

Erick Verran

READER,

I HERE put into thy hands, what has been the diversion of some of my idle and heavy hours: if it has the good luck to prove so of any of thine, and thou hast but half so much pleasure in reading, as I had in writing it, thou wilt as little think thy money, as I do my pains, ill bestowed. Mistake not this for a commendation of my work; nor conclude, because I was pleased with the doing of it, that therefore I am fondly taken with it now it is done.

OBITER

For the understanding, like the eye, judging of objects only by its own sight, cannot but be pleased with what it discovers, having less regret for what has escaped it, because it is unknown. Thus he who has raised himself above the alms-basket, and, not content to live lazily on scraps of begged opinions, sets his own thoughts on work, to find and follow truth, will (whatever he lights on) not miss the hunter's satisfaction; every moment of his pursuit will reward his pains with some delight, and he will have reason to think his time not ill spent, even when he cannot much boast of any great acquisition.

DICTA

For though it be certain, that there is nothing in this treatise, of the truth whereof I am not fully persuaded; yet I consider myself as liable to mistakes as I can think thee; and know, that this book must stand or fall with thee, not by any opinion I have of it, but by thy own. If thou findest little in it new or instructive to thee, thou art not to blame me for it. It was not meant for those that had already mastered this subject, and made a thorough acquaintance with their own understandings; but for my own information, and the satisfaction of a few friends,

OBITER DICTA

BEFORE YOU START TO READ THIS BOOK, take this moment to think about making a donation to punctum books, an independent non-profit press,

@ <https://punctumbooks.com/support/>

If you're reading the e-book, you can click on the image below to go directly to our donations site. Any amount, no matter the size, is appreciated and will help us to keep our ship of fools afloat. Contributions from dedicated readers will also help us to keep our commons open and to cultivate new work that can't find a welcoming port elsewhere. Our adventure is not possible without your support.

Vive la Open Access.



Fig. 1. Hieronymus Bosch, *Ship of Fools* (1490–1500)

OBITER DICTA. Copyright © 2021 by Erick Verran. This work carries a Creative Commons BY-NC-SA 4.0 International license, which means that you are free to copy and redistribute the material in any medium or format, and you may also remix, transform and build upon the material, as long as you clearly attribute the work to the authors (but not in a way that suggests the authors or punctum books endorses you and your work), you do not use this work for commercial gain in any form whatsoever, and that for any remixing and transformation, you distribute your rebuild under the same license. <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/>

First published in 2021 by dead letter office, BABEL Working Group, an imprint of punctum books, Earth, Milky Way.
<https://punctumbooks.com>

The BABEL Working Group is a collective and desiring-assemblage of scholar-gypsies with no leaders or followers, no top and no bottom, and only a middle. BABEL roams and stalks the ruins of the post-historical university as a multiplicity, a pack, looking for other roaming packs with which to cohabit and build temporary shelters for intellectual vagabonds. We also take in strays.

ISBN-13: 978-1-68571-002-6 (print)

ISBN-13: 978-1-68571-003-3 (ePDF)

DOI: 10.53288/0301.1.00

LCCN: 2021947743

Library of Congress Cataloging Data is available from the Library of Congress

Book design: Vincent W.J. van Gerven Oei


spontaneous acts of scholarly combustion

Erick Verran

OBITER

DICTA



Table of Contents

FIRST NOTEBOOK

17

Ordinary voodoo · A totality of involvements · What thy right hand doeth · Reductio ad finem · The zen of concentration · Singing of the man · La source · Crossover · Love versus lust · Right all along · Scale of visual clarity · Hilarotragedy · Stoops to conquer, kneels to rise · Ghostless shell · Getting in the spirit · Yes, but · Musically like a glove · Seekers and finders · Through the glass · God in pain · Pneumatic engine · Colanders · Look here · Bodies and organs · The opposite of prolixity · Actually or nearly fractal · Tugs-of-war · The glazier's burden · And yet I was not seen · Predict the inevitable · The gift outright · Graphical self-sabotage · Nothing coming of nothing · Eternity in an hour · Gone fetch · Neither here nor there · On autopilot · Writ small · Trading up · Stare, stare in the basin · Written on the body · The medium being the message · Guiltier than · Barthes's author, Lazarus · Belshazzar's feast · Show and hide · He's told us not to blow it · Heard this one before · Pedantic if not shallow · Stitchless · Consistency being key · Once upon a time · Mental spotlights · Left, left · Ceaselessly into the past · Fore and aft · The witch's help · Digging with one's tongue · They're there

SECOND NOTEBOOK

63

Filling out · Psychic shift · Intravitreal · Out of many, one · Granting the parallax view · What the thunder said · White rings of tumult · Intervention affected · Either/or · Irony's sincerity · Lugubrious motor · Overlaps · Haydn's bit players · Art as charged battery · Sans · Big crunch · Das Wirtshaus

THIRD NOTEBOOK

77

Edging · Preludes like shells · Illusioning holism · Crowded in the head · Pop-up books · The warlock's familiar · Behind the scenery · One-sided · Once removed · Lights for the night · Gra-

datim ferociter · Jugglers · Solid with holes · Glitch carpets · When you're not strong · Nimrod from a dream · One thing after another · High and low · Hygroscopy · Subject and its ground · On tattoos · Greater than we know · Sling out of shot · The question of expressionism · Hurting art · Calligraphy being foolproof · Qualities of the lunch · Rafts and tables · Fuseli's limp muscles · To laugh and sing · A koan for your thoughts · On God and fugues · Evil of Arendt's kind · Brahms, the limner · Laughter in the dark · Church and the miniaturist · Breadcrumbs · Giving all the heart · Sleights of hand · Socrates is a man · Rounded with a sleep · As if to change his shape · Tree of life · Circling the poles · Out of whole cloth · Photography's guarantee · Shopping after modernity · Choice of hue · Spatial concepts · Hopping kings and bishops · Wilder Reiter

FOURTH NOTEBOOK

119

Postproduction · Richard's chairs · By line alone · Beethoven overheard · Giving the vocalist a leg up · Caged birds · Passing thought on clouds · Pacifiers · Like in dough · Hindsighted · Hot potato · The artist's fiery parcels · Lang Lang overboard · Zips · My light is spent · The sort of thing that's quite impossible · Link's Awakening · Milking a theme · The shock of the new · Graphics of older vintage · Speak, lamp · Cardigan depth · Revolutions in shampoo · Musical verisimilitude · Queen me · Artifact economics · The insect's cataracts · Subzero · Comics' eugenics · One for another · Cognizance of the dance · Turn-based · Magritte, the literalist · Meridian response · Greatness explained · Be fruitful and multiply · Many a true word hath been spoken in jest · Foretold to other eyes · Rückblick · Vanilla in the brain · Carved horse

FIFTH NOTEBOOK

153

Cursed · Toward a musical kinetics · Manufactured scarcity and the historic · Die Wetterfahne · Rickrolled · Humility and the moderns · Giotto on his own · Where and when · Difference · Living rhythms · The withered cherry · Hills peep o'er hills · Slow thighs · The pendulum held · Essentially snake oil · Clouds in the foreground · Beginning again · La troupe de Mademoiselle Eglantine · Tomato, tomato · Everything illuminated · Cries of despair · Why, why not · Peach-eating · Little fires everywhere · Mister Stokowski · The kettle in Tchaikovsky · Struggles with tigers · Caused effects · Cradle in the air · What goes on in Congo · Capaciously empty · Astonishing Paris · Catalogue

SIXTH NOTEBOOK

179

Whoso list · Sticks and flints · Kipling's man · Ambiguous though visible · Ugo and his targets · Amplifier up front · One step ahead · Coda · Music and lyrics · Pricelessness · Hewer of stone · Cunningham unshod · Group or unit · Length and what else · The long and the short · Gone from Pontoise · Photorealism · Gefühle nach dem Sturm · Substance of a third kind · I'm not there · Collage, what it's good for · Narrative and types of motion · Der Dichter spricht

Script · Sequins distinguished from stars · The end shied from · Ozenfant's husks · Abyssal · Noli me tangere · Highly fulfilling prophecies · Galériens to culture · History's role in aura · Lying as style · Abstraction from · O harp and altar · The definition of insanity · Substitutions of bass and treble · Rounding up in thought · Der Wegweiser · The originality of losers · Der stürmische Morgen · Ouroboros' four Os · Covers and their contents · As within, so without · Mirror, mirror · Words in air · The musical neutrino · Phases of the moon · Hog the limelight · Singular unless plural · On the uses and abuses of cubism · Totum pro parte · Toward some flashing scene · Confronting the novelty of algorithms · Guesswork · In the village is a hamlet · In the lowest deep · Chance and systematic music · Irrlicht

What oft was thought · Spacetime's upper limit · Knowing not what they do · Cover bands · O glaube, mein Herz · Sans paroles · Simulation hypothesis · God in the wild · Locating consciousness · Things fall apart · Where the camera was · Misers and show-offs · Miles to go · Tweaking the real · Contributions of the setting · Such labour'd nothings · The anxiety of influence · Im Dorfe · To the end and back · The legibility of what's slow · Boulders and thin weeds · Painting's Big Bang · A lot like Corot · Hockney's splash

Waste not · One for all · Upside-down gardens · Mind in the inanimate · Silencing the angels · The volition of plants · Books left on the mantel · Like nothing else · Dumbshow · Symphonic form and utility · Halves and quarters · My life as a cashier · Hippocrates's theory · The woman with the twisted arm · Thumbnails and I · Tokens · Where heaven and earth meet · Taxidermy in the round · Blindness elevated to a universal rule · Cut to the beat · Gravity's kneading · Strange loops · Schrödinger's deck · Theseus and his ship · Saint Martin in the fields · The quick dead · Schubert in furs · The golden rule

Day by day · Faking kintsugi · Chemin de fer · Cleave to the roof of my mouth · Ontology and nonsense · Not really · Much, much ado · Sloughed · Hemisphere of magic fiction · Prolegomena · The time of masters · Effort and the hidden · Confusio linguarum · In sickness and in health · Problems latching · On steampunk · Perfect versus perfected · Camera obscura · The laugh of the Magikarp · Discover what's inside · Health à la carte · Voxels · Completing geometric perspective · Hearing things · Emphasis mine · Taking interpretive risks · Mermaids and dwarves · Hamlet in German · Of no account · Blind neighbors · Angel of history · Music's

late start · Something I don't know · A prayer for the temple · Melt, thaw, and resolve · Equal distribution · Debussy as an idea · Causality pictured · Der Leiermann · Frogger's homology · Flies in the ointment · Occorrono troppe · An English lion · To be · Preempt

ELEVENTH NOTEBOOK

321

Now, now · Pile on · Corruption in musical development · Hic sunt dracones · Greater intelligence · From vine to vine · Digital looking glass · Lady Agnew below the neck · Touching the dial · Crowds by gradations · Interrogating Alexa · Lower than low · A day-long Ninth · Darkness at noon · Measuring the shore · Liszt's failings · Rid of melodies · Making up Sappho's reliquary · The web and the rock · Caterpillars will hatch · The thought held · Giant missteps · Realism of the body · Spooky action on trial · From the horse's mouth · Whittling everything · Joke, no joke · Benefits of doubt · Swept with confused alarms · Personal best · Blowing off steam · Down and out of · Beside the esplanade

TWELFTH NOTEBOOK

345

Volume in its earliest form · Ends of a line · The walls have ears · On paronomasia · Coloring nooks · Useful toil · Hockney in his eighties · Our weirdest medium · Garden of earthly delights · No way through but out · Carried along in the procession · A world at every plunge · A question of attribution · But for the grace of God · Spoiled by war · Qua sky · One length · Brought before the emperor · Experience for machines · Studying tableaux · Slide through my fingers · Photographic surrealism · Der greise Kopf · Information moves, or · Justifying virtuosity · With tapers quenched · Auf dem Flusse · Smaller pills · Der Ring ohne Worte · A blighted one · Tautological · Storming the tower · Little high, little low · Getting latte art · The pleasure of reading Emerson · Me, the theme · Talented enough · Fragonard's swing · Leading the blind · Matryoshka · Could paint that · All such idle fancies

BIBLIOGRAPHY

371

Acknowledgments

Foremost thanks to my parents and to Eileen A. Fradenburg Joy and Vincent W.J. van Ger-
ven Oei for their abiding faith. Grateful acknowledgement is due to Lily Brewer for her as-
siduous editing, MFA@FLA, the Creative Writing Program at the University of Florida, and
friends elsewhere for their love.

*Strangely fertilizing, in the long run, does a
wasted effort of attention often prove.*

—Henry James

#137149



0 50428 30971 1

Distributed by: CVS Pharmacy, Inc.

One CVS Drive, Woonsocket, RI 02895

© 2013 CVS/pharmacy

www.cvs.com 1-800-shop-CVS

Made in China

V-30597



CVS Quality
Money Back Guarantee

callber®

Composition Book

Feb. 2015 -
Apr. 2015

Erica Verian (954) 212-1190
everian12@gmail.com

**College
Ruled**

80 Sheets

4 1/2 in x 3 1/4 in
(11.4 cm x 8.2 cm)

First Notebook

1

Ordinary voodoo. Music has a peculiar way of cinematizing life's passage, looking at hardwood flooring or a skylight; even if one listens inattentively, dusty objects nearly animate as rhythm and environment correlate sensuously.

The greatest delight which the fields and woods minister, is the suggestion of an occult relation between man and the vegetable. I am not alone and unacknowledged. They nod to me and I to them.¹

After a session of yoga, the blood pulsing through one's temples, a slowly turning star suspended under the ceiling appears, vaguely "shimmering," to do so in cognizant acknowledgement of the tune played — the dumb is inspirited, to the degree that mere things sync to the incomplex music from this instructor's playlist. As one operates a Ouija board or would speak with a dog.

2

A totality of involvements. Isolated language, like with a slogan in a shop window, begets its ceaseless enactment. Advertising can be felt to propagate in address of passersby, who "pick up" the message, carrying downtown one frame of its instantiation.

She didn't want to go to bed yet because she knew Jim would be coming out and she wanted to see him as he went out so she could take the way he looked up to bed with her.²

Or how dolls seem to children handling them; there's cerebation in each quavering motion, which the toddler dramatizes with attention as sensitive as a floating needle.

It is, in a positivity that excludes the medium of thought, only barbaric aberration alienated from itself, subjectivity mistaking itself for its object.³

1 Ralph Waldo Emerson, "Nature," in *The Annotated Emerson*, ed. David Mikics (Cambridge: The Belknap Press, 2012), 33.

2 Ernest Hemingway, "Up in Michigan," in *The Complete Short Stories of Ernest Hemingway* (New York: Scribner, 2003), 61.

3 Theodor Adorno, *Minima Moralia: Reflections from Damaged Life*, trans. E.F.N.

3

What thy right hand doeth. While in the middle of the last century American literary criticism declared outside information to be neither necessary nor desirable, it might be said this point of view is concerned only with fewer intention-adroit texts; that is, whether historical accounts of the author's goals can be useful to an evaluator, insofar as they may be incorrect.

In the end, perhaps such a man will produce works *which he is no longer in a position to judge*, so that he utters nothing but stupidities about them, and believes them as well.⁴

4

Reductio ad finem. Some describe abstraction in the plastic arts as participant in a declaration against subjects. Matissean reduction of a fulsome lamp toward its least significant form surely evidences delight with the human world, not disinterest. Or thus a sculptor's process of depicting an ovoid visage or golden bird through the fewest gestures is golf-like, shaving off any excess strokes, as Olympic swimmers do tenths of a second. Corporeality is not rejected outright. It is typical for the paradigmatic chapters of European art's history to be perforated with grandiose reformations and second thoughts as to what seeing really entails—linear and binocular by the sixteenth century, after the rejections of stratigraphic verticality and one-point perspective—until the moderns let subject understudy for the blur of essence.

Scientific accuracy and artistic goals of “what a painting should do” are moving targets.⁵

Boiled down, what's left is often a heavy outline girding unmodulated patches of color.

5

The zen of concentration. The meticulous pleasure derived from first-person shooter in videogames suggests, beyond any empathetic link to violence, that centering one's reticle on a target and anticipating blowback, upgrading parts and the technical comparison of weaponry, finding the optimal path through a course, and execution of objectives are transvaluatively engrossing, as though from a great semiological distance.

Jephcott (New York: Verso, 2005), 240.

4 Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Joyous Science*, ed. and trans. R. Kevin Hill (New York: Penguin Books, 2018), 265.

5 Lorraine Daston, quoted by Steph Yin, “Do You Know What Lightning Really Looks Like?” *The New York Times*, June 11, 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/06/11/science/lightning-paintings-photographs.html>.

They remain true to their destiny by not performing, not participating in the process of abstraction that levels down that destiny, but instead abide as allegories of what they are specifically for.⁶

The challenge lies in perceiving exactly what in a simulation fascinates game-players without leaning on *Newsweek* platitudes. Reflection on the other's enjoyment finds there is a gratification deeper than language in mopping up after close, that a sand garden provides.

The minute we apply a glimmer of consciousness to a mechanical gesture, or practice phenomenology while polishing a piece of old furniture, we sense new impressions come into being beneath this familiar domestic duty. For consciousness rejuvenates everything, giving a quality of beginning to the most everyday actions.⁷

6

Singing of the man. Concerning the classical poet's invocation of the muse, rather than being a desire to gainsay labor, the inspiration and strength of mind required for versifying, its origin is perhaps the now ubiquitous practice of distancing a product from its production, after which point things become associated with the touch of angels. Because a work of art's birth is otherworldly, suggested by obfuscation as to its making, the Greek hearer is funneled toward competing superlatives, every one bordering on supernaturalism.

Publicly to endow the writer with a quite carnal body, to reveal that he enjoys dry white wine and rare beef is to make even more miraculous, of diviner essence, the products of his art.⁸

Artists love to emphasize a work's all-too-human foundation while alluding very little to the hundreds of hours involved. The poet bursts onto the literary scene in a humble tank top, just as *LIFE* magazine released a photo of Faulkner stripped to his shorts, bearing this hint: achievement from so mortal a source.

We would read their shopping lists if we could — such things make them more human, and therefore slightly inhuman, since how is it possible that the authors of *Leaves of Grass* or “Because I could not stop for Death” or *North of Boston* could have needed new stockings, and hair oil, and cornflakes?⁹

6 Adorno, *Minima Moralia*, 228.

7 Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, trans. Maria Jolas (Boston: Beacon Press, 1994), 67.

8 Roland Barthes, “The Writer on Vacation,” in *Mythologies*, trans. Annette Lavers (New York: Hill and Wang, 2012), 24.

9 William Logan, “Elizabeth Bishop at the ‘New Yorker,’” in *Guilty Knowledge, Guilty Pleasure: The Dirty Art of Poetry* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014), 243.

And the novelist is slyly demoted to a perspiring novice. Come holiday season, a bestseller drops from her typewriter.

7

La source. Claude Debussy is frequently to have said, “One must forget that the piano has hammers.”¹⁰ Despite the primary intention, as regards the performance of his music, Debussy’s counsel reflects the much older anxiety over spectator-focused experience. Elevating *L’isle joyeuse*, for example, above the operations of a mere percussion instrument ignores the manual labor of musician and strings, ontologically contingent with its lulling evocations.

The more difficult challenge was to fulfill this imperative in a work that transcended the limitations of its medium without violating the integrity of art itself.¹¹

Apotheosized to the arid plane of metaphysics, this faultless composition alienates its conjuring through consumer estimation. Masterpieces have to be foreign imports from Shangri-La. Jeep and Chevrolet are assumed to manufacture their vehicles on American soil, while Apple’s celebrants view their glossy devices less in terms of material finesse deserving of praise than stamped with sterile holiness, like a tangible vapor, with exploited workers and the planet footing the bill. Privation then buys shares in the product’s ultimate surplus, labeled ethical, celibate, or enlightened, depending on the brand.

The fetishized austerity and performative asceticism of minimalism is a kind of ongoing cultural sickness. We misinterpret material renunciation, austere aesthetics and blank, emptied spaces as symbols of capitalist absolution, when these trends really just provide us with further ways to serve our impulse to consume more, not less.¹²

Not a little disappointingly, it dawns on one that the artisan’s cultural metamorphosis into an artist is simply the familiar, protectionist move that launders copyright to the whiz’s living executors. For all its spirited *Kunstwollen*, the technique said to have been consciously inaugurated with Albrecht Dürer’s Christesque self-portrait also encouraged James Joyce’s *Finnegans Wake*, who saw that a novelist is always a body of scholarship waiting to happen. Industry is willfully misunder-

- 10 Marguerite Long, *At the Piano with Claude Debussy*, trans. Olive Senior-Ellis (J. M. Dent & Sons: London, 1972), 13. Bernard Holland quotes Vladimir Horowitz for the latter’s *New York Times* obituary: “The most important thing is to transform the piano from a percussive instrument into a singing instrument — a singing tone is made up of shadows and colors and contrast. The secret lies mainly in contrasts.”
- 11 James Longenbach, “Why It Must Be Abstract,” *The Georgia Review* 45, no. 1 (Spring 1991): 76.
- 12 Kyle Chayka, “The Oppressive Gospel of ‘Minimalism,’” *The New York Times Magazine*, July 30, 2016, <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/07/31/magazine/the-oppressive-gospel-of-minimalism.html>.

stood as the courage of going it alone. The painter as artistic spinster, childless but for the many apprentices underfoot who haven't visions of their own.

8

Crossover. How much of the planet's endless fauna and flora transfers to the remote galaxies of fantastic literature, tales where magic is freely cast but copper stripped from tunnels underground, while above goes on the husbandry of vaguely bovine animals.

"Always like the earth," she murmured.¹³

Arthur C. Clarke's distant futures are rife with mid-twentieth-century verbal tics. Long ago and far away conform to the hairstyles of America circa 1977. Science fiction is of course limited by the materials of its day and ages past, such that every goofy invention is closer in spirit to the rearrangement of known subparts, however quixotic the final look of things.

"Call them trees, certainly," Harfex had said. "They really are the same thing, only, of course, altogether different."¹⁴

Spike Jonze's film *Her* mostly hedges its prognoses, giving us brainier tech in the familiar dimensions of a shirt pocket and Los Angeles fashion just ahead of the proverbial curve, when our waistbands will be slightly higher and beltless.

9

Love versus lust. Desire is continuous forgetting, while discarding clothing merely reveals the body. Thankfully this is the case, for intimacy would be hopeless if the simple fact of nakedness, as opposed to nudity, automatically involved tapping through skull into the disrobed's emotional universe. Pornography's lesson is that everybody is equipped to show their very bones under disguise of an alias yet tell us nothing.

The striptease sounds ironical or grotesque until we realize that exposure is the key to Utopian society as More devises it; not only do you have no right to privacy, but you also have a duty to publish your whole being.¹⁵

In spite of its later incorporation of the male point of view, in terms of interactivity porn has remained a desolate commodity. Between performer and voyeur

13 Joseph Conrad, "The Tale," in *Tales of Hearsay* (London: T. Fisher Unwin Ltd., 1925), 161.

14 Ursula K. Le Guin, "Vaster Than Empires and More Slow," in *The Wind's Twelve Quarters* (New York: Bantam Books, 1976), 180.

15 Daniel Albright, *Panaesthetics: On the Unity and Diversity of the Arts* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014) 39.

there's of course nothing but light-emitting diodes; like the stranger is alien to us, these actors remain at a fluorescent distance. If lust subsists on the absence of familiarity, truly knowing one's partner prefigures desire's end, the stepped ramp of gentle conversation to foreplay and intercourse a subtle negotiation of attitudes or duck-rabbit of exclusive aspects impossible to entertain simultaneously, flickering between attempts at abuse and the beloved's recollection.

So marriage has its disappointment — call this its impotence to domesticate sexuality without discouraging it, or its stupidity in the face of the riddle of intimacy, which repels where it attracts, or in the face of the puzzle of ecstasy, which is violent while it is tender, as if the leopard should lie down with the lamb.¹⁶

Partners help achieve their own pseudo-objectification with sly glower and a wink, which is to say keeping out of character, as the mother transforms into whore and vice versa. Using language, our bodies intermittently decouple from the black ice of their identities, on which the carnal struggles to gain traction. The antithesis of lust and love would seem to be rooted not in a basic incongruity of the former compared with common life, as one generally errs without sexual pretension, but the acknowledgment and disavowal of the other's subjectivity, loving by the candlelight of memory and desiring upon its extinguishment. "You're like a thousand women in one," remarks Lui in *Hiroshima, Mon Amour*, to which his lover replies, "That's because you don't know me."¹⁷

10

Right all along. Slavoj Žižek is fond of relating how a final, third conjecture — on the revolutions of the heavenly spheres, for instance — can often represent, teleologically, the triumph of some original thesis a long time damned in intellectual circles.¹⁸ In accidental solidarity with him, Noam Chomsky reminds us that "some of the earlier ideas [from the history of European science], which were abandoned, because they seemed completely unfeasible or crazy, have been revived and in fact turn out to be pretty sensible, if looked at from a different point of view."¹⁹ Except one is always left with this existential schist: irreducible stalemate, which cannot

- 16 Stanley Cavell, *Pursuits of Happiness: The Hollywood Comedy of Remarriage* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003), 31.
- 17 *Hiroshima, Mon Amour*, dir. Alain Resnais (Pathé Films, 1959).
- 18 See the discussions in Slavoj Žižek's *Less Than Nothing: Hegel and the Shadow of Dialectical Materialism* (New York: Verso, 2012), 1–19, of *Eppur si muove*, Galileo's likely apocryphal comment upon the heels of recanting heliocentrism, that first of Freud's three narcissistic wounds, before the Inquisition. Bitterly condemned in its own day then finally wedging itself into English canon, one now throws *Jude the Obscure* to the floor for its ridiculous moral overtures and absurd plotting, in which it seems nothing may happen except through coincidence.
- 19 Chomsky's Philosophy, "Noam Chomsky: Mind, Language, and Infinite Use of Finite Means," *YouTube*, October 17, 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1J5FetoYvqk>.

choose a winner between cherishable creation and the whole's incontestable lack of meaning.

There is no center, no inertly given and accepted authority, no fixed barriers ordering human history, even though authority, order, and distinction exist. The secular intellectual works to show the absence of divine originality and, on the other side, the complex presence of historical actuality.²⁰

11

Scale of visual clarity. The airless look of comics, or by and large the aesthetics of Hergé, Winsor McCay, and the rest, can be classed with expressionism due to the twentieth-century movement's disregard for natural perspective. In searching for such an ancestor, the aridity of postimpressionism, a doubling back after *sfumato's* banishment, and its descendent Cloisonnism — flat forms traced with dark wire, whose stylistic antithesis the silk screens of Jacob Lawrence example — hold profoundest sway. Traditionally the face of Christ worsened in clarity the further recessed it is in the picture and gained as one got closer to Golgotha. But to the expressionist, this slide is scarcely abided if at all. The attire of Captain Haddock or Professor Calculus averages about a color, complementing the absolute rule of Hergé's hard edge. It gives no readers pause when, turning the page, the criminal stands now farther from us, either by quick maneuvers or through a shift in the vantage of the scene. Since Hergé begins with a minimum of modularity, if one looks at Captain Haddock's blue turtleneck or Professor Calculus's green mackintosh, what else could be lost to sight.

The grass blades of a meadow a mile off, are so far discernible that there will be a marked difference between its appearance and that of a piece of wood painted green.²¹

Applying classical perspective to this parafocal aesthetic would yield the bizarre conclusion that cartoon distances are informationally equal in every place, as vertical as the throne room of a Cimabue.

12

Hilarotragedy. Correlational with drama's rise in popularity, the obtuse emotional definition of Greek thespians' masks, necessitated by the amphitheater's ballooning girth, involved the thick application of paint and deep incising for shadows to pool, whereby mirth or hate was implied.

20 Edward Said, "Opponents, Audiences, Constituencies, and Community," in *Reflections on Exile and Other Essays* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000), 131.

21 John Ruskin, "Of Truth of Space," in *The Genius of John Ruskin: Selections from His Writings*, ed. John D. Rosenberg (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1998), 28.

A sum of spectacles, none of which is a function: each moment imposes the total knowledge of a passion which suddenly rises straight up on its own, without ever extending toward the consummation of an outcome.²²

While theater fostered an intimate proximity, two and a half millennia before nosebleed seating, film jumped off precisely where action's complete tip-to-tip wingspan came into view, advancing from the motion camera's decreasingly cumbersome portability and later miniaturization, allowing for tight bathroom shots and now long takes of the protagonist walking, frequently ending in credits.²³ Pierrot and Columbine can seem convergently related to the Greek use of overlarge costumes, yet the actors of silent film managed a remarkable bodily transition. Charlie Chaplin, for instance, marched in step with the era's rapid technological development. Because his expressive range included both physical antics and a clarified look, Chaplin's compatibility with cinema's stage days was doubly marketable upon the advent of the close-up. Bridging the gulf between spectator and spectacle then increasingly leaves an actor with opportunities for emotive subtlety. Of paramount importance to the last century's entertainers, our stars, backed up by ingenious editors and audio engineers, manage to hybridize abject physicality with bouts of character.

13

Stoops to conquer, kneels to rise. One could describe the first half of European art as the on-again, off-again attempt to get work and mimetic intention — the *trying* — to line up, a slow gestation that's often miscarried. The deeply serious focus of the second, which follows the late baroque's decline, continues to be delimiting mastery, or the lopsided distribution of artistic sophistication. In order to quit the heights of colorful dexterity achieved during the Italian high renaissance, though later surpassable in terms of natural pungence, the painter of farm animals or rush hour in Chicago has donned the cap of intellect.

14

Ghostless shell. The illusion of subjectivity in a talkative puppet delights children, if it does, through defying the artifice status quo. As concerns *music's* ventriloquism, but also clairvoyant narrators and nickelodeons that talk, a composer like Beethoven exploits our understanding that inert things do not harbor traits such as frustration, exultation, despair, or frivolity. In accounting for the popularity of the *Moonlight* Sonata, we might liken it to a sigh exhaled from an anoxic medium, the semblance of human cognizance in what's obviously artificial.

Like a hollow glass globe, from the emptiness of which a voice speaks.²⁴

22 Roland Barthes, "In the Ring," in *Mythologies*, 4.

23 For example, as the Polish films *Ida* and *Corpus Christi* both conclude.

24 Arthur Schopenhauer, *The World As Will and Representation*, trans. E.J.F. Payne (Mineola: Dover Publications, 1966), 1:278n.

Beethoven's nineteenth-century salon howled and wept, just the same. His lithe chords do more than gibber: right on the heels of its being drawn, a line is crossed. Daguerre and Talbot did as much for their public, the earliest of whom found this interventionless technology, capable of fidelitous portraits, preposterously swift; a commercial *éclat* for applied chemistry. In our social imagination, the arrival of the new is usually expected to be gradual, considering the general breadth of science, countless headstones in diameter. But whether that is the silly yowl of Peter Frampton's Les Paul or Cosmo, toymaker Anki's "real-life" robot, the economic upshot to feigned affectation is inescapably a monetary bonus laundered in the guise of scientific progress.

15

Getting in the spirit. Doesn't capitalism's tendency to rarify consumables seem neatly simpatico with the last century's mass secularization. On the ontological battlefield Nestlé intends to conquer matter itself.

The conclusion which one draws from this is that what must be added to the dead signs in order to make a live proposition is something immaterial, with properties different from all mere signs.²⁵

Although a boisterous majority of us abjure the existence of angels, we'd swear an unopened can of soda contained something holier than carbonated water, food-grade coloring, and corn fructose: a trade ingredient too complicated to be named. With objects and their simple materiality apotheosized, a God who was always metaphysically special now declines into ordinary wonder. Once again this dead heat, civilization's achievement as magnificent as it is existentially tenuous. Owing to the shortfall in a tie-breaking vote, everywhere one looks there is a winnowing; painting's redaction of depth and sculpture's brutality, the eschatological cliff music goes over, and consumers' temporal myopia in the form of the dissolution of labor. Artwork courts our disbelief at its coming to be in the first place, and philosophers grope at birds in flight or a ship's identity, which otherwise can be defined by Linnaeans down to the barbule and physicists a state of matter, who are leaned always toward elementariness.

Every mental phenomenon must be grounded in, or anchored to, some underlying physical base (presumably, a neural state). This means that mental states can occur only in systems that can have physical properties; namely physical systems.²⁶

"Arranging what we have always known" limits the discipline's lifespan, just as Ludwig Wittgenstein intended. Given hard science's remedial promulgations — basi-

25 Ludwig Wittgenstein, *The Blue and Brown Books* (New York: Harper & Row, 1965), 4.

26 Jaegwon Kim, "Mental Causation," in *The Oxford Handbook of Philosophy of Mind*, eds. Brian P. McLaughlin, Ansgar Beckermann, and Sven Walter (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 40.

cally, the technical form of quietism—those softer fields attempt to outlive the trash compactor of ignorance dwindling, with our human motives incrementally reducible to chemistry.

16

Yes, but. In the fine arts if not elsewhere, overauthenticity should refer to the excessive use of characteristic visual, unless musical or linguistic, cues in the work of forgers and harmless imitators. Along the border of Van Gogh's rendering of the ukiyo-e woodblock prints *The Plum Orchard in Kameido* and *Evening Shower at Atake and the Great Bridge*, he employs far more Japanese lettering than Hiroshige.

The poverty of the sunrise in Richard Strauss' "Alpine Symphony" results not only from its banal sequences but from its very splendour. For no sunrise, even in mountains, is pompous, triumphal, imperial; each one is faint and timorous, like a hope that all may yet be well, and it is this very unobtrusiveness of the mightiest light that is moving and overpowering.²⁷

Also his tender painting copied from Jean-François Millet's *First Steps*, in which Van Gogh's cottage looks close to collapsing under all that straw's weight. With lushly conspicuous emphasis on what strikes him as the primary element of such a dwelling, Van Gogh signals the fact alone of shelter, as though unconsciously. Subjectively perceived importance is related through disproportionate sizing, like in the victory stele commissioned by a Mesopotamian king.

Overbelief, as distinguished from what is justified on emotional grounds as faith, might be described as hyperbole taken at face value then lambasted on the basis of perceived ostentation or danger. Presumably to jocular internet Christians, their foil, the atheist feedbag-magazines howl in rebuttal that New Secularism is not a form of religion. How unimpressively true the headline but embarrassing the drama, cooked up for dunces.

It's strange, you were ungainly, but you were never wrong.
You had the yessers and noddors and eggers-on
to take care of that. Ungainliness in this instance
happened to be the price of rightness.²⁸

Boatloads of internet chatter lurch with what these sleuths see as healthy skepticism. If a laudable engineering goal, the moon surely lies beyond any space agency's reach. Likewise, an album of Kendrick Lamar's or *Jimmy Corrigan: The Smartest Kid on Earth* will be praised as somehow greater than their genres.

Indeed, I could say that Shakespeare surpasses literature altogether, if I knew what I meant.²⁹

27 Adorno, *Minima Moralia*, 111.

28 Michael Hofmann, "Portrait d'une Femme," in *One Lark, One Horse* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2018), 14.

29 Virginia Woolf, *The Diary of Virginia Woolf: 1925–1930*, ed. Anne Olivier Bell

Perhaps the opposite of Shakespeare's case, whose irreproachably stupendous corpus is thereby supposed to outshine any Elizabethan known to us, is like saying that Hemingway's fiction never was great, this coincident with the fact that the author comes off a bit sexist by our standards. In Carl Theodor Dreyer's *Ordet*, a religious man loses his sanity through reading the works of Kierkegaard. Or there's modern Olympic long-jumpers vying to beat Phyllos of Kroton's record, although the Greeks made multiple standing leaps assisted by halters. Artur Schnabel, Stakhanovite of the piano, fails to honor the *Hammerklavier's* faulty metro-nome markings,³⁰ whose *Schlag* comprised two half notes.

17

Musically like a glove. Albeit with qualifications, I long ago relented to the quaintly heterodox opinion that Chopin exceeds even Beethoven and Brahms³¹ in sheer gift if not ear-splitting profundity, insofar as it is in him that European classical music's strenuous hundred-year pilgrimage achieved its goal of what could be called the "perpetuum melodia." Quarried not under a microscope, as one might see Bach hunched over a backlit slide tweezing sheets of minuscule veinage, but in copious slabs cloven with dynamite, Chopin's best melodies are elephantine enough to stand for composition itself. Beethoven feigns disorientation at the center of his best labyrinths, while Bach is a builder of boxwood mazes. Chopin runs the optimal path through his oneiric tangles, entertaining neither Tchaikovsky's lack of resolve nor Schubert's circular absorption. In contrast to one like Schumann, a Chopin melody is no pretty oyster delivered for the listener's shucking.

A tune is a kind of tautology, it is complete in itself; it satisfies itself.³²

Telemann gives us the tradition's diligent beachcomber, his day-after-day haul a lot of conches and other shells of common whorl. Among high-profile suspects, there's Schumann and Mendelssohn decorating serious morsels fishable with one's tongue,³³ their numerous suites and trios handsomely frontispiced; sheltered by

(London: Hogarth Press, 1980), 301.

- 30 While Beveridge Webster apparently nails them, it's unclear what merit there is in obtaining a golden ring placed so very high erroneously. Then there's General Electric engineer Marvin Pipkin, who invented the frosted diffuser bulb after being assigned the task as a joke.
- 31 It occurs to me only too late that there is a strange resemblance of pattern to be found between Johannes Brahms's symphonies and Frédéric Chopin's ballades. Both sets come to four in total, with the first in each being somewhat over-wrought and the most calorically dense. The Second Ballade is the lightest, as is true of Brahms's Second Symphony, written over a summer in the alps. Like Brahms's Third Symphony, Chopin's Third Ballade achieves an ideal balance between its form and content; it is the most Chopinesque of the four. And the last ballade, like Brahms's futuristic final symphony, is Chopin at his most sublime.
- 32 Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Notebooks, 1914-1916*, eds. G.H. von Wright and G.E.M. Anscombe, trans. G.E.M. Anscombe (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1961), 35.
- 33 When the poster movement for a popular work is shown to have borrowed its best idea, what then? In Mendelssohn's Piano Trio in D Minor, the andante

organized tonal wholes, their melodies appear to us like delightful orphans in underwhelming homes. Pop music does precisely this when digitized vocal fry or a somewhat novel hook qualifies a three-minute single for Billboard's all-important roll. And like the idiophonic steelpan and hang attract solely on the basis of their opalesque resonance, on the radio a nonnutritive fluff of separable "effects" — syrupy lyrics, with the pulse monotonous — is stacked like pancakes.

Bach achieved that Goldilocks state of Chopin's, where logic congeals and the essential is beautifully said, on countless occasions. Baroque music can be downright agreeable for miles. Like a fairgrounds juggler, the entertainment lies in keeping aloft so many bowling pins and oranges. Millions are the studious oiling lamps for a drop of Hippocrene, the lubrication of a halfway-decent keyboard sonata, but where, upon application, the drop dries. Others are like the cartoonist's escaped Alcatraz felons whose makeshift tunnel ends up under San Francisco Bay. Bach's steady peal of chorales devised for mass, along with stirring concertos, the works for solo violin, and everything else, deliver us unto acres of haystacks worth rifling through for what findable glories hide there; golden eggs when it comes to the likes of Henryk Wieniawski, a third-rate career at least prolific in sustained effort.

It was, from the first, an everlasting war
 Conducted, as always, at gigantic cost.
 Think of the droughts, the shifts of wind and weather,
 The many seeds washed to some salt conclusion
 Or brought to rest at last on barren ground.
 Think of some inching tendrils worming down
 In hope of water, blind and white as death.³⁴

In the latter movement of Beethoven's final sonata for the piano, he breaches something resembling Dixieland before the letter. Metaphorical eons of tonal pressure collapse, like "a lock which suddenly yields after a thousand ineffectual attempts,"³⁵ and either the motif instantly compresses into a diamond of ecstasy or anticipates New Orleans jazz, depending on whether you ask Andrés Schiff. Subducting into a deeper contingency, this last evolution is a masochistic rupture that can't help leaking the future.

con moto tranquillo is too earwormish to be genuine; and so it uses Schubert's Impromptu in G-flat. Truly unfortunate is that Samuel Barber's *Adagio for Strings*, the single opus on which the man's reputation rests, was derived from the D-sharp Minor fugue in the second book of Bach's *Well-Tempered Clavier*, like Béla Bartók's best-loved works depend on his ethno-musical appropriation of Romanian folk tunes. Another example of the fishable morsel is surely *Orfeo ed Euridice*, where Christoph Willibald Gluck's inclusion within the "Dance of the Blessed Spirits" of what is only called *Melodie* appears purely advantageous: a second, lesser gemstone is crammed into an occupied diadem in order to safeguard against its loss.

34 Anthony Hecht, "Green: An Epistle," in *Collected Earlier Poems* (New York: Borzoi Books, 1990), 119.

35 Roland Barthes, "Einstein's Brain," in *Mythologies*, 24.

That theory might emerge, as quantum theory did from classical physics, from violations in quantum theory that appear if we push it hard enough.³⁶

18

Seekers and finders. Compared with Bach, Mozart, and Beethoven, while they themselves encapsulate the trend in miniature with their steady albeit less precipitous decline in sheer prolificacy, music's only one really serious problem is the increasingly slight output of composers, beginning with the late romantic period. Among the most disheartening is Jean Sibelius: cursed with the Finnish state's lifetime pension, he gave up early on and burned a mature symphony.

The potential Schuberts flee in alarm, but the Professor Jadassohns march in bravely. That is to say, music is hard for musicians, but easy for pedants and quacks.³⁷

I wonder if this dropping off has to do with melody's stranglehold on the romantic imagination, become a daily Grail quest by Mozart's time but which he knew as something closer to finding decorated eggs, such that Brahms without an original idea to divulge sounds almost vulgar. Incidentally or not, here is the end of divertimenti, and the opus per se comes to necessitate an epic. After the Ninth, composition amounts to a great undertaking, for one no longer tosses off twenty-minute symphonies over lunch. But however monolithically heroic the architecture it must also be studded with glorious opals of feeling.

Compare the lessening output of composers, a fact exponentially relevant up to our deficient present, with Roland Barthes's observations on the modern car, or videogame studios that license the Lego brand for its oddly satisfying compartmentalized aesthetic. For the origin of aura, one can study the global campaign to bloat commercial value through intimations of qualitative surplus, as a slogan of Coca-Cola's shows:

It was already Marx who long ago emphasized that a commodity is never just a simple object that we buy and consume. A commodity is an object full of theological, even metaphysical, niceties. Its presence always reflects an invisible transcendence. And the classical publicity for Coke quite openly refers to this absent, invisible, quality.³⁸

Along the same lines falls Debussy's comment about a piano's hammers and the routine instruction that junior string players emulate the human voice. And what of portamento? A continuous glide through large tones that sounds all those be-

36 Philip Ball, "Physicists Want to Rebuild Quantum Theory from Scratch," *Quanta Magazine*, August 30, 2017, <https://www.quantamagazine.org/quantum-theory-rebuilt-from-simple-physical-principles-20170830/>.

37 H.L. Mencken, "Music as a Trade," in *A Mencken Chrestomathy* (New York: Vintage, 1982), 548.

38 Slavoj Žižek, quoted in Sophie Fiennes, dir., *The Pervert's Guide to Ideology* (Zeitgeist Films, 2012).

tween, more incremental than any notation. Like birdsong, the cello has no ivory division, though a cellist adheres to one just the same. Plot holes remind the reader of a tale's fictitiousness. An error, such as that in *Lord of the Flies* where the focal of Piggy's eyeglasses is incompatible with igniting campfires, is ontologically accountable only through the author's judicial summons. Around the fin de siècle composers begin to hide the unsightly seam, binning whatever alludes to the composition's homespun pedigree. This is accomplished either through devotion to succinctness or quibbling over musical crumbs, as pigeons do; not charging toward the miraculous birth but hanging a star overhead. It is necessary to broaden the symbols.

As with New Vintage's embrace of styles so refurbished it might seem they never took place, there are anemic zones in Bach's mammoth catalog, which one might in another sense think of as noise, uninteresting part-inventions and fantasias that never make their point. Like the child taps at a nail slowly wilting to one side and the surrounding wood is dented with crescents, an image to be contrasted with the carpenter's true couple of blows.

We tend to conceal from our audience all evidence of "dirty work," whether we do this work in private or allocate to a servant, to the impersonal market, to a legitimate specialist, or to an illegitimate one.³⁹

Xenomelic limbs, while integral to bigger, not-unpleasant journeys, feel so artistically sovereign they appear to warrant amputation, like Mascagni's singularly famous intermezzo, the giant-spot-like chorale in Holst's *Jupiter*, Rachmaninoff's eighteenth variation, and Elgar's ninth. In short, renaissance bumps into renaissance in the chronicles of literature as much as painting, and the mushrooming impotence of European music over its handful of eras parallels the suburban home's total war against dust. Quality once kept pace with quantity's trot. Dvořák worried in a letter that finally he composed too much; and, if one audits the Czech master's career, the ratio of strikes to uncontested hits verifies this fear. Owing to his worship of silence, Thomas Carlyle hesitated to speak, while Schubert's farewell sonata growls nine bars out of the gate.

Bach is like early modern painting, where one rehearses ahead of shooting in order to get everything in a single take and closes case on the subject.

The music no longer presents itself as being in a process of development. Thematic labor becomes merely part of the composer's preliminary labor. Variation as such no longer appears at all. Everything and nothing is variation; the process of variation is itself relegated to the material and preforms it before the composition properly begins.⁴⁰

Beethoven begins the habit, commonplace now after a century and a half, of re-visiting the scene of the crime obsessively, the quintessentially romantic desperation to capture rightly, like the optimist jumping from failure to failure and the

39 Erving Goffman, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (New York: Anchor Books, 1959), 44.

40 Theodor Adorno, *Philosophy of New Music*, ed. and trans. Robert Hullot-Kentor (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006), 50.

cynic harrumphing over each success. Or it's the difference between "Once upon a time..." where setting and principals are introduced together at the outset, and only getting to the beating heart of the novel partway through. Painting succumbs to this in time, beginning with repeat landscapists like Claude Lorrain and later J.M.W. Turner, who's looking to finally pull off sunrise. It goes without saying that nature is daily before us and the observant learn afresh as often, while no one has a monopoly on the death of Hyacinth or Caesar, except of course Shakespeare. Is it possible to imagine Caravaggio doing Matthew — the oafish saint hunched over his gospel, club of a foot lifted in thought — one hundred times?

But why, I thought, why so many existences, since they all look alike?⁴¹

Until the birth pangs of modernity can be felt, trying is a business relegated to the sketch pad.⁴² Gelmeroda is reached for, doggedly, by Lyonel Feininger, who isn't necessarily thirstier than Aesop's fox but less fain to discouragement. Churning out a glut of *Lieder ohne Worte* based on lottery odds is no surer undertaking than Heinrich Schliemann camped in the vicinity of Troy with hired entourage and a bevy of pickaxes, feverishly hollowing out tells like they're cornflakes before deciding the bottommost bauble once belonged to Agamemnon. Chopin dug after truffles in a ferocious downpour and failing health only to publish his nocturnes two at a time.

19

Through the glass. Instrumental music can be thought of as offering more or fewer ideas per composition. The largest chunk of the genre's actual, unrecorded output is barren. Greater or lesser than is meaningless when it comes to individual melodies. Analogous then is Ludwig Wittgenstein's simple dictum that "All propositions are of equal value."⁴³ If Chopin's melodies seem to us stronger than those of Schumann, that's because they're integrated better, like well-appointed houses with inspired furniture and large hearths. Schumann's too often verge on foreclosure, the cupboard just half full; one senses his debts behind everything, the basic struggle to make do. Affected music strikes us as truthful through veneers of candor and exigence. The composer must be rattling on about *something*.

On account of this lack of material not only do we see the gift for composition developed at the most tender age but very talented composers frequently remain throughout their life the most ignorant and empty-headed of men.⁴⁴

- 41 Jean-Paul Sartre, *Nausea*, trans. Lloyd Alexander (New York: New Directions, 1964), 133.
- 42 Qualified exception should be made for something like Joseph Haydn's string quartets, standalone works that nevertheless represent a lifetime of interrogating a particular form, like athletes also practice through competing.
- 43 Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, trans. D.F. Pears and B.F. McGuinness (New York: Routledge Classics, 2001), 86.
- 44 G.W.F. Hegel, quoted by Adorno, *Philosophy of New Music*, 18.

Veracity in appearance is enough for the ear, a historical lie being the cloth from which an origin for the *Hebrides* was cut. Beethoven had inexhaustible energy for enlacing a conceit, Tchaikovsky hardly any, while one suspects that Bach didn't share the latter's fitfulness. Chopin's are herbs bloomed inside of jars, or espalier-like themes developed along each measure's length. He has the efficiency of great patience, never content to fill a gap with banged-out clods of dirt, and the CEO's wisdom to make his listener a shareholder.

In his preface to *The Phenomenology of Mind*, Hegel clarifies, "The truth is the whole. The whole, however, is merely the essential nature reaching its completeness through the process of its own development."⁴⁵ Whole-as-truth would be unsound because it suggests a process toward creating truth, as opposed to discovery. In other words, "themes often do not reside at a determinate point in musical space but rather come into being gradually as the piece unfolds."⁴⁶ Composition is an allographic⁴⁷ spyglass trying the horizon for sight of land, thus a melody seemingly of great beauty is rather one more thoroughly spied.

