, at this height full of gravitas and apocalyptics.

iv
On the plains of this heaven just beyond sight
a queue, infinity-long, not speaking, an indefinite and bloodless
transplantation.

v
‘Only such grievous apes as we could have such
godless, unspeaking gods?’

vi
The clocks on the walls here have never once moved.

vii
Notes from the city: two

An empire of morning with fleamarket bicycles wobbling through skeleton key suburbs.
Sunrise has been pasted into the halcyon, and a banner trails a plane: *kultur macht reich!* above Marx and Engels in an unmown park, in bronze, visitors in long beards from an old world.
A bohemian pack is beginning to snarl. Light stills, where books once burned. ‘Beauty is a history lesson we have failed’ they bark, dog-headed, without even fallen angels for company.

In the graffiti-hung galleries, bombs and ideologies have all been dropped.
Directions to the Edge of Here nor There

Left at daybreak.
Down first thousand flights or so.
Consult new map on tattooed forearm.

Hurry out portrait kept in cupboard
into a sunless cellar.
Fumble lightswitch.
Search for phone. Rest hangover.
Stumble to books
in cellar corner. Scrape paint
out either ear.
Snooze awhile. Board passage
in novel
Rinse print off hands.
Watch a sunset disappear and get
sailor-drunk in tattoo shop.
Purchase postcard. Find phone.
Bump through night in back of a mailcart.

Arrive
at this place yet again. This time maybe
try turning right.
Notes from the city: three

Mint tea in a blue-walled labyrinth, wasps flashing like teeth in air. Trumpets sway the heads of cobra while shadows catcall, timeless as holyman smiles. ‘Salaam Alaikum!’ the cry, bags of sea urchin thrust into old daylight. ‘You want?’ Dusk is smuggling a medina into place under bare-faced electric globes. Donkeys clatter. Fingers caress a wrong turn of lost pockets as nicotine cloud twirls with the chatter of spice sellers: ‘when He wants you, Ali Baba’ a butter knife voice, skimming the yellow night, ‘a fist shall be closed around your heart.’ On the rooftops, the goats. Imams are calling words into centuries of prayer, monotone into the answering sky.
Man with Postcard and Uncertainty Principle

A postcard: dusk
is falling, with snow. Factories
have been shut
against night, and citylights
beam. Tiny owls
are flying
out from the edges of the postcard. The man
strains a brow.
A figure
is moving across a boulevard
and she is holding
a postcard
with miniscule owls
flying up, out from its edges.
The man
finds a magnifying glass. Each time he blinks
her postcard’s sky
blinks
back at him.

She is smiling, upward
past his shoulder
where the blue-eyed sky
begins
to dim.
Notes from the city: four

The Mekong is old sinew in a skin of afternoons. Tuk-tuk drivers are unloading jungle hissing 'boom-boom girl? Smoke?' Bright and bomb-laden, the poppy fields are exploding, carpet at the feet of machinegun mountains. Monks pedal the horizon orange as factories paint the sky petrochemical. In pagodas, long-lobed Buddha heads, quiet as dharma in bell-chime shade. In the markets, the glimmer of machete and militia, where we cargoes of falang come, adrift in different gravity.
Portrait of a Lost Encyclopaedia Salesman, Trapped in a Fractal

It all began with me trying to open a small wooden box from the inside. This was a quiet place and windless too though I left it nonetheless, kicking my way through and into a slightly larger wooden box. Here things were filled with a quietness and not much wind. I kicked in the wooden wall of this box and clambered into yet another quiet and windless box where I thrashed the wall and took a run-up before breaking into a slightly larger still wooden box. ‘How charmingly windless and quiet it is here’ I noted as I kicked down the wooden wall to discover a still slightly larger wooden box. Inside, it was windless and quiet. As was the next wooden box, the next and every other box I discovered the rest of that week. Somewhere, Chihuahuas were howling like wolves and aliens kept gazing from the unknown, wordless.
After Herman Hesse’s *Wandering*

Dear (insert name)

the juddering? Snow, plane, sun, plane, cinema experience
for the blind, plane. Nicotine and anesthetic, a lovely time been had, one more
piss-reeking cityscape, affrays writhing like its 1984. Or forever.
Here a famous film got shot and there an empire passed, touts touting in *whichever language you are boss*. Hashish mazurka. Zoom click. *Your back sore?* once begged
half a begging planet of its white gods. Under highrise afternoon
the mouth of someone is murmuring to the ear of another
someone, intonation over Cro-Magnon foreheads, chatterers in perfect worlds
wishing life could be Swedish magazines (slipped
inside the covers of *l’Humanité*). In slightly monotonous fields, sunlight
has been sliding into absence, trodden by a species monumental as *wherefore now?* Crags into cloudform. Architecture through haze. Is it all some sort of orderly disaster
with trees, to think below? Hello mushroom. Between my eyes
and the heavens a dark golden bee is hovering and humming, and I’m asking

*are we there yet?* When will we be there?
part four

a murmur, then an afterclap (rhapsody)
... here flat biological machines, here
in terra firmament air

glottal amid affluenza

the noise of hysteria.

<Café setting (darkened metro)>

GARCON!

Here

\begin{tabular}{l|l}
OF PERFECT SENSE & \textit{gaze, television} \\
\textit{make the world} & by limelight, the relentlessness \\
& eating hamburgers forever \\
\end{tabular}

(thankyou good for you thankyou good for you)

(prolegomenon

when first  \hspace{1cm} slow-blinking
we glimpsed  \hspace{1cm} the veering
from the sky  \hspace{1cm} we stood
coughing sunlight \hspace{1cm} in the metro’s old heart
was it then  \hspace{1cm} wondering if

\begin{umath}
\textend prolegomenon
\end{umath}

GARCON!  \hspace{1cm} Click fingers above head for promptness and old-fashioned bombastics

LIME SPIDERS FOR THESE WIND-BURNED, MURMURING ROBOTNIKS

(and make it zippy \hspace{1cm} ACHTUNG \hspace{1cm} thumbscrews out \hspace{1cm} BLESS YOU)

\hspace{6cm} good for you

thankyou thankyou thankyou.
A Quick Quiz: do you believe
there are demagogues in your garden digging by gas lamp?

☐ Yes
☐ No
☐ Zabaglione

the supply of full stops/internet pornographers/polar ice caps

is limitless?

Good for you

(Click. Here)

(True or False)

Tetragrammaton™ is made with fermented pomegranates

☐ True ☐ False

Wingnoise|in|thunderhead|maelstrom|below

☐ False ☐ True

They put arachnids in milk to make it froth better

☐ True ☐ False

Good for you …

tra la la la. La la la. Oompahpah

GARCON!  What are these thoughts racing headlong thru our minds?

good for you (NO GOOD FOR YOU) good for you no (GOOD FOR YOU) good for you (NO GOOD FOR YOU) good for you no


Like bodhisattvas wandering daydreams.

Like a quark, a swept editing floor and a kurdaitcha man walking into a bar.

Like a species of biological machines meandering amid wallpaper.

Like bicycle tours for somnambulists.

Like a shade that traverses a dust, a force that traverses a shade

perhaps, perhaps

perhaps it was a slight attack of insanity after all.

GARCON!

Here

Listen to this fulsome noise just a moment more:

The Transmigration of Notions

3. Nothing works the same since.
1. Lightning at the crown of our skulls.
2. Were capitalism, the weather, standard operating procedures, were any of them sustainable

(colophon)

stammering at the horizon

far far far far far far farfarfarfarfar

'Will Whatever Is Real Please Stand Up?'

storm-filled, equivocal [while

in clearlight] our shadows, lost

sigh *yet another* "

^end colophon)?

\[\begin{array}{ccc}
\text{x} & \text{y} & \text{no no no} \\
\text{floss} & \text{machine separated meat product} & \text{in a can} \\
\text{razors} & \text{reality} & \\
\text{yarb} & & \\
\end{array}\]

<menu>

**GARCON!**

Here, the pitched noise

\(... oompahpa hoompahpah all ok NOTHING GOING ON all ok NOTHING GOING ON all ok NOTHING GOING ON all ok NOTHING* ...\)

\(\text{another question (No \checkmark Required)}\)

never heard it before?

Well\(\text{good for you, good for}\) bang! Thankeyou
Notes

Page 34: it is Jewish custom for mourners to cover their mirrors.

Pages 36-37: the refrain ‘and so it goes’ is taken from Kurt Vonnegut’s Slaughterhouse 5 (1969).


Page 42: ‘Things To Do’ takes its name from a poem by Jordie Albiston. The line ‘see how the nearness of things remains absent?’ is taken from Martin Heidegger’s essay ‘The Thing’ (1949). ‘Just wait: soon enough you will be quiet too’ is taken from a poem by Robert Hass, ‘After Goethe’.

Page 47: ‘Collins Street 5pm’ responds to John Brack’s 1955 painting of the same name.

Page 55: ‘New World Ord …’ is appropriated from George H.W. Bush’s 1991 speech to Congress; ‘mobile armies of meanings and their kith’ responds to Nietzsche’s truism that ‘truth is a mobile army of metaphors’.

Page 57: ‘one must be so careful/ re the disappearance of hope’ are lines taken from Jorie Graham’s ‘Praying (attempt of April 1904)’.

Page 58: ‘work out your own salvation. With diligence’ are reputed to be Siddhartha Gautama’s last words.

Page 60: ‘only a god can save us now’ is taken from Martin Heidegger’s posthumously published interview in Der Spiegel (1976).

Pages 53-62: ‘the horror’ is taken from Joseph Conrad’s Heart of Darkness (1902).

Page 67: the statue in front of the Immanuel Kant State University of Russia commemorates a thinker who never left his Prussian hometown of Königsberg (as it was known before the area was annexed by Russia after the Second World War). ‘What can I know? What ought I do? What may I hope?’ are questions asked by Kant in his Critique of Pure Reason (1781). ‘Two things fill the mind … the starry heavens above me and the moral law within me’ is taken from his Critique of Practical Reason (1788), and serve as an epitaph on a plaque at the Kaliningrad cathedral, where the philosopher was once interred. His bodily remains were lost during the Second World War.

Page 69: ‘a Cambridge shadow moaning how “the world is all that is the case!”’ refers to Wittgenstein, associated with the university for much of his life. The aphorism is taken from his treatise, Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus (1921).

Page 70: the ‘eyebright’ flower is a reference to Paul Celan’s poem ‘Todtnauberg’, written by the poet after visiting Heidegger in 1967; ‘black milk’ is taken from Celan’s poem ‘Death Fugue’.

Page 79: ‘wishing life could be Swedish magazines’ is a reference to the Iggy Pop song. The lines ‘Between my eyes/ and the heavens a dark golden bee is hovering and humming’ are taken from Hesse’s travelogue, Wandering (1917).

Pages 83-85: reference is made throughout ‘Murmur and Afterclap (rhapsody)’ to work from Joseph Conrad, Jean-Paul Sartre, Wallace Stevens, and Slavoj Zizek.
Section Two

*The Archaic Shudder? Toward a poetics of the sublime (a critical investigation)*

Imagination means one thing in rhetoric, another with the poets; and you cannot fail to observe that the object of the latter is to amaze, of the former to give distinctness; both, however, seek to stir the mind strongly.

A.O. Prickard, *Longinus on the Sublime*

Depending on the depth of the history of a people, there will exist or will not exist, in the all-determining beginning, the poetising of the poet and the thinking of the thinker, i.e. philosophy.

Martin Heidegger, *Basic Questions in Philosophy: Selected Problems of Logic*
Introduction

A précis, methodology and glossary.

What uses might a poet find for philosophies? What do poetries do (and how do poets do it)?
This cross-disciplinary investigation focuses on genre and the sublime; traversing these fields of study, I characterise experience that cannot be explained directly with language – that which is ineffable, impossible, non-rational, and incomprehensible – as extra-logical, and so as sublime. I also speculate that after sublime experience, after wonder, thinking is influenced by genre and, finally, that the imagination may contain its own sublime processes. Through the arché-texts of pseudo-Longinus and Edmund Burke, I take the sublime to be both textual and affective. However, I first re-read (and agree with) Kant’s account of the sublime as phenomenological – and herein lies the issue. I wonder whether poetry entails different thinking, a different style of responsiveness to wonder, to philosophies? In *Learning and Teaching Genre*, Aviva Freeman suggests genre can ‘form part of the discursive context to which rhetors respond in their writing and, as such, shape and enable the writing’.

What I suggest is that the poems under consideration in this investigation bear traces of generically-shaped thinking. What I will contend is that these poems (by Wallace Stevens, Anne Carson, Robert Hass, and Rainer Maria Rilke) may be borne from sublime imaginative processes of psychic disequilibrium, chaos, and silence.

Why an archaic shuddering? In his article, ‘Schiller and the Political Sublime: Two Perspectives’, Charles H. Hinnant calls the sublime a form of Kantian mental agitation that manifests as ‘an archaic shudder’. It may be that the sublime is an ancient textual style (pseudo-Longinus), or affective response (Burke), or extra-logical phenomenology (Kant) or, more recently, it may entail an attempt to present the unpresentable (Lyotard).

What these conceptions of the sublime indicate is that discourses – theoretical discourses, at least – have historically mutated. In this study, I take an opportunity to further mutate discourses on the sublime by presenting it as an explicit and integral component of processes in which creative producers make an approach to language, thinking generically after the experience of wonder.

In essence, all thinking may be creative and subject to what Kant calls a ‘transcendental power of imagination’.

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1 Aviva Freeman 1994 *Learning and Teaching Genre*, page 273.
2 Charles H. Hinnant ‘Schiller and the Political Sublime: Two Perspectives’ in *Criticism* Vol.44, No.2, (Spring 2002), page 130.
3 Lyotard’s ‘Answering the Question: What is Postmodernism?’ (trans Régis Durand) is contained in Jean-François Lyotard (trans Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi) 1984 *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, page 82.
‘know-how’ as it relates to apprehending and seeing, and then knowing what to do. After Heidegger, I explore to what extent genre entails not only particular styles of *technê* and know-how but, also, whether genre engages different styles of ‘apprehending’ and ‘seeing’. A wealth of scholarship arrives at a similar junction to my reading of Heideggerian *technê* as a matter of genre. In her article, ‘Teaching Genres: A Bakhtinian Approach’, Elsie Rockwell writes that ‘in Bakhtin’s terms, certain “categories of thought” are embodied in generic traditions’. This provokes an immediate question: how does genre influence particular styles of thinking? Are generic atmospheres entailed? Commentator Sonia M. Livingstone, in *Making Sense of Television: the Psychology of Audience Interpretation*, writes ‘different genres are concerned to establish different world views’ but, beyond the influence of genre in originating particular ontologies for different reading communities – and this seems incontestable – what role (if any) does genre play in setting up specific paradigms for thinking? Tzvetan Todorov provides an answer. In ‘The Origin of Genres’, Todorov writes that genres ‘function as “horizons of expectation” for readers, and as “models of writing” for authors … Genres communicate with the society in which they flourish by means of institutionalisation’. And so, examining poems from Stevens, Carson, Hass, and Rilke, and in viewing these poems through texts by Plato, pseudo-Longinus, Burke, Kant, Freud, Heidegger, Wittgenstein, and a host of contemporary theorists, I will come to argue that each poet adopts their own *technê*, and that each poem under analysis contains an apprehension of sublime imaginative processes. I call these apprehensions an ‘immanence of absence’, which turns what poststructuralists term a metaphysics of presence; this style of thinking after wonder is directly influenced by considerations of how to shift language toward ‘poetry’.

In examining the influence of genre and the sublime on thinking and writing, what has become increasingly clear is the need for a specialist term. I venture *poeticognosis* – a fusion of the terms *poësis*, cognition, and *gnosis* – to indicate a particular style of apprehending-into-genre. At the conclusion of my investigation, I explore my neologism and the complex ways in which it relates to creative production. Other researchers have speculated their own versions of how the sublime relates to creative and critical thinking.

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For example, when introducing *The Textual Sublime: Deconstruction and its Differences*, authors Hugh J. Silverman and Gary E. Aylesworth write:

> the literary seeks to articulate and express the sublime; philosophy names and appropriates the sublime for itself – in effect, philosophy removes the sublime from its proper place and makes use of it for its own purposes.\(^\text{10}\)

I wholly agree (and follow a similar gesture) to this repositioning of the sublime into creative sites. Re-reading across a range of recent conceptualisations, late twentieth century theorists propose the sublime as analogous to a blockage,\(^\text{11}\) pulsation,\(^\text{12}\) slippage,\(^\text{13}\) sublimation,\(^\text{14}\) and excitement.\(^\text{15}\) Psychosexual associations aside, a minor industry of scholarship has recently emerged and explored the concept in an attempt to essentialise it. So how do I define the sublime?

Paying attention to three dominant, historicising theories (from pseudo-Longinus, Burke, and Kant), I agree with theorist Thomas Weiskel who, in *The Romantic Sublime: Studies in the Structure and Psychology of Transcendence*, writes that the ‘essential claim of the sublime is that man can, in feeling and in speech, transcend the human’.\(^\text{16}\) In reaction to Kant, Weiskel also states that the cause of the sublime ‘is the aggrandizement of reason at the expense of reality and the imaginative apprehension of reality’.\(^\text{17}\) Can sublime experience, then, be characterised as an affective, psychic (and, for creative producers, a *linguistic*) grasp toward comprehension when confronted with that which resists logic and reason? In other words, does genre have any role to play in the attempt to comprehend the incomprehensible? In his survey, *The Sublime*, Philip Shaw states the sublime ‘marks the limits of reason and expression with a sense of what might lie beyond these limits’.\(^\text{18}\) Shuddering at

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\(^\text{12}\) ‘(A) pulsation or *Tingle*: an indeterminate oscillation between the two poles of sublimity and Mundanity.’ See Michael Angelo Tata ‘The Pomo tingle: from Mundanity to Sublimity and Back Again’ in *Critical Studies* Vol.15, No.1 (January 2001), page 209.

\(^\text{13}\) ‘The transport of the sublime, therefore, includes a slippage among the positions of enunciation, as the *destinaire* achieves a fictive identification with the speaker’. See Suzanne Guerlac’s ‘Longinus and the Subject of the Sublime’ in *New Literary History*, Vol.16, No.2, The Sublime and the Beautiful: Reconsiderations (Winter 1985), page 275.

\(^\text{14}\) Terrence Des Pres seems to strike out alone, rather than follow any particular theory or philosophical precursor, when he writes ‘the sublime experience is the product of a process more commonly known as *sublimation*’. This aligns, somewhat, with Burke’s terror/delight dyad. See Terrence Des Pres ‘Terror and the Sublime’ in *Human Rights Quarterly* Vol.5, No.2 (May, 1983), page 142.


\(^\text{17}\) Ibid, page 41.

limitation – imaginative, cognitive, emotional, phenomenological, sensate, linguistic – seems an apposite reaction to the dissonance of the beyond-human, which must remain consigned to the realms of mystery. When Wittgenstein expresses his own approach to limitation with the aphorism ‘(w)hat we cannot speak about we must pass over in silence’, I argue that philosophical genre texts, following an impulse to comprehend, must follow Wittgenstein’s edict. Further, in my investigation I re-read silence (after Burke’s treatise) as an imaginative site across which creative thinking can shift, while ideas move from nothingness into language. The limit of thinking – silence? – may define the moment of thinking arriving; this (in part) is what my investigation will seek to illuminate.

Shaw goes on to propose that the sublime may ‘mark the point at which thought itself is brought into question’. So, in taking Hinnant’s lead by naming this a study of the archaic shudder, I seek to valorise poetry as a style of apprehending-into-genre that makes active use of sublime states: disequilibrium, chaos, and silence. In waiting reflectively for thinking to happen, I assert a diachronic shuddering passes through creative producers. What I will go on to argue is that poems contain visions, fragments, and momentary epiphanies, which arrive and register (and then formalise) a shuddering shock of wonder.

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Developing my poetics of the sublime, I first survey two instances of philosophical language use. In ‘Dialectics and Logic: two modes of the genre “philosophy”’, I analyse truth-effects in Plato’s The Republic and Kant’s Critique of Judgment. Here, I am motivated less by a desire to postulate classifying taxonomies of philosophy, and remain more interested in analysing material instances of philosophical meaning-making. In locating ‘dialectical’ (Platonic) and ‘logical’ (Kantian) impulses at work in philosophical genre texts, I argue that these exemplary philosophies embed diachronic modes embodied in the discourses of the genre. What I mean by ‘diachronic’ is that dialectics and logic are modes of philosophising that mutate across histories of philosophical language use. In locating these ‘philosophical’ modes, what I will come to argue is that it is

21 Jeremy Hawthorn, in his book A Glossary of Contemporary Literary Theory, defines the term diachronic as follows: ‘A diachronic study or analysis concerns itself with the evolution and change over time of that which is studied: thus diachronic linguistics is also known as historical linguistics, and is concerned with the development of a language or languages over time. A synchronic study or analysis, in contrast, limits its concern to a particular moment in time. Thus
theoria and gnosis that most usefully characterise two ways of organising thinking – the philosophical, and the poetic, which are by no means fixed or stable – into genre. I then contemplate wonder and the sublime, theoria and gnosis to mark a further distinction between genres, which I phrase as a (somewhat artificial) division between ‘logical comprehension’ and ‘extra-logical apprehension’. As contemporary thinker Arthur Danto states, in The Philosophical Disenfranchisement of Art, philosophical systems originate and act in relation to art as a ‘penitentiary architecture … keeping monsters in and so protecting us against some deep metaphysical danger’.22 In this part of my investigation, which is an analysis of responsiveness to wondering and generic language use, I rattle the dialectical bars described by Danto.

In the second part of my investigation, ‘Toward Poetognosis? Re-thinking the sublime’, my emphasis shifts toward a speculative modelling of processes (technical and phenomenological) at work in the poetries of Anne Carson and Robert Hass. Underpinning this part of my study is the hypothesis that, for some poets, returning to language after sublime apprehension (where language ceases to function), particular styles of thinking transfer. As contemporary poetician Harold Bloom names it, ‘the poetic sublime’ is mediated through ‘gnosis’,23 a form of more-than-rational knowledge. Here, I map my own speculative system of processes by which poems arrive gnostically, in a manner altogether different from philosophical comprehensions.

Anne Carson asserts that sublime experience is likely to transfer to readers, when she writes that ‘(t)o feel the joy of the Sublime is to be inside creative power for a moment’.24 What I assert is that the unusualness of the usual (this is to borrow from Heidegger25) arrives in some poets, whose work then comes to reflect the beyond-human and mysterious. These are poets who point readers toward experience of the sublime, rather than make any attempt to comprehend in the ways philosophical languages seem to. Instead, readers stand to be amazed by poems that reveal, as Hass does in ‘Tall Windows’:

> a feeling that everything in the world has its
> own size, that if you found its size among the swellings and diminishings

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23 Poetician Harold Bloom defines gnosis as ‘not rational knowledge, but like poetic knowledge (I suspect “like” to be my evasion) Gnosis is more-than-rational knowledge’. See Harold Bloom 1982 Agon: Towards a Theory of Reviviscence, pages 4,5.
it would be calm and shine.\(^\text{26}\)

This is no philosophical explanation but, instead, a description of a feeling, which is a feeling of immersion in totality. ‘Tall Windows’ is (among other things) a narrative of the Holocaust, and serves to indicate the poet’s ethical concerns, which he seeks to share with readers just as any moral philosopher might do. The difference is that Hass cuts a shape and sound in language, which projects images on to the minds of his readers. In following his thinking toward a gestalt, Hass’ imperative is to figure language by questioning and making strange, rather than to comprehend by explanation.

Using language in what I take to be an exemplary, poetic manner, can we regard Hass’ illuminating poem as reflecting the poet’s own calmness? In other words, confronted with Wimsatt and Beardsley’s affective and intentional fallacies, do the poems under analysis here suggest their poets’ phenomenologies? If so, what elements in the language indicate states-of-mind at the time of writing? Without asking (and even if I were to ask), can I claim to know what Stevens, Carson, Hass, and Rilke have experienced in order to make poems? Clearly, this is not a claim I can make with any confidence. But applying the same strict measure, can I assert that each of these poets arrive at already-complete poems? In other words, is it so strange to think that, grafted on to the language of a poem, there remains some trace of a poet’s thinking or feeling? Situated within this continuum – the impossibility of knowing what specific poets do, weighed against an intuition (supported by my own practice) that poets do something – I argue that poems indeed bear some trace of their psychic origins. My investigation attempts to draw analogies between poems so that speaking positions, approaches, and ideologies are aligned through my close reading. What I am seeking to know is what it must be like to be inside creative power for a moment, to see as these poets may have seen. In going beyond the formal linguistic properties of the poems under analysis, I make my attempt at a speculation of phenomenological processes, which I will contend are defined by genre and, more particularly, by how the sublime comes to be mediated by genre.

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A word now on methodology. I have read in aesthetics from Antiquity, through Enlightenment, and across

texts from the 20th century. I have also read in logical positivism and the ordinary-language philosophies, as well as across the canon of poetics. In seeking to identify a series of defining characteristics through analysis of a spectrum of texts that go by the programmatic titles ‘philosophy’ and ‘poetry’, questions of genre have arisen. This necessitates a discussion and review of genre theory.

‘Genre’ emanates from the Greek γένος (race, stock, breed) and γόνος (birth, offspring, stock); these ancient etymologies echo across and beyond the twentieth century as philosophers of language conceptualise analogues in which language is presented as a species, family, institution, and set of inter-relating speech-acts. For genre theorists, the manner in which sub-groupings – genres – fit together within these categories is a matter of intense speculation. As an adjunct to the dominant analytical forces focussing on texts and textuality throughout the twentieth century, genre theory has emerged from Romantic conceptions of genre as a codified, categorising system of organising literatures. These notions are now all but abandoned and, as genre theory broadens as a field of analysis, at the beginning of the 21st century questions of genre are dominated by two particular approaches to texts and textuality. These, outlined below, are (what I term) the ‘literary’ and ‘socio-cultural’ approaches:

1. Literary approaches to genre theory.

Responding to the Russian Formalists, who took literary evolution to be discontinuous and who saw that new forms and genres appear as old forms and genres exhaust the possibilities of fulfilling their functions, genre theorists involved in Literary Studies take genre to be a ‘continuous site of contestation’. In the era of poststructuralism, genre has been construed as a limit; indeed, the father of poststructuralism, Jacques Derrida, has this to say of genre:

(a)s soon as the word ‘genre’ is sounded, as soon as it is heard, as soon as one attempts to conceive it, a limit is drawn. And when a limit is established, norms and interdictions are not far behind: ‘Do’, ‘Do not’ says ‘genre’, the word ‘genre’, the figure, the voice, or the law of genre.

28 For a discussion of the dominant metaphors used to describe genre across the twentieth century, see David Fishelov’s Metaphors of Genre: The Role of Analogies in Genre Theory (1993).
An impulse toward genetic purity is apprehended by theorists like Derrida, whose revolutionary program requires that limits be shattered, laws transgressed, and so genres mixed (I discuss the poststructural program in a moment, in my re-reading of Paul de Man’s reading and writing style). According to the this approach, genre no less than threatens the autonomy of texts; many literary theorists regard genre with suspicion and scepticism. Todorov cites Maurice Blanchot, who perhaps wishes that genre will disappear:

(t)he book alone is important, as it is, far from genres, outside rubrics – prose, poetry, the novel, the first-person account – under which it refuses to be arranged and to which it denies the power to fix its place and to determine its form. A book no longer belongs to a genre; every book arises from literature alone, as if the latter possessed in advance, in its generality, the secrets and the formulas that alone allow book reality to be given to that which is written. Everything would happen as if, genres having dissipated, literature alone was affirmed, alone shined in the mysterious light that it spreads and that every literary creation sends back to it while multiplying it – as if there were an ‘essence’ of literature.\(^{31}\)

Contemporary literary approaches to genre, exemplified in my citations from Derrida and Blanchot, take issue with the imposition of rules governing boundaries: ‘one must respect a norm, one must not cross a line of demarcation, one must not risk impurity, anomaly, or monstrosity’,\(^{32}\) Derrida says, taking up a dialectical position for poststructuralists to follow. Indeed, where some have seen opportunity for stability, genre theorists of the literary persuasion apprehend opportunities to transgress. To those professionally interested in texts, textuality, and the production of writing, genre will be approached with these impulses in mind: ‘(m)ixture, hybridity, epicenity, promiscurity’.\(^{33}\)

2. Socio-cultural approaches to genre theory.

In his essay, ‘The Problem of Speech Genres’, theorist Mikhail Bakhtin distinguishes between literary and everyday ‘speech genres’. Working in the mid-twentieth century, Bakhtin’s insights produced a socio-cultural ‘turn’ – and significant broadening – in genre theory, which some theorists now apply to all utterance.


According to the socio-cultural approach, genre is contingent on social factors and contexts which, of course, are not fixed. Indeed, Carolyn Miller advances this new approach to genre theory when writing, in ‘Genre as Social Action’, that ‘a rhetorically sound definition of genre must be centred not on the substance or form of discourse but on the action it is used to accomplish’.\footnote{Carolyn R. Miller ‘Genre as Social Action’ in Quarterly Journal of Speech Vol.70 (1984), page 151.} Under this conception, genre offers a glimpse into human activity and interactivity: language is apprehended as gestural, and genres defined by the functional outcomes their speech-acts produce. To theorists involved in the socio-cultural approach to genre theory, here is a way of reading codified ways in which diverse cultures operate. Anis Bawarshi, in ‘The Genre Function’, contends ‘genre does not simply regulate a pre-existing social activity; instead, it constitutes the activity by making it possible through its ideological and rhetorical conventions’.\footnote{Anis Bawarshi, ‘The Genre Function’, in College English, Vol.62, No.3 (January, 2000), page 340.} In The Principle of Reason, Heidegger writes ‘language speaks, not humans. Humans only speak inasmuch as they respond to language’\footnote{Martin Heidegger (trans Reginald Lilly) 1991 The Principle of Reason, page 96.} but, to socio-cultural theorists, this aphorism might be refined: language speaks in genres. Humans only speak inasmuch as they respond to language by uttering in genres, each of which produce particular effects.