The music is behind those dots. You search for it, and that is what I mean by the grand manner. I play, so to speak, from the other side of the score, looking back.⁴⁸

Comparing the inner movements of Mozart's fourteenth keyboard sonata with Beethoven's eighth, one might observe that Mozart's discovery of a femur and several vertebrae enabled Beethoven to unearth a brontosaurus. This genre's tragedy is the certain existence of additional fossils none are equipped to excavate, barred doors to which the only passholders are deceased. We never get so much as a whiff of masterpieces Chopin, Schubert, and Mozart would have written, had it not been for syphilis and tuberculosis, works not aborted but unbegun.

Yes, a key can lie for ever in the place where the locksmith left it, and never be used to open the lock the master forged it for.⁴⁹

One exception could be the ideas of dodecaphony, their length being rationally determined from without. But this also suggests, from the other way around, that what attracts us to melodies is their paradoxical embeddedness in that which by

45 G.W.F. Hegel, *The Phenomenology of Mind*, trans. Sir J.B. Baillie (New York: Cosimo Classics, 2005), 1:81.

46 Jeffrey Swinkin, "Variation As Thematic Actualisation: The Case of Brahms's Op. 9," *Music Analysis* 31, no. 1 (2012): 39.

47 This term, introduced by Nelson Goodman in *Languages of Art*, refers to "works of art such as pieces of music or literary texts where there can be multiple copies, each of which is equally an instance of the work" (*Oxford Reference*, s.v. "allographic"). Gaston Bachelard offers a similar fact with regard to visual media: "For images cannot be measured. And even when they speak of space, they change in size. The slightest value extends, heightens, or multiplies them." Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, 173.

48 Vladimir Horowitz, quoted by Bernard Holland, "Vladimir Horowitz, Titan of the Piano, Dies," *The New York Times*, November 6, 1989, A1.

49 Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Culture and Value*, trans. Peter Winch (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), 54e.

necessity leaves them incomplete; the thinking ear is tantalized by the possibility of further development, despite the composition's finitude. Fitting naturally inexhaustible material to the procrustean row is artifact-making without the expected utility of pleasure, as opposed to the nurturing effect a boundary has, which in no sense limits an idea — the thinking being that music must inevitably resolve and conclude — but provides the necessary framework for growth; without this a musical germ suffers the worse fate of mere dormancy. Immortality of nonexistence on the one hand, which seems loftier because it is undefined, on the other a freedom that is time-sensitive and repaid with one's death. A mother does not mortally condemn her child by giving it life in the first place.

20

God in pain. Mozart is the musical Christ, while romanticism's prime mover is Beethoven. Bruckner could almost be their fusion if not for Bach; his is a spectacularly painful music set on religion's stage, a millstone hung from an angel's neck. Or the dialetheia of a cold pulse, namely analytical baroque will, bodied in the full-throated vigor of Wagner. For the same difference there's Alex Ross's description of the Brahms's Fourth Symphony as "rationalized thunder," its extensive counterpoint tick-tocking through the slow-to-die, involuntary knell of the classical idiom.

Anachronism becomes the refuge of modernity.⁵⁰

21

Pneumatic engine. Painters emerging late in impressionism, most notably Paul Gauguin and Vincent van Gogh but also Henri Rousseau, Émile Bernard, and Paul Sérusier, signal the beginning of a collapse when they exclude atmosphere (whipping rain, the fog lifting) while *leaving in place* distortion that atmosphere would otherwise have begot; with nothing to equalize the pressure, what follows is additional redactions. In a matter of decades, the Brittany countryside is a tranquil vacuum where Les Nabis rove as earthbound saints (they're the Schuberts of European painting) and the Fauvists stand palm leaves on edge. Note the radical flatness of any of Édouard Vuillard's patterns: compared, for instance, with Kehinde Wiley's brand of parquetry, boringly competent and easily churned out for a lifetime, Vuillard's blurry persons combine like sheets, one before the other, until a roomful of furniture crams together expensively upholstered textiles, the floral-est wallpaper, and a swath of tablecloth overhung for what additional showing that affords; except for the odd monochrome patch — the artist's mother, outfitted in complete black, has pulled aside a mustard-yellow curtain to reveal a flowery wall — every atom of these canvases shimmers, as though the electromagnetic frequency were dialed way up.

50 Adorno, *Minima Moralia*, 221.

22

Colanders. A photographer chooses, selecting this sitter or locale over that, while painters and sculptors elutriate. Michelangelo chiseled out his subject and subsequently excluded next to everything.

We who are all aswim in time,
We, “the inconstant ones,”
How can such fixture speak to us?⁵¹

Art lifts boudoirs and table fruit in its perforated sieve, disposing of their finer silt.

23

Look here. Associated equally with unschooled drawers and the illuminators of Carolingian manuscripts, a disjunct picture directs us by virtue of its disunity; a splendid counterintuition. Comic strips guide our eyes in a similar manner as they hop between lily pads of discrete, pooled hues.

The natural color of a thing in ordinary daylight, uninfluenced by the proximity of other colors.⁵²

Jewelry, too: the earlobes stapled with pearls, each of these ocean-borne coalescences is for landing on, while diaphanous chain spills crisscrossed vicinities down the wearer’s collarbone and throat. In lieu of hard nodes, sparkling.

24

Table 1

	Gesticulation	Stillness
Articulation	Television	Radio
Silence	Pantomime	Photography

25

Bodies and organs. Appropriating Gilles Deleuze’s concept of the body without organs, we might think of a compositional form’s melodies, or at least noteworthy themes, as its organs. Presumably, healthier instrumental music has both a body and organs, form tight with its content; but then it’s possible to imagine them apart, too, as lengthy exercises focused on technique or a collection of melodic bonbons.

51 Anthony Hecht, “Dichtung und Wahrheit,” in *Collected Earlier Poems*, 113.

52 *Oxford English Dictionary*, s.v. “local color.”

Table 2

Body	Organs
Cello Suites	<i>Kinderszenen</i>
<i>Pastoral Symphony</i>	

There is a plant-like quality to an idea when seemingly it lacks the means for its greatest expression, drooping wanly out of its unsuitable clay for want of a trellis. But a composition short on skillfully developed ideas is simply composition done for the titillation of labor or to satisfy a patron, like a novel composed solely of verbs or a decorated stage without actors. In the first case, a zombie running on motor cortex alone, “like the hand that wanders around alone in early surrealist films,”⁵³ the second, a heart preserved in cognac.

The former is reminiscent of the ceremonial courtesy—as at a masked ball—of many schizophrenics. All that remains to this music after having successfully exorcised the soul is the empty shell of the animate.⁵⁴

26

The opposite of prolixity. Selection allows the hero’s labors to succeed flawlessly, opposed to a history of misfires, slips of tongue, and faulty judgment. Concision makes literature parsable, stabilizes paintings, and gives music contiguity.

27

Actually or nearly fractal. One finds sinkholes of depth in a photograph physicaly minute, such as those from Helen Levitt’s career. Large pictures are grasped by visitors to the gallery a brief moment after their heads saccade. Confronting a wall of Levitt’s work, it is first the elementary recognition of a monochrome tonal palette set in organizing quadrilaterals. But under examination a multitude of shapes are detected, faces with the indentation of age, a brownstone’s every concrete pore. Against a photographic negative, a painting’s informational quotient is nothing. In the art of Joel Stanulonis, pencil drawings showcasing the crammed instrument panels of aircraft are realized, upon close inspection, to contain satirical labels.

28

Tugs-of-war. Increasingly prevalent in mainstream features and top-tier television, the resounding displeasure the latest digital framerate meets with was to be expected. Art has the odd distinction of both resembling life and being unmistakably removed from it. Motion blur, that gentle reminder of cinema’s unreality, is threatened.

53 Slavoj Žižek, *How to Read Lacan* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 2007), 62.

54 Adorno, *Philosophy of New Music*, 133.

We know that beyond 60 images per second there will be no more viewers, since nothing more will be perceived.⁵⁵

Movies leave a degree of contrivance but grudgingly, coerced by the technology's limitations. *The Hobbit's* high framerate, even in spite of the movie's other artificiality, too closely matches the quotidian liveliness in spite of which one's laptop is looked at, its surroundings of pressed wood at once lackluster by comparison and begrimed with authenticity. Consumers pine for the combination of ownership's familiarity and the alienation of what is vestal, or like Mrs. Ramsay's refrigerator "fringed by joy." In other words, a product seemingly estranged by the enormity of its own prebought potential, as when Samara's restless ghost, tuned to a dead channel, climbs from the television screen. After leaving Best Buy, the household vows to preserve the effervescence of this costly fount — The Consumer's Prayer. Eventually the hot air leaks away and the object's hyped prestige, guaranteed in all but legal print, then seems a ruse, no loftier in the cosmic hierarchy than something dropped from a great height. Yards of Ingres and Leighton turn out to be pigmented hemp. We've wanted it both ways since Babel, but these haystacks contain needles and finding them pains us. The ambivalent tugs-of-war continue until credulity is pulled into the mud by the first scratch.

The human is a rope, fastened between beast and Overhuman — a rope over an abyss.⁵⁶

29

The glazier's burden. Stained glass differs from painting not in its detached laying of color, to the extent that one thinks of an art palette as dollops of solid colors, but that glass is salted before its application. This incapacity for blending hues prior to their assemblage, a honeycomb effect, is shared by a cartoonist's dependence on Adobe software, her scanned boneyard of lines is finally inked by bucket tool. The glazier's burden is similar: to slot piecemeal into the lead comes what already is. Little wonder, then, that these mediums respectively foster the so-called Poor Man's Bible and Sunday funnies.

30

And yet I was not seen. Is there a class of artist *never* invited in from the cold to thaw beside appreciation's fireplace, omitted year after year is from curators' widening delectuses and unmentionable in the official literature, despite its continual amendment? Alcoholism and manslaughter are neither causes for exclusion, nor the loud beliefs that offended once, which eventually became our salves. Ignored are those millions of isolatos, the associate professor sponging sea foam in her liv-

55 Paul Virilio, interview by Chris Dercon, "Speed-Space," in *Virilio Live: Selected Interviews*, ed. John Armitage (Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 2001), 76.

56 Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, trans. Graham Parker (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 13.

ing room, the hobbyist tinkering in a garage, homebodies who grasp zip about the chronicles they flout and into which many ache bitterly for induction.

It is less that I am known in the broader community than that I know I could be known, less that you know my name than that I know I am named.⁵⁷

Manqués below average in their mother tongues struggle to get verse in edgewise, having caught the new millennium's complicated murmur like flu. Standing apart requires a *from*, so while the critical jurisdiction has been extended from coliseums to the barest wisp of brushwork and theoretical disinclination is no bar, if its goals are crossed or missing altogether the thing disqualifies itself. Incidentally, a space is left for the world's Kinkades, whose *raison d'être* is twinklingly clear. Truly it is the loser who, shoving off on abortive journeys without so much as an internal compass, is shunned on the basis of pure originality, helpless before the most philanthropic critic.

In this sense more than any other, perhaps, the proposition is true that the most individual is the most general.⁵⁸

31

Predict the inevitable. It is a question that precedes its formulation, of the beautiful being so. Proclaiming beauty, following a prejudiced about-face, is to discover what has always been the case. Canon is a doctrine of Calvinist flavor; for every tome deposited the weight, in units of merit, is noted precisely, while Dr. Eliot's shelf could be a foot too long or Oxford's catalog in error. Judges of books less arbitrate disputes than estimate the contents of a sealed vault, like the specific import of a Rubens multiplies when a pupil adds grapefruit to the master's still life and the papacy gives Eve a fig leaf; and safflower oil spins a rivulet web as the craquelure yellows. Images need promulgation as ardently as finches the denomination of their species, which flourished in sexed variety long before the watercolors of Audubon.

It is extremely doubtful if these animals, were they able to call, would call for pictorial representation of their plight but, more likely, would, if they were articulate, call for some one to alleviate their condition.⁵⁹

The aesthetic narrative foretelling abstract expressionism, begun five centuries ago and culminating in East Hampton, Long Island, can just be told in hindsight.

57 Ben Lerner, *The Hatred of Poetry* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2016), 15–16.

58 Adorno, *Minima Moralia*, 45.

59 Ernest Hemingway, "A Natural History of the Dead," in *The Complete Short Stories of Ernest Hemingway* (New York: Scribner, 2003), 336.

Every great man has a retroactive effect: on account of him, all history is weighed in the balance again, and a thousand ancient mysteries come crawling out of their hiding places — into the light of *his* sun.⁶⁰

That independent specters of the real “show up” in our lives sounds too much like a rogue Guignol confronting its forgetful puppeteer, or maybe a police officer clapping herself on the shoulder, and temporal disjunction, insofar as I’m powerless to describe anything as having been prior to its retrospective interpellation from this present — the only where. Greenness and the triangle strike us as eternal for being eternally possible, in terms of the universe’s inceptive potential to devise intelligent life. This is post-diction.

The properly dialectical solution of the dilemma of “Is it really there, in the source, or did we only read it into the source?” is thus: it is there, but we can only perceive and state this retroactively, from today’s perspective.⁶¹

32

The gift outright. When we think of today’s artist, exceeding by lightyears her distant peerage and endowed since neoclassicism with the means equal to her every ambition, how is it that she’s tempered, given the breadth of aid? For the graphic designer, crossing Cooper Union chops with loaded software fuels a white flame of loquacity. It remains a short time ago that scholars chased a tossed-off comment through flaking indices. By comparison, the internet’s collective glossary fills a writer’s sail beyond use. T.S. Eliot is certainly justified in his outlay of proper nouns, given the decades of monkish concentration their accumulation implies. Capital letters throng the cantos of Ezra Pound, who is modern poetry’s Cézanne, as much as they do “The Waste Land,” whose stanzas are like the crowd that flows over London Bridge. The allusions nearly bump into one another.

While the historian and the philosopher are advancing in, and accelerating, the progress of knowledge, the poet is wallowing in the rubbish of departed ignorance.⁶²

In compensation for unlimited hyperlinked fodder, the post-internet poet administers self-governance and shuns what is now overly accessible. Creative undertakings seldom harbor secondary aspirations but blossom, like fulfilling prophecies, for achievable ends; as with Pompeii’s fancifully named rooms, plastered with fresco columns supporting leafy clusters of grapes or Indian birds. Although the plurality might strike one as ambidextrous, its ontological purpose is straightforwardly domestic. Challenges these artists came up against weren’t solved with

60 Nietzsche, *The Joyous Science*, 62. See also Jorge Luis Borges, “Kafka and His Precursors,” in *Labyrinths: Selected Stories & Other Writings*, eds. Donald A. Yates and James E. Irby (New York: New Directions, 1964).

61 Slavoj Žižek, *In Defense of Lost Causes* (New York: Verso, 2009), 312.

62 Thomas Love Peacock, “The Four Ages of Poetry,” in *The Works of Thomas Love Peacock*, ed. Henry Cole (London: Richard Bentley & Sons, 1875), 3:334–36.

theory but calculus, the domicile's ambitiousness equal to the owner's delight in illusion.

What continues to exist simply by virtue of heroic effort could just as well no longer exist.⁶³

In that sense, decorative art is an insular practice, and the endless deliberations and philosophical accomplishments abrogated in their day are then bequeathed to a timeline. A tastefully framed photograph is preferable to such opulence, but not in deference to photography's veracity, a notion now mundanely familiar for its repudiation.⁶⁴ Paul Gauguin, whose more-foreign-than-foreign tableaus could hardly be more self-consciously enigmatic, wrote in his journals, "The painter has not before him the same task as the mason, that of building a house, compass and rule in hand, according to the plan furnished by the architect."⁶⁵ Incomplex painting in our day is consciously chaste, which by ancient standards meant ambition in a form comparatively simple. Idealizing an upright vase or bird of paradise was nobody's choice.

33

Graphical self-sabotage. Art in the twenty-first century curbs its prodigious facility by way of ballpoint pens, goose quills, gunpowder. Implying contrition, a blunt tool licenses all the fuller ejaculation. Becky Allen, for instance, a process-oriented minimalist who uses irregular linear forms, circumvents the boycott on abandon through artful prostration; meanwhile, the monasteries all echo with laughter. Norman McLaren's direct-animation style, the technique of drawing onto blank film stock — or engraving, in the case of developed stock — is a piquant alternative to the real gaudiness of midcentury American cinema and an example of ostensibly kosher asceticism intelligized in honor of the industrial revolution. These laboriously nimble cels, however they might have been in the most literal sense innovative, stand for craft's abdication. Except this amounted to a decision on McLaren's part, circling back to byzantine squalor with feathery quadrilles.

63 Adorno, *Philosophy of New Music*, 21.

64 Photography's mechanical simplicity and inexhaustible wellspring of framed compositions, coughed up automatically, continue to have deleterious effects on many an unprincipled artist looking to outsource inspiration; tracing her subjects from random life, without intervening creatively, on the assumption that the palsied, off-color difference between source and end product will itself be identified as what's aesthetic. The "creeping realism" of this sort dooms much contemporary painting, which otherwise might have hit on an adequate subject interestingly composed, to uncanny almost-thereness.

65 Paul Gauguin, *Gauguin's Intimate Journals*, trans. Van Wyck Brooks (Mineola: Dover Publications, 1997), 27.

34

Nothing coming of nothing. Iniquity has much principally in common with the loftiest art. Either will be said to arise ex nihilo from bad childhoods and imagination's petri dish, like a perfunctory hunch. Ingenuity and depravity are taken to depend on a kind of fecund void, banked in the brain's urn as the ectoplasmic snowdrift of thought and correspondingly labeled boundless or heartless. Art's purity is a taught falsehood. Evil itself is held to be pure, like a tasteless poison.

35

Eternity in an hour. A film camera mechanizes the split second — click, the blip and whirl. It used to be that chemistry took considerable time to register.

The pioneer of the instant glance, the quick look, came to realize that he needed to work much more slowly, more deliberately, in order to capture the moment.⁶⁶

36

Gone fetch. It is a feeling dyed in the wool that what we prize in dogs and cats is their ability to understand us. Petco would go belly up today *were* it possible to auscultate puppy subjectivity. An owner, detecting the immense vacancy in her animal, compartmentalizes on the spot, searching every facet of the dog's bearing for dramatic subtext and intuiting by a low whine or a woof anything from objection to enthusiastic assent. It's essential that one balance such feats of canine mentalism with equanimity, flexibly intercepting behaviors that convey disinterestedness, not to mention the pet's basic incapacity for meaningful participation. The inverse of the ideomotor reflex: subtle, involuntary observation.

Although the concepts and ideas we employ in thinking about the external world are initially applied from a point of view that involves our perceptual apparatus, they are used by us to refer to things beyond themselves — toward which we have the phenomenal point of view. Therefore we can abandon it in favor of another, and still be thinking about the same things.⁶⁷

As Descartes might have cautioned, these happy captives of ours don't reserve judgment out of some nobility of character but are incapable of judging, though one suspects there resides the barest of ethical senses. A dog's alert attention is a near-perfect mirror, before which the owner signs to herself, the stick returned a boomerang completing a journey that always begins in the thrower's hand.

66 James N. Wood, *Impressionism and Post-Impressionism in The Art Institute of Chicago* (Easthampton: Hudson Hills, 2000), 60.

67 Thomas Nagel, "What Is It Like to Be a Bat?" *The Philosophical Review* 83, no. 4 (October 1974): 444.

Is it not the case that more often than not the ‘aim,’ the ‘purpose,’ is a mere pretext, a retrospective self-deception driven by vanity, which does not wish it to be said that the ship followed the stream in which it happened to find itself?⁶⁸

Glimpsed in childhood, didn’t natural tumult seem to comply with one’s targeted impulses. This was the astral projection of empathy, just enough to collapse a rolling wave or tease out a preponderance of cottony sky.

As if, that is, the will were an influence, a force, or again: a primary action, which then is the cause of the outward perceptible action.⁶⁹

37

Neither here nor there. Supposing I locate myself in neither the sperm nor ovum comprising my fertilization event, the hypothetical case in which a different spermatozoon outpaces “mine” is enough to persuade me that the essential oneself-as-oneseff never finds its way.

Thousands seethed in your womb, wanting to be *him*,
but look: he grasped and excluded —, chose and prevailed.⁷⁰

Irrefutably, one’s being does not reside neatly in spiritual dormancy, waiting on self-hood to flower, akin to the physical infoldedness depicted by Nicolas Hartsoeker,⁷¹ but rather compounds throughout gestation and the years ahead. Except only one haploid resulted in me. It is such a faultable quandary, until the obvious matter of subjective discreteness arises, Arthur Schopenhauer’s *principium individuationis*, which holds across a family of infinite gross.

Roughly speaking: to say of two things that they are identical is nonsense, and to say of one thing that it is identical with itself is to say nothing.⁷²

A swishing hundred million sperm want to reach separate eggs, begetting as many fetuses — one thinks of Derek Mahon’s thousand mushrooms crowding a disused shed, “so long / Expectant that there is left only the posture.”⁷³ Offspring, believing themselves anomalous every time, to say nothing of phenotype’s genetic tic-tac-toe, get baptized with the names of their unborn rivals.

68 Nietzsche, *The Joyous Science*, 255.

69 Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Remarks on the Philosophy of Psychology*, eds. G.E.M. Anscombe and G.H. von Wright, trans. G.E.M. Anscombe (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1980), 1:159e.

70 Rainer Maria Rilke, “Duino Elegies,” in *The Selected Poetry of Rainer Maria Rilke*, ed. and trans. Stephen Mitchell (New York: Vintage International, 1989), 185.

71 See also H.R. Giger’s *Birth Machine* motif.

72 Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, 63.

73 Derek Mahon, “A Disused Shed in Co. Wexford,” in *Selected Poems* (New York: Penguin Books, 1993), 63.

All my bones belong to others;
 maybe I stole them!
 I took for my own what was perhaps
 meant for another;
 and I think that, had I not been born,
 another poor man would be drinking this coffee!
 I'm a lousy thief... Where will I go?⁷⁴

In that miasma of cellular beforelife, numberless endure on the strange basis of having might been, with the fraction of us to matriculate into living exiled after a while for good, whereafter all the love and despair to come will only *like* ours. It is the sort of puzzle common to philosophy, mischievously tightening around one's finger just as it seemed to be slipping free. The solution is to fish readymade identity, ostensibly nothing from something, out of the zygote.

The lions that are born and that die are like the drops of the waterfall; but *leonitas*, the Idea or form or shape of the lion, is like the unshaken and unmoved rainbow on the waterfall.⁷⁵

38

On autopilot. Habit is looked on like chemical dependency: one must, for one has so long. But couldn't it be said that habituation alleviates this reliance on will-power? Thus aversion ensues when, confronting some procedural chore, we find ourselves out of practice.

An automatic adjustment of the human organism to the conditions of its existence[; . . .] for a moment the boredom of living is replaced by the suffering of being.⁷⁶

Midnight elapses in a castle one only built to have something to maintain. Now salt-and-peppered, we're too delicately rigged to dig up the pilings.

39

Writ small. Covering the set of the NBC special *Peter Pan Live* is an antique map labeled and charted after J.M. Barrie's fairyland, its scale comically preposterous. If we consider its kilometric span relative to an observed point of view of this actual walked-upon map, "NEVERLAND" should be a thousand times wider.

74 César Vallejo, "Our Bread," in *The Complete Poetry: A Bilingual Edition*, ed. and trans. Clayton Eshleman (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009), 111.

75 Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*, 2:483. Also: "the situation of temporal, historical, and ontological disjunction in which the apparent presence of being is replaced by an absent or deferred non-origin." *Wikipedia*, s.v. "Hauntology."

76 Samuel Beckett, *Proust* (New York: Grove Press, 1931), 9.

She was lying on a clear white bank of sand and the spar was a sort of foremast or some sort of tackle that slanted out of water the way she was laying on her side. Her bow wasn't very far under. I could stand on the letters of her name on her bow and my head was just out of water.⁷⁷

Instead, rational proportion takes a back seat to visual knowledge so that Wendy's location is recognizable, deep within the nucleus of action.

40

Trading up. Painters eking out a living in the torchlight of the Dark Ages would have greedily assimilated Giotto's innovations. And indigenous peoples fork over — when they aren't stolen outright — important heirlooms and wovens for a working musket.

If the artists of the time had access to better production tools, I'm sure they would have been thrilled. "Pixel art" was never a thing — nobody was thinking, "I think we'll go with pixel art for this game."⁷⁸

The Duveen Gallery was founded to house half the Parthenon Marbles. Apart from theft, partage can go both ways, though the opulence be utterly different. The Quai Branly lugs its half-million bought and stolen objects through curatorial rotation and a spot above an indigene's hearth is reserved for the compass Henry Morton Stanley dropped. Portraitists brought up in the British colonies eagerly binned their immature stylings for the sophisticated artistry Benjamin West had to teach. So the globe's virulent traffic is welcomed when the tithe it requires is a cultural token, something of the goods leisure precipitates. Liszt profited by the ideas of Chopin; and wherefore Alexander Scriabin's blatant crib of the latter if not to claim for himself equality of inspiration. Doubling the injury, Scriabin's transplantations were half-done, obfuscated. Pried from its coffin, the corpse is dumped into cultured marble. Beethoven didn't hide his pilferages of Haydn but instead marshaled them to a higher calling.

Does Shakespeare change anything in Sophocles? Does Molière take anything from Plautus? Even when he borrows *Amphitryon*, he does not take it from him. Does Figaro blot out Sancho Panza? Does Cordelia suppress Antigone? No. Poets do not climb over each other.⁷⁹

77 Ernest Hemingway, "After the Storm," in *The Complete Short Stories of Ernest Hemingway*, 284.

78 Blake Reynolds, "A Pixel Artist Renounces Pixel Art," *Polygon*, May 13, 2015, <https://www.polygon.com/2015/5/13/8595963/a-pixel-artist-renounces-pixel-art>.

79 Victor Hugo, *William Shakespeare*, trans. Melville B. Anderson (Honolulu: University Press of the Pacific, 2001), 102.

41

Stare, stare in the basin. An unlidged cup of scalding-hot coffee reflects a light fixture overhead until, rippling the surface with one's breath, depth shoots through.

When the storm comes,
we will see into it, there will be no near and no far.⁸⁰

Collecting itself, that rectangle of light again stops one from getting beyond coffee's orange sheen. Inspired by J.M.W. Turner's very thoughtful depiction of the surface of a pond, John Ruskin chastises the watery renderings typical of Englishmen for being "*morbidly* clear and deep, so that we always go down *into* it, even when the artist most wishes us to glide over it."⁸¹ Mincing juice, milk, and fruit in a blender offers this staring-through impression as, absent depth cues, the mixture's homogeneous distribution of monotonal matter visually shoves backward the purplish sample against the blender's glass. I'm reminded of a zoom microscope's ability to continuously approach an object through successive powers of magnification. Or if a polished metal screw were watched from directly above while the disk of its head turned perfectly in place, could anything be detected?

All that silence and absence of goings-on is the stillness of infinite motion — the sleep of the spinning-top.⁸²

42

Written on the body. Broadcast vivacity and the stilted tête-à-têtes larding daytime soaps, operatic wrestling, and airline safety presentations are really closer in sympathy with high-stripe literature's manicured colloquies than not.

This emphatic function is quite the same as the one in the ancient theater, whose resources, language and its accessories (masks and cothurns), concurred in the exaggeratedly visible explanation of a Necessity.⁸³

Compared to village blather, fiction's best dialogue seems hackneyed. Artifice is aesthetic focus, the narrative distillation of a crime scene down to bloodied fiber and smudged wine glass.

80 Karen Solie, "Bitumen," in *The Road In Is Not the Same Road Out* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2015), 76.

81 John Ruskin, "Of Water, as Painted by Turner," in *The Genius of John Ruskin: Selections from His Writings*, ed. John D. Rosenberg (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1998), 32.

82 Thomas Hardy, *Jude the Obscure* (New York: Penguin Books, 1998), 112.

83 Barthes, "In the Ring," in *Mythologies*, 4.

43

The medium being the message. How does one praise great lieder, short of cheering its singer? It can be difficult to decide between Franz Schubert's incomparably lush "Du bist die Ruh" and Ian Bostridge's stupendous lungs. Abundant desert-island recordings lead us to confuse myriad interpretive decisions for a trained performer's default.

44

Guiltier than. Voltaire's well-known comment that "every man is guilty of all the good he does not do"⁸⁴ generalizes nicely, though it was originally directed at ministers of state. One refinement is needed, however. An individual of comparatively greater means, being in a literal sense more capable of aiding those less fortunate, should consequently be guiltier than overeducated layabouts and the actually impoverished for withholding dollars.

Was it Chaplin's M. Verdoux who said that when it comes to calibrating liability for murder it is all, finally, a matter of scale?⁸⁵

Greedy negligence is frustrating when the perpetrator has no sense of misdoing; indeed, the legal slate is clean.

45

Barthes's author, Lazarus. Scoring the accuracy of

Goethe's parable of the oak-tree planted in a costly vase and Coleridge's idea that Hamlet thought so much that he "lost the power of action in the energy of resolve" to Schopenhauer's "weakness of will," Bradley's stress on the traumatic shock of Gertrude's remarriage and Freud's Oedipus complex,⁸⁶

intending to snuff out *which* Shakespeare really meant, is unrealizable, for it is underneath his leviathan ability that these critical obeisances were forged. Without an author's thoughts, hermeneutics seems wanting a middle road.

What they call anthropology, linguistics, psychoanalysis is nothing but literature reappearing, like the Hydra's head, in the very spot where it had supposedly been suppressed.⁸⁷

84 Basically a secular formulation of James 4:17.

85 Gore Vidal, "The Meaning of Timothy McVeigh," *Vanity Fair*, November 10, 2008, <https://www.vanityfair.com/news/2001/09/mcveigh200109>.

86 Kenneth Muir, *Shakespeare's Tragic Sequence* (London: Routledge, 2005), 55.

87 Paul de Man, "Criticism and Crisis," in *Blindness and Insight: Essays in the Rhetoric of Contemporary Criticism* (London: Routledge, 1983), 18.

Somewhat like Lev Kuleshov's series of experimental montages, combining the same one close-up of a man's emotionless face followed by a bowl of soup, a corpse holding flowers, and a reclined beauty, how two visually indistinguishable pictures,⁸⁸ one of which happened to be an authenticated Pollock, could ever be properly evaluated, or critically appraised and sold on merit, falls to latter's philosophical integrity, such that the unschooled artist cancels out her work through the fatal combination of unaffected technical poverty, or the absence of natural facility trained to a sharp point, and aesthetic laxity. Synthetic valuation wades into the interpretive circle by way of antagonism, the question being whether a painter intended any outcome in particular.

The way in which the entity we are interpreting is to be conceived can be drawn from the entity itself, or the interpretation can force the entity into concepts to which it is opposed in its manner of being.⁸⁹

46

Belshazzar's feast. The singular trouble with juvenilia is not that it is unreadable but that there's nothing to read.

47

Show and hide. Hard, reflective costume returns information, in the form of light, while soft, absorptive costume does not. Holding true across a broad spectrum of entertainment, less intelligent mid-tier enemies are usually compensated with hubris, which helps explain their sartorial exposure (no headgear, willingness to divulge plans and charge into battle), while their nefarious leader, superior in analytical intelligence as well as strength, is the least exposed, suggesting depth of plot, capacity to harm, and hidden physical manifestations. Our disparity between feminine and masculine dress⁹⁰ can be understood similarly for its explicit social function, such that bared shoulders and a skirt are designed to gainsay the wearer. And there's a desirable tension to this, to the extent that a misanthropy of clothing fits what is the internet generation's performative self-loathing. Our possessions hate us, too.

88 See the work of Elaine Sturtevant, who achieved fame for her nearly exact replicas of other artists' work.

89 Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (Oxford: Blackwell, 1962), 191.

90 See Marvel Comics' *Cloak and Dagger*, a New Orleans superhero duo. Split along the color line, so as to reap prejudice's ingrained connotations, the television adaptation consists of a white woman in a skintight leotard, her ample figure available for adults to enjoy, and a Black man cowed head to toe whose ability is to disappear in broad daylight.

The commodity is readable: in opposition to the object, which never completely gives up its secret, the commodity always manifests its visible essence, which is its price.⁹¹

Myth finds plenty of traction here, since the trickster's wily subterfuge depends for its success on feigning an alignment between outward sign and internal trait. Affectation of decrepitude contrasts sharply with Odysseus's massacre of the suitors hanging around Penelope. I'm reminded of Roland Barthes's elucidation of the gossip pieces of French magazines that would detail a writer's surprisingly banal holiday. Combined with a boorish demeanor, this deprives the literary figure of her former elegance, whereby the literature is made greater out of sheer contrast.

48

He's told us not to blow it. A two-dimensional platformer fixedly entails navigating within the two axes' cooperated plane,⁹² leaving the stage obstructed with one or more iterations of a fanged plant, cruising bullet, and paratrooping turtle. Mario dashes and leaps baddies on parade, in response to a controller, and the learning curve amounts to a haptic balance between input and outcome. Almost a Pachinko field sloping rightward, the player footstools Goombas with more or less irreversible trajectory until she hoists the flag at each stage's terminus; anchored perpendicular to the z-axis, by its dual nature a side-scroller game tolerates both reflexive engagement and detached observation. In spite of timed button presses and knee-jerk maneuvers, the plumber in blue overalls is felt to be a hero at liberty. Shrewdly "anticipating" Mario's movements, the player is thereby flattered.

I know what's around almost every corner and I exult in knowing. It's as if I could predict the news.⁹³

How gradually movement in videogames progressed over the medium's history, from the instantaneous motion of Pac-Man, who travels up, down, left, or right without first accelerating up to gobbling speed and stops dead with release of the joystick, to Mario's slow-to-fast running tilt, which becomes one's perseverate effort to reach and maintain top velocity, parallels nicely the development of musical

- 91 Jean Baudrillard, "The Ecstasy of Communication," trans. John Johnston, in *The Anti-Aesthetic: Essays on Postmodern Culture*, ed. Hal Foster (Seattle: Bay Press, 1987), 131.
- 92 If we didn't look on from the sideline but inhabited Mario's headspace, as he does, this forwardly hurtling point of view would make the game next to inoperable.
- 93 Alex Ross, "Listen to This," in *Listen to This* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2010), 20. If one hears in lower strings that which is about to reach the higher, "speaking" register, then we might understand the bass/treble relationship in terms of spatiality — the antagonist is spied far off, musically indistinct, before arriving in razor-sharp clarity, altered only in its eidetic proximity. Or the lightning/thunder pattern flipped, the latter's low growl heard just before the white bolt hits.

instruments in Europe; that is, in regard to sound's decay. Depressing a key on a pipe organ, the emitting note does not dissipate but punctually shuts up.

Since the substance of video games is simultaneously both *imagery* and *events*, their elements can be abstract in both *appearance* and *behavior*.⁹⁴

A slow succession of notes ultimately seems less right for the baroque temperament, opposed to rapid proliferation. Because the sound exhibits little to no decay, the baroque note is only “replaced,” and pretty much the instant after it was pronounced. This is why the baroque is described as vertical, or architectural, while the romantic is horizontal, suspending bridge-like over time; like those choring strings Hart Crane described, romanticism owes a significant debt to the greater dynamic range of its instruments. So the symphonic form snowballed to its enormous girth, over the course of the nineteenth century, due to the unspoken rule imposed on its most chimerical engineers to justify every action. It became popular to exhibit the inner workings themselves — or seem to, a nod to the growing predilection for organicity, nature being denser than machinery. The artist doesn't want to show her sketches, not exactly, but what If a Brandenburg Concerto functions like a clean rifle, the *Eroica* affords us the exploded, schematic view. Including minutiae, adding the *how* to *what*, ballooned the composition, like behind-the-scenes material supplementing a Criterion release. Hitting its mimetic stride, music voluntarily fettered itself to duration,⁹⁵ giving rise to a new form of vocalizing based on progress against struggle, ranging from the hero's courageous endurance to a bad thought's dissipation. What this allowed for is a new range of affects, music slumberous, hesitant, or anxious. But despite adopting kinetics wholeheartedly into its constitution, the works of Beethoven, Chopin, and Mahler are found to contain short-lived moments of “ecstasy,” the insuppressible niveaux of trance that unhinge from formal governance a while, like the berserker champion of Swedish sagas who is clad in a bear's pelt and frenzied on herbs, a shift that is altogether baroque in grammar.⁹⁶ One recalls how the Starman power-up,

94 Mark J.P. Wolf, “Abstraction in the Video Game,” in *The Video Game Theory Reader*, eds. Mark J.P. Wolf and Bernard Perron (New York: Routledge, 2003). 49.

95 While in the score to 4'33" John Cage encourages durations other than just over four-and-a-half minutes, one is necessary, for the same reason that a sphere needs the imposition of volume in order to instantiate, as much as show off, its surface area. And because all of Cage's expected shifting-in-one's-seat and coughing is accidental, no interpretation of the work seems possible, outside of its chosen length and whatever ironic optics instrumentation affords. The cute ukulelist gloats over her cleverness, and the orchestra is mute while its jacketed conductor beats time.

96 This lax attitude finds shelter in the perpetuum mobile, a leash-optional enclosure where vertiginous freedom may be had from the daily constraints of the nineteenth century's thermodynamic revolution. Perhaps formally debuted with Alkan's *Le chemin de fer*, the familiar example is Rimsky-Korsakov's *Flight of the Bumblebee* and to a lesser extent Popper's *Dance of the Elves*, while the baroque and classical eras sought expressive relief in the fantasia, as Chopin did. But this was for the opposite kinetic ends. For Bach and Mozart, “fantasia” serves as forewarning intended to head off critical obloquy, as with the title of Kurosawa's *Dreams*, for example, while by Vaughan Williams's day the form betokens noth-

a hallmark of the *Super Mario* franchise, renders the player temporarily invulnerable while substantially increasing run speed.

49

Heard this one before. Having been properly introduced, a theme undergoes explication, whereafter the vocalizing subject, in the form of its abstract personification, is allowed sufficient time to reflect before trying again, the subject's emotional tone now carrying that confidence which is born of familiarity. Grown accustomed to its content, the subject remains recollectable for a wide variety of purposes, ranging from manipulation for the fun of it, like a cat toys with prey, to a second denunciation in the manner of the Cadaver Synod, not needing the lengthy care of its original pronouncement:

Presentation (introduction and theme)
 Comprehension (restatement)
 Deconstruction (inversion)
 Response (enhanced restatement)

During a repetition there is sometimes a “rushing-through” quality,⁹⁷ which is either notated by the composer or a soloist's decision, as though the development couldn't be bothered to stop. Zipping through the tail of a phrase can be attributed to puckish insouciance just as convincingly as it can trauma, with denser rubato applied than in a previous lap around the speedway (see fig. 1); plucking up one's courage and stepping into a cold lake determinately, hardened with purpose after shying from it for a while, as opposed to learning not to flinch.

Traveling a familiar stretch of country, this time one slows in appreciation of the unchanged landscape. A phrase known to the performer, and by extension the musical subject beneath her fingers, is on a subsequent occasion — not between back-to-back performances but within the composition's duration — more deeply

ing wilder than a flight of heart. When today's composer attempts something like real melodies the work is felt to need a disclaimer (John Adams's *Naive and Sentimental Music* comes immediately to mind), while the more intentionally retrospect *Classical* Symphony of Prokofiev was one of a number of canaries in the coalmine before atonalism seeped in. During the nineteenth century it became lucrative to gather up one's miscellany and publish the lot as short pieces meant for beginners, such as Schumann's *Album for the Young* and Bartók's *For Children*. One imagines everything from a contemporary Chopin would be cautiously hedged as *Suites Populaires*, after the likes of Villa-Lobos.

97 A favorite example of musical logic propelling itself through a hindersome patch, though very different if compared with, say, the morasses Rachmaninoff climbs out of, is the 24th measure of Beethoven's Piano Sonata no. 28, which gathers the necessary force only upon its third fling. Roland Barthes describes a practice like this in his essay “The Grain of the Voice” in regard to the lied singing of baritone Charles Panzéra, who is said to have frequently recommended “skating over” the consonants between vowels, lending them a patina of linguistic erosion, that of aural familiarity.

lensed, due to the gravitational influence of memory.⁹⁸ Music of the romantic persuasion will generally be heard to undergo such exponential accelerations, both in terms of tempo and material proliferation. Choral singing conveys understanding, as with the satisfying pulse of techno, and maps well onto this fast/slow interpretation, from the brash austerity of the first stage through to the ornamented, more hesitant second. Like surveying half-heartedly a vale one has already traveled, the opposite of Alexander Pope's "the first clouds and mountains seem the last." Electronic dance music, but also landler and waltzes, seldom sets aside a handful of measures for the purpose of reflecting on the subject and its development thus far; rather, such music perpetually determines itself, always starting within that inner sanctum accessible upon the subject's comprehension of its situation and adaptation. This leaves us with a hard problem, the subject's relation to the greater musical architecture, which it both is locatable inside of and cavalierly supervenes.

Ostinato has a symbolic function, carrying a tinge of psychological compulsion.⁹⁹

50

Pedantic if not shallow. If poorly integrated, instrumental development is the more irritating when it also happens to be bromidic. Leonard Bernstein reveres Beethoven, who is music's Proust, for his "*inexplicable ability to know what the next note has to be*. Beethoven had this gift in a degree that leaves them all panting in the rear guard."¹⁰⁰ Towering among perfectionists, in the particular Vienna's giant is exceedingly dull.

51

Stitchless. It is disappointing that Walter Pater stopped short of music's aspiration. Composition seeks the distillation of subject qua form, the absolute — at its most possibly cogent, becoming melody — shorn of worthless fleece and hoping that what's left can stand on its own legs. Ironically, this fate, like an extraordinary anecdote adapted into a novella, is typically reserved for unmelodic writing as well as the acutely brief (Chopin's 12-measure Prelude in E Major would be one example). Along with artistic conquest comes the goal of simple perfection, except that form and content achieve perfect balance in the simply bland, too. Moderation is its philosophical fallout, attributable to uniformity. The Empire State Building as one spired floor. Luxury could be the answer, the way a doe-eyed model seems to gape at the unsayable. In one of his illuminating monthlies, Roland Barthes observed this rightly:

98 A musician who staggered the original and subsequent iterations of a melody could just be a sight-reader, while a performance that rushed through both, venturing no interpretation, recalls a MIDI-based performance.

99 Alex Ross, "Chacona, Lamento, Walking Blues," in *Listen to This*, 35.

100 Leonard Bernstein, *The Joy of Music* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1960), 28–29.

It must not be forgotten that the object is the supernatural's best messenger: in this object there is easily a perfection and an absence of origin, a completion and a brilliance, a transformation of life into matter (matter being much more magical than life), and all in all a *silence* which belongs to the order of the marvelous.¹⁰¹

Perhaps this line of thinking can disentangle the contradiction at the heart of immaculate conception, at least as it applies to life under late capitalism, with the difference split between a theological good's implied ahistoricity, unblemished by the sin of having an origin, and its association with a designer. One notes in passing how Apple prefers to label its consumer electronics "Assembled in China" rather than "Manufactured..." the suggestion being that every MacBook is merely put together from already extant pieces whose material provenance could never be disclosed to us. It's why car manufacturers gradually retooled their factories to shed every visible nut and bolt, with everything from coupes to pickups fabricated on some assembly line in heaven. While Barthes tells us that "Christ's tunic was seamless, just as the spaceships of science fiction are of unbroken metal,"¹⁰² with the human nipple, morphologically analogous to the knobby interstices that join flat patches of steel, it is as though one has been admonished to hide God's welding; at the same time, the ethical exemption given to the male torso goes back to what is still portrayed as the hero's bodily as well as spiritual self-determination, with breasts a sort of biblical curse. For while Mary must have breastfed Christ, the angelic are just as surely ungenitalized.

52

Consistency being key. As the New Testament of the instrument to Bach's *Well-Tempered Clavier*, which Hans von Bülow compared to Genesis up through the prophetic books, the greatness of Beethoven's keyboard literature lies in their sustained merit, chasing sophisticated beauty over a lifetime, with nearly every shot a bullseye. Composers such as Brahms, on the other hand, did enough to subsidize their retirements. Beethoven's creative endurance, as though by sheer momentum, lets us skip over his less-than-brilliant works, with these mostly being commissions, such as the *King Stephen Overture*.

Much may be done by preparing and clearing the way; and one of the best means towards this end is sifting the material, and replacing favourite and unimportant works, by those less known though more important.¹⁰³

Buried within the landslide of national songs and unrecognized late-period bagatelles hide such sapphires, which lack identifying epithets.

101 Roland Barthes, "The New Citroën," in *Mythologies*, 169.

102 Ibid.

103 Hans von Bülow, "Klavier-Etuden von Fr. Chopin," *Instructive Ausgabe*.

53

Once upon a time. *Sleeping Beauty* showcases a benign purgatory of wildflowers and boggy forest, whose temporality is like a politically inert version of medieval Europe. In these landscapes of Eyvind Earle's, with help from Japonisme, grassy slopes ramp to nowhere and bunched trees cut through a solitary Trecento-esque cliff. In Walt Disney's thinking, at least, antiquated fashion befits an antiquated subject.

Table 4

Time of the Narrative	Narrative of Time
Political choice	Intentional choice
Style is negotiated	Style is selected
Subject is worship	Subject to worship

Or were the fourteenth century's woods really ossified, its bluffs splintered? Diligent if not scholarly, Earle's venture respects the Middle Ages through hinting at a legacy of painting then inchoate. Illustration compares to writing a love letter in reverse, where upon carefully getting down this lasting testament of backdrops one then needs the cel's instigating quickness. *Sleeping Beauty* engages the Sieneese school as though they added up to a bunch of surveyors, all the Lilliputian houses and stone pines ambiguously translated.

Gradually it became evident that an image could outlast what it represented; it then showed how something or somebody had once looked — and thus by implication how the subject had once been seen by other people. Later still the specific vision of the image-maker was also recognized as part of the record. An image became a record of how X had seen Y.¹⁰⁴

Gone is gold leaf, having devolved to a burlesque symbol, as later doses of realism mandate that styles reminiscent of Cimabue's be brought to natural order.

54

Mental spotlights. Casting from the opposite shore of posterity, how much better we get history's forest for its trees. The British soldier's mortal periscope doesn't breach the surface, so integrated does everything seem, though one might say this is more to do with the psychological gravity of lone events, the pawn's inability to think more than a hundred paces from the last skirmish. As though to say legionnaires who perished at Hadrian's side were ignorant to much significance, those totalities — their campaign's ramifications on the way to the collapse of an empire — that are the beads on historians' rosaries.

104 John Berger, *Ways of Seeing* (New York: Penguin Books, 1977), 10. But consider the fact that Berger assumes X has the hand-eye coordination, let alone aesthetic wherewithal, to duplicate Y in the first place.

The persons who make up a nation to-day, next year die, and their experience with them.¹⁰⁵

One succumbs to fever, while another dies of plague or is fatally gored. The fiction of post hoc metaphysics is assembling a platoon consisting strictly of individuals, the preoccupation of Brecht, that has the gods' perspective on things. But for the odd dissatisfied Socrates, nobody credits the light of a candle lit against the *Weltgeist's* brilliant sun.

The "fog of war," almost a universal feature of real-time strategy videogames and defined, more broadly, as "the uncertainty in situational awareness experienced by participants in military operations,"¹⁰⁶ encourages the player to explore, the square map either darkened or submerged beneath impenetrable fog until a sentry is deployed; with that unit's charge into terra incognita, steadily come drops of permanent illumination, triggered by actual inhabitation. Light dawns in the familiar metaphor: analogous to memory, only better, once it is blazed the trail is established.

Yet all experience is an arch wherethro'
Glams that untravell'd world whose margin fades
For ever and forever when I move.¹⁰⁷

At a mountaintop lookout in Saint Cézaire sur Siagne, I let myself admire the tremendous insensateness of the distant foothills ahead. Out in Cimmerian nature each leaf is dumb to its neighbor's shape and deaf to the rustling all have a part in. I noticed as miniscule cars entered this density, the fact of their bright motion all that was discernible. Yet the drivers are always proved, such that occupant and vehicle entangle — they vouch for each other. To an observer far away, the jurisdiction of being's fireball effulges onto that highway in every direction.

His eyes, meanwhile,
Straining pursu'd them, till the flame alone,
Upsoaring like a misty speck, he kenn'd:
E'en thus along the gulf moves every flame;
A sinner so enfolded close in each.¹⁰⁸

Adherents of the "growing block universe" model, which opposes both eternalism and presentism, describe the temporal present as "an objective property, to be compared with a moving spotlight. By the passage of time more of the world comes into being."¹⁰⁹ It is not literally that boats shrink in their approach of the

105 Ralph Waldo Emerson, "Self-Reliance," in *The Annotated Emerson*, ed. David Mikics (Cambridge: The Belknap Press, 2012), 184.

106 *Wikipedia*, s.v. "Fog of War."

107 Alfred Lord Tennyson, "Ulysses," in *Tennyson* (New York: Everyman's Library, 2004), 88.

108 Dante Alighieri, *Hell*, in *The Vision; Or, Hell, Purgatory, and Paradise of Dante Alighieri*, trans. Henry Francis Cary (Philadelphia: Samuel F. Bradford, 1822), canto 26, lines 38–42.

109 *Wikipedia*, s.v. "Growing Block Universe."

horizon, the sailor worsening in clarity.¹¹⁰ Thomas Cole had to miniaturize blasted landforms whose real-life equivalents are enormous and muddy what up close is pellucid. Light, heat, and speech are felt to glide through volumetric space like so much folded paper. That misty rainforest or an airplane descending through dense clouds might be obscure even to itself says something about our ability to endow the phenomenal with objecthood. But this amounts to forgetting the pilots.

Yes, there is someone in that house who is keeping watch, a man is working there while I dream away. He leads a dogged existence, whereas I am pursuing futile dreams. Through its light alone, the house becomes human.¹¹¹

55

Left, left. Three turns right is different than one left, though their sequence ultimately produces the orientation that would have resulted from turning left; as the line on a racetrack signifies different things depending on whether a runner is bent on her mark or overlapping a competitor.

The grey half-tones of daybreak are not the grey half-tones of the day's close, though the degree of their shade may be the same. In the twilight of the morning, light seems active, darkness passive; in the twilight of evening it is the darkness which is active and crescent, and the light which is the drowsy reverse.¹¹²

When coworkers say they'll see us next year,¹¹³ they treat tomorrow's new day as one that is twelve months from now, which ought to remind us of the commonplace confusion between 360° as one complete turn and "complete opposite," like how one may travel east continuously in order to end up back on the West Coast.¹¹⁴ Picture an ant making a figure eight on a strip of paper into which a twist has been introduced. The insect would do so from its own relative spatial perspective and not a topologist's broad conceptual standpoint; while the latter insists on a Möbius strip's oneness, for this bug there is indeed an obverse to such surfaces, though traversing them leads everywhere.

110 "Others watch fells dwindle, think / the sun's fires sink." Basil Bunting, "At Brigflatts Meetinghouse," in *Complete Poems*, ed. Richard Caddell (Tartet: Bloodaxe Books, 2000), 110.

111 Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, 34.

112 Thomas Hardy, *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, ed. Sarah E. Maier (Ontario: Broadview Editions, 2013), 155.

113 One may be excused for preferring the nonsensical "See you later, if not before," which has less of the former's insufferable delightedness.

114 Or take the self-inking office stamp, its octagonal rubber dies enclosed in an ergonomic plastic shell, as conflated with the exposed alphabetic bands of a rotary stamp. Like the seeming detachedness of some trees where they bulge into roots, such that the base could almost be supposed flush against the earth. Deep down, one is thinking about the flat bottom of a Himalayan cedar that sits in visitor centers, which some university department varnished and illustrated along its rings.

I have heard what the talkers were talking, the talk of the beginning and the end,
 But I do not talk of the beginning or the end.¹¹⁵

56

Ceaselessly into the past. Metaphysicians focused on the nature of temporality are said to fall into camps of eternalists, who hold the contention is that “every frame of time has equal reality,” and presentists, who insist that only this passing moment makes sense. (It is an irony of sympathetic opinions that they can’t intersect, being parallel one another.) Past and future fully hew from the same thermodynamic sum, neither created nor destroyed but pitched through representation. Every day a number of comets burn up and disperse even before leaving our thoughts.

In this specious present of the real, life struggles to maintain every manifestation, every individuality, that exists. In the end, life always fails, but the amorphous hurrying stream is held and diverted into new organic vessels in which form persists, though the form may not be that of yesterday.¹¹⁶

Assuming that foreign country can be located on a map and a traveler go there mistakenly conflates tensed time, the adjectival distinctions of past, present, and future perfect, with physical reality’s inherent dyschronometria (“All ages are contemporaneous,” said Pound). Assigning a historical event to either side, one should then interrogate that chronological boundary. It is the question, in other words, of exactly where the future lapses into the present and the present obliterates, which might be the same as asking on what basis the living derive existence and the dead lose it: discreteness versus disintegration. Always the case with ethics, one holds out for the wishbone of a dialectic composed of theses.

57

Fore and aft. Experience in a real-time strategy game is elegantly heuristic, to the extent that revelation has to be continually prompted by one’s explorations into parts unknown. It is as if this benighted landscape were everywhere divided into pressure plates. Out of respect for Princess Aurora, lapsed into death’s silent repose (finger, spindle), her godmothers place the castle under a fairy spell of sleep. Among the loyal subjects in attendance, it is a handful of foreground figures that nod, together comprising a sort of epistemological hierarchy. Generics pose as normal beneath the shower of Merryweather’s dust until one of them is “enabled,” diegetically speaking, by our gaze; that is, unless the camera impels them.¹¹⁷ Sub-

115 Walt Whitman, “Song of Myself,” in *Walt Whitman: Complete Poetry and Collected Prose*, ed. Justin Kaplan (New York: Library of America, 1982), 190.

116 Loren Eiseley, “The Star Thrower,” in *The Unexpected Universe* (San Diego: Harcourt, 1994), 78–79.

117 A family resemblance warrants invoking the Wordsworthian kingdom of nature, contented on the basis of its sovereignty, and the recording poet.

sequent close-ups feature lines of soldiers and standard bearers slumped down their halberds' poles. With regard to the economics of animating, it is understandable that the graceful nobles occupying the courtyard amid their retinues, who also lilt in reverie, should be poorer in motion than the queen and king and lack their granularity. How plain the three fairies' green, red, and blue are; though their aprons exhibit degrees of fluidity, rumpling along with a wand's thrust. *Sleeping Beauty's* backdrops, however lushly done, tell us a perspectival law is upset in the land, as spatially recessed objects traditionally incur losses in visual stature and resolution. This conflicts with the animator's need to minimize drafting, like the fairies' monotonal dresses,¹¹⁸ while a production designer can lavish attention on foliage, having guarantee of its stationary longevity. Hence the capacious, lovingly brocaded forest in front of which Prince Phillip lopez.¹¹⁹

Having both high image/sound resolution and real time responsiveness was impossible. Designers were left with the difficult decision of what aspect of their possible environments they would like to implement, and which to sacrifice.¹²⁰

Animation disturbs the hallowed ground of European art no less for these contraventions being aesthetically unprecedented. One lauded case of departing from pictorial normalcy, whether christened on a significant date, like *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon* and *Houses at l'Estaque*, or eliding technological drift, is the Italian baroque. Rich in drama and staged to give pause, Caravaggio, along with Francisco de Zurbarán, focalized the sunlight transuding through clouded glass, not to mention candle and lamp glow, into beams in order to point them. Consider the magnitude of shift when a movie like *Sleeping Beauty* inverts resolution disparity, halving the perspectival criteria. On a lopsided visual basis, the fairy godmothers are indicated, albeit indemonstrably, to be farther in cartoon space than the highly detailed oaks they obviously congregate in front of; nonetheless, this nagging compulsion to push and pull is overruled by the inviolable relationship of backgrounds to their characters.¹²¹ Notice how Jean-Baptiste-Camille Corot's touches of white

118 Aside from *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* and *Pinocchio* on through *One Hundred and One Dalmatians*, early novelty shorts like *Gertie the Dinosaur* stand for their own sort of hiccup. Eased in turn by line drawing, *Gertie's* capsulation of rock slab, timber, and stone flips geometric perspective back on itself, as when one stares at a linear parallelogram. Henri Rousseau's jungles have this same airless feeling, as though glued in a strike of lightning. Boulders dotting the dinosaur's shore are as little modulated — or obscured, the same difference — as the mountains logically behind them, which is to say that foreground and background objects in *Gertie* lack distinguishing cues, aside from size and recognizable iconography. This “instability” allows the design, in theory if not quite fact, to telescope and slip forward with each mental contraction. Like the bonneted girl suddenly becomes the old hag.

119 See the multiplane camera.

120 Andrew Hutchinson, “Making the Water Move: Techno-Historic Limits in the Game Aesthetics of *Myst* and *Doom*,” *Game Studies* 8, no. 1 (September 2008): <http://gamestudies.org/0801/articles/hutch>.

121 Integration of computer software into the television cartoon's assembly line, such that Krusty the Clown be drawn to order before taping then simply choreo-

lead, dappling trees in the landscapes of his late period, actually show the hashing of cloud through branches; notwithstanding the beautiful *effets de soir*, in a limited sense the grammar's wrong. While highlight refers to an object's outer surface, the fact is Corot employs that usage for the opposite purpose of peeking at cumulus off in the distance. Once he built up these numinous bosks, topping them with sprouted buds, the finishing touch was wisps percolating through the boughs' crisscrossed limbs.

58

The witch's help. Heart pierced, the spewing dragon that was Maleficent smolders into a purple heap. Metamorphosis of a villain has long explained that involuntary deposition to some baser form offers the truest confirmation of death, because enchantment necessitates concentration.

The supernatural powers of magicians were maintained only by unremitting effort, as also was their ascendancy over the spirits they forced into unwilling service.¹²²

Trusting a large share of one's soul to the safe deposit box of a horcrux, as Prospero basically does his books, effectively outsources this thought work. Persons uglified by a witch are released with her lasting demise as she reduces to a terrified rat or evaporates. Impurity of heart, Perrault's tale impresses upon us, turned her skin its artichoke color.

59

Digging with one's tongue. Verse is the hazarding of that Yeatsian ploy in which all saying undergoes factors of torsion, equal nearly to the total joules of a novel. Conceal labor, it implores, a line may take hours. Or there is a spectrum of unequal reciprocity, for example as between the chapter-less *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich* and Sartre's interest in durational realism.

Those granted some measure of fame can either reconcile themselves to the reality of being a poet in modern America, taking some consolation perhaps in the fundamental incommensurability between the furious spirit that is the source of the poems and the frivolous energy that attaches to the poet.¹²³

graphed, like a paper doll, raises the question as to whether this saving in labor should be recycled back into the characters' appearances, who might then be more gingerly tinted, as figures tend to be in short films. Layers of matching granularity do not necessarily meld across a single ground. Motion sets off the actor or prop, and Springfield could nonetheless be lacquered to a blur.

122 William Shakespeare, *The Tempest*, ed. Frank Kermode (New York: Random House, 1964), 25n.

123 Christian Wiman, *He Held Radical Light: The Art of Faith, the Faith of Art* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2018), 45.

A lyrical text overawes through our reading quickly what was slowly wrought; thus, while fountain pens and typewriters are clever, bona-fide wit is tongued, a knack for punning being a cousin of freestyle rap. Compared with Joyce's legendary hurrahs to language, the best thinking on one's feet demands impossible fleetness, that of jocose tit for tat; *Right Ho, Jeeves* from impressions of actual chat, *Lucky Jim* a script of humorous ripostes. Anecdotes champion brevity, brought spring-loaded from the lives of Shakespeare and Voltaire, and cook up a ponderous sort of sonneteer who'd have us believe that fourteen lines were rhymed in a heartbeat. Others suppose *Ulysses* is read over the course of a single day.

60

They're there. Before trekking there oneself, for miles the huge Sitka spruce on Campbell Island would fit the ring of a forefinger and thumb.

My eyes already touch the sunny hill,
going far ahead of the road I have begun.
So we are grasped by what we cannot grasp;
it has its inner light, even from a distance.¹²⁴

Inhumation seems preferable to cremation for one's being somewhere, compared with disappearing into ash, lungs and brain released through a mortuary's flue.

Nor yet in the cold ground,
Where thy pale form was laid, with many tears,
Nor in the embrace of ocean, shall exist
Thy image.¹²⁵

Never mind burial's ghastly deliquescence, the spirit peculiar to that grisly depiction of Christ entombed by the younger Holbein. As Michel Onfray writes, "this work is like entering a coffin to see what's happening inside. Which is nothing, apart from a dead body, a corpse — motionless for all eternity."¹²⁶ Inversely, a coffin's job is colloidal, preserving dead relatives as they look in fading photo albums.

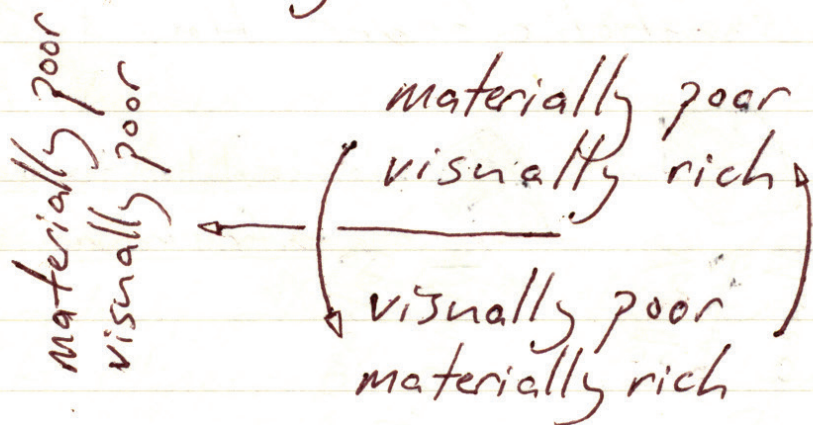
124 Rainer Maria Rilke, "A Walk," in *Selected Poems of Rainer Maria Rilke*, trans. Robert Bly (New York: Harper & Row, 1981), 177.

125 William Cullen Bryant, "Thanatopsis," in *Nineteenth-Century American Poetry*, ed. William C. Spengemann, with Jessica F. Roberts (New York: Penguin Books, 1996), 10.

126 Michel Onfray, "Messages from a Master: Hans Holbein," *Tate*, September 1, 2006, <https://www.tate.org.uk/tate-etc/issue-8-autumn-2006/messages-master>. Published in conjunction with *Holbein in England* (September 28, 2006–January 7, 2007), Tate, London, England.

~~These~~ This trend would seem to be cyclical ^{and} not as we might have naively described, a race to the bottom. Compared ~~the~~ with the practice of eclecticism, minimalism would, in light of these discussions, seem to be a manifestation via consumption of the idealizing drive in the virtual. This is not to ^{claim} ~~suggest~~ ~~minimalism~~ virtual worlds predate the minimalist aesthetic, rather, what is suggested is an encompassing influence ~~yet~~ ~~made~~ to detected but unnamed. The virtual's ^{graphical} ~~regular~~ ebb and surge, the baton of plenty ~~passing~~ ~~betw~~ ~~passed~~ and returned between ~~the~~ ~~im~~ ~~materially~~

constrained reality and ~~at~~ the
mechanical infinity of
reproduction, eventually inherited
an enthusiasm that passed
onto video games only to be
~~later rejected~~ in its early
stage, resembles the cycles
of recycling entropy
contained between form and
content ~~when we regard~~ ^{or considered}
the history of art.



Consider the irony in the
practice of graphically
overhauling Minecraft a topic
mentioned in the Pol. as well

Second Notebook

1

Filling out. Typifying the ongoing cosmetic emendation of previously two-dimensional videogames is the *Yoshi* franchise, whose major releases since 2015 have traded everything for a lot of colored yarn. It is a lineage of reboots and botched attempts at graphical amplification, extending back with the greatest redundancy through *Yoshi's New Island* and *Yoshi's Story* to *Yoshi's Island*, adapted from the *Mario* universe. *Yoshi's Crafted World*, the latest from Nintendo to star the saddled green dinosaur, includes a noteworthy exception for the length of one stage, where *Crafted World* improvises on its titular theme with a "paper town," closely resembling the look of *Yoshi's Story*. Although terrain should be getting denser, the reason for this material retrogression is that, while *Story's* developers use cardboard's bumpy thickness to visually enhance the side-scrolling gameplay beloved by fans, acknowledging the new generation of beefier hardware without diving headfirst into the territory of 360° exploration, *Crafted World's* technological salubrity is such that its designers are free to derogate their project without risking a falling off in perceived value. Like Robert Rauschenberg's *Erased de Kooning Drawing*, ostensibly doing less need not mean want of ingenuity. Rauschenberg's stunt is more a confident man's bravado than the act of some bohemian scraping the creative barrel. Wool's association with thickness aided Nintendo when it decided to dimensionalize chopped-wood footbridges, elevators of made of clouds, and bushes dotting the yellow path. In the end, these cutesy titles are the symptom of their consoles' moderately greater brawn, like a balloon expands to fill a depressurized chamber: blocks all soften and enlarge from one decade to the next, eventually acquiring the rondure of life, just as painted drapery learned to relax, with harsh creases becoming supple curves.

2

Psychic shift. The hover associated with an athlete over the meridian of a straight upward jump — to crest and return, her position neutralizing through the turnover — resembles certain descriptions of the tormented music of Alexander Scriabin with references to "psychic shift."¹ Consider the fact that a basketballer is not observed to begin descending instantly upon reaching the top of her jump, as though repulsed by a downward force.

1 Anatole Leikin, *The Performing Style of Alexander Scriabin* (London: Routledge, 2016).

The main jet
Struggling aloft until it seems at rest

In the act of rising, until
The very wish of water is reversed.²

Romanticism steers slipshod, like a driver fighting for control on black ice. An eighteenth-century partita, however, flits from allemande to saraband, changing direction as sharply as a *Tron* light cycle; that is, the baroque composition goes hither and thither unaffected by momentum. By contrast, an emotional swell of Tchaikovsky's, its lifespan pathetically short, drifts through its own momentum, dragging in place with the simultaneous push/pull of rocket boosters escaping the bonds of earth.

The whole is stable within
Instability, a globe like ours, resting
On a pedestal of vacuum, a ping-pong ball
Secure on its jet of water.³

3

Intravitreal. "A twinkle in your eye" describes nothing in one's eye. Outer appurtenances, lid and brow innervated by the facial nerve, globally constitute this sly hinting.

4

Out of many, one. Boiling a series of transistoral procedures down to one graphic, while seeming to reduce the total amount of information, of course only sweeps these millions of discarded gates under the rug of translation, based on the icon's established order of magnitude, the agreed-upon number of transistors ■ stands for. "Consolidation" would seem to be the appropriate descriptor. As language has always done, gathering its referent children into the shoe of a word.

5

Granting the parallax view. The abstract distillation of nature, say in terms of Paul Cézanne's cylinder, sphere, and cone, lets a material thing's perceptual degeneration, caused by the buildup atmosphere over a distance, stand for that thing's *in situ* physical condition. Pictorial objects thus absorb phenomena locatable between where they are and the observer.

2 Richard Wilbur, "A Baroque Wall-Fountain in the Villa Sciarra," in *New and Collected Poems* (San Diego: Harcourt, 1989), 272.

3 John Ashbery, "Self-Portrait in a Convex Mirror," in *Self-Portrait in a Convex Mirror* (New York: Penguin Books, 1979), 70.

There is a ripple in the window-pane. Moving your head, you can make the ripple travel over the cows grazing in the pasture, over the ploughed land beyond, over the line of poplars, and up into the sky.⁴

As with “approaches that appreciate animals as exotic or symbolic, that anthropomorphize them in a kitsch way, or that consider them solely for their formal features,”⁵ codifying hills as triangles or the moon a circle, whose actual malformation every telescope is happy to confirm, is no less brutally one-sided an interpolation.

6

What the thunder said. In Besant and Leadbeater’s *Thought-Forms*, a catalog of watercolor tulpas the pair created together via extrasensory means is claimed to be abstract. Instead of a compilation of inkblots interpreted like they’re tea leaves, we find stars, bolt lightning, and icebergs, their accompanying interpretations — respectively, “Radiating Affection,” “Murderous Rage,” and “At a Shipwreck” — about as expected.

The object has ceased to exist, because the meaning is merely the hallucination of meaning.⁶

But then the opening chapter admits that “similar objects are already familiar to those who look at the picture and accept the suggestion which it conveys.”⁷ Meanwhile, the bulk of truly nonrepresentational forms collected in the book are merely Chladni figures,⁸ unless they were derived from messing around with pendulums.

7

White rings of tumult. Consisting strictly of line, a perfect circle can no more be said to exhibit curvature than ephemerally, for “perfect” refers to the hypothetical condition of geometric linelessness and “circle,” a polygon composed of adjusting intervals, edges, or lines equidistant to a single point. Thus the notion of a perfect circle writes its own epitaph as “a lineless polygon of lines.” Growth beyond dot status to the qualified circle demands an original move into the second dimension. In other words, having no spatial extent, a point cannot “lean into” flection. Unless

4 J.M. Coetzee, *Foe* (New York: Viking, 1987), 50.

5 Stephen Davies, *The Artful Species: Aesthetics, Art, and Evolution* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 23.

6 T.S. Eliot, “Swinburne as Poet,” in *The Sacred Wood* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1921), 136.

7 Annie Besant, and C.W. Leadbeater, “The Difficulty of Representation,” in *Thought-Forms: A Record of Clairvoyant Investigations* (London: Theosophical Publishing Society, 1905), 16.

8 “When resonating, a plate or membrane is divided into regions that vibrate in opposite directions, bounded by lines where no vibration occurs (nodal lines)” *Wikipedia*, s.v. “Ernst Chladni.”

it first breaks straight, a point attempting to only curve would therefore be limited to turning in place.

It might both come-to-be out of nothing and exist as a composite of nothing; and thus presumably the whole body will be nothing but an appearance. But if it consists of points, it will not possess any magnitude.⁹

It's why an event has to begin before it can be felt leave in its wake, like a trail of slime, the metaphysical fact of its having once been. To claim instantaneity for something that indeed took place obviously sets up an information paradox, where the event concludes inside of what is intended to be its duration, or, contradicting the very attempt to denote the impossible, while an event of no duration doesn't occur in fewer seconds but none. It raises an interesting point about the fundamental difference between absence of duration and duration merely as a postulate of human thought. Crossing this line should not be likened to photons shaving fractions off their best lap but, instead, a categorical leap that separates lines and points. Not a shorter line but line's annulment, the Euclidean stick-drag in the sand being functionally imaginary, like a municipal plaque that located Golgotha for us, where not even the customary skull or a splinter of wood remains. Any depiction of a qualityless concept dies of crossed purposes. The poet asks, with apologies to Bernhard Riemann, "In curved space, is a line a circle?"¹⁰ Answer: "There will be no edges, but curves. / Clean lines pointing only forward."¹¹ Every mark, divot, and scratch aspires to the condition of line because that's what they already are. Note what is the actual intermediacy of a corner as an element reified by the interfacing of two perpendicular lines; a corner floats within the lines' superstitious middle like a grandmother's lap. Or a lap not only disappears when one stands up but no longer means anything.

8

Intervention affected. With "It Was Never a Dress," the social-media campaign that revised the women's-bathroom stick figure with the color palette of Wonder Woman, what was otherwise a tweetable illustration or big sticker inevitably turned up as the real thing: hard plastic and, as evidenced by a widely shared photograph, complete with incidental patina, like that of any public object. Affixed to a door for such a period of time so as to accrue all the usual scuffs and scratches, by itself evidence of longevity, leaves us with an argument for the new placard's acceptance in the world ex post facto.

When the painter Edvard Munch — who liked to hang on to things, and look after them badly or not at all — said of his pictures that they would be

9 Aristotle, quoted by Nick Huggett, *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, s.v. "Zeno's Paradoxes," June 11, 2018, <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/paradox-zeno/>.

10 Arthur Sze, "The Redshifting Web," in *The Redshifting Web: New and Selected Poems, 1970–1998* (Port Townsend: Copper Canyon Press, 1998), 8.

11 Tracy K. Smith, "Sci-Fi," in *Life on Mars* (Minneapolis: Graywolf Press, 2011), 7.

improved once they had got a few holes in them, he should have been thinking of Schwitters, who seems to use only old and worn ingredients in his collages, things that have *already lived*.¹²

Adding wear and tear to untried hypotheticals lends an air of toleration, of having already withstood; the clay side-splatter left on pickup trucks, like the Edwardian surgeon's blood-encrusted apron. Certain contemporary artists will upgrade a giclée print with packing tape, random dabs of acrylic paint, or synthetic gold leaf, whereby one might conclude that the unspoken goal is to hamstring the daunting informational opulence of a film camera. Compared with their analog forebearers, digital photographs have become cloying *objets d'art*, doomed to our forgetting them in cloud storage. How ironic that photogravurists lavishly costumed their sitters and tinted the blowups, no doubt owing to self-consciousness (Linda Seton determines to get by without spending a cent of her inheritance) over the question of artistry and skill. As with Damien Hirst, who's our Andy Warhol, photography's groundbreakers find themselves exposed to the charge of laziness, as if literal verisimilitude were shameful.

A photograph has for too long been as easily obtained as candy. Whether in vintage boutiques by the crateful or shot on a smartphone in multiples, no doubt the medium's future lies with a form of meddling that half reminds one of the Lud-dite desire to undo an industry's latest advancement. In this case the result can be remunerative, though unintuitively so, in which the same old success is minted out of an ugly compromise, like the fugitive in a Western disfigures her face in a desperate bid to elude her captors. Through varying degrees of aesthetic "damage" it is confirmed that the artist indeed contributed, the idea being to enhance the resulting print, not to mention the gallery's asking price. Thus the maximalist art of Andreas Gursky breaks auction-house records owing to his use of Photoshop and the Safdie brothers add graininess to their films.

For a human being, is "reality" not ONTOLOGICALLY defined through the minimum of RESISTANCE — real is that which resists, that which is not totally malleable to the caprices of our imagination?¹³

One might expect scarification to be oftener practiced were a spotless complexion synonymous with having skin, to say nothing of cosmetic freckles, while a great deal of tattooing would appear to be prompted by kenophobia if nothing else. After the unplugged decades, natural vocals come to be as generic as vanilla. The plainchant of hippies is overshadowed by hip-hop's quirky tuning, then comes neofolk and acoustic rap. The terminal form and seeming independence of memes present each one as a digital tumbleweed that finally blows one's way; our collective hunch that the web is shapeless, due to its both decentralized and omnipresent frontier, or that it is a thought-ocean of unplumbable depths, means that we generally encounter its hairballs of remixed content belatedly. The paradox is that a new meme also has the air of having been vetted; on the other hand, those with

12 Michael Hofmann, "Kurt Schwitters," in *Where Have You Been? Selected Essays* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2014), 243.

13 Slavoj Žižek, *On Belief* (London: Routledge, 2001), 51.

actual history come off nostalgic at best, as internet antiques telling of attitudes long surpassed or cancelled out of the noosphere.

9

Either/or. In Michael Moebius's painting *Marilyn Bubblegum*, usually underscored with the phrase "BEING NORMAL IS BORING," there is intimated to exist a rift between normal and abnormal, where beauty is equated with the latter. Flawed and flawless, normal and unusual, are flipped, such that on the surface normalcy is defined as the condition of being without flaws but read as eccentricities, like blowing a gum bubble is a universal sign for disaffected laxity. In so many words, "perfectly dull."

Table 1

Denotation	Interesting than Boring
Connotation	Ugly than Beautiful

As a novelty shirt displayed in beachside gift shops and retailers, the hidden message of normal qua boring is that abnormalcy, which is to say exceptional beauty, comes down to a lifestyle choice.

The goal of this look was to make my insufficiencies appear chosen, to give my unstylish hair and clothes the force of protest.¹⁴

It can remind us of celebrities' hand-bra selfies and films such as Amy Schumer's *I Feel Pretty*, which teaches that the solution to loving one's unfamous body is affliction by a powerful delusion, the quasi-feminist inversion of 2001's *Shallow Hal*. Championing the expensive lifestyles of professional narcissists while pretending to espouse body positivity, this sort of Trojan horse is too often hurried through the gates of internet opinion for looking like a win-win. Hence the allure of lip-sync dance videos, namely those on TikTok. In committing oneself to mouthing fifteen seconds of upbeat pop rap, the only thing remaining to the uploader is her conventionally attractive body. But this, too, is sacrificed, the lyrics matched with "original" choreography that itself can be understood as collagist, the aggressively banal movements interspersed with cheeky scowling and disarming smiles meant to convey self-awareness after all.

The professionals of striptease wrap themselves in a miraculous ease which constantly clothes them, affords them the icy indifference of skillful practitioners haughtily taking refuge in the certitude of their technique: their knowledge clothes them like a garment.¹⁵

- 14 Ben Lerner, *Leaving the Atocha Station* (Minneapolis: Coffee House Press, 2011), 26.
- 15 Roland Barthes, "Striptease," in *Mythologies*, trans. Annette Lavers (New York: Hill and Wang, 2012), 167.

Classifying themselves as teenage ingénues, whose wardrobes run the gamut from loose pajama bottoms to close-fitting athleisure, these influencers masturbate unstable egos and laugh at their prodigality—the windfall of sun-kissed youth—while disavowing every clip as harmless fun, the anonymous follower’s moral alibi is that she’s allowed to enjoy as a voyeur in sheep’s clothing. No doubt we’ve begun calling celibacy disdain for convention, as the enlightened already do in forgoing bar soap and fluoride.

10

Irony’s sincerity. Popular novelists and the taste-making editors of literary reviews would like us to believe that the last sixty years merely represent feigned engagement; communication co-opted by a tone, which is dependably the oppressive mocking of unseriousness.

The post-ironist folds over on his own sincerity with exaggeration, using the ironic not just to ridicule, but also to enjoy the absurdities of what he genuinely appreciates.¹⁶

That sincerity can be continuously rediscovered between long stretches of superficial glibness, and thus once in a while new, only really evidences our willingness to confess in the worst faith, with a lipless smile and shrug, that love is a periodicity of contemporary human life when found to be genuine.

For the time being, things are quite different; for the time being, the comedy of life has not yet “become conscious” of itself; for the time being, it is still the age of tragedy, the age of moralities and religions.¹⁷

11

Lugubrious motor. Although straightforward in their motion, each of Erik Satie’s frigid-but-stately *Gymnopédies* and, to a lesser extent, the seven Gnossiennes, if one counts *Le fils des étoiles*, harbor what might be thought of as microlacunae of velleity, in which a solipsistic note can dissolve in isolation. The *Gymnopédies* are romantic hybrids that cross-pollinate lassitude with a sense of metronomic indefatigability. Compare Ravel’s *Une barque sur l’océan*, a composition of ceaseless, believably fluid dynamics, where we distinctly hear salty ocean slap against the little boat. Or bring Rachmaninoff’s Third Concerto to just about a halt and the logic would corrupt. Anticipated by Liszt in the third of his *Concert Études* and continued a half century later with ragtime, these novel pieces stage the alarming

16 Robert Mariani, “Million Dollar Extreme’s Adult Swim Show Becomes Collateral Damage of Trump’s Victory,” *The Federalist*, December 12, 2016, <https://thefederalist.com/2016/12/12/million-dollar-extremes-adult-swim-show-becomes-collateral-damage-trumps-victory/>.

17 Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Joyous Science*, ed. and trans. R. Kevin Hill (New York: Penguin Books, 2018), 34.

fusion of kinetic feeling slowed through inordinate grace. This is exactly the *sprezzatura* of card magician Ricky Jay or Michael Moschen, the pure finesse of whose juggling surpasses the idea of the sport. When these musical voices of Satie's dally the traditional Beethovenian penalty, loss of momentum, doesn't seem to apply: pistons of mystical efficacy budge this lugubrious motor, humping it upward from asthenic valleys.

12

Overlaps. On the challenge of conforming landscape to human perception, Boris V. Rauschenbach writes,

One of the recurring problems in visual art is the representation of space and objects within it on a picture plane. [...] The only way to meet the requirement that a spatial representation in a picture plane shall not have 'break-ups' or unwanted overlaps is to introduce distortions in the representation — obvious departures from what is seen.¹⁸

It occurs to me that cubism is *the* Euclidean mood. According to Rauschenbach, no representational painting can be done in perfect — distortionless, or not "crimped" — accordance with human vision. Instead of crushing flat the visual-perceptual pleats, which are perhaps the depictive equivalent of infinitesimals, mathematics' problematic leftover, Braque and Picasso rotate and mortise in order to accommodate these fissures, denaturalizing the picture but maintaining a superficial integrity.

13

Haydn's bit players. Whatever their real triviality, Boccherini's fandangos seem to us triumphant as composed music by dint of sheer cleverness. Scarlatti is unjustly caught in this trawl; his sensitivity doesn't convey a lesser appetite's unpretention but something like the tragicomedy of Orpheus in search of a lyre.¹⁹ A great deal of Haydn can be thought as closer to the lighthearted interplay of textures than as so much drama consisting of identifiable characters, which is to say musical

18 Boris V. Rauschenbach, "Perceptual Perspective and Cézanne's Landscapes," *Leonardo* 15, no. 1 (Winter 1982): 28–29.

19 Although he plays beautifully, it is strangely difficult to imagine that, while pacifying Cerberus and persuading Hades to give up Eurydice, Orpheus performs any one piece of music in particular. Exquisite playing, in the technical sense, is meaningless without something, whether written or improvised on the spot, playing out its distinct musical logic. But then this detracts from the player, unless Apollo's legendary student is also a composer. This is our abstract idea of music: as a collective noun stored within ability, maybe then released in the seclusion of a wood or public. Like a waterseller making his way through Seville, what Orpheus pours forth is a homogeneous substance and a product one could certainly acquire elsewhere — in contrast to Giuseppe Verdi's "Drinking Song," which is only found in *La Traviata* — except the quality is uniquely high.

ideas worth caring about. Just when you think you've encountered a striking idea by a lesser-known of the baroque, then you learn about La Folia or one of the handful of chaconnes traded around the Continent. But this may be chalked up to Haydn unfavorably compared with Mozart. Though he predates Haydn, of course the more significant figure on the timeline is Bach, suggesting an alternating-but-equal historical pattern of idea, texture, idea. Haydn's genius lies both chronologically and qualitatively down in the valley between two mountains; an important river, but not a summit. Or, to paraphrase H.L. Mencken, he's like a nice girl on your knee when another is on your mind.

14

Art as charged battery. Paul Virilio's violence of speed concerns in large part the compression of time and space along with their mediation, facilitated and encouraged by accelerating technologies. Hundreds of hours are squirreled away inside a Leonardo, like a tree hollow loaded with acorns or a battery cell based on vibranium. Thus revelation (the mayor pulls down the white tarp) is a showing violence.²⁰

The artist knows that his work has its full effect only when it arouses belief in an improvisation, in a wondrous instantaneousness of origin.²¹

A painted canvas releases its charge and zaps the observer, like a surplus of muscle passively denotes hours spent in the gym. Sonic spins in place before he's released, Donkey Kong winds up his punching arm by giving it several counterclockwise rotations.²²

"In *your* country," Mein Herr began with a startling abruptness, "what becomes of all the wasted Time?"

Lady Muriel looked grave. "Who can tell?" she half-whispered to herself. "All one knows is that it is gone — past recall!"

- 20 In James Whale's *Frankenstein*, the angry mob's involuntary drawback tells us about the monster's horrifying appearance, while the ravishing close-up shot of its face early on is frustratingly brief. In a society based, instead, on telling stories, as opposed to showing them, there's the watery fight between Magwitch and Compeyson in *Great Expectations*, which is reported to Pip after the fact, in compensating for his limited point of view; director David Lean followed Dickens in his version of the novel, while I suspect that later adaptations would prefer to shoot this final melee beneath the Thames. Cinema suits T.S. Eliot's recommendation for objective correlatives, the creative renouncement of telling's dictatorship. And we might hold Cormac McCarthy's microscopic attention to the American terrain, its every rock cataloged by type, up to Terrance Malik's body of work, which is more twilight and burning fog than plot. Think, too, of the presentational flip-flopping pornography has seen, from unliterary page-turner to dialogueless rendezvous to plot-adjacent vignette.
- 21 Friedrich Nietzsche, *Human, All Too Human*, trans. Marion Faber and Stephen Lehmann (Lincoln: Bison Books, 1996), 103.
- 22 For the equivalent of "spinning in place" in classical music, see the beginning of Frédéric Chopin's Waltz, op. 64, no. 1, or his Étude, op. 10, no. 8.

“Well, in *my* — I mean in a country *I* have visited,” said the old man, “they store it up: and it comes in *very* useful, years afterwards!”²³

As we find in a particular variety of martial arts films, and not necessarily the parodic ones, the fighter doles out a flurry of punches, mistakeable for a Bruce Lee-style feint, before time goes normal again and the opponent absorbs all of the blows in a slurred cluster.

From trapeze to
to trapeze, in the hush that
that follows the drum roll’s sudden pause, through
through the startled air, more swiftly than
than his body’s weight, which once again
again is late for its own fall.²⁴

15

Sans. During the cinquecento period in art, it was if elementary intuition dictated Italians’ pictures. One imagines Perugino thinking “*Il terreno è piatto...*” — and *Ecco!*, the twelve bowling lanes of *Christ Giving the Keys to St. Peter*. It is the same post-impressionist sterility, of landforms lacking gravel, as when hyperrealists copy out a twiggy, lit-up nightscape that could almost pass for a ghost town.

The city itself, one has to admit, is ugly. It appears calm and quiet, but after some time the way it differs from many other centres of commerce becomes clear. Imagine — if that’s possible — a town with no pigeons, no trees, no gardens, where you never hear the flusker of birds’ wings, or even leaves rustling. A null, neutral place where the changing seasons can only be told by looking up at the sky.²⁵

16

Big crunch. In magazine writing and thoughtful video essays, relativist thinking can’t help equating the complexity of reality directly to the universe’s physical size. As opposed to what further discoveries lie just over the event horizon, not additional mathematics but concepts allegedly too out there for all our Einsteins combined, I’m tempted to believe in a Spinoza-esque substance of no quantity.

23 Lewis Carroll, *Sylvie and Bruno Concluded* (New York: Macmillan and Co., 1894), 105.

24 Wisława Szymborska, “The Acrobat,” in *View with a Grain of Sand*, trans. Stanisław Barańczak and Clare Cavanagh (London: Faber & Faber, 1996), 57.

25 Tom Paulin, “Oran,” in *The Road to Inver: Translations, Versions, Imitations* (London: Faber and Faber, 2004), 1.

History is the subject of a structure whose site is not homogenous, empty time, but time filled by the presence of the now.²⁶

Abandoning the stupendous breadth of light years as only another of our abstractions, as meaningless as an hourglass without sand, space could be rethought as singularly dense, with everything cheek to cheek—far-flung asteroids jostle like olives and the trees of Ulaanbaatar flower above lobster shacks in Kennebunkport. The copy-cat science writers who tease us with a ten-dimensional reality are bold enough to identify a simplistic exercise with the universe's actual makeup. For where is the Cartesian ant limited to depthless second-dimensional length and width that goes about as a dot? Instead of ten dimensions, one truism will suffice, which is the mere fact that physical things have dimension by virtue of their basic corporeality, redundantly so, while the number of distinctions one can make using language is infinite.

17

Das Wirtshaus. One staple of Japanese role-playing videogames is the restorative opportunity to check one's party into a country inn for a nominal fee. Observing how Terra Branford, *Final Fantasy VII's* amnesiac heroine, settles down into bed, it's a wonder that the furniture doesn't slide out of frame. In order to conjure a sleeping posture out of nothing, we're asked to imagine the vertical, flat sprite undergoing axial reorientation, from standing's *y*-axis to sleeping's *x*-, unless Terra steps through the mattress. A graphical conflation that is nearly the half-supine position of adult flounder. Since the character's sprite doesn't change a jot, this context-dependent spatial transformation engages the player's ability to sympathize proprioceptively.

As to what happens, phenomenologically speaking, when a minority of players invert their controllers' *y*-axis, such that pushing the analog stick forward now angles the in-game camera downward, hinges on two completely different conceptualizations of the stick's relationship to the camera. For the standard player, a pitch forward with her thumb should fall quite obviously along the *z*-axis, while the inverted configuration can be likened to a plank extending across a fulcrum, that is, the monitor or television's screen, between the controller and implied camera; with either configuration, pulling back on a thumbpad is felt to see-saw the camera. Consequently, this means that neither traditional nor modified use of a controller's analog stick corresponds in players' minds to the same *y*-axis movement, as it invariably does in two-dimensional games, which lack a third axis in any navigable sense, regardless of how the controller is actually held.

26 Walter Benjamin, "Theses on the Philosophy of History," in *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections*, ed. Hannah Arendt, trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken Books, 2007), 261.

typically
in the heart, always signifying
death and especially reserved
for history painting. ^{for example,} ~~As in~~
Jacob Schikanecker's
Murder in the House (1890). The
unusual posture can also
be found in depictions of
wrestling, as in ~~with the~~ Joazeiro's
Dante and Virgil in Hell (1850)
and sacrifice as in Rembrandt's
Abraham and Isaac (1634).

Because ~~the~~ this position of
the arm ^{is difficult to} ~~can~~ only be achieved
~~by~~ ^{the leverage of an} without ~~an~~ external force,
~~there~~ ^{there} being no ~~reason~~ place for it in natural
body language, it means a falling death, or the
clumsy disorder of the corpse. ~~generally understood~~
~~to~~ ^{disorder} ~~signal~~ ~~disharmony~~.

also A distant relative to these thoughts, we
find similar contortions in "robotic" dancing. As we
we've discussed the aim
of choreography is artifice.



See also Rubens' Massacre of the Innocents, ~~and the work of Palma il Vecchio (d. 1578) and Palma Giovane.~~
~~insert~~ * Edward Vimont's Death of Archimedes, Jacek Malczewski's Death of Ellenai (obviously based on Mantegna's Dead Christ) and Donatello's Lamentation over the Dead Christ. * (after The Dark Knight) Philip Co., and ~~Shane Black's~~ The Blueface in Shane Black's The Nice Guys. ~~The blue face in Shane Black's The Nice Guys.~~
 The ~~blue~~ ^{incredibly} ~~blue~~ ^{have} ~~face~~ ^{to enable}

Third Notebook

1

Edging. Taking the path that follows a road one normally drives down is eerily different. Now exposed and slower, one brushes alongside what was dismissed as unreal for being peripheral — those desperate quarter-circles of asphalt infiltrated by crabgrass, apartment complexes the color of a malnourished flamingo, the leaning trees. Why it's preferable to empty bladder in a dimly lit alleyway has to do with its metaphysical dubiety, situated as the city's negative connective tissue and interjected no man's land together. Or who's to say that what takes place does?

So the bumble-bee goes out
very proud
and loudly buzzing:
I have been inside
and to those
who don't quite believe him
he shows his nose
yellow with pollen.¹

Surreal spaces are those felt to be unimportant and yet the center of one's experience, as everything is when you're passing through it. Off-limits and at the same time available, the fringe of what's relevant is treated as such by the callously incurious: soil absorbs a stranger's urine, bushes catch spit. Commuting had relegated this territory to a liminal, fast-receding else. Now you're like the poet diving head-first into a wreck she long ignored. More unsettling here is not up-close inspection of poverty but the vague sensation that one cannot abide where one unquestionably is.

At the snowfields depot there is nothing but snow and silence, wind and blue. I rest in the warm sun, enveloped in the soft shroud of white emptiness; my presence in such emptiness seems noticed, although no one is here.²

1 Zbigniew Herbert, "On Translating Poetry," in *Selected Poems*, trans. John and Bogdana Carpenter (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), 7.

2 Peter Matthiessen, *The Snow Leopard* (New York: Penguin Books, 2016), 165–66.

2

Preludes like shells. Surrounding the beach boardwalk one finds pavers consisting of worthless shells and colored glass. After the cutting of this hardened admixture, which hasn't the finer crush of coquina, local impressions remain of the shells that were bisected across the mason's line, based on whelks and cockles visibly under the surface; these lost halves totter between flatness and depth, as evoked through a moment's reflection.

The shingled pattern that seems to cease
 Against your box's rim
 Continues right on in the piece
 That's underground with him.³

In oval-shaped vases where the base is flat, for the sake of keeping upright, a bulbous remainder similar to the cap of a cigar might be detected, continuing virtually through the table. I'm reminded of the twenty-four beads Chopin strung together on the island of Majorca, or mostly, like the opening⁴ paragraphs of as many stories stapled into an opus. Coloring something in with limited regard for the dotted boundary on the page then trimming the fat with kid scissors, a surplus lives on, burst of neutrinos long tarrying.

I once said, perhaps rightly: The earlier culture will become a heap of rubble and finally a heap of ashes, but spirits will hover over the ashes.⁵

Good preludes have this tantalizing ambiguity, of vaster tableaux hid under sonic clothing, as do the photographs Cindy Sherman artfully disguises as film stills, as though the preceding and succeeding frames were waiting in the wings, one just having exited and the next about to enter. Along the vertical axis, sandwiching a Midwestern house are the ancillary nowheres of cellar and attic. *Waiting for Godot's* memorably palaverous slave, Lucky, a man as burdened as a sumpter and trailing a length of rope, comes onto the stage before his fat handler trots into view. Interestingly, during brief this moment the leash's other half, floating in the amnion that is offstage space, doesn't in the least slacken.

Everything about a creature that comes out of a shell is dialectical. And since it does not come out entirely, the part that comes out contradicts the part that remains inside.⁶

- 3 Thomas Hardy, *Poems of Thomas Hardy: A New Selection*, ed. Ned Halley (London: Macmillan, 2017), 327.
- 4 But see also Friedrich Nietzsche's *Schluß eines Klavierstücks*, a short keyboard composition that apparently amounts, either metaphorically or in fact, to the tail end of such a work.
- 5 Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Culture and Value*, trans. Peter Winch (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), 3e.
- 6 Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, trans. Maria Jolas (Boston: Beacon Press, 1994), 108.

3

Illusioning holism. It could be said that a subsidiary function of dinner jackets and pull-over sweaters is to allow the soft clash of differing materials, as at that sartorial juncture where shirt gets belted into pants, to instead transition. In order for a shirt to illusion holism, that of literal seamlessness, the necktie acts as a dangling scrim for the looped buttons, like Hollywood's centimeter-long hypodermic needle is always removed under a cotton ball and the braided-leather halves of a cowgirl's bolo meet behind in secret a pendant of tumbled malachite. The result of this is the implication of choate garment, for doesn't a button hide its buttonhole, thereby effacing the slit.⁷ Rumpled fabric erupts through the rim of a pullover as though it were all of a piece. In Paolo Uccello's wonderfully theatrical *Saint George and the Dragon*, the dragon's cave, rather than being the outgrowth of stone, is aided by a convenient deposit of moss and vine just where the meeting would be visible.⁸

Periphery becomes wizardly coverage while a freight train is observed to elapse behind commercial buildings. There is a feeling of locomotive length yet, that preceding a contiguous gross hurtling into nothing, as with a clerical collar.

4

Crowded in the head. Dmitri Shostakovich's is a music fraught with rivalries, a hydra of voices vying with itself that, miraculously, is also the farthest thing from noise; the quandaries of a clarinet or oboe laced with paranoid importance.

There's a marked difference between not wanting an answer, and not needing a listener.⁹

Courtly dialogue in the symphonies of Anton Bruckner gives way to a crushingly bland counterpoint that anticipates brutalism's dictatorial sameness, a lawfulness in which brother garrotes brother. What the listener held to be a benevolent force undergirding the orchestra is drastically promoted to its adversary when the brass, like a Panzer tank, overtakes a prayerful tone in the strings.

- 7 Even the vanishing point may be preferred "hidden" behind some large, complicated monument, visible as a distasteful knot if only for being collaboratively felt as the site where everything else suggests it is headed, like the hidden nadir of a whirlpool. See, for example, the open temple doorway in Perugino's *Christ Giving the Keys to St. Peter*. Naturally, the vanishing point cannot be covered up as it is the projection of an observer's mind, somewhat like the painter's extrapictorial if inconspicuous signature. As one might camouflage a scar with a piece of custom tattooing. Instead of removed, the scar is visually superseded.
- 8 *Chicken Run*, the claymated comedy by Aardman Animations, covers the slit around each character's throat with a kerchief or pearl necklace, the models' heads being constantly swapped throughout the animation process.
- 9 Denise Riley, *Impersonal Passion: Language as Affect* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005), 61.

5

Pop-up books. Taped to the wall of this diner is a vintage advertisement whose illustrated items, including a carton of loose cigarettes and scoop of ice cream, use short tabs of paper to support flat duplicates of themselves, each glued in place above the original, reduced to its shadow. Typically it's the same with a pinball machine. Although marginally nearer to where one sits lordling over a plate of eggs and toast, in the sense that the advertisement forms a single image the projected layer must then be aesthetically equivalent to the base. While I'm inclined to think of the pages of extrasensory books as irrelevant to all but the visually impaired, to the extent that duplicates raised to the touch or a layer of brail doesn't change the underlying images so much as superficially double them. Pop-up books, meanwhile, breach the reader's personal space in developing a playful critique of reading and shifting the balance in book-reading from an act of pure intellection to one that's largely mechanical. The fire-breathing dragon's launched jaws, after a moment's pause, smoothly accordion toward the verso with the page's turn.

6

The warlock's familiar. Embarrassment has to be the momentary failure or sabotage of a public act, one's lifelong charade of self-determination, while incontinence is the bodily real's obtrusion between the will and this slavish mass that typically obeys. The careful symbologies fall apart with a lapse of the sphincter. Loose parts lurch and spill in unthinking disregard of our roles, which is to say in spite of the owner's mien of total composure; existence in precedence of essence, or what Roland Barthes, situating the analytic film still against the reel's synthetic motion, calls "the indifference or freedom of position of the supplementary signifier in relation to the narrative."¹⁰ Breasts suddenly exposed uncommonly humiliate with their ramped-up facticity. Body trumps body language for being, in every sense, the louder. The dropping of his trousers undercuts the comedian's mock-serious stance and flatulence interrupts his mock-serious stance. The pretension to modesty doggedly follows a varsity jock keeping his shirt on, while clown shoes are oafish on purpose. Or getting socially drunk can't be thought the negation of one's nine-to-five self when one too many gin and tonics was a decision. The little black dress and sculpted abs look as though an air of discipline whipped up their tautness. In this a morbid something — an electrode touched to a frog's leg. The fitness model's biceps wait like familiars eager to do his bidding.

Suddenly it jerks from its solidarity
 With the concrete, and lurches towards a stanchion
 Bursting with superhuman well-being and abandon
 Shouting Where? Where?¹¹

¹⁰ Roland Barthes, "The Third Meaning," in *Image–Music–Text*, ed. and trans. Stephen Heath (New York: Hill and Wang, 1977), 63.

¹¹ Ted Hughes, "Tractor," in *Collected Poems*, ed. Paul Keegan (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2003), 512.

We're expected to find a sort of fashionable cavalary in a bangle worn loosely on the wrist, except the chances of any bracelet slipping free are slim; as the pirate's devoted Polly goes about the ship uncaged, foiling the plots of mutineers.