And so, the particular effects of philosophies and poetries remain of central importance to this investigation. How do I characterise the genres? In Metaphors of Genre: The Role of Analogies in Genre Theory, David Fishelov defines the term as the ‘combination of prototypical, representative members’;\footnote{David Fishelov 1993 Metaphors of Genre: The Role of Analogies in Genre Theory, page 8.} that is, texts clustered according to backwards-looking schematics. John Frow, who favours the literary approach to genre theory, summarises the same historicising principles in his monograph, Genre, and proposes the following taxonomy to identify genre (before going on to problematise it), which exists where texts can be shown to share:

(1) a set of formal features.

For example sonnets, manifestoes, and pop songs become distinct by their syntactic and grammatical vocabularies. Formal features organise the enunciation of a genre’s particular world of meaning-making, and can serve as codifying signposts of discursive properties.

(2) A thematic structure.
Themes help to identify the genre in which a text is participating. The genre of philosophy, to use one example, embeds an impulse toward a thematic organisation of ontologies, epistemologies, metaphysics, ethics and aesthetics, in the same way that airport novels share themes of intrigue, subterfuge, and the improbable hi-jinx of their lead characters.

(5) A situation of address.

Horizons of expectation and models of writing (see Todorov38) guide writers and readers to genre. Speaking positions indicate those readers a text will address and expect to be taken up by.

(4) A structure of implication.

Genre often sets up ‘a certain complicity with the reader’,39 and presupposes participants who engage in communicative acts understand the (often complex) rules of these genre worlds. For example, without foreknowledge of poetries’ nuanced devices (metre, sound patterning, the Aristotelian tropes), poems will present a challenge for non-specialist readers, as will midrash, libretti, religious apocrypha, and soap operas. Foreknowledge, that assumed complicity between text and reader, can mark the boundaries – and accessibility – of genres.

(5) A rhetorical function.

Political satires and television for children, for example, establish and affirm truth-effects as meanings communicate between addresser and addressee, text and reader. The rhetorical function signifies what and how – and ultimately who – genre texts address.40

Texts, then, make genres (rather than the other way around), and genre theory is a way of gauging those structures (however unstable41) responsible for creating a spectrum of distinctive worlds. Perhaps these worlds are deceptively close; can it be stated with any certainty (and this is a question Heidegger’s translator, Albert Hofstader, asks) that poetic thinkers remain formally and functionally worlds apart from thinking

40 Ibid, pages 9-10, 72-77 passim.
poets? When genre theory is used as a tool to distinguish between texts, is a real difference identified? One suspects that the imagination, irony, and sheer bloody-mindedness of human beings means one genre’s rules and codes will be adopted to pursue the ends of the different genres; raids, ruptures, transgressions, and interference all seem aspects of genre (or, at least, the instability of genre). ‘From where do genres come from’ asks Todorov, before answering his own question: ‘Why, simply, from other genres. A new genre is always the transformation of one or several old genres: by inversion, by displacement, by combination.’ So it is that some philosophers will seem poetic (Hofstadter’s ‘poetic thinkers’) while some poets will seem philosophical (‘thinking poets’) … this all seems to indicate how genre is provisional, and somewhat superficial. While it makes every attempt to be classifying, genre remains porous.

It is through the lens of genre theory that I examine philosophies and poetries. At the heart of the matter is my investigation of the common material – language – which I examine in order to discern difference between genre-making texts. In How to Read a Poem, Terry Eagleton talks of the materiality of the signifier, and ‘that the word has its own texture, pitch and density, which poetry exploits more fully than other verbal arts’. Returning to Frow’s first identifying principle of genre (that is, that genre can be identified according to a similarity of formal features), when I come to examine what use Stevens, Carson, Hass, and Rilke make of language, I take into consideration not only Frow’s porous taxonomies, but also those devices which can make poetries sing language uniquely: tone, pitch, rhythm, diction, metre, pace, voice, texture, structure, syntax, register, point of view, lineation, enjambment, figuration and punctuation all work toward creating (what I term) the value-effects of poetries because, firstly, these formal properties remain constitutive of value and, secondly, they seem largely absent from the outcomes philosophers (no matter how poetic) make with language.

A word now on some of the terms and paradigms I use throughout my investigation. The following glossary is a foundation for my spectrum of thinking around material, generic, and phenomenological difference between

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42 Albert Hofstadter, in Martin Heidegger (trans and introduction Albert Hofstadter) 1971 Poetry, Language, Thought, page x.
44 Terry Eagleton 2007 How to Read a Poem, page 43.
poems and philosophies. I ask that readers approach the definitions I provide here as starting points only; as I draw these introductory categories into my analyses, they will develop into nuanced ideas.

**gnosis and theoria**

(i) ‘gnosis’ is defined in *The Shorter Oxford English Dictionary* as ‘special knowledge of spiritual mysteries’. The term is re-read by Harold Bloom, who searches for a specific variety of ‘poetic’ knowledge in *Agon: Towards a Theory of Revisionism*. Bloom shifts *gnosis* from its early Christian and Hebraic traditions and recuperates it as a form of ‘more-than-rational knowledge’. Sharing Bloom’s impulse to move across speculative abstract realms, I use *gnosis* throughout my investigation to denote a particular mode of responding to wonder. Following Kant, I argue poets apprehend (rather than seek to comprehend); this form of knowing does not require theoretical or deductive processes but is instead formulated through observing, reflecting, and questioning.

(ii) ‘theoria’ is defined in *The Shorter Oxford English Dictionary* as ‘contemplation, survey’, and elsewhere as ‘theoretical activity’. I use *theoria* throughout my investigation to characterise a philosophical mode of response to what is surveyed, in which philosophers explore and then explicate wonder.

**architectonics and teleology**

(i) ‘architectonic’ is defined in *The Shorter Oxford English Dictionary* as ‘1. of or pertaining to architecture; serviceable for construction 2. Constructive 3. Directive, controlling 4. Pertaining to the systematisation of knowledge’. In proposing his own (albeit sceptical) definition of architectonic, Yale deconstructionist Paul de Man proposes:

> the heavens are a vault that covers the totality of earthly space as a roof covers a house. Space, in Kant as in Aristotle, is a house in which we dwell more or less safely, or more or less poetically, on this earth. This is also how the sea is perceived or how, according to Kant,

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poets perceive it: its horizontal expanse is like a floor bounded by the horizon, by the walls of heaven as they close off and delimit the building.\textsuperscript{50}

Closely aligned with Bloom’s \textit{gno{\textquotesingle}sis}, throughout my investigation I use architectonics to characterise poetic perception. The term architectonics extends Heidegger’s speculation that ‘(t)he taking of measure is what is poetic in dwelling. Poetry is a measuring’.\textsuperscript{51} To see architectonically is to map apprehended realities with a particular style of linguistic blueprint.

(ii) ‘teleology’ is defined in \textit{The Shorter Oxford English Dictionary} as ‘the doctrine or study of ends or final causes, especially as related to the evidences of design or purpose in nature’\textsuperscript{.52} \textit{Telos} derives from the Greek ‘final purpose’;\textsuperscript{53} \textit{The Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy} defines teleology as ‘the philosophical doctrine that all of nature, or at least intentional agents, are goal-directed or functionally organised’.\textsuperscript{54} I use teleology throughout my investigation to characterise perception that is specifically philosophical. Grounded in \textit{theoria}, teleological perception starts as an impulse to explain and culminates (with epistemologies, metaphysics, ethics, and aesthetics) in the exhaustion of wondering.

\textbf{wonder and curiosity}

In following Heidegger as he moves through etymologies, I re-read wonder as an originary mode of seeing that remains different from being curious about that which is beheld.

(i) ‘wonder’ is defined in \textit{The Shorter Oxford English Dictionary} as ‘1. to feel or be affected with wonder; to be struck with surprise or astonishment, to marvel.’\textsuperscript{55} Heidegger might contest the dictionary’s definition, asserting instead that wonder shares a problematic relation with both surprise and astonishment. The philosopher identifies astonishment (together with admiration and awe) as a curiosity, which he then labels as a permutation of wonder.\textsuperscript{56} So, then, what is it to \textit{wonder}? Heidegger employs ‘amazement’ and ‘marvelling’ on his way to a rapprochement of primordial thinking, in which wonder is implicit to observing. Analogous to

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{50} Paul de Man (ed and introduction Andrzej Warminski) 1996 \textit{Aesthetic Ideology}, page 81.
\item \textsuperscript{51} Martin Heidegger (trans and introduction Albert Hofstadter) 1971 \textit{Poetry, Language, Thought}, page 219.
\item \textsuperscript{52} C.T. Onions (ed) 1992 \textit{The Shorter Oxford Dictionary}, page 2255.
\item \textsuperscript{54} Robert Audi (ed) 2001 \textit{The Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy (2\textsuperscript{nd} ed)}, page 905.
\item \textsuperscript{55} C.T. Onions (ed) 1992 \textit{The Shorter Oxford Dictionary}, page 2566.
\item \textsuperscript{56} See Martin Heidegger (trans Richard Rojcewicz and André Schuwer) 1994 \textit{Basic Questions in Philosophy: Selected ‘Problems’ of ‘Logic’}, pages 142-143.
\end{itemize}
the Russian Formalists’ terms ‘estrangement’ and ‘defamiliarisation’, Heidegger writes that ‘(i)n wonder what is most usual itself becomes the most unusual’\(^{57}\) and that ‘(t)he wondrous is first of all what is striking, remarkable, an exception to the habitual’.\(^{58}\) Wonder marvels at the ordinary, not the extraordinary, and the ordinary is a different matter to the habitual (Heidegger states ‘an exception’ to it). In considering wonder, what is at hand is a matter of perception, of seeing things as things-in-themselves. This is also a matter of transferring amazement persuasively, so as to produce agreement on the nature of being and beings. Throughout my investigation I attach wonder to architectonic apprehension, and privilege those poets who come to inform my analyses as language users whose texts embed a style that transfers wondering.

(ii) ‘curious’ is defined in The Shorter Oxford English Dictionary as ‘1. careful; solicitous; nice; accurate; skilful 2. desirous of seeing or knowing; inquisitive. Often in a bad sense: prying.’\(^{59}\) In Being and Time, Heidegger writes ‘(c)uriosity has nothing to do with observing entities and marvelling at them.’\(^{60}\) Curiosity is instead a form of not-martvelling, of desiring to see or know but remaining unable to do either. Heidegger labels astonishment, admiration, and awe as modes of curiosity. I discuss curiosity in greater detail in the next section of my investigation, on Paul de Man’s reading and writing style.

truth-effects and value-effects

In his glossary to Genre, John Frow defines a truth-effect as follows: ‘(l)ike “reality effects”, a term developed to explain in relative rather than absolute terms the kinds of truths elaborated in and by texts (of any kind).’\(^{61}\) I adopt Frow’s term throughout the first part of my investigation, and agree with his definition when it is applied specifically to philosophies. In the second part of my investigation, however, I develop my own term – value-effect – to emphasise generic difference between philosophies and poetries. This is to problematise that part of Frow’s definition in parentheses: rather than pertaining to ‘texts (of any kind)’, I propose a ‘truth-effect’ best fits an ambit made by philosophies, and that ‘value-effect’ better determines those resonances a poem can leave readers, who may not be seeking the same kinds of ‘truths’ pursued by philosophies.

\(^{58}\) Ibid, page 141.
\(^{60}\) Martin Heidegger (trans John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson) 1962 Being and Time, page 216.
Frow states ‘genre is central to the social organisation of knowledge.’ In re-reading philosophy from Plato’s ancient antagonism forward, I appropriate Frow’s ‘genre world’, and acknowledge as both particular and alienated those styles of knowing which ‘philosophy’ and ‘poetry’ attempt to organise.

My investigation now introduced and its parameters (methodology, glossary) established, I next critique Paul de Man’s transgressive writing style – which I take as typifying a genre sometimes labelled ‘postmodern’ but which I label the ‘postphilosophical’. In Consequences of Pragmatism, contemporary philosopher Richard Rorty writes of the hybridising inventiveness at work in postmodernism, which he reinvents as post-philosophy. In attempting to define what sort of writing post-philosophers produce, Rorty suggests:

(t)he modern Western ‘culture critic’ feels free to comment on anything at all. He is a prefiguration of the all-purpose intellectual of a post-Philosophical culture, the philosopher who has abandoned pretensions to Philosophy. He passes rapidly from Hemingway to Proust to Hitler to Marx to Foucault to Mary Douglas to the present situation in Southeast Asia to Ghandi to Sophocles. He is a name-dropper, who uses names such as these to refer to sets of descriptions, symbol-systems, ways of seeing. His specialty is seeing similarities and differences between great big pictures, between attempts to see how things hang together. He is a person who tells you how all the ways of making things hang together hang together.

This is a writing style – characterised by pastiche, intertextuality, literary inventiveness – that my investigation seeks to emulate. When Todorov writes of the evolution of genres, in ‘The Origin of Genres’, he suggests a process of inversion, displacement, and combination, in which new genres manifest out of ‘other genres. A new genre is always the transformation of one or several old genres’. While I make a range of arguments against de Man’s deconstruction of Kant, I regard ‘Phenomenality and Materiality in Kant’ as written in a transgressive style that can break new ground.

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Chapter One

A post-philosophical turn?
On the in-between-nesses of de Man’s deconstructions

Once philosophy was the most strange, the most rare, and the most unique; now it is the same, but only in the form of curiosity.

Martin Heidegger, Basic Questions in Philosophy: Selected ‘Problems’ of ‘Logic’

What’s the difference?

Paul de Man, Allegories of Reading

… the essence of truth became the most unquestioned and hence a matter of the highest indifference.

Martin Heidegger, Basic Questions in Philosophy: Selected ‘Problems’ of ‘Logic’
In his essay, 'Phenomenality and Materiality in Kant', Paul de Man reflects on the *Critique of Judgment* before questioning how it is that Kant comes to label poetic perception as architectonic rather than teleological. But when de Man contends that 'instead of purely intellectual beauty, we can only produce the beauty of the imagination’,¹ I begin to wonder who it is that he includes in his categorical proposition. Who are those he includes (but never identifies) as his 'we'? De Man’s lecture was first delivered at Cornell University; the audience would most likely have been graduate students, faculty members, those already equipped with a degree of foreknowledge and expertise. Surmising thus, de Man’s is a rallying call to stakeholders in his post-philosophical genre world. In producing an authority, through following his presentiments on language to a series of deconstructions, de Man’s premise is that beauty is consonant with the imagination – non-intelligence? – of unreliable artists. But how are we (that is, you, reader, and I) to regard de Man’s ‘purely intellectual beauty’? I argue his proposition embeds an absence, as if purely intellectual beauty is a state de Man would like to achieve. Perhaps, in setting out to locate ‘the beauty of the imagination’, de Man’s post-philosophy aims to be both reliable and beautiful – that is, philosophical and poetic.

Does the enterprise succeed? In this chapter, I postulate a range of consequences as aftermath of the post-philosophical style. I return to Heidegger’s conception of wonder once more to interrogate whether the paraliteratures of the late twentieth century’s theoretical avant-garde (I use de Man’s essay as exemplary) may bear traces of curiosity, which Heidegger identifies as a permutation of wonder. In *Basic Questions of Philosophy: Selected ‘Problems’ of ‘Logic’*, Heidegger writes:

> to the extent that the nineteenth century had to make culture the object of a cultural politics, philosophy became a curiosity, or what comes down to the same thing: the essence of truth became the most unquestioned and hence a matter of the highest indifference.²

In addressing the politics of de Man’s revolutionary program, my aim is twofold: I wish to homage the post-philosophical as a writing style that can break new ground. Creative producers might approach the post-philosophical style strategically, inasmuch as some of the tricks played in post-philosophical language games are curious, clever, and well worth learning. But in this chapter, I have a second aim: I want to show why the ideas contained in de Man’s paraliterary essay on Kant might be approached with scepticism.

¹ Paul de Man (ed and introduction Andrzej Warminski) 1996 *Aesthetic Ideology*, page 84.
When de Man writes that ‘we are clearly not dealing with mental categories but with tropes, and the story Kant tells us is an allegorical tale’, one issue remains far from clear: is his materialist critique a foray into fact, or is it in fact itself an allegorical tale? If, after the linguistic turn, philosophy is to be subject to the same methods of appraisal as literature, and is to be penetrated with deconstructive analyses, then a further question arises: where to from here, philosophers? By ‘linguistic turn’ I refer to that moment in the mid-twentieth century when, as contemporary philosopher Karl-Otto Apel writes, analytical philosophy was undermined ‘in favour of all kinds of scepticism and relativism’.

Perhaps Paul de Man is a storyteller who looms as a spectre, manoeuvring his deconstructions to create scepticism around the assumption of philosophies’ reliability. In his radical re-reading of philosophy as textual, in which ontologies, epistemologies, metaphysics, ethics and aesthetics are literary sub-genres, de Man probes underlying grammatical structures in his selective analysis. In ‘Phenomenality and Materiality in Kant’, an essay occupying pages 70-90 of *Aesthetic Ideology*, de Man uses the word ‘between’ twenty-five times. The between-ness of his language yokes together an array of heterogeneous ideas from different disciplines, and I wonder to what extent his essay is similar in its revolutionary zeal to the textual styles elaborated by the aesthetic avant-garde? What sort of genre-making is this?

De Man’s surrealist precursors valorised a style characterised by ‘the fortuitous meeting, on a dissection table, of a sewing machine and an umbrella’. Todorov’s notion of the evolution of genres – by inversion, by displacement, by combination – may echo the Surrealists’ credo, and I wonder to what extent de Man’s theorising can be characterised as inverting, displacing, combinatory, and surreal? As well as defining difference between architectonics and teleology (which I find extremely useful in my own approach to Kant, in Chapter Three of this investigation), de Man writes of between-nesses in the Kantian conceptions of the sublime and the beautiful; between the pleasure and pain of aesthetic experience; between metaphysics

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3 Paul de Man (ed and introduction Andrzej Warminski) 1996 *Aesthetic Ideology*, page 86.
4 See Karl-Otto Apel ‘What is Philosophy? The Philosophical Point of View After the End of Dogmatic Metaphysics’ in C.P. Ragland and Sarah Heidt (eds) 2001 *What is Philosophy?*, page 172.
5 This figure excludes instances of ‘between’ occurring in texts de Man cites from.
6 Out of Lautrémont’s definition Max Ernst developed his formula of ‘the fortuitous meeting of distant realities.’ From Anna Balakian 1972 *Surrealism: the Road to the Absolute* page 191.
and transcendence; between seeing and dwelling; between materiality and tropeology; and, ultimately (and this is de Man's trump card), between grammar and rhetoric. The theorist attempts to cross each of these junctures with his highly-inventive style of theoretical pastiche; but what is de Man's endgame here? A categorising definition for his program is located in the third sentence of his widely-read *Allegories of Reading*: de Man declares his work involves 'the problematics of reading'. In *The Resistance to Theory*, de Man asserts that his theoretical discourses are 'something of a wild card in the serious game of the theoretical disciplines'. What might he mean?

De Man's claim, that his texts are wild cards, draws on a sporting term to create a sense that theoretical disciplines are adversarial contests. Does de Man’s status as self-appointed wild card describe an outsider’s role from where he might give the ‘serious’ language games of philosophy his best shot? Will his version of play confuse serious players? Perhaps: de Man persists in conducting his commentaries in an allusive, esoteric, intertextual style. The freplay of the de Manian discourses comes as a shock after the mannered languages of the analytical philosophies preceding post-philosophy. De Man follows the footsteps of an aesthetic avant-garde, which in the early twentieth century sought to shock as incomprehensible, transgressive, and outlandish. In following the aesthetic programs of the surrealists and others, de Man is playing a winner’s game: behind the façade of playfulness there is determined intent. Just as the aesthetic avant-garde debunked canonical conceptions of artistic form and style – surely an inversion, displacement, and combination of old genres into new – the post-philosophical theoretical impulses seem to focus a programmatic effort toward debunking the truth-effects of their philosopher forebears. While both the aesthetic and theoretical avant-gardes write new chapters in their respective, inter-relating canons, there is a significant difference: while inclusion in the canon enervates the former (one commentator calls it a 'technical exhaustion'), for de Man and his cohort of theorists, inclusion in the theoretical canon is a goal.

Perhaps, rather than creative producers learning from de Man’s esoteric style, has de Man instead learned a series of tricks played by the aesthetic avant-garde? It seems the post-philosophical style has spread

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8 Paul de Man 1979 *Allegories of Reading*, page ix.
as a meme, just as the surreal literatures of the aesthetic avant-garde once did. Perhaps this is how genres inter-relate, appropriating gestures. In the early twenty-first century, it seems readers have been freed into an endless play of textual interpretation now regarded as a foundation of contemporary Literary Studies. In his essay, ‘Semiology and Rhetoric’, first published in 1973 in the journal *Diacrítica*, de Man criticises previous approaches to literature, which he believes have mistaken texts as hermetic entities with unitary meanings. Of course, they are not, and de Man presents the traditional ideal of textual analysis as a model where literature is misapprehended as ‘a kind of box that separates an inside from an outside, and the reader or critic as the person who opens the lid in order to release in the open what was secreted but inaccessible inside’. Rodolph Gasché informs his readers that deconstruction ‘takes place as an endless process’; de Man repositions the act of reading by ascribing a ‘priority of *lexis* over *logos*’, and devises a loose methodology of guiding principles with which to undertake his model of deconstructive analyses, in which language is foregrounded. The theorist declares this, in ‘Semiology and Rhetoric’, when he splits rhetoric from grammar by devising an enigmatic paradigm, where the ‘rhetorisation of grammar’ is set against the ‘grammatisation of rhetoric’.

This chiasmus – one device in de Man’s style creative producers might consider emulating – explores the semantic displacement at work in a question posed by popular television character, Archie Bunker: ‘(w)hat’s the difference?’ Bunker quips when his wife wants to know whether he will ‘have his bowling shoes laced over or laced under’. De Man suggests the grammatical structures at play here provide evidence of a mistake made all too often by reading communities: namely, when grammar is confused with rhetoric, possible meanings may be obfuscated. De Man offers another way of regarding the question asked by Bunker’s wife:

(t)he grammatical model of the question becomes rhetorical not when we have, on the one hand, a literal meaning and on the other hand a figural meaning, but when it is impossible to decide by grammatical or other linguistic devices which of the two meanings (that can be entirely incompatible) prevails.

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12 Paul de Man 1979 *Allegories of Reading*, page 5.
14 Paul de Man 1979 *Allegories of Reading*, page 45.
17 Paul de Man 1979 *Allegories of Reading*, page 9.
De Man’s is a tale that problematises the distance between literal and figural; a radical extension of this is that unitary meanings contained within language are unreliable or, worse, a fallacy. De Man is asking his audience to review the cues they have been enculturated into using, by re-reading texts figurally and metaphorically rather than literally and allegorically. De Man’s imperative is that readers break from the confines of genre; post-philosophical readers are instead to work toward their own meanings rather than ‘the meaning’. De Man is rewriting how to read, and he reveals how rhetoric (defined in his text as ‘the study of tropes and of figures’19) can be disfigured: the grammatical structures of rhetoric – that is, all textuality – become the object of his re-reading program.

The deconstruction of grammar and rhetoric reveals an in-between-ness that operates on several levels. Firstly, de Man’s erudition extends his commentary to encompass a broad range of materials: in ‘Semiology and Rhetoric’ de Man re-reads popular television, a poem by Yeats, a character in a novel by Proust, and Peircean semiology (among other texts); in ‘Materiality and Phenomenality in Kant’, he draws on the work of Foucault, Kant, Wordsworth, and a host of others. Tenaciously positioned between the edifices of primary materials, de Man’s intertextual language games legislate a new variant of truth-effect, governed by his new genre. Rosalind Krauss characterises the post-philosophical trope, in The Originality of the Avant-Garde and Other Modernist Myths, as a style that ‘finds itself caught in a dramatic web of many voices, citations, asides, divagations. And what is created … is a kind of paraliterature’.20 Is it literary criticism, or critical literature? Is it pseudo philosophico-poësiów, or poetic pseudo-philosophy? Whatever it is (and I assert a new genre is generated: whether this entails a new mode of thinking after wondering is a matter for speculation), what seems clearest is that these paraliteratures scramble hitherto canonically upheld philosophical truth-effects.

For creative producers, gestures of transgression and revolution, as well as formal emphases on pastiche and intertextuality, can be appropriated from the post-philosophical style. After post-philosophy, cultural materials can be approached with the view to appropriating ideas. Reading as reconnaissance? Philosophies as figural and creatively-written? These are some of the lessons the post-philosophical style can teach. But post-philosophising marks the beginning of a dialectical war fought on similar grounds to Plato’s

20 Rosalind Krauss 1985 The Originality of the Avant-Garde and Other Modernist Myths, page 292.
ancient antagonism with poets. The difference is that this is a war conducted between post-philosophers and analytical philosophers, whose texts have been dis-figured as indeterminate. What this means is that theorists like de Man take an extreme and sceptical view of the ontologising impulses of philosophies, and rewrite these as styles of creative writing. Post-philosopher par excellence, Jacques Derrida, makes the claim (like de Man) that philosophy is, after all, a form of language. In his essay, ‘Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences’, Derrida writes:

> the names related to fundamentals, to principles, or to the centre have always designated an invariable presence – *eidos*, *archê*, *telos*, *energeia*, *ousia* (essence, existence, substance, subject) *alêtheia*, transcendentality, consciousness, God, man, and so forth.\(^{21}\)

According to Derrida, underlying these cornerstone terms (on which philosophies found ontologies) there is simply *more language*. If this approach is adopted, then philosophy cannot remain hermetic. After this, for creative producers (and post-philosophers: \(\hat{\omega}\) there in the end that much of a difference?), philosophies become both the object of wondering and a formal material that may be raided and appropriated. But at the extremities of Derrida’s proposition, there is an existential indeterminacy that seems anti-humanist. If philosophies are all (and only) language, then this reductive credo may be employed to defeat all attempts to make language mean anything at all. This, I feel, is too radical a position to take against analytical philosophies.

In the post-philosophical milieu where, as Richard Rorty states, ‘men and women (feel) themselves alone, merely finite, with no links to something Beyond’,\(^{22}\) it seems there is no longer the consolation of totalising truth-effects but, instead, a web of theories and ideologies. Once the post-philosophical impulse resituates language as relative, then all textualities (high and popular texts, multiple genres read as a polyphony) have something interesting to say. Hence de Man blends a range of materials in his commentaries, and this exemplifies a strategy alive and mutating now in Literature Studies departments where the ‘growing “professionalism”’\(^{23}\) is taken seriously. But has post-philosophising mutated into a gesture for epigones? De Man is both figurehead and progenitor of the post-philosophical style, transplanting his

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\(^{23}\) David Lehman 1991 *Signs of the Times: Deconstruction and the Fall of Paul de Man*, page 131.
reading practices from post-war Europe. Here is a theorist who ‘gave deconstruction its first American
headquarters – the French and comparative literature departments of Yale University’;\textsuperscript{24} with this, one more
in-between-ness is located. In this instance, de Man has propagated an exotic continental reading strategy
among the new world’s graduate readers. But as time and generations pass, has his style become an ideology,
or dogma? And what might be beautiful about this curious and concretised pursuit?

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In locating answers to the above question, I will begin with another question: what evidence is there of
creative strategies (rather than philosophical argumentation) at work throughout de Man’s ‘Phenomenality
and Materiality in Kant’? In the essay, Kantian philosophy is read back to us as creative writing, but de Man
is equally creative in his retelling of Kant’s tales. When pointing to how Kant frames the architectonic, in the
\textit{Critique of Judgment}, as the ‘vision of nature as a building’, de Man draws the attention of his readers to
another definition of the architectonic which appears in the \textit{Critique of Pure Reason}: here, the architectonic is
phrased by Kant as an ‘organic unity of systems’\textsuperscript{25}. Nature as building, or naturally-unified systems: using this
apparent contradiction as a springboard for his argument with Kant’s ideas, de Man resituates the sublime to
accommodate his own view. The de Manian sublime is a ‘metaphorico-metonymical tropological system’.\textsuperscript{26} To
this post-philosopher, the sublime is nothing more than a trick done with language, a slippage (or stretching,
or silence in the language machine) which is a trick a theorist like de Man can endlessly play. Perhaps this is a
truism creative producers can agree with?

Is de Man’s rendering of the sublime a matter of materiality? The theoretical binaries at play in his
essay on Kant – metaphysics versus transcendence, teleology versus architectonics, the implied reviewing of
grammar versus rhetoric – culminate in the sublime being re-assessed as follows:

\begin{quote}
\textit{(w)hen the sublime is translated back, so to speak, from language into cognition, from formal
description into philosophical argument, it loses all inherent coherence and dissolves in the
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{24} For a commentary on this see the first half of David Lehman’s book \textit{Signs of the Times: Deconstruction and the Fall of Paul de
Man}, page 24.
\textsuperscript{25} Paul de Man (ed and introduction Andrzej Warminski) 1996 \textit{Aesthetic Ideology}, page 87.
\textsuperscript{26} Ibid, page 15.
aporias of intellectual and sensory appearance … the sublime cannot be grounded as a philosophical (transcendental or metaphysical) principle, but only as a linguistic principle.27

To de Man it is all language, and I aver on one point in particular: the sublime is no philosophical principle, and is subject to mutation as equally as genre seems to be. Ultimately, and as my investigation will seek to prove, the sublime is an aesthetic principle. But de Man’s emphasis on language goes too far: to de Man, the sublime is only linguistic, but this fails to take into consideration matters of the imagination (Kant’s ‘blind but indispensable function of the soul’). De Man’s argument carries a bias; he is at his most political when informing readers that ‘in the experience of the sublime, the imagination achieves tranquillity, it submits to reason, achieves the highest degree of freedom by freely sacrificing its natural freedom to the higher power of reason.’28 This is something creative producers who will agree with my speculations – in which I take the sublime to be an essential component of creatively apprehending-into-genre, after wonder – will be unable to agree with. Imagination achieving tranquillity after submitting to reason? De Man’s reading of the sublime is a misreading and his argument, that post-philosophical re-readers must not learn to see the ocean as poets do, but as de Man will have them see it, is fallacious. After de Man, external phenomena are given an indeterminate meaning by a contingent language game. This is a theorist attempting to enshrine his own ideolocat at the apex of meaning-making, while at the same time re-reading canonical ideas in a highly creative manner. Though avowing that the sublime is simply a matter of language, de Man’s creative philosophising still makes the ambit of philosophical genre texts: here is a theorist seeking to explain, and therein exhaust, the sublime.

Indeed, presenting reason as desirable, de Man’s version of events may qualify the intellectual as beautiful. The theorist might wish to convince less sceptical readers that his analyses unify but, beyond the sheer force of erudition and persuasion, what do his theories communicate? Far from methodical, de Man seems an opportunist in fusing a range of texts to employ his arguments, and to create a range of interesting fusions. But are these anything more than language games? An example of de Man’s opportunism is his use of a lesser-known passage from Kant’s Logic, which he assimilates into his analysis of the Critique of Judgment in order to deconstruct the difference between poetic (architectonic) perspectives and the myriad philosophical (teleological) worldviews. In taking issue with Kant’s fiat that philosophers must learn to view the ocean as

28 Ibid, page 86.
poets do, de Man redefines architectonics against the grain of Kant’s Logic. He takes the following from Kant’s lesser-known text:

> a wild man who, from a distance, sees a house of which he does not know the use. He certainly observes the same object as does another, who knows it to be definitely built and arranged to serve as a dwelling for human beings. Yet in formal terms this knowledge of the selfsame object differs in both cases. For the first it is mere intuition … for the other both intuition and concept.29

De Man, in his role as arche debunker, wild card, and arch-post-philosopher, is apprehending, seeing, and knowing differently to either analytical philosophers or poets. His style is highly creative, and somewhat antagonistic in its prescriptive analyses of other genres. Further, this paraliterary style seems opportunistic in its methodology; de Man could have explored tensions between poetic and philosophical languages through incorporating a broader range of texts into his discussion (including Heidegger’s ‘The Origin of a Work of Art’, which he discusses at length later in Aesthetic Ideology). One wonders what has stopped de Man from discussing this text – which he is clearly familiar with – in this essay). We might surmise this: if post-philosophers are in the business of unifying ideas in a manner similar to creative producers then, rather than telling philosophical truths, methodical argument is not only unnecessary but redundant, tedious and, most likely, uninspiring to readers.

So what has happened to the matter of truth in philosophising? Is wonder-into-truth (which Heidegger claims for ancient philosophies and, later in his career, poetries) curtailed here, replaced by a dogmatic impulse to revolutionise how readers read? When de Man concludes ‘Phenomenality and Materiality in Kant’ by privileging his own version of teleology, the ‘seeing and dwelling, sehen and wohnen … absent in pure aesthetic vision’,31 I suspect his own politicised vision misreads as fact the interpretation that Kant’s poets remain blind. In following his privileging assertions, de Man includes a vital clause: we are to see philosophy via the ‘materiality of the letter’. Everything herewith will be a matter of form. But, after post-philosophy, I cannot help but wonder whether style has replaced content. This is partly answered in de Man’s response to poets. The theorist writes:

29 This citation from Kant’s Logic is contained in Paul de Man (ed and introduction Andrzej Warminski) 1996 Aesthetic Ideology, page 81.
31 Ibid, page 82.
(t)he poet who sees the heavens as a vault is clearly like the savage … He does not see prior to dwelling, but merely sees. He does not see in order to shelter himself, for there is no suggestion made that he could in any way be threatened, not even by the storm.\footnote{Paul de Man (ed and introduction Andrzej Warminski) 1996 \textit{Aesthetic Ideology}, page 81.}

This beautifully figured, gnomic paragraph is at best a theoretical interpretation, a tale of Kant’s tale that can itself be reworked and retold. Rather than savages, I contend poets think creatively from positions of lucid questioning, which emanate from sublime states of responsiveness to wonder. Some poets encounter the everyday (the heavens, storms, oceans) not as savages but as individuals with imaginative faculties that register symbolic values – the \textit{mythos} rather than philosophies’ purported \textit{logos} or post-philosophies’ \textit{lexis} – of the ordinary. This more-than-knowing begins to locate the sublime, which is not only a matter of language, as de Man would have us believe, but which remains a genre world away from intellectually-beautiful curios like de Man’s ‘Phenomenality and Materiality in Kant’.
Part One

Dialectics and Logic: two modes of the genre ‘philosophy’

… language speaks, not humans. Humans only speak inasmuch as they respond to language.

Martin Heidegger, *The Principle of Reason*
In the following analyses of philosophical texts, I examine how genre difference directs the psychic experience of readers and writers. In my second chapter, 'Performative exile, theoria, and creativity: re-reading Plato’s *The Republic* through the lens of Wallace Stevens’ “An Ordinary Evening in New Haven”, I review wondering as a common point of origin for the genres, and then trace how philosophies and poetries diverge through responding to wonder differently. I re-read philosophical *theoria* against creative, gnostic phenomenologies (I privilege poets), and emphasise Plato’s ancient antagonism against poets as a discursive ambit for control of the philosopher’s proposed city-state. Squaring off against poets, Plato reifies his transcendental dialogue as truth. But is it? Making use of mid-twentieth century philosopher of language J.L. Austin’s notion of performativity,¹ I isolate Plato’s dialectical style as a self-enacting speech-act that produces its own authority while sublimating other ways of using language, other genres. Todorov writes:

> there has never been a literature without genres; it is a system in continual transformation, and the question of origins cannot be dissociated, historically, from the field of the genres themselves. Chronologically, there is no ‘before genres’.²

This chapter, then, marks the ancient antagonism between philosophies and poetries as, foremost, a generative argument that locates genre difference. Plato’s *Republic* creates a distinct ontology; in using language particularly, this is a philosophy that generates ways in which humans will come to fit a particular style of generic existing.

In my third chapter, ‘Apprehending, seeing, knowing: toward an account of *technē* after Kant’s architectonics and Heidegger’s conception of wonder’, I consider two discrete styles of philosophical thinking and language use. In his role as ur-logician, Kant undertakes to organise minds: abstract and external phenomena are universalised after his three-tiered critiquing program. In the *Critique of Judgment*, Kant delineates a difference between poets and philosophers when formulating a system on the beautiful and the sublime. The philosopher advises his readers to view the ocean as poets do because, in adopting a non-functionalising perspective when viewing art and the world, viewers are allowed a ‘free power’³ to make their

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¹ Austin labels ‘true or false statements’ as *constative* as opposed to *performative*, and explores the idea that ‘many traditional philosophical perplexities have arisen through a mistake – the mistake of taking as straightforward statements of fact utterances which are either (in interesting non-grammatical ways) nonsensical or else intended as something quite different.’ See J.L. Austin 1975 (2nd ed) *How To Do Things With Words*, page 3.


own judgments. With this advice, Kant enshrines how creative producers see in distinct manners (and differently to philosophers). I frame the Kantian prosecution of poetic difference as a matter of thinking: poets mediate the sublime in extra-logical ways that are contrary to how logicians approach thinking and language. Against Kant’s ideas, I read Heidegger’s conception of wonder, contained in Basic Questions of Philosophy: Selected ‘Problems’ of ‘Logic’. Like Kant, Heidegger models how philosophical thinking happens, but raises the possibility of wondering becoming exhausted under the strict impulse to philosophise. Heidegger phrases technē as a ‘mode of knowing. To know means to have seen, in the widest sense of seeing, which means to apprehend what is present’.¹ In re-reading Kant and Heidegger, I venture how poets and philosophers apprehend wondering (seeing and knowing) differently, and my discussion hinges not only at conceptions of genre, but at the concept of the sublime. When a philosophical impulse to formulate comprehension is confronted with the ineffable, the impossible, the beyond-human, the non-rational, the mysterious and the incomprehensible, some philosophies (like Kant’s systematising logic) are immediately problematised. Throughout this chapter on different styles of apprehending-into-genre, I work toward formulating my own response to Hofstadter’s observation, in which he muses on whether there is ‘in the end any fundamental difference between the thinking poet and the poetic thinker?’² I respond in the affirmative, and valorise the sublime as integral to genre difference.

² Albert Hofstadter, in Martin Heidegger (trans and introduction Albert Hofstadter) 1971 Poetry, Language, Thought, page x.
Performative exile, *theoria*, and creativity: re-reading Plato's *The Republic* through the lens of Wallace Stevens' ‘An Ordinary Evening in New Haven’

... we shall treat him with all the reverence due to a priest and giver of rare pleasure, but shall tell him that he and his kind have no place in our city, their presence being forbidden by our code, and send him elsewhere, after anointing him with myrrh and crowning him with fillets of wool.

*Plato, The Republic (Book Three)*

‘The search
For reality is as momentous as’
The search for god.’
It is the philosopher’s search

For an interior made exterior
And the poet’s search for the same exterior made
Interior

*Wallace Stevens, ‘An Ordinary Evening in New Haven’*
For millennia, creative producers have felt the consequences of Plato’s dialectical text. I contend throughout this chapter that Plato composes *The Republic* performatively: in devising a quarrel with poets, this philosophy enacts a bias squarely in favour of philosophers. As Plato argues it, *The Republic* is reified as truth. But is it? In the mid-twentieth century the ‘ordinary language’ philosopher, J.L. Austin, separated performative from constative utterances, and it is this distinction that remains critical to my analysis of Plato’s exile of the poets. A constative utterance can be judged as either true or false,\(^1\) while a performative utterance performs the event it is describing.\(^2\) I read Plato’s exile of the poets as a smear campaign inflected with Austin-esque performativity, a discourse that self-enacts under the imprimatur of telling truths. What is happening in *The Republic* echoes Austin’s idea of force:\(^3\) Plato’s dialectic sets up, and then wins, his own arguments.

Platonic philosophy is a stance for rationalism and censorship in opposition to ancient poetry’s mnemonics, its stirring of emotions, its divine inspiration and, as Plato took it at least, its imperfect copies of universal forms. Plato forsook the rarer pleasures of poetry to establish stability and cohesion through philosophising. In *The Philosophical Disenfranchisement of Art*, Arthur Danto diagnoses Plato’s theories as ‘largely political, a move in some struggle for domination over the minds of men in which art is conceived of as the enemy.’\(^4\) In *Literature Against Philosophy, Plato to Derrida: a Defence of Poetry*, Mark Edmundson goes one step further and states ‘(l)iterary criticism began in the West with the wish that literature disappear’, before wondering if there is ‘any other kind of intellectual enquiry that originates in a wish to do away with its object?’\(^5\)

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\(^1\) Austin labels ‘true or false statements’ as *constative* as opposed to *performative*, and explores the idea that ‘many traditional philosophical perplexities have arisen through a mistake – the mistake of taking as straightforward statements of fact utterances which are either (in interesting non-grammatical ways) nonsensical or else intended as something quite different.’ See J.L. Austin 1975 (2nd ed) *How To Do Things With Words*, page 3. Reading Plato after Austin, it is a misapprehension (perhaps common) to regard his philosophy as simply an idealistic statement.

\(^2\) Austin writes ‘(w)hen I say “I name this ship the Queen Elizabeth” I do not describe the christening ceremony, I actually perform the christening; and when I say “I do” (sc. take this woman to be my lawful wedded wife), I am not reporting on a marriage, I am indulging in it.’ See J.L. Austin 1979 (3rd ed) *Philosophical Papers*, page 233-235 passim.

\(^3\) Ibid, page 238. Of *force*, Austin writes ‘What we need besides the old doctrine about meanings is a new doctrine about all the possible forces of utterances, towards the discovery of which our proposed list of explicit performative verbs would be a very great help’.


To Plato, poetry represents a threat to the consolidation of his ideal city-state; poetry is presented to readers of *The Republic* as both untruthful and an agent of corruption. What is Plato threatened by, that he must label poetry thus in his attempt to subjugate it? In seeking to configure a set of steadfast rules by which his city-state will come to function, Plato projects poetry as dangerous, flawed, and unstable. The philosopher fears that, erring into strangeness and individualistic expressiveness, poets will transgress those paradigms he seeks to model and impose with his singular ideas of cohesion.

In *The Republic*, then, Plato proposes to limit the possibility of poetry’s value-effects being taken up by readers. In part, the philosopher is a campaigner: in defaming poetry, Plato seeks to instate his own version of humanly-unifying truthfulness. In concretising this, and to follow commentator Louis Mackey, philosophy locates an origin: ‘(i)t originates as the dialectical critique of poetry.’ Understanding that poetry contains its own kinds of value-effects, Plato derides poets as at best unreliable thinkers, and labels them as mad and blasphemous. The effect is that, by exiling poetry to the hinterlands of early civilisation, Plato succeeds in politically manipulating both genre and future discourse.

What I contend is that each time poets fix their gaze, bound by a state of wonder as if seeing things anew, language shifts into new areas of expressiveness, the very thing that threatens Plato’s concretising style. Millennia later, American transcendentalist poet Wallace Stevens writes of this impulse toward poetic newness in his poem-manifesto, ‘An Ordinary Evening in New Haven’ (first published in *The Auroras of Autumn* in 1950). Stevens writes:

The poem is the cry of its occasion,
Part of the res itself and not about it.
The poet speaks the poem as it is,

Not as it was: part of the reverberation

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6 Plato writes ‘all the poets from Homer downwards have no grasp of truth but merely produce a superficial likeness of any subject they treat, including human excellence.’ See Plato (trans Desmond Lee) 4th century B.C.E./ 1974 *The Republic* (second edition [revised]), page 367 (600e). See Sterling and Scott, page 291.


9 See, for example, Plato’s earlier text *Ion*, where a poet is generalised as ‘a light and winged and holy thing, and he has no ability to create until he has been inspired and is out of his senses, and reason is no longer in him’. See Plato (trans Hayden Pelliccia) 4th century B.C.E./ 2000 *Selected Dialogues of Plato*, page 11(534b).
Of a windy night as it is, when the marble statues
Are like newspapers blown by the wind. He speaks

By sight and insight as they are.¹⁰

This figural language shifts from pentameter to hexameter (the standard epic metre in Antiquity); does ‘An Ordinary Evening in New Haven’ echo something great, as the ancient epics did? Here is a truism Stevens communicates: in speaking of the thing, the poem becomes part of the thing. Plato, as philosopher/rhetorician/proto-statesman, may have regarded Stevens’ text with horror, and as exemplifying the reasons for proposing exile: ‘An Ordinary Evening in New Haven’ is an event in which readers are exposed to metaphorico-metonymical language and, thereafter, may begin to imagine all sorts of realities.

This is the sort of transmission of individualistic poetic expressiveness that Plato would control. In defaming and exiling poetry, Plato creates exclusive space in readers’ imaginations for his own version of truthfulness. Plato establishes philosophy’s organising principles (and the future trajectories of his chosen genre) with his ideal of universal forms. During the allegory of the cave, in Book Seven of The Republic, the universal forms are speculated as objects in an abstract realm, existing in perfection somewhere beyond the sensate world. Conducting his elenchus, that philosophical technique of emptying out a question through ‘cross-examination or refutation’,¹¹ Plato acts as dramaturge. The Republic is written as a dialogue between Socrates and Plato’s older brothers, Adeimantus and GlaucOn. This characterises the Platonic speech-acts: dialectics is defined in The Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy as ‘an argumentative exchange involving contradiction or a technique or method connected with such exchanges. The word’s origin is the Greek dialegein, “to argue” or “converse”.’¹² In the following dialogue, Socrates might at first be mistaken to be arguing his case in order to persuade GlaucOn of the existence of the forms. He states:

(t)he realm revealed by sight corresponds to the prison, and the light of the fire in the prison to the power of the sun. And you won’t go wrong if you connect the ascent into the upper world and the sight of the objects there with the upward progress of the mind into the

intelligible region. That at any rate is my interpretation, which is what you are anxious to hear; the truth of the matter is, after all, known only to god. But in my opinion, for what it is worth, the final thing to be perceived in the intelligible region, and perceived only with difficulty, is the form of the good; once seen, it is inferred to be responsible for whatever is right and valuable in anything, producing in the visible region light and the source of light, and being in the intelligible region itself controlling source of truth and intelligence.\footnote{Plato (trans Desmond Lee) 4\textsuperscript{th} century B.C.E./ 1974 The Republic (second edition [revised]), pages 259-260 (517b, c). Sterling and Scott's translation differs only slightly: the tone and meaning alter accordingly. See page 211-212.}

This, the site of the forms, is beyond the realm of spatio-temporal realities; here, Platonic supra-reality exists in a pure state, transcendentally, alongside truth and knowledge. Or so Plato speculates, inventing his ideas. The philosopher knows this dialogue may either persuade or be challenged by readers: a higher authority, however, will not judge his thoughts constative (true or false). This is a style of responsiveness to wonder that is not truth-telling, but rhetorical: to adopt the parlance of poststructuralists, Plato's philosophy echoes a metaphysics of presence, but underneath the language of Plato's transcendental signifier – god, the universal forms – there is not the essentialised truth he claims. There is only more language and the acceptance (or otherwise) of his opinions. The translations differ; instead of Lee’s ‘the truth of the matter is, after all, known only to god’, in Sterling and Scott’s translation Socrates states ‘(g)od only knows whether it is true’.\footnote{Plato (trans Richard W. Sterling and William C. Scott) 4\textsuperscript{th} century B.C.E./ 1985 The Republic, page 211 (517b).} This seems apt, and illuminates Plato’s reflexive flourish; in Sterling and Scott, Socrates appeals to a voiceless divine power which (the philosopher can assume) will not speak. Glaucon, a nodding figure\footnote{This is epitomised in Glaucon’s avowal (which concludes Book Ten of The Republic), that ‘your argument convinces me, as I think it would anyone else.’ See Plato (trans Desmond Lee) 4\textsuperscript{th} century B.C.E./ 1974 The Republic (second edition [revised]), page 577 (608b). Sterling and Scott translate this simply as ‘You are right. I agree.’ See page 298. Either way, Glaucon is Plato’s rhetorical projection of his audiences’ responses.} throughout The Republic, will have to listen to Socrates’ narrations because no higher authority may enter the dialogue – which, on further thinking, is really just a monologue of Plato’s speculations carried out between a range of characters manoeuvred with a poetically-literary language figured with imagery and metaphor.

And so the forms, rhetorised as perfect and infinite, are used by Plato to rid his city-state of the (volatile) speech-acts of poets. The Republic sets up philosophy as accessing truth; poetry is a mimicry of imperfection, a wrong path\footnote{In Book Ten of The Republic Plato writes of poetry: ‘such representations definitely harm the minds of their audiences, unless they’re inoculated against them by knowing their real nature.’ See Plato (trans Desmond Lee) 4\textsuperscript{th} century B.C.E./ 1974 The Republic (second edition [revised]), page 360 (596b). Platonic philosophy is both inoculation and placebo, even when we consider the strikingly dissimilar translation from Sterling and Scott: ‘… it appears to me that their art corrupts the minds of all who hearken to them, save only those whose knowledge of reality provides an antidote.’ See page} which leads those upon it around the circuitous routes of the sensate world.
Plato reinforces this when he asserts that each object in the world is an imitation of a transcendentally-located form. He informs his readers that, in order to imitate the forms, poets first need to achieve mastery over each thing … that is, over everything. In an era of guilds and technical expertise, the philosopher believes such broad ranging specialisation is not humanly possible. He writes in Book Ten of *The Republic* that ‘the artist’s representation stands at a third remove from reality’,\(^{17}\) and at the very moment of exile, in Book Three, that:

> if we are visited in our state by someone who has the skill to transform himself into all sorts of characters and represent all sorts of things, and he wants to show off himself and his poems to us, we shall treat him with all the reverence due to a priest and giver of rare pleasure, but shall tell him that he and his kind have no place in our city … \(^{18}\)

To follow the path of Plato’s rhetoric, then, is to accept that the inventions of poets cannot be trusted, that poems are copies of the sensate world’s essentialised copies of ontologically-existing forms. At the insistence of his transcendentalism and with philosophy working within a framework of final purposes – where a city-state will be modelled and then realised – Plato regards poetry to be at three removes from perfection. Poets are imitators of imitations, thrice removed from the *arché* (‘origin’) of the forms; poems are ‘easy to produce without any knowledge of the truth, because they are appearances and not realities’.\(^ {19}\) For Plato, it is philosophy that will build a royal road, a through-way of synthesising rhetorical manoeuvres leading to the purest origins of truthfulness and knowledge. Poetry, says Plato, is instead a dead-end, a movement away from the perfection of his dream for a civilisation.

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\(^{17}\) Plato (trans Desmond Lee) 4\(^{th}\) century B.C.E./ 1974 *The Republic (second edition [revised])*, page 363 (597e). Sterling and Scott’s translation (‘… one who makes something at third remove from nature you call an imitator’) is found on page 288.


\(^{19}\) Plato (trans Desmond Lee) 4\(^{th}\) century B.C.E./ 1974 *The Republic (second edition [revised])*, page 365 (599a). Sterling and Scott translate the same as ‘(poems can) easily be produced without any knowledge of truth. Poets contrive appearances and not reality.’ See Sterling and Scott, page 289.
Plato’s style of philosophical truthfulness outmanoeuvres the claims poetry makes for its own value-effects.\textsuperscript{20} Returning to Stevens, we see the difference between philosophies and poetries framed as follows, in §XXII of his poem:

Professor Eucalyptus said ’The search
For reality is as momentous as
The search for god.’ It is the philosopher’s search

For an interior made exterior
And the poet’s search for the same exterior made
Interior: breathless things broodingly abreath

With the inhalations of original cold
And of original earliness.\textsuperscript{21}

Stevens identifies a divide between genre worlds, which I interpret as two opposing approaches toward the same subject: what remains of interest here are modes of responsiveness. Stevens does not claim one approach as more truthful than the other; he is pointing out that philosophies and poetries both share a search, but differ in method. Poetries start with the exterior world and make images more-than-literal (that is, poems use language figuratively, as symbolic of inner worlds). Conversely, after Stevens, a philosophy like Plato’s brings the inner world of the philosopher to a performative style of textual comprehension. I extend Stevens here, to propose that the thinking of a philosopher like Plato, who responds to wonder by projecting his interiority), can perform and initiate no less than human realities.

So, when we read of Plato exiling poets, we might wonder what this section of The Republic is setting out to achieve. I contend that after The Republic, the humanly real will not be constructed by exiled poets but by philosophers who, in the Platonic tradition, will position their texts in control of language. And yet Plato’s language in The Republic slips across genres into a mode somewhat resembling the poetic (that is, the search for an exterior made interior). In Book Seven of The Republic, Plato presents his allegory of the cave so as to

\textsuperscript{20} Which, to echo Horace, delight as they instruct. See Horace \textit{Ars Poetica} in Aristotle, Horace, Longinus (trans T.S. Dorsch) 1965 \textit{Classical Literary Criticism}, page 22. I get the sense Plato would exorcise delightfulness from the serious business of making meaning.

elucidate philosophy’s role in decoding ontology. In speaking as the other (that is, allegorically\textsuperscript{22}) Plato chooses to express his ideas in metaphors. What follows are a series of images Plato asks readers to consider as an integral part of his philosophising:

SOCRATES: I want you to picture the enlightenment or ignorance of our human condition somewhat as follows. Imagine an underground chamber like a cave, with a long entrance open to the daylight and as wide as the cave. In this chamber are men who have been prisoners there since they were children, their legs and necks being so fastened that they can only look straight ahead of them and cannot turn their heads. Some way off, behind and higher up, a fire is burning, and between the fire and the prisoners and above them runs a road, in front of which a curtain-wall has been built, like the screen at puppet shows between the operators and their audience, above which they show their puppets.

GLAUCON: I see.\textsuperscript{23}

Plato’s allegory resonates with artifice, and is akin to a prose-poem. Indeed, Glaucun (and, by association, Plato’s audience) has been invited to a puppet show conducted by Plato. His are representations of ideas performed for the edification of a captive audience (who might be likened to the prisoners in the cave). This dramatic speculation moves away from the philosophical mode of \textit{elenchus} to build a ‘speaking picture’, which Roman theorist Horace would later propose as one definition of a poem.\textsuperscript{24} Plato’s images project on to our minds. And Glaucun? ‘I see’ is the literal and figurative response to Plato’s mimesis; Glaucun has had the puppet-strings of his imagination pulled. As soon as Plato writes of Glaucun declaring that he sees, an image transmits, poetically, transferring from the mind of Plato via the invented mouth of his narrator Socrates and into the phenomenology of readers. Simply put, Plato’s philosophy paints images here; it is ‘the cry of its occasion’. This is philosophy that manoeuvres an idea into minds by employing a poetico-literary device the philosopher would exile poets for using.

Plato develops his ideas on mimetic transference in an earlier discourse, \textit{Ion}. Here, perhaps acting under some unconscious creative impulse, the philosopher once more uses figural language to elucidate his

\textsuperscript{22} ‘Allegory’ from the Greek \textit{allos} (‘other’) and \textit{agoreuein} (‘to speak’), the term entails an extended linguistic figuring. See Alex Preminger and T.V.F. Brogan (eds) 1995 \textit{The New Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics}, page 51.
\textsuperscript{23} Plato (trans Desmond Lee) 4\textsuperscript{th} century B.C.E./ 1974 \textit{The Republic (second edition [revised])}, page 256 (514b). Sterling and Scott’s translation does not differ meaningfully from Lee’s; Glaucun responds to Socrates with ‘So far I can visualise it.’ See page 209.
\textsuperscript{24} Horace \textit{Ars Poetica}, cited in Alex Preminger and T.V.F. Brogan (eds) 1993 \textit{The New Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics}, page 1339. Horace’s \textit{ut pictura poesis} translates to ‘as is painting so is poetry.’
position. In this instance, Plato postulates the origins (and malignant powers) of poetry. In addressing the rhapsode Ion, Plato writes of Socrates warning:

> there is a divinity moving you, just as in the stone which Euripides calls a magnet, but which is commonly known as the stone of Heraclea. This stone not only attracts iron rings, but it also imparts to them the same power of attracting other rings; and sometimes you will see a number of pieces of iron and rings suspended from one another so that they form a very long chain: and all of them derive their power of suspension from the original stone. Similarly, the Muse herself first makes some men inspired; then from these inspired people a chain is suspended as still other people receive the inspiration. For all good poets, epic as well as lyric, compose their beautiful poems not by art, but because they are inspired and possessed.\(^{25}\)

Here, Plato repeats a process of projection, moving his thoughts on to the curtain-walls of readers' imaginations even as he criticises poets, who do the same. While representing poetry as an uncontrolled trope, his philosophy is itself in some ways poetic. In representing poetry as what we might recognise as a meme drawn into the minds of audiences through a force akin to magnetism, his philosophy (without irony) does the same. The difference is that Plato imagines truthfulness and knowledge as his to transfer. Unwittingly, Plato uncovers a broader function of language: mimesis magnetises minds when a text is allegorical, metaphorico-metonymical, and figural. Poetic language, then, projects understanding as a way for readers to stand within ‘the extraordinary awesomeness of the truth that is happening in the work’ (as Heidegger expressed it, in discussing what art conveys).\(^{26}\) What Plato is exploiting are the creative slippages of language into poetic modes of expressiveness. His are texts that bear constant traces of inspiration … or is it possession?

Through Plato’s pseudo-poetic allegory of the cave and his figure of the magnetic rings of mimesis and transference, the modes of responsiveness can be re-aligned. If we agree with Plato that sensate reality, unimpeded by either poetry or philosophy, can be likened to shadow-puppets on a stage beheld by inmates locked in darkness (and already, an impediment to the view begins), then into this model comes thinking after wondering, masked by language to parade human meaning in a variety of manners. Inside his cave allegory, what role does Plato suggest philosophers play? He writes of a fire burning, behind which are gathered prisoners who have never seen daylight and who mistake as real the shadows cast upon a wall by people

'carrying all sorts of gear along behind the curtain-wall, projecting above it and including figures of men and animals made of wood and stone and all sorts of other materials'. 27 Further, some of these people talk among themselves, creating the illusion that sound is coming from the passing shadows. This illusion is misapprehended by the cave’s prisoners, who mistake the shadows of the objects mentioned as ‘the whole truth’ 28 the very thing Plato feels is his to proffer, designating the following transcendental role to philosophers: some, momentarily freed from the cave, go to the world of pure reality above – the site of the universal forms – and bear witness before returning to regale their fellow prisoners with visions of ‘the brightest of all realities’ 29 outside. Plato assigns this role to philosophers, for it is philosophers who tell a form of truthfulness, not because they are inspired or possessed (as he avows poets are), but because of what philosophers have ‘seen’. Ever the pedagogue, Plato’s imaginings are fixed by a transcendental signifier, which he presumes audiences will leave unquestioned. In appealing to an unspeaking higher authority, the truth-effects contained in Plato’s speculations are rendered incontestably rhetorical.

So what are some of the things creative producers might do differently when responding to thinking, after wondering? Plato’s allegory of the cave can be recuperated to illuminate my speculations. So, suppose this is a cave occupied by philosophers who stand at a fire, deep in the elenchus of philosophical reasoning, responding to the shadows and curtain-wall representations with answers that explicate (and in so doing, nullify) wonder. Now, suppose the darker recesses of the cave are peopled by prisoners who have found no succour in philosophy’s answering-styles. Beyond the fireside nodding of the philosophical cohort, these individuals can be heard to sing and moan and, without the guidance or assurance of philosophies, are already in a form of exile. The questioning noise of wonder echoes from these spectral presences, and the uncanny resonance causes philosophers by their fire to huddle closer in their discourses. Mapless and alone, creative producers are unconvinced by agreed upon versions of reality, and cry out instead from a solitude of darkness and unknowing.