7

Behind the scenery. During the opening sequence of Ingmar Bergman's *Fanny and Alexander*, the Swedish auteur's crowning opus, the titular Alexander gazes dreamily into his playset, an elaborate candlelit stage stocked with paper actors. Because he could only be looking at the troupe's gray backsides, it falls to the moviegoer to witness the vivid queen lead before her entourage of gay hunters, whose auxiliary perceptions interpolate for Alexander's.

8

One-sided. How telling that in the Flammarion engraving, so named for its inclusion in Camille Flammarion's nineteenth-century treatise on meteorology, leafed boughs only appear on the farther side of the great tree, denoting for the anonymous artist's fantasy conception a centroidal, observer-based viewpoint.¹² Tipped vertically like saucers of beaten gold, each halo in Duccio's *Annunciation* unconsciously acknowledges the directed planarity inherent to such painting, much as a novelist litters her fiction unthinkingly with the tics of her particular style and a draughtsman's busted thumb will manage to tinge every line. Cocytus, El Dorado, and Joseph Conrad's aphotic Congo derive, as we're taught, from the geographic exceptionalism felt by axial countries, whose racist cartographers haughtily speculated about interiors remote from arbitrarily located middles.

A true man belongs to no other time or place, but is the centre of things.
Where he is, there is nature.¹³

Compare Hiroshige's woodblock depictions of the Tōkaidō Road's fifty-three stations, most of which prioritize setting over the drama of individuals, with the result being that faces are obscured in a fish market's crush, as are those of the men ferrying customers across a stream; like in Robert Altman's *McCabe & Mrs. Miller*, where a lot of unimportant dialogue is lost in deference to the saloon as a whole. In one Basohli illustration to the Bhagavata Purana, the faces of Hindu gods emerge from a primeval void grotesquely frontal if not in sharp half profile, though supposedly the scene is one of haphazard tumult. And the lovely naturalism of Lawrence Alma-Tadema's *Roses of Heliogabalus* quite belies the painting's historical subject.

Compare this to, say, a painting of an apple tree by Grandma Moses. She will make the trunk and then the branches, and she will hang the apples

12 See also J.M.W. Turner's *The Bay of Baiae, with Apollo and the Sibyl*.

13 Ralph Waldo Emerson, "Self-Reliance," in *The Annotated Emerson*, ed. David Mikics (Cambridge: The Belknap Press, 2012), 170.

on it. And you count the apples in the painting and that's how many are on the tree, because she is literally hanging these things. In fact, some of the apples would be behind others, while some would be hidden by branches, but a naive or folk artist tends to paint symbolically — each mark stands for something.¹⁴

Another example from cinema is Dr. Evil's secret lair in *Austin Powers: The Spy Who Shagged Me*, whose carved likeness à la Mount Rushmore reproduces Evil's facial disfigurement. But the set has been designed to resemble Austin's nemesis from inside as well, such that the drooping eyelid is there in sheet metal. This unnecessary obverse, while in some ways structural, works as a visual cue intended for the audience's recognition and is justified either on the grounds of continuity or as one last bit of architectural eccentricity.

9

Once removed. It would often seem that one's basic distance from a fiction enables a secondary spectacle, as with the portrait of Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres's wife, whose coyness is that of meeting the challenge of our gaze, or the quality of eavesdropping on intensely romantic music, so private is the lamentation. We see that Beethoven yells but doesn't scream, and he mourns with the intelligence of Hamlet.

But no trace of consciousness that any eyes are upon us must be visible in the work itself. The actor knows that there is an audience present; but if he acts as though he knew it, he acts ill. [...] Mozart also is great in musical oratory; but his most touching compositions are in the opposite style — that of soliloquy. Who can imagine "Dove sono" *heard*? We imagine it *overheard*.¹⁵

White Noise, Don DeLillo's wryly comic ode to America in the throes of postmodernity, for whose Springfieldesque family an ecological disaster is good television, includes a scene in which passengers, immediately after deboarding a commercial airplane, gather to hear the story of their near crash.

That which drove the prospective victims of Hitler's régime to buy, in paralysed greed, the newspapers in which stood the measures announcing their own doom.¹⁶

- 14 Michel Onfray, "Messages from a Master: Hans Holbein," *Tate*, September 1, 2006, <https://www.tate.org.uk/tate-etc/issue-8-autumn-2006/messages-master>. Published in conjunction with *Holbein in England* (September 28, 2006–January 7, 2007), Tate, London, England.
- 15 John Stuart Mill, "What Is Poetry?," in *The Broadview Anthology of Victorian Poetry and Poetic Theory*, eds. Thomas J. Collins and Vivienne J. Rundel (Ontario: Broadview Press, 2000), 566–67.
- 16 Theodor Adorno, *Minima Moralia: Reflections from Damaged Life*, trans. E.F.N. Jephcott (New York: Verso, 2005), 237.

10

Lights for the night. Driving at night with the headlights clicked on, for the first time I find myself surprised that the dashboard's display is dim, compared with hours earlier. After the sun has gone down less natural light enters the car, but less is needed then to see. During daylight the car's display is brightest, a fact intuition strongly resists.

11

Gradatim ferociter. Those animals, cartoon as well as Linnaean, with legs ablur, have the appearance of outperforming their speed, as when a spooked Scooby-Doo galumphs in place but also the visual effect of detached hubcaps on a lowrider when it stops at an intersection. While a broth remains stationary inside a rotated bowl, stew tends to cling, noted by the contrast of the motionless vegetables.

In motion as the mere displacement of a physical body, rest is, to be sure, only the limiting case of motion. Where rest includes motion, there can exist a repose which is an inner concentration of motion.¹⁷

Bipedalism in videogames is always animated this way, with the avatar's legs triggered by floor. One recalls Giacomo Balla's *Dynamism of a Dog on a Leash* and how a puppy held over a filled bathtub will instinctively paddle the air.

Table 1

	Covers Much	Covers Little
Leisurely	Satie	Schubert
Hurried	Prokofiev	Bach

Going up a flight of stairs, the space commander's foot does not plant itself onto each step. Instead, there's a lot of genuflection while the character model rises smoothly along the flight's diagonal gradient, like the boobytrap staircases of kid-movie villains go flat. Not ambulation as such but connotative enough to be fun.

The result is a glistening homogenous sound with ceaselessly shifting lights and shadows, resembling a highly complex machine that in the vertiginous movement of its many parts remains at a standstill.¹⁸

17 Martin Heidegger, "The Origin of the Work of Art," in *Basic Writings*, ed. David Farrell Krell (New York: HarperSanFrancisco, 2008), 173.

18 Theodor Adorno, *Philosophy of New Music*, ed. and trans. Robert Hullot-Kentor (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006), 70.

12

Jugglers. Aside from hardscrabble origins, videogames and early instruments, such as the pipe organ but also idiophones, share in common a temporal instability so that constantly the sense perdures. We might think of this as the diegetic requirement to juggle fragments, by which I mean either developmental material stale on its own or the bowling pins of individual notes.

13

Solid with holes. If one clutches a large quantity of honey in one-third ounces, each sealed in its own transparent sachet and slick against the other, the handful, despite its nooks, feels like a gibbous solid; however they might be squeezed together the sachets' isolated contents obviously cannot amalgamate. What's puzzling is that the sensation, at least to my palm, equally describes one homogeneous globoid under pressure, the orange sugar able neither to densify nor expand. There is a through-effect of airless contiguity. Imagining a flexible sac that contained the sticky equivalent in liquid form, a single packet would afford this feeling, too, of manipulating honey that hasn't been divided up, albeit the surface is then significantly less. In the abrasion between genitalia, the organs meet in a manner that can seem thoroughly unmediated, notwithstanding the digital camcorder with which they're framed; an oleaginous baldness clings to the actors, evocative of soft statuary, scrotum and lubricious phallus crashing and deforming. Beyond eroticism is the dumbness of this meeting recorded close up, glabrate flesh lurching within labial grooves and everything remembering which is which. In a monadic sense, these two selfsame substances never forget themselves, like releasing the tap into a glass jar and pulling out a handful of polymer beads.

14

Glitch carpets. It is impossible to forget the Azerbaijani designs Faig Ahmed's contemporary "glitch carpets" allude to; the deviated-from shape is there, as though holographically.

This distorted image, although it is fundamentally conditioned by the original, is comical because of its elongation or broadening while its dependence upon the original is still apparent.¹⁹

Lightyears ahead of magazine illustrators afraid to leave their software, all of Ahmed's distension and twisting use thread. Assisted by two dozen weavers, the jowls we see in one carpet actually droop and in another the deluge of amethyst-colored tears is fibrous, not graphical. In all, the frangible reigns on top of its ghostly quadrilateral. While attractive as the distortion of the latter by way of reference, a glitch carpet requires additional yarn over and above that of its Azerbaijani ideal;

19 Theodor Adorno, *Current of Music: Elements of a Radio Theory*, ed. Robert Hullot-Kentor (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2009), 100.

unlike figmental objects, which are limber without answer until substantiated. Is it not by this same tension that a cellist like Hauser creates his transcriptions? Through simplification of what's already incomplex, a single instrument channels song lyrics using vocalise and a timbre like weeping into a barrel.

15

When you're not strong. The incorporation of a column of support into Michelangelo's *David* as a tree stump, keeping with the statue's visual culture, contrasts sharply with the awkward plastic crutches that accompany Japanese figurines. Amiibo, the toys-to-life line developed by Nintendo, are frequently accompanied by stanchions whose milky translucency, along with the company's official renderings, evidences a half-hearted aspiration to be less obtrusive, like a shoulderless top will be seen to hang from semiopaque straps. Aficionados of Nintendo's tchotchke mentally discard them, but it is clear that Amiibo headquarters frequently bumps into aesthetic dead ends.

16

Nimrod from a dream. That hospital sedation is credited with supplying the primary idea for his Cello Concerto recants the sweat and lamp oil Edward Elgar must have poured into this autumnal opus. Couldn't the same could be said of Samuel Taylor Coleridge's laudanum-fueled dream and Paul McCartney's doubtful alibi for "Yesterday."

The ways by which the poet, both insatiable and a perfectionist, managed his failures by not taking himself to account for them.²⁰

Late into his career, both estranged to the nation and lauded, there's Elgar, the only significant English composer since Handel, pecking mazily at the family piano. According to the lore, it is his wife Alice who noticed the adagio, christened "Nimrod" after this episode, like methane trapped a thousand centuries under ice. *Winnie-the-Pooh* stitches together the young Milne's cohort of real dolls, *The Wind in the Willows* a number of bedtime tales.

17

One thing after another. Similar to how a mouse pointer will click open folders or adjust a hard drive's share of disk storage, the conventional cooktop stove is fixed with bloated knobs in order to better match a chef's obtuse fist, each dial of brushed metal leading on the farther side to electric ignition and the modulation of flames. Petroleum gas sojourns along a chain of calibrated gates.

20 William Logan, "The State with the Prettiest Name," in *Our Savage Art: Poetry and the Civil Tongue* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009), 108.

What becomes immediately obvious in observing this act is the detachment of the artist's hand from the result on the canvas, the distance the colors must travel before they reach the painting's surface.²¹

Maybe one imagines a doctoral candidate shambling through and dutifully cross-referencing Ezra Pound's unfinishable *Cantos*, an Odyssean work founded upon the ossuaries of Italian comedies and ballads from the Provençal. Here allusion roots the multilingual flower, petaled by verbs, to an agrestal soil, from where capital letters hoist a nutriment of the useful dead. Jointed action has a feeling of congestion — the instantaneous, connected *yank* of testing a contraption's linkages as one's shoe tries a bicycle, the feeling of rubber's spreading grip delivered through the pedal. I can't help thinking, relatedly, of the martial stomp that launches a Nazi's salute or how a wooden toy, stringed through its joints, convulses into and out of tensity.

18

High and low. Outside the science museum a quartet of uninspired exhortations, DISCOVER, IMAGINE, SEARCH, INNOVATE, displays paired with an orange butterfly, triceratops fossil, floating astronaut, and diaphanous, blue hand bathed in something like binary; suffused with this blather of is and os, the hand points out of frame, nostalgic for the future. I guess the museum's visitors, confronted with high-caliber evolution, are expected to find remarkable utopia's overreach, the human epidermis superseded by a tegument of dated circuits. But then this boring stock photograph accidentally theorizes negative volume, in which lowest (indecipherable code) sublimates for uppermost (our replaced flesh). Consider a self-permeable sphere halfway obliterated inside-out; specifically, the interior of overlapping convexities. Although definitely a conceptual nonstarter, the great innovation would spur us to a hokey kind of sublimity, which is the leftover ghost of capitalism hyped to a delirium. Instead of bone and arteries, a doctor's scalpel finds the élan of technology.

19

Hygroscopy. Animals stand within a landscape of pooling dilutions in Arthur B. Davies's *Unicorns (Legend — Sea Calm)*, bringing to mind the pious subjects of Paolo Uccello, who precedes by the usual number of centuries the former's birth in upstate New York. If Uccello meant his style as a visual compromise, his rusted caballeros lacking beefier plate owing to the inadequate depth of field, Davies can be said to have rejected an excess of splendor, which is to say the talent at his disposal. A couple of muses attend on waferish unicorns, while the placid sound behind them resembles an opened lung. Modernism stands at odds with Renoir's "juice" and the relucant haystacks Monet lumped out of doors. Sweltering afternoon and

21 Marco Grassi, "Acheiropoeta," *The New Criterion* 39, no. 4 (December 2020): 12, <https://newcriterion.com/issues/2020/12/acheiropoeta>.

daybreak change a boating party's *déjeuner*. In other words, impressionism registers how humidity and light get glass to wilt.

The ways in which solid objects deliquesce into sense data.²²

Symbolism better aligns with an oiled plow that looks shopworn, the pasturing cattle and newly refurbished church inexplicably ambiguous to sight: Puvis de Chavannes, or whomever, decided against including fog. Different still is an absent haze that continues to alter, a quixotic job for the ambitious that's also not unheard of in music. Schumann's *Humoresque*, for instance, "is to be read against the background of the gradual loss of the voice in his songs: it is not a simple piano piece but a song without the vocal line, with the vocal line reduced to silence, so that all we actually hear is the piano accompaniment."²³ An invisible climate relies on the boater eroded in its midst, and from this spot in the d'Orsay I occupy that storm's eye.

Much camping focuses on a long stick: the displacement of the hand through space, whereby the camper is helped to nudge smoking coals and shoo the odd toad. Among the cattails on a starry night, into a stream's fresh babble the scout dips her wrist; the crystal lobes split up like tadpoles, then the faint ecstasy of trespass subsides.

Every time the machine tries to swallow or mechanize The Tramp, we might expect he will break down, or become like the machine. But it is the machine and factory system which breaks down, when it cannot digest Charlie's Tramp.²⁴

James Wright's Minnesota-inspired "A Blessing" is the ideal foil to John Keats's feverish consultation with a nightingale. Wright's poem trades that happy dryad for a couple of mares, and what at first seemed licit intrusion ("they can hardly contain their happiness / That we have come") comes to prelude a leap of faith ("over the barbed wire") headlong into death's remembrance. It is this gesture, roused out of haughty proximity, that brings on the speaker's final thought, which now we understand to be one of mortal spoilage: "Suddenly I realize / That if I stepped out of my body I would break / Into blossom."²⁵ Among science fiction's opportuni-

- 22 Daniel Albright, *Panaesthetics: On the Unity and Diversity of the Arts* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014), 77. Romanticism's exponential advance over the course of European music history likewise affects a kind of obscuration as the compositional skeleton becomes harder to make out, either buried under layers of orchestral color or structurally diluted from the bottom up. The knowable body's liquefaction, blurring down to the bones that are its hard outline and essence together.
- 23 Slavoj Žižek, *The Parallax View* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2006), 365. See Giacometti's *Hands Holding the Void (Invisible Object)*.
- 24 Gregory Stephens, "Biting Back at the Machine: Charlie Chaplin's Modern Times," *Senses of Cinema* 60 (October 2011), <https://www.sensesofcinema.com/2011/feature-articles/biting-back-at-the-machine-charlie-chaplins-modern-times/>.
- 25 James Wright, "A Blessing," in *The Branch Will Not Break* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 1963), 57.

ties includes depositing the fragile earthborn at some zero level, the impossible confines of which a cadet is safely retrieved from and the gadgeteer able to slough voluntarily.

The metaphor of form as a diving bell in which the poet descends into an element that would otherwise destroy him.²⁶

The futurist's wet dream, to float at earth's core unscathed and witness the birth of stars with impunity, carries with it all the vanity of thanatopsis. I'm reminded of the daydreamer in Wallace Stevens's "This Solitude of Cataracts," who wishes himself of bronze and thus by a romantic leap "released from destruction." Such is our strange jealousy for what seems an inanimate thing's immortality. In caricature of artists' homesickness for the nineteenth century, what Frederic Jameson calls a "mode-of-production aesthetic"²⁷ tacitly sanitizes the industrial environment, which by its nature is exactly antithetical to living tissue.

What it seems to have to do with, really, is human beings' reconciliation with the fact of having a body.²⁸

It seems to me that steampunk's deeper motivation is thus the desire for a super-human union born of an inferiority complex; this perceived inferiority may be related to either lifespan, compared to mere stuff and the collective longevity of earth, or education, as with the specialized knowledge behind computer science. The aesthetic Jameson identifies, challenging into material form a generation's disenchantment with capitalism, neuters the junkyard and laboratory; the go-lucky operator runs slapdash between towering, carnassial heaps of trash and a teenage physicist is insulated against the radioactivity of nuclear fuel rods by nothing more than fire-retardant gloves and a leather apron.

20

Subject and its ground. Since artistry necessarily entails selection, negotiating against what a dish of pears might be presented requires nailing fast the possible configurations. As artificial objects, each painting that doesn't aspire to be sculpture chooses instead to articulate its rectangular limit: a picture simply ends, whereupon the last licks of brush waterfall over the canvas's naked, drear edges.

The earth fell away on every side equally in its arcature and by these limits were they circumscribed and of them were they locus.²⁹

26 Christian Wiman, *He Held Radical Light: The Art of Faith, the Faith of Art* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2018), 22.

27 Frederic Jameson, *Archaeologies of the Future: The Desire Called Utopia and Other Science Fictions* (New York: Verso, 2005), 59.

28 David Foster Wallace, "Roger Federer as Religious Experience," *The New York Times*, August 20, 2006, <https://www.nytimes.com/2006/08/20/sports/playmagazine/20federer.html>.

29 Cormac McCarthy, *Blood Meridian* (New York: Vintage International, 1992), 307.

Much is to do with how the subject depicted relates to its ground, like in any one of a number of paintings that begin *Landscape with...*, and the frame.

Table 2

	Infinite Ground	Finite Ground
Subject against	History	Still Life
Subject as	Landscape	Genre
Partial Subject	Impressionism	Purism
No Subject	Abstract Expressionism	De Stijl

There's generally disagreement. The giant sunflower bloomed left of the center, or the kelp-laden tide has lunged out of bounds. Framed art is more rosy lens than glass orifice, a hole for already vistas acclaimed by drapes. "Not so much a framed window open on to the world," says John Berger, "as a safe let into the wall, a safe in which the visible has been deposited."³⁰ If one takes Berger's window for a lossless, unfixed composition, a Gothic wheel's daily insolation is like the glow of pregnancy, such that sunlight is stained glass's version of blood and salt.

21

On tattoos. Among the most salient psychological aspects of inking skin involves the tattoo's hidden presence, such that a bit of secret needling can be an emotional wellspring or kind of totemic confidant, the wearer's alone if unmeant for public exhibition.³¹ Recall Joseph Conrad's Professor, with one hand always clasping the rubber ball affixed to his jacket's flask of explosives.

Like a winner's speech in your pocket:
 what everyone knows you have
 even though you may never use it.³²

Near the village of Montignac, the Lascaux complex is stained with a beautiful ochre zoo Upper Paleolithic families spat and daubed together, with overlapping bison, spotted deer, and aurochs, the latter chased to extinction. Farther recessed than natural light reached, these viewless animals are speculated to have aided our forebears on their prehistoric hunts as remotely fortifying mascots.

³⁰ John Berger, *Ways of Seeing* (New York: Penguin Books, 1977), 109.

³¹ Besides the flanged wearables of a sex shop, there is a secretive kick to be had with sneakers where the insole is specially dyed or when the silk lining of a jacket crawls with paisley (the closest we've come to a microbial fashion, which for a long while was as contagious as paper marbling among bookmakers). And stripping a mattress of its sheets lets us behold edge-to-edge hydrangeas, which nobody asked for.

³² Luljeta Lleshanaku, "A Perfect Day," in *Negative Space*, trans. Ani Gjika (New York: New Directions, 2018), 130.

The essence of this bliss was to walk by yourself in the black night; the slide shut, the top-coat buttoned; not a ray escaping, whether to conduct your footsteps or to make your glory public: a mere pillar of darkness in the dark; and all the while, deep down in the privacy of your fool's heart, to know you had a bull's-eye at your belt, and to exult and sing over the knowledge.³³

22

Greater than we know. Concluding his sonnet series, *The River Duddon*, Wordsworth acknowledges, though in the major key of natural faith, what might be our saddest delusion: the “[feeling] that we are greater than we know.” Why we suspect ourselves geniuses,³⁴ as though one but lacked an unbiased signatory,³⁵ swivels on the fable of gift intelligence, frivolous, nigh-psychic precocity that sets the hobby-less-at-leisure salivating, as the completeness of God's thought should seem to us a perfectly colossal stupidity, like white is held to imply an absence. Our romantic heritage continues to foster genius as the magical thinking par excellence, a gushing enthusiasm catching up astronomers and the writers of symphonies, which displaces the work of looking and drafting. Lucky millions find in these tea leaves a kinship sterility, and would-be cosmologists haunt *Quora* threads with their competing theories of everything, the baccarat player comparing himself to Einstein with the greatest of reluctance.

The ground of the mistake is, that men, finding in the raptures of the higher poetry a condition of exaltation, to which they have no parallel in their own experience, besides the spurious resemblance of it in dreams and fevers, impute a state of dreaminess and fever to the poet.³⁶

The serial killer Richard Ramirez, believing the simplistic tropes about evil, assumes he should have an opinion on the subject, only to recite before television reporters a lot of Nietzschean cant along the lines of nihilism and the sobriety of Lucifer. The man who figured out general relativity denied that loftiest of categories his membership in silent protestation of the same bogus notion of intellection ex nihilo the dolt champions, who reduces question-asking to a pointless flourish.

33 Robert Louis Stevenson, “The Lantern-Bearers,” in *The Lantern-Bearers and Other Essays*, ed. Jeremy Treglown (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1988), 230.

34 See the Dunning–Kruger effect.

35 Perhaps the seeming grammatical mismatch of they/them for an individual, rather than being evidence of identity politics' lingering inability to get its story straight, not only draws attention to the shortage of English pronouns available to the non-binary but can be said to resist mainstream assimilation, the slow climb toward normalcy, through this fundamental incongruence. Meanwhile, self-identifying as irrepressibly other comes to be broadly accepted on its own terms, like anyone might flag themselves with a button indicative of their faction and its collective grievances. As Albert Camus observes in one book-length essay, there lies at the paradoxical heart of rebellion the aspiration toward order.

36 Charles Lamb, “The Sanity of True Genius,” in *The Works of Charles Lamb* (London: Edward Moxon, 1842), 22.

“What is truth?” said jesting Pilate; and would not stay for an answer.³⁷

After Einstein's death his Princeton office was flooded with correspondence he left sealed and an avalanche of scientific papers.

23

Sling out of shot. Spider-Man's ejected sling exceeds its own representation whenever it leaves the comic's panel so that he might pendulate through the Big Apple as relative to a hinge, the target a skyscraper ahead in pictorial space; anchored invisibly in outer Bristol board, this oscillation depends on limiting sight of Spider-Man, such that two locations biject like in teleportation. Be it Kuleshov effect or just regular credulity, saccading panel to panel legitimizes this graphical feint. Gaps are thus the forge by which impossible levels of circuit complete. Anything may be accomplished—Selbit's lovely assistant survives sawing and a bull charges at the bullfighter's living curtain—so long as nothing is disclosed. But then it isn't readerly faith that a viscid batch of webbing reaches the Chrysler Building; this occurs for an illustrated fact. Belief in a hero's superhuman abilities is the same generosity of spirit that gives magic a pass, for laser vision and transmogrification can never justify their ways to science. As he surveys Midtown for the Sinister Six, Parker's fingertips overpraise the gecko.

24

The question of expressionism. The rabble of Francisco de Goya's art, grotesque from maltreatment by Bonaparte and deadening field work, are placed at a less-than-justified distance with respect to where a beholder stands in the Prado and seldom found to dominate the foreground. Following postimpressionism, a figure's stony deformity no longer has atmospheric deterioration to blame. Even before he entered the *Quinta del Sordo*, Goya brought to his work a sort of pictorial glaucoma.

In the optical democracy of such landscapes all preference is made whimsical and a man and a rock become endowed with unguessed kinships.³⁸

These late-period middle grounds, with their bruised lunatics and raggedy, huddled masses, owe themselves to the practice that helps define modernism: depressing representationalness at the focal point, a departure even from the style of Diego Velázquez, by whose legislation messes of oils are able to escalate in resolution to become Saint Thomas shouldering Christ's spear, for instance. Edvard Munch, with his horrified alien volte-facing almost out of the foreground, and the figurative work of Francis Bacon represent the natural evolution of Goya's frescoes, not

37 Francis Bacon, “Of Truth,” in *Francis Bacon: The Major Works*, ed. Brian Vickers (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 341.

38 McCarthy, *Blood Meridian*, 259.

just for their smudged, calcined indistinctness (in Bacon this is almost gore) but illegal nearness.³⁹

25

Hurting art. Jake and Dinos Chapman's color retouching of the *Disasters of War* intaglio prints is Britart one-upmanship at its best, a jubilant pasquinade that honors Goya's ferociously condemnatory portfolio. But is it novel anymore to chastise the public for its obsolete adoration? In theory the brothers' collection, cleverly titled *Insult to Injury*, the insult being the act of defacing masterpieces, injury Goya's strife-torn republic of mutilation and alarm, delivers a queer shock through colliding abject terror with drollery, like pulling the rug out from oneself masks the garlic-like odor of sincerity, which normally keeps away the vampiric ironists. Bolstered by Mark Rothko and Jackson Pollock, Arshile Gorky and Hans Hofmann certainly did repudiate the foregone Thirties, except that vanguards tends to be Hegelian.

The ceaseless activity of their own inherent nature makes them at the same time moments of an organic unity, where they not merely do not contradict one another, but where one is as necessary as the other; and this equal necessity of all moments constitutes alone and thereby the life of the whole.⁴⁰

For its depthlessness, abstract expressionism is the teleologic splash of a cultural-historical chain that ends geometric perspective in literal closure. Pollock's multi-color gristle intrudes into our space, not that of any pictorial world. As hilarious as death, the Chapmans' masque daubings, with lidless eyes sunken in blanched faces, shore up already core aspects of expressionism.

26

Calligraphy being foolproof. Because Islamic calligraphy doesn't attempt to depict anything in the mimetic sense — no Persian Longhairs, no date palms reflecting in the Euphrates, no quadrilateral Charbagh — it rules out in advance the possibility of failure. Painting from life assumes the risk of misunderstanding an aspect of method, the subject chosen, even one's artistic goals. Handwriting follows and lapses from popular usage like spelling. Its competition is other scripts, the relative beauty of which is subject to debate. Calligraphy is unlikely to appear outmoded except from an occidental standpoint, which overwhelmingly prefers catalogs of things. Lettering for the disciplined pleasure of it is, furthermore, a mannerist im-

39 In the nightmarish right-hand panel of Hieronymus Bosch's *Garden of Earthly Delights*, a city engulfed in fire resembles James Abbott McNeill Whistler's *Nocturne in Black and Gold — The Falling Rocket*, except for being physically minute in painterly stature. This is what accounts for the abstract character of Bosch's work.

40 G.W.F. Hegel, *The Phenomenology of Mind*, trans. J.B. Baillie (New York: Cosimo Classics, 2005), 1:68.

pulse of literacy, as art in general could be described as the exaggeration of craft per se. Barring a slip of the reed, a design based on “unfixed” shapes must be thought absolutely equivalent with the maker’s intentions.

27

Qualities of the lunch. John Ruskin’s objection to *Object*, the teacup, saucer, and sugar spoon covered by twentieth-century Swiss artist Meret Oppenheim in gazelle fur, is predictable enough: “If you don’t want the qualities of the substance you use, you ought to use some other substance.”⁴¹ Oppenheim’s response is also guessable, namely that *Object* is neither a teacup and spoon together on their saucer but one sculpture called *Object*.⁴² What moves us to understand *Object* as semiotically mixed in the first place is supposing its material incorrect. The time-less associations of gazelle fur with gazelles and tea with porcelain is flagrantly jumbled; form, as we’re used to seeing, has been orphaned from function. Gazelle is suitable because Oppenheim refrained from defining what sort of object *Object* is. Its unnecessary title asserts one fact while neither supplying nor denying interpretations.

28

Rafts and tables. Tomato bisque, or a cheese board’s semi-hard agates of goat’s milk, the blueberries and folded prosciutto, the dished pâté that goes on oblong slices of baguette, the jar of gherkins. Our idea of food in photography invariably comes down to surveyance from overhead and weirdly inclined angles.

Objects at once close up and inaccessible, whose consumption can readily be accomplished in a single glance.⁴³

Certain items are best understood in profile, such that a dry martini photographed straight from above would be unrecognizable save for the inclusion of a tooth-picked olive, though occasionally a painter, such as Manny Farber, will choose this for their aesthetic default. Artists cannot depict an empty kitchen table by edge alone, as a horizontal lip of maple. Consider the halo of Gabriel in Botticelli’s *Annunciation*; while the messenger’s head conforms exactly to profile, Botticelli has tilted his nimbus a little so as not to depict a yellow stripe; something that would hardly signify, as thin as Apelles’s legendary line. The representation of newsprint, to take another example, is usually lifted, being expansive and taut in the mind. Idealized painting in the truest sense, not reconstructed after nature but imagination’s lenient recollection.⁴⁴ It had been impermissible to less than honor one’s sub-

41 John Ruskin, “The Work of Iron, in Nature, Art, and Policy,” in *The Two Paths* (Frankfurt am Main: Outlook Verlag, 2018), 84.

42 *Le déjeuner en fourrure* is André Breton’s subtitle.

43 Barthes, “Ornamental Cuisine,” in *Mythologies*, trans. Annette Lavers (New York: Hill and Wang, 2012), 144.

44 Besides nearly anything by Mary Fedden and Kenne Grégoire, see Marius Borge-

ject since International Gothic fell out of fashion; but then the point of a gargoyle is a figure both pathetic and nowhere to be found in nature, or in the words of Thomas Hardy, “too human to be called like a dragon, too impish to be like a man, too animal to be like a fiend, and not enough like a bird to be called a griffin.”⁴⁵ It is wonderfully instructive to associate stylistic laxity of this order, inaugurated by Paul Cézanne’s tables, with Henri Matisse, whose determination to fabricate and shape fits his love of wallpaper like a glove.

Gombrich employs Picasso’s still life as a paradigmatic example of a cubist work, describing the painting as representing the way in which one thinks of a violin, that is, of different aspects simultaneously, with some more distinct than others.⁴⁶

The academicians of the foregoing generation certainly didn’t neglect to adjust their figures, as opposed to unfettered warping, or the implied trapezoid upon which a scene played out. Observed drama advantages itself through the adoption of verticality over head-on foreshortening, and this results in more plentiful staging. In one preparatory chalk and wash study for *The Raft of the Medusa*, Théodore Géricault tested the seaworthiness of a vantage close to level with the ocean, whipping up a scene so moshed it ultimately shortchanged his narrative.

In the Ebbo Gospels’ depiction of Saint Matthew, with its emphasis on the fatiguing strain of dictation, Matthew’s sheaf and lectern lean unnaturally toward the viewer like house plants, all for our better seeing them.

The primitive artist twists and tilts the various possible visual aspects until they fully explain what he wishes to represent.⁴⁷

His manuscript looks as though it should drop to the floor, as is often remarked of Cézanne’s apples. Consider, too, those famously squashed profiles in the art of pharaonic Egypt, limited to fresco, and the winged *lamassu* of Assyria, belonging to either the University of Chicago’s Oriental Institute or the Metropolitan Museum of Art, which at first suggest the natural symmetry of four appendages. Looked at from the side, however, the leg right of center should be identified with the frontal view’s right. Perhaps it is a Western habit to think of a sculpture as quasi-pictorial as well as self-defeating, such that a section of what it might show is always obstructed. It may be assumed that the *lamassu*’s Mesopotamian sculptor had little choice but to convey different postures simultaneously, as opposed to dual views of one. Because it was the sculptor’s ambition to combine in-the-roundness with the planate dimensionality of painting, the technical challenge of this design is tough

aud’s *Intérieur aux deux verres* for a genial example as well as *Bowl of Apples on a Table*, one of Matisse’s most extreme still lifes in terms of sheer composition.

45 Thomas Hardy, *Far from the Madding Crowd* (Hertfordshire: Wordsworth Editions Limited, 1993), 248.

46 Rafe McGregor, “The Problem of Thick Representation,” *Contemporary Aesthetics* 16 (2018), <https://contempaesthetics.org/newvolume/pages/article.php?articleID=839>.

47 Marshall McLuhan and Quintin Fiore, *The Medium Is the Message: An Inventory of Effects* (Corte Madera: Gingko Press, 2001), 56.

to reconcile with a desire to justify the subject's inclusion through its completest representation.⁴⁸ It is the same one negotiated during Egypt's Old Kingdom. So while the illustrated scribes of European books of hours are frequently shown calligraphing on vellum that, if one looks closely, has already been bound, a walled Nefertiti gives up anatomical naturalism for the extra facial real estate. Why else should the deity's powerful legs stand out of rank if not to keep them from collapsing? Artisans of the distant past and the twentieth century's fauvists both strove to get down platonic objects, be they chimerical beasts or tobacco, as glimpsed undergoing endless change.

29

Fuseli's limp muscles. Although William Blake is key to his style's lineage, inside every qualmy drawing of Henry Fuseli lies the urge to disintegrate. Nudes languish in his Elsinore like pinched-off dough, and Hamlet Sr., an awkward Colossus of Rhodes outfitted with crakows, looks impotently segmented. In Pontormo's *Deposition from the Cross* the son of God hangs from his disciples like taffy, as if he's softened in the desert heat, whereas Ingres's odalisque reclines on more than the usual number of vertebra: these remain legible giants, whatever their eccentricities. Gauged in terms of pictorial strength, were *Oath of the Horatii* run through pointillism, or pixelated for that matter, Jacques-Louis David's supreme orderliness would endure. Degradation of this sort, a uniform change to the whole, leaves alone sign-to-sign relationship. Squinting one's eyes proves this; through the dark barricade of eyelashes a painting's weave cinches tighter. It makes sense that Cimabue resorted to piggybacking his lookalike seraphim three or four high, as opposed to deep, in the margins of his altarpieces, for the master angels are varnish-thin.

Off to the side, because Adam can't figure out how to put them behind the house, are four trees: Leigh's elm, Jean's ash, Emmett's ironwood, and Adam's maple, each made from identical green puffballs.⁴⁹

Had Cimabue bubbled each of those sallow clones with personal space, I'm unsure whether he might then be said to gainsay flatness. It is a question not of illusioning volume but letting dimension be reckoned on the basis of apparent necessity. Henri Matisse is truer to the utter flatness of décor than anyone, for example. Others tell us that a palazzo is capacious by including a fountain or an elephant, a categorically massive object; even in such contourless tableaux as the thirteenth century produced, it follows the palazzo must be at least larger. Under the prolonged sway of divisionism, Wassily Kandinsky's early series of paintings, *Colorful Life*, apportion one scene into bite-sized chews, with yellow for a coat and teal for an old man's beard, each color remaining as eye-separable as the cells of a honeycomb. Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres's lush abuse was out of love for

48 In his eighteenth-century grand manner, Thomas Gainsborough captured a truer extension of his sitters at the expense of narrated activity; but this has been the nature of portraiture, with history painting as a sort of compromise.

49 Richard Powers, *The Overstory* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2018), 47.

womandom, Pontormo's the euphoria latent in religious transfiguration, and both at a certain loss of verisimilitude. Kandinsky's populist vision of Orthodox life is ultimately grander than fulgid confetti and obeys the etiquette of ages.

30

To laugh and sing. In the first story in George Saunders's *In Persuasion Nation*, a device marketed as I CAN SPEAK!, fitted over a baby's mouth, audibly translates its babble into cogent speech.

What is a poet? A poet is an unhappy being whose heart is torn by secret sufferings, but whose lips are so strangely formed that when the sighs and the cries escape them, they sound like beautiful music.⁵⁰

The bell a cat wears on its collar not only informs us that it is afoot but translates the cat's behavior with something like the precision of motion capture, every twisting leap eliciting a falsetto clang, while the metallic cadence of its trot is like distracted humming. Attached at the throat, a cat's monosyllabic bell both upgrades the larynx and doubles it, the tintinnabulation of aluminum combined with mewling. Like a dusty vocalise semblances Tinker Bell's reluctant agreement to errand on Peter Pan's behalf or her jealous frustration.

The "real" body of the other serves only as a support for our phantasmic projections.⁵¹

The speech of animals is a kind of maundering from which what we take for preference slips, select phonations that surface in the manner of a bottled letter.

31

A koan for your thoughts. One of the major figures of conceptual art after 1960, Lawrence Weiner enjoys mainstream status as postminimalism's hoariest rhetorician, sainted for his miles of contentless declamation. Weiner, who is so archly attuned to American symbolatry, has made non sequiturs his stock and trade, foisting an annoyingly honest argot on the public that still manages to be Delphic.

It's not actually insight, of course; it's stuff everybody already knows, dressed up in gobbledegook. But it *feels* like something.⁵²

50 Søren Kierkegaard, *Either/Or*, trans. David F. Swenson (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1949), 1:15.

51 Slavoj Žižek, *The Metastases of Enjoyment: Six Essays on Women and Causality* (New York: Verso, 2005), 210.

52 Nathan J. Robinson, "The Intellectual We Deserve," *Current Affairs*, March 14, 2018, <https://www.currentaffairs.org/2018/03/the-intellectual-we-deserve>.

His outdoor and floor-to-ceiling museum installations represent five decades of looting the West Coast for its stale bucolics; like if tedium could be fossilized. Weiner's installations are as thrilling as a solutionless riddle, having taken the form of uppercased expressions divided across a vinculum, or hinged together by a diagonal line, and crash blossoms that go nowhere.

The feeling of disgust we get if we utter an *invented* word with invented derivative syllables. The word is cold, lacking in associations, and yet it plays at being "language." A system of purely written signs would not disgust us so much.⁵³

Nonsense is frustratingly polysemic. On the cryptic scale, "AS FAR AS THE EYE CAN SEE" little more than registers when encountered in isolation, as though the uppercased sentence dropped out of an optometrist's handbook. Bland enough to be difficult and as rootless as a pressed flower, the specific meaning of any one of Weiner's stencilings is a deflection pretending at depth, like a dummy hand closed in a trunk asks you to believe in the corpse. Seeming poignance can be fruitful. Contrasted with modernist poetry, gymnastic in its lexicon and full of true allusivity, like T.S. Eliot anchored "The Waste Land" deep enough to strike oil, a systemic difference becomes clear; but then students resist trying to place Tiresias and Philomel, and the cheerleader is literarily bewildered, lost as to what exactly the thunder said. With hardly a glance, one judges "ALIGNED BEFORE AND AFTER THE HORIZON" to be a crackable nut without attempting to do so ourselves.

Only what they do not need first to understand, they consider understandable.⁵⁴

Anywhere a stone lands on the surface of Eliot's poem it either skips or immediately drops out of sight. The same may be said of any information-starved chart, insofar as in this the stones of interpretation also disappear, but they're submerged an inch.

His obscurity was not that of Eliot or Pound, not a layered and allusive language whose intrigues deepened the more one examined it.⁵⁵

The homespun critiques of advanced science that denature its findings and befoul its symbols fail to see how the glyphs of a molecule and syringe are far from empty signifiers but merely the field's topsoil; likewise, contemporary art is often better appraised in the negative. As Theodor Adorno tells us that understanding Samuel Beckett's *Endgame* would be tantamount to grasping its incomprehensibility for a fact.

53 Wittgenstein, *Culture and Value*, 52e.

54 Adorno, *Minima Moralia*, 101.

55 William Logan, "Hart Crane Overboard," in *Our Savage Art: Poetry and the Civil Tongue* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009), 167.

32

On God and fugues. Like a courtly procession of compositional blocks ushered by trumpet, there is a stately remoteness to Gustav Mahler's Third Symphony, one of many debts to Anton Bruckner. A few years out from the *Kinderhimmel* of his next symphony, the Third's sublimity is also ambiguous and disclosed slowly, as with the best-designed parks, which marry presentation with transition. At the heart of Paris's twelfth arrondissement, Parc de Bercy could be the spatial equivalent of études-tableaux; designed so that its fourteen hectares vary agreeably over the course of a desultory walk, except for the need to periodically wend left or right, comprehending Bercy's full extent would require access to a rooftop if not the architects' blueprints. As in the dervish finale of the **Jupiter** Symphony, counterpoint holds together a whorling storm of glossolalia through the gaseous coda, the interworked stretti self-strengthening in the manner of roof tiles. Because a quintuple fugue is less than followable by ear, Mozart's symphony permits the listener to choose a favorite tributary or otherwise relinquish to its flow, a confluence like the five holy *prayags* of India. The capacious mind of Olympus's king could track such a fusillade in its simultaneous entirety, this supposedly the logic behind the sobriquet.

33

Evil of Arendt's kind. The T-1000's stony-eyed rampage is the farthest thing from human villainy's hot-and-cold psychologizing. Its target is John Connor in the way that a compass needle is unable to face any direction but north. Oblivion is both what appeals to us in killer robots and renders them coherent — decision qua prestidigitation, as it were.

Their judgment in its pure accuracy will resemble grace and in
Their circuits the one form of action will be understanding.⁵⁶

The attempt to fix *Pepé Le Pew* or Anton Chigurh, being very different examples of the unstoppable-force archetype, on a scale of intentionality is all too redolent of good nagging at evil, of the soul's two wolves and the little angels that clip onto one's shoulders like moral epaulettes. Instead, Cormac McCarthy limbos the fictional Chigurh transvaluatively, where herculean stamina belies anything that hints at irresolution or bodily vulnerability.

The starting point of the theory of relativity is the strange fact that, for every observer, no matter in what direction and how fast he moves, light moves at the same speed; in an analogous way, for Lacan, no matter whether the desiring subject approaches or runs from his or her object of desire, this object seems to remain at the same distance from the subject.⁵⁷

56 Robert Pinsky, "The Robots," in *At the Foundling Hospital* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2016), 45.

57 Slavoj Žižek, *Living in the End Times* (New York: Verso, 2011), 303.

The checkered histories and ethical complexions of the gods Ovid described are unnecessarily tricky for screenwriters, say as compared with the ruthless supernatural entity of *It Follows*, whose drive to kill is never explained, and the first *Terminator* films.⁵⁸ Thus when a tornado rips through southeastern Idaho it happens for no reason.

34

Brahms, the limner. Sagely bereaved, the artist is grown old. The tonal scene one draws from Brahms's *Intermezzo in A Major*,⁵⁹ less evocation than a miniature recollecting in tranquility, crosses Boethius with a lonesome Li Bai raising his wine in toast to the moon, which blushes in Li's cup. The profundity of this eleventh-hour work jars those unprepared for the greatest of séances, mellower than ventriloquism but as shocking as Talbot's calotype and the lightbulb. Brahms acknowledges his own querying with a handful of tender measures; and through the desire to "help along" a theme over the course of its development, our breathing slower and fingers beginning to lift, the dialectic of call and response is internalized. Ask the question — lo, Ouija answers. Like with James Merrill's affable, Virgil-esque Ephraim, we're fooled into reading our minds, as though momentarily bicameral.

I never was so much surprised in all my life — couldn't credit my own 'ed — to tell you the truth, hardly believe it *were* my own 'ed.⁶⁰

Late Brahms is august stuff, where little encloses much technique gained in the work of a lifetime.

35

Laughter in the dark. Illustrations of the Big Bang have a calyx's flared shape, tipped to one side with the older side tapering into a starburst. The inherent anthropocentrism of this zoomed-out diagram in particular lends itself to an epistemological cop-out; with cosmologists unable to see beyond the inflationary threshold, this earliest of epochs has to be acquitted at the level of the shown as concentrated white light, for the singularity's mystery doesn't stop us from conquering it figuratively.

History also teaches how to laugh at the solemnities of the origin.⁶¹

In the colored-pencil drawings so common to high-school textbooks and nature brochures an all-over bloom covers everything. Putting it cynically, because white fills in there's less to draw. But this was stylistically *de rigueur* for a subset of post-

58 Indeed, the franchise's critical plunge coincides with the increased humanity of the later films' antagonists.

59 From *Six Pieces for Piano*, op. 118.

60 Charles Dickens, *Great Expectations* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 46.

61 Michel Foucault, quoted by Daniel Albright, *Panaesthetics*, 35.

impressionists, most evidently Maurice Prendergast. In his bustling cities it's as though more might have been included if not for that ubiquitous dust. Think of a shoreline's lapping barter of surf or how crash cymbals, whose aural trailing-off has the fineness of sand, are useful in easing in a musical phrase.

On each part the light
Diminish'd fades, intensest in the midst;
So burn'd the peaceful oriflame, and slack'd
On every side the living flame decay'd.⁶²

Invariably with today's open-world games, a technical sleight front-loads the player's journey into found lands, it being desirable to render a landscape gradually, in tandem with its approach. Or one recalls the sporadic buffering that plagued software of the aughts and the recurrence of brief elevator rides, a divertissement for when the console is loading the subsequent area as well as an attempt by developers to analogize what is a necessary hardware operation into the gameplay. Conveying that a three-dimensional environment is actually undivided, persistent across space and time, therefore entails staggering the revelation of that environment. The uneasy balance of it is that lower verisimilitude equals higher playability. Hoofing it into the distance, low-resolution polyhedra become trees or large shrubs and formations the color of oatmeal densify; that is, with the exception of a few monuments that stick out as permanent landmarks, such as obelisks and temples. Each player finds herself privy to a storyworld of scripted bots and decorations trip-alarmed to populate with her arrival. Like the clever use of unskippable airlocks and elevators in videogames, during a film the audience's attention can be smuggled from one place to another by blinding lens flare or a close-up shot of a wall, behind which incommensurable locales glue. As stage combat routinely puts paid to theatergoers' belief, with every altercation its bloodiest if veiled.

36

Church and the miniaturist. It may be interesting to compare miniature painting to the filling of a normal canvas with background figures, though in the limner's job there is greater detail; somewhere between the grotesqueries of the margin of a book of hours and the bit players that pass through classical landscapes, as the miniaturist's diminutive figure will be only marginally larger. Were they to change places, the straw-hatted penseur of the miniature set inside the landscape, this should present a conflict with regard to perspective; like the use of shrink rays in science fiction doesn't lead to adults being mistaken for a child, such intensity of detail, relative to the size of the figure and its location in the setting, is sure to be disjunctive, as if one simply upped the resolution of Christ making his way to Emmaus.

All of our Flemish distances disclose

62 Dante Alighieri, *Hell, in The Vision; Or, Hell, Purgatory, and Paradise of Dante Alighieri, Paradise*, trans. Henry Francis Cary (Philadelphia: Samuel F. Bradford, 1822), canto 31, lines 117–20.

A clarity that never was:
 Dwarf pilgrims in the green faubourgs of Mother
 And Son, stunted cathedrals, shrunken cows.⁶³

37

Breadcrumbs. There are occasions when the assonance in a poet's work, dismissed as a tic of style by generous critics, is in truth all too revealing of her method. Sylvia Plath's internal near-rhymes and at times overwhelming focus on vowels unsettle the reader's attention by leaving no doubt as to a line's birth. It all happened quite automatically at the breakfast table, "grave" precipitating "cave," "cave" precipitating "ate." The lean pencil sprints across paper like a greyhound, and the author crosses the finish line in second place to her creation. Krapp (of Samuel Beckett's *Krapp's Last Tape*), who never comes to grips with the Kierkegaardian error of ditching one's lover for art, does not himself achieve wisdom in exchange for choosing the darkness, as Oedipus does. He comes to us on his birthday and in the end has learned nothing; the key to his failure eludes Krapp, who will not live to see another year. The attentive reader, almost an auxiliary brain, is burdened with understanding what the loser could not.