28 Lee translates, ‘And so in every way they would believe that the shadows of the objects we mentioned were the whole truth.’ See Plato (trans Desmond Lee) 4th century B.C.E./1974 The Republic (second edition [revised]), page 257 (515c). The difference in Sterling and Scott is considerable: ‘By every measure, then, reality for the prisoners would be nothing but shadows cast by artefacts.’ See Sterling and Scott, page 210.
29 Plato (trans Desmond Lee) 4th century B.C.E./1974 The Republic (second edition [revised]), page 261 (518d). Sterling and Scott translate this section thus: ‘with the entire soul one must turn away from the world of transient things toward the world of perpetual being, until finally one learns to endure the sight of its most radiant manifestation.’ See page 212.
Is this what separates the modes of responsiveness? As stated earlier, according to both Plato and Aristotle, philosophy – etymologically, a conjugation of ‘to love’ and ‘wisdom’ – originates in wonder, which both ancients name as ὑπομονέζειν. In his discourse *Theaetetus*, Plato writes that ‘this feeling – a sense of wonder – is perfectly proper to a philosopher: philosophy has no other foundation, in fact’. In *Metaphysics*, Aristotle goes further, suggesting:

it is because of wondering that men began to philosophise and do so now. First, they wondered at the *difficultiae* close at hand; then, advancing little by little, they discussed *difficultiae* also about greater matters, for example, about the changing attributes of the Moon and of the Sun and of the stars, and about the generation of the universe.

What kind of response to wondering is this? For Aristotle, moving from the difficulties close at hand outward, philosophical thinking, after wondering, is characterised as a mutating impulse that seeks to provide answers to questions around things apprehended from the particular to the abstract. He is including the natural sciences in this definition of philosophy (that is, an accumulation of knowledge rather than just speculations and answers). But both ancient thinkers hint at wonder being exhausted through recourse to reasoning’s comprehending responsiveness: in short, philosophy ‘begins in wonder and ends in *theoria*’. By contrast, a poem like Stevens’ contains a responsiveness based in unknowing, ‘an and yet, and yet, and yet’, which valorises both an elaboration and extension of wondering. Stevens’ distillation of *dichtung* into *poesie* will extend readers’ imaginative processes through a style of wondering that does not provide answers but, instead, leads to more wondering.

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30 Classicist Andrea Wilson Nightingale writes that the ‘Greek word for “wonder” is, in the verbal form, ὑπομονέζειν’. She also argues that ‘Aristotle was no doubt following Plato when he said that philosophy begins in wonder’. See Andrea Wilson Nightingale 2004 *Spectacles of Truth in Classical Greek Philosophy*, pages 255, 257.


32 Aristotle (trans Hippocrates G. Apostle) 3rd century B.C.E./1966 *Metaphysics*, page 15 (982b13-18). The same quote is translated in Nightingale as ‘It is through wonder (ὑπομονέζειν) that men originally began, and still begin, to philosophise, wondering at first about obvious perplexities, and then … experiencing perplexity … about great matters.’ See Andrea Wilson Nightingale 2004 *Spectacles of Truth in Classical Greek Philosophy*, page 253. Aristotle also designates a difference between teleology and architectonics when he writes in *De Anima (On the Soul)* of how thinking is ‘something other than perceiving, and its two kinds are held to be imagination and supposition’. See Aristotle (trans Hugh Lawson-Tancred) *De Anima (On the Soul)*, page 198.


In introducing her book, *Spectacles of Truth in Classical Greek Philosophy*, classicist Andrea Wilson Nightingale states philosophy ‘originates in wonder and aporia and aims for certainty and knowledge.’\(^{35}\) She goes on to define *theoria* as ‘witnessing a spectacle’, a response to wonder specific to philosophers. Thus:

\[(i)n \text{ the effort to conceptualise and legitimise theoretical philosophy, the fourth-century thinkers invoked a specific institution: that which the ancients called ‘} \text{theoria’. In the traditional practice of } \text{theoria, an individual (called the theoros) made a journey or pilgrimage abroad for the purpose of witnessing certain events and spectacles. In the classical period, } \text{theoria took the form of pilgrimages to oracles and religious festivals. In many cases, the theoros was sent by his city as an official ambassador: this ‘civic’ theoros journeyed to an oracular centre or festival, viewed the events and spectacles there, and returned home with an official eyewitness report.}^{36}\]

What seems clearest is this: wonder is an original cause, shared by both philosophical *theoria* and creative production. What I contend is that, once language fuses with the thinking of a philosopher like Plato, *theoria* is the result; wonder terminates in a performative answering-style of language use. It is this that serves as an initial and defining difference between philosophies and poetries.

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At this point, I will introduce a dyad to illuminate formal and phenomenological distinctions at work in the creation of philosophies and poetries. My (somewhat artificial) distinctions incorporate Stevens’ proposition that philosophers search for ‘an interior made exterior’ while poets search for ‘the same exterior made/Interior’.

To assist with my separation of the speech-acts, I recuperate two terms: *theoria*, defined as a variety of witnessing characterised by ‘contemplation, survey’;\(^{37}\) and *gnosis*, which Harold Bloom labels as a mode of ‘more-than-rational knowledge’.\(^{38}\)

I assert that philosophers, as ‘lovers of wisdom’, begin their thinking *gnostically*: from the interiority of this, a search is then made for ways to fit thinking to the world. One way of achieving this is the way Plato

\[^{35}\text{Andrea Wilson Nightingale 2004 Spectacles of Truth in Classical Greek Philosophy, page 12.}\]

\[^{36}\text{Ibid, page 3. Nightingale’s introduction (pages 1-39) surveys the origins of the ancient philosophical discourses, fusing wonder and theoria.}\]


\[^{38}\text{Harold Bloom 1982 Agon: Towards a Theory of Revisionism, page 5.}\]
seems to exteriorise his thinking: through imposing rhetorical speculations in *The Republic*, the philosopher’s inner world of thought comes to model his best conceivable version of the humanly real. By comparison, a poet like Stevens, as a maker (from the Greek *poietēς*) falls out of language in that moment when, like philosophers, the cognitive dissonance of wonder (or non-comprehension) is first apprehended. From these sublime origins, a creative thinker and writer begins with the *theoria* of contemplation, surveying that which surrounds them before searching next for correlates within. This is an interstice where creatively apprehending-into-language entails discovering or inventing (surprising and delightful) texts, through apprehending the world and then knowing what comes next. Is it for this reason that Heidegger, thinking on *technē*, writes of how one ‘who truly knows what is, knows what he wills to do in the midst of what is’? The more-than-rational knowing is the next step, after wondering, in approaching language creatively.

What I emphasise is that creative texts differ from philosophies not just generically, but because they are first mediated by *gnōsis* and not by *theoria*. Figure i (see below) indicates the shared foundation and subsequent split between the genres.

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40 Martin Heidegger (trans and introduction Albert Hofstadter) 1971 *Poetry, Language, Thought*, page 65. This has been considerably improved via minor changes in the version of Hofstadter’s translation appearing in Krell: ‘He who truly knows beings knows what he wills to do in the midst of them.’ See Martin Heidegger (ed and introduction David Farrell Krell) 1993 *Basic Writings*, page 192.
What kind of response to wondering is \textit{gnosis} if it is not the \textit{theoria} that produces philosophical comprehension? Taking his lead from the Gnostics of the early Christian and Hebraic traditions, in \textit{Agon: Towards a Theory of Revisionism}, Harold Bloom identifies \textit{gnosis} as ‘more-than-rational knowledge’.\textsuperscript{41} Elsewhere, the term is framed as a form of esoteric knowledge.\textsuperscript{42} Bloom speculates further that the experience of reading poetry is a type of \textit{gnosis} that resonates on an existential level for readers, who personalise the universal:

in the deep reading of a poem what you come to know is a concept of happening, a realisation of events in the history of your own spark or \textit{pneuma}, and your knowing is the most important movement in that history … If this is what the poet speaks to, then this is what must answer that call by a knowing, a knowing that precisely is not that which is known.\textsuperscript{43}

By implication, what some poets know, the register of \textit{mythos} (over \textit{logos} or \textit{lexis}), is transferred to readers in their genre world in a process similar to Aristotelian catharsis; the esoteric knowledge of this style of response to wonder is a particularising sense of the world evoked in a language that, as Bloom puts it, is ‘purposefully in flight from the obsessive universe of human repetitions’.\textsuperscript{44} Stevens describes poems as ‘broodingly abreath/ With the inhalations of original cold/ And of original earliness’.\textsuperscript{45} What the poet is pointing to is a style of apprehending in which the world resonates as preternaturally strange, existing before human ideas and knowledge – a world that is only (and only ever) ‘exterior’. From apprehensions of this timeless state come contrasting modes of creative ontologising, essentially different from that which is attempted in philosophical texts like Plato’s \textit{The Republic}. The \textit{gnostic} moment of a poem like ‘An Ordinary Evening in New Haven’ may be characterised by a transcendental approach toward language, or an experiential perspective that makes an attempt to unify the unknowable, the mysterious, and the immanent.

As a form of more-than-rational knowledge, I contend this taxonomy of knowing may be particular to some poets. The apprehending mind, sensitive to originary wonder, becomes receptive and aims to allow the unknown to present itself as itself. In so doing, this style of poetic responsiveness accepts what a mind cannot comprehend, but reaches toward emanations of the mysterious nonetheless. Regarded thus, some

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{41} Harold Bloom 1982 \textit{Agon: Towards a Theory of Revisionism}, page 5.
  \item \textsuperscript{42} See Robert Audi (ed) 2001 \textit{The Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy (2nd ed)}, page 346; for an historiography of the term ‘\textit{gnosis}’ see Wouter J. Hanegraaff (ed) 2005 \textit{Dictionary of Gnosticism and Western Esotericism}, pages i-xiv.
  \item \textsuperscript{43} Harold Bloom 1982 \textit{Agon: Towards a Theory of Revisionism}, page 8-9 passim.
  \item \textsuperscript{44} Ibid, page 14.
  \item \textsuperscript{45} Wallace Stevens ‘An Ordinary Evening in New Haven’, §XXII, lines 5-8, in Wallace Stevens 1975 \textit{The Collected Poems of Wallace Stevens}, page 481.
\end{itemize}
poems may seem to respond to a sublime call; a poem sings the humanly real into the strange contexts of the beyond-human. In ways not dissimilar to Plato’s idea of the universal forms, then, a poem can speak the world as wonder-filled. Heidegger offers an analogue – is it the briefest of prose-poems? – in which the mysterious is acknowledged as defamiliarised and wondrous: art, Heidegger writes, is the beingness of a being coming ‘into the steadiness of its shining.’

Further, poems may arrive after the apprehended tremorings of an imagination, and ask their readers to perceive the humanly real in the context of sublime surroundings. It is this gnōsis, I contend, that Stevens articulates in ‘An Ordinary Evening in New Haven’, §V, as:

Reality as a thing seen by the mind

Not that which is but that which is apprehended,
A mirror, a lake of reflections in a room,
A glassy ocean lying at the door,

A great town hanging pendent in a shade,
An enormous nation happy in a style,
Everything as unreal as real can be,

In the inexquisite eye.

The gnōsis of a poet like Stevens entails a different style of attaching thinking to language, but this remains a style as deserving of readers’ attention as the truth-effects of philosophies. When apprehending minds re-contextualise the humanly real to a point where all things, things-in-themselves, are unconcealed and renewed, a poem can remind a reader to wonder. The task of the poet is, in part, to re-view the sensate world in wonder, and to then open language to the shock and surprise of originary, newly-seen meanings. The value-effects therein, in which a style of ontologising takes place, seek to show readers (as much as Plato’s philosophies do) both who and how they are.

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46 Martin Heidegger (trans and introduction Albert Hofstadter) 1971 Poetry, Language, Thought, page 55. The sentence in Hofstadter’s earlier translation reads, ‘The being of the being comes into the steadiness of its shining.’ In the later translation, the same sentence reads ‘The Being of beings comes into the steadiness of its shining.’ See Martin Heidegger (ed and introduction David Farrell Krell) 1993 Basic Writings, page 162.

Having mapped Plato’s transgressive, trans-genred text and its rhetorical, performative functions, and having then extended this into an analysis of ‘philosophy’ and ‘poetry’ as genres that influence thinking, in the next section of my discussion I move to a textual analysis of a section from Immanuel Kant’s *Critique of Judgment*, where I re-read the philosopher as he links his notion of the sublime as extra-logical, and as a perspective of poets.
Chapter Three

Apprehending, seeing, knowing:
toward an account of techne after Kant’s architectonics and Heidegger’s conception of wonder

... when we judge the sight of the ocean we must not do so on the basis of how we think it, enriched with all sorts of knowledge which we possess (but which is not contained in the direct intuition), eg, as a vast realm of aquatic creatures, or as the great reservoir supplying the water for the vapours that impregnate the air with clouds for the benefit of the land, or again as an element that, while separating continents from one another, yet makes possible the greatest communication among them; for all such judgments will be teleological. Instead we must be able to view the ocean as poets do, merely in terms of what manifests itself to the eye – eg, if we observe it while it is calm, as a clear mirror of water bounded only by the sky, or, if it is turbulent, as being like an abyss threatening to engulf everything – and yet find it sublime.

Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgment*

Poetry is a measuring.

Martin Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought*
In this chapter, I further clarify how genre comes to influence apprehending-into-language. Under the influence of Martin Heidegger’s oracular conceptions of poetry, I selectively re-read Immanuel Kant’s *Critique of Judgment*. Kant proposes philosophers ‘think’ when apprehending; he then advises his audience of philosophers to view phenomena ‘as poets do, merely in terms of what manifests itself to the eye’.\(^1\) In exploring Kant’s advice further, I respond to Albert Hofstadter, Heidegger’s translator, who introduces his translation of *Poetry, Language, Thought* by asking whether there is ‘in the end any fundamental difference between the thinking poet and the poetic thinker?’\(^2\) Examining typologies of ‘poetic thinking’ and ‘thinking poetically’, I respond to Hofstadter by taking Kant’s lead. I argue here that the technical requirements in approaching language through genre conceals different styles of apprehending and thinking. I maintain that the differences between philosophies and poetries are not only material but, indeed, phenomenological.

Creative producers stand to gain much in examining Kant’s schematics. When devising his philosophical edifice, in which phenomena can be comprehended abstractly (that is, as *a priori*) and without direct experience (*a posteriori*), Kant encounters an irresolvable problem: those moments of *a priori* apprehension that agitate minds without comprehension continue to resist his speculative (albeit almost totalising) logical systems. In counselling philosophers to view the ocean as poets do, Kant implies a phenomenology in which the minds of poets agitate without the impulse to comprehend (as Kant proposes the minds of philosophers do). After Kant, and instead of philosophising, creative producers may follow a clear path – non-philosophical? Illogical? – toward their own genre texts. As I shall attempt to illuminate, after Kant, what is made available is no less than an extra-logical style of creative ontologising.

Alongside Kant, I re-read Heidegger’s conception of wonder, outlined in *Basic Questions of Philosophy: Selected ‘Problems’ of ‘Logic’*. Heidegger writes that *techné* ‘means knowledge: know-how in processes against beings’\(^3\). What does Heidegger mean by ‘processes against beings’: does *techné* entail habituated modes of responsiveness? Or perhaps *techné*-as-knowledge is somewhat indicative of particular styles of knowing? This seems affirmed when, in ‘The Origin of the Work of Art’, Heidegger seeks to further probe the term; he writes ‘the word *techné* denotes rather a mode of knowing. To know means to have seen, in the widest sense of

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seeing, which means to apprehend what is present. These linkages are best drawn together diagrammatically:

\[ \text{fig 3: \textit{tecn\'e} as a mode of apprehending, seeing, and knowing} \]

Following from my previous chapter’s discussion of \textit{theoria} and \textit{gnosis}, I propose two variants of \textit{tecn\'e}, ‘philosophical’ and ‘poetic’ know-how, which I will show to function when thinkers first think and then approach the materiality of language. In this chapter I model how creativity may happen, and explore how apprehending, seeing, and knowing can be distinct in creative (as opposed to critical) thinking. I extend here my intuition that genre exerts significant influence over phenomenological (and thereafter textual) difference.

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When he writes that philosophers must be able to view the ocean as poets do, Kant leaves a conceptual door ajar in his otherwise hermetic textual edifice. It is through this door that creative producers may escape the philosopher’s logical imperatives. Any attempt to summarise Kant’s universalising critiques is bound to oversimplify this vast philosophical system: for the purposes of contextualising my analysis, Kant’s most famous works may be said to correspond to an epistemology of metaphysics (\textit{Critique of Pure Reason}), of ethics (\textit{Critique of Practical Reason}), and of aesthetics (\textit{Critique of Judgment}). Kant imposes a transcendental limit on apprehending, seeing, and knowing, when he synthesises two antecedent philosophical schools. By fusing the discourses of his philosopher precursors (rationalists Descartes and Leibniz, empiricists Locke and Hume),

\[ \text{4 Martin Heidegger (trans and introduction Albert Hofstadter) 1971 \textit{Poetry, Language, Thought}, page 57. The translation in Krell does not deviate from this version of the translation. See Martin Heidegger (ed and introduction David Farrell Krell) 1993 \textit{Basic Writings}, page 184.} \]
Kant’s program is a genre-defining moment in the history of philosophy. Specifically, Kant’s synthesises Leibniz’s *a priori* rationalism, which contemporary philosopher Roger Scruton characterises as a ‘God’s-eye view’,\(^5\) with Hume’s *a posteriori* empiricism, which maintains that knowledge is accessible through direct experience only. Kant’s enduring legacy, transcendental idealism, reifies a pragmatic model for humanly abstract thought. This is a logical system that underwrites a range of categories, which will remain essential for imputing as *a priori* the *a posteriori* experiences of others.

What result is that, after Kant, the world can be known through pure reflection. Kant equips philosophers with a series of critical parameters to fix thinking to abstraction and, after Kant, reality is a concept capable of being upheld as universal (and universally real). As a critical aspect of his program, the philosopher positions aesthetics (alongside metaphysics and ethics) as worthy of philosophies’ investigations. In the *Critique of Judgment*, Kant seeks to establish a ‘subjective universality’\(^6\) for all beautiful (and sublime) experience. And it is here that the philosopher’s know-how begins to encounter problems.

In formulating categories for aesthetic judgment, Kant proposes art works should be regarded as ‘purposive without purpose’;\(^7\) that is, judgments of taste must be made free of bias and without connection to purpose. To achieve subjective universality, beauty must be distanced from both function and bias. Into this paradigm, Kant then introduces the sublime, beauty’s counterpart, and makes this intrinsic distinction while prosecuting his logic:

natural beauty carries with it a purposiveness in its form, by which the object seems as it were predetermined for our power of judgment, so that this beauty constitutes in itself an object of our liking. On the other hand, if something arouses in us, merely in apprehension and without any reasoning on our part, a feeling of the sublime, then it may indeed appear, in its form, contrapurposive for our power of judgment, incommensurate with our power of exhibition, and as it were violent to our imagination, and yet we judge it all the more sublime for that.\(^8\)

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\(^6\) V. B. Leitch (general ed) 2001 *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism*, page 500.
\(^7\) Immanuel Kant (trans and introduction Werner S. Pluhar) 1790/ 1987 *Critique of Judgment*, page 84 (236).
\(^8\) Ibid, page 98-99 (246).
Unlike beauty, which ‘refers the imagination in its free play to the understanding so that it will harmonise with the understanding’s concepts’,

9 sublime experience ‘refers the imagination to reason so that it will harmonise subjectively with reason’s ideas’.

10 This is likely to pose problems when apprehending as philosophers do, in the Kantian manner, which is to ‘think’ by comprehending and logically systematising phenomena. Little doubt, then, that when a philosophical thinker like Kant encounters the sublime, the experience proffers a ‘mental agitation’ in which a rank of affective responses arise after ‘the imagination’s displeasure’.

11 Of little comfort to the reasoning processes of philosophising, it seems the sublime may cause instead (after the failure of logic) feelings of discomfort. But for creative producers, who operate under their own genre’s know-how (which does not require philosophical styles of comprehension), this violence to the imagination may trigger altogether different processes of wondering.

What may have begun to shift into view are typologies of know-how, which arrive after wondering; the ‘teleologies’ of philosophies and, alternative to these, the ‘architectonic’ know-how of creativity. What is teleology? In the Critique of Judgment, Kant valorises teleological perception as the mediating phenomenology between philosopher and world, suggesting:

without man the chain of mutually subordinated purposes would not have a complete basis.

Only in man, and even in him only as moral subject, do we find unconditioned legislation regarding purposes. It is this legislation, therefore, which alone enables man to be a final purpose to which all of nature is teleologically subordinated.

13 To Kant, the task of philosophising is to reify human agency with the know-how of legislated logic. Philosophers, self-appointed agents of human agency, ‘man’ the helm of a hierarchical complex of systems, and participate in making the world purposeful through a teleological relationship. Kant’s critiques categorise the conditions in which metaphysics, ethics and aesthetics will arrive in thinking, and his logic legislates rules (Kant calls them ‘categorical imperatives’) as absolute, absolutely purposeful, and no less than reality-making.


10 Ibid, page 113 (256).

11 Ibid, page 100 (247).

12 Ibid, page 114 (257).

Self-sustaining and autocratic, Kant’s *techné*-as-knowledge is evinced in three monumental questions, which the philosopher italicises in his *Critique of Pure Reason*:

1. *What can I know?*
2. *What ought I to do?*
3. *What may I hope?*  

In following his apprehending-into-language, Kant responds in an intricately constructed formal style. His language (in translation) is abstruse: philosopher John Armstrong notes how Kant characterises ‘everything which is beguiling and annoying about philosophy: now you are going to get the answer to everything; unfortunately it will be incomprehensible.’ The Kantian critiques are limited by an assumed foreknowledge of esoteric commonplaces but, generic implicature aside, the genius of this philosopher is that he rewrites the rules governing how future philosophers will conduct thinking. In so doing, Kant imposes what seem to be permanent strictures on the genre:

1. *This* is what (and how) I/ we can know.
2. *This* is what I/ we ought do.
3. *This* is what I/ we will hope.

The philosopher provides a motto for the Enlightenment in his essay, ‘What is Enlightenment?’, writing: ‘*Sapere aude!* Have courage to use your *own* understanding,’ but the irony is that the methods of post-Enlightenment analytical traditions in philosophy are both established and limited by the boundaries of Kant’s know-how. What can we know, philosophically? We can know the inextricable imperatives of the Kant’s teleological critiques.

So, what of the ‘architectonic’ perspective Kant ascribes poets? The non-philosophical know-how of this genre, which is not generated by logic, is a style of apprehending-into-language generated by sublime experience. In their article, ‘The Sublime: in Alchemy, Aesthetics and Psychoanalysis’, Jan Cohn and Thomas

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16 Kant’s essay is cited in M.A.R. Habib 2005 *A History of Literary Criticism: from Plato to Present*, page 359. Italics are from Kant.
H. Miles inform readers that ‘in the case of sublime and all its derivatives, the Latin roots … give us “up to the lintel”.’ A lintel is a horizontal support across the top of a doorway or window; the sublime, then, transcends the logical thresholds of Kant's critiques and, as already noted, is a conceptual door that exits the philosopher’s teleological systems. In essence, the sublime constitutes moments in which logic breaks down. How might this be of interest (or use) to creative producers? What is at stake here is an organisation of phenomenological difference; what I am attempting to illuminate is that which Kant calls a 'blind but indispensable function of the soul'. How creativity happens may require rethinking the Kantian sublime.

Theorist Paul de Man interprets Kant’s advice to view the ocean as poets do as directing his readers toward an ‘architectonic’ perspective. De Man traces this to another Kantian text, the Critique of Practical Reason, where an architectonic perspective is proposed to equip individuals with the facility to:

grasp correctly the idea of the whole … to fix one’s eyes upon all those parts in their reciprocal reference to one another by means of their derivation from the concept of that whole. This examination and warrant is possible only through the most intimate acquaintance of the system.

To view phenomena as poets do is to undertake an altogether different process to critical thinking after wondering. As I have already discussed in my previous chapter, in Agon: Towards a Theory of Revisionism, contemporary poetician Harold Bloom recuperates gnosis as a form of more-than-rational knowledge. By implication, the esoteric knowledge of this style of apprehending-into-language may be a sense of the extra-logical world evoked in language that, as Bloom puts it, is ‘purposefully in flight from the obsessive universe of human repetitions’. More than that which the Russian Formalists characterise as ‘defamiliarisation’, I contend this taxonomy of more-than-rational knowledge may be a style of know-how in which a mind accepts that which it cannot comprehend – the beyond-human, the mysterious – and, during this violence to the imagination, reaches toward emanations of the mysterious nonetheless.

19 Immanuel Kant (trans and introduction Werner S. Pluhar) 1788/ 2002 Critique of Practical Reason, page 16 (10). Italics are from Kant.
Rendered thus, an architectonic perspective correlates with Bloom’s conception of gnosis-as-poetic-perception: in viewing phenomena like a poet, there is directness, a primacy to this paradoxical, more-than-rational knowing. Rather than referring to other philosophies for answers, Kant is advising his audience of philosophers to view the world as it is, and not as it has been presented (through the manifold lenses of philosophical speculations).

Re-reading in the murk of truth-effects that loom as unchallenged philosophical authorities, Heidegger’s thinking seeks to illuminate similar intuitions to Kant’s grasp toward how imaginations function. In Basic Questions of Philosophy: Selected ‘Problems’ of ‘Logic’, Heidegger surveys the state and status of wonder and hypotheses that, when philosophers think after wondering, comprehension terminates the unusualness of the usual. The philosopher contends that wondering, upon being linguistically expressed, ‘in unfolding, must surrender its originality’. This raises (at least) three issues:

1. Heidegger’s thinking necessitates a reconsideration of how the sublime, which generates wondering, can trigger particular critical and creative responses;

2. Heidegger’s thinking necessitates a distinction be drawn between two discrete styles of technê, and his later speculations on poetry contradict his (all-encompassing) statement that wonder, when formalised in language, will always surrender originality;

3. indeed, poetic apprehending-into-language can instead transfer wondering to readers.

After Heidegger, who remains suspicious of the impulse to teleologically philosophise, critical thinkers might interrogate how they wonder, and how they might wonder creatively in order to discover once more the ‘thingly character of the thing’ (which is one task this philosopher ascribes to poems).


Heidegger expends a great deal of thought discerning between wonder – characterised as ‘the basic disposition compelling us into the necessity of primordial questioning’ – and curiosity, in which the extraordinary is conveyed through astonishment, admiration, and awe. Heidegger maintains that curiosity confounds the pursuit of wonder, avowing that philosophical techné can supplant the impulse to wonder with an ‘avidity for learning and calculation’. Philosophy has historically generated after primordial thinking but (Heidegger fears) it homogenises as a set of gestural responses, a dogmatics if you will. Far from a ‘pure acknowledgement of the unusualness of the usual’, Heidegger characterises philosophies as skewing from wondering on aletheia (‘the uncovering of beings’) to homiosiosis, a form of imposed truth. Viewing the world as Heidegger fears philosophers may come to do – instead of gazing at what manifests itself to the eye? – is to risk misapprehending that which might be gazed upon in its primordial being-ness. As the impulse to philosophise crystallises, Heidegger suspects a set of processes will be set in motion, in which a basic disposition to wonder is replaced by process-driven procedures. These, Heidegger fears, which concretise the world through answering-styles of language use, where emphasis is placed on functionalising (and, therein, exhausting) wonder.

In ‘Poetically Man Dwells’, Heidegger writes:

(m)an’s taking measure in the dimension dealt out to him brings dwelling into its ground plan. Taking the measure of the dimension is the element within which human dwelling has its security, by which it securely endures. The taking of measure is what is poetic in dwelling. Poetry is a measuring.

This designates a way in which creative thinkers might approach Kant’s questions. It also provides a pathway for Kantian-style thinkers, away from totalising systems and toward a style of reapprehending. To view phenomena as poets do is to enter a generic style of thinking, after wondering, that is non-teleological and where the being-ness of beings can register as a primordial strangeness. What can be known, done, and hoped

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26 Martin Heidegger (trans Richard Rojcewicz and André Schuwer) 1994 *Basic Questions in Philosophy: Selected 'Problems' of 'Logic*, page 155, 156.
27 Martin Heidegger (trans and introduction Albert Hofstadter) 1971 *Poetry, Language, Thought*, page 155, 156.
for? In following into language the ‘unconcealedness of what is’, creativ
ahieving is know-how based on the revelatory, the disjunctive, and the fragmentary. This style of more-than-rational knowing is far
removed from the systems, analyses, and logical cognitions of the telelogical style; what seems foremost is an intuition that the world is sublime, not logical. In measuring, creative producers appraise human limitation
before using language to gesture toward the beyond-human, the mysterious.

A final word from Heidegger on *technē*. In his push to valorise poetic thinking and languaging, Heidegger re-reads *technē* as follows:

(†)he Greek for ‘to bring forth or produce’ is *tikto*. The word *technē* means neither art nor
handicraft but rather: to make something appear, within what is present, as this or that, in
this way or that. The Greeks conceive of *technē*, producing, in terms of letting appear.  

Creative *technē*, then, is no less than an alternative mode of ontologising, of referencing emergent realities in
language. This style of apprehending-into-language transfers sublime emanations of an ‘idea of the whole’ (to echo de Man), which cannot be contained in logical systems. In poems, specific genre devices can be
employed in which the material of language is stretched with metaphor, irony, and the poetic image; at the
same time, language is cut to a precise shape (the meter and sound patterning, for example, of the canonical
poetic forms). Thus, a poem is made in a strange shape which somehow seems to fit the non-logical,
mysterious world; these organically unifying, shaped texts can be as humanising as the teleological realities
made by philosophies.

As already discussed, in ‘The Origin of the Work of Art’ Heidegger models his ideas of *dichtung* and
*poeie*, and it is *dichtung* (that primordial and extra-linguistic framing essence) which makes possible *poeie*, the
manifestation of poetry in language. To Heidegger, *dichtung* is a wordless creative essence that embeds not
only the *poeie* of language expressed as poem; indeed, according to Heidegger, the universe is shot through
with this originary impulse, the primordial strangeness which a poem enacts as it languages (measures, brings
forth) beings. What Heidegger would have his readers believe is that poetry is an ‘illuminating projection’,  

and that poems are architectonic maps which open up to defamiliarised vistas of the common world, made

31 Ibid, page 70.
strange. Creative know-how, under the force of these ideas, is an inexhaustible mode of apprehending which philosophers and poets alike might strategically adopt in viewing phenomena.