38

Giving all the heart. One admits that Balthus held back in such paintings as *Three Sisters* or *The Turkish Room*, while *Thérèse Dreaming*, for all its scandalous adolescence, owes its success entirely to the assuredness of its technique and compositional sophistication. Balthus's paintings break no de jure rules except that they're usually impoverished, as though the artist were only half serious; that stigma died with the posthumous celebrity of Van Gogh, while neither man's works could be called poorly constructed. Something is patently different, however, when it comes to Henri Rousseau, who actually screws up. Only the sycophantically philanthropic attribute the uneven quality of his oeuvre to defiance, with the warning that fame is its own justification and to hell with method,⁶⁴ unless the truth is that Rousseau couldn't be bothered to "do it right." Out of the single occasion when he sought the esteem of the jurors in Paris, *Tiger in a Tropical Storm* impresses us, particularly the tiger's sculptural head. Then we discover *The Girl with a Doll* or *Boy on*

63 Anthony Hecht, "A Birthday Poem," in *Collected Earlier Poems* (New York: Borzoi Books, 1990), 125.

64 See the *Portrait of Jules Roc*, evidently a group commission à la Frans Hals, which websites attribute to Rousseau. This stretches credulity to breaking. As far as latent potential goes, this lone sample would significantly alter the calculus of Rousseau's amateurism from happenstance to consciously adopted. Authentically recondite as the snatches of talk one hears on the subway, unfortunately his lapses are stranger than fiction. Although Henri Émilien Rousseau, a French painter raised in North Africa, whose catalogue raisonné consists, not unexpectedly, of orientalist fantasies in the palpably humid style of Delacroix, would have been a teenager when *Portrait of Jules Roc* was completed, his paternity makes a great deal more sense than believing Rousseau secretly capable.

the Rocks, who've been disowned by their shadows and float, respectively, above the flattest meadow imaginable and stalagmites too jagged for sitting.⁶⁵ *Woman Walking in an Exotic Forest* and *Woman in Red in the Forest* look like scenes from the bottom of a garden for violating the obvious signficatory distinction between classes of flora. Instead of towering trees that have leaves, Rousseau gives us leafy growths the height of firs, an uninterpretable mismatch, like a sandbox cannot double for the beach. Just as his portraits of kids avoided the harder modeling of three-quarters profile, a tropical setting let Rousseau be his own boss. In particular, a rainforest's dense vegetation excused Rousseau from tackling ambitious distances, allowing him to splash about in the safety of the foreground.

This is our world, lit with crescents and stars of light; and great petals half transparent block the openings like purple windows.⁶⁶

Gold leaf served the same end in fifteenth-century Italy. For especially apt comparisons we might look at Masaccio's *Saint Peter Healing the Sick and Baptism of the Neophytes*.

Many Italian cityscapes and biblical episodes used a low elevation with buildings jockeying for attention and mountains landing within yards of the city's limits in order to circumstantially block any view onto farther things. Historically, this is European art's cautious, intermediary step between Gabriel in Mary's bedroom and the Gethsemane of Mantegna. I'm reminded of the Sieneese School painters as well as the twentieth century's *retour à l'ordre*, to a lesser extent, except that the self-nominated outsiders of art, including those who feign unsophistication now that it's hip to be neuroatypical, is not necessarily disposed to bungling, unless we mean that myopic combination of cornball uncultivation and taking oneself too seriously. Possibly most damning is Rousseau's *View of Saint Cloud*: from right to left, the silver expanse — a lake? — and town drop off over the skimpiest of thresholds. Nothing lies beyond these five trees but the laurel-green undercoat with which the painter began. Even the horizon is half gone. Compare Gustave Courbet's *The Lady of Frankfurt*, which is strikingly like *View of Saint Cloud* in design. But then *Carnival Evening*, similar for its three-layer composition and painted decades earlier, avoids such lopsided carelessness.

39

Sleights of hand. Paul Cézanne's truncated kitchen table is a piece of exceedingly clever legerdemain, in which a cloth arranged with apples and pears hangs over the front either raises or drops with the edge's reappearance, depending on the direction of one's looking.⁶⁷ The table grammatically resembles the background in

65 See also *The Wedding Party* and Christopher Hartmann's nearly shadowless diptych *A Touch That Is Longing, a Touch That Is Distant*.

66 Virginia Woolf, *The Waves*, ed. David Bradshaw (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 12.

67 Beethoven does as much toward the end of the first movement of the Ninth Symphony. Using the trumpet's attention-holding brightness and oboe's nasally whine, one can fail to notice the circling of the low basses and cellos until their

Paolo Uccello's *Saint George and the Dragon*, which changes precipitously before and after the dragon's cave, albeit the reason for this change is the opposite one. For Cézanne the tablecloth presented an opportunity for mischief, while Uccello effectively committed a compositional gaffe. Implausibly elongate, the bodies in Bronzino's *An Allegory with Venus and Cupid* have been chalked up by experts to the liberty of pre-baroque mannerism. Here I begin to see a resemblance to what I considered a Late Gothic phenomenon. During such time, but also including doodle art and the domain of amateurs, there is usually a formal discontinuity between and within elements necessarily contiguous. Uccello's wonky horizon unintentionally severs the line of diegesis as the result of his drafting from one side of the canvas to the other, discovering the background as he inched forward; unless Uccello jumped between the two territories. I want to offer the possibility that the zones of a picture inadvertently rope themselves off spatially, encouraging the artist to lose track of a form that is limited in malleability to what it imitates. In the Bronzino, with Cupid's lanky physique bijecting across the arm of Venus her upraised limb functions like a magic portal. The two halves of Cupid are hence thematically related but compositionally incompatible artistic events: Cupid kissing Venus while supporting her head and Cupid's splayed-leg embrace of Venus's torso. Recall how exploration-based videogames⁶⁸ load indoor environments in the form of unique cells, or different files in separate folders, such that triggering the entryway of a thatched potion shop or tavern teleports one inside. It follows that these spaces don't need to relate to the physical dimensions of their outdoor models but can be of whatever internal area, like inhabitable bags of holding.

When we enter the closed space of a house, we are often surprised: the inside volume seems larger than the outside frame, as if the house were larger from the inside than from the outside.⁶⁹

Aren't these the apartments of sitcoms, whose interiors are impossibly roomy. Like the artists of postimpressionism tended to render domestic objects eidetically, on television a domestic space come to physically resemble the camera's disembodied wingspan if not its independence, no less than Fritz Lang's zigzag lugubricity.

If we turn to René Magritte's *Le blanc-seing*, our first impression ought to be of a painting confronting the medium's actual flatness. As with *The Treachery of Images*, *Le blanc-seing* fails to supply the things it offers: an equestrian invaginated within a pictorial forest. Because the painting, when we consider its material physicality, is already three-dimensional, Magritte's question is to the necessity of denoting a hierarchy of spatiality, seeing as nature does as much for us; while the cedars appear natural in their placement, Magritte carefully segmented his subject with occlusive slices of the woods, like Photoshop layers can be pulled forward or pushed backward, except in vertical strips. Our faith lies in the anterior connect-

symbolic threat has sublimated into the violins like the last scene out of *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, sweeping civilization away with encompassing fury. As the orchestra's forebrain, the higher strings, if understood sympathetically, are where the music becomes aware of this intruding thought, just as we do. Our attention had been on the bullfighter's muleta.

68 "Instancing," regarding online persistent worlds.

69 Žižek, *Living in the End Times*, 258.

edness of an object partly obscured, which of course had always been fundamental to the appreciation of figurative art. The remainder's endurance is taken for granted, the mind stapling closed a foot or thigh blocked by something at the top of the pile. After surrealism — and yet all along, we understand — a horse half-concealed by the trunk of a cedar is half the horse, for where is the remainder of paint.⁷⁰ This might afford us a way into the eerily incomplete suns and moons of Max Ernst's landscapes. Like holed coins, these apparently celestial bodies let through a circle of sky that must, it follows, hang behind them in the picture plane.⁷¹ What's more, due to their formal ambiguity it is unclear as to whether Ernst meant to provide any spherical dimensionality. But then the manner in which the sky's unmistakable blue gradient passes through the figures is altogether discal; and so at last we recall the equal superficiality of all paint on a canvas, with nothing behind anything else except that which got brushed over. Reorganizing what Magritte has left us, were *Le blanc-seing* a puzzle and that its objective, would sillily assert the relevance of a foregone illusion, that everything on a canvas shares one surface of no depth, other than that formed by the coat of gesso, and that cues to the contrary, namely the ancient conceit of wringing three dimensions from two, sabotage the observer's ability to ascertain a visual pecking order. Indebted to facile gimmicks like the impossible trident ("The task is to see the riddle," said Heidegger), Magritte's goal was nonetheless to shake us even from the assumptions of our hardwiring.

40

Socrates is a man. Synthetism, the co-invention of Pauls Sérusier and Gauguin, stands for the surprisingly progressive attempt to depict a subject without interpretation.

It is well to remember that a picture before being a battle horse, a nude woman, or some anecdote, is essentially a flat surface covered with colours assembled in a certain order.⁷²

Upon reducing a group of nuns aniconically to its essential colors and shapes, the resulting image purportedly has extirpated the symbolic heart of messy life. Perhaps this is like substituting anatomy while preserving the Linnaean classification. Émile Bernard, Maurice Denis, and others out of the Pont-Aven colony shortchanged nature in their pictures until a tree was diluted to its shade. In acute cases like Bernard's *Yellow Tree* the act of looking falls to glancing at the work's title and reminding ourselves that leafage is oftentimes thick and as yellow as bananas; like Gauguin's *The Green Christ*, which features a seaside calvary that has oxidized. Claiming recognizability for a creative effort beyond what reasonably constitutes mimesis is foolhardy if not exactly misleading, that yellowish bunches on light-blue sticks *would* be interpreted as trees reflecting above a lake. But then

70 No doubt the analogous personality to Magritte in cinema is not Luis Buñuel but Jean-Luc Godard.

71 See also Magritte's *Le seize septembre*, *Le banquet*, and *La page blanche*.

72 Maurice Denis, quoted in *The Oxford Handbook of Perceptual Organization*, ed. Johan Wagemans (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 887.

the bare fact of art brought kicking and screaming into the world is no declaration ipso facto, especially as to lucidity. I'm reminded of Saul Kripke's fictional Pierre, a monolingual French child who has heard that "Londres est joli" and, upon immigrating to an unattractive neighborhood in the city, that London is not beautiful. And how different "Louis" sounds against "Ludwig" while occupying the same nomination of its language.

"No," she said simply, whether in English or Spanish I couldn't tell.⁷³

While synthetism isn't color-field painting, a meaningful claim to coreferentiality, being at its core the acknowledgement that it is possible to correctly infer an artist's intentions, relies on the observer's knowledge and innate sense to decode "treeness" from a tall shedding plant bearing lateral branches.

It implies (this *inflection* of language) a previous or prepared receptivity to its stimulus on the part of the reader. The reader's sensibility simply responds by identifying this inflection of experience with some event in his own history or perceptions — or rejects it altogether.⁷⁴

In spite of Gauguin encouraging Sérusier decision by hesitant decision, according to the anecdotal record, *The Talisman*'s content is finally unrelatable to some hypothetical ur-condition. Surrealism deserves the same critique, though supposedly its source is not the lees of reality but the cesspool of the unconscious. Non-representational art doesn't want for coreferentiality, there being nothing to find. Generally this doesn't occur to the museum-going public, which so thoroughly depends on there being something — a smile in Willem de Kooning, a window in Franz Kline — to fuel their theoryless expatiations and make art fun again. Not unlike conspiracy theorists will trace pentagrams in satellite photography.

Consciousness famished for truth imagines it is grasping a dimly present knowledge diligently denied to it by official progress in all its forms.⁷⁵

41

Rounded with a sleep. There's a sense in which culture can be contextualized, if obtusely, using anthropology's inside-out lens, within the free-associative interpretation of certain psychosomatic features of our biology. As Tobias Gerstenberg and Joshua B. Tenenbaum explain, "while the concepts and laws in a scientific theory are explicitly defined and known to the scientists in their respective fields, the operation of intuitive theories may be implicit and thus potentially unknown to its user."⁷⁶ The act of dreaming, for example, suggests the insignificant coinci-

73 Ben Lerner, *Leaving the Atocha Station* (Minneapolis: Coffee House Press, 2011), 168.

74 Hart Crane to Harriet Monroe, "A Discussion with Hart Crane," *Poetry* 29, no. 1 (October 1926): n.p.

75 Adorno, *Minima Moralia*, 241.

76 Tobias Gerstenberg and Joshua B. Tenenbaum, "Intuitive Theories," in *The Ox-*

dence of mild consciousness with the subconscious business of deep sleep; like the unintelligible words to a conversation taking place elsewhere, a flotsam of half-remembered images and dulled stimuli slips across.

Though stripped of words, the tones beneath
still whistle softly through my teeth,
the absentminded rise and fall
of voices through a bedroom wall
that blend in sleep until they seem
the murmurs of a little stream.⁷⁷

It is this autonomic level of phenomena that a society fits important omens to, descrying logics revelatory of everything from romance to the cosmos with the accuracy of a Magic Eight Ball.

42

As if to change his shape. Constraining the artistic imagination has the same use as weight in exercise. Through resistance, allowing one's mental sinews to draw fully, meter and rhyme leverage a versifier's muscles as well as dignify the entanglement. Or thus the trained artist, capable of sprinting and leaping at a moment's notice, finds hurdles to throw into her path. It is simplistic if not embarrassing to scribble with abandon or close one's eyes and lobby people to change their ways: the reins needed are twofold, craftsmanship and propriety, one in each of the wrangler's gloved hands. It may be the "heavenly length" of a symphony, either testing the listener's patience or delaying her gratification, depending on one's interpretation, that makes us want to help Schubert get a move on. Individual chords can be hard won, as Sergei Rachmaninoff demonstrates in his Third Concerto, that cross-grained warhorse, whose very rib cage can be made out after forty minutes of continuous keyboarding; but then it ends divinely, with an assumption like that of a more glorious Count Orgaz.

43

Tree of life. Considered together, experience points and a player-character's skill level, essential components of role-playing videogames, would appear symptomatic of our desire to scale what is vanishingly subtle into coherent tallies and count what is so subjective as to be representationally moot, such as one's emotional age, a temporally condensed record denoting the achievement of a personal milestone ("You have learned crossbows") or boost in acuity (+1 TO INTELLIGENCE).

ford Handbook of Causal Reasoning, ed. Michael R. Waldmann (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 516.

77 Devin Johnston, "Tommy Jarrell," in *Mosses and Lichens* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2019), 55.

Character traits, from genuine kindness to the hysterical fit of rage, become capable of manipulation, until they coincide exactly with the demands of a given situation.⁷⁸

44

Circling the poles. Artists vacillate within a constellation of poles governing limitation, favoring one element in a binary pair against the other — cause raised above effect, kairos above telos — as schools of thought dictate. But organizing a historical narrative around warring styles is disingenuous. Style should be thought confirmatory of the mature director or sculptor's position beyond attempt, insofar as what she produces in the brilliant light of technique is repeatable and tempered, thwarting the charges of improvisation and maximalism. From a bird's-eye view the apparently linear direction of art recurses into an ellipse.

Reading the histories of other genres, I often get a funny sense of déjà vu.⁷⁹

While the baroque and hip-hop equally disregard kinetics, it remains a question as to precisely how the degree of organic liveliness a genre adopted corresponds with its fundamental musicality.

What this differentiation inadequately and arbitrarily describes is to be sought in knowledge of the material's laws of movement. According to these laws, not everything is possible in every age.⁸⁰

It can be an edifying surprise to google the forgotten, pre-baptism style of an artist, which usually isn't incipient so much as plain different; Wassily Kandinsky, for instance, while it is hard to imagine what appeal there could be in seeing Duccio's juvenilia, who already lacked an oar, in terms of his many techno-historical disadvantages. One prefers to encounter these European forebears aesthetically all there.

⁷⁸ Adorno, *Minima Moralia*, 230.

⁷⁹ Alex Ross, "Listen to This," in *Listen to This* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2010), 17. Compare the University of Utah's Smart Glasses to the *Brillena-postel* in Conrad von Soest's *Wildunger Alter*, reminiscent of an optometrist's trial frame. With the increased marketing of curved flat-panel displays, the technology that gradually replaced bulky CRTs is in a sense being rediscovered, though in the opposite direction, along with the latter's deeper occupation of any physical space. How typical it is for the prototypical examples of cyberpunk, from literature and film, to be set either in Japan or the next best thing, a crowded, polyglottal Chinatown (*Blade Runner*). There is a curious redundancy to this, in which a self-conscious desire to appear sufficiently postdated compels William Gibson and Ridley Scott to choose cosmopolitan localities, the melting-pot effect of globalization, ones bursting with the hallmarks of an eroded hypermodernity. But if civilization has been set far enough into the future, the average metropolis will do for conspicuous shows of advertising technology and the like. Why the need to double down with Chiba and Los Angeles?

⁸⁰ Adorno, *Philosophy of New Music*, 31.

I see here a poet who, like so many men, exercises a higher charm by his imperfections than by any handiwork of his which is complete and perfectly designed — indeed, he owes his reputation and success more to his ultimate limitations than to his considerable strengths.⁸¹

An important caveat is that in the early work of Ingmar Bergman, for instance, as compared with Rembrandt's *The Stoning of Saint Stephen* or his first sketches, is that film, at least under normal conditions, doesn't wrongly capture the human body or an elm tree, while stronger and stronger drawing will naturally be found to develop throughout an artist's progression.

45

Out of whole cloth. Comparing a Frank Stella sculpture to his paintings, mostly geometries of solid stripes and heterogeneous in color, the former clashes unlike patterns excised from their originary contexts. Like the kindergarten technique of carefully cutting out a Crayolaed shape along its border, Stella's late pieces in mixed media can't help but openly refer to unkindred antediluvian integrities, the cloths from which the sculptor tore each tatter.

On the mantelpiece a stuffed quail looms
that once relied on an infinity of forest,
a vase with a sprig of silver birch,
and a postcard of an Algerian bazaar.⁸²

It could certainly be that the sunnily postindustrial and vaguely readymade quality of a work like *At Sainte Luce! [Hoango] [Q#1]* and even the flat acrylics; *Das Erdbeben in Chili*, for instance, but then not Stella's cardboard reliefs, which tattle on their single parent, to the extent that the generic uniformity in application tries to appear collaged. Assuming designers exist for the loops, polka dots, and zigzags Stella chooses to arrange, though they're also straightforwardly abstract, encourages us to locate each in its unavulsed bolt or complete vehicle, where formerly it had been oriented within significances. After surgery, the colorful fragments have the air of a purpose accomplished, with Stella's that of intending this harmonic unification.

The work is distinguished by being created so that its createdness is part of the created work.⁸³

However it enters the sculpture, the eye then rolls into gravity's spacious divot with all the naturalness of a marble while dismissing certain scraps as ornamental trim.

81 Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Joyous Science*, ed. and trans. R. Kevin Hill (New York: Penguin Books, 2018), 91.

82 Joseph Brodsky, "In England," trans. Alan Myers, in *Collected Poems in English*, ed. Ann Kjellberg (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2002), 134.

83 Heidegger, "The Origin of the Work of Art," 173.

The idea of grafting together material alien in origin and incitement isn't limited to abstract work. Assuming the thought experiment is worth the thought, there should be a lesson in the transplantation of a miniature canvas into one of relative enormity, its subject lush forestlands or a still life juxtaposing a used hookah and cracked pomegranate; this ought to enhance the homuncular painting's subject matter and perspectival thrust, mushrooming its nest egg of intentions outward, like development swells a motif.⁸⁴ Though it goes without saying that the uniformity of perspective's foreground-to-background obscuration as well as the angles of its planes would be compromised in this scenario, it is hardly a challenge to compare in one's imagination and suppose equivalent the information quotient of a bland stock figure with a tiny sitarist, who has the density of a star.

46

Photography's guarantee. A film camera's attraction lies in its hard authenticity. Conversely, whatever direct experience Jean-François Millet had with gleaning wheat after a harvest and the winnowing of chaff, his paintings cannot go to the end ("Art is magic delivered from the lie of being truth," said Adorno), unless through mere allusion to that reality the art lover feels herself agreeably disturbed with visions of just what has been left behind.

We do not simply have two species of cinema, documentary and fiction; fiction emerges out of the inherent limitation of the documentary.⁸⁵

One might lightly condemn photography for publicizing this outer frontier. In other words, a traditional photograph seems to declare, "This is all there was," as though the assurance were that a film camera is incapable of overlooking. To paraphrase Auden's familiar line, had anything been there, it should certainly have seen.

47

Shopping after modernity. According to plan a focus-grouped playlist of radio singles, each inoffensively cool, is piped into the local shopping mall, with bespoke track lists for Lord & Taylor and Hollister to distinguish their vibes, like regional changes in the weather. Contracted to the gilt foot of so-and-so's throne, the musicians one hears nevertheless portray themselves as natural entrepreneurs and creatively uncompromising. The heart throbs and do-gooders with their charities are inclined to shrug off the question of money as having no great sway and take offense to accusations of tainted influence or, worst of all, less than total authenticity. Beyoncé choreographed all over the Louvre and Taylor Swift cooped up in a

84 See Joseph Lange's portrait of Mozart, evoking in its supposedly unfinished state a sullen general looking over his army from high above, which is understood to be a finished work grafted by a later owner onto a larger square of unbleached canvas. Materially, what has been added to the Lange is unfinishedness.

85 Žižek, *The Parallax View*, 30.

lambent cabin insist the dilemma is contrariwise, that the awesome can also make your head nod; certainly what they license to the highest bidder is more than a crowbar for consumers' wallets. The hippest wallpaper inside any hole-in-the-wall boutique, a relentless filler of pointless variety, lands squarely in the category of the artifact for being endlessly reproducible and snitching on its own devaluation. Take Erik Satie's *musique d'ameublement*, for another example. Besides easy reproducibility, these short pieces are designed to withstand an indefinite number of repeats, like a great deal of Brian Eno's discography. Satie wanted to upset the pedestal on which music had begun to fall asleep so that in all seriousness it might be adapted for the breezily unserious spaces of sale and domesticity. His intention completely opposes that of Maurice Ravel's *Bolero*, which loops agonizingly to a definite, brassy finish. Included in concert programs for the conceited joy it offers audiences, the *Bolero*'s hearers know upfront they'll predict every go-around of the theme from the first bar.

Collusion with the listener, disguised as humanity.⁸⁶

Mozart's not-little catalog of divertimenti and serenades is overly beautiful; even the unnamed bagatelles of Beethoven fail as trifles. Now art pardons itself to be merely adequate, to successfully do less, which isn't to say manage to fail. Roughly a century ago a category of music emerged that is functional, or situationally ergonomic, and thus undemanding, the way a good-enough table holds dinner and is forgotten. Or this is Henri Matisse's imaginary businessman, for whom art is a comfortable armchair. The death of the form-embedded subject fertilized the rise of music-as-texture, then completed by film accompaniment, which is infinitely limber. The eidetic hero is let go, replaced by human talent.

48

Choice of hue. Accomplished realism is exceedingly difficult when the palette is limited. Compared with a bit of fastidious penciling, Thomas Kinkade's (the *other* Painter of Light) softening application of violet to rooftops, with every casement radiating cozy, golden light, gingerbread villages where the glucose level easily qualifies as diabetic, sidesteps choosing the appropriate hue. Imagine a *non-fantasy* landscape that, barred the alternative-universe excuse, nonetheless combined Candyland color with competent linework, giving us the graphical equivalent of lipstick on an adequate pig.

To equip a dull, respectable person with wings would be but to make a parody of an angel.⁸⁷

In Kinkade's work there is perfect incongruence of goals in overcoloring what has been studiously delineated.

⁸⁶ Adorno, *Philosophy of New Music*, 9.

⁸⁷ Robert Louis Stevenson, "Crabbed Age and Youth," in *The Lantern-Bearers and Other Essays*, ed. Jeremy Treglown (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1988), 67.

Spatial concepts. Through the nineteenth century, the desideratum for a painter came down to knowing better, the methodological difficulty of convincingly representing objects as they should appear at various distances, while film's challenge has been a practical one: the rising tide of technology and money. It was out of the deepest necessity that European painting lashed itself to depth, of course; and what followed is the accordioning of a bellows of egg and oils that has never stayed closed for long. Geometric perspective bottomed out well prior to its aesthetic culmination in impressionism.⁸⁸ Art's escape option, rocketing through the z-axial ceiling, tells us something else. Nonrepresentationalism was one-upped by Lucio Fontana's epidermal *Tagli*, which for the first time supplied literal depth (a slashed-in canvas) while having nothing to do with the oculus and even less illusions. A decade later, what spills onto the museum floor but Eva Hesse's *Hang Up*.⁸⁹ This last move flips the mimetic polarity from superficial⁹⁰ to specular, as the content is reflected out toward the viewer. The telos of traditional sculpture also involves the z-axis of development but reversed. Instead of a declining sinkhole, that all-attracting implosion toward the vanishing point, advancements in material science tempt sculptors as much as architects to stray farther from the center of mass, stepping onto the air like Penelope.⁹¹ Being almost unavoidably inclined to duplicate nature, the limitations film is desperate to transcend are our mortal own: death and gravity.

Consume my heart away; sick with desire
 And fastened to a dying animal
 It knows not what it is; and gather me
 Into the artifice of eternity.⁹²

Movies are fascinated with extreme maneuvers between high and low, mostly falls from a great height or the longitudinal swoops of superheroes. As its directors vie for a technical knockout Hollywood is worried sick about ticket sales; analogously, sculpture's basic inflection is to balance ambition with tensile strength upon

- 88 Late into the Italian Renaissance, a landscape painting technically has about the methodological sureness an impressionist will be able to summon. Missing from the ancient equation, however, is voluble atmosphere. As I say elsewhere, this is why impressionism represents the logical conclusion of perspective as such. The landscape is filled with itself.
- 89 As Hesse's title implies, the wire grossly exaggerates that which might be included on the other side of a picture frame for the purpose of hanging it; thus, *Hang Up* is not a backward canvas but, loosely, one that has semiotically collapsed. See also the work of Jason Martin and Leslie Wayne.
- 90 Unlike superflat, the style pioneered by Takashi Murakami. Superflat owes much to depth, considering the way Murakami's smiling flowerheads dogpile one another. In abstract expressionism this happens as a material consequence, not because the painter hoped his elements would resemble actual thatch.
- 91 See *Christ and St. Thomas*, Andrea del Verrocchio's bronze for a niche outside the Orsanmichele.
- 92 W.B. Yeats, "Sailing to Byzantium," in *Collected Poems of W.B. Yeats*, ed. Richard J. Finneran (New York: Scribner, 1996), 193.

leaving the safety of the pedestal's nest. That is, under penalty of toppling over. Painting went through awkward phases, too, boosted by the collapsed rooms of Matisse and the appropriative shock of Picasso's African masks. A clique of irrelevant scholars still champions classical-style draftsmanship from the Alamo of realism, where Lawrence Alma-Tadema's flawless body of work lies in state, while the ingenious go outside or stay indoors according to theory's forecast. Cinema's objective is nearly the same, involving a continual PR effort to declare palatable the latest visual, which is to say head off uncanniness.

50

Hopping kings and bishops. In videogames of the eighties the two-dimensional sprites would sometimes hop between platforms. This saved pixel artists the extra labor of drawing every intermediary position, while in the silhouette animations of Lotte Reiniger a knee will bend or a chin slowly lift. The pieces of board games are hopped both for their compact solidity and as a way of emphasizing the fact of each move, which are the events; and how unfun it should be, were it tediously necessary to adjust Hulk Hogan's legs as one showboated the wrestler's likeness around its Lilliputian ring.

51

Wilder Reiter. The instantaneous action of a rider on horseback as it's depicted in animation and videogames does not show a command leading to the horse's conditioned response but rather the decision of an integrated consciousness, neither originating with the rider nor distributed therefrom; the murmuration of starlings taken one step further, such that no birds steer but the flock is cognitively whole.

When you see us swarm — rustle of
wingbeat, collapsed air — your mind
tries to make us one, a common

intelligence, a single spirit un-
tethered.⁹³

As cartoon physics have it, a horsebound knight turns and leaps through the air without first spurring the horse; no earlier is a distinction between their wills visualized, though one is ostensibly in thrall to the other. The animal's faster-than-light cooperation denotes a "flattening" of the nervous system — the dendrites shorter, a wave collapsed. Or it's as though the chemical bonds resolved themselves throughout the entirety of the character, allowing for a kind of localized panpsychism; the mounted rider, relative to her whole outline, from helmet to hoof, is thus like a steam chamber billowing with willpower. The knight's lance thrust, which the horse actively leans into, doesn't happen one prior to the other, an action in prece-

93 Nick Flynn, "Swarm," in *Blind Huber* (Minneapolis: Graywolf Press, 2015), 5.

dence of its outcome, “but is retroactively posited by the network of its effects.”⁹⁴ Intended by the animation team or not, with this hastening of what amounts in the real world to a temporal relationship of cues to movements has been squashed, and our desire to see the knight instantly control the well-equipped steed, rather than petition it, deforms one of humankind’s classic interdependences as a case of tool-use. Like a mountain troll with a goblin hurling explosives from its shoulder, something out of *Warhammer 40,000*, the two are empathetically one and the same. Besides together comprising one looping sprite or contiguous, hollow polygon, nothing need be said.

Central to the construction of the cyborg are informational pathways connecting the organic body to its prosthetic extensions. This presumes a conception of information as a (disembodied) entity that can flow between carbon-based organic components and silicon-based electronic components to make protein and silicon operate as a single system.⁹⁵

In contrast to a piece of choreography that’s been rehearsed and the fugal tête-à-têtes of stage drama, failure to carry out an operation has a way of barring the biological channels that actually make us tick. The quickest draw has to wait for ion channels to fire. Blooper reels and behind-the-scenes footage let us in on this joke, which is about fallibility; fantasy and science fiction’s consolidations hedge against bad outcomes by determining in advance the final domino to tip as though it were the first. Yet we’re confronted with such occurrences every day, at least apparently, when a unification skips a few links and still just functions or is surreally liquid. Think how a motorcyclist’s tinted visor diffuses her gaze so that it’s no longer a brace of directed pinpoints but an undivided berth of looking bordering on the panoptic; literarily, it splits the difference between Sauron’s far-seeing eye and the *palantír* of Orthanc. Then there is the Yamaha’s responsiveness to its rider to consider, throttled partway with an imperceptible lean in the hips.⁹⁶

Man’s imperial nature no longer sends itself forward through the electric sensibility of the horse; the inter-agencies are gone in the mode of communication between the horse and his master, out of which grew so many aspects of sublimity.⁹⁷

With its synchronicity of traveler and vehicle, the helmeted biker is our anonymous *Blaue Reiter*; the centaur brought off, like the dandy horse became the body wheeled, while a car is always closer to steering a high-velocity barge. Take how a

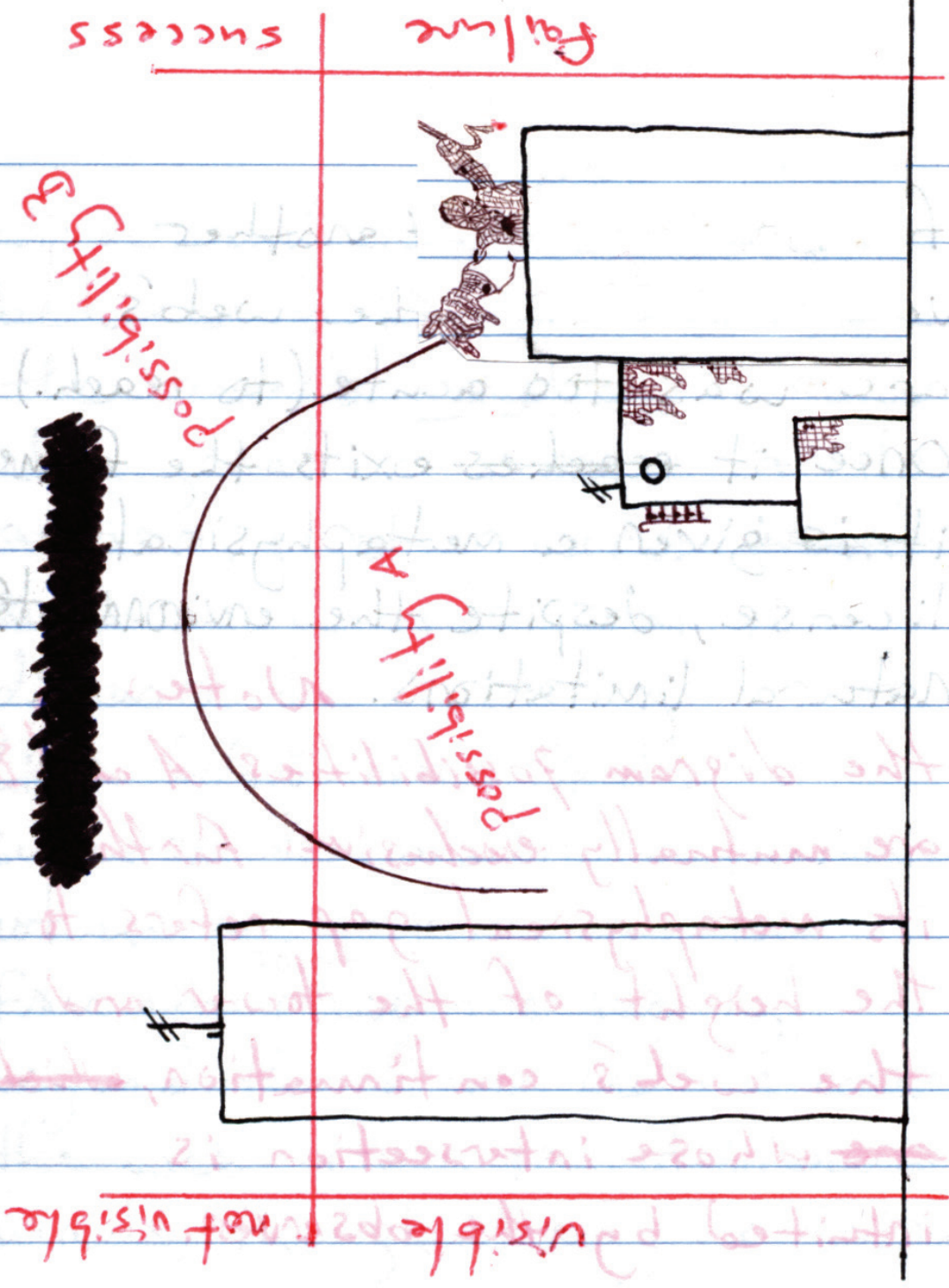
- 94 Slavoj Žižek and F.W.J. von Schelling, *The Abyss of Freedom/Ages of the World*, trans. Judith Norman (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1997), 79.
- 95 N. Katherine Hayles, *How We Became Posthuman: Virtual Bodies in Cybernetics, Literature, and Informatics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), 3.
- 96 “Instinct with joy, a young Italian banks / Smoothly around the base / Of Trajan’s column, feeling between his flanks / That cool, efficient beast, / His Vespa, at one with him in a centaur’s race.” Anthony Hecht, “The Cost,” in *Collected Earlier Poems*, 107.
- 97 Thomas De Quincey, “The English Mail-Coach,” in *Selected Writings of Thomas De Quincey*, ed. Philip van Doren Stern (New York: Modern Library, 1949), 928.

sommelier knife will cantilever against a wine bottle's lip. As the corkscrew twists into the bottle's soft plaque I can't help feeling that the key yanks itself from my hand; and as I apply upward force on the handle the other half shoves away before I notice, beginning not after my decision to lift but with it.

For of one will, the actions will be harmonious, however unlike they seem.⁹⁸

Nothing is quite like a two-handed pull on a capable lever. The shovel plunges into loam at the insistence of what force you mustered, then a boot notches on and the load's bailed to the hilt with a satisfying rasp — iron through stony dirt, or the breakage of thin roots, which is felt in the wrists. The handle's wood fissuring the lethargic soil, as if each time a grenade were detonating eight inches under the surface.

98 Emerson, "Self-Reliance," in *The Annotated Emerson*, 169.



failure

success

possibility B

possibility A

visibility not visible

Bosch's right-panel of *The Garden of Earthly Delights*. — The top portion, a burning city, resembles Whistler's *Nocturne in Black and Black*, with the exception of being at a distance (ie which accounts for its ~~abstract~~ abstractedness. Like Goya, et al; if only brought to the fire.

Islamic abstract art as precluding the possibility of failure, in so far as there is no attempt to represent another thing, an historical

Fourth Notebook

1

Postproduction. A music video's production typically involves recording in-studio, exclusive of the short film taped in a cordoned-off stretch of beachfront, then transposing that audio onto lip-synced footage¹ of the singer and her bandmates; their lead guitarist hardly tries without so much as a glance downward and, though slumped beneath a palm tree, the singer turns out pitch-perfect. Lending impassioned vocals to a frivolous posture ("Singest of summer in full-throated ease"²) downplays the significant capital involved. A contrast scheming to convey nonchalance, as when the words in Peter Gabriel's "Sledgehammer" get slightly ahead of his mouth. This helps us think about the use of ambient noise when it precedes the start of the song proper, usually somebody's footsteps walking over gravel or clicking down a linoleum hallway. In short, a little of the diegetic is let in; this always feels novel because the going assumption, that music videos disclude real-world acoustics, never changes, filmed acoustic performance being something of an exception. Postproduction does a similar thing in layering a soundbite of whooshing rope to a gymnast's somersault, for example, this suggesting far rapider motion, or perhaps we note how ambulation in videogames combines simple axial conveyance, as across a floor or up a staircase, with a related animation, the latter matched to the former's pace. In any number of videos from the last twenty years, the band leader's antsy choreography is stultified through jump-cutting, while fluid vocals suggest all that movement to be taking place within normal time, the trivial loss due to the frame rate's limitation notwithstanding. Hollywood relies on reciprocal shot placement to correct for the discontinuity of editing, opposed to continuous shooting. Jump cuts are the reverse: the footage *is* doctored and yet the *mise-en-scène* holds to the same shot. One is faintly aware when this artificial splicing and gluing happens, the exception being that alternative shots are not introduced; a slight hiccup, the reel is surgeoned, but François Truffaut does not explain himself. Intriguing, too, is the jump cut's similarity to a GIF file when the looping is perfect. Left alone, a handful of images becomes an artsy minimalist film, like the futuristic car dashboards in certain lo-fi playlists on YouTube, the duration equivalent with the number of go-arounds one lets elapse.

- 1 As expected from Marguerite Duras, the dialogue in Alain Resnais's enormously influential *Hiroshima, Mon Amour* is so preposterously stilted, with its aggressively uninspired one-liners, that the actors are forced to be awkwardly flat themselves, almost the opposite of a spaghetti western.
- 2 John Keats, "Ode to a Nightingale," in *Complete Poems and Selected Letters of John Keats* (New York: Modern Library, 2001), 236.

There was a machine in the kitchen which could extract the juice of two hundred oranges in half an hour if a little button was pressed two hundred times by a butler's thumb.³

2

Richard's chairs. Artwork can choose to register the spatial content of an object, and thus refer to the actual object's configuration, through relating recognizable materials (stone, cedar, glass). Richard Artschwager's *Splatter Chairs*, which are physically flat as well as flatly colored, assemble in the mind's eye, the legs classifying themselves as before or behind; to the extent that one is larger or partly obscured, the chair is also given the air of three-dimensionality, no different than in painting.

So I observe them, able to see
them as they are, the neutral sections
of trunk, spare, solid, lacking at once
disconnectedness and unity.⁴

3

By line alone. The art of Indian miniature painting would seem to consist of detached vertical sets upon horizontal slopes of theatrical foliage; the blue Krishna and shrub assemblages are so reminiscent of stiff, upright card planted on a stage.⁵ An object solidly monochromatic reduces in dimensionality to a semiotic oblateness. Compare Michelangelo's *Libyan Sibyl* with its preparatory chalk study, or as opposed to cubism's planar explosion in oils. Lacking both tight crannies of shadow and the Greeks' carnivalesque colors, the illusion of bulk in sculpture is accomplished by line alone. In Mughal painting, recession into space looks to the earth's foliate plane for guidance.

4

Beethoven overheard. With hip hop, especially the decades leading up to its Auto-Tune blood oath, as much as the baroque the listening experience is altogether a calming one, possessing as these genres do a kind of voluble directness. The thing about a chopper-style rapper like Busta Rhymes is that his loquacity doesn't hold the listener's hand but hovers far above, such that we nod along in a slower, zoomed-out way. Just in this sense does a complicated fugue bulldoze us, equally

3 F. Scott Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby* (New York: Scribner, 2004), 39.

4 Thom Gunn, "Waking in a Newly Built House," in *Selected Poems*, ed. August Kleinzahler (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2009), 18.

5 See American painter Emma Webster, whose ordinary surreality clashes visibly "detached" trees and forest animals with fiery landscapes of intense color, and *Perceval le gallois*, an outlier in Éric Rohmer's filmography.

tongue-tied before Busta's onslaught of off rhymes and the lapping trails of counterpoint.

You know how when the music goes right over your head and straight into that part of you which is most beautiful? I mean when your mind can't grasp the music's math and your heartbeat has no clue, your pilgrim soul just follows the melody's path.⁶

Capriccio leaps and a stepwise delivery rinse the soul of its proverbial dust; as does relinquishing control, when you're the lone occupant of a railway sleeper or in a kayak nosing its way downriver. A compulsion like empathy, only it's physical, stirs in the fingers while one is standing at a dish-laden sink with the radio on, with a sponge for the conductor's sudsy baton; desperate to enlarge the unbuttoned sophistication of Serge Gainsbourg to include us, our tense hands shove and drift as a leg cantilevers on its knee. Isn't the deep insistence of nodding one's head like thrusting, the attempt again and again to further the rhythm. Both fail, respectively to transgress and make music do anything.

Without your twirling it the Earth can spin,
Without your pulling it, the tide comes in.⁷

The seeming opportunity to imbricate a portion of ligamental feeling into a symphony's locomotion develops the superstitious half-belief that one helped it chug and choo. At the heart of getting classical music today is this iterative circle jerk of one, in which an audience patiently awaiting the thoughts of a dead man shooshes and boos itself. The wannabe pop-star guesses the chorus and nails every verb; and the feedback loops of pseudo-challenge coax us into timed bouts of *amor fati*, spinning wheels and choosing the best jewel.

You and I, side by side, gaped at the vision
that materialized only after I thought
to ask for it, so it would seem given.⁸

So it is throughout the dull career of Christopher Nolan but especially *Inception*, a hedge maze of glass that self-identifies as a genuine head-scratcher.

That we eat reel after duplicate reel of entertainment, confected for profit and debited on foppish birthright, hints at a relations campaign that wants to rebrand consumption as voting one's conscience — or voicing allegiance, when it comes films keyed to a demographic — using dollars and reloadable gift cards.⁹ Just be-

6 Stew and Heidi Rodewald, *Passing Strange* (New York: Dramatists Play Service, 2010), 20.

7 George Cukor, "Without You," in *My Fair Lady* (Warner Bros, 1964).

8 Ange Mlinko, "Was that mare made of plum blossom?" in *Distant Mandate* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2017), 60.

9 Olivia Wilde tweeted that *Booksmart*, her directorial debut, is "getting creamed by the big dogs out there and needs your support," while men who decline to sign up for a monthly shave club are threatened by banner ads with not giving a damn.

hind registering for the Selective Service, for a while it was national duty that every adult and teenager judge *The Dark Knight* for herself. In the unsalaried role of film buff, after a last slurp of cola I record however many postcoital stars to that Valhalla of tallied opinion, elder of a sort and the internet's shepherd. But the deception is least that audiences shell out for the flickering lights of operettas; modern-day Fortunatos, we're duped into *insisting upon* the freedom to upload food selfies and splurge. As freshmen reprimand Shakespeare for tiptoeing beyond their vocabularies, cinema is never alleged to be "intellectual" unless, despite its twists, things end up a very reasonable bonbon.

They consist of nothing beyond a challenge to the eye to compete with the situation. One is supposed, schooled by countless precedents, to see what is "going on" more quickly than the moments of significance in the situation can unfold.¹⁰

Roland Barthes alleges as much in his essay "Criticism Blind and Dumb," one of the structuralist's most coruscating polemics; namely, how the dishonest reviewers are those who willingly acknowledge, albeit as a kind of critical shrug, that the fault in difficulty is no one's but their own. Bach's ghost turns again from its listener, not in the diaristic sense of "feeling confessing to itself" but as performance's natural ebb. As with the *logos endiathetos* of Hamlet and Beethoven in the late works, these great favorites speak to themselves as though quite alone.

I know of no deeper distinction in the overall appearance of an artist than this: whether he looks with the eyes of a witness at his nascent work of art (that is to say, at "himself"); or whether he has "forgotten the world," which is the essence of every work of monological art — it rests on *forgetting*, it is the music of forgetting.¹¹

Certain diarists of note, including Noël Coward but not Samuel Pepys, who enciphered his smuttiest thoughts with gibberish, had every expectation of publishing and wrote to that end. In her poetry, Anne Sexton, the most fanatically self-conscious of the American confessional school, presents as closeted knowing that she'll be read.

5

Giving the vocalist a leg up. Anticipating the conclusion to a musical statement amounts to experiencing those measures in advance, to say nothing of one's accuracy. The desire to "help along" a bit of musical development has a lot to do with prediction. Antiphonally, the listener feels it her duty to support, knowing with a degree of certainty on which syllable a sentence hopes to end, as the Gabrieli Consort wends home. One pities the singer whose breathing is labored if not less

10 Theodor Adorno, *Minima Moralia: Reflections from Damaged Life*, trans. E.F.N. Jephcott (New York: Verso, 2005), 141.

11 Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Joyous Science*, ed. and trans. R. Kevin Hill (New York: Penguin Books, 2018), 263.

articulate: like the crack linking Pyramus and Thisbe, what Mimi wants to tell Rudolfo lies on the other side of a hacking cough. Our premonitions arrive on time's wing, a slight delay built into *bel canto*. As when a stammerer¹² gropes at some phantasm of language that I see before her ("people truly made of clay, people tied for life into a bag which no one can undo"¹³), though unlike the moments in conversation when something unclear gives an interlocutor pause. If we accept the characterization of pop culture as flattery, with regard to its cheap predictability and the listener's socially manufactured predisposition, it can be disappointing to attribute this somewhat embarrassing participatory affect to the great romanticists, too, who feign confusion as to the next move of a quartet, which of course is a completed and published composition; as if Wagner's drawing-room struggles to formulate developmental solutions were meticulously notated and included in the Breitkopf & Härtel edition. Kanye West's guttural "Uhn, 'eah!" lets slip viscerally this embodied need to assist his own musical subject, though West knows better than anyone how things end up. His irrepressible urge has a certain mere resemblance to a conductor gesticulating before the smartly dressed members of the orchestra. In truth, the order of operations is reversed: the conductor's flick means to cue action taken by the seated musicians, who follow their maestro with ebon swoons.

6

Caged birds. The aural panoply of life outdoors — cows lowing in a drizzle of summer rain, or the neighborhood's songbirds imitating car alarms — though as meaningful as a forest fire, is hardly random but occasioned by a multitude of natural factors. At least hypothetically, this activity would be predictable within its ranges and thus wholly limited in scope.

7

Passing thought on clouds. It must be that cumulus, sharply defined, better registers due to our quiet understanding of the natural ratio between distance and visibility, with definition continuously lost at farther distances relative the observer. That being the case, shouldn't a perspicacious cloud, not visually diffuse but starkly contoured with a tight outline, confront the daydreamers on their hills as contradictory for also being thousands of meters high? Clouds are known by the eye with a specificity like that of near things and felt at the same time, through rational induction, to be paradoxically far; their objectlike keenness clashes with fact.

- 12 An amusing self-autoglyph or homological word, insofar as the double suffix of "stammerer" reminds us of one in the throes of that affliction. I'm reminded of "aibohphobia," which denotes the fear of palindromes and comically is itself one.
- 13 Robert Louis Stevenson, "Truth of Intercourse," in *The Lantern-Bearers and Other Essays*, ed. Jeremy Treglown (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1988), 96.

8

Pacifiers. As with fellatio and, to a lesser degree, cunnilingus, the rave baby's pacifier serves as a subcultural totem suggesting membership and likelihood of engagement; outwardly hamstringing oneself signals this to the club like buckshot, since *verbal* speech would leave the possibility of contradicting everybody else's installation of slavish thoughts. Likewise is a blower's will stupefied, at least to all appearances; become autonomic. Snapchat's filter sticks out another tongue when we're equipped to do as much ourselves.¹⁴

"Like a mirror with my face painted on it," I wrote.¹⁵

The function of the neon pacifier is thus to maintain a show of vacuity, which would otherwise require constant upkeep, as is said of Tibetan prayer wheels. Or thus a tattoo on the back of the neck is not your third eye but a second mouth.

Soutine once claimed that his whole artistic project was to free a cry in his chest that he felt while watching a butcher cut the throat of a goose. His dead animals are both the cause of the cry and ventriloquists of the cry: they scream on his behalf.¹⁶

On the red carpet the talented and wealthy are instructed to keep their mouths always slightly ajar in order not to be misapprehended by a stray photograph; think how the vampires of dive bars shapeshift between sour pursing and waifish malaise. Baptism derives its powerful effect, through momentarily overwhelming one's senses, congested as they are in the face. It is the appeal of peek-a-boo as much as kissing, in which the live electrode of another's lips and tongue smothers taste, obstructs sight, and slurs speech. Enjoyed for its consented-to abnegation, in fellatio the subjectivity of the giver is thought to clog up like a head cold and denied on the grounds of no talking, which is the servile basis of animal companionship.

9

Like in dough. How does an outline collect disorganized color, or coax amorphous lilac and tangerine under its border, despite the object's pictorial dissipation? Say that beneath the crisp regiment of a rectangle lies an unmodulated color: the two's overlap is felt to alter the fundamental geometric character of the field, its rectangularity, adapting itself in a manner similar to bridging a divide. The impo-

- 14 See *ahegao*, fictionalized in erotica as involuntary and before long adopted by softcore models. But equally the open mouth with tongue lifted toward a molar and one eye winking, or both clenched shut. Here, too, sensory ground zero is compromised on purpose, between the fake stupefaction of wide-eyed exposure and happy spasm implying a sort of joke imbecility.
- 15 Dan Chiasson, "Euphrasy & Rue," in *The Math Campers* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2020), 22.
- 16 Dan Grossman, "There Will Be Blood: Chaim Soutine at the Jewish Museum," *Jewish Currents*, May 29, 2018, <https://jewishcurrents.org/chaim-soutine/>.

sition of a line has a paring effect, not hiding any stray marks that land outside ink's curtain but instructing us to disregard them. In favor of the cookie cutter's thinly debossed shape, lots of other dough is ignored.

The problem is thus not that of how to grasp the multiplicity of determinations, but rather to *abstract* from them, how to constrain our gaze and teach it to grasp only the notional determinism.¹⁷

The suspension of disbelief is always a two-way street, as it helps both the creator's lonesome work and its recipient, whose enjoyment depends on believing the work of art efficacious.

Aesthetic evaluation with respect to a utilitarian item's functionality involves a judgment about the input made by its aesthetic properties to its overall functional success, or more generally an aesthetic appreciation of how it brings off this success.¹⁸

An arrangements of mutual benefit,¹⁹ like the actor is spiritually chaperoned by her audience, which waits for the fall and tears with bated breath. An infinite number of plane figures lie buried in an unrumpled bed of a color, instantly defined when the geometric lens of a wiry circle, square, or triangle is applied (see fig. 1).

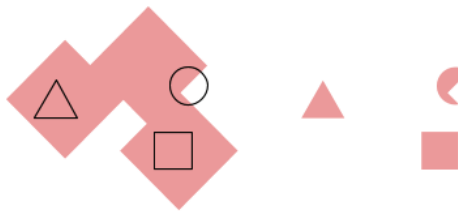


Fig. 1. Courtesy of the author.

Maybe line is a sort of absolute in this case. Instead of recessed, a line sits *above* crayon's smudge, an additional step between us and the truth, albeit a necessary one, as we might say of musical scores. A polygon's line is minor in the grander scheme of things but of foremost importance in noticing what is hidden.

- 17 Slavoj Žižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology* (New York: Verso, 1989), xi.
- 18 Stephen Davies, *The Artful Species: Aesthetics, Art, and Evolution* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 21.
- 19 In videogames, the conscription of a superficial field to a pictorially outermost but literally lower station involves the use of textures. Mapping a texture means to crop and adapt the source photograph (flesh, pebbles, bark), more complexly pocked any polygon. However, visually this process seems to merge a tree or boulder's high-resolution texture with the boxy model's surface, like a splinter is lifted by an applied salve. Its ghostly remainder, the real material game designers discard, radiates outward.

A form then could *give* its shape to what it contained. And content could transfer its significance as painting to what contains it. Then shape *pervades*, like gravity, or energy, or air.²⁰

Administered last, once the blanket of a shade has been set down, shape is oddly brought into relief by that which precedes it, leading us to guess that the figure in question was submerged though really the proverbial cherry on top. Aperture then is not a gap through which quasi fossils are viewed but an enchanted lens that makes a triangle of glass knowable. I note how the difficulty one has in imagining a fact as stating what it directly contradicts is somewhat like tracing one's hand on a sheet of paper and clarifying that it only *just* fits its own shape.²¹ As is true of all our deaths, history shrink-wraps down to Schubert's paltry lifespan. That crowded vista on the horizon, his potential, is lost; we cannot imagine him surviving another Austrian winter to compose long into springtime and the summer months. Mozart is supposed to have written his three best symphonies last in acknowledgment of his impending demise,²² despite the fact that every significant European composer if not poet got better as they aged, thus every fall comes necessarily at the career's peak,²³ though surpassing *Don Giovanni* or the Clarinet Concerto is tough to imagine. No doubt Mozart would have dovetailed with Beethoven's love-sickness and Schubert nibbled further into Mendelssohn's cache of melodies.

10

Hindsighted. With the fat block of a book, as with cut sandwiches left apart to show the contents, how strongly do I believe the letters are there? I see the shape and comprehend its properties as an object, whereby I satisfy perception. But as for the motivation to really picture those airless pages stained with English's jumbled-up alphabet, one admits what it is useful to admit, lest our semiotics melt into a compassless puddle. I have trouble keeping this fact down. See how a breakfast bar is presented, its outer layer sprinkled with grains for decoration. An affordable miracle: a handful of plain oats survived Kellogg's ovens and rose intact to the surface.²⁴ Credulous eaters, even when shiny packaging sins against what's inside, we're inclined to say that the sticky bar consists of wheat stuff, too,

- 20 Stanley Cavell, *The World Viewed: Reflections on the Ontology of Film* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1979), 13n, 232.
- 21 See Giorgio de Chirico's *Rising Sun on the Plaza*, where the sun appears to cast its own shadow. Curiously, the eleven crimped rays visible above the horizon end up redistributed in the sol niger on the ground.
- 22 Or Anton Bruckner intended to leave his Ninth Symphony unfinished. But this is a contradiction. Willfully not completing a project seems to do just that: carry out one's intentions.
- 23 But then the longer-lived composers — the quartet of Bs, if we include Anton Bruckner — tended to be deadly inspired to the last. Conversely, one admits that Pietro Mascagni is classical music's Thomas Gray.
- 24 As though a tight pack of Bicycle playing cards fell somewhere between a hunk of bleached pulp (the crepe-thin pages of a dime novel stick and seemingly merge) and a transcendental wormhole, the audience member's chosen card "tunnels" to the top of the magician's regular deck.

as unmarred as the planet on television, when in truth the flat oats one discovers upon unwrapping such treats were deposited before the confection underwent baking and was punched into bars. Although it shows up dehulled and rolled, the familiar oat makes the amalgam one peels, like a stickier banana, somewhat legible. In one Sunday comic, the physician's X-ray reveals unchewed bowtie pasta in a patient's stomach. Watermelon bubblegum is dyed artificial green in denotation of its artificial flavor; in a pastiche of nature, taste is equated again with what we see, this time unmistakably so. How literal tasting notes on a bottle of wine are, not reminiscent of pineapple and sweet cherries but DARK CHOCOLATE, EUCALYPTUS, TOASTED ALMOND, rattled off as though they were *included*. A wine label is trying to compensate, in other words, for the visual homogeneity of fermented juice.

It is comparable to the idea that *properties* are *ingredients* of the things which have the properties; e.g. that beauty is an ingredient of all beautiful things as alcohol is of beer and wine, and that we therefore could have pure beauty, unadulterated by anything that is beautiful.²⁵

There is something phenomenologically curious to dragging the periphery of a flash element, as for instance on a webpage one happened to be navigating, when doing so brings a continuous ream of whitespace before one's eyes, the question being whether this virtual amplitude should be thought to have existed prior to bringing it unbidden into the frame or created then and there with each sweep of the mouse.

To give an object poetic space is to give it more space than it has objectivity; or, better still, it is following the expansion of its intimate space.²⁶

Using the eraser tool in Microsoft Paint to cut a swath of white through any image, it's almost as if the software registers that absence positively, when in all likelihood the reverse is true; as with a blank area of HTML slapped further and further up or down²⁷ like toilet paper, persisting in RAM if not graphically, this cancelled Yangtze is not deletion but removal kept track of, like an aborted keystroke. I'm reminded of the persistently online, seamless continent of *World of Warcraft*, and the close of August Wilson's *Fences*, whose blatant supernaturalism²⁸ has the effect of retroactively adjusting the plot's American setting, transforming what was realism into magic realism. The tennis match between the mimes at the end of Michelangelo Antonioni's *Blow-Up* is no different as their invisible ball soon takes on sound.

- 25 Ludwig Wittgenstein, *The Blue and Brown Books* (New York: Harper & Row, 1965), 17.
- 26 Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, trans. Maria Jolas (Boston: Beacon Press, 1994), 202.
- 27 Using a touchpad, there are two ways of understanding its relationship to what's on the monitor, either of which may be inverted with a change of settings. Stroking downward on the pad should correspondingly raise a document, counterintuitively a move in the direction of the last page, unless one thinks of the touchpad and document as a single ream of paper, in which case the downward stroke lowers the document before our eyes to bring on earlier paragraphs.
- 28 In the play, Wilson's final stage direction is, "the gates of heaven stand open as wide as God's closet."

An unwrapped booster pack of trading cards is hardly acknowledged for what it naturally is, while the outcome of every lottery ticket is thought a foregone matter (“You could already be a winner!”) decided on the basis of worthiness. Turning over a playing card that has yet to be looked at is an experience akin to the feeling that a shut refrigerator is filled with light as well as Schrödinger’s much-abused thought experiment, to the extent that a particular card’s identity is felt to instantiate during its 180° yawn. Unquestioningly, Schrödinger’s cat is misrepresented as phenomenal, a characterization repeated time and again. If we’re honest, the ten of clubs came to be there the instant it was dealt — one has already lost the hand.

11

Hot potato. An orchestra’s reliance on trading a whorish theme between instrumental groups over the course of its development makes it the musical equivalent of *cangiante*, a technique essential for painters in reducing visual fatigue and that *Wikipedia* defines as “a change in color necessitated by an original color’s darkness or lightness limitation.”²⁹ Frequently changing partners helps the subject avoid the impression of vocal monotony; a healthy shove off toward other shores, like instinctive revulsion to incest in burrowing rodents, their check for hereditary diversity and a safeguard against disease. Traditionally, every pass of the baton, from harp to clarinet, oboe to viola, presented an opportunity for altering the composition’s attitude if not identity; more makeover or change of wardrobe than facelift. In the dense symphonic woods of Shostakovich’s oddly symmetrical body of work, a misfiring or something like genetic corruption brings the schizophrenic to light.

Table 1

	Homophony	Heterophony
Polyphony	Choric	Duetic
Monophony	Soloistic	Schizophrenic

12

The artist’s fiery parcels. The kenophobia of Joseph Stella’s Brooklyn Bridge is of the type one finds in kindergartens, triggered by the bridge’s network of trapezoidal cavities, inadvertently matrixed because the cables overlap.³⁰ Stella fills each fiery parcel by number, similar to how Anton Bruckner would block out the entire score of his next symphony in advance before he’d written the music. Nothing like a sky coheres behind these wires unless one takes *Brooklyn Bridge* to be a bag of assorted candies; as with the bricked-in valleys of early Italian art, who ventured outside before the ink was dry on a science of perspective, treating each gap in

29 *Wikipedia*, s.v. “Cangiante.” See also *The Rape of Tamar* (ca. 1640), attributed to Eustache Le Sueur.

30 Another painting of Stella’s, titled *Luna Park* and which precedes *Brooklyn Bridge* by seven years, is more oysterish accretion than coloring page.

the bridge as discrete communicates to the eye an overall mistranslation between foreground and background. In its earliest applications gold leaf was uniformly laid, never lessening between a gate and the courtyard but as steady as a forcefield. According to Stella's fractioned idiom, color spasms sympathetically, a trait that reminds one of either Pontormo or a frightened octopus, the New York vignette and crisscrosses of abstract seafoam fitted into whatever quilt it is that hangs in the distance. Everyday parallax becomes actual, as though the lenses of one's eyeglasses, instead of framing what was looked at, collapsed that distance to lodge there.

It is rather that, as Hegel would have put it, subject and object are inherently "mediated," so that an "epistemological" shift in the subject's point of view always reflects an "ontological" shift in the object itself. Or — to put it in Lacanese — the subject's gaze is always-already inscribed into the perceived object itself.³¹

13

Lang Lang overboard. Pianists emote more strenuously during a passage marked adagio (or *lento*, *largo*, and so forth) not because this tempo brings out more decidedly a movement's beauty but due to the preponderance of rubato suffusing every respirant beat, which asks for the inherently balletic timing of eyebrows liting and shoulders floating.

14

Zips. On and off, Barnett Newman's revelatory "Zip" passes for the frazzled zig-zag of a material that has undergone tearing, an event belonging to that object's physical life. But when his edge is ruler-straight, brought about through Newman's preliminary application of masking tape, the result can be thought of as another example of the artist attempting to ditch historicity, the temporally situated mechanicalness behind all non-miracles having assumed the status of modernism's nemesis. Initially it would seem that Newman has added an embellishing something that relates to the work's construction and confusable for a clue, as with the rivets running up and down a ship's hull or how the gusset strengthens a pair of denim jeans. Through the introduction of one of these skinny diversions along the canvas's vertical axis, usually orange or cloud-blue in color, we're left with a sort of perceptual red herring.

These are always inserted directly in the landscape, and the more impressively smooth and broad they are, the more unrelated and violent their gleaming track appears against its wild, overgrown surroundings. They are expressionless. Just as they know no marks of foot or wheel, no soft paths along their edges as a transition to the vegetation, no trails leading off into

31 Slavoj Žižek, *The Parallax View* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2006), 17.

the valley, so they are without the mild, soothing, un-angular quality of things that have felt the touch of hands or their immediate implements.³²

Temporarily integrated within his acrylics and oils, as opposed to something like an added strip of fabric, the Zip is a positive loss or inverse scar, evidencing as much by what's left behind.

Each grafted text continues to radiate back toward the site of its removal, transforming that, too, as it affects the new territory.³³

It alludes to defunct histories of construction and dismantling, the ideal contrast to the keloidal seam of aluminum welding.

15

My light is spent. Staring ahead in a pitch-black room, lids wide to the nothing, I cannot help feeling a restless, thinly ephemeral presence inches before my face.³⁴

Sensible emptiness, there where the brain's lantern-slide
Revels in vast returns.³⁵

Perhaps this sensation of physical proximity is due to the absence of some minimum for refraction, with the brain chalking the cause up to a light-absorptive fabric, or a comparable blackbody. As with leaving the sliced halves of a ping-pong ball on one's eyes, almost the opposite of eigengrau and the leather hood that disappears a falcon's world, seeing doesn't immediately halt just because the eyelids have shut. It continues, only there is nothing to see.

16

The sort of thing that's quite impossible. In Agatha Christie's *And Then There Were None*, the letter read by Justice Wargrave on the train from Paddington Station, despite its near illegibility, lacks only the irrelevant glue of articles and prepositions. Fortunately for Wargrave, all salient locations and a single date survive, their inclusion being a bit of contrivance that disguises Christie's debt, as the story's teller, to the reader. Advertisements for the Amazon original drama *Fearless* show us a paragraph as heavily redacted as a declassified government report, where only READ, BETWEEN, THE, and LIES is legible. In general, features are highlighted at the expense of the whole: like a Saul Bass movie poster, the neckless glyphs in bike

32 Adorno, *Minima Moralia*, 48.

33 Jacques Derrida, *Dissemination*, trans. Barbara Johnson (New York: Continuum, 1981), 390.

34 See Karen Solie's "Forty," in *The Road In Is Not the Same Road Out* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2015).

35 Richard Wilbur, "A World Without Objects is a Sensible Emptiness," in *New and Collected Poems* (San Diego: Harcourt, 1989), 283.

lanes and on bathroom doors negate the body's interstitial joints, such that in restaurants two severed heads float above their needlessly gendered outfits.

17

Link's Awakening. Invariably sealed away in a castle or disabled by Ganondorf's petrifying magic,³⁶ the bodily status of Princess Zelda is routinely abbreviated to that of a quest checkpoint, literally cementing her rescuable-ness, with the added effect that whatever potential Zelda had to assist Link, her elfin champion, in thwarting evil is obviated right off the bat.

They sun themselves in the great man's light, and feel it to be their own element. They cast the dignity of man from their downtrod selves upon the shoulders of a hero, and will perish to add one drop of blood to make that great heart beat, those giant sinews combat and conquer. He lives for us, and we live in him.³⁷

Zelda's agency lies with a handful of convenient interventions at most, blending the stick-and-carrot of Mario's ever-kidnapped Peach with the ghostly encouragement of Obi Wan.

18

Milking a theme. Going through a dense manuscript of Brahms and finding every page or so blazed with its own number would be like navigating by the bright stripes along a nature trail. Couldn't variations, stockpiled into one opus as the enumerated fermentation of a theme, be thought of as temporal waypoints, between which lie the briefest of rests. Like individual scenes will make up a film despite being designed to flow into one another, the cut is there just the same. Material as fissile as Handel's *Harmonious Blacksmith* needs to hang its laurels on the regular, or else be less clever per beat.³⁸ Always has it been the ambitious artist's gamble to stay at the table exactly long enough and resist cashing in her chips on a lucky throw; acting against the gravity of a good denouement, based on some truth-like pith, variations paradoxically seem to increase in density while growing nebulous as the number of days spent in orbit of the theme only climbs. Growth in a piece of classical music normally presents us with that all-too-familiar moth interrogating its discovered bit of fire, never landing on the flame but incessantly

36 The set up for *The Legend of Zelda: Phantom Hourglass*.

37 Ralph Waldo Emerson, "The American Scholar," in *The Annotated Emerson*, ed. David Mikics (Cambridge: The Belknap Press, 2012), 87.

38 A ceaseless musical invention able to shiver away into the wee hours — less ingenious than an eighteenth-century album leaf if we could possibly square up the staves, the way Ella Fitzgerald pales in comparison with Milton line for line, her nursery rhymes for his blank verse, unless it were possible to "quantify" Fitzgerald's singing, the devastating intensity of a sonata movement equal to the cool of a lengthy solo — of course won't be realized until jazz.

tossed back and reapproaching; the fugitive lamb herded to where the grazing's safe. A bolt of lightning catalyzes the first variation as additional ones hatch, like newborn turtles navigating by shafts of celestial sea light.

The analogy of keys lost and found is dropped for that of a magnet whose hold gradually weakens as Brahms's musical children swell in cleverness down a line of generational sallies, eventually to forget whence development cometh. Or the prodigal daughter is sought for robbery and eastbound, trailing a star till she's out of gas. Hear the Rondo of Schubert's twentieth Piano Sonata, which attenuates in genius after the outset of its especially tender melody.

Like fish spreading thin as a song
Diminished by its own opening.³⁹

Brahms makes a bee line from Handel's catchy aria and ultimately forges a gloriously lucid fugue, while the *Goldberg* shows its soporific head a second time at the close to bid us goodnight.

19

The shock of the new. The idea of being scandalized seems necessarily related to understanding than a look of awed shock really suggests, that facial expression of disbelief chosen like a hat and as predictable as what's for lunch. Long-lasting outrage requires that the women of MADD carefully study the hurt wrought by driving under the influence and the Sierra Club monitor the effects of deforestation. Awe, however, is closer to unknowing. If not shied from altogether, the well-documented torching of the earth is met with a dismissive giggling that even the doomed share in.

Something much stronger is needed, something akin to the old religious topic of a cosmic perversion or catastrophe in which the world itself is "out of joint."⁴⁰

Confronted with the tissue flutter of a newly minted obscenity or cross-eyed rebuttal, it's a toss-up between butterfly net and flyswatter. In the electronic heat of scrolling, idiots are afforded that least pause of brushing away, the refutation of a leftward swipe, and one double-taps to like. If we argued that Schumann composed his *Album für die Jugend* not entirely as a choice but in acquiescence to subpar genius, bravely aligning harvest to yield, it is too little to then refer us to the biographies. Alert greats like Melville said as much from their soap boxes in the concrete markets of Boston, that truth comes dripping grease: more than being hard to grasp, the usual slipperiness of the new, but wild to behold. Aren't we *agreeably* puzzled, scandalized in the healthy public sense of the word, when confronted by what was thought not possibly the case.

39 Terrance Hayes, "Fish Head for Katrina," in *Lighthouse* (New York: Penguin Books, 2010), 55.

40 Žižek, *The Parallax View*, 185.

20

Graphics of older vintage. Named for the soldering technique *cloisonné*, the fused continuity of Cloisonnism finds its twentieth-century parallel in cel shading,⁴¹ in which gradient colors are vivisected into tightly defined slices. Both styles include a form of visual came, though instead of lead we've got oil and graphics. I want to suggest that the dark trim Émile Bernard and Edgar Degas left on their Breton girls and ballerinas, their mythic idlers, lodged between hope and accomplishment, lies above the figures, seeing as these lines carry a certain amount of physicality, something like a raised boundary across which the various shades break. The outline keeping a tutu from dissolving into a stage can be understood as a flat stencil paradoxically brought flush with a world of fragile, bulbous objects for their safekeeping, like the thin cardboard that cradles a shipment of glassware. Juxtaposing Nintendo's toon shader with the painstaking sprite drawing of celebrated titles from past decades, such as *Street Fighter* and *Metal Slug*, the latter is found willing to break characters for graduality's sake, referring to the combover of a volume cohering and the liquid reach-around of shadows when they're real. The cel style in videogames renders this daily tide of sunlight through isolating each tint successively with the tourniquet of code. For the commemorative re-release of LucasArts' *Monkey Island* series, beloved by fans of the point-and-click adventure genre, the game's charming aesthetic passes through a bilinear glaze, which has the ghastly effect of evening out what in the original was as crusty as a lot of rocks. In this newer edition, everything on the island is filtered to an oxymoronic smudge; a certain grit is lost, the setting and larger-than-life characters have the lubricious ick of bad magazines. LucasArts was fortunate in particular for the edged lineation of Guy Threepwood's sprite. Actually the rough shape saves its navy-blue and yellow palette, which in the remastered edition comes off as crippled. The specific problem has to do with substituting that which signals obsolescence to contemporary gamers with a properly modern aesthetic, and the new tends to be smooth. Pixel art being labor-intensive rather than the easy way out, it becomes difficult to stick to one's guns with the two-dimensional.⁴² The inevitable move for a studio trying to look relevant is unfortunately this overreach toward "improvement," such that gamers would cry foul if asked to exchange thirty bucks for a game that seemed lower in resolution than previously.

21

Speak, lamp. I take it that repetition rather fuels than circles the absolute's emergence, irritated into relief perhaps in the manner of friction welding; consistently and successfully touching the subject, slowly bolstering its existence. A tennis ball ricochets off an invisible spot on the court and another remains perfectly dry when it rains, lighter in color and hemmed by raindrops. In spite of romanticism's

41 The primary visual criterion of the *Borderlands* franchise.

42 If this alternative, an edition done in the third dimension, were the case an optics of high quality could be given through high polygon counts, though without sacrificing the side-to-side gameplay. See the videogame *Oddworld: Abe's Oddysee*, which has gone through remasterings of its own.

dalliances with atonality, which may be rightly described as melodic celibacy, the composers' dramatis personae feel out development through the usual method: continuous shots in the dark and recalibration.

What distinguishes didactic rules from aesthetic norms is the impossibility of consistently meeting the requirements of the former. This impossibility becomes the motor of the effort to learn. This effort must fail, and the rules themselves must again be forgotten if they are to bear fruit.⁴³

As the fifth-edition *Grove's* entry on Sergei Rachmaninoff calls his music as "well constructed and effective, but monotonous in texture, which consists in essence mainly of artificial and gushing tunes accompanied by a variety of figures derived from arpeggios."⁴⁴ Liszt frequently wrote such stuff, except for the part about tune-fulness, though a mad thumper like Charles-Valentin Alkan, many of whose compositions strike one as pointless in an aggressive way and difficult for the wrong reasons, might be the choicer example. Philip Glass's music of small changes, for another, has less to do with some longitudinal subtlety of his; it's that Glass repeats himself, which is almost tautological to point out. Consider John Luther Adams's *Become Ocean*, a work consisting of entirely of textural foam without a buoy of an idea in sight or the devout minimalism of Arvo Pärt, solemnly cowed in its brown habit and carrying a little bell as it meanders through the misty Estonian highlands.

22

Cardigan depth. If there is an explanation for the billowy gowns and imposing robes of Tudor fashion, by which I mean the gigantesque sleeves of Hans Holbein the Younger or the *feuillettée*-like silks with which British television is stuffed, I would point to the relative thinness of the materials today's couture uses, the compensation for which is voluptuous puffs. Industrial advancement gives us densely imbricated fabric, one of the twentieth century's brilliant condensations (the integrated circuit, genetically modified corn) that reproduces the large within the domain of the small.

To suppose that linen is deep, which nobody had ever supposed.⁴⁵

Inspect the microscopic weft and warp of a bargain-bin shirt, then tell yourself it was stitched by hand. What would an Egyptian weaver make of such an article, or for that matter the country's ubiquitous thread count? The shirt produced via automation saturates uncannily with the glow of hand-and-eye labor.

43 Theodor Adorno, *Philosophy of New Music*, ed. and trans. Robert Hullot-Kentor (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006), 90.

44 *Grove's Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, s.v. "Sergei Rachmaninoff," ed. Eric Blom, 5th edn. (London: Macmillan, 1954).

45 Roland Barthes, "Saponids and Detergents," in *Mythologies*, trans. Annette Lavers (New York: Hill and Wang, 2012), 33.

Revolutions in shampoo. Like the flagellate who habitually whips herself to abrogate pleasure, more or less aroused while ostensibly punished, the all-natural market advertising dye-free solvents that are safe for limestone to absorb goes on trafficking in the dirty practices it claims to have washed its hands of, such that an enlightened line of Unilever dish soaps and detergents boasts of ingredients a toddler can pronounce but is still dumped and shelved in the usual polyethylene liner with laser-printed mission statement. But a company neglects frivolous dispositions of ours at its peril, continuously shuffling through subterfuges and alternate feints when jingle fatigue is eating into the stock price or the mascot's racist. Budget detergent has less impressive labels, the trade-off for its low price point, and no cable footprint. Consequently, an in-house brand like Target's Up & Up is poorly regarded by these same eco-friendly shoppers for being *unintentionally* minimalist, though Up & Up's goo is also naturally derived. In contrast to the day-to-day austerity of the lower classes, minimalism is sought as an end, demanded for the safety of dogs and babies. With the emergence of unscented cat litter, where the sales pitch amounts to railing against the compounds that simulated lilac and jasmine as now undesirable, as opposed to the ammoniacal tang of feline urine, the product offers something beyond mere absorbency, over and above the contents themselves and their efficacy, "Extreme" replacing "Ultra" in the length of a news cycle. How strange this negation of what started as a numinousness you can't see; Fresh Step leaves out the invisible heaven of aromatics, but acutely so.

To most men only the cessation of the miracle would be miraculous and the perpetual exercise of God's power seems less wonderful than its withdrawal would be.⁴⁶

Aquafina, courtesy a paid-to-say Lisa Kudrow, claims they "promise nothing." Excusing the consumer, who eggs on the con in the traitorous belief that the laughing shall inherit the earth, the need to justify a ponderously huge profit margin rears its ugly head. In the last century, the surplus value especially associated with single-use goods represents a shift from nothing as benign, free of harmful bacteria and heavy metals, to nothing as slightly opulent, the feeling that carbonation is rare, or the soda can's aluminum hymen. La Croix squeezes in natural raspberry and lemon using the French equivalents and unfamiliar verbings, such that a can of grapefruit sparkling water is labeled Pamplemousse, its contents not flavored but "essenced." The very basis of life becomes the tofu for a supernaturalism of thirst, with value everything besides practicality.

The imbecility of our condition is that things cannot, in their natural simplicity and purity, fall to our use.⁴⁷

46 Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, *Kavanaugh: A Tale*, ed. Jean Downy (New Haven: College & University Press, 1965), 59.

47 Michel de Montaigne, "That We Taste Nothing Pure," in *The Complete Essays of Montaigne*, ed. William Hazlitt, trans. Charles Cotton (London: John Templeman, 1842), 313.

Aquafina's slogan is novel insofar as it winkingly calls attention to the gouging scheme at its core, the bottling of a cherished natural resource cheaply available as a taxpayer-funded utility. In league with the product that claims to be 93% naturally derived, here is an egregious markup not even for added ingredients, unless you credit the milliliter of chemically inexpensive vitamins, but the guarantee of state-of-the-art filtration and denser healthfulness, PepsiCo having goaded everyone into treating city water with snobbish hauteur. One side effect is that the idea of gourmet water quickly becomes redundant on its own terms; as plain as day to the ironic buyer, who knows better and nonetheless spends. Meanwhile, microplastic slivers circulate in the bloodstream like darting fish. Kudrow delivers her line in the eye-rolling tone of feigned audacity, boldly alluding to the fraudulence of bottling tap water with something like Antoinette effrontery. Marketing's gambit is to preemptively push back against the hungry, whose collective knee jerks violently when confronted with overblown sincerity. Instead of declaring a two-thirds-empty foil bag of Doritos satisfying, a testable claim, the standard ad shoots for the moon, knowing the pseudo skeptical will land somewhere below over-the-top, where nothing's been pledged.

Thought must aim beyond its target just because it never quite reaches it.⁴⁸

As with extreme flavor and Apple's loathsomely smug "I'm a PC" spots, the result of all this corporate self-deprecation is that the consumer is less likely to grasp what exactly is on offer.⁴⁹ Garnier Fructis launches shower-stall putsches in shampoo ("It's a revolution!" gushes one girlishly cosmopolitan voice) with revolving-door regularity; Naked fabricates a coup d'état in juice, while dating apps like Bumble and Tinder promise licentious *coups de foudre*.

The magazines at checkout bait us with alarmingly large thought fragments, set in white letters, begging for our quick verdicts. It's an obtuse game of dot-connecting in which the donkeys are pinned in advance to ensure that we sleuth correctly—the duped judge, the sensitive investigator hired for a laugh and out of her depth. All this elucidation of nothing and signifying in the wind. Jennifer Aniston locks antlers with her fellow millionaire, the juxtaposed ex-lovers holding apart a sea of chewing gum.⁵⁰ Both shopper and tabloid are queerly benefited, the latter going to press with the editorial confidence that everything's been left to insinuation and the public no longer fusses about bias but takes home brightly colored boxes of gossip subconsciously, like they were radiofrequency-tagged.

In myth, in fact, human relations almost completely shed their conventional form, intelligible only to abstract reason; they show what life has that is truly human, eternally comprehensible, and they show it in that concrete form,

48 Adorno, *Minima Moralia*, 127.

49 Anxiety about which we see reflected in the Fair Packaging and Labeling Act, legislated in a kinder era, whereby commodities are compelled to disclose their literal contents, net weight, and country of origin.

50 Just as the former president's latest tweet and a stand-up comic's wordy outrage will be cropped together, the latter seemingly within earshot.

excluding all imitation, which gives to all true myths the individual character that you recognize at first glance.⁵¹

On playgrounds and in hallways, the bully pantomimes her classmate's supposed blunder with outsized mocking in order to identify its subtext inescapably.

24

Musical verisimilitude. In the blogs dedicated to new releases of classical music, a lot of soft tomatoes, along with the occasional rose, are thrown over the degree of a soloist's adherence to the composer's directions, as left in the score. Between composer and stained manuscript, musician and loose sheaf, the disconnect involves a completionist's kind of dysmorphia, lauding deterioration for gains in verisimilitude, and eventually all-consuming obsession for naturalness that approaches tulipomania at its height. The vocalise of an egoless chorus swept through with an aeoliphone, exemplified by Maurice Ravel's *Daphnis et Chloé*: this sickness unto spoilage is both aural and entropic, which is to say experiential and mechanical, while altogether the testimony yielded describes nothing profounder than a vibration lessening in strength. Anxiety fostered in the wake of this asymmetrical rift, the disparity between intending and doing — cogitation and the resulting graphite line, the slight predominance of matter over antimatter that brings about gnats and English — begets a morbid neo-programmatic crusade to musicalize everything from laughter at a witch's sabbath to the splash of dry fountains. At its most classically antipodean this would be the tranquil *Gymnopédies* of Erik Satie, inspired by the depictions of Athenian gymnasts on clay pots; Satie's trio of melodies gasps in awe of the ground, both for its threat and miraculously slow advance. In this sense, stage flooring is not a ballerina's enemy but her strictest accomplice and confidant. Max Paddison defines surrealist music according to its quotient of juxtapositional collage, recalling Eisensteinian formalism. Here I content myself with a thought about the shadowy metaphysics of music's bedrock, what's there before it sublimates to the surface as phenomena. If we look at the coda to Chopin's First Ballade,⁵² a gesture like structural collapse is crossed in the score with three hurdles. Meant to heighten the drama, by breaking this descending passage into chunks, obviously what the ballade wants is octaval relief. Krystian Zimerman obeys his compatriot's wishes with beautiful compliance while Vladimir Horowitz goes full tilt to the terminal double bar, prioritizing intuition's hint.

51 Charles Baudelaire quotes Richard Wagner's "Zukunftsmusik," an essay that first appeared in French translation, a year before publication of the original German. See Margaret Miner, *Resonant Gaps: Between Baudelaire & Wagner* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1965), 70.

52 Chopin's *David Copperfield*, as it were, and thus his personal favorite of the ballades, as he admits in a letter to Schumann and where he also agrees that the Fourth Ballade is the greater.

25

Queen me. Vanity literature, less obscure than thoroughly clumsy, and its analogue in painting, which isn't unschooled work but that of beggars promoting their egos on Instagram, generate uninteresting contradictions, of course without meaning to. For the latter, this happens through mismatching elements — the staple techniques of illusion and figuration, which one either bullseyes or consciously thwarts⁵³ — that are naturally opposed and the juxtaposition of others destined to synthesize; the supreme kitsch of everything at once. Goodly queens and faithless knights forget their ranks in the hands of children unfamiliar with how chess is fought; unless, having requisitioned the material, the king atrophied behind a phalanx of lowly pawns.

26

Artifact economics. One the challenges faced by Nintendo would seem to be the steady progression of its franchises, which subsist on a tight stable of lore and characters. These touchstones are wringed, time and again, by a creative director's team for the necessary mileage until the whole enterprise is coasting on fumes. It's why Wagner elongates the Grail motif until Lohengrin enters his castle and Chopin settled on the salon miniature. Inversely, Mary Cassatt could not go on and on with her *Cup of Tea* the way Monet continued his lilies, which, though marvelous, have all the duplicability of wallpaper, while a traditional scene is constrained physically as well as narratively by its logic. But then every inch of impressionism, at least before the tube goes flat, is given its own bit of oily fodder. Penelope Fitzgerald divided *The Blue Flower*, close to a novella's length, into fifty-five chapters, each limited to a not unpleasant scene of some three or four pages; together, they make a blister pack of sugar pills or chambered bullets triggered one by one. If altered constantly, the gold-rimmed teacup, frilly outfit, and striped upholstery ask for an ontologically if not chemically original touch. In other words, a brushstroke is not copy-pasted like a keystroke but utterly fresh. Agnes Martin, whose mystical abstraction hangs in museums like wordless hymns, identifies plot for us with line's shimmering accumulation. In the case of videogames there is a shortfall, while painting breaks even. Authors may devote themselves to a whiny monotone or jump points of view by way of a filmic shot/reverse shot, precisely what's so fun as well as disorienting in *Mrs. Dalloway*. Literature is when a batch of style, disguising handpicked vocabulary and syntax as a dialect one cannot help, ferments additional vistas and situations as if they were yeast.

53 Hamlet and the Antonioni film *Blow Up*, if T.S. Eliot and Ronan O'Casey are to be believed, are compellingly peculiar due to their shortcomings, respectively the development of Hamlet out of some hypothetical ur text and shortfall in Antonioni's production budget. As Eliot says memorably, a work of art should be thought so because it is interesting, rather than interesting simply because it is a work of art.

Table 2

	Varied	Repetitious
Expansive	Landscape	Meadow
Discrete	Garden	Backyard

27

The insect's cataracts. A moth does not repeatedly throw itself at a windowpane because it is stupid, and thus, for being so, mulishly obstinate. It is easy to credit arthropods with the ability to comprehend solidity, whose crashing should then be likened to the continuous tapping, even *sounding*, of a visually impaired individual's white cane against streetlamps and obstacles, continuously sweeping for the sidewalk's end, which returns a haptics that's audible in the hand. Confronted with the enormous width of most everything else, the moth launches *itself* at the glass, as if the alternative were to cautiously hold out one antenna. It must be that a flying insect's compact agility exceeds in responsiveness the limited range of a jointed feeler, like we see in the brisk crawl of ants touching and going from the mouth of a gin bottle.

28

Subzero. It occurs to me that there are no truly negative sums, notwithstanding one's ability to write them on paper. Language alone can talk about a real⁵⁴ amount that, paradoxically, lies beneath zero, that analytical no man's land. Indication of nothing facilitates the changeover to a measurable absence.

To paint a canvas white is to make a more active, aggressive emptiness than the emptiness created by merely not doing anything.⁵⁵

Given referentiality, any number can be made the referent quantifying a material lack. It sounds like a kid's question, to ask whether negative integers aren't just positives in different coats.

29

Comics' eugenics. Lest he show up Captain America's comparatively wan muscles, the Hulk's skin conveys inferiority of a kind, as when a European *Bond* antagonist is morphologically — thus psychologically, we understand — demerited with the signature physical aberration, such as a braced leg. In every heist film the leader is calm, cool, and American, while the token specialist, either an Italian marksman

54 Or positively *unreal*, though not quite as neatly nonsensical as the concept of life after death, or for that matter "the living dead."

55 Thomas Albright, *Panaesthetics: On the Unity and Diversity of the Arts* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014), 228.

or Chinese acrobat, works to remind immigrants that cultural-economic inclusion is tied to their possession of unique traits. In comics the asymmetry of the scientist is permanently altered by an experiment gone awry, unless she was exposed to gamma rays, neither of which kills or infelicitously disfigures: Mr. Negative, for example, nothing more than a souped-up one-percenter, or The Thing, with his splitting orange clay. The color will be irrelevant except for green's literary association with monstrosity and the impulsiveness of youth.⁵⁶ Offsetting the Hulk's awesome build are his short fuse and dim-witted catchphrases. Cognitive and quasi-racial handicaps have the effect of tempering any physiological gifts that, if left unchecked, would unfairly advantage their owners against the normal, hence the savage with a complicated heart and King Kong, who's allergic to the limelight.

30

One for another. *Ancient Sound*, one of Paul Klee's designs cleverly plotted through color with a slight lean to it, is perfectly suited to its title for using analogous visual qualities, despite being nonfigurative; the subtle game of insinuation, opposed to simply dumping further material until one had reached parity, which Klee, Switzerland's chief fauvist whose first language happened to be abstraction, excelled at. Allusion is infinitely safer than showing and even more profitable, for the attentive dexterity of a naturalist inevitably loses to the humblest dilapidation, say a little churchyard with a farm. The gradual fading of Klee's painting out from a bright middle is that of a tone left to dissipate, the earthy hues suggestive of aged flora.

31

Cognizance of the dance. In a qualified sense, James Jeans's idealistic assertion that "the universe begins to look more like a great thought than like a great machine"⁵⁷ in fact claims direct knowledge of reality, the linguistic flip of failing to relinquish epistemological certitude, for then the universe very much is, equivalent with that tapestry of scientific laws and theories. Atheists and Buddhists are as eager as sages to tell us that the millennia-long effort to get under the thick rind covering reality, with the hope of finding its indigestible pit, has yielded the equivalent of a charcoal rubbing. We go too far, those of us who sigh with priestly resignation, that smiling tilt of the head meant to imply an exhausted intelligence and humility: in this view, knowledge is tied exactly to the complexity of X, such that, though one understands next to nothing, it just happens there is so little to

56 Although taller with Amazonian hair, connotative of gross health, She-Hulk — subalternate to the Hulk, thus the one-sided hyphenation, "Hulk" being autochthonous, like He-Man's quest is to distinguish himself from the lackluster "Man" — is a boring, green-skinned supermodel, which may be why *X-Men's* female mutants tend to be psychokinetic or winged, a bodily appendment that doesn't hamper the sex appeal.

57 James Jean, *The Mysterious Universe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1931), 137.

understand. With this comes a declaration about telescopes or Thales of Miletus, that even in theoretical terms is the universe forever a step ahead, the wisest thing surely being to content ourselves with a lengthening trolley of abstractions.

However smacking of contradiction, doesn't it fly in the face of sense to vouchsafe anything *but* simples? The rudimentariest thought, directed at the external, whether that's a beautiful amphitheater or scrambled eggs, is ipso facto a minimum of one degree separated from it, all the world being a map of varying topographical legends and indentation. But the territory is also to be distrusted, for mere lab rubbings, lending themselves to meticulous blueprints — allowed, however flawed — are truer than the brain volumizing a baseball so it isn't a stitched disc. The original and the substitutive elude investigators through our cognitive as well as symbolic engagement, upsetting a lake's surface to look at ripples.

Pure science does not like to recall its impure beginnings — the very observation that secured our knowledge often condemned, or began the ruin of, what they observed.⁵⁸

An elephant is truly in the room and won't be coaxed with a handful of dust. One finds another answer and then another as to where exactly the Horsehead Nebula becomes empty space or what a leaf includes, its intactness dependent on the exclusion of other entreties.

O chestnut tree, great rooted blossomer,
Are you the leaf, the blossom or the bole?⁵⁹

Jupiter's gaseous chaos is sustained through its antithesis, the densification of circling a drain. The *buta* stands as a teardrop's schematization in the mind's eye; and the salty globule dilutes to that simpler outline while ignorant of doing so, like the constant, nearly uninterrupted mitosis of one's tissue cells. If we're unable to deliberate on anything's physical beginning or end, one certainty is that heaven's spheres recognize neither our perceptual consolidations of them nor our stories.

Hegel is not the winter
yellow in the pines: the sunlight has never
heard of trees.⁶⁰

32

Turn-based. French horns and woodwinds shout confidently into the air; that they do so mostly in useful steps toward and away from the home key's magnetic north while acknowledging the genre, either tautologically, as with improvisatory

58 William Logan, "The State with the Prettiest Name," in *Our Savage Art: Poetry and the Civil Tongue* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009), 94.

59 W.B. Yeats, "Among School Children," in *Collected Poems of W.B. Yeats*, ed. Richard J. Finneran (New York: Scribner, 1996), 217.

60 A.R. Ammons, "Gravelly Run," in *The Selected Poems: Expanded Edition* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1986), 11.

impromptus but also waltzes it's actually possible to waltz to, or through formal compliance, can remind us of the agitated combatant in a turn-based strategy videogame, who stands about hurling threats ("Prepare to be destroyed!") like a chained dog or a biker revving engine on the designatory line.

It delights us when the tragic hero can still find words, reasons, eloquent gestures, and on the whole a clear intellectuality, precisely when life approaches the abyss and real men usually lose their heads, and certainly their fine language.⁶¹

Our surprise is seeing the machine under a semblance of flesh, its cogency incredible. Or take "the ever-popular Tchaikovsky, who even portrays despair with hit-tune melodies,"⁶² except I disagree that the *Pathétique's* sorrow should be thought merely the composer reaching for some profitable hummability. That a symphony's emotional midpoint coincides with apocalyptic development or a gut-wrenching melody is par the course. To do otherwise as a nineteenth-century artist would have been tantamount to contradicting oneself, for why shouldn't a narrator lend authority, a coincident gesture in verbal or aesthetic acknowledgement, to the action unfolding before us, quite as dancers land on the beat. As with the "beautifully" riddle-like suicide of American performance artist Ray Johnson,⁶³ it is possible to see how a certain perversity here, in the paradoxical fusion of insuppressible agony and bliss (the rehearsed prayer, an articulate howl), was not only meant but counted on, no differently than Catholicism beatifies gore in order to affect us all the more deeply.

33

Magritte, the literalist. Food in clear, vacuum-sealed packaging affords an odd kind of contact, with ground turkey's organic ridges greaselessly available to the touch, as they are to be seen,⁶⁴ like the inverted gloves allowing a doctor to safely handle quarantined infants but the distance is less. It's authentic enough, the grain of fat marbling through tissue. Besides clean meat having a slightly ferrous scent, is this not otherwise the food itself? Actual touching is deflected at a one-to-one correspondence. The plastic's thin forcefield resembles the much-circulated fact about the physics of electron repulsion. As though these knurls and lumps of turkey occupied the very location of Albertson's film. Compare the bulbous package of an unclothed mannequin — crucially, denoting *veiled* genitals — with that of a real-life model wearing boxer briefs. Although the mannequin, sufficiently sexed

61 Nietzsche, *The Joyous Science*, 92.

62 Adorno, *Philosophy of New Music*, 14.

63 Tchaikovsky succumbed to cholera ten days after the premiere of the Sixth Symphony, his greatest achievement. He is thought by certain biographers to have done so intentionally and, hinted at by Tchaikovsky himself, the symphony to contain in program the composer's confession of illicit love.

64 Tight-fitting synthetic clothing increases the tactility of gym admirers' eyesight, like low fat percentage is what's meant by one having prominent vascularity. Not thick-veined but thin-skinned.

to be male, is completely lacking in garments, the stiff bolus of its groin is almost morphologically identical to that of its flesh-and-cotton counterpart. Associating nakedness with exposure and like the Greek sculpture's feminine cleft beneath a small tufting of pubic hair, the hierarchy of clothing's category of untouchability might be understood dialectically: fabric cross-pollinated with the zero level of skin. René Magritte's *La philosophie dans le boudoir* demonstrates the manifest opposite of this. These heels anticipate the footwear of a company like Merrell, and aren't the nipples visible beneath a slip? The painter's droll literalization makes it so.

34

Meridian response. In the final scene of the Abbas Kiarostami film *Through the Olive Trees*, a boy dashes toward a hill, diminishing before our sight; nonetheless, we hear his breathing and each footstep, for though Kiarostami's camera is stationary and doesn't follow him the actor is equipped with a microphone. A leotard that basically matches its dancer's skin tone combines with the garment's skin-tight fit, mapping all but the body's subtlest territory. In this, signifiers indicatory of the material, cloth and flesh, semiotically clash; like a bottle of vodka filled with mineral water, the dancer's actual non-nudity is what matters. The appearance of blood denotes wounding and, moreover, its escape outside the body, while the capillary damage a blood blister means it is subdermal. A pain located in the hand belongs to nociceptors and their respective cortices — visual and actual vie for the golden apple of one's choice. Because Aladdin talks and jokes in English (setting aside subtitles and region-specific releases), children must assume that his inner voice as well as the movie's depiction of Agrabah are shot through with this Anglo-phonetic tongue; yet Disney's loose adaptation of the Scheherazade tale does include a version of Central Asian markets, Persian-inspired architecture, and hot Arabian sands. At night, headlights appear themselves to tilt when a speed bump lifts and drops a car, like a dog curled on the floor either doesn't completely shut its lids or is apparently half awake, depending on the owner's viewpoint. One thinks of the frightened chimpanzees grinning in random television commercials.

With the soft-spoken roleplay videos produced by and for YouTube's ASMR community, any moment of hesitation spent searching for a starter clause is generally understood by the listener as the thoughtful pause of good pacing. In one popular subgenre, the uploader poses as a repairman who's been hired to service a piece of equipment, and will tinker around the periphery of the camera, standing for the broken electronic. Now and then come snatches of spoken thought to do with the job (“...screw missing here...” “...need to adjust...”), which then taper off. Each detail floats to the surface, the level of the barely audible, conveniently without context, for of course the uploader is not engrossed in a workman-like operation but acting and waving around a few props.

A man is talking on the telephone behind a glass partition; you cannot hear him, but you see his incomprehensible dumbshow: you wonder why he is alive.⁶⁵

65 Albert Camus, “The Myth of Sisyphus,” in *The Myth of Sisyphus and Other*

Obfuscation gives whoever's listening the tingling feeling that an organized knowledge lies just out of microphone range. It is a staple of art, apotheosized with Monet and Renoir, who unbarred the gates of light. Naturally, on-the-spot role-playing is chock full of pleonasm; there is finally no bottom to the iceberg but a coreless pulp, no epistemological coherence from which a true engineer draws sotto voce. Nothing agrees because the uploader's mumbling is pretty much ad-libbed. That strings of verbiage ("The thing about it is that it's...") buy time in our conversations is well understood. The rapper wades into a freestyle preceded by her reputation with "Y'all already know what it is" and the French trail off with *Et voilà*, the Italians *Ecco qua*. The calm of healers and guided meditation would frequently seem to be a real-life buffer for the extemporization that fills their dreamy speechifying, while quacks in white coats, along with the salespeople of outlet-mall kiosks and car dealerships, speak quickly in order to overwhelm us with their rehearsed pitches. Keith Jarrett appears to swoon at his own music, cresting a long improvisation that has at last borne fruit, when what he's really doing is *thinking*.

35

Greatness explained. The person who describes herself as a complete mystery trusts that we'll take her sage-like opacity at face value; one wants to drag Emerson into the shot for a quick, "Ah, so you shall be sure to be misunderstood." These self-diagnostic exclamations mistake the everyday intellectual poverty of having read nothing and thought nothing for an indecipherable abundance.

The last chamber, the last closet, he must feel, was never opened; there is always a residuum unknown, unanalyzable.⁶⁶

As though froth were like a library for also having so much of one thing. Or the black hole reversed, which is infinitely dense but used metaphorically to mean a powerful emptiness. Others single out the lemniscate as profound and to lead everywhere for lacking direction as well as a beginning, like the geometric sphere, symbolic of total knowledge, refers to a displacement. To avoid definitions is not to define everything; and to define one thing is to define nothing else.

36

Be fruitful and multiply. Although nature grows without overtly intending to benefit us,⁶⁷ neither does it fight against these ends, like the definition of art implicitly excludes toolmaking and a chisel obtests for employment. Artifacts lean toward use even when they're cataloged in archaeological boxes or gingerly arranged in little plexiglass cabinets ("The knife there on the shelf— / it reeked of

Essays, trans. Justin O'Brien (New York: Vintage International, 1991), 15.

66 Ralph Waldo Emerson, "Circles," in *The Annotated Emerson*, 190.

67 "A creature isn't thought from its shell, my knife extracts it / to nourish me wasn't in its life plan no kidding." Karen Solie, "kingdoms like these don't collapse all at once," in *The Caiplie Caves* (Toronto: House of Anansi Press, 2019), 43.

meaning, like a crucifix⁶⁸), while the loftiest entertainment depends for its life on this abstracted fondness; the gushing of the connoisseur. Inevitably as dominoes falling, a flower obeys the law inscribed in its nucleotides.