To wonder seems implicit to both critical and creative production. I have illuminated the differences between poetic thinking and thinking poetically as phenomenological and formal, as different as the beauty of enquiry (philosophising) can be to an enquiry into beauty (creative thinking). How the sublime is mediated characterises how genre can generate phenomenology; what begins with wondering ends in either teleological or architectonic styles of ontologising. Critical thinkers may attempt to explain the sublime but, in the explanation, the sublime is (literally) explained away. The know-how of creative thinkers entails (in part) knowing how to stretch and cut the material of language so that what is shaped is a gnostic idea of the beyond-human, the mysterious. As Kant and Heidegger would avow, this may be a style of apprehending that critical producers might approach and adopt.
Part Two

Toward poeticognosia? Re-thinking the sublime

… if man is to find his way once again to the nearness of Being he must first learn to exist in the nameless.

Martin Heidegger, ‘Letter on Humanism’

Poets, then, are materialists of language.

Terry Eagleton, *How to Read a Poem*
In this second part of my investigation, ‘Toward poeticognosia? Rethinking the sublime’, I examine the poems of two contemporary poets, which I read alongside two philosophical theories of the sublime. Foremost in this part of my investigation, I describe my reactions to (and experience of) Carson and Hass’ poems, through the lenses of pseudo-Longinus’ textual and Edmund Burke’s affective sublime. In making my attempt to enter into that sub-genre of aesthetics, the theory of creativity, I examine how these poets convey wonder while their poems emanate from generic apprehensions, and then extend my analysis toward a series of speculations.

In ‘Decreating thinking: toward a theory of creativity? Rethinking the sublime after Anne Carson’s Decreation and Edmund Burke’s A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origins of Our Ideas of the Sublime and the Beautiful’, I propose that, for poets like Carson, delight may arrive after apprehending poetic language, after wondering. Burke asserts delight is the phenomenological response accompanying ‘the removal of pain or danger’ ¹. I argue that creative thinking entails a phenomenology of waiting in a form of Burkean privation. Re-reading Freud through Harold Bloom, I argue that the wondering of poets can swarm out of what Freud labels primary and secondary processes,² and into language.

In my next chapter, ‘Meter-making arguments? The pseudo-Longinian “grand style” as a mode of extra-logical argumentation in the poems of Robert Hass’, I extend my investigation into how the sublime is an extra-logical mode of apprehending, and how Hass’ ‘grand style’ exemplifies an impulse to creatively ontologise. Hass is a poet who fixes his gaze upon the world-as-dwelling, before then viewing the same as a place in which to stage reality-as-theatre. This meta-viewing, of human context in a sublime setting, suggests a perspective (as if this is possible) that is outside the poet. Hass’ immanence of absence allows him to grasp great conceptions (to echo pseudo-Longinus); this is a poet whose work can be entrancing, and whose poems can act as entrances to new vistas, new possibilities for how to be in the world. But, further, there is something of the ethicist to Hass. What sets him apart from philosophers is his language and, I argue, the formal ways in which he puts his imagination to extra-logical use.

The passions which belong to self-preservation, turn on pain and danger; they are simply painful when their causes immediately affect us; they are delightful when we have an idea of pain and danger, without being actually in such circumstances; this delight I have not called pleasure, because it turns on pain, and because it is different enough from any idea of positive pleasure. Whatever excites this delight, I call sublime. The passions belonging to self-preservation are the strongest of all the passions.

Edmund Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*

what

swarm of clearnesses and do they amaze you,
inbetween when you hear the phone and when you get it,
all palpable explanations of why it rang and what to do
and what'd it be like if your brain were this fit
all the time?

Anne Carson, ‘Gnosticism IV’
Anne Carson’s *Decreation*, read in conjunction with Edmund Burke’s treatise on the sublime, contains the makings of a theory of creativity. Burke proposes delight is a response accompanying the ‘removal of pain or danger’. What I propose is that Carson’s epistle meditates on how creative thinkers move from privation – Burke’s explicit cause of the sublime: ‘Vacuity, Darkness, Solitude and Silence’ to delight. Carson’s collection of ‘Poetry, Essays, Opera’ encodes how, as creative work arrives, the delight of a unified self also arrives. The poet writes of entering a familiar site ‘from the sleep side’, and then praises sleep while speaking analogously of creative processes. After reading Carson, I wonder if poets indeed catch a ‘glimpse of something incognito’, as the poet says we all do when we sleep. Exemplifying creative apprehending-into-language as dream-like, *Decreation* contains writing that stirs the imagination differently from the way philosophers such as Plato and Kant prosecute their reasoning.

Borrowing from a range of theorists (Heidegger, Freud after Bloom, as well as Burke), in this chapter I model a theory that speculates how creative thinking may move from the nothingness of a blank imagination (which I take to be a form of privation), toward language. After Burke’s theory of the sublime, I recuperate a series of terms from Burke and a range of other theorists: negation is framed as ‘self-abnegation’; I frame the arrival of poems as a dual arrival of ‘poem-via-poet/ poet-via-poem’; I tailor poetician Harold Bloom’s ‘disjunctive generation of meaning’ to my own ‘disjunctive germination of poetic language’; theorist Thomas Weiskel’s notion of ‘aphasia’ is recuperated here to frame the apprehending imagination’s momentary and sublime lapse out of discourse. Incorporating writings from a broad range of theorists, who I have read against Carson’s *Decreation*, I come to develop my theory of what creative producers do when imaginations shudder, and then move toward language.

In their book, *The Sublime: a Reader in British Eighteenth Century Aesthetic Theory*, editors Andrew Ashfield and Peter de Bolla suggest ‘great revolutions of the Enlightenment’ as responsible for ‘changes in the ways in

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2 Ibid, page 71.
which man conceptualised himself, his relations to others and to the world outside and around him. Enlightenment, in other words, theorised as a period in which a variant human psychology arose to shift the paradigms of human realities. After Enlightenment, the universe was no longer a Newtonian ‘sensorium of God’ with a Platonic ‘anima mundi’; with Enlightenment, human realities came to be reframed as an ‘intellectus mundi’ peopled by an emerging spread of selves who thought and who therefore were, and to whom a faculty of imagination became available, surpassing earlier modes of humans thinking realities into being. This aesthetically-attuned mass of individuals signalled the arrival of modern selves able to ask of their mimetic representations for the first time ‘what can we know? What do we do? What may we hope?’ These were questions art could respond to: in finding a name, aesthetics could teach humans who and how and what they could be.

A part of what came to be interrogated by Enlightenment thinkers, however, was to remain mysterious; how to formulate aesthetic judgment when art contained apprehensions that could not be philosophically expressed? It became clear that art did something that the comprehending minds of philosophers could not explain; what was required was a paradigm with which to explain the mysterious in art. So, when Nicolas Boileau-Despréaux published his version of Peri Hupsou in 1674, Traité du sublime ou du Merveilleux dans le Discours, the ‘grand style’ provoked great interest as ideas of the sublime began to transmit

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7 Ernest Tuveson ‘Space, Deity, and the Natural Sublime’ in Modern Languages Quarterly #12 (1951), page 27.
8 ‘… divine providence brought our world into being as a truly living thing, endowed with soul and intelligence’. See Plato (trans and introduction Donald J. Zeyl) 4th century BCE/2000 Timaeus, page 16 (30c).
9 Ernest Tuveson ‘Space, Deity, and the Natural Sublime’ in Modern Languages Quarterly #12 (1951), page 36.
10 The literature suggests confusion around this detail: Lyotard reports ‘In 1674 Boileau published his Art Poétique, but he also published Du Sublime, his translation or transcription from the Peri tou hupsou’ in the essay ‘The Sublime and the Avant-Garde’. See Andrew Benjamin (ed) 1989 The Lyotard Reader, page 200. Terence Des Pres echoes this date: ‘The influence of Longinus began to be felt in Europe in the latter part of the seventeenth century, especially after Boileau’s French translation from the Greek in 1674’ in Terrence Des Pres ‘Terror and the Sublime’ in Human Rights Quarterly Vol.5, No.2 (May, 1983), page 156. Richard Macksey dates the publication 120 years earlier, stating ‘Peri Hupsou (traditionally rendered in English as ‘On the Sublime’)… is the sole surviving work of its author, known by convention as ‘Longinus’, but whose very name is in doubt. There is, in fact, no ancient reference to the tractate or sign of its influence, so its history effectively begins possibly a millennium and a half later with the Basel publication of the Paris manuscript by Francesco Robortelli in 1554.’ See Richard Macksey ‘Longinus Reconsidered’ in MLN Vol.8, No.5 (December 1995), page 913. An answer to the confusion is located in Samuel Monk’s The Sublime: a Study of Critical Theories in XVIII-Century England: ‘The first edition of Longinus appeared in 1554 in Basel. Franciscus Robertello was the editor. This was followed in the next year by the edition of Paulus Manutius, published at Venice. The third and last edition of the sixteenth century was that of Franciscus Portus, published at Geneva in 1569. In 1572 there appeared the first translation from the Greek – the Latin version of Pagano, published at Venice. One would expect to find in England during the last half of the sixteenth century some traces of the interest that was being manifested in Longinus by Continental humanists, but one looks for them in vain … The sublime came to England from France in Boileau’s translation of Longinus (1674) – came with a certain accretion of aesthetic concepts that it had gathered from Boileau’s Préface. It will be recalled that John Hall had translated Peri Hupsou as ‘the Height of Eloquence’; likewise Putney, the second translator of the treatise into English, adopted the title, A Treatise of the Looftiness or Elegancy of Speech, even though he translated not from the Greek but from Boileau’s version. It was an anonymous translator who, in 1688, first translated Hupsou by the Latin and Romance derivative, sublime, although, as
into 17th century discourses. Thereafter, in setting out to answer how modern selves might define, limit, and comprehend ideas around the indefinable, the limitless, and the incomprehensible, theorists sought to initiate agreement with their concretising discourses. One landmark text, which arrived almost three quarters of a century after Boileau-Despréaux’s translation, was Edmund Burke’s *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origins of Our Ideas of the Sublime and the Beautiful*.

Burke’s is a manual of experimental psychology with a radical message for its readers: in Burke’s rethinking of the ancient sublime, it is terror that produces a positive affective reaction. As Philip Shaw notes, in *The Sublime*, Burke shifted the discourse of the sublime ‘away from the study of natural objects and towards the mind of the spectator’,11 speculating a phenomenological model to explain how emotions are produced by beauty (pleasure and comfort, mostly12) but also by sublimity, which Burke defines as:

> whatever is in any sort terrible, or is conversant about terrible objects, or operates in a manner analogous to terror, is a source of the *sublime*; that is, it is productive of the strongest emotion which the mind is capable of feeling.13

For Burke, human imaginations shudder when terrorised (from a safe distance14) by incomprehensible stimuli. In his schema, relief arrives at the resolution of a mind’s disequilibrium15 but, more so, when a mind stops shuddering and terror is sublimated, relief magnifies to a much stronger response: Burke uses ‘the word *Delight* to express the sensation which accompanies the removal of pain or danger’.16 His treatise, then, is a map that traces speculative territories in which affective, mind-sharpening jolts arrive in individuals who

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12 Burke writes ‘sublime objects are vast in their dimensions, beautiful ones comparatively small; beauty should be smooth, and polished; the great, rugged and negligent; beauty should shun the right line, yet deviate from it insensibly; the great in many cases loves the right line, and when it deviates, it often makes a strong deviation; beauty should not be obscure; the great ought to be dark and gloomy; beauty should be light and delicate; the great ought to be solid, and even massive. They are indeed ideas of a very different nature, one being founded on pain, the other on pleasure’. See Edmund Burke (ed James T. Boulton) 1757/1958 *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*, page 124.
14 Ibid, page 40. Burke writes ‘(w)hen danger or pain press too nearly, they are incapable of giving any delight, and are simply terrible.’
15 I am indebted to David Mikics for this term, which he uses when contesting that ‘(f)or Kant, who followed and was influenced by Burke, the sublime involves a disequilibrium between the mind and its object.’ See David Mikics 2007 *A New Handbook of Literary Terms*, pages 290-291.
encounter cognitive dissonance, a result of experiencing the ineffable, the incomprehensible, or that which is impossible to explain.

For creative producers, something akin to the Burkean sublime may indeed be experienced when moving through the murk of psychic processes … and Carson’s Decreation points the way. In the poem ‘Seated Figure with Red Angle (1988) by Betty Goodwin’, the poet writes how ‘artists tell you art is before thought’ (the italics are hers) and that ‘you reach inside the edges of the thinkable, which leaks’.17 Is there something of Burke’s sublime supposed by the idea of grasping toward immanent edges of thinking? Perhaps at work here is a style of wondering in which creative thinkers acknowledge that their thinking, once glimpsed, must then be located in language. As theorist Thomas Weiskel writes in The Romantic Sublime: Studies in the Structure and Psychology of Transcendence, ‘the sublime appears to involve a kind of temporary aphasia, which we have characterised as a lapsing out of discourse.’18 I argue that what creative producers lapse into is self-abnegation, as they reach across languageless aphasias and toward the very edges of the thinkable. This is a phenomenology concomitant with Burke’s sublime causes (Vacuity, Darkness, Solitude, and Silence).

In her book, Carson never fully defines the term ‘decreation’, but comes closest with the following, which appears in an essay recounting twentieth century French classicist and philosopher Simone Weil starving herself: ‘(t)he process of decreation is for her a dislodging of herself from a centre where she cannot stay because staying there blocks God. She speaks of a need ‘to withdraw from my own soul’.19 This decentring, necessitating selflessness (here, to the point of disappearance and death), may give rise to confusion; as creative thinkers lapse from conscious modes of thinking and comprehending, that which is apprehended may be mistaken for a glimpse of something metaphysical: whatever that might be. But Carson emphasises these apprehensions as immanent. In ‘Every Exit is an Entrance (A Praise of Sleep)’, she suggests ‘something incognito may cross over from night to day and change the life of the sleeper’.20 What is this: a lucid dream? A vision? Perhaps what is incognito is the beginning of creative thinking, at a point of arrival. Elsewhere in Decreation, art is held to be ‘the servant of allure’, and there ‘is no master of allure’ but

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19 Anne Carson 2006 Decreation, page 167. Carson writes this of Simone Weil’s death: ‘she is believed to have hastened her own death from tuberculosis in 1943 by a regime of voluntary self-starvation undertaken out of sympathy for people in France who didn’t have enough to eat.’ Ibid, page 175.
20 Ibid, page 22.
'conditionals are of two kinds allure and awake'. Creative thinking, according to this schema, may be confused with a form of metaphysics but after all, isn’t creativity simply another form of ontologising, a mimetic imperative that goes some way toward shaping the real? This style of selfless apprehension, an otherly form of wakefulness, comes to exert powerful mystery over thinkers, some of whom will exert little conscious control over their epiphany-carrying processes.

For creative producers, who make something appear from nothing, self-abnegation – decreating usual modes of thinking – entails work being undertaken as if from outside the self. In a zone of aphasia, privation, disequilibrium and a reflexive state of self-absence, ideas begin to swarm from the unconscious. Being taken hold of thus, poetic thinking enters ‘from the sleep side’ while poets grasp (before thought) through the psychic murk of self-abnegation. A precursor of this is contained in Romantic poet John Keats’ proclamation (made in support of his idea of negative capability) that the ‘poetical Character … has no self’; further support is located at the height of the Modernist movement when T.S. Eliot denotes poetic processes as an ‘escape from personality’, suggesting the ‘progress of an artist is a continual self-sacrifice, a continual extinction of personality’. Occupying different canonical epochs, what did both poets intuit? Given the similarity of sentiment from both Keats and Eliot, what I contend is that creative thinking entails a particular phenomenology, somewhat akin to a zone in which non-predictable results will be borne as thinkers reach inside the edges of the thinkable while their imaginations operate in a state of heightened, decentred awareness. In such a state, apprehensions swarm in a manner that is neither logical, analytical, nor teleological, but which instead contains the emanations of an event that arrives ‘before thought’ (as Carson names it).

In his own theory of creativity, ‘The Origin of the Work of Art’, Heidegger proposes ‘(t)he artist is the origin of the work. The work is the origin of the artist. Neither is without the other’. This is an insight Maurice Blanchot shares, developing it in his essay ‘Literature and the Right to Death’:

(t)he writer only finds himself, only realises himself, through his work; before his work exists, not only does he not know who he is, but he is nothing. He exists only as a function of the work; but then how can the work exist? … he is the author of it – or rather that, because of it, he is an author: it is the source of his existence, he has made it and it makes him, it is himself and he is completely what it is. This is the reason for his joy, his pure and perfect joy before noting, and this remains critical to my analysis, how ‘silence and nothingness are the essence of literature’.25 Creative producers, like Carson, will follow wondering into the invention and discovery of poeisis, stretching ideas from the unconscious (absence and nothingness). But what arrives is a mirroring moment: as wondering moves into language, so too does the thinker/ writer move into being.

The inner workings I am speculating here are phenomenological scapes that are blind and indispensable to creative processes. In his Critique of Pure Reason, Kant designates the imagination as a ‘blind but indispensable function of the soul’,26 and I re-read the same blindness as sublime, as indispensable to the co-arrival of work and artist. Might further clarity be thrown on these seeming mysteries? How to map unconscious (and, surely, individualistic) processes? This has been surveyed in part by Harold Bloom, who seeks a specific, poetic version of the sublime. Bloom re-reads Freud and labels the psychoanalyst a ‘prose-poet of the Sublime’27 as he theorises how unconscious processes function when imaginations shift from nothingness into creative thinking (and then toward language). In his essay ‘Freud and the poetic sublime: a catastrophe theory of creativity’, Bloom re-reads Freud’s ‘The Uncanny’ to suggest a psychoanalytic formula wherein:

negation allows poetry to free itself from the aphasias and hysterias of repression, without however freeing the poets themselves from the unhappier human consequences of repression.

Negation is of no therapeutic value for the individual, but it can liberate him into the linguistic freedoms of poetry and thought.28

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25 ‘Literature and the Right to Death’ appears in Maurice Blanchot 1995 Work of Fire, pages 303-309 passim. The self-entailment of the poetic act is also discussed by Nobel Prize winning poet Octavio Paz, who writes of how ‘The poet speaks, and as he speaks, he makes. This making is above all a making of himself: poetry is not only self-knowledge but self-creation.’ See Octavio Paz (trans Rachel Phillips) 1974 Children of the Mire: Modern Poetry from Romanticism to the Avant-Garde, page 60.
28 Ibid, pages 224, 225.
A creative thinker will wander into the immanence and immensity of their unconscious, a vacant, dark, solitary and silent phenomenology, where ideas swarm across psychic self-darkness and toward techné (a form of knowing what to do). In a later work, *Agon: Towards a Theory of Revisionism*, Bloom designates negation as a ‘disjunctive generation of meaning’. I rephrase Bloom’s aphorism here to suggest *poeisis* entails a disjunctive germination of language: an idea, grown from nothingness, then blooms into form.

In moving closer to a speculative model for the origin of some poems, Bloom’s re-reading of Freud’s primary process is instructive:

Freud speaks of the primary process as being marked by a wandering-of-meaning, with meaning sometimes dislocated onto what ought to be an insignificant idea or image, and sometimes compressed upon a single idea or image at a crossing point between a number of ideas or images. Is Bloom’s *gnosis* a form of Heideggerian knowing? Sharing Bloom’s impulse to move across speculative abstract realms, I use *gnosis* here to recuperate Freud’s primary process as imperative to creative apprehension. Thus, the engine room of creativity (if you will) swarms with the condensation and displacement of ideas fusing unpredictably while creative thinkers remain in a reflective state of not-knowing. What happens creatively (through decreation) during this detachment from usual thinking? Do creative producers forsake the impulse to control and instead reflect within privation, allowing unconscious work to materialise as they wait to record a glimpse of ‘something incognito’ (to echo Carson)? This, a *gnostic* blankness of the primary process, seems to signpost how mysterious the arrival of thinking (and knowing) can be.

How, then, from the chaos of apprehensions swarming, to enter language? While augmenting his theory of poetic thinking, and after exploring the primary process, Bloom next re-reads Freud’s secondary process, which:

begins with a binding of psychic energy, which subsequently moves in a more systematic fashion. Investments in ideas and images are stabilised, with pleasure deferred, in order to

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make possible trial runs of thought as so many path-breakings towards a more constant pleasure.\(^\text{31}\)

According to Bloom, Freud’s secondary process is an affirmation of the more-than-knowing of poets, wherein the sublime experience of the primary process is reframed through the crafting of wonder into the *tecnē* of constraining language (what I take to be any poet’s mediation of metre, sound patterning, the Aristotelian tropes). In this re-reading of unconscious poetic thinking and doing, the secondary process shifts a poem into language and its poet, as we see in figure iii, into being.

![Diagram](image)

*figure iii: the relation of self-abnegation to self-enactment through thinking-into-poetry*

To recapitulate: I postulate creative thinkers move through a form of Burkean privation, across a phenomenology akin to Blanchot’s silence and nothingness, while mindfully experiencing the blindness of Freud’s primary process. In this *gnostic*, Heideggerian mode of apprehending, ideas swarm from the unconscious while creative thinkers reach inside the thinkable as if outside themselves. In these moments of thinking arriving, ideas next move into Freud’s secondary process (that is, toward language). As writers make writing, in so doing writing creates a unified sense of self. In this way, thinkers move from decreation to creation, from disequilibrium to delight.

In the following sections I re-read the suite ‘Gnosticisms’, which I take to actively meditate on how poetic language masks mysteries between ‘something and nothing’.

I then re-read the suite ‘Stops’, written for the poet’s dying mother. What I will come to suggest is that both these autobiographical suites indicate a wild intelligence approaching language from a state of disequilibrium. I speculate Carson has both decreated her self and written self-reflexively on her approach toward language; in so doing, the poet locates how the sublime functions as a particular mode in her thinking and unique style of knowing how to respond to thinking.

Menopause contains a disconcerting array of styles: this is a book that begins with a suite of poems about the poet’s mother, followed by an essay, and then an ode, to sleep; a re-reading of Longinus through the lens of Italian film-maker Antonioni; a short text on the same film-maker’s visit to an asylum; two sequences of poems, ‘Sublimes’ and then ‘Gnosticisms’; a meditation on a painting by Betty Goodwin; an oratorio, ‘Lots of Guns’; a short text homaging Beckett; a screenplay on medieval lovers Abelard and Heloise; another essay on solar eclipses; a further essay about the ecstatic which develops ideas from Sappho, Marguerite Porete, and Simone Weil; a libretto on the same authors; and, finally, a shot list for a non-existent documentary, ‘Longing’. How to regard such generic transgression? Decreation is ekphrastic, intertextual, chaotic, a heady work conveying a series of codes that, given the allusions at work, require scrutiny. Individually, some of the texts in Decreation misfire, others remain oblique; the best of Carson’s work haunts as the author’s disequilibrium transfers to readers. What I contend is, in its treatment of the sublime, this book embeds a theory of creativity that, when decoded, is a style manual for the imagination, a guidebook of creative thinking.

When Carson asks ‘(w)hat would the singing of the real world sound like? What would the thing itself look like?’ she is at once suggesting the world her readers occupy is not a ‘real’ world, while also setting the task of locating some Platonic, supra-sensible version of the real. In fact, what the poet is doing by asking these sorts of questions is using language in a pseudo-philosophical fashion. Similar to, say, the
impossibility of understanding the language of lions (as Wittgenstein proposes\textsuperscript{34}), Carson cannot hear ‘the singing of the real world’ but instead investigates what possibilities exist for poetry as a medium through which to demarcate reality. In questioning what the real might look like, the ways in which Carson ‘sees’ with language remain different from the reifying teleologies of philosophies’ styles.

Carson sets up poetry as a way of seeing that is reminiscent of dreaming. The poet writes of entering a familiar site ‘from the sleep side’\textsuperscript{35} where, speaking analogously of creative processes, she catches a ‘glimpse of something \textit{incognito}’\textsuperscript{36}. Rather than prosecute her thinking logically, as a philosopher might, Carson suggests ‘something \textit{incognito} may cross over from night to day and change the life of the sleeper.’\textsuperscript{37} The suite ‘Gnosticisms’ is studded with lines that suggest Carson believes poetry, as an otherly style of seeing with language, can only ever \textit{almost} access reality. In the first of her ‘Gnosticisms’, which relays a dream of the word ‘bird’ in which the bird-ness of ‘bird’ is portrayed thrusting through darkness, the poet traces several mysterious arrivals in attempting to locate what the thing itself might look like:

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Heaven’s lips! I dreamed
of a page in a book containing the word \textit{bird} and I
entered \textit{bird}.

Bird grinds on,
grinds on, thrusting against black. Thrusting
wings, thrusting again, hard
banks slap against it either side, that bird was exhausted.

Still, beating, working its way and below dark woods
small creatures
leap. Rip

at food with scrawny lips.
Lips at night.
Nothing guiding it, bird beats on, night wetness on it.
A lion looks up.
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\textsuperscript{34} ‘If a lion could talk, we could not understand him.’ See Ludwig Wittgenstein (trans G.E.M. Anscombe) 1953/ 2001 \textit{Philosophical Investigations}, page 190.
\textsuperscript{35} Anne Carson 2006 \textit{Decreation}, page 20.
\textsuperscript{36} Ibid, page 20.
\textsuperscript{37} Ibid, page 22.
Smell of adolescence in these creatures, this ordinary night for them. Astonishment inside me like a separate person, sweat-soaked. How to grip.

For some people a bird sings, feathers shine, I just get this tbis.  

How are readers to get a grip on this poem of profound disequilibrium? Captivated by the poet’s alluring and otherly wakefulness, where are readers that lions (lines? Loins?) can seem so out of context? What kind of nothingness does the bird swoop across in this dreamlike logic? Is Carson meta-poetically reflecting her own primary process? Is astonishment (through the narrator) inside her like ‘a separate person’, a moment of uncanny self-arrival? Or is a doppelganger wandering through the poem? ‘Heaven’s lips’ is no random pejorative but a hint that Carson is singing from a plane on which a higher order of making (ontologising) is at work. These ‘Gnosticisms’ are borne from what Bloom might identify as a more-than-rational knowing. In being jolted by the arrival of nothing-into-thinking (a primary process) and then apprehending-into-language (a secondary process), the wandering-of-meaning sunders the darkness of the poet’s unconscious, the this-ness of the bird entering from a blank realm through which Carson follows the swarm (or flocking?) of ideas into poetic figuration. What I propose Carson is attempting in ‘Gnosticism I’ is to write meta-poetically of how poems are borne from inchoate processes: ‘thrusting against black’, Carson gets ‘this tbis’ when she approaches the word bird in a book in a dream in her imagination. What materialises from the poēsis is a startling thing, the this-ness of bird-image metaphorically bespeaking bird-as-poem which flies from the nothingness of the poet’s imagination.

Another way of reading ‘Gnosticism I’ is that, rather than a triumphant cry of affirmation, ‘this tbis’ instead conveys the poet’s disappointment, defeat, and dogged attention to the fact that the poem must remain in language. Arriving at ‘this tbis’, the poet arrives at words on a page; there is no ontologically-certain reality, nor even the manifestation of bird thing. Instead, Carson catches only a glimpse, and this is all her poem records. Her making, which is a singing of proximity to reality, alludes to the procreative: ‘lips’, ‘grind’, ‘thrusting’, ‘rip’, ‘wetness’, ‘sweat-soaked’ and ‘grip’ are each evocations of the sexual; from nothing, this triumphant/defeated bird-poem encodes the poet’s take on the mysterious originary locus of all beings-via-

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38 Anne Carson 2006 Decreation, page 87.
language (which are destined to remain trapped in language, as almost-beings). Here is a text begotten of an apprehension of bird-ness, in which the word 'bird' has been traced backward from its arrival on a page in a book, back to its swarming origins where ideas germinate while imaginations move from silence and nothingness into wondering and language. 'Gnosticism I' gives readers an intimation of what the thing itself might look like. This is a poem which (like all poems) can act only as a lens, to focus readers' imaginations only ever as close to the thing itself as a portal might, on to some kind of ontological vista, which readers can see (through the poem) but may not enter.

The poet's viewing of glimpsed, approximate realities continues in 'Gnosticism VI'. In this poem, Carson renders the sublime an innate psychological pattern imprinted onto language users, a function of negation-via-language that humans seem hardwired for:

Walking the wild mountain in a storm I saw the great trees throw their arms.
Ruin! they cried and seemed aware

the sublime is called a “science of anxiety.”
What do men and women know of it? – at first

not even realising they were naked!
The language knew.

Watch “naked” (arumim) flesh slide into “cunning” (arum) snake in the next verse.
And suddenly a vacancy, a silence,

is somewhere inside the machine.
Veins pounding.39

The natural world resonates here with Carson’s invented preternatural strangeness, anthropomorphised trees stirring to terror the mind of the poem’s narrator: ‘Ruin!’ Carson projects the trees calling, while shuddering in the wild mountain storm. From this innocuous first couplet, the poem becomes strikingly weird. It can be decoded with another text from Decreation, ‘Mia Moglie (Longinus’ Red Desert)’. Here, Carson writes of how

39 Anne Carson 2006 Decreation, page 95.
ancient poet Sappho ‘has somehow got the Sublime inside her.’ Sappho, Carson – I contend many poets – have the sublime in them because the sublime is a range of occasions: poet and critic David Baker writes the sublime is occasioned by ‘a natural landscape, an aesthetic mode, a state of mind’. In ‘Gnosticism VI’ the poet seems to suggest that what language isn’t, the sublime can be. Or perhaps, instead, what the sublime is, language cannot express. For poets who enter into blank imaginative zones, what they discover in language is the very thing Carson points to in ‘Gnosticism VI’: ‘suddenly a vacancy, a silence/ is somewhere inside the machine.’ The poet again frames it as procreative, words colliding like bodies to create strange mingling. As a material that can at best represent the thing-ness of things, Carson seems implicitly aware of how language also creates absence around its representations. The silence in the language machine contains terrifying emanations of an absence Carson apprehends (or, at least, invents) as so real that, in the silence, veins can be heard pounding. Something, naked and cunning, bodily, has been glimpsed and the poem’s narrator has been haunted. While the poet sets out to arrive at ‘this thau’, the mysteries represented in ‘Gnosticisms’ are as terrifying as the sound of a pulse throbbing somewhere inside a machine … until readers realise that this is a pulse belonging to an unrecognised self, the selfsame self glimpsing the idea of reality and the simultaneous absence of the real in language. The sublime, a vacancy or silence, is in the poet and, somehow, also in this poem. Projecting on to the blank screen of her readers’ imaginations, Carson is attempting to transfer a vision: just as she has reached inside the edges of the thinkable, these ‘Gnosticisms’ are indeed a style manual for creative producers, who may come to feel ‘the joy of the Sublime’ which, as Carson identifies it, ‘is to be inside creative power for a moment’.