You cannot draw the seed up out of the earth. All you can do is give it warmth and moisture and light; then it must grow.⁶⁹

Rodin dreams of sculpted gates not commissioned but having the inevitability of white light dividing into bands. How incredible if the *David* weren't exactly how it is, though a meteorological phenomenon brought on by God should be as terrifying as an alien invasion; skywriting of a higher order. Art might be useless, but it is authorized at the bone. Any signature nature can boast of is the labeled afterthought of biologists. The messiah's deliverance, glorious and fragile, one deems a lucky birth, like the staged documentary footage of poltergeists. It's feared that *Guernica* could not have occurred to Picasso without Mussolini's bombs, thus we're estranged to our gratitude. But creation sleeps through her miracles. Aura of this caliber is exclusive to high-latitude ionization and the Sierra Nevada, the stillness of Bierstadt's deer owing to a twig the landscapist stepped on rather than the landscape.

Indigenous value is calling the tectonics of shoving out a mountain range a laborious achievement, and surely the one honest illusion. Art should be wondered at, though it be cloaked in taught sleights of hand and prior to which the biggest pyramid looks as mechanical as a Babbage calculator. Whether we choose to characterize earth as everyone's tolerant servant, grateful for a slap in the face, or emphatically denounces its status as capitalism's ultimate toilet, on the topics of asphyxiated coral reefs and the depletion of the ozone layer, the mass die-off among bird populations and arsonists setting fire to the Amazon, the third planet from the sun continues endlessly turns away without comment. Gawk at a colonial glassblower's shears and it is abundantly clear for what purpose they were originally forged. *Café Terrace at Night* exists because Van Gogh needed it to.

Precisely where the artist and the process and the circumstances of the genesis of the work remain unknown, this thrust, this "*that it is*" of createdness, emerges into view mostly purely from the work.⁷⁰

Castles and tortoises leap out from clouds, and the neighbor's cat is thought to gesticulate. A laser is tripped in the brain, compulsory but like neurochemical whim. The irritatingly desperate hum of cicadas, like a refrigerator kicking on. Artists pine especially for a transcendence with the optics of altruistic spontaneity, the painting estranged to any origin because the odds disfavored its nativity. Hungry rats chewed through hundreds of Audubon's first watercolors; Hemingway's valise, bursting with drafts and the carbon copies, too, quietly disappears from a

68 Elizabeth Bishop, "Crusoe in England," in *Poems* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2011), 186.

69 Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Culture and Value*, trans. Peter Winch (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), 42e.

70 Martin Heidegger, "The Origin of the Work of Art," in *Basic Writings*, ed. David Farrell Krell (New York: HarperSanFrancisco, 2008), 190.

train compartment. Mary showing up on a slice of cheese toast and Jesus inside the limb of a tree evidence a death wish against the embarrassing fact of making while crediting a maker, whose doings subsequently take on the cast of impossibility accomplished after all. Holes in thought sends us tumbling after the horologist who'll explain this watch he left ticking. Artistry is starry-eyed for stubbornly refusing to be just stuff in our estimation. A sideline of cheerleaders accompanies Munch's saddest madonna, based on the dregs of willpower.

37

Many a true word hath been spoken in jest. A stopped clock is neither wrong nor right twenty-four hours a day for the same reason an upright corpse cannot be thought to answer a question to which silence qualifies as reply.

When you know that nothing is intentional, then you also know that nothing is accidental; for it is only where there is a world of intentions that the word 'accident' has any meaning.⁷¹

Although the deceased's involuntary characteristics match those of the guess selected in advance as the best one, there is nothing either right or wrong until choosing makes it so. Can I legitimately answer in the first place after mishearing the question? Certainly, it would be injudicious to penalize my response when I didn't realize that a quiz was going on, unless as evidence of distractedness. Every vocalization might be led about like Gloucester down the blind alleys of conversational forks.

38

Foretold to other eyes. Staring open-facedly at holiday fireworks exploding over the Charles River, I think how distance flattens a blast that was volumetric by definition, as much as looking through a microscope at protozoa. What a reveler believes is that the dyed smithereens of dynamite, professionally coordinated and ignited far below, don't expand toward her and her loved ones but tesseract in one place; the ballooning is thus understood to be illusory, a hanging transition that collapses as it deforms. See how fireworks are totally a spectacle of lavish durations,⁷² the explosive dice repeatedly thrown until a last tax-funded hurrah at midnight tells us the miracle is departing and this bridge resumes its leaden hues. Aunts and uncles chirp appreciatively, because this is a gift almost biblical, for many the calendar's lone wonder besides a ball drop or the onset of snow.

⁷¹ Nietzsche, *The Joyous Science*, 122.

⁷² See Polish director Krzysztof Kieslowski's lesson, in which he uses a disintegrating sugar cube to visualize the passage of time: Mayur, "Krzysztof Kieslowski's Cinema Lesson (Master Class in film direction)," *YouTube*, August 2, 2013, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9-k6sIN-2K4>.

If the stars should appear one night in a thousand years, how would men believe and adore.⁷³

Boatloads of incinerated capital must be hooted at, lest they abate unacknowledged, meaning to the benefit of nobody's self-worth as a privileged watcher. In truth none care awfully much.

The freedom of eye-witnesses has about it something impaired, akin to apathy.⁷⁴

The expensively temporary seems to need videotaping and applause, as the older crowd does in movie theaters. In spite of a nationwide yawn.

39

Rückblick. There's a big misalignment in videogames between temporally finite speech blurbs and nonplayer characters' idle animations, where a shopkeeper or thief's dialogue is either spoken aloud or scrolls inside a text box, the player acknowledging each chunk with an old-fashioned button press. As soon as the dialogue is not forwarded, however, an awkward lull emerges, with the words already said and this physiological unsteadiness continuing, which is meant as the base-level dynamism of the being alive. Even if voice actors were used the waterfall of letters frequently stops to allow the player to catch up; like a long-winded intertitle or tombstone, the semipermanence of the text we see is due to the developer's inability to know when we have finished reading.

It is remarkable that involuntarily we always read as superior beings.⁷⁵

Leaving the button dedicated to progressing the text unpressed obviates the utter falseness of videogames-as-literature while, at the same time, allowing us to stare deeply into what is always lurking behind the sincerity of digital entertainment, its exhilarating vacuity. The elastic between script and delivery fails, the shopkeeper's thought gathering dust like an item not for sale.⁷⁶ With books the splay of pages

73 Ralph Waldo Emerson, "Nature," in *The Annotated Emerson*, 30.

74 Adorno, *Minima Moralia*, 179.

75 Ralph Waldo Emerson, "History," in *The Annotated Emerson*, 140. One might vouch as much for the laid-out quality in every painting.

76 It seems to me worth asking whether these just-spoken words enduring on the player's screen can be thought to stand for typographization of memory. Not unlike how Greek pottery and medieval scrolls literalized the gut feeling that words, as opposed to sounds generated by the larynx, are what exits the mouth, the speech acts inked on long streamers of parchment or simply let fall from Achilles and Ajax as a loose alphabet. Although graphical, the modern thought bubble illustrates the opposite intuition (as to the where of speech), showing a sentential reflection complete inside the mind. In speech and thought bubbles alike, white negativity and external positioning outside the foreground registers the unreality of the author's intervention as translator of dialogue or pondering, like a sign-language interpreter at a news conference.

operates in much the same incidental fashion, insofar as one can at a moment's notice cast a knowing look back in the diegesis or, flipping ahead, sightsee through a changeless tundra of things both to come and already past, nodding sheepishly when the narrator tells us yesterday's story. There's Pip speaking, then and then, a muffled chorus expatiating across hundreds of pages at once, as though too soon.

OSBORNE: My name's Osborne. I'm second in command of the company. You only call me "sir" in front of the men.

RALEIGH: I see. Thanks.

OSBORNE: You'll find the other officers call me "Uncle."

RALEIGH: Oh, yes? (*He smiles.*)

OSBORNE: What's your name?

RALEIGH: Raleigh.⁷⁷

Quest-givers fidget to themselves to imply a priori readiness and as not to be caught out of character by one's stray attention, like the animatronic robots in theme parks. In other cases the jittery thief, having concluded his declarations and inquiries, continues bodily to stand for verbalization, lips and tongue disagreeing as they do in the worst spaghetti westerns. With or without pellets in front of her a travelling Ms. Pac-Man nevertheless chomps.

40

Vanilla in the brain. Greater pungence, or heat, in a hot sauce might be analogous to "brightness" on the far end of the musical spectrum. And flavor would be voice, the articulating personality, brought out by either heat or cold in synthesis with the basic tastes. Publix adds sugar to its canned sweet peas, as if they weren't enough *what they are*.

Extravagance of umbrella pines
propping their fingers under the bonus horizons
of the hills, redundancies
boosting the city's resemblance to itself.⁷⁸

One fortifies a pan of chicken marsala using chicken stock, not only so it tastes more like what it is but that the stock — as with sugar and salt, an invisible addition — is forgotten and the bird thought to taste as it does on its Kantian own; that is, mentally extricated from the influence of one's tongue, like a personality is at once understood to be both separate from the body and mediated through it. Or why a strawberry seems to know something about redness by the strength of its chemical embodiment. As beef generally demands a higher serving temperature than fish, certain melodies better inhabit different registers, coming off stale if transposed higher or lower. Adding sugar to a salty dish may be wrongly compared with cooling a hot beverage, such that sugar and salt form their own

⁷⁷ R.C. Sherriff, *Journey's End* (London: Heinemann Educational Books, 1970), 10.

⁷⁸ Jana Prikryl, "To Tell of Bodies Changed," in *The After Party* (New York: Tim Duggan Books, 2016), 41.

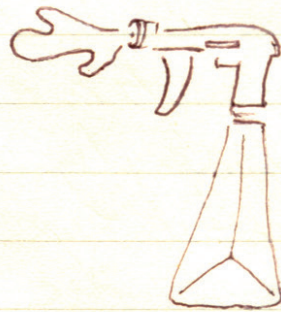
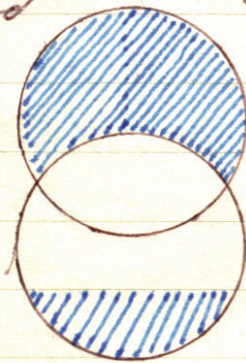
grayscale; not of flavor, but you couldn't fault anyone for thinking so. Given a beverage artificially flavored and another that included those foods as ingredients, for instance, the juice of multiple oranges instead of an orange beverage, scandalously devoid of juice and pulp, if we suppose the latter to be gustatorily indistinguishable, the difference is then perhaps no more than epistemological, between the laboratory beverage flavored without a drop of tree-grown fruit and some not-so-distant technology capable of simulating in us the taste of steak or vanilla through an interface with the brain.

41

Carved horse. The American Folk Art Museum has among its collection an ornamental horse of coarsely hewn wood outfitted with a bridle, saddle, and stirrups entirely of thinned paint. The toy's actual carving anticipates this outermost layer, like horses themselves seem morphologically designed to be ridden, such that lovingly applied color got bolstered from below, exactly like a polygon interprets the tabular photograph mapped onto it. The anonymous craftsman was thus allowed to lay down leather in a delineatory fashion that hugged the ridges,⁷⁹ the saddle adhering to its lathed depression, opposed to relieving each accessory at the outset. I'm reminded of all the henna-like overdrawing in Gustave Moreau's *Salome Dancing*, which barely follows the contours of his figures. Artists belonging to no tradition fabricate their citrus trees and hardware stores in like manner, plunking down a building as though it were lowered by crane. Things look generally unfixated; huge barns hover above patchily brushed grasses when they ought to be rooted, as though an outgrowth of the city planners. Like stitching a simple butterfly of thread into a quilt, the area of fabric corralled in this way being the chitin of the insect's wings, the horse's equipage can be thought quixotically subsumed inside itself, flush with the horse's shined coat.

79 Sculpture does this, though iconography and chiseled shape share one material.

here (ie with the spray bottle)
such liquid remains in the
base, undisturbed. It is
indicated visually that
the liquid has not left
the bottle, that it is not
doing so, given the empty
two-thirds. — Of course it
does, all the same. One can
find a description of the



same in a previous notebook
with regard to clothing.

How the detonated housing
block collapses into the
just cloud of its own
making, so that one never

sees it crash. Rather, an
incommensurably large
form drops, as if virtually,
behind a smoke screen.

The lower sounds in Glass',
score to Koyaanisqatsi, such
as the bassoon, being barely
audible, become linked in
our minds with the patten
of feet in Grand Central,
tire slapping the highway,
and the wrapping of hot dogs.

fearing I have not set this
down elsewhere, I want to
~~out~~ this trend of reduction,
the gradual distillation
to basic forms which one
observes in all art, has
too its place in music. This
is nicely evidenced by

Fifth Notebook

1

Cursed. With Schopenhauer arguing that the totality of will is undivided and every perceived change exclusive to a thinker's skull, that neither identity nor segmentation inheres in reality no amount of linguistic ingenuity can affect; for change implies division or multiplication, and the laws of thermodynamics forbid such operations. The kingdom of unnamed things goes on holding out for some cosmic Adam.

2

Toward a musical kinetics. Jazz is a mechanical (akinetic, or disembodied) language that nevertheless strives in the way of nineteenth-century composers for tonal resolution, while classical music is like a sated lion: capably fanged (kinetic, or corporeal) but harmless just the same. Jazz's philosophical dissatisfaction is that of an unhappy god: the loss of what was the baroque's spiritual contentment, laundered through the classical period as the bonhomie of a lengthy court employment. Or as Wynton Marsalis says, "it's like an argument that you have with the intent to work something out, not an argument that you have with the intent to argue."¹

Table 1

	Resolved	Unresolved
Kinetic	Classical / Rock	Romanticism / Blues
Akinetic	Baroque / Electronic	Plainchant / Jazz

It is the lesson behind the film *City of Angels* as well as Wim Wenders's infinitely better *Wings of Desire*, in which the angel Daniel condescends to flesh on a lonely impulse before eventually becoming disillusioned with Berlin.² So Pinocchio, as

- 1 Wynton Marsalis, quoted in Ken Burns, dir., *Jazz* (PBS, 2001).
- 2 "It may be helpful to say that a new member gets its distinction by investigating a particular set of features in a way that makes them, or their relation, more explicit than its companions. Then as these exercises in explicitness reflect upon one another, looping back and forth among the members, we may say that the genre is striving toward a state of absolute explicitness, of expressive saturation. At that point the genre would have nothing further to generate. This is perhaps what is sometimes called the exhaustion of conventions." Stanley Cavell,

with Hans Christian Andersen's mermaid and Robert A. Heinlein's thinly veiled Martian, with adjustments here and there, comes to life as easily as wishing but must learn through hard trials the burden of living. Configured to share these characterizations (see Table 1) and following the history of European music, all of the possible outcomes shift such that each volta, snaking left-to-right and right-to-left toward the bottom refers to a trade of only one attribute while constantly maintaining a total complementarity of two (see Table 2), though on the tail is firmly planted in the mouth.

Table 2

	Baroque Pacifies Plainchant
Classical Corporealizes Baroque	
	Romanticism Humanizes Classical
Jazz Disembodies Romanticism	
Blues Corporealizes Jazz	
	Rock and Roll Pacifies Blues
Electronic Disembodies Rock	
	Plainchant Humanizes Electronic

Pursuits of Happiness: The Hollywood Comedy of Remarriage (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003), 30. Development from baroque to classical, for instance, or from classical to romanticism can be described, per the table of binarily dispensed attributes, as a change from incorporeality to corporeality, by which I mean the acquirement of kinetic weightedness (baroque to classical, the latter remaining “resolved,” or philosophically at ease), and pacified to humanized, which refers to the acquirement of psychological emotion (classical to baroque: now each of the two attributes has flipped polarities). Dashed cells refer to where one of two attributes outlasts the change in genre, to be flipped at the appropriate historical later, meaning that no genre undergoes two binary changes through a single turn, though the baroque eventually vivifies to become Beethoven's hoarse joy and sunshine lightens plainchant into the intelligent champagne of Mozart.

3

Manufactured scarcity and the historic. Originality is the difference between art and the commodity that exists in multiples. There's an original *Mona Lisa* or two but then typically no tennis shoe is historically "lesser" in a given batch, as this would stain the advertised variants, between pairs of the same model and brand, with inferiority.

While a Cadillac undoubtedly excels a Chevrolet by the amount that it costs more, this superiority, unlike that of the old Rolls Royce, nevertheless itself proceeds from an overall plan which artfully equips the former with better, the latter with worse cylinders, bolts, accessories, without anything being altered in the basic pattern of the mass-produced article: only minor rearrangements in production would be needed to turn the Chevrolet into a Cadillac.³

It is important that goods of the same make be uniform in quality so that no one is pulled off the conveyor belt as greater-than, ignoring a contradiction like, "The BMW 16 is simply a work of art." Every edition is limited, after all. The disposable luxuries of everyday life would suffer financially, were they susceptible to aura except as nostalgic tokens or memorabilia, much as a Guggenheim exhibition based on the household things most of us currently own would be pointless, whatever their suggested retail price. The laughing disregard we have for trade shows and the increasing kitsch of brands. Imagine staring into a well-lighted case in which a laced-up pair of trainers is displayed, only to be wearing the shoe oneself. Warhol told us rightly that anyone can eat the same McDonald's hamburger and duplicate Marilyn Monroes on their own, at least in theory. Guggenheim's ambition is naturally the opposite one: to inflate the worthiness of stuff.

The human gaze has a power of conferring value on things; but it makes them cost more too.⁴

Art is valuable in proportion to inaccessibility, cherished for its scarcity and subsequently enshrined in ballistic glass. Auracticity, the qualitative condition of aura-having that we project onto objects and phenomena deemed rare, in the historical sense, if not sublime, is a sort of indefinite emotional response, akin to ignorance's mediation.

Her recent Vogue cover story wasn't a profile. It was the Gospel according to her transcriber, a testament. So her mystery is compounded and her excellence undiminished, undisturbed, unchallenged.⁵

3 Theodor Adorno, *Minima Moralia: Reflections from Damaged Life*, trans. E.F.N. Jephcott (New York: Verso, 2005), 119–20.

4 Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Culture and Value*, trans. Peter Winch (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), 1e.

5 Wesley Morris, "Should Art Be a Battleground for Social Justice?" *The New York Times*, October 3, 2018.

Why a Leonardo would be descended upon by Saudi collectors is a far simpler question than that of its ontological hybridity, being a worked-over material object injected with something like metaphysical heroin. The commercial object must in theory be obtainable, the work of art limited to CEOs and thieves; and between which lies artifacts, say a baseball given Babe Ruth's autograph. As masterpieces flow through Sotheby's to the highest bidders, priceless gestures toward a value beyond worth, like pointing with one's elbow.

4

Die Wetterfahne. Invariably does one find a whirligig painted, either like a rower with a set of oars or a robin wheeling its clapboard wings, as though to highlight the correspondence between form and function; except the purpose of whirligigs would really seem to be, like clowns, their blithe uselessness. Is this not also late capitalism's continuous ruse, to disguise sheep using the clothing of wolves. As is usually the case with weathervanes, now those lasered stencils that spend their rusty immortality above a pitched roof. Imagine the opposite: a four-way of perpendicular letters that told which way the wind was blowing, as plain as algebra, if not a flapping strip of unbleached linen. Because these time-honored functionaries are nearly the complete embodiments of their task-doing,⁶ a weathervane is limited to work of a nature resembling it physically, for which reason it is tempting to say that the strictly utile can have no obvious aesthetic dimension, being limited to the tautology of itself (hammers hammer, nails nail). Beautifying tools, like jewelizing a set of Milwaukee wrenches, defies this logic as the useless is laminated onto what's formally self-explanatory.

Sometimes a writer will be so uneasy before the naked power of his art that he will install within the work itself—albeit with a little shyness, a touch of the good taste of irony—the clear and explicit interpretation of it.⁷

Automobiles need a measure of color as well as shape since they're produced to diverse ends, between limousines and school buses. Even so, when that which culminates in outdoor stationariness is decorated an undercoat goes with it, a certain just-detectable prophylactic quality, as if to tell passersby that attention has been duly paid.

Somebody embroidered the doily.
Somebody waters the plant,
or oils it, maybe.⁸

6 Like a hopping boot enlivened by a spell or how the design of a top's stem is incorporated into the whole toy.

7 Susan Sontag, "Against Interpretation," in *Against Interpretation and Other Essays* (New York: Delta, 1966), 8.

8 Elizabeth Bishop, "Filling Station," in *Poems*, ed. Saskia Hamilton (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2011), 126.

An outdoor thermometer slots into the gaudy sheath of a palm or Christmas tree, while a house's mezuzahs are like the reminder string tied to a finger. Beautification is thought to equal acknowledgement, like acts of grooming keep one looking attentive, almost unconsciously so.⁹ The homesteader applies a gloss of kitsch to her farm implements in the hope of shielding their sun-blached, soiled usefulness against the stigma of pragmatism.

5

Rickrolled. I find myself questioning the relevance of short passages of descending music whose actual purpose is to herald some more substantial else. Certainly the brisk sequence of drum hits introducing Rick Astley's chart-topping eighties single, hauled briefly out of pop's cobwebbed vault, is key to the allure of the short-lived bait-and-switch coined in his name. Think of the jingle that solemnly chimes upon mission failure or a player-character's death, soon enough doubling as an irritating leitmotif: after succumbing to zombies, one begins wincing at its intonation even before the first note. Worse than death is the agony of waiting for the other shoe of that loathsome ditty to drop. As if studio polish lent a radio song scarcity, we're fooled into believing that our worship is of something not just expensive but worth savoring, while at the same time honking out the chorus ourselves on drives home. In a slight twist, videogame failure music goes hand in hand with predicting the outcome of a timed button press; the annoyed player understands the last note in the coffin will be sadistically drawn out in order to hold open the window of time within which the player grieves, the suggestion being that she does so with the greatest opprobrium. Tipped off by the police deputy's, "You have the right to remain silent. Anything you say..." which is always declared smugly and with the usual amount of malice, the television audience knows a narrative fade-out is upon them.

6

Humility and the moderns. In hindsight, art's medieval embarkment for the heights of Italy, interrupted by spats of plague, comes to be described as quaintly sincere or religiously modest, since its ethos seems to us guided by naive sympathies. Artists under the flag of Charlemagne, far from being self-denying Spartans, find themselves starved by their environments, lacking the idea of oil for the binder, a cost-efficient purple, and all but the rudiments of a perspectival method.

Indeed, they seemed to have been drawn by children — no set of parallel lines ever parallel, no circle ever circular, perspective lost in some twelfth-century muddle of vanishing points, everything thumbed onto the page with the spirit not of art but of need.¹⁰

9 The reverse would have a certain predictable sadness, say a cache of unanswered letters yellowing in a desk drawer.

10 William Logan, "Elizabeth Bishop's Sullen Art," in *Our Savage Art: Poetry and the Civil Tongue* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009), 121.

In compensation, the king's limners throw themselves into this work from ability's highest limb. Maximalism as a temperament always falls short, of course, because its grapes hang over a bottomless abyss. The world is too much for a subject when your recipient has the epistemological upper hand ("The eye can bear but a certain quantity of light," said Hugo). It's the difference between literary description and literal vision. Cubism's breakthrough, slandered for what is thought to be decadence, is in fact seriously humble in endeavor; Braque and Picasso could have done more.

Table 3

	Restrained	Indulgent
Prosperous	Fauvism	Neoclassicism
Impoverished	<i>Arte Povera</i>	Dada

As today's graphic designers usually do, with the commodification of deep scientific knowledge into Adobe's user-friendly software. In terms of what happens on the canvas, the craftsperson's progress is one of many narratives within the history of art that inevitably reverses direction upon its Hegelian fulfillment, saving the twentieth century from being crowded with larger-than-life figures as well as their kaleidoscopic skills.

When poetry records only the trivial blizzard of experience, it offers the chaos of act without the order of interpretation.¹¹

Music's rivalry similarly pits ancients against moderns, but the roles are reversed. Contrasted with romanticism, the baroque comes off as refreshingly unguarded, because in truth acceleration and momentum are privileges. It is honest, rather than wanton, to compose according to one's inclination, starting from the weediest depths or a magnificent crest. Houdini voluntarily slaps on a pair of handcuffs for the struggle of it, unless merely feigned for the entertainment value.

It is precisely this sacrificing, this throwing away, which alone is visible in him; he is accordingly called a self-denier, and as such he stands before us like a monk, the very soul of mortification. But he is well pleased with the impression he makes on us: he wants to hide from us his longing, his pride, his intention of winging his way *beyond* us.¹²

Or who doesn't sympathize with Van Gogh, living on coffee and even less bread, desperate to show us the beauty of the way and the wayfarer's sore travail. The point I am getting at, however, has everything to do with the desire as such of artists to chip away at the impossible. Bach's calming labyrinths are less affected than Mahler's heartache, though the stew of feelings he relates is exceedingly genuine;

- 11 William Logan, "Verse Chronicle: Falls the Shadow," in *The Undiscovered Country: Poetry in the Age of Tin* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), 244.
- 12 Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Joyous Science*, ed. and trans. R. Kevin Hill (New York: Penguin Books, 2018), 59.

while a Mahler symphony is by its nature wholly dramatic, if the stage were any indication, they sometimes go off to rapturous weeping and fainting in the aisles.¹³

We might call impressionism's basic dalliance with light aesthetically less honest than pointillism; and to those claiming for impressionism the greater faithfulness to reality, which is wet and humid, suggesting that Monet's achievement was to closely reproduce the dilapidation atmosphere wrecks on our visual systems, I would point out that a faint contradiction lies in making opaque what one at the same time deigns to look through.

That we have first rais'd a Dust, and then complain, we cannot see.¹⁴

An attempt to allure is clear. I am perhaps too fond of Chris Marker's comment, in his film *Sans soleil*, about self-censorship, how really aggrandizing it is. Likewise, I understand the bluster of wind and rain not as representation per se but a means of gesturing toward truer subjects that deserve our looking and, at the same time, cannot be fully unobscured.

But thick weather, though it blinded one, brought no such relief. Mist is deceitful, the dead luminosity of the fog is irritating. It seems that you *ought* to see.¹⁵

Impressionism teases the way a variety of genres have, through leaving evidential shreds of referentiality in plain sight with the onlooker to seek their source in vain, like predicting the torso of a goat or sheep on the basis of a pink nose and some tufts. Allusion is the painter's bread and butter, ranging from an upland occupied by rolling fog to prostitutes waiting in smoke-filled brasseries.

Clearly the fascinating objectivity of Chardin is in no sense that of the photographer.¹⁶

7

Giotto on his own. The genteel angst of Brahms, championed in the weeklies of Eduard Hanslick, his critical bulldog, came to engender a wealth of talented offspring, the late romantics. As these composers gradually shoved against the theoretical boundary of hearability they found themselves in an asymptotic

- 13 For Justine Mahler's account of the Second Symphony's 1895 premiere, see Natalie Bauer-Lechner, *Recollections of Gustav Mahler*, ed. Peter Franklin, trans. Dika Newlin (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 42–43.
- 14 George Berkeley, *A Treatise Concerning the Principles of Human Knowledge* (Yorkshire: Scolar Press, 1971), 5.
- 15 Joseph Conrad, "The Tale," in *Tales of Hearsay* (London: T. Fisher Unwin Ltd, 1925), 168.
- 16 André Bazin, "The Ontology of the Photographic Image," in *What Is Cinema?*, ed. and trans. Hugh Gray (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967), 1:13.

predicament,¹⁷ faced not just with the divergent endgames of atonality and an agreeable impasse in tonality.

I am in a prison: one wall is the avant-garde, the other wall is the past, and I want to escape.¹⁸

Like Jupiter exploding into shapeless dust, lawfully exploiting music's penchant for entropy, the larger engine Beethoven built, out of designs he found in Haydn's garage and which made gaseous symphonies possible, led to its dissolution into uninterpretable noise. Like diagonally opposed coaches, Brahms and Wagner stoke their different fires. The artist of a school that has at last come of age behave as the watercolorist sometimes does, resigned to her travel case's few shades. Allowing a composition to gibber realistically, within its instrumental shell the solipsistic ghost that Beethoven debuted becomes a senseless reverberation destroying even the possibility of thought. Action cannot gather itself long enough to utter a coherent phrase. It's a good thing the twelfth century didn't have our palette, let alone techniques. The ancients are loveable today, sparing us from an epoch of church-funded kitsch, not due to their lack of determination but supplies.

8

Where and when. The paintings of Cézanne combine place, and Picasso, time. Image-wise, Cézanne amalgamates a space out of its own aspects, dogpiling them in one spot,¹⁹ while Picasso distributes snapshots of a subject temporally elongate. Usually the opposite is guessed and not discoverable through a quick look at these works but extrapolated in hindsight. It is Picasso who is obsessed with surface area, and Cézanne, time's unstoppable hands, seeing as how he walked around his crippled cherub, with the two radishes and apples at its feet, to draw it anew each time a lap is completed.

9

Difference. In his essay on Jacques Derrida and post-critical reading,²⁰ Gregory Ulmer uses the biological phenomenon of misreplication, when harmful changes are introduced by DNA — as though in spite of itself — to discuss textual repetition. Ulmer relates Derrida's unscholarly habit of "borrowing," although nothing

17 Minimalism and atonality should not be thought analogous, respectively, to abstraction and the nonrepresentational for visual art but variant solutions to one problem, that of musical "storytelling" as developed over the course of premodern Europe's artistic maturation, quite as literature ends up with Beckett's post-apocalyptic austerity and the polysemic virtuosity of Joyce.

18 György Ligeti, quoted by Alex Ross, "Ligeti," *The Rest Is Noise*, June 12, 2016, <https://www.therestisnoise.com/2006/06/ligeti.html>.

19 That of the object's physical situation (e.g., a bowl of oranges beneath the foyer's mirror).

20 Gregory Ulmer, "The Object of Post-Criticism," in *The Anti-Aesthetic: Essays on Postmodern Culture*, ed. Hal Foster (Seattle: Bay Press, 1987), 83.

like Slavoj Žižek's sentence-by-sentence plagiarism of himself, and this is where I begin thinking about creative appropriation, a critically underappreciated practice that was widespread among European composers. Affecting much of the literature, I wonder if this, too, can be thought of as elements regrouping, insofar as an inconsequential motif, that plainest of utterances after the Mahlerian hammer-slam, once "remotivated," might rise from its ashes beautifully significant. An echo transfigures the commonplace through saying again what doesn't bear repeating.

The same line is no longer exactly the same, the ring no longer has exactly the same center, *the origin has played*.²¹

I'm reminded of the "woodsmen" featured in the experimental third season of *Twin Peaks*, demonic antagonists living above a convenience-store-turned-Pandora's-box. The first woodsman David Lynch introduces, covered cap to boot with either coal dust or sulfur and tumbling an unlit cigarette between his fingers, approaches a driver at his steering wheel and hypnotically growls, "Got a light? Got a light? Got a light?"

A mimicry or repetition which is originary, producing differences.²²

10

Living rhythms. In Philip Glass's score for *Koyaanisqatsi*, a lower-register syncopation, including that of bassoons, is easily understood as ancillary with respect to what's on the screen, ingeniously associated with the sped-up patter of feet and assemblage of cathode-ray tube televisions, a tire slapping highway, and the shrink-wrapping of beef franks.

11

The withered cherry. I want to emphasize that the aesthetic trend of formal dilution has its place in music, nicely evidenced by the manner in which appropriated material is typically cast to one side or pronounced in isolation, so as to be dramatically felt. The gold-and-ivory fetters of the eighteenth century, designed to chasten hale bodies, Schubert slipped for being illness-thin. In other words, the romantic composer bypasses almost entirely what was the classical period's inclination to lace expression with a bit of musical tinsel and finish every thought with a curtsy.

21 Jacques Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), 296.

22 Ulmer, "The Object of Post-Criticism," 96.

12

Hills peep o'er hills. A law describing the talent of the giants of Italian art, who exercised their trade centuries before art was required to billet philosophy, might relate admiration proportionally to ignorance, our collective necks awkwardly craned to understand Michelangelo's ceiling.

Literary studies as we know it is probably unthinkable except as built upon a foundation of awe.²³

An occult appreciation of the masters is best,²⁴ which we might otherwise describe as our amused inability to grasp the supernatural facticity of a story as comprehensible as pie. God separated light from its sibling, darkness; now that everything is visible, what is it one knows?

Our task is not to find the maximum amount of content in a work of art, much less to squeeze more content out of the work than is already there. Our task is to cut back content so that we can see the thing at all.²⁵

I'm tempted to that believe the subtlest register of technique cannot be communicated by eye, acquired by a teenage Leonardo in Andrea del Verrocchio's studio and thereafter utilized with gusto. Michelangelo's legendary horsepower and Raphael's finesse necessarily boast of what is ultimately their surplus, as if *The Last Supper* were hooked to an intravenous drip of ichor. One grants the artist shrugging at her impeccable technique that which the public forfeits impulsively through adoration and historians vivify into perpetuity. Absurd in method, art's development is indebted to something like that intellectual totem pole of three scientists under a trench coat to which Newton attributed his exceptional stature. Artists "see farther" by virtue of a sorcery explained under penalty of excommunication, or it's why their debts are best repaid through homage.²⁶ Imagine a mathematician building his case on the foundational work of colleagues and submitting the Frankensteinian proof in multiple typefaces under a single name, the concerted effort of a lone Grigori Perelman. Decades of contributions can be seen in their original contexts. Nobody is conspiring to bury the giants, though such a thing as forgetting Robert Hooke is possible, who sank beneath the celebrated weight of those ladderings above. The earth's house has room for artists and scientists as well as tyrants, varying in size from Keats to Ozymandias.

23 Mark McGurl, *The Program Era: Postwar Fiction and the Rise of Creative Writing* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009), 10.

24 Implied by Charles Lamb in his essay "Elia," which concludes with a rueful account of finding the manuscript draft for Milton's *Lycidas* in the Wren Library at Cambridge.

25 Sontag, "Against Interpretation," 14.

26 Vincent van Gogh's beautiful copies of the work of Jean-François Millet, for example.

You may go backward in centuries, you do not go backward in art. The Pyramids and the Iliad remain in the foreground.²⁷

Rachmaninoff grew to be arboreally tall on the weepy shoulders of Tchaikovsky, such that the older man, obscured by the canopy but visible to anyone walking in the woods, seems as aloof as a Japanese maple. It becomes tough to descry such artists, equal parts genius and byproduct, but through a sort of hindsighted transposition, like the forest's cruciferous top is lost on us.

13

The pendulum held. As surely as we know that human enterprise, for all its sweat and bloody tears, doesn't hold a candle in the cosmic ledger, the indifference is two-fold, touching our unprofound causes as much as earth's sustainability. Blind to her own illnesses and wins, the planet doesn't feel our deepest mineshafts and is incapable of panic, sky falling and the sea level rising to meet it. The eastern lowland gorilla and loggerhead sea turtle lumber about ignorant of their conservation statuses.

14

Essentially snake oil. Appropriated from legitimate medical evaluation, like children will ape the doings of their parents obtusely, the cranial nerve examination joins a long list of diagnostic practices taken up by physicians of dubious licensure, who prove themselves through their memorization of the musculoskeletal system, as well as the self-treatment community, which loves to pretend at doctoring, for who knows a body better than its occupant? The physical reality of cranial nerves, against what value it has in a real clinical setting, now plays into what are our homegrown or intuition-based generalizations about health, which not only go unchecked but are readily listened to and, with the go-ahead of others, amplified as dogma. It is a tenuous arrangement, to the extent that quacks rely on actual, effective doctors to provide them with the building blocks of their craft. Language and technique, lacking all subtlety, are drawn from the very same group of people vilified online. At base is the curiously similar induction that everyone's biological system is a harried post office receiving and sorting nutriment in a manner suggestive of total homogeneity, like a storage cubby the length and breadth of the body, a ludicrous conceptualization abetted by an unmuzzled inner voice and disinformation from asymbologists posing as trustworthy bloggers.

The sophist thus sells the signs and insignia of science: not memory itself (*mnēmē*), only monuments (*hypomnēmata*), inventories, archives, citations, copies, accounts, tales, lists, notes, duplicates, chronicles, genealogies, references. Not memory but memorials.²⁸

27 Victor Hugo, *William Shakespeare*, trans. Melville B. Anderson (Honolulu: University Press of the Pacific, 2001), 103.

28 Jacques Derrida, *Dissemination*, trans. Barbara Johnson (New York: Continuum,

Another way of putting it is that one feels the body, clothed in the elastic membrane of one contiguous organ, capable of distributing things as though it were conscious of the intended destination and physiological effect behind this latest ingestion, such that one might take a daily capsule of fish collagen with the expectation of “filling in” crow’s feet or a knee deficiency. Couldn’t it be that collagen is produced in abundance, via the body’s steady release of amino acids, and that its actual replenishment involves biological processes unrelated to diet?²⁹ Cranial nerves are felt to suspend within that aqueous receptacle of the head like collagen fibers in an eyeball, while in chiropractic terms these become loosely the back’s chronic nerves, their paradoxical specificity boiled down to nodes, not unlike textbooks designed by phenologists (“people incapable of reading a diagram posing as engineers”³⁰), the chakra master’s rainbow of colors separated for clarity, and *Operation*, the board game brought to us by Milton Bradley. All are symptoms of a historical thirst for explanatory juice at the cost of simplification, from televised debates to *No Fear Shakespeare*.

15

Clouds in the foreground. If we consider how, in a pencil drawing, a sheet of paper’s blank radiance can function as the highlight, we’re also presented with a certain hierarchic or stratigraphic disagreement. Insofar as a dab of titanium white straight from the tube refers to unrefracted light shining on a noblewoman’s cheekbone or the gleaming forehead of Immanuel Kant, does it not pose at least a physical contradiction for bleached pulp, graphite’s substrate, to stand for reflected light? As an artistic practice, when large swaths of clean paper are used for white as a color, the suggestion is that paper’s status exceeds that of greasy lead, hatched and streaked. This goes for Jean-Baptiste-Camille Corot, too, who inadvertently classified the odd puff of cloud as a foreground object, not visible between the interlocking branches of trees but on top of them; that is, Corot’s white touches seem to float *before* that which they were obviously meant to be spied *through*. Luckily, art’s semioticity, combined with our native language for understanding imagery at all, safeguards these clericisms from having any negative effects.

16

Beginning again. European classical music never quite fulfills the destiny implicit in the degree of its narrative arc. Compared with the history of visual art, though which can be measured by an eerily similar rubric, I begin to see that classical music doesn’t adhere to what elsewhere I characterized as ancient indulgence and modern restraint. Art music from before the end of the medieval period to the onset of baroque is decidedly uncomplex, even considered against the ham-fisted censoriousness of the church. It is less theological proscription than dearth of

1981), 109.

29 In a Venn diagram, “medicine” and “supplement” both lay claim to “treatment.”

30 Adorno, *Minima Moralia*, 220.

means that explains plainsong's humility,³¹ in particular the availability of fewer instruments. Prudishness aside, those first-millennium psalmists, like all creative types in the feverish centuries before industrialization, should be expected to throw at the liturgy everything they've got, having only themselves.

Our unfortunate dramatist, therefore, is placed in the unseemly predicament of having to give all his passion, all his skill, all his time to the task of "doing" life — consciously to give anything less than all would be a gross betrayal of his gift and an unpardonable presumption.³²

Plenty of conservatory talent busies itself with dissonance; like with contemporary art in general, the field is now opulent with learning and theory. Couldn't Juilliard, whose endless, duplicate students vie to be Steve Reich and concoct brassy textur-escapes in imitation of Thomas Adès, afford to lose a pie slice to neoclassicism? Instead of dissipation on the excuse of abundance, like burning hundred-dollar bills.

An excess of storytelling has become the contemporary way of shrouding, in majesty, a lack; it is the Sun King principle.³³

The composer of maximalist stripe, who brings to every skirmish modernism's full arsenal — not accomplishment ipso facto, which depends on its fruitful use — writes out of step with the latest philosophy if not the day's fashion.

17

La troupe de Mademoiselle Eglantine. Sown into the underside of the can-can dancer's calf-length skirt, layered ruffles of toile are decipherable, besides for their sartorial allusion to petticoat design, as risqué visual punning on labia; an iconographic exaggeration, as it were. Indeed, the Moulin Rouge's dancer lifts her skirt as if to disclose pantyhose but, instead of some feminine effluvia, what tumbles out is artificial silk, both relieving the unspoken thought and toying with voyeurs, like Elmer Fudd will be guided toward a specific door that is bricked-up on the other side.

18

Tomato, tomato. *Café*, as the French word for coffee, has long functioned appelatively³⁴ in English-speaking countries, as the designated name for both a class of

- 31 It is tempting to say that monophonic chant is to music what the spiritual quietude of suprematism is to painting, but this equation fails to account for technical ability governed by the will.
- 32 W.H. Auden, *The Sea and the Mirror: A Commentary on Shakespeare's "The Tempest,"* ed. Arthur Kirsch (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003), 50–51.
- 33 James Wood, "Human, All Too Inhuman," *The New Criterion* 223, no. 4 (July 2020): 42.
- 34 "This again is connected with the idea that the meaning of a word is an image, or

eatery and locally owned instances of such, though its original usage be indicative: [*Nous vendons du*] *café*, as if it were French appropriating the English, diacritic notwithstanding. The identification of a compilation with its content, collapsing the castes that separate set and unit (a cafe sells *café*), leads me to consider the difference between Pound's canto and that of Dante or a novel entitled *Chapters* compared with the songbook of Gershwin, which bursts with songs. So the hardy Atlantic fishermen fish fish.

The last flower to flower, a verb named for
its noun.³⁵

19

Everything illuminated. Appearances populate the world like water becomes a teapot. Light, sound, heat. But light is particulate, while the view of a room is exclusive to one's mind. Same for the radio, which merely vibrates a household's dusty air and is not heard within the ear but through a complex mental translation. Although boiling-hot tea scalds I can hardly know its temperature, for my hand is not a thermometer. This does, however, report a certain something about the thermal conductivity of the cup, with its frustrated atoms baked in place. Early on in its formation³⁶ the universe is theorized to have been a vast benightment. In the sense of galaxies spitting out electrons like sunflower seeds, this stage of development refers to the reionization of space. Hasn't space always been dark — or doesn't "lightedness," which is an aesthetic situation limited to sensitive lifeforms, become, in objective terms, the preponderance of one type of lepton? At least in the popular imagination, the universe once was dark but now is fulgent, unless you're a flatworm or blind salamander and simply lack the ganglia.

20

Cries of despair. Every second of minimal techno resembles the height of so much romantic destabilization, when the dressing no longer holds³⁷ and the muse hemorrhages with a despairing cry. The quickening pulse and emotional throes that lead to the abruptest of paroxysms in Tchaikovsky's music, his alarm snoozed over and over.

a thing correlated to the word." Ludwig Wittgenstein, *The Blue and Brown Books: Preliminary Studies for the "Philosophical Investigations"* (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1965), 18.

35 Dan Chiasson, "Euphrasy & Rue," in *The Math Campers* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2020), 8.

36 Approximately 370,000 to 1 billion years into cosmic expansion. *Wikipedia*, s.v. "Chronology of the universe."

37 Like the adage about bootstraps, co-opted by Reaganites and long confused for tough love, self-therapy is the dilemma of performing the Heimlich on oneself or applying continuous pressure to one's own wound.

Artworks resemble grimaces made by children, set forever by the sounding of the hour.³⁸

In Tchaikovsky the aneurysm does subside for a while, as happens in Beethoven, too, who never quite loses his cool. But arousal goes on indefinitely in techno because minimalism is gratifyingly motivic, orgasm without end being supposed by the luckier condition.

21

Why, why not. Having been sold on the fable that our universe is an intelligent autoclave or vast neural network of hydrogen, no wonder we're disappointed with materialist arguments for the beautiful why of human life.

They reached the feeble light, which came from the smoky lamp of a little railway station; a poor enough terrestrial star, yet in one sense of more importance to Talbothays Dairy and mankind than the celestial ones to which it stood in such humiliating contrast.³⁹

The answer is expected to equal the tidy awe of not comprehending, hyped in the pages of a Google search to drool-inducing stupefaction and useful to a shuffling subset of us, whose coils lose tension by the hour. As though nothing explained to one's satisfaction means nothing to fear. An attitude like this balks at the latest discoveries through a lifetime spent in denial that terribly much could be new under the sun. Spinoza's opinion is readily available as a salve for the conspicuously curious, who would prefer to slap another sticker on their laptops than learn what stars were made of. Secularism is not religion's opposite but rather the ambivalent position of being caught between incompatible truths, when you're enchanted with civilization while honest enough to acknowledge the nigh end; a tug-of-war raging in aporia, like competing lexicographers in disagreement over a definition. At the far pole to a horologist in ethical charge of the universe's every moving part is the materialist decree of insignificance for a fact.

Nature is but an image or imitation of wisdom, the last thing of the soul; nature being a thing which doth only do, but not know.⁴⁰

22

Peach-eating. Musical speech binds itself in order to thrash all the more violently, a kinky Prometheus knotting the ropes himself, exactly as gym equipment lets us.

38 Theodor Adorno, *Philosophy of New Music*, ed. and trans. Robert Hullot-Kentor (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006), 102.

39 Thomas Hardy, *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, ed. Sarah E. Maier (Ontario: Broadview Editions, 2013), 206.

40 Plotinus, quoted in an epigraph, by Ralph Waldo Emerson, "Nature," in *The Annotated Emerson*, ed. David Mikics (Cambridge: The Belknap Press, 2012), 27.

Strictly limit the spectrum of acceptable opinion, but allow very lively debate within that spectrum.⁴¹

Crying wolf on some mysterious cataclysm bound to go off late and soon, the tenor of “Any minute now,” the disembodied orator maintains a distance of time sufficient to ratcheting up the suspense, behavior that also indicates a modicum of self-awareness. The question is Prufrock’s, whether the symphonist dares carry her idea to full term. Soliloquy is the appropriate parallel: on opening night the monologue alone knows its destination, drawing out revelation like a spool of hot wire. An audience needs resolution, the theme’s sublimation into the widening gyre of its key signature, which before the apogee doesn’t exactly loop but says again.

23

Little fires everywhere. Contemporary art’s “knock-knock joke” sensibility promises little in the way of hermeneutic lastingness, insofar as stainless-steel balloons and a Molotov cocktail of flowers extinguishes the instant the museumgoer hears who’s there: gets the juxtaposition, decodes the rebus.

Certainly it is a serious charge against much of Henry James, for example, that when the reader has once successfully read it there is nothing further which he can do. He can only repeat his reading. There is often a point at which the parts click together, the required attitude is achieved, and no further development is possible.⁴²

Art with the punchline built in is highly saleable because of its ability to tickle us immediately, which the smiling *Mona Lisa* achieves through a mix of grace and reputation, pungent enough to smell in the adjoining wing.

24

Mister Stokowski. Synth bands have a sum-of-their-parts relationship based more on complementarity than the interlocution of a fugue and light years from the kind of melodic development that is compelling all by itself; the extent to which each member of Kraftwerk or Depeche Mode is responsible for a facet of the whole. While an orchestra is assembled to perform together, and although the percussion and certain horns seldom rise above a supporting role, each musician’s contribution funds what could be thought of as a kind of *overlapping* glossolalia: one behemoth mouth host to multiple tongues, perhaps as opposed to whatever a think tank does. In Gustav Mahler’s Eighth Symphony, “Veni, Creator Spiritus!” would ring as monotonally with a quartet of singers as it does with an airplane hangar of them.

41 Noam Chomsky, “The Media,” interview by David Barsamian, *How the World Works*, ed. Arthur Naiman (New York: Soft Skull Press, 2011), 234.

42 I.A. Richards, *Principles of Literary Criticism* (New York: Routledge Classics, 2001), 198.

I saw at sea a great fog bank
 Between two ships that struck and sank;
 A thousand screams the heavens smote;
 And every scream tore through my throat.⁴³

Think of a disciplined, unaltering wall of strings, the signature color of Leopold Stokowski's orchestral transcriptions. Or as though kaleidoscopes were valued for their variability. Rotating the cardboard barrel however one may, the result is always disappointingly symmetrical.

25

The kettle in Tchaikovsky. Why is it that the believably psychological subject in a work of romantic music, which likes to whistle joyously and other times will burst exasperatedly, like escaping steam, is unable to express itself in any fashion other than one which meaningfully develops the theme or brings on the aria?

Music seems to be nothing more than speech grown so excited that only the excitement is intelligible, not the words.⁴⁴

Even in "situations" of duress, the logical permutation of the journey is adhered to since, of course, it has already been scored, including every detour and swerve. Mahler's *Resurrection* Symphony, which contains some of European music's most cataclysmic outbursts, nonetheless verbalizes its lengthy program in a manner one could never describe as mere gibberish, for this would suggest the loss of attention to form. I'm reminded of operatic singing that, however prosaic, can have the appearance of a forced confession, aligned to an underlying script, besides the libretto. As if La Scala's soprano wore a shock collar or a hidden earpiece to correct her lament in real time.

26

Struggles with tigers. Eugène Delacroix's convulsive style, with its orgied bodies struggling in the foreground over a tiger uglier than any seen on the Indian subcontinent, tends to give equal weight to its subject and secondary effects, as is often the case with sketching. In his painting of Algerians hunting lions, the ethanol fire of their scimitars and horses swirl together. One way of accounting for this unstudied, sketch-like quality in Delacroix's linework might compare it to the distinguished friendliness of a state of innocence. His lines' movement engages us bareback, without need of bridling or stirrups. The lines are curious and unprejudiced in a manner that also exudes confidence. In a street scene, Delacroix makes little to no attempt to diversify his opacities, which thus form a hodge-

43 Edna St. Vincent Millay, "Renaissance," in *Renaissance and Other Poems* (Mineola: Dover Publications, 2011), 3.

44 Thomas Albright, *Panaesthetics: On the Unity and Diversity of the Arts* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014), 169.

podge of competing textures. If this involved the orange beam projected from a carriage sloshing through the rain, Delacroix would depict the wet asphalt partially in anticipation of Paul Cézanne's undoing of impressionism, its grit redacted by weather not pictured.