After enshrining creativity as a style of sublime wondering in her ‘Gnosticisms’ suite, this is a book that becomes weirder yet. Contained in Carson’s most successful work is not just a sense of the terror of being, but also a sense of the poet’s horror when confronting how to continue to exist. This is clearest in the fourteen poems that form the suite ‘Stops’. These (at times they seem paroxysms) espouse a poet stricken with a particular disequilibrium, a shuddering that is at once elegiac and dumbstruck with a sense agitating somewhere between obligation toward a demented mother (‘Eat your soup, mother, wherever you are in your

42 Anne Carson 2006 Decreation, page 46.
mind and the impulse to recoil. The result is a suite of disembodied, dissociated figurations of bound, filial love. If the sublime is a science of anxiety, then Carson examines her own discomfiture with a coolly scientific gaze. These poems portray a family romance as claustrophobic as a ‘little room/ with walls too close.’ In ‘Sunday’ (cited in full below) Carson distils the nightmarish from a phone call she makes to her mother:

My washed rags flap on a serious grey sunset.
Suppertine, a colder wind.
Leaves huddle a bit.
Kitchen lights come on.
Little spongy mysteries of evening begin to nick open.
Time to call mother.
Let it ring.
Six.
Seven.
Eight – she  
lifts the receiver, waits.
Down the hollow distances are they fieldmice that scamper so drily.

How does ‘Sunday’ come to seem so foreboding? What has the poet done to language so that tone and form seem so intertwined? There is something both melancholic and hopeless in the first line of this poem: why are rags drying? Why not a mechanic’s overalls or sequinned tutu? ‘Rags’ is an early signal of the poet’s intentions. While the sunset conducts its own business, the poem next counts as it descends – sands, hourglass? – the lines not only counting the time it takes Carson’s mother to answer the phone – ‘Six./ Seven’ – but also, arguably, counting toward the arrival of death. In his review of Decreation in the ‘New York Review of Books’, poet and critic Charles Simic writes that many of Carson’s ‘experiments with typography and form are not really innovative. They have been around at least since the days of Dada.’ Nonetheless, ‘Sunday’ takes a concrete form: is this centre-justified poem reminiscent of an egg-timer’s shape? This is a poem about time both continuing and running out and, when the receiver is picked up, what next? Nothing. The unspeaking mother is a device Carson employs to convey an impending and infinite silence. When the last line arrives it does so, apparently, disinjunctively: fieldmice trespass as strangely as the lion in ‘Gnosticism.

43 Anne Carson 2006 Decreation, page 11.
I’. Are they three blind mice? Or are they (mortally) running up a clock (hickory dickory dock), while the poem winds down? These bit-part, allusive mice are quite possibly plaguing the poet as she contends with the conflicting notions of mothering and mortality. Meanwhile, ‘Sunday’ ends not with an epiphany but with rustling, static silence.

There are multiple levels on which the poet employs language to transfer disequilibrium. Carson conveys a tone of restrained hysteria throughout this suite to her mother, and this is emphasised when writing of the sale of a house, in ‘No Port Now’:

In the ancient struggle of breath against death, one more sleep given.

We took an offer on the house.

In the sum of the parts
where are the parts?

Silently (there) leaves and windows wait.

Our empty clothesline cuts the sloping night.

And making their lament for a lost apparel of celestial light angels and detritus call out as they flow past our still latched gate.47

There is something of the metaphysical to all this; from beyond the boundary-lines of her mother’s sanctuary (now sold), the night is calling while ‘little spongy mysteries of the evening begin to nick open’ when the ‘clothesline cuts’ into darkness. After the first two lines, the remainder of this poem’s end-rhymes echo a staccato consonance, the hard ‘t’ of ‘parts’, ‘wait’, ‘night’, ‘light’ and ‘gate’ functioning as clefts that emphasise each line-break; structurally and sonically, there is something violent to this poem, and it is at this point that I begin to question whether Carson is writing (as Plato said of all poets) as mad or divinely inspired.48 Calling an angelic host into her poem as a response to the sale of her mother’s house, Carson’s sublime is never far from either comic absurdity or surrealism. What sort of reaction is this, if not overblown? In this suite, the poet seems most at home in the uncanny realms of discomfort, in metaphysically-inflected responses to the practical requirements of the everyday. But Carson’s is a responsiveness that evokes a diabolical disequilibrium; her figurations not only reach ‘inside the edges of the thinkable’ but further: the poet’s restrained hysteria begins to spill when ‘the parts’ of this gestalt reveal themselves. There is the house, the

47 Anne Carson 2006 _Decreation_, page 7.

48 Plato writes ‘all good poets, epic as well as lyric, compose their beautiful poems not by art, but because they are inspired and possessed.’ See Plato (trans Hayden Pelliccia) 4th century B.C.E./ 2000 _Selected Dialogues of Plato_, pages 20, 11(533d).
mother (absent, unspeaking, probably senile), and then a host of noises in the night figured as angels and detritus calling through darkness. Over-arching is a sense that things are drastically out of kilter. In this suite of psychically-agitated poems Carson asks only two questions, and only one is a full question: ‘In the sum of the parts/ where are the parts?’ she asks (the other question is ‘was it April?’; which, in another poet’s work, is famously the cruellest month). While her mother gives her hell, here is a poet fixating on parts yet operating from a gestalt position, apprehending a gnostic whole – the family – as greater than the sum of the parts. In locating those parts of existence that stir a shuddering responsiveness, the poems in ‘Stops’ speak less of integration by assembling parts of a life into an imaginative order, and more of a rhapsodic swerve toward disintegration.

Even abstraction comes to be violently figured throughout ‘Stops’: ‘Shadow draws the gut of the light out dry against its palm’,\(^{50}\) the poet writes and, elsewhere, poses the non-question ‘What knife skinned off/ that hour’\(^{51}\) A tone of restrained hysteria is at work; here is a suite of autobiographical poems in which the poet seeks release from a child/ mother relationship while simultaneously registering the guilt of this impulse:

God’s pity! How long will it feel like burning, said the child trying to be kind.\(^{52}\)

Lineation, and the force of enjambment – ‘will’ as 1. auxiliary verb; 2. as last will and testament; 3. as wilful – wrenches at the third line: trying both to ‘be’ and ‘be/ kind’, Carson’s problem is not metaphysical but ontological. The poet is haunted by the horror of desiring escape from mother, but this encapsulates a darker wishing yet. What Carson desires is liberation from her originary locus – mother – so as to be freed to locate her own ideas, which swarm across the chaotic zones of nothingness, where her mother is not and the self of the poet is freed, and free to arrive.

\(^{49}\) Anne Carson 2006 Decreation, page 14.
\(^{50}\) Ibid, page 11.
\(^{51}\) Ibid, page 13.
\(^{52}\) Ibid, page 5.
Written as a series of parts which have the appearance of Sapphic fragments, as Decreation continues it progresses toward its own gestalt, encoding a theory of creative processes. In attempting to apprehend the weirdness of existing, Carson shifts away from the autobiographical poetry of ‘Gnosticisms’ and ‘Stops’ to address disintegration as a theme in the prose-poem monologue ‘The Day Antonioni Came to the Asylum (Rhapsody)’. In this text, a rhapsode recounts the film-maker’s visit:

He got behind his 16mm Bell & Howell. Two of his men gave instructions. Patty and Bates and I were dragging chairs out of the way. The big black cords had to be run out to plugs. We were making no mistakes. We were being extremely careful. No jokes. No staring. And she in her place by the wall, refolding her crossword and trying to look calm.\(^{53}\)

When in a fit of ecstasy Carson writes of her narrator revealing ‘Antonioni wore a small brown sweater and looked like a cat. I wanted to give him a lick or a pat’,\(^{54}\) this writing moves a tenuous increment closer to absurdity. Elsewhere, the poet renders insanity as a state in which the rhapsode is naïve, impulsive and disinhibited, sexually biddable and expressing follies (one of only two tones Carson makes available here). Consider the somewhat clichéd angle Carson takes in portraying life in an asylum: They told us we had to come downstairs to the salon early and “participate”, so we all took our clothes off;\(^{55}\) every time Bates past me we kissed which is one of our interior arrangements in group activities (of which there are a lot here), life being short and burning yearning being burning yearning;\(^{56}\) ‘To yell is the rule here – the rule of the mad – it disguises the kissing and makes us less sad’;\(^{57}\) ‘it was Friday, angel cake for supper, hot showers later and who knows what interior arrangements there’.\(^{58}\) In this milieu, occasions of brilliance slip through the interstices of the rhapsode’s damaged mind; Carson portrays insanity as a condition that enables flashes of illumination (this is the second tone in which the rhapsode communicates):

She left her place by the wall and came over to him. The patients are afraid of the light, she explained, they think it is a monster. This kind of spontaneous misinformation is typical of the medical profession. Well I suppose she could hardly say, ‘The patients worship life-giving Aphrodite every chance they get, thank you for furnishing this opportunity. Anyway, I’m not sure how smart she

\(^{53}\) Anne Carson 2006 Decreation, page 54.
\(^{54}\) Ibid, page 53.
\(^{55}\) Ibid, page 53.
\(^{56}\) Ibid, page 54.
\(^{57}\) Ibid, page 55.
\(^{58}\) Ibid, page 56.
is. One day I told her about evolution – how in the beginning people didn’t have selves as we have selves, there were arms heads torsos what have you roaming about by the breakers of the shore of life, ankles unattached, eyes needing brows, until at last what made the parts come together as whole creatures was Love …

Carson’s tone – lurid high-mindedness in the above example – is problematic, inasmuch as it privileges madness as characterised (however momentarily) by insight and epiphany. The poem’s narrator is merely a device devoid of the poet’s empathy, a literary device that extends (clumsily) the prose-poem’s narrative impulse. A point is being worked toward in ‘The Day Antonioni Came to the Asylum (Rhapsody)’, and eventually the mad rhapsode reaches it: love is what knits the parts of each self into selfhood. This is what makes parts come together, and what was conspicuous in its absence from the autobiographical suite ‘Stops’, in which the poet seems to verge on psychic disintegration. When read against the above soliloquy, what Carson achieves in a later section of Decreation is redeemed. When the notion of love turns from familial to ontological, from insane to divinely inspired, it becomes a path poets may use to make ‘parts come together’ in language. In ‘Decreation: How Women Like Sappho, Marguerite Porete and Simone Weil Tell God’, love is a metaphysical rapture, a surpassing moment, a sublime state of personal negation: love, no less, ‘dares the self to leave itself behind, to enter into poverty.’ Through employing narratives about three female thinkers – a mystic remembered by her fragmentary meditations on metaphysical love, a heretic burned at the stake for writing a ‘handbook for people seeking God’, and a scholar who believed her starvation would increase the presence of divine love in the world – Decreation becomes a book about the usefulness not just of privation but of imaginative self-obliteration. Rather than a treatise like Burke’s, Carson’s book contains a series of love-letters to the astonishing energies of creativity. Love is a force of creation but also, through Carson’s expertly strange book, it is a psychological state entailing self-annihilation. By calling into the abnegated absences of the real, the poet sings her ideas and, in the singing, makes an approach to reality. For Carson, this is transfigurative, not so much metaphysical as ontological. Plato’s proposition of poets as mad and divinely inspired comes close to the matter at hand: what Carson has intuited is that while she has worked in negation there has been something of the ascetic to her poetic modes of glimpsing realities.

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60 Ibid, page 162.
61 Ibid, page 163.
For creative thinkers, there is much in this book that demands to be re-read. Carson builds a gestalt through employing a series of interlinking ideas that are not immediately clear. Decreation moves toward a unified sense of the sublime, encoding not only an impulse toward self-extermination but also an impulse toward an extreme form of freedom, a creative coming-into-being writers might follow by detaching from self-defining paradigms of integration and sanity. Through risking disintegration and non-sanity, an alluring mode is made available. In following Carson’s essentially transgressive, decreative template, those who seek to follow their ideas into writing will enter the freedoms of sublime negation-into-creativity. After Burke (and with the help of several other theorists), I hold Carson’s work to be a complete and complex theory of creative production.
Meter-making arguments?
The pseudo-Longinian ‘grand style’ as a mode of extra-logical argumentation in the poems of Robert Hass

Imagination means one thing in rhetoric, another with the poets; and you cannot fail to observe that the object of the latter is to amaze.

Pseudo-Longinus, *On the Sublime*

… poetry is an instrument for glimpsing a supreme reality.

Robert Hass, ‘Introduction’, *The Selected Poems of Tomaz Salamun*
Read in conjunction with pseudo-Longinus’ treatment of the sublime, Robert Hass’ poems exemplify the know-how of an extra-logical style. Pseudo-Longinus theorises how poetry written in the ‘grand style’⁴ will amaze readers. What seems most consistent across Hass’ five collections of poetry is a theme of mortally incipient and primordial silence. Causing violence to the imagination, Hass’ poems can amaze by shifting readers toward personalising (and shuddering at) the silence of the beyond-human and mysterious world. But what is equally, compellingly present in this poet’s work is an impulse to make meanings appear within such sublime settings. Using an array of formal tools to construct what American transcendentalist poet Ralph Waldo Emerson calls ‘meter-making arguments’,² the organic forms of Hass’ (mostly) free verse poems are suffused with a humanising ethics.

There is much in this memorable poetry that aspiring creative producers might, while being amazed, heed and emulate. In mounting my analysis, I align pseudo-Longinus’ term ‘amazement’ with Heidegger’s proposal of wonder as a pathway that can lead writers toward unconcealing beings, where ‘the most usual, yet still as such unthought (beings), are established in their most proper unusualness’.³ What Hass has apprehended – extra-logical moments of wonder? – he then shifts into language, transferring wonder by employing what the Russian Formalists call ‘estrangement’.⁴ In writing on the everyday strangeness of the real, Hass amazes his readers by shifting accustomed modes of perception.

Developing ideas from pseudo-Longinus, Heidegger, and the Russian Formalists, I continue and extend my investigation into the sublime here, with an analysis of how some poems can make the mysterious overt. In the poem, ‘Regalia for a Black Hat Dancer,’ Hass figures the ‘whole theater of the real’ as a place in which to enact ‘sadness, which seems infinite,/ cruelty, which seems infinite’.⁵ In taking up this speaking position, the poet locates a sublime meta-view of reality as theatrical; from this vantage point, Hass argues for an ethics with which he would subvert the unending processes of sadness and cruelty. In so doing, his poems book a place (I feel) in the canons of future generations of readers: just as pseudo-Longinus feels the best

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⁴ Commentator David Mikics writes of estrangement that ‘literary art devotes itself to the making strange (the defamiliarising, or estranging) of our accustomed perceptions’. See David Mikics 2007 A New Handbook of Literary Terms, page 85.
writing can do, Hass has clothed his ‘fame with immortality’ by wondering on both silence and ethics in a ‘dignified and spirited’ style. These are poems other creative producers can learn from; what this part of my investigation illuminates are some of Hass’ most interesting stylistic lessons.

But first: what of pseudo-Longinus’ grand style? Peri Hupsous is an arché-text in which the sublime is figured as a textual mode that can uplift the mind of a reader ‘almost to the intellectual greatness of God.’ For this enigmatic author, known ‘by convention as Longinus, but whose very name is in doubt’, the grand style denotes ‘eminence and excellence in language’. Pseudo-Longinus’ is a style guide for more-than-rational thinking and writing; addressed to Postumius Terentianus, Peri Hupsous is written in response to a lost tract, ‘concerning Sublimity’, by Caecilius. Arriving in the first century, and several hundred years after the Platonic and Aristotelian discourses on mimesis, pseudo-Longinus’ interrogation of oratorical modes sets out to redefine how texts transfer thinking and emotion to readers.

As he works toward his own definition of the sublime, pseudo-Longinus extrapolates on how ‘passages of extraordinary genius’ take on amazing dimensions. He also seeks to show how language can be manipulated to transfer senses of the mysterious, the ineffable, and that which must remain silent. Pseudo-Longinus enumerates five sources of the grand style as:

6 A.O. Prickard (trans) 1906 Longinus on the Sublime, page 2. I use two translations of Peri Hupsous throughout my discussion here: A.O. Prickard’s is my primary translation, against which I read a translation by James A. Arieti and John M. Crossett’s, from which I cite in all footnotes. Arieti and Crossett translate the tract above as: ‘thrown around their glorious reputations the mantle of the ages.’ See James A. Arieti and John M. Crossett (trans) 1985 Longinus On the Sublime, page 9.


1. First and most potent is the faculty of grasping great conceptions, as I have defined it in my work on Xenophon.

2. Second comes passion, strong and impetuous. These two constituents of sublimity are in most cases native-born, those which now follow come through art:

3. the proper handling of figures, which again seem to fall under two heads,
   a. figures of thought,
   b. and figures of diction;

4. then noble phraseology, with its subdivisions,
   a. choice of words,
   b. and use of tropes
   c. and of elaboration;

5. and fifthly, that cause of greatness which includes in itself all that preceded it, dignified and spirited composition.12

The ancient author is speculating his own model of creativity here, a model which demarcates how ideas move from the apprehension of wonder to know-how. But can an imagination be taught to function creatively? In The Sublime, Philip Shaw notes ‘the sublime is something that the elevated individual instinctively knows: one does not learn the sublime; one catches it, like a divine contagion.’13 Critically, although the grand style arrives in language, it is not just a matter of genre or formal technique: for pseudo-Longinus, the grand style is foremost the ability of writers to formulate ideas (that ‘faculty of grasping great conceptions’) and it is also the ability of writers to apprehend heightened emotional states (‘passion, strong and impetuous’). This, a question of instinct and talent, remains both deeply individualistic and, it seems, unteachable.

Creative producers, then, must have courage to use their own imagination (to morph Kant’s credo), and this partially involves waiting and being responsive to thinking. ‘(P)assion, strong and impetuous … in

12 Numeration is mine. From A.O. Prickard (trans) 1906 Longinus on the Sublime, page 15. Arieti and Crossett’s translation of pseudo-Longinus’ five sources of the sublime are as follows: ‘first and most powerful is a solid thrust of conception, as we have defined in our pages on Xenophon; second is an intense and enthusiastic emotion (these first two are for the most part self-bred constituents of sublimity, while those now left come also from technique); third is a sort of moulding of figures, both figures of conception and those of style; in addition to these there is noble phrasing, the parts of which are the selection of words and the trope and “made up” elaboration of style; and the fifth spring responsible for greatness, which includes all before it, is the way things are put together in worth and loftiness’. See James A. Arieti and John M. Crossett (trans) 1985 Longinus On the Sublime, pages 46-50.
most cases native-born’ suggests a mode of inspiration (privileging and elitist as it is) that relies on the unpredictable immanence of epiphanies arriving mysteriously. How to teach a mind to respond to the swarming of ideas, after wonder? How to teach a mind to swarm with ideas in the first place? Pseudo-Longinus can at best point the way. He adopts his own grand style when attempting an analysis of inspiration, writing how ‘sublimity, we know, brought out at the happy moment, parts all the matter this way and that, and like a lightning flash, reveals at a stroke and in its entirety, the power of the orator.’ This ‘all-at-once capacity’ (as Arieti and Crossett translate) bears resemblance to the Bloomian conception of gnosis and the Kantian conception of the architectonic as unifying perception. The grand style, it seems, emanates from a non-conscious, non-rational, individualistic and intuitive sense of know-how (which I label an apprehending-into-language).

In part, creative producers remain reflective and receptive to the event of ideas arriving. What is this apprehension of thinking after wonder? Is some sort of compulsivity toward ‘passion, strong and impetuous’ entailed? The native-born moment of insightfulness – is it an ‘inner-sightfulness’? – is perhaps not so much conscious but, rather, an immanent act of response that cannot be controlled, only planned for. Is this part of a creative process? In the poem, ‘Notes on “Layover”’, Hass writes of apprehending thinking as a ‘way of locating itself that even the idle mind works at.’ Perhaps what some poets see arrives unbidden, a bolt of illumination flaring across the darkness of an idling unconscious. Like pseudo-Longinus’ lightning flash, in this sublime moment of apprehension, what may be seen is a semblance of what a poem will be, yet to be harnessed in language. Perhaps, then, a poem is a doubling, an uncanny resemblance of an epiphany first glimpsed by an idling mind and then formally manoeuvred. When Heidegger names poetic techné ‘a mode of knowing’, perhaps he intuits that, having caught a glimpse of what they will shape, creative producers already intuit some approximation of the work (and language) to come.

The formal enterprise this entails may extend beyond Roman poetician Horace’s credo that poets

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14 A.O. Prickard (trans) 1906 Longinus on the Sublime, pages 2-3. The same quote from pseudo-Longinus is translated by Arieti and Crossett as follows: ‘sublimity, brought out at just the right moment, makes everything different, like lightning, and directly shows us the “all-at-once” capacity of the speaker.’ See James A. Arieti and John M. Crossett (trans) 1985 Longinus On the Sublime, page 9.
instruct and delight. What I propose is that poems apprehended in the manner of pseudo-Longinus’ lightning flashes are no less than entrances to new ways of perceiving. As noted in an earlier chapter, Jan Cohn and Thomas H. Miles inform readers that ‘in the case of sublime and all its derivatives, the Latin roots … give us “up to the lintel”.’ A lintel is a horizontal support across the top of a doorway or window; ‘limen’ originates from the Latin term for ‘threshold’. Misreading the etymology, figurative language (transferring from one imagination to the next, as Plato identifies the languages of poets do, in his discourse Ion) may be recuperated as a metaphorical doorway that can lead thinkers toward immanent visions.

Do poems, speaking pictures that often amaze their readers, provide a glimpse of new ontological vistas? My emerging speculations extend from classicist T.S. Dorsch’s translation of pseudo-Longinus; in his Classical Literary Criticism, Dorsch writes ‘the effect of elevated language is, not to persuade the hearers, but to entrance them.’ Entrancing an audience? Does ‘entrance’ perform a different function to pseudo-Longinus’ ‘amazement’, or Heidegger’s ‘wondering’, or the Russian Formalists’ ‘estraignment’? It does when skewing the noun to a verb function: viewed thus, do a poem’s readers peer through entrances, across figural texts that defamiliarise (and, therein, render explicit) the real? As in previous chapters, what is at stake here is an emergent mode of creative ontologising; apprehending-into-language, the know-how of some poets can cause readers to shudder, entranced and wondering, while jolted out of accustomed modes of perceiving. I shall attempt to show how this characterises many of Hass’ poems.

What becomes clear when regarding Hass’ as work written in a grand style, is that these speaking pictures can cause psychic agitation, as if readers are being required to step across a threshold toward ineluctable moments

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20 This, from Horace’s Ars Poetica, is cited in Alex Preminger and T.V.F. Brogan (eds) 1993 The New Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics, page 1339. Horace’s ut pictura poesis translates into the aphorism ‘as is painting so is poetry.’
21 Aristotle, Horace, Longinus (trans T.S. Dorsch) 1965 Classical Literary Criticism, page 100. In Prickard, the same quote has been translated as ‘it is not to persuasion but to ecstasy that passages of extraordinary genius carry the hearer’. See A.O. Prickard (trans) 1906 Longinus on the Sublime, page 2. Arieti and Crossett’s translation reads: ‘(w)hat is beyond nature drives the audience not to persuasion, but to ecstasy.’ See James A. Arieti and John M. Crossett (trans) 1985 Longinus On the Sublime, page 9.
of truthfulness. Hass uses two kinds of silence – the impending/personal, and the preternatural – to cause such shuddering. ‘After Goethe’ (cited in full below) exemplifies how skilfully the poet reminds each reader of their own impending silence:

In all the mountains,
Stillness;
In the treetops
Not a breath of wind.
The birds are silent in the woods.
Just wait: soon enough
You will be quiet too.  

What is in the mountains? Stillness. What is in the treetops? Not a breath of wind. ‘After Goethe’, an elegy that eulogises its still-living audience, unfolds as a dread memorandum. Abutting themes of transience, mortality, and the beyond-self, Hass’ whispering intensity turns at the penultimate line: ‘Just wait’ readers are warned, though they don’t have to wait for long. The tone of the final, revelatory line is unfathomable. Is it a matter-of-fact proposition? Is it hysterical, or haunting? Successive readings of this epigram – or is it an epitaph? – refuse to relinquish a singularity of tone or intent. The impression is that Hass’ almost-silent poem works in a language that can make a reader shimmer with ideas. In asking us to personalise the inexorability of impermanence, the poet sings each reader toward a context. Is a shock being administered? Is Hass provoking his readers to shudder existentially?

Perhaps, through meditating on impermanence (as if to decree that the time to act, because time is limited, is now), Hass is preparing to take up an ethical position. In ‘Interrupted Meditation’, the poet continues his existential theme. Here, he writes of a silence that:

preceded us. We are catching up.
...
    silence is waiting. Milosz believed there is a Word
at the end that explains. There is silence at the end,
and it doesn’t explain, it doesn’t even ask.  

Beyond the ‘Word’ of the Christian tradition, there is the indefatigability of a silence that this poet expends much energy in bringing to his readers’ attention. The almost-conversational hexameter in ‘Interrupted Meditation’ could be launched from a lectern: the poet is making a point as he waggles his finger (or metrical feet, as it were) in our faces. Hass uses italicisation instead of inverted commas to denote a conversation he has had in the past; as well as denoting speech, this becomes a device through which the poet follows the formal convention of lending emphasis. Hass’ arguments are made, then, not just by measuring of meter of language; each linguistic convention – morphological, tropological, syntactic – seem manoeuvred by the poet’s responsiveness to nuance and detail.

But Hass is not only memorialising here. Gazing at the world-as-dwelling and into primordial silence, readers are reminded that, conditional to existence, we are each predestined to ‘be quiet’ and that for Hass (differing from Nobelist poet, Czeslaw Milosz), no trace of consciousness outlasts quietness. In Peri Hupsous, pseudo-Longinus lists Homer’s Odyssey as a text that explores a similar theme: ‘the silence of Ajax in the book of the Lower World is great, and more sublime than any words.’ Employing non-language to great effect and in similar ways to how Homer does in the Odyssey, Hass’ stance seems to be that the silence of not-being may only be approximated with words. What he and his readers are catching up to remains extra-logical, beyond both experience and language. Like Homer’s, the images Hass employs can only frame the irrevocability of a final, non-sentient silence, to which all living beings move toward and are catching up.

For Hass (alongside pseudo-Longinus and Homer), the ne plus ultra of existing is a silence that ‘doesn’t even ask’. This is terror done from a distance (to recall the Burkean sublime); a readership of mortals may indeed feel mere, if by mere we agree to the Latin merus, or pure. Hass’ poems portray humans as mortal, as purely human; but the chthonic silence that surrounds each reader is a specific, human silence. Hass explores the strangeness of this, in ‘A Note on “Iowa City: Early April”’:

24 Ajax’s vision of the dead in Homer’s Odyssey is relayed in Prickard’s translation of pseudo-Longinus as follows:
‘But never Aias, child of Telamon
   Came near me, but with gloomy brows and bent
   Stood far arood, in sternness eminent,
   Eating his heart for that old victory
   Against him given by clear arbitrament,
   Concerning brave Achilles’ arms.’
'This naturalist I admire,' I said, 'says that every species
lives in its own sensory world.'

The raccoon stared down; he was silent.

‘He also said that we may come to know enough about the human
brain to diagnose and correct the deformations
imposed by evolution on the human senses
and arrive at something like objective truth.’

The raccoon was silent.' 25

Hass’ refrain (‘The raccoon stared down; he was silent’; ‘The raccoon was silent’) at once creates emphasis and unity through a repetition of (slightly altered) sound patterns. The poet is asking each reader to consider how humans make connection with the world; Hass’ poem is a song about the limits of what can be known by humans. This ‘note’ of notes toward another poem is framed, similarly to ‘Interrupted Meditation’, as a conversation, but this time with a raccoon and this time not in italics but, instead, in inverted commas, as if too emphatic a conversation and the animal will run into the night. Hass’ is a complex ventriloquism, in which a variety of thinking and speaking is happening. But more subtle effects are also being achieved. This lyric’s metre, for example, shortens with each line as if a zero-point, an ‘objective truth’ alluded to by the poet, may arrive if the poem continues for much longer. This cutting and shaping of language, where form mimes theme, is an example of Hass at his most subtly argumentative: ‘A Note on “Iowa City: Early April” is a poem that gesturesmetrically toward silence.

In following his apprehensions-into-language through a grand style, what this poet remains wondrous of is that he is contextualised by the world-as-dwelling, by the raccoon’s presence, and that part of this self-knowing is dialectical. Hass is human because he is not-raccoon, and the raccoon’s ’experience of his being and mine of his and his of mine/ were things entirely apart.’ 26 After this poem, what becomes permissible is that poetry is a species-specific way of singing the same way birds, for their own reasons, chirp at dawn. Is this mere singing, or a purifying of language? Of course, humans are not birds (or raccoons) and

26 Ibid, page 35.
Hass has a particular set of reasons for harmonising as he does. These reasons become clearer when the poet concludes ‘A Note on “Iowa City: Early April”’, turning toward an emanation of the ineffable:

So I entered the silence, and was glad to be in it for a while, knowing I couldn’t stay.

It smelled like snow and pine and the winter dark, though it was my silence, not his, and there was nothing there.27

There is no moment of overwhelming comprehension here; there is only Hass’ immanence of absence, momentarily glimpsed and then transferred to readers, modelling a moment of immersion in (a human version of) extra-logical totality. Even in the apparent absence of self, language, and meaning (via silence, which he is glad to be in for a while, perhaps because it takes on the appearance of mystery), Hass renders himself human … what else? It is as if Hass has returned to Kant’s question, ‘what is a human being?’28 and is responding: in part, any response to Kant from Hass might be that it is through language that human beings harmonise. In ‘A Note on “Iowa City: Early April”’, the last line falls into an iambic metre that sonically and syntactically resonates: ‘and there| was no| thing there’ goes the thrice-repeated, invocatory rhythm: ‘da DUM da DUM da DUM’. What was there? ‘Was no’ (da DUM) ‘thing there’ (da DUM) the language thrums. Harmonising on these cadent levels, which may uplift consciousness in a genre-specific manner (lineation, enjambment, meter, cadence), Hass is shifting his readers toward a sense of what lies ahead, at the end of all harmonies (da DUM da DUM).

What of this sublimely-measured nothingness, cut to shape in Hass’ language? In his article ‘The Sublime: Origins and Definitions’, poet and commentator David Baker wonders if the sublime is part of humankind’s physiological make-up. Does Hass fathom humans as a species hard-wired for emanations of mysterious depth-experience (which can be sung about, but not comprehended)? Re-reading the etymology of ‘sublime’, and conflating it with the limbic system, Baker speculates:

(t)he ‘limbic lobe’, to use neurologist Paul Broca’s term from the nineteenth century, is the

area surrounding the primal brain stem. The limbic ‘system’ defines the larger structure – the cerebral layers – of the brain, from the reptilian to the early mammalian to the later mammalian, as our evolution demanded an increasingly complex apparatus to assure our survival. We experience – in the order of our evolution – reactions, emotions, then finally cognition.  

According to Baker’s deliberations, to be sub-limbic is to encapsulate a ‘cognitive, or precognitive, circumstance: an emotional state.’  

Under the threshold of our conscious minds, then, what Baker supposes to operate even now is a primal state of emoting-as-response to the fact of existing: that is, a sublime state. And much of what Hass does with language seems to arrive as a suite of questions probing original (and then mutating) modes of existing. But then, Baker exposes his misreading:

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\text{limb} \text{ derives from the Latin noun } \text{limbus,} \text{ indicating an edge, a border. If something is sublimbic, it is beneath the complex apparatus of the brain. The word sublime (there’s no second } b \text{ in this word) suggests a parallel meaning, though it derives from a different root.}
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Rather than delve into historical meanings of the word, Baker is conducting an interesting word-association exercise. To continue and extend it: I wonder whether, beneath the limbic system, there are memories embedded in the primal brain stem of humans, pre-language memories of the universe as thing-in-itself? Does a place swelled with the non-human noise of world as \textit{ens realissimum} (‘the most real being’, as Kant identifies it) remain outside the limits of human logic? This is the sort of inscrutable place the doors of some of Hass’ poems open on to, portals that allow readers to imagine sites where the human species was yet to learn how to sing or utter itself with meaning.

What sort of architectonic apprehensions are these? Hass explores preternatural silence (which is, oxymoronically, full of noise) in ‘State of the Planet’, a poem in which lines skip through anapests into iambics, elaborating (from trimeter to tetrameter) the noisy movement of life from a silent, rocky place:

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31 Ibid, pages 306.  
32 ‘Kant thinks that human knowledge is “constrained” to posit the idea of a necessary being. The necessary being that has the best claim to necessity is one that is completely unconditioned, that is, dependent on nothing; this is the \textit{ens realissimum}. He sometimes explicates it in three ways: as the substratum of all realities, as the ground of all realities, and as the sum of all realities. \textit{Ens realissimum} is nonetheless empirically invalid, since it cannot be experienced by humans. It is something ideal for reason, not real in experience.’ From Robert Audi (ed) 1999 \textit{The Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy}, page 267.
There is no silence in the world
da DUM/ da DUM/ da DUM/ da DUM

Like the silence of rock from before life was

da da DUM/ da da DUM/ da da DUM/ da DUM

Here, the thrumming metre echoes the drumming of life into existence; syntax is pulled along with the sound of this poem, and this is another level (meta? Or sub?) on which Hass harmonises. Continuing his exploration of preternaturalism, he asks, in the poem 'Twin Dolphins':

What's old? The silence
In the black, humped, porous mass
Of 'prefossilferous rock'
The ocean beats against.

No animals, no plants,
The tides of fire before there was a sea.

Hass risks the banal with these seeming aphorisms. Why aren't they banal? In 'Twin Dolphins', no word or syllable seems misspent; each enjambed line creates a striking impression that readers may be privy to a speaker who is measuring his words and, in so doing, is choosing to communicate only when there is something fitting to say. Hass' language, cut to shape, is indeed a fitting; in depicting the humanless world, he has prepared his readers' ears to listen closely for when he introduces the species into his poems.

Up to this point, I have proposed Hass' poems may cause a violence to the imagination, in which readers' minds shudder at the idea of silence. What I now suggest is that, in the broader contexts of his work, many of Hass' poems produce a series of different effects in precipitating amazement. Those poems about language, desire, and morality argue toward harmonising versions of what we know, what we are doing, and what we

34 Ibid, page 34.
yet may hope for. In ‘Santa Lucia II’, the poet writes ‘life fits her like a glove’, and this exemplifies Hass’ program of apprehending-into-language: the poet fixes his gaze on how humans fit so as to appraise what shapes reality-as-theatre take in the world-as-dwelling. Hass aphorises ‘we are what we can imagine’, as if speaking meta-poetically, as if he is not imagining but *knowing*. In the same way ‘dogs in the morning (have) their dog masks on’, Hass achieves a clarity in which the chaotic gap between signifier (language) and signified (reality-as-theatre) can sometimes taken on an appearance of stillness and calm.

While exploring how images function in poetry, in *Twentieth Century Pleasures: Prose on Poetry*, Hass postulates:

(images are not quite ideas, they are stiller than that, with less implication outside themselves. And they are not myth, they do not have that explanatory power; they are nearer to pure story. Nor are they always metaphors; they do not say this is that, they say this is.

Herein, Hass’ grand style seems timeless, resonant with a truthfulness that amazes through the plausible resemblances his images bear with (almost) recognisable human realities. These are masks readers may not have seen, and yet will be shocked and surprised by the immediacy of their recognition. I propose that what this poet’s language argues toward is a particular kind of inspired, seemingly truthful resemblance to things. ‘Human Wishes’ contains a meditation on what Hass feels poetic language can do:

I stayed home to write, or rather stayed home and stared at a blank piece of paper, waiting for her to come back, thinking tongue-in-groove, tongue-in-groove, as if language were a kind of moral cloud chamber through which the world passes and from which it emerges charged with desire.

This is a language charged with both sexual yearning and the precepts of Hass’ Buddhist position, in which thinking and responding are evoked in a three-part schema: there is the world-as-dwelling (*logos*); there is language (*lexis*); and there are the effects of language on being. Hass remains vigilant in his careful

demarcations of desire as an engine that drives both self and language; in ‘Spring Drawing 2’, he makes his own position overt when writing ‘(t)he first temptation of Sakyamuni was desire, but he saw that it led to/ fulfilment and then to desire, so that one was easy’.

Hass presents himself as ‘non-attached’ to his own drives, and is this that enables him a perspective by which to mount his ethics. But the poet also signals the futility of desire, an all-too-human pattern of repetition, in ‘Regalia for a Black Hat Dancer’:

Emptinesses –
one is desire, another is the object it doesn’t have.
Everything real is nourished in the space between these things.

Perhaps it is the compulsivity of desire that characterises the species. Is it this that compels Hass to name his third collection Human Wishes? Or is he wishing for something more than the world of human behaviours he observes? Hass’ non-attachment enables him to speculate on how humans use language to make a dwelling of their worlds; Hass’ language, under this construction, is a yearning for a homecoming to a utopia.

What Hass argues toward is spurring readers into thinking and then taking up considered ethical stances. Indeed, after revealing how he believes human realities entail a set of embedded drives paired to language, Hass implores his readers to think for themselves. This is exemplified in the poem, ‘Tall Windows’ (cited in full below):

All day you didn’t cry or cry out and you felt like sleeping. The desire to sleep was electric light bulbs dimming as a powerful appliance kicks on. You recognised that. As in school it was explained to you that pus was a brave army of white corpuscles hurling themselves at the virulent invader and dying. Riding through the Netherlands on a train, you noticed that even the junk was neatly stacked in the junkyards. There were magpies in the fields beside the watery canals, neat little houses, tall windows. In Leiden, on the street outside the university, the house where Descartes lived was mirrored in the canal. There was a pair of swans and a sense that, without haste or anxiety, all the people on the street were going to arrive at their appointments punctually. Swans and mirrors. And De-

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cartes. It was easy to see how this European tranquillity would produce a poet like Mallarmé, a middle-class art like symbolism. And you did not despise the collective orderliness, the way the clerks in the stores were careful to put bills in the cash register with the Queen’s face facing upward. In the house next to the house where Descartes lived, a Jewish professor died in 1937. His wife was a Dutch woman of strict Calvinist principles and she was left with two sons. When the Nazis came in 1940, she went to court and perjured herself by testifying that her children were conceived during an illicit affair with a Gentile, and when she developed tuberculosis in 1943, she traded passports with a Jewish friend, since she was going to die anyway, and took her place on the train to the camps. Her sons kissed her good-bye on the platform. Eyes open. What kept you awake was a feeling that everything in the world has its own size, that if you found its size among the swelling and diminishings it would be calm and shine.42

Consider this prose-poem’s first proposition, anapests rolling to a clackety rhythm as Hass and his child ride through the Netherlands on a train:

All day you didn’t cry or cry out and you felt like sleeping.
da da DUM da da DUM da da DUM da da DUM da da DUM.

Repeating this first sentence of exactly-repeated sounds (‘you’ and ‘cry’ twice repeated, and ‘cry’ echoed in the assonance of ‘like’; the two sharp ‘e’ sounds in ‘sleeping’) produces a euphonic effect, as if a fairytale has begun. A shape and sound has been measured by the poet – a shape defined by the sound – all the way to the final proposition which, as in ‘A Note on “Iowa City: Early April”’, thuds to a conclusion in iambic tetrameter. The poet elects as his salutary ending an incantation that stills the mind: ‘it would be calm and shine’ resonates as a phrase readers might commit to memory. Beyond Hass’ associative imagery (the self-regulation of blood and the monogamy of swans are both images that function on allegorical levels), ‘Tall Windows’ is an expertly-rendered pastiche. Despite the colossal horrors of twentieth century history, reality-as-theatre can still be a place to wonder in for Hass and the child he addresses, a situation-of-address in which Hass speaks through the poem to both child and readers. Is Hass a paternal figure in this poem? Or is the poet writing as an elder spokesman, purifying the language of his late twentieth century tribe?

In a review of *Time and Materials*, poet and reviewer Charles Simic describes Hass as having a ‘mind in seven places’. This ‘all-at-once capacity’ of the grand style bespeaks a Bloomian ‘more-than-rational knowledge’ as much as it recalls Bloom’s ‘disjunctive generation of meaning’. Hass’ style of pastiche seems effortless, erudite, lyric and harmonising. This may be an ethical spokesman speaking out but, to turn Hass upon himself, is his a form of ‘middle-class art’? Some readers may suspect that these poems, posted from the turrets of the American military-industrial complex, are an easy and verbose posturing that play out Romantic gestures of artist-as-inspired-vessel for beauty/ truth. What I argue is that a poem like ‘Tall Windows’ contains a tale of people taking a moral stance amid chaotic circumstance, and that this indicates the poet’s speaking position. Hass wants to believe – wants his readers to believe – in the importance of these stances.

Hass evokes his ethics in a timbre of stilling calmness, and his poetry co-mingles empathy with a position of social concern. But Hass is not just moralising, and neither does he ever become misanthropic: often, irony sharpens the precision of his position. This spur to readers is clear, in ‘English: an Ode’:

There are those who think it’s in fairly bad taste
to make habitual reference to social and political problems
in poems. To these people it seems a form of melodrama
or self-aggrandisement, which it no doubt partly is.

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46 Ibid, page 238.
And there’s no doubt either that these same people also tend to feel that it ruins a perfectly good party to be constantly making reference to the poor or oppressed and their misfortunes in poems which don’t, after all, lift a finger to help them. Please help yourself to the curried chicken. What is the etymology of *curry*? Of *chicken*?

Wouldn’t you like just another splash of chardonnay? There’s far less objection, generally speaking, you will find yourself less at loggerheads with the critics, by making mention of accidental death, which might happen to any of us, which does not therefore, seem like moral nagging, and which also, in our way of seeing things, possibly tragic and possibly absurd – ‘Helen Mansergh was thinking about Rilke’s pronouns which may be why she never saw the taxi’ – and thus a subject much easier to ironise.  

Maybe Hass’ poetry a form of moral nagging, if by nagging we can agree the word means an insistence on being heard (the etymology of ‘nag’ is unclear; perhaps of Scandinavian origin, the word may originally have come from Swedish *nagga*, ‘to gnaw, nibble, irritate’). In self-ironising, and in postulating a role for poems in this poem, Hass’ most ethical gesture is that he does not resile from taking his own place at the dinner party (so many of his poems are located as conversations around tables) while at the same time negotiating a way to think through the constancy of human horror. These are conversations about conversations Hass wants to have with his readers, or wants to spur his readers into having with him.

While Hass’ ethical questions demand to be re-read, meanwhile, the poet’s exasperation seems to be growing. His newest book, *Time and Materials*, is his angriest yet. ‘State of the Planet’ is exemplary of Hass’ anger, and is an aria that sings the planet’s unbalanced ecologies. The poet loses neither patience nor inspired mastery over language in delivering judgment:


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Cod: about fished out. Haddock: about fished out⁴⁹

and, elsewhere:

the rosy shinings
In the thick brown current are small dolphins rising
To the surface where gouts of the oil that burns inside
The engine of the car I’m driving oozes from the banks⁵⁰

and, while he identifies himself as part of the problem (a decision by which he avoids accusations of moral posturing) he arrives, finally, at this:

They drained the marshes around Rome …

In the years since, we’ve gotten
Even better at relentless simplification, but it’s taken
Until our time for it to crowd out, savagely, the rest
Of life⁵¹

At this point Hass’ exasperation, always measured, spills into a temple-clutching ‘(w)hat is to be done with our species?’⁵² Hass offers no answers in ‘State of the Planet’, but instead seeks to raise his readers’ consciousness, perhaps in the way North American presidents address the world in their state of the nation speeches. What is to be done? Most worrying is that a poet like Hass, who speaks in such purified, measured language, can seem so concerned. He has viewed the world-as-dwelling, framing his response in ‘State of the Planet’ through a monologue addressed to Roman poet and thinker Lucretius; in surveying the current milieu though the lens of Lucretius’ ancient version of the same place, Hass’ poem arrives at a suite of damning conclusions. He abandons the impulse to sing of merely beautiful vistas; here is a poem that seeks to ‘be able to comprehend the earth’,⁵³ and yet cannot comprehend the humans on it. Moral nagging? Hass decries a world in decline, as much as the empire-ruled world of Lucretius was – if not more so.

⁵⁰ Ibid, page 53.
⁵¹ Ibid, page 54.
⁵² Ibid, page 55.
⁵³ Ibid, page 50.
In gazing across the silences of the world-as-dwelling, Hass poses judgment on the contemporary settings of reality-as-theatre. But Hass is aware, always, of his own limitations, at one point submitting a Kantian-style critique of the conditions for perceiving (and the impossibility of human objectivity), in ‘Consciousness’:

It’s hard to see what you’re seeing with, to see what being is as an activity through the instrument of whatever-it-is we have being in.\(^{54}\)

Hass seems heedful of the innate subjectivity of his program, and yet his poems seem so accurate that an impression can form that he mounts his gnostic arguments from a omni-human perspective. Hass continues to probe how to see what seeing is – and, on an epistemological level, how to know what knowing is – all too aware that he is doing so from within his own bio-mechanical, psychic framework of the ‘whatever-it-is we have being in’. Hass makes incursions into these aporia – how to see? What to do? – calmly, and then with a formal mastery over language. What Hass sees is the tremendousness of existing within an extra- or omni-tremendousness that cannot be seen, known, or registered by logic or comprehension alone. His extra-logical, sublime position reminds readers not only of who and how we are, but of the importance of remaining in a state of hopefulness and wonder.

Conclusion

Memorialising the immemorial?  
Archaic shuddering in Rainer Maria Rilke’s ‘Sonnets to Orpheus’

Language is the house of being. In its home human beings dwell.  

Martin Heidegger, ‘Letter on Humanism’

Still there are words that can calmly approach the unsayable …  

Rainer Maria Rilke, ‘Sonnets to Orpheus’
What has become clear while moving toward my own theory of creativity is how necessary a specialist term may be. In setting creative apprehending-into-language (indeed, an apprehending-into-genre) aside from other styles of wondering, the influence of genre on the sublime has been instrumental to my analyses. Re-reading the poetries of Anne Carson and Robert Hass has enabled me to extend my speculations and test a phenomeno-linguistic model, in which I postulate how ideas swarm and two arrivals (poem and poet) occur. This swarming is of a particular kind: I venture poeticognosis entails a specific apprehending, into creative genres.

In surveying philosophies, pseudo-Longinus’ grand style and Edmund Burke’s notion of delight have assisted my recuperation of the sublime as an active component in the responsiveness to wondering of creative producers. Rainer Maria Rilke once wrote that ‘We are bees of the Invisible. Nous butinons éperdument le miel du visible, pour l’accumuler dans la grande ruche d’or de l’Invisible.’ I venture that poeticognosis entails a swarming of ideas, from Freud’s primary (and into secondary) processes, as ideas shift through the initial apprehension of wonder to the technical requirements of binding psychic energies. I have sought to illuminate how different genres of know-how is, foremost, a matter of phenomenology.

Throughout my investigation, I have argued for a mutating, diachronic style of sublime creative process, in which an archaic shuddering transfers from a creative producer’s imagination, into language, before crossing to readers. There is indeed some sort of silence in the language machine, as Carson apprehends it, and it is this sublime essence that some poets seem to bear in mind (even if unconsciously) when responding to wonder. Speculating on how some poets move from nothingness into language, I have argued that what swarms are apprehensions of particular modes of wondering which produce not only Aristotelian catharses but, also, particular variants of truthfulness. Beyond the limit of Derrida’s poststructuralist credo, ‘il n’ya pas hors texte’, there is indeed nothingness outside texts, outside language, outside the ne plus ultra of human phenomenologies. I have argued some poets apprehend nothingness as an

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1 See Rainer Maria Rilke (trans and introduction J.B. Leishman and Stephen Spender) 1942 Duino Elegies, page 158. Heidegger cites from Rilke in his essay ‘What Are Poets For?’, in which the quote from Rilke is translated as ‘We ceaselessly gather the honey of the visible, to store it up in the great golden beehive of the Invisible.’ See Martin Heidegger (trans and introduction Albert Hofstadter) 1971 Poetry, Language, Thought, page 128.


active absence and reach across, as Carson puts it, ‘the edges of the thinkable, which leaks’. While W.H. Auden contends ‘poetry makes nothing happen’, I turn this to contend that nothingness can make poetics happen.

In a letter about the writing of ‘Sonnets to Orpheus’, Rilke describes his creative process: ‘(n)ever have I gone through such tremendous gales of being-taken-hold-of’, the poet explains. I contend that the force of poeticognosis is akin to being-taken-hold-of, which can cause some poets to shudder, as if this is constituent to the experience of apprehending realities that remain beyond-human and mysterious. Rilke’s paean to Orpheus points the way. In his essay, ‘What Are Poets For?’, Heidegger suggests that Rilke ‘has in his own way poetically experienced and endured the unconcealedness of beings’. To see as poets do, which is to catch a glimpse of reality (Heidegger speculates Rilke has endured this), is perhaps to experience being taken hold of by some sort of madness or moment of divine inspiration (as Plato would have it).

‘Sonnets to Orpheus’ is a historicising work that relates its own truths about how poets see. Rilke writes of ‘(c)reatures of stillness crowded from the bright/ unbound forest’ and assigns this role to Orpheus: ‘you built a temple deep inside their hearing.’ When Heidegger re-reads Rilke, the philosopher writes that ‘(l)anguage is the precinct (templum), that is, the house of Being.’ Rilke enshrines poetry as language that makes the world vivid, in which the poem is temple and the poet is a seer. Under these constructions of the sacred, poetics are rendered transformative ways of hearing and sensing, in which the ordinary both sounds and seems extraordinary.

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6 Rainer Maria Rilke (trans and introduction Stephen Mitchell) 1985 The Sonnets to Orpheus, page 164.
8 Rainer Maria Rilke (trans and introduction Stephen Mitchell) 1985 The Sonnets to Orpheus, page 19. Cohn’s translation reads ‘you built them their own Temples of the Ear!’ See Rainer Maria Rilke (trans and introduction Stephen Cohn) 2000 Sonnets to Orpheus with Letters to a Young Poet, page 15.
The unusualness of the usual is implied when Rilke’s Orpheus muses on how the ‘shiny costumes of furs, carnations, and silks’ seem unreal. In this version of reality-as-theatre, Orpheus apprehends extra-dimensionally, extra-territorially, and more-than-rationally:

Wheels rolled past us, we stood and stared at the carriages; houses surrounded us, solid but untrue – and none of them ever knew us.  

Rilke’s Orpheus senses a greater reality exists beyond the ‘solid but untrue’ commonplaces of the costume dramas of the real. It is from this transcendental angle that Orpheus sees and sings, reaching toward the evanescence: ‘(w)hat in that world was real?’ Rilke begs, and then responds: ‘song is reality’. Rilke is singing a species-specific song and, eventually, the poet hits a transcendental note. ‘Simple, for a god./ But when can we be real?’ This is a double gesture of elation and defeat; the closest to reality poets may get is through their poems. Rilke (like Stevens, Carson, and Hass) consistently seeks to know what is real; for poets of this ilk, reality almost happens when responding to wonder.

These glimpses entail a making, from sublime semblance to resemblance, and what is made is both poem and poet. Is this identification of self with reality an ultimate narcissism? Or, when purifying the language of their tribe, do poets adopt a position of privilege in universalising the particular? The impulse to imagine and sing primordially is framed by Rilke as an original impulse:

Though the world keeps changing its form as fast as a cloud, still what is accomplished falls home

11 Rainer Maria Rilke (trans and introduction Stephen Mitchell) 1985 The Sonnets to Orpheus, page 87. Cohn phrases the same question by Rilke as ‘Was there anything real?’ See Rainer Maria Rilke (trans and introduction Stephen Cohn) 2000 Sonnets to Orpheus with Letters to a Young Poet, page 83.
12 Rainer Maria Rilke (trans and introduction Stephen Mitchell) 1985 The Sonnets to Orpheus, page 23. The translation from Cohn reads ‘Easy for the God./When might we be?’ See Rainer Maria Rilke (trans and introduction Stephen Cohn) 2000 Sonnets to Orpheus with Letters to a Young Poet, page 19.
Rilke’s auguries are those of a seer who sees into the depths of a shrouded meta-reality. Translators have used ‘Primeval’ and ‘age-old’ in an attempt to convey the meanings of Rilke’s German noun ‘Uralten’. In German, the last line of Sonnet XIX is ‘heim zum Uralten’. This is more nuanced than either ‘Primeval’ or ‘age-old’.

The prefix ‘ur’ (as in Heidegger’s ‘Ursprung, or ‘primal leap’15) cloaks ‘alten’ with an originary ambit: whatever ‘alten’ is, it springs forth in Sonnet XIX from a generative, ur impulse. ‘Alten’ translates as ‘to restore’. So, Rilke’s ‘heim zum Uralten’ may approximate with ‘to the Primeval’ or ‘grow back to the age-old’ but, retracing Sonnet XIX back to its original language, Rilke is meditating on what poets do. ‘Uralten’ is the key: Rilke is singing of how language, used poetically, memorialises the world as immemorial.

‘Sonnets to Orpheus’, then, is an ur-text that examines what poets do when they sing. This is a text that recovers innate knowledge, which Heidegger names in ‘The Origin of the Work of Art’ as dichtung, that wordless creative essence in which a being ‘comes into the steadiness of its shining’.16 Rilke writes ‘(i)t is Orpheus once and for all/ whenever there is song’17 and, elsewhere, that poetry is everywhere around him:

Breathing: you invisible poem! Complete
interchange of our own
essence with world-space. You counterweight
in which I rhythmically happen.18

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14 Rainer Maria Rilke (trans and introduction Stephen Mitchell) 1985 The Sonnets to Orpheus, page 55. Cohn translates the same as:
Thou may change fast
as billowing cloud,
all things manifest must
grow back to the age-old.

See Rainer Maria Rilke (trans and introduction Stephen Cohn) 2000 Sonnets to Orpheus with Letters to a Young Poet, page 51.

15 Martin Heidegger (trans and introduction Albert Hofstadter) 1971 Poetry, Language, Thought, page 75. In Krell, the same is translated as: ‘Art, founding preserving, is the spring that leaps to the truth of beings in the work. To originate something by a leap, to bring something into being from out of its essential source in a founding leap – this is what the word ‘origin’ (Ursprung, literally, primal leap) means.’ See Martin Heidegger (ed and introduction David Farrell Krell) 1993 Basic Writings, page 202.


17 Rainer Maria Rilke (trans and introduction Stephen Mitchell) 1985 The Sonnets to Orpheus, page 27. Cohn writes ‘all song is Orpheus/ now and forever.’ See Rainer Maria Rilke (trans and introduction Stephen Cohn) 2000 Sonnets to Orpheus with Letters to a Young Poet, page 23.

18 Rainer Maria Rilke (trans and introduction Stephen Mitchell) 1985 The Sonnets to Orpheus, page 73. The same is translated by Cohn as:
Breath, you unseeable poem,
ceaselessly, freely exchanging
a measure of World for our being!
Counterpoint, of whose rhythm I am.
Rilke’s ‘Breathing: you invisible poem!’ and Stevens’ ‘breathless things’ (which are   
broodingly abreath    
With the inhalations of original cold  
And of original earliness’19)  
capture an intimation of dichtung in the same way the world swelled extra-logically, in the aftermath of the windstorm in the Victoria Alps, while my agitating mind apprehended stillness. In that moment, everything seemed to draw breath, so that there was a clearness in this stillness, a mysterious clearing in which what was unconcealed was a moment of overwhelming awareness of self-in-context. Had I been taken-hold-of by some weird apprehension akin to dichtung, or by a gnostic apprehension of the whole? Allow me to ask the same question Rilke’s Orpheus asks: what was real? My experience seemed supra-real, an unexpected way of seeing that may indeed be a form of madness or divination, inasmuch as it defies logic and will remain more-than-rational.  

This is what Heidegger’s translator, Albert Hofstadter, has to say when thinking about what roles a poet might perform:  

(t)his time of technology is a destitute time, the time of the world’s night, in which man has even forgotten that he has forgotten the true nature of being. In such a dark and deprived time, it is the task of the poet to help us to see once more the bright possibility of a true world. That is what poets are for, now.20  

The poetries of Rilke, Stevens, Carson and Hass all suggest that these are poets who have seen into the shiningness of beings existing under a shroud of darkness (as Hofstadter puts it). These are poets who have glimpsed a reality; further, they each use language to pose ethical questions, provoking readers to question

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See Rainer Maria Rilke (trans and introduction Stephen Cohn) 2000 Sonnets to Orpheus with Letters to a Young Poet, page 69.  
accustomed perceptions. Poems can crystallise value-effects that are ‘(s)ayable only to the singer;’ \(^{21}\) what I argue is that poets can be taken-hold-of by a sublime force and, after apprehending, await the poeticognostic swarm of thinking. Approaching the unsayable, poets acknowledge the mysterious as writ large, where to be taken-hold-of is to surrender to the sublime noise of language beginning to sing, surrounded by a chthonic absence, a noiselessness, which Rilke apprehends when he writes:

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{\text{(t)true singing is a different breath, about}}
\]

\[
{\text{nothing. A gust inside the god. A wind.}}^{22}
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\(^{21}\) Rainer Maria Rilke (trans and introduction Stephen Mitchell) 1985 *The Sonnets to Orpheus*, page 109. Cohn’s translation reads ‘None but the singer can say it./ None but a God ever hears.’ See Rainer Maria Rilke (trans and introduction Stephen Cohn) 2000 *Sonnets to Orpheus with Letters to a Young Poet*, page 105.

\(^{22}\) Ibid, page 25. Cohn translates the same as ‘(t)true signing/ is whispering; a breath within a God; a wind.’ See Rainer Maria Rilke (trans and introduction Stephen Cohn) 2000 *Sonnets to Orpheus with Letters to a Young Poet*, page 19.
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Appendix

‘Does anybody else here not understand?”
Language, post-philosophers, bewitchment and confusion: some post-conference reflections
At the conclusion of my third chapter, ‘Apprehending, seeing, knowing: toward an account of techné after Kant’s architectonics and Heidegger’s conception of wonder’, I examined how both Kant and Heidegger have written of the possible benefits of critical producers adopting something approaching what I phrase as gnostic, more-than-rational styles of apprehending.

In this appendix, a digression from my main discussions on genre and the sublime, I examine an aesthetics conference I attended early in my candidature. While remaining focussed on how contemporary critical producers use language after the linguistic turn in philosophy, my analysis here is driven by a desire to know whether ‘post-philosophical’ meaning-making exemplifies a shift toward creative styles of writing and, as the once-new post-philosophical genre moves from emergence to eminence, from antagonism to agonism, what ramifications there may be for both analytical philosophies and poetries.

1. *Introducing ’Sensorium: Aesthetics, Art, Life’*

I attended numerous conferences during my time as a PhD student, and the first left an indelible impression. *Sensorium* was a conference on ‘aesthetics, art, life’, co-hosted by a number of departments at the University of Melbourne.1 Published two years later, if you liked the conference, you’ll love the book: a monograph which models a speculative sensorial aesthetics. Rather than ‘artists deferring to philosophers in regard to the meaning of their works’, the model under proposal seeks to shift power so that philosophers instead ‘defer to artists, who are understood as experts and inventers (sic) in the realm of sensibility’.2 What kind of deference might be entailed? Any yielding or postponing (the etymological roots of ‘defer’) seems an idealistic goal: after all, isn’t art a primary material which, when encountered by aestheticians, is only part of a process in which ideas come to be formulated? What kind of deference – other than lip service – can be possible in this discourse of power relations?

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1 *Sensorium: Aesthetics, Art, Life* was held at the University of Melbourne in June 2005, and was co-hosted by (the now-defunct) School of Creative Arts, in conjunction with the Department of Cinema Studies (housed in the School of Art History, Cinema, Classics and Archaeology) and the Melbourne School of Continental Philosophy (housed by the Department of Philosophy).

In this appendix, rather than mount my own discussion of specific artwork, I critique whether *Sensorium* meets its paradigm-shifting goals, while reflecting on the (so often problematic) relationship between art and theories of art.

2. What uses might a poet find for philosophies?

This thought turned and returned over the three days of *Sensorium*. What uses might a poet find for philosophies, when the latter can be spoken in such peculiar lexicons? Those presenting at *Sensorium* were, one way or another, seeking to return ‘to the question of life through the subversion of the privileged positioning of the intelligible over the sensible’.

Indeed. Here was an ambit to upset a hierarchy, to reposition art and artists within a paradigm that had historically privileged theoreticians seeking to make art make sense. What functions would I find for the ‘peculiar lexicons’ of this conference’s writing communities? I felt certain ‘the attempt to legitimate art’ held great promise for creative producers (like me). How exciting, after all, to attend a conference on aesthetics – that branch of philosophy ‘which examines judgments of taste and the feelings of the beautiful and the sublime in relation to nature and art’ – that would defer (rather than prescribe) to art makers.

Despite the audacious goal, much of what I experienced during *Sensorium* was incomprehensible to me. Loudest seemed a version of philosophising that, intent on shifting hegemonies, valorised them instead. Was there something of the legitimising to keynote speaker Arkady Plotnitsky’s reminder that philosophers historically regard artists as ‘at best, unreliable philosophers’? This was sure to prick the ears of artists in the audience: what kind of philosophical reliability might Plotnitsky, however unwittingly, have implied? This seems to revisit ancient antagonisms; in *The Philosophical Disenfranchisement of Art*, contemporary thinker Arthur Danto reviews the Platonic quarrel between poets and philosophers, and identifies ‘two disenfranchising moments, aggressions, really’ made by philosophies against art:

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5 Ibid, page xiii.
6 Ibid, page xiii.
7 Panel Session: *Philosophy and Aesthetics* Tuesday 21st June 2005, 6.30pm. The monograph takes up Plotnitsky’s point: ‘the artist has often been construed as an “unreliable philosopher” – one who thinks in muddled concepts, expressed in a derivative and poor way through sensations, which then need to be “reappropriated” into representations which are in turn clarified in concepts by philosophers.’ See Barbara Bolt, Felicity Coleman, Graham Jones, Ashley Woodward (eds) 2007 *Sensorium: Aesthetics, Art, Life*, page xiii.
the first is the effort to ephemeralise art by treating it as fit only for pleasure and the second is the view that art is just philosophy in an alienated form: what it requires, as it were, is only an awakening kiss in order to recognise that it really was philosophy all along, only bewitched.7

What might a graduate student researching poetries and poetics do with philosophies that (some philosophers may say) offer wakefulness, when it is only dreams that artists proffer? Had presenters at Sensorium decided that art does the thing Danto later speculates, that is, ‘what philosophy itself does, only uncouthly’?8 Or were these theoreticians doing what art does, but couthly?

A clue is contained in Sensorium: Aesthetics, Art, Life, when the book’s editors avow ‘(t)he various chapters collected in this volume encompass a variety of styles, from formal academic prose to literary inventiveness’. But this strange proposition then follows:

sensorial affects … persist in all the chapters here, even the more theoretical. These sensations, which provoke life, persist in all writing about art and aesthetics, because writing itself is an art.9

There may well have been an attempt made to privilege the sensible over theoretical responses to art at Sensorium, but what seemed absent from papers delivered at this conference was any kind of deferring. Indeed, in barely discussing art at an aesthetics conference, a gesture was being played out: here were philosophies offered as dominant, legitimising discourses. Moreso, in using language somewhat like artists, these theoreticians seemed to have done away with the need to discuss art much at all.

This was likely to problematise that new relationship Sensorium was seeking to establish (or rekindle): who was to play the role of artist, and who would act as philosopher deferring – or not – to artists? As Sensorium progressed, it became clear that the papers presented may have been compelling to only a small percentage of gathered cognoscenti. Without exception, each non-presenter I sat with avowed their own state of confusion. Complexity as the preferred mode of communication is writ large in the conference handbook: one keynote speaker, for example, was to deliver an examination of the ‘literary-philosophical writing’ of Pierre Klossowski, who is described as re-reading the work of Nietzsche and its impact on Deleuze’s thinking

7 Arthur C. Danto 1986 The Philosophical Disenfranchisement of Art, pages xiv, xv.
on art.10 This commentary seems to be a style of aesthetics done at three removes from its subject – that is, art viewed through the filter of three different theories, a re-re-re-reflection if you like – and this complex style of analysis typifies the communication strategies of those presenters participating in Sensorium. Were these paraliteratures a kind of art or, I couldn’t help but wonder, were they a bewitching style of sophistry?

I have no argument with complexity, though I left Sensorium wondering what had been communicated during this three day talkfest about ‘Art’, in which artworks were a mere footnote for theoretical thinking. Far from the Mallarméan poetic gesture (where poets purify the language of the tribe), presenters at this conference seemed to affirm a particular problem. In attempting to articulate their versions of philosophy to non-philosophers, many of whom arrived without foreknowledge of the sub-genre ‘aesthetics’ (and yet felt themselves to be stakeholders), here were whole days of discourse falling on confused ears. At the end of Sensorium, I was not alone in querying the possible function of presentations that failed to communicate much else beyond multi-syllabic noise. This was ‘Art’ for aestheticians, not artists (nor even a general academic audience). I began to wonder this: is a particular kind of great reader/listener required to have great aestheticians?

Perhaps so, and this then begs a range of further questions: who is aesthetics for? What does aesthetics do? The term ‘aesthetic’ gained widespread acceptance in Europe in the mid-eighteenth century, after the publication of Alexander Gottlieb Baumgarten’s Reflections on Poetry. Baumgarten writes:

*things known* are to be known by the superior faculty as the object of logic; *things perceived* (are to be known by the inferior faculty as the object) of the science of perception, or aesthetic.11

Perhaps a science of perception – categorising? Totalising? – is required when truthfulness or knowledge in art becomes so embedded or encoded, so confounding and specialised, that audiences must have it mediated. Will aestheticians, then, humanise art? This was not my experience at Sensorium; instead, in struggling for the naming rights (‘truth’, ‘knowledge’), presenters at Sensorium undertook to theorise on what and how and

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when ‘Art’ might be without either practice-led approaches, or much analysis of artworks. Instead, artistic theorisations seem to have become enclosed, self-referential discourses.

In his article, ‘We must nurture the humanities’, contemporary philosopher Peter Singer asks ‘what is excellence in a university?’ In surveying the Australian context, he has this to say:

Australian academics in the humanities need to accept a share of the responsibility for the state of their field. In some fields, it has become fashionable to write and talk in a way that few can understand. Jargon lends an aura of expertise, but obscures the important issues that are at stake.12

My polemic here, a challenge really, remains sceptical of the languages of conferences like *Sensorium*. To agree with Peter Singer’s contention: as much as I am interested in ideas and in talking about ideas, I remain frustrated that complexity has been mistaken (or swapped) for excellence. To this poet, working with language differently to those engaged in analytical industries, *Sensorium* turned into a run of days fraught with disenchantments. Where to from here?

3. Post-philosophy: a selective history

In the mid-twentieth century philosopher of language, Ludwig Wittgenstein, sought to claim some sort of logic-based reliability for the languages of philosophy. In *Philosophical Investigations*, he wrote that ‘Philosophy is a battle against the bewitchment of our intelligence by means of our language’13 and, in the same book, that ‘philosophical problems arise when language goes on holiday’.14 Wittgenstein’s warning seems prescient for my concern. Beyond the linguistic turn, have the languages of philosophy gone on holiday? At its inception, the linguistic turn was promulgated halfway through the twentieth century by an emergent group who came to be known as the ‘ordinary-language philosophers’ (J.L. Austin, the latter Heidegger, and others) which held that concepts ‘central to philosophy – e.g., the concepts of truth and knowledge – (are) fixed by linguistic practice’.15 This turn of emphasis toward language was later extended by, among others, Jacques Derrida who, with his programmatic deconstructive principles, sought to transgress what had hitherto been taken as

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12 Peter Singer, ‘We must nurture the humanities’ in *The Age* newspaper (Monday June 27, 2009).
14 Ibid, page 16e. Italics are from Wittgenstein.
hermetic linguistic structures. In radicalising the ordinary-language school’s endeavours, Derrida risked destabilising the entire project of analytical philosophy by exposing (what he termed) the lack of a ‘metaphysics of presence’. For Derrida, underlying language there were no abstract concepts like truth or knowledge but, simply, more language. After Derrida’s truism, there could be no claim to objective viewpoints through the lens of philosophical languages. Truth and knowledge would be contingent – fixed by linguistic practice – rather than absolute.

In the early twenty-first century, it seems thinkers and writers have arrived at the agonistic ends of Derrida et al’s postmodern theoretical avant-garde. This reading and writing style has reframed analytical philosophies, literatures, ‘high’ and ‘popular’ texts, as an interconnecting mesh woven by the machines of culture … and I wonder whether it is here that theoretical meaning-making has gone on holiday? In *Consequences of Pragmatism*, contemporary philosopher Richard Rorty writes of the hybridising inventiveness at work in postmodernism, which he reinvents as *post-philosophy*. In attempting to define what sort of writing post-philosophers produce, Rorty suggests:

(t)he modern Western ‘culture critic’ feels free to comment on anything at all. He is a prefiguration of the all-purpose intellectual of a post-Philosophical culture, the philosopher who has abandoned pretensions to Philosophy. He passes rapidly from Hemingway to Proust to Hitler to Marx to Foucault to Mary Douglas to the present situation in Southeast Asia to Ghandi to Sophocles. He is a name-dropper, who uses names such as these to refer to sets of descriptions, symbol-systems, ways of seeing. His specialty is seeing similarities and differences between great big pictures, between attempts to see how things hang together. He is a person who tells you how all the ways of making things hang together hang together.17

To see the world as post-philosophers do is to move between a range of textualities so as to generate a meta-picture of how pictures of the world are made. These theoretical (and at once artistic, if the editors of *Sensorium* are to be believed) compositions will be limited only by erudition and a theoretician’s creative abilities – a style of *poesis* that moves into a specific style of post-philosophical *technē* – which will yoke together sets of arbitrarily assigned meanings. And herein lies a problem.

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Specifically, post-philosophical interpretations manifest in more than simply specialised lexicons. These meta-language-games – critiques of language, in language – are so esoteric they seem impossible to decode. An example: what is to be made of the jargon employed by Arkady Plotnitsky in his essay, “The Shadow of the ‘People to Come’: Chaos, Brain, and Thought in Deleuze and Guattari” (Chapter Twelve of Sensorium: Aesthetics, Art, Life)? Does this writing contain what Rorty calls a meta-picture? Perhaps part of my confusion is that this ‘picture’ does something with language differently to poetic images (which aim to transfer on to the blank screens of imaginations: I am thinking of Horace’s credo ‘ut pictura poeisis’). What is most disenchanting in Plotnitsky’s essay is that, in dissecting what art does differently to philosophy and science, the theoretician glances hardly at all toward artwork. Instead, he uses language to achieve the following effects:

... sensations, percepts, and affects exist as the products and generators of planes of composition, enacted by and in the material (monument) of a work of art. This plane will be contrasted, in defining art qua art, with the plane of immanence or consistency, inhabited by concepts, in philosophy, and the plane of reference or coordination, inhabited by functions, in science. Each plane of composition in art is defined ‘as an image of a Universe (phenomenon)’ – a cosmos or chaosmos (chaos-cosmos) or a constellational assemblage of ‘affects and percepts’ – appearing in the field of thought, in which the thought of art intersects with the chaos of forms that are born and disappear with an infinite speed. Such an image is, however, not a representation of any real world, ‘since no art and no sensation have ever been representational’. One may, of course, experience or even create an artwork as a representation, but as such it is not art on Deleuze and Guattari’s definition. Such an image may be that of a Universe as chaos, in any of the three senses here considered, but in particular, chaos as the incomprehensible, of what Blanchot calls ‘the unfigurable Universe’. Even in this case, however, it is still an image of a Universe, although in this case the term ‘un-mage’ would be more appropriate. And so the essay goes, delivering 28 pages of its own incomprehensible chaos. If this were some kind of gnomic prose poem, I might congratulate its author on their text’s pastiche and disjuncture, on the use of non-sequitur and truism, and on what seems a parody of the overwrought styles of postmodernity. But this is no prose poem; while a series of arguments are being developed here, what I am at first dazzled and then stunned by is the language Plotnitsky the post-philosopher employs, a language which is laden with referents from which edicts on ‘Art’ arrive, while remaining devoid of reflections on specific artwork. This is all theory,

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with no evidence, and it is hardly the necessary technical language of a specialised, theoretical field. What I object to is that jargon like Plotnitsky’s has become an end in itself, a style that endlessly elaborates while – however unwittingly – obfuscating clarity.

When post-philosophical compositions employ this style of language, dialogue becomes all but impossible. The overarching impulse seems to drive toward being as inventive as the aesthetic avant-garde once was. My sense is that texts like Plotnitsky’s obscure important issues and, in so doing, subvert a founding principle of philosophy: dialogue is hijacked, and the ‘dialectical’ arguments and conversations of interested parties (from the Greek *dialegein*[^19]) are arrested. Among some, there is suspicion that this late twentieth century writing style is a gimmick or, worse, gobbledygook, and that there is nothing (at least nothing of lasting worth) underneath. Contemporary analytical philosopher John Searle perceives postmodernism as a linguistic miasma that, when scrutinised, ‘just dissolves like so much mist on a hot day’.[^20]

After the postmodern program, in other words, readers may be reminded that philosophies are discursive rather than hermetic. But otherwise, Searle (and many with him) doubts these programmatic texts will serve a long-term purpose. Where to from here, post-philosophers?

4. Where to from here, post-philosophers?

In one of post-philosophy’s arché-texts, ‘Answering the Question: What is Postmodernism?’, Jean-François Lyotard calls for a ‘war on totality’ and suggests that this is a war that can be fought through a unified push from artists and theorists alike, away from the aesthetico-theoretical gesture of absolutism and toward a multiplicity of relative ideas. Setting up distance between his program and the universalist principles of the Modernists, Lyotard advises his audience of thinkers and writers to ‘be witnesses to the unpresentable’.[^21] He calls for postmodernists to delve into abstract realms and work ‘without rules in order to formulate the rules of what will have been done’.[^22] We might imagine the hoisted placards: *No Rules!* ... except those uniquely established by the work; and it is this antagonistic self-reflexivity by which postmodernism was to arrive. Of

[^21]: Lyotard’s ‘Answering the Question: What is Postmodernism?’ (trans Régis Durand) is contained in Jean-François Lyotard (trans Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi) 1984 *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, page 82.
[^22]: Ibid, page 81.
course, Lyotard's stricture carries its own (paradoxical) universalist gesture; after all, what but a universal gesture can counteract the antecedent universal gestures of the Modernists?

This was no dialectical manoeuvre. Lyotard's was a hostile take-over bid. Challenging nothing less than canonically-set boundaries of ontologico-linguistic reality, Lyotard's speculative model placed trust in a program that emphasised contingency, transgression, and anti-absolutism. But Lyotard set out to establish a revolutionary program that was to be broader yet: he would promote a mindset that adopted an 'incredulity towards meta-narratives'.\(^\text{23}\) Aimed toward the incessant 'invention of new rules',\(^\text{24}\) those canonical meta-narratives of truth and knowledge which had been reified since Enlightenment were to be de-limited, abandoned because these same marked the limits of consumer-based, capitalist culture. Commentator Suzanne Guerlac typifies the postmodern program when she writes of how '(t)heory became our encounter, if not with transcendence, then at least with the limit, the limit between limitation and illimitation'.\(^\text{25}\) While I argue post-philosophical theorisations both test and broach the limits of comprehension, I acknowledge an ethics underpins the proposed transgressions of these first-wave, proto post-philosophers. As a mode of revolt, theirs was a program seeking to change the rules of how to formulate speculative knowledge, blending _theoria_ with _poeisis_ in the hope of waging a war on totality in which culture had been commodified. This would begin by unfixed language, so that the grand narratives of truth and knowledge could be reapproached; post-philosophies shifted into artistic acts, in which theorising became 'an art'. But, like other avant-garde programs, postmodernism seems to have fallen short of its goals, and is now – and conferences like _Sensorium_ confirm it – little more than a writing style. Just as Auden once proclaimed how 'poetry makes nothing happen',\(^\text{26}\) and just as Heidegger assures his readers that philosophy is "immediately useless','\(^\text{27}\) the revolutions promised by the postmodern program have succumbed to the realities of late-capitalist banality. Where to from here, post-philosophers?

5. Where to from here, post-philosophers? (ii)

\(^{23}\) Jean-François Lyotard (trans Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi) 1984 _The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge_, page xxvi.
\(^{24}\) Ibid, page 80.
Allow me, if only for a moment, to attempt a writing experiment. I wish to adopt a writing style that is part theoretical language, part artistic invention, and wholly post-philosophical.

Let’s speculate on the future by first glancing backward. In 1882, when Nietzsche declared ‘Gott ist tot’, the deicide signalled an early marshalling of modern selves toward postmodern personae: once the godhead was tried in absentia (where else?) and declared dead, an earlier question, ‘what is a human being?’ (asked by Kant a century earlier) was thrown into a whole new light. In wresting control of language, Nietzsche inscribed ‘god’ as a fallacious and limiting myth; now the word was no longer ‘god’, and Nietzsche’s performative killing was an ultimate transgressive act. But rather than enshrine human agency, the Nietzschean gesture became a model which has since devolved into a lengthening tradition of thanatogenics, a nihilistic death-for-all trope employed over the course of postmodernism. What is this gesture, this endless search for a limit? In an attempt to overcome canonical meta-narratives, it seems postmodernists have replaced these with their own: what remains is a single meta-narrative, Lyotard’s contradictory yet totalising command – a first (and only) commandment? – that there shall now be no more meta-narratives. After the death of ‘god’, there shall be postmodernity, and … after? Or have the postmodernists enshrined their own version of the fiat lux?

Let us abandon the fantasies of our philosopher forefathers! After postmodernism, there shall be post-philosophies, where anything – other than absolute truth or knowledge – might be possible. The limit imposed by a godhead and next by philosophers has been replaced by a simulacrum where what are now imposed, as theoretician Thomas Docherty frames it, ‘are only appearances and disappearances, and no claims can be made upon any ontological reality at all’. According to another famed voice from postmodernity, Jean Baudrillard’s, the milieu of the simulacrum is ‘no longer that of a territory, a referential being or a substance. It is the generation by models of a real without origin or reality: a hyperreal’. De-limited, self-deterministic, non-Utopian, post-philosophers define and dictate the parameters of human

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30 For an elucidation of these ideas, see my article ‘Vale Postmodern Thanatogenics? Towards an Aesthetic Proto avant-garde’ in Traffic No.7 (2005), pages 115-129.
realities, acting as custodians who maintain the upkeep of an ontological headquarters in which ‘representations precede, indeed create, that which they represent’.\textsuperscript{33}

Hasn’t this generation of realities been happening since Plato’s performative enshrining of an ideal city-state, in \textit{The Republic}? What sort of genre world do post-philosophers model, if grand narratives are abandoned? Baudrillard’s simulacrum is a swarming vortex where what is enshrined as hyperreal is a space where \textit{artistic theorisations} can flow endlessly, an infinite regress of ideas which are limelit momentarily before disappearing into a mass-consumed history of passing curiosities. These ideas are destined to be forgotten and then forgotten that they have been forgotten. In the aftermath of postmodernism, thinkers and writers now confront realities in which canonical discourses of truth and knowledge are rendered not just void but absurd, redundant. Nietzsche once idealised a primal oneness, in which dreams were taken to be ‘the illusion of illusion’.\textsuperscript{34} For Lyotard, Baudrillard, and their ensuing armies of post-philosopher epigones, all limitation is forsaken, after Nietzsche, for a universe without truth or knowledge. And now? Now we have conferences such as \textit{Sensorium}, which host presenters who are complicit in echoing a jargon of bewitching language. The illusion of illusions has itself become illusory; the wakefulness of the post-philosophical program portends the maddening industries of insomnia.

6. Where to from here, post-philosophers? (iii)

Did my experiment – a rant, to be sure – do what post-philosophies do? Was it a cogent, organically unified invention? And is \textit{this} a style for creative producers to adopt? Not necessarily: for, to take up (and turn) Wittgenstein’s aphorism on the role of philosophy, post-philosophies seem to encode a battle against the intelligence of language by means of bewitchment. One recent thinker, Gilles Deleuze, provides a plausible set of characteristics for the post-philosophical enterprise. In \textit{What is Philosophy?}, he writes:

\begin{quote}

some concepts must be indicated by an extraordinary and sometimes even barbarous or shocking word, whereas others make do with an ordinary, everyday word that is filled with harmonics so distant that it risks being imperceptible to a nonphilosophical ear. Some
\end{quote}

\begin{footnotes}
\item[33] Jeremy Hawthorn (ed) 2000 \textit{A Glossary of Contemporary Literary Terms}, page 325.
\item[34] Friedrich Nietzsche (trans Shaun Whiteside) 1993 \textit{The Birth of Tragedy}, page 25.
\end{footnotes}
concepts call for archaisms, and others for neologisms, shot through with almost crazy etymological exercises.\footnote{Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari (trans and introduction Hugh Tomlinson and Graham Burchell) 1994 \textit{What is Philosophy?}, pages 7-8.}

What uses might a non-post-philosopher find for the almost-craziness of post-philosophies, when post-philosophers rely on what ultimately remain ill-defined ‘imperceptibilities’ to communicate? Or perhaps I miss the point? What Deleuze seems to be getting at is that a new set of rules – morphological, tropological, syntactic – must be learned before individuals can communicate with post-philosophers. This is not particularly new or novel: codes are commonly required when seeking to enter specific genre worlds, and have been since (and probably before) the inscription was first carved on the Temple of Isis (Mother Nature):

‘I am all that is, and that was, and that shall ever be, and no mortal hath raised the veil from my face’.\footnote{Immanuel Kant (trans and introduction Werner S. Pluhar) 1790/ 1987 \textit{Critique of Judgment}, page 178-9.} Do poems, as Romantic poet Percy Bysshe Shelley speculates in his \textit{Defence of Poetry}, lift ‘the veil from the hidden beauty of the world’?\footnote{Percy Bysshe Shelley in John. E. Jordan (ed) 1965 \textit{A Defence of Poetry}, page 39-40.} Can post-philosophies operate on similar extra-logical, gnostic levels of discourse? Perhaps, though the papers I saw delivered at \textit{Sensorium} did not seem to set clarity (the unveiling of ideas?) as a goal. As the now notorious Sokal hoax exemplifies,\footnote{In the late 1990s, the distinguished journal \textit{Social Text} published Alan Sokal’s article 'Transgressing the Boundaries: Toward a Transformative Hermeneutics of Quantum Gravity' (1996). This article promised to expose profound new truths: ‘In quantum gravity, as we shall see, the space-time manifold ceases to exist as an objective physical reality; geometry becomes relational and contextual; and the foundational conceptual categories of prior science – among them, existence itself – become problematised and relativised. This conceptual revolution, I will argue, has profound implications for the content of a future postmodern and liberatory science’. See Alan Sokal and Jean Bricmont 1998 \textit{ Intellectual Impostures}, page 200. First published in \textit{Social Text} 26/27 (Spring/Summer, 1996), pages 217-252, not only did this article fail to deliver its promises: it was a fake. A pastiche of physics and poststructuralism the document was, by the author’s admission, ‘brimming with absurdities and blatant non-sequiturs’. \textit{Ibid}, page 1.} perhaps even those equipped with what Deleuze professes to be a philosophical ear (what is this?) sometimes only pretend to understand these bewitching writing styles. Perhaps creative producers are right to remain sceptical? If philosophy ‘is, and always has been’, as Stanley Rosen defines it in \textit{The Quarrel Between Philosophy and Poetry: Studies in Ancient Thought}, ‘the comprehensive articulation of problematicity’,\footnote{Stanley Rosen 1988 \textit{The Quarrel Between Philosophy and Poetry: Studies in Ancient Thought}, page xi.} then post-philosophies rupture the historical discourses of analytical philosophy to a point where articulation itself is comprehensively problematised.

When an aesthetics conference such as \textit{Sensorium} is conducted in tropes where language is taken on holiday, meaning-formation around art and around what artists do stands to be hijacked. As Wittgenstein emphasises (at least as much as we might assume his italics confer emphasis), ‘(t)he limits of my language mean
the limits of my world’. While Wittgenstein’s is not the last word – he has a tendency to use the rhetoric of certainty and truth – what became increasingly clear during Sensorium was a genre world spilling with epigones who all spoke a learned jargon that was not only imperceptible (the derivation is from ‘perceive’: per- ‘entirely’ + capere ‘take’), but which imposed strictures of incomprehensibility on the genre world of art. This is a manoeuvre that surely no artist will be entirely taken with? Without decoding, Sensorium’s post-philosophies seemed as useful as an unknown foreign language to those thinking and writing in other genre worlds. Where to from here, poets?

7. What uses might a poet find for philosophies? (ii)

I wonder at the father of philosophy, Thales, who fell into a well when looking into the night skies reflected below him. Is this fall – I extend it to impute a generative, forwards-looking, pre-emptive fall of the analytical philosophical tradition – recalled by the arrival of post-philosophies such as those exhibited at Sensorium?

Much like the stars Thales saw reflected on the sheen of the water’s surface, ideas can become lucid and clear on the surfaces of language. But there remains a sensate world of objects: if, as Terry Eagleton pragmatically frames it in his recent book, How to Read a Poem, ‘language is not what shuts us off from reality, but what yields us the deepest access to it’, then it is clear that analytical philosophy employs its own styles of language in reflecting realities. But when post-philosophers re-read philosophy as purely mimetic and as a genre that literally and literally relates stories, philosophies founder. The figurative water stared into by Thales millennia ago has been refigured, stirred so that the ability to philosophically reflect with language now swirls, convoluted. Straining to capture a glimpse of the world (at ideas disappearing as the meniscus of philosophical language breaks), philosophy seems to have fallen, just as its ancient father fell. The traditions and histories of philosophy ripple and disappear, while post-philosophies expend much effort in the revelation (of limited worth?) that, underneath these, there is only a void of shifting language.

Perhaps, as ordinary-language philosopher J.L. Austin frames it, in his essay ‘Performative Utterances’, what is exposed by texts such as those contained in Sensorium: Aesthetics, Art, Life is a particular style, a ‘force’ (as Austin italicises it) where what is intended is ‘not to report facts but to influence people in

\[41\] Terry Eagleton 2007 How to Read a Poem, page 69.
this way or that, or to let off steam in this way or that'.\textsuperscript{42} Perhaps this is all I am doing here. But I maintain any over-riding forcefulness – such as complexity in the place of clarity, and transgression as compulsive gesture – problematises the possibility of dialogue. Richard Rorty, when theorising Derridean deconstruction, in \textit{Consequences of Pragmatism: Essays 1972-1980}, informs his readers that deconstruction is a style of writing that ‘always leads to more writing, and more, and still more’.\textsuperscript{43} Plotnitsky avers as much in his obituary to Derrida, ‘The \textit{Différance} of the World: Homage to Jacques Derrida’, when he writes ‘deconstructive work never ends, as it builds new technologies, new forms of \textit{writing}’.\textsuperscript{44} It seems the post-philosophers are not planning a quiet departure (or any departure at all), and their hybridised, paraliterary hegemony seems enshrined. But to this poet, post-philosophical languages remain unconvincing, as a writing style that has become a self-referential, somewhat artless argumentative force.

As a researcher who is primarily a creative producer, the post-philosophical fields seem fraught with disenchantments. The shock that postmodern theory once aimed to administer has overloaded the dialectic of philosophical discourses and, as new theoreticians emerge to stand on the shoulders of theoreticians before them, deconstruction verges on bewitchment. But post-philosophies can also be regarded strategically, as fields populated with ideas for creative producers to wander and wonder with. It is here that poems can begin to generate. Through assimilating aphorisms and the ‘truth-effects’ of post-philosophers, through ekphrastically appropriating whatever language or idea causes me to re-read or makes my mind swarm, I am moving toward an intertextual, critical style of poetry. This reversal of the ficto-critical gesture (a question, I think, of emphasis) privileges the creative use of language and, in particular, poetry (that mediation of meter, sound patterning, and the Aristotelian tropes, which is the business of any poet), while at the same time interacting with post-philosophies creatively. Are artistically theoretical texts ‘immediately useless’? For this poet, they are not. But, in finding a use for post-philosophies, I remain sceptical.

I leave the final word to commentators Richard Freadman and Seamus Miller, who frame postmodernism as a form of ‘constructivist anti-humanism’. In \textit{Re-Thinking Theory} they write:

\textsuperscript{42} J.L. Austin 1979 (3rd ed) \textit{Philosophical Papers}, page 221.
the ‘theory’ paradigm comprises three constitutive elements … One, a repudiation of substantial conceptions of the human subject, be it of authors or of social beings in general; two, a denial of the referential power of language and of literary texts; and three, a repudiation of substantive discourses of value, both moral and aesthetic.\textsuperscript{45}

First-wave postmodernists were once responsible for freeing thinkers and writers into new interpretative spaces, where new fusions of meaning could arrive through a process of decentring and de-limiting language. But, several generations into a waning theoretical avant-garde, has the impulse to relativise arrived at a point of meaninglessness? A challenge remains: where to from here, post-philosophers?