27

Caused effects. At the heart of what we might call one of the aesthetic hallmarks of postimpressionism as it relates to the history of geometric perspective is the afterlife of atmospheric distortion, a sort of posthumous longevity that continues to affect the artist's subject, however spatially distant it may be from the implied eye point; what began as a useful mutation then became trapped in the medium's genes. It is therefore possible to seriously question whether Henri Rousseau's traveler and lion ought to be read as eroded themselves,⁴⁵ not in relation to atmosphere but down the woman lies sleeping. This is the severe detachedness of David Hockney's splash, water's ejection out of itself become a separable artifact, in accordance with its identification as a verbal noun. Artistically speaking, such is possible in the first place because this hallowed relationship, dutifully learned from Aristotle, was always merely inferred through the correlative force of lamination, like a Los Angeles backlot soaks when a sheet of rain simulating a real downpour comes between camera and set. An effect in a painting, the attempt to bottle natural splendor, like lightning and Niagara Falls approach the condition of freestanding monuments, with the horsehair key running to the canvas, stands aloof, predicated on greater or lesser revelation of its referent, between an exploded constellation of chops or the splinters of a depiction that lives anywhere but in the extreme foreground. One thing broken up by the simulated interposition of another. That the length of a painted snake never actually slips behind a tree's trunk — the joke to René Magritte's *Le blanc-seing*, that he allows himself carte blanche to do visually as he pleases — does not stop the snake from disassembling into three serpentine segments in perspectival space.

Since they belong to the same type of daydreams, we must associate abbreviations of animals that have their heads and tails fastened together — the artist having neglected to show the intermediary parts of their bodies — with

- 45 Consider the curtain of thin feathers used by painters to denote raining, the most recognizable example perhaps being Rousseau's *Tiger in a Tropical Storm*. Because droplets are thought to stretch while falling, when actually they form wobbly donuts, their depiction as such violates the orthodoxy that every painting represents an instant plucked out of time. In other words, because stretched drops are an illusion based in time, the painter mistakenly behaves like a photographer. This is similar, but not identical, to the problem of truthfully representing quadrupedal locomotion, misunderstood until Eadweard Muybridge settled the debate. Presumably, the instants that Charles Bentley captured, for no worse reason than misunderstanding, belong to a universe slightly different than ours. Periodically, a commercial film or advertisement will "freeze" the action on-screen by means of a powerful invention capable of controlling time's flow, and, in doing so, leave the family members and dog blurred when they should be at their sharpest. Frank Coraci's film *Click* gets this right, for example.

these snail-shells from which emerge quadrupeds, birds and human beings. To do away with what lies between is, of course, an ideal of speed, and thanks to a sort of acceleration of the imagined vital impulse, the creature that emerges from the ground immediately assumes its physiognomy.⁴⁶

With regard to the postimpressionist mindset, on what social contract do artists who systematically deviate from realism depend in order to safeguard looking-at-art's fundamental credulity, that bridge the observer is responsible for crossing? Whether we abide the theories that past generations fostered and derided, the situation is less that we're grandfathered in than that the past's methods endure in a state of artistic rigor mortis. Gauguin built his Tahitian scenes as his forebears might have but with the causal linkages largely left out, like Hockney's splash is that ejected, motionless portion of water. I don't see the pool's stillness as exhibiting some temporal difference, before joined with after in a single image, though this reading is attractive. Instead, Hockney attended to the equipoise of a situated effect taken as a form per se. Including the splash without the pool rising from beneath as constitutive of its outgrowth, Hockney pokes fun at art's basic plasticity, confident enough in his other works to show us a table bereft of screws and do glass with the streaks alone. What we've long taken for logical necessities are effortlessly replaced by the glue of viewership. An effect is materially the volumetric coherence of bell tower or bough. The splash per se, though logically the doing of a splasher, is none other than an amount of liquid thrown in a more or less probable shape; not a lightbulb's glow but a displacement that isolates and thereby upgrades the glow. Combining body with action, object with effect, yields a complete event in time or figure. It then became the modern painter's prerogative to exclude one or the other by layers, which until the twentieth century seemed a matter left to rational sense.⁴⁷ It's a sliding scale: Whistler eventually peeled his onion nearly to the bud, while Alma-Tadema used them all. One millennium builds the world and the next dismantles in perfect reverse order.

When Fredric Jameson, excerpting a passage from Marguerite Sechehay's *Autobiography of a Schizophrenic Girl*, asks us to consider "the gloss and smoothness of material things,"⁴⁸ in some way this reiterates to me that an object may be removed

46 Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, trans. Maria Jolas (Boston: Beacon Press, 1994), 111.

47 Like Monet and Renoir father the dry unclarity of Matisse, Debussy seems to represent the analogous instrumental tipping point, wherein a melody or theme, skillfully developed, combines with derivative textural effects — the melodic subject seen darkly, through some musical occlusion. Chopin made conspicuously stronger use of any idea he's seized upon, but then Debussy enveloped his in a blinding shimmer. This strain of impressionism was preceded and succeeded by deformity, too, coming before Schoenberg's rational expressionism and after the emotional storm that was romanticism, which manages through clear-sightedness to be all the more disfiguring. In both cases, dissonant intensity is delivered point-blank, as symphonic monologues from a stage or uglified by the chromatic scale's magic spell. And like the thick British fog of Turner, suffused with pulverized gold and coal smoke, became more or less devoid of ships, later composers eventually let melodies slip away altogether.

48 Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*

from the realistic context of a painting, denying light's reflective luster on whatever surface, though incontrovertibly the sun shines.

Table 4

	Distinguishable	Obscure
Near	Classicism	Expressionism
Far	Hyperrealism	Impressionism

After a minute's careful study, it can become obvious that Jean Varda's *Abstraction*, an undated colored-paper construction, depicts four upright persons exploring an outdoor setting and which features a green portrait bust, the only face recognizable as such for its triangular nose, chiseled mouth, and heterochrome eyes, besides what appears to be a crown. Varda needed to distinguish between living beings and mimesis, always conspicuously poorer, being lesser than humankind. In order to reflect the anonymous sculptor's effort toward a likeness, the visitors themselves had to be faceless.

28

Cradle in the air. Isn't it that nature "smells" a freshly hollowed void like sharks are said to with blood except faster, almost the instantaneity of shoving a one-mile-long pole. That earth's atmosphere is always pressing down eludes us. Air less rushes in, such as the sun's rays are constantly being replenished, than it is forever bearing down, as though one were the keystone to the stratosphere; invisible barbarians always at the gate of our bodies. Perhaps it is because I raise my arm without visible impedance that I also fail to see it is my lot to be submerged. Gravitation is quite the same, such that we consider ourselves to be above something only in terms of being higher than something else: with a threatening gap between self and below. The latter could be a garden bed or the ninety-ninth story. Interestingly, gravity's tugging does not distinguish between lying on the sofa and slipping off a roof, as Einstein observed. The danger of falling is a height furnishing gravity with sufficient time to approach the terminal velocity it has been hurtling each of us toward since birth.

29

What goes on in Congo. Achievement in art deflects a chore like social beautification for thinking itself the product of a sort of heroism of the mind. As Marshall McLuhan understood, the thought bubble made possible by Gutenberg, namely the privacy of biographies and novels, is tantamount to intellectual segregation, whereas the Industrial Revolution divided labor between specializations, like our halcyon pelt-and-spear days did the sexes. Outside of oral storytelling, I wonder to what extent major non-decorative art has ever been collaborative. Christo and Jeanne-Claude come to mind as well as the studios of Dutch masters, cramped

with apprentices. Mount Rushmore testifies as easily to the nation's deadly capacity for self-celebration as it does Gutzon Borglum's limited genius; neither is there anything healthy about dynamite. Taxpayers are unlikely to agree, to the extent that art is now flown under the banners of all-out positivity and wellness. This plays tacitly into the fiscal conservative's sick idea of health, of course. Misbegotten folks in the trailer parks of unremarkable counties find themselves relegated to the unglamorous category of animal woe, lumped in with its diurnal warring.

Miss Gee looked up at the starlight
 And said: "Does anyone care
 That I live in Clevedon Terrace
 On one hundred pounds a year?"⁴⁹

If the pursuit of scientific knowledge seems to us better than disorganized scrounging after root vegetables, though our tools be powered by human lithium batteries, the cobalt and palladium stolen with the local junta's approval, this sharpest of pinnacles is also the hill we die on, for what is climate change if not highly advanced. Surely the end of life as the first world knows it is destined to coincide with its greatest technological marvels and a final *New York Times* headline. Medieval Europe loaded its glass cathedrals with ceiling-high altarpieces, but then dysentery and plague have a way of scuttling even the most necessary acts of creation.

30

Capaciously empty. It is the absence of explicit meaning, rather than a deficiency in the semiotics, that gives an emoticon nearly limitless applicability. Depth's negation, the sign never getting in its own way.

31

Astonishing Paris. In a qualified sense, postimpressionism is grammatically responsible for expressionism, impressionism having been the dormant goal of realism, implicit in its beginnings. Impression is Europe's realization that the complete portrait of an apple would be impossibly inclusive, representational beyond sense, thus an entire school's investment in everything's obscuration. Thus, too, Paul Cézanne's ceaseless, duplicative orchard-making.

32

Catalogue. Erin Shirreff's *Catalogue*, deeply compelling as a rare example outside of painting of cast shadows solidifying and absences filling,⁵⁰ could be described as detail-struck, like Carlo Carrà's San Trovaso harbor emptied of everything but its

49 W.H. Auden, "Miss Gee," in *The Collected Poetry of W.H. Auden* (New York: Random House, 1945), 210.

50 See Richard Artschwager's boxy Formica sculptures.

concrete. Shirreff's geometric parts resemble a raft of objects that may or may not have been abstracted from life.

There are some qualities — some incorporate things,
That have a double life, which thus is made
A type of that twin entity which springs
From matter and light, evinced in solid and shade.⁵¹

Given the sculpture's simple nakedness on the museum floor, which is furthermore to say belonging to our world of fire and earth, one pines for specificity's teeth. Instantiation of a specific potential without its actuality, Aristotle's *dunamis* minus the *entelecheia*.

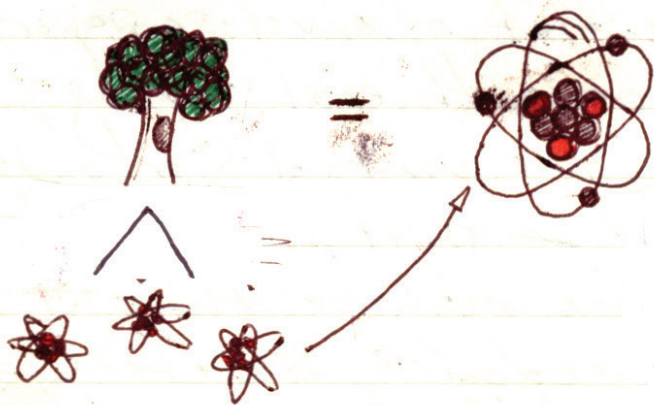
There is nothing to be seen, or felt, or guessed at in it; it is grey paint or grey shade, whichever you may choose to call it, but it is nothing more. Nature would have let you see, nay, would have compelled you to see, thousands of spots and lines, not one to be absolutely understood or accounted for, but yet all characteristic and different from each other; breaking lights on shattered stones, vague shadows from waving vegetation, irregular stains of time and weather, mouldering hollows, sparkling casements; all would have been there; none indeed, seen as such, none comprehensible or like themselves, but all visible; little shadows and sparkles, and scratches, making that whole space of colour a transparent, palpitating, various infinity.⁵²

Rachel Whiteread is the necessary comparison here. More directly literal than Shirreff, Whiteread appears to have just about the opposite goal while using the opposite shade. Instead of Shirreff's black, three-dimensional positives that lack content, we're provided the sculptural equivalent of filled negatives in white.

- 51 Edgar Allen Poe, "Sonnet — Silence," in *The Portable Edgar Allen Poe*, ed. J. Gerald Kennedy (New York: Penguin Books, 2006), 419.
- 52 John Ruskin, "Of Truth of Space," in *The Genius of John Ruskin: Selections from His Writings*, ed. John D. Rosenberg (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1998), 30.

and pick up the smallest particle.
The game represents, in other words,
as does Legos a collage, as in
the paintings of Jackson Pollock,
which may still be moved
within! The atom is underfoot
about the size of your hand,
nevertheless, a canopy of sky
hangs far overhead. Yes, this
world, both shallow and
cavernous, is contradictory indeed.
our trades of rich for poor,
poor for rich, smashed together
and an ~~even~~ environment built
thereupon. The largeness of
the smallest form, with which
castles shelter their avatars,
represents ~~not graduation~~ ^{a of objects} ~~not~~
that ^{classical} cosmic reduction ~~through~~
which all things are built in scale
but a sort of cosmic compaction,
a single domain, and the last

according to pre-quantum models,
~~reduplicated~~ enlarged, ~~to~~ so as
to be perceptible, and
reduplicated layer by layer,
like a house of mirrors, from
hell to earth.



As a final thought I might add
a comment on video games' grass,
flowers, and elemental effects,
being in fact two-dimensional,

Sixth Notebook

1

Whoso list. As an interested glance on the subway will barely register then fade as quickly, attraction is by and large a silent affair, if the true sum of our engagements could be tallied. The thought is normally subvocal if the admirer has the least shred of dignity, and reciprocally shared less often. Imagination is our final ether, bringing lips together that very possibly shouldn't meet. It can feel like all one knows on earth is a shadowy hurry. The caress transgresses at an empathetic distance when it neither crosses into lewdness nor begs for an answer. A slap physically withheld buffets the lusty sailor; almost the feeling of shouting underwater. As with a telegram brought to that limbo of the post office Bartleby dreaded, the thought proves undeliverable. Ordinary perversion keeps a tongue in its head, like an apparitional puppy loosed on a face.

Little streams pass'd over their bodies.

An unseen hand also pass'd over their bodies,
It descended trembling from their temples and ribs.¹

2

Sticks and flints. Shouting down fashionable technology and the gift of leisure seems susceptible to Nietzsche's characterization of the Christian ethos as advantageously defeatist. Couldn't one interpret the modern Luddite's refusal of lifestyles out of her socio-economic grasp as convenient?²

- 1 Walt Whitman, "Song of Myself," in *Walt Whitman: Complete Poetry and Collected Prose*, ed. Justin Kaplan (New York: Library of America, 1982), 198. See also Anne Stevenson, "Sous-entendu," in *Reversals* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 1969), 22.
- 2 It is almost irresistible to say as much about the rise of atonalism, which caps a century of fewer and fewer melodists (or whatever their population, lesser output from each composer). Abandoning a brilliant object to the elements is careless, while an umbrella keeping nothing dry is pointless. Although it may be that decreasing interest in lyrical composition effectively leads to the modernist changeover, like the classical style arose out of a desire to escape counterpoint's steep difficulties, there is a more obvious swerve away from what historically has been instrumental music's greatest artistic challenge — architecting the shelter to house good ideas.

Like those clients who, unable to attain the adult possession of objects (because too expensive), are content to derive pleasure from looking at a choice of samples or a department store catalogue.³

Pointing to how nature offers us abundant honey and sunshine and multipurpose herbs, one tosses the coffee, albeit a little hesitantly, with a quip to the effect of luxury's insufficiency and that Western plenty is illusory. On the face of it, a peppermint-mocha frappe with whip is delicious if life-shortening, *Vogue's* photo-essays wasteful but also hypnotically decorous. Then there is the carnivore's dilemma as to how pork, beef, and chicken are procured, the squealing hogs and various steer brained by air compressor and the viscera chucked. How satisfying the country-fried results truly are, like firing an AK-47 thrills the teenage insurgent.

The excesses envied by the philosophers may at times have been by no means as boring as they assure us.⁴

Animal life, which seems as finely balanced as the guts of a watch, is necessarily brought into comparison with tool-ingenuity; besides the cactus spine Darwin's finches use and the handheld flints of chimpanzees humankind's unique achievement. The latter generates significance through rehabilitation of the mundane in what Baudrillard described as nature made newly redundant.

3

The body geographic. In *Back to the Future*, when Marty and Doc visit the courthouse in 1955, the plaza with its clocktower is innocuous *then*, while the knowledge of what's to come weirdly transfigures the town's environment, lending it an antediluvian gloss. Eden in hindsight, shot through with one's knowledge of the flood, or the inappropriate calm of idyllic weather during a global pandemic.

In one sense, Freud's theory of deferred action can be simply stated: memory is reprinted, so to speak, in accordance with later experience.⁵

A kindergartner's bare torso disturbs for this uncanny doubling, being a slate at once blank and destined to estrange us as it gathers illegal charge by the birthday. Sarah Connor despairs for a world that in one sense has already been annihilated. The landscape is surreal by virtue of what she knows, like non-spaces typically or a composite simultaneously permissive and forbidding. Idling at four in the morning right in the crosshairs of an unbusy intersection.

It is human nature to stand in the middle of a thing,

3 Roland Barthes, "The Third Meaning," in *Image-Music-Text*, ed. and trans. Stephen Heath (New York: Hill and Wang, 1977), 66.

4 Theodor Adorno, *Minima Moralia: Reflections from Damaged Life*, trans. E.F.N. Jephcott (London: Verso, 2005), 176.

5 Adam Phillips, *On Flirtation* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1994), 33.

but you cannot stand in the middle of this.⁶

Or there is something agreed upon about a nude beach or the outdoor exercise parks where the shirtless lift themselves.

There is nothing specific about the zone. It's purely a place where a certain limit is set. You set a limit, you put a certain zone off-limit, and although things remain exactly the way they were, it's perceived as another place.⁷

Transgression's appeal lies unsurprisingly in the phenomenological distinction between interior and exterior, the way fine art is dignified through yelling at its admirers. Barbara Kruger insists that you and I invest in the Sistine Ceiling's divinity. Prohibition has its circular logic, the valuable artifact seeming so if looked at through bulletproof glass. Pregnant with fragility, the virgin is an otherworldly thing, and jabbing a Tiepolo with a penknife would carry the heinous shock of deflowering. Maintained by strategically placed personnel and the potbellied father, beyond whom lie unalterable laws.

4

Kipling's man. In sculptor Beth Carter's *King of the Birds*, the subject's crown is pleated in such a way that acknowledges its lost wax, complicating the bronze for an observer. While it might be that Carter gives away the method of construction and somewhat robs the sculpture of its awe thereby, more than likely she has playfully framed this would-be king's delusion through obviating the homemade quality of his diadem, wryly separating the fictively "real" man from an artificial costume, the headdress of a royal charlatan.

5

Ambiguous though visible. Abstraction is a hair that splits almost paradoxically between depicting clearly and distinctly that which is nonrepresentational — *not* to say unrepresentable, however — and unclearly and indistinctly that which is representational: Yves Tanguy's circus of gesticulating fleas and a guitar of Georges Braque that might as well have been dropped from a tenth-story window.

Although we can describe them ("it is like..."), we can never name them ("it is..."). This is because they are amorphous, and at the same time, they are definite three-dimensional illusions.

6 Marianne Moore, "A Grave," in *Observations*, ed. Linda Leavell (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2016), 58.

7 Slavoj Žižek, quoted in Sophie Fiennes, dir., *The Pervert's Guide to Ideology* (Zeitgeist Films, 2012).

Things with a definite form are both clearly segmented and fixed. On the other hand, amorphous beings are in a state of flux and their segments are ambiguous.⁸

In a land without referentiality nothing need be obscured. Since none can identify the types, Tanguy lets figures blaze in gray nakedness.

6

Ugo and his targets. Ugo Rondinone's *Sun* is uniformly blurred, simulating depth within abstraction, while the bands of Kenneth Noland's *Blush*, a painting from about sixteen years earlier, are cleanly demarcated. In short, a tidy, smooth geometrical rendering alludes to the primacy of an unmodulated shape. Abstraction seems ill-equipped to treat an object as though it exceeded the scenic foreground where one apparently stands, compared with the traditional adherence to a two-point plane; but then the New York school is beginning to look like ages and ages hence. Rondinone works against this principle, infusing a nonfigural target, by its nature abhorrent to depth, with the classic perceptual cues. That pastels are faded suggests their lapsation from bolder hues. Milky, washed out—but if pastel was freshly applied? Or does one consider pink lesser than red, once removed? Rondinone's target implies a far-flung location and the interposition of vapor.

Several nights, "being cloudy, were unfavorable to observation." The cloudiness, significantly, was here on earth.⁹

Art's freedom includes crying wolf for affective contexts that aren't there. In his misunderstood thought experiment, Erwin Schrödinger is careful to remind us that "there is a difference between a shaky or out-of-focus photograph and a snapshot of clouds and fog banks."¹⁰ Georgia O'Keeffe's close-cropped, emphatically yonic portraits of flower labia beg the question as to whether they're stretched interpretations, obviously based on sharply defined real plants, or meant to be thought visibly indistinct even to the clear-sighted.

It is hard to say where the two hyperboles begin; the one of the too sharp eye, and the other of the landscape that sees itself confusedly under the heavy lids of its stagnant water.¹¹

- 8 Takashi Nagao, "Yves Tanguy and Multiplication of the Arcs," *Trying to See the Invisible, It's Just Misunderstanding*, May 30, 2013, <http://kaitentou.blogspot.com/2013/05/yves-tanguy-and-multiplication-of-arcs.html>.
- 9 Kevin Young, *Bunk: The Rise of Hoaxes, Humbug, Plagiarists, Phonies, Post-Facts, and Fake News* (Minneapolis: Graywolf Press, 2017), 15.
- 10 John D. Trimmer, "The Present Situation in Quantum Mechanics: A Translation of Schrödinger's 'Cat Paradox' Paper," *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* 124, no. 5 (October 1980): 328.
- 11 Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, trans. Maria Jolas (Boston: Beacon Press, 1994), 210.

7

Amplifier up front. It is almost Kantian to notice a bassist's molasses-like sound beneath its louder double, changed both aurally and spatially, depending on the amp's placement. One's relationship to an instrument so configured necessarily entails hearing its amplification. Copied sound is the more desirable in this case, however it relates electrically to a source.

Every radio phenomenon obtains a new and very specific space relation, namely that it is not actually here, that it comes from somewhere else.¹²

As if by technological shortcoming, the noisy mechanism of a Remington typewriter has a way of augmenting a typist's fingers as they slam each key. Music frequently chooses to leave physicality behind, thereafter condemned to serve as its creation myth, yet unlike television's imaged beam holding audio's hand.

Only sound needs echo and dreads its lack.
A glance is accustomed to no glance back.¹³

8

One step ahead. Through its predictive dependability music allows us to sing our praises. Besides Adorno's use of it, I begin to see the social dimension behind prediction; an extra interpretation, not the root of experience, phenomenally speaking. In the most agile of movie plots, we still follow the actor as she approaches the basement door, believing a knob will jiggle if not turn and its hinges creak, or that colliding vehicles squeal as they accordion. Of course the far side of the moon is no dark mystery but both hemispheres receive an equal share of sunlight. It's that the moon usually shows us this half, as though to the detriment of the other.

The cold conditions of Rodin's studio caused the back of the head to freeze and break off.¹⁴

Exceptions to these ingrained assumptions might include the wryly bizarre (the films of Luis Buñuel) as well as avant-gardists such as François Truffaut, whose movies trade in gently intelligent winks and nods. The audience that doesn't take notes, or cast a knowing glance backward, loses itself in a funhouse.

12 Theodor Adorno, *Current of Music: Elements of a Radio Theory*, ed. Robert Hullot-Kentor (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2009), 87.

13 Joseph Brodsky, "A Part of Speech," trans. Daniel Weissbort, in *Collected Poems in English* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2002), 101.

14 "Auguste Rodin: Art History Archive," *The Art History Archive*, <http://www.arthistoryarchive.com/arthistory/sculpture/Auguste-Rodin.html>. The reference is to Rodin's mask-like *Man with the Broken Nose*.

9

Coda. Accompaniment abides like a shadow but with all the listlessness of ghosts. Complementation shows what's true through a glass darkly, whereas the lyric is spoken by an orchestra as though half forgotten. In the thickest molten type, the word "shadow" would also cast one. How should one understand a song that was composed solely of background fuss—absolved of Katy Perry's ultra-flamboyant camp¹⁵—but referred very definitely to the vocalist? With pre-twentieth-century classical music, the symphonically thorough tried digging up more of a few themes; not necessarily further and further truffles but as much of one brontosaurus as possible. I can't help wondering what a complete musical thing-in-itself would be unless a whorling Dantean rose, its multiple petals all of the latent elaborations together. In a poetic sense flawless works are thus fenestrated, the absolute pouring in like the breeze through a screen door. Indistinguishable from the music itself, a spillage akin to leaning so near a painting that the gold frame is lost sight of. Music that bursts through its coda might be thought to do so at the behest of surplus momentum; but does this occur in Bach, for instance? It is always tempting to criticize the romantic impulse as infirmity, its control seemingly loose in comparison with the baroque. Note Slavoj Žižek's point about *City Lights*, how the movie ends on a fade to black followed by an emotional hemorrhage of additional music.¹⁶ Or this is why the *molto vivace* of Beethoven's Ninth strikes us as a second *allegro*: to avoid bloating the introductory movement, a surfeit of ideas was formally cordoned off. Isn't the mazurka like a tipsy drinker who can't get into kilter or a turning waterwheel, such that sloshing kinetic energy overflows the measure. I'm thinking, too, of those pages intentionally left blank at the back of a novel. Not forgetting ellipsis, which budding poets believe lends free verse a certain they don't know what, or the epilogue to *Blood Meridian*, which Cormac McCarthy tacked on only after getting his editor's go-ahead.

10

Music and lyrics. Atonality's uniformity, at first listen about undetectable, can be mistaken for the uniqueness of enjoyable music, that penetrative musk the truly inspired gives off. It sometimes happens that a fragrant melody chaperoning a load of clichés will fool us into liking the trip when really line by line they're not worth it. Less misdirection than gloss.

The faded spongy brick
of the terrace is overpowered by the paintwork's

- 15 Irritation with the monotony of a chorus can have to do with misjudging those phrasal lyrics, of which the radio darling's song is composed. Although stagnant on the surface, structure of an academically rigorous if artistically boring quality is everywhere discernible in pop.
- 16 Songs based on a repeating musical figure, unlike Gustav Holst's "Neptune" but like The Beatles' "Across the Universe," taper off toward silence because *ostinato* stays in motion unless acted upon, much as a stage play, having settled into a domestic rhythm, can only drop the curtain

sweet dessert colours. They spoil it, but you understand they are there as the sugar in tomato soup is there.¹⁷

The radio star's hoarse whine is intensified with a polycephalic yell and slamming the drums.

11

Pricelessness. Appreciating why the arts are underfunded is badly in need of a meeting of minds over the leisure activity's fiscal liftoff in the twentieth century and, since then, lasting ascendancy up in the cultural stratosphere. With its hyper-inflated cachet, the continual enigma of art's market evaluation is hard to make jell with a planet expensively engineered and publicly bought, to say nothing of our awful stewardship, built downtown hand over fist in full view of the taxpayer. It might that be our fervent insistence on art's inherent value — outside of labor and an arrhythmic stock exchange — has led naturally to governmental neglect. One thinks of Blake's useless plow adorned with gemstones and gold. If a charcoal study from the workshop of Tintoretto can take one's breath away and have its worth calculated to two decimal places, how could a grant remunerate what in the first place we've deemed priceless.

12

Hewer of stone. Composed of differently shot vantages, the way Cézanne organized his kitchen table with contradictory views of the same fruit, Erin Shirreff's *Monolith* is an imaginary subject. Her series of fused photographs made from aligning slices of sculpture can only be thought of as collagist; the spirit of it certainly is. David Hockney's "joiners" approach this technique fitfully using Polaroids, but what Shirreff manages is truly convincing. Besides disagreements in the lighting, her cohesions document objects apparently never halved.¹⁸ This film-based cubism releases sculpture a second time, from Italian marble quarries to where it lodges in the photograph's black-and-white carbonite, while both preserving the camera's flattening and looking as though the subject's visibility were increased, a sort of implied origami. While on the Campidoglio you've got to choose a side of the she-wolf, Shirreff's subtle joinings offer more dimension for your buck, albeit at infinitely lower resolution.

13

Cunningham unshod. Modern choreography's fixation on the thud of bare feet and slap of hands against thighs, the dancer's body constantly flexing into and out of tension, is that exploratory stage music underwent two hundred years ago, as

17 Michael Hofmann, "From Kensal Rise to Heaven," in *Selected Poems* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2008), 37.

18 Architecturally speaking, this drops us into Daniel Libeskind territory.

though a stethoscope were applied to the art form's own heart. In the case of dance the human body was already massive, bound by its configuration and enslaved to gravity, from which there is but temporary relief; whereas the nineteenth-century composer finds the violin's low origins shameful, created upon a time by the first lutenist from maple or spruce. Merce Cunningham's sterile metaphors, totally asymbolic though not without their moments of genuine feeling, embrace all the physical uses of ligaments and muscle, as if this was breaking news. Art needs the sophistry of card magic. Without the energy of contrast, visual or natural, aura hardly forms but slides about like yolk in an unheated pan. At its artistic height, ballet pushed the envelope on strength and balance, easily done with Nijinsky and Pavlova in your company. As the best art does when egg tempera laps together tufts of animal fur or a sculptor lessening her basalt makes a cluster of grapes. What in painting differentiates an effect from its dominant object¹⁹ reasonably describes the abstract quality of modernist dance, which routinely gives us a gestural pose drawn from life. Bent to avant-gardism's will, these poses become hopelessly decontextualized within the bounds of the latest commission for the stage, a show of downturned hands set cutely under the chin,²⁰ arms crooked as if they held a newborn, and outstretched fingers.

This elaborate gesture, like all her others, was so completely meaningless, almost formal, that she seemed a dancer rather than an affected actress.²¹

Since the Sun King has classical dance sought to move in ways thought anatomically impossible, or do what's unnatural with flair, as the ballerina floats through matrices of sinew and bone. Cunningham's choreography is as natural as urination. In other words, decidedly unauratic, reflecting what the body already does. Like the blasé cool of today's illustrators, the break-dancer emulating a robot is philosophically out of touch.

14

Group or unit. Latent in a quantity of needles is its capacity for sublimation into one unfamiliar entity; heaped to enough of a bulk, at some distance the semiotics of the object melt down beyond recognizability.

In it can be perceived all the gnostic themes: the unity of nature, the ideal possibility of a fundamental reduction of the world.²²

The result is a twinkling heap in which no unit is discernible to the unaided eye, leaving one to guess as to the object's content in the reverse based on visual uniformity, and the sly premise of Tara Donovan's *Untitled (Pins)*, a waist-high cube

- 19 Or modularity without meaning and one's mental registration of the signified.
- 20 I have in mind the performances Cunningham produced in collaboration with Katherine Litz during their time at Black Mountain College.
- 21 Nathanael West, *The Day of the Locust* (New York: New Directions, 1969), 94.
- 22 Roland Barthes, "Einstein's Brain," in *Mythologies*, trans. Annette Lavers (New York: Hill and Wang, 2012), 101.

comprised of thousands of straight pins. Of course a pin is also composite, in terms of its alloyed metals. *Untitled (Pins)* gives us the sculpture-as-aggregation, forced into a hexahedron that would seem to be constitutionally homogeneous. Donovan's work broods on its shining instability like a hen over a clutch of eggs.

Table 1

Group		Unit
Pin as Alloy	>	Metals
Cube	<	Pin as Component

Inspecting this massive haystack up close, with its fluctuations of silvery matter, each of the needles is there distinctly, like they list the ingredients on a candy wrapper, SUGAR, COCOA BUTTER, CHOCOLATE, and SKIM MILK nesting almost tautologically inside of MILK CHOCOLATE. As if container might also reside within that which it contained. Compare this to the difference between putting your nose up to a painting and closely examining tree bark. Effortlessly so much, the oak's fractals outpace your ability to see thinkingly.

World is crazier and more of it than we think,
 Incurrigibly plural. I peel and portion
 A tangerine and spit the pips and feel
 The drunkenness of things being various.²³

Nothing recognizable hides behind the innermost palisade of brushstrokes, while the merest leaf transfers the biologist from book to book down to the kingdom of quarks. Lineages of recession disobey the ordering of our hierarchies, an endless arbitration as to where the top is on a Möbius strip and what counts as macro.

15

Length and what else. Between length, width, and height, I can't help feeling that width refers to depth only in a police lineup with length. Our idea of height might be broadened to stand for horizontal and negative extension as well as vertical. I want to get something down about actual and illusional three-dimensionality while attending especially to the intentional character of the latter. Apart from the depth it geometrizes, a painting is also a piece of still material, as anything might boast. J.M.W. Turner gives us Hannibal's elephants standing in the frozen alps; like them, in *The Embarkation for Cythera* it is unclear whether Antoine Watteau's *fête galante* has already ended or is just beginning. Niggling over Euclid fails to get the audacity of realism, which dreams of tunneling through a millimeter of gessoed cotton, an endeavor as implausible as prospecting for oil in Florida. In the painter's imagination the third dimension is as relevant as the backboard to basketball, meaning supportive rather than necessarily how points are scored. Graphed lines eke out a living ushering us toward vanishing points like carnival

23 Louis MacNeice, "Snow," in *Collected Poems*, ed. Peter McDonald (London: Faber & Faber, 1979), 30.

barkers. In spite of the fact that the art object's flaking materiality can always be noted, as responsive to observers' destructive touch as a forensic lab's electrons, for all intents and purposes the surficial image of a Raphael is shallower than a florin. Hence the intensity of the plunge. Think of the lithospheric skin on earth's apple. In terms of an artist's literal relationship to her easel, what need would there be for the broken pikes in Paolo Uccello's *Battle of San Romano*, fallen as if magnetically along the degrees of perspective, or the checkerboard flooring used by Johannes Vermeer, if she were satisfied with that flat acreage stretched and nailed to a panel, the lovechild of Procrustes and Christ.

16

The long and the short. Agglomerating the twentieth century's hoard of catch-penny music, which for a brief moment flash with all of the brilliance of magnesium, is a gaudy way to hand the spark what it lacks: the semblance of a thermodynamic whole, though each three-and-a-half-minute track be hopelessly unto itself, mired in self-admiration. Plenty is enginelike in the characteristic styles of an Albinoni or Telemann. However agile, the made-ness is evidenced in spades. But in order to lend Schubert the same air of internal separateness, his prayerful fantasies and keyboard sonatas must be looped.²⁴

Two contradictory routes whose dialectical resolution can be readily discerned: on the one hand, to escape nature by a sort of delirious baroque [...] and, on the other, to attempt reconstituting that same nature by an incongruous artifice.²⁵

As many uploaders of classical do when they're not busy poaching one another's stuff, the *Moonlight* Sonata, which is only ever to say the sustained adagio sostenuto, is centipeded tail to head ad nauseam.

The visual aspect of pasted-up postage stamps: fragile and yet gaplessly dense, glued-together montages, as threatening as in the worst dreams.²⁶

Not artificially inflated from within but linked to copies of itself, as "extended" in the titles of these videos implies. Momentary silence, as between stops and starts, is music's absolute zero for everything carried in Beethoven's salinous wake. In any lapse we hear, a kinetic energy, that of intention, hangs in the air like background

- 24 In *Koyaanisqatsi*, director Godfrey Reggio sticks to long exposures of one subject at a time because speeding up the business of a children's playground or jungle floor would be merely chaotic. But if cars are going to stream down the interstate for hours on end, in this case one loses the driver while retaining the individual car's movement, now shared by hundreds of motorists slurred together.
- 25 Roland Barthes, "Ornamental Cuisine," in *Mythologies*, 143. See Paul Lamere's Infinite Jukebox, intended to help those bored with their "favorite" songs beat new life out of them.
- 26 Theodor Adorno, *Philosophy of New Music*, ed. and trans. Robert Hullot-Kentor (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006), 134.

radiation; this is the grammatical justification for catching up with the musical subject's development on the farther side of that gulf ("The ball, remembering who hit it, keeps going"²⁷), whereas the baroque composer doesn't let go. Reminiscent of the riddle about lightening a barrel, this lends the gap a positive charge. Haydn's soul is fifty percent baroque, blessed with the Energizer Bunny's uninterrupted go, yet when it comes to drama he's theatrically a bit hokey, like a thunder sheet. The thread of his, or Mozart's, flow is eidetic, based on whim rather than physics, as opposed to the high G-forces of Mahler's rollercoasters, which, upon finishing a tortuous climb, store enough thrilling potential for more than corkscrews. Bruckner has the launch of a NASA shuttle igniting its costly payload, though the terminal velocity is extravagantly higher. However devout the silence, the ground state of romanticism is a low rumble. Palestrina is constantly on the move but sails calmly. Bach composes pit stops of absolute stillness that would make Lord Kelvin jealous.

17

Gone from Pontoise. *Hoarfrost*, Camille Pissarro's modest salon piece that features a wilted traveler crossing a dirt field, expanded the range of subject matter available to an artist from objects to effects, with his emphasis on the shadows cast by skinny trees far outside the painting's edges. Pissarro problematizes subject as such through depicting the insubstantial corollary²⁸ of an absent object. This logically becomes *ens causa sui*, or that which causes itself. The myth of the self-made millionaire. *Hoarfrost's* charitability toward figments of reality was further developed by Italy's mad futurists, as much obsessed with dive bombers as the bicycle and allegedly naming their movement after Jean Cocteau's *Le rappel à l'ordre*, who loved the incorporeal writ large; the face of a mountain wiped clean of its presidents, or a multifaceted jewel without its glassy mineral. Abstraction wends from the total heaven by degrees. The artistic representation of life is not limited to dressing up signifiers but is rather a Jenga tower where the stratigraphy is both additive, each layer beneficial to the whole, as well as capable of withstanding a layer's deletion, like a bridge can lose a few cables without collapsing; modularity, by dint of pencil shading and through leaving the page's white for highlight, linear perspective, reflectivity. Anything can be safely pulled out by ones or twos, just not everything. Even Malevich decided to leave us with the square.

27 Michael Hofmann, "Wheels," in *Selected Poems* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2008), 89.

28 I'm reminded of when actors walking through the foreground are bizarrely out of focus, and it is not until the real stars enter the shot, albeit farther off, that we realize the director had adjusted her equipment in advance for these subjects, such that everything inside the frame inadvertently heralds their arrival. In other cases, the camera backs up so a telephone may ring again. Or how in *The Wire* the camera sometimes swaps the focus between two actors prematurely, that is, before the subsequent actor begins delivering her lines. This causes the focus to adjust, as though its attention were got.

Photographic idealism. Don Jacot is acclaimed for the hyperrealism with which he paints tinplate Americana, the branch of vintage toys that took the form of a yellow taxicab as easily as Dick Tracy or a cymbaling monkey. Jacot sidesteps the great shortcoming frequently evident in photorealism, particularly that done throughout the 1970s, namely the artist's inability to render a subject with photographic fidelity to the reference. Looking a hyperrealist's Manhattan nightscape, one notices that bits and pieces of the Big Apple are blurry, while a gleaming Harley-Davidson engine falls short of what extreme proximity to chrome demands.²⁹ (Aerosols generate similar unclarity, for which reason they seem ill-suited to realism — unless one's intention is to render a piece of street graffiti with perfect verisimilitude.) By this I mean that the impressive technical proficiency on display is not enough to satisfy the artist's own goal. The outcome is usually a few rings shy a bullseye.³⁰

Since the artwork, indeed, cannot be reality, the elimination of its characteristic elements of semblance only throws all the more glaringly into relief the semblance character of its existence.³¹

Jacot lowers the bar for himself and triumphs through perfectly capturing a reality that happens to be simpler than life.³² Obviously his dogs, for instance, aren't the same as living hounds but copies of satirical reductions. Philosophy has always tracked the artist's distance from her subject. While a carpenter fashions a chair from her conception of chairness, thrice removed is the draftsman who, allured by quadratic beauty, drags ink in its likeness. Thus photorealism only stands a chance against photography, though by no means suggesting a rivalry, in portraying that which is already diminished, or compromised for being planted in a form, such as toys and even other artwork. How Carlo Carrà's differs from Paolo Uccello is a matter of varied intentions, insofar as I regard Uccello to be imperfect, whatever pleasure his work affords, while Carrà's deficiencies line up with the day's theory. Both of these painters' figures are wispily thin, but this is closer to the aesthetic of Bill Traylor rather than Kara Walker, whose style refers to cut paper's thinness as much as anything else. As with Uccello, one aligns Traylor's style with his poverty and lack of modern art-school education. When a face by Goya, putrid with fear or wide-eyed in defiance, lacks the amount of visual information one expects (the cripple's grotesque proximity) it fully accords with Goya's mastery. That closely cropped motorcycle, trying to impress us with a solar ton of luster, fails

29 Imagine a classical soloist whose interpretation of a concerto involves strongly "enunciating" each note. While this retards the performance, one better notices the ambition, a decidedly fluid — implying emotional mastery of the composition — playthrough that is nevertheless articulate. As if to say nothing goes unnoticed, the violinist gives every bit a sliver of her individual attention, like an impressive speed-talker will not mumble.

30 See the work of Gus Heinze, who succeeds without qualification.

31 Adorno, *Philosophy of New Music*, 57.

32 Compare Glennray Tutor, whose gallimaufries of disposable plastic and gum-balls, seemingly endless in configuration, fall short of Jacot's convincing tactility.

through not meeting its end of the bargain. The honest artist will strive for that golden mean at which her ability and the endeavor's demands sync best.

Unless to denote the variety of lens used, one fragmentary definition that works for photorealism may be "As seen through a camera's lens," to be distinguished from "photographic realism," which doesn't necessarily have anything to do with the technology but a level of specific density comparable to that of a film negative. If hemisphericity is a factor, what's to stop a wittier artist³³ from locating us just inside the skull à la Ernst Mach?

You must not grieve that the world is glimpsed
Through veils. How else can it be seen?
How will you rip away the veil of the eye, the veil
That you are.³⁴

The question here is why one bothers about Nikon when the socket and jutting nose are ignored. Where should the artist plant her easel? Neoclassicists with hyphenated names (Jacques-Louis David, Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres) paint like cyclopes as they defend the French tradition against Greifswald's encroaching purple. Cézanne is the first to binocularize, which he does in observance of our embodied tendency to slightly lens and thus misperceive the land's lay. The choice to deform a sitter's portrait with fisheye convexity³⁵ bears some resemblance to pop father Richard Hamilton's *I'm Dreaming of a White Christmas*, a color-negative silk-screen print of a film still, where Hamilton flips Bing Crosby into cyan, magenta, and yellow, such that Crosby's palette suggests, insuppressibly, a televisual mode of seeing. Going with the normal hues of pink and brown would not have been enough to distinguish one setting-dependent point of view from another, either as situated behind a pair of eyeballs or projection screen, except through a Warhol-esque kind of revolving-door transfiguration. Among the most interesting of these is *Reflections*, a series of paintings completed by the amazingly protean Roy Lichtenstein during the last decade of his life, when the artist revisited several of his famous paraphrases from comics, this time updating them here and there with the white streaks of glass. Adding this layer, like the cellophane on James Rosenquist's equally stunning *Gift Wrapped Dolls*, Lichtenstein ingeniously complicates our reading of these already well-contrived pilferages, not least because of the Ben Day dot's rigidity.

- 33 See also the American painter Thomas Dahlberg, whose implied subjects thrash along the moat of vitreous humor, stupefied by the palinopsia of everything.
- 34 Suji Kwok Kim, "Monologue for an Onion," in *Notes from the Divided Country* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2003), 51.
- 35 Something Chuck Close did repeatedly over his career with a self-consciousness that takes the wind out of the notion of mere "copying." In an interview, Close explained that "the reason I don't like realist, photorealist, neorealist, or whatever is that I am as interested in the artificial as I am in the real." Chuck Close, "For Chuck Close, an Evolving Journey through the Faces of Others," interview by Jeffrey Brown, *Artbeat*, PBS, July 6, 2010, <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/show/for-chuck-close-an-evolving-journey-through-the-faces-of-others>.

Omnipotent quantification has taken away the possibility of perception itself.³⁶

A magnifying glass should yield nothing further, held up to a newsprint version of Monet's *Haystacks*: the atomically irreducible dot at once blends and remains visually singular.

The solution of Ben Johnson, a London-based hyperrealist known for his superhuman precise cityscapes, to the blur visited upon painters who mismanage nearness involves ditching atmosphere altogether³⁷ and hosing the vast minutiae of people and animals down the storm drain. "Hyper" because Johnson somewhat sanitizes reality, as virtuality does. His technique girds flat pools of color as though the time were always an hour before high noon. Appreciation of a finished design is naturally bolstered through isolation of underdrawing, emphasizing the tensile strength of a work, like reinforced concrete's hidden steel. Perhaps this is the agreeable sonority of Picasso's line portrait of Stravinsky, that a single nib gives the composer, seated in his director's chair, bodily fullness in addition to a skeleton without the artist resorting to hatching. Artistic lineation is as fresh as listening to that humming keyboardist of the North trek through the *Pastoral* Symphony with nothing but the trusty staff of his instrument and embarrassing little chair, the mammoth undertaking courtesy of Liszt that made Beethoven's nine circles available to chamber societies as much as the housebound. Johnson is concerned singlemindedly with the architectural identity of Liverpool, such that any visual distortion due to smog or the constant British drizzle would be a nuisance to include. His enormous images subscribe, as it were, to a cozy idealism that favors the works of humankind over its workers.

Hyperrealism differs from its graduating class as much as magic realism³⁸ does the Barbizon school. Instead of a standoffish glow from within, Jean-François Millet's stooping gleaners appear to be dusted with pollen, which is the light of God shining upon their aching backs. Artistic literalists closer in style to George Ault, more eager to bring about holograms than slice-of-life genre scenes, are gracious enough to spare us the cringeworthy goodwill of a style like Charles Fazzino's, whose serigraphs look less like glitzy flyovers than they do gargantuan thank-you cards signed by every hotel and restaurant in Fort Lauderdale. Instead of an illustration that took eighteen hours to render, with licensed stock imagery of minimalist patio furniture and mall shoppers, Ault's etiolated view of this or that midwestern township is like a fine blueprint raised to the touch. With the basically unpopulated, industrial-rural landscapes of Rackstraw Downes, it becomes easier to understand hyperrealistic plein-air painters as the long-exposure photographers of their medium, insofar as desert power substations and Philadelphia bodegas are simply around long enough to be captured by Downes. The ephemeral

36 Adorno, *Minima Moralia*, 236.

37 Ivan Durrant's strategy is the same but flipped, in which jockeys photographed out of focus are cloned in oil paint with neither a shred of artistic interpretation nor the copyist's *disegno*.

38 My preference is for the term "marvelous realism," which admits neither the boringly saccharine "illusions" of Rob Gonsalves nor the abstruse symbolisms of Frida Kahlo. It does, however, suit Rudolf Dischinger and Alexander Kanoldt's still lifes, with their faint paranoia.

activity of humans, on the other hand, amounts to a just-noticeable smudge that the artist has squeegeed from the view. Like an insect wiped off a driver's windshield as she herself vanishes down the unchanging interstate.

19

Gefühle nach dem Sturm. Life after impressionism, austere during its twilight years, increasingly favored a fire-fallow method of cultivation. Cubism and futurism began to rot shortly after war's end in Europe. The various movements differently heeded the call for a classical revival, while by no accident the resulting swidden — the guerrillas scorched practically everything of value — has a markedly trecento feel to it, or more relevantly the stiff unnaturalness of plastic, which is the true aesthetic character behind *Neue Sachlichkeit*: Franz Sedlacek's spotlit *Storm*, for instance, whose dramatic center is so like a scale figurine. As with hyperrealism's flat aerosols and mostly unactionable goals, the weird building in Carlo Carrà's *Lo squero di San Trovaso* is closer than his painting is willing to admit. Diminishment is the trait he selects for, like a regular Gregor Mendel. The generation that belonged to Ghiberti's Florence had a skill ceiling, and there lay the deciding vote, making their peace with an inflexible budget, meeting the epoch's limitations with fitful designs. Carrà guts the boatyard and much of the white church rising behind as if in accordance with an older tradition of built-up atmosphere,³⁹ for although waves toss so little else is apparent.

The miles of dirty air —
it's dim, but one is there,
and there's another, fairly bright
white, or is it a jet?
They're there, they're there.⁴⁰

Carrà has left out the bowels of his subject; channeling his inner Giotto lets him paint the claustrophobically near like it referred to a distant landmark. But then how many gondolas can a ten-inch-wide landing be expected to hold.

20

Substance of a third kind. Mechanical energy is popularly thought of as having an almost physical viscosity. In truth a toppling of chemical dominos, neighboring molecules that talk face to face, share heat like bread and routinely break their bonds. As occurred in elementary school between coins at either end of a ruler, kinetic transfer, along with the body's other tricks of thermodynamics, is rarely talked about as phenomenologically emergent but as though it were some vapor-

39 See Christo and Jeanne-Claude's *Wrapped Reichstag*, an artistic as well as diplomatic triumph.

40 Elizabeth Bishop, "City Stars," in William Logan, *Our Savage Art: Poetry and the Civil Tongue* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009), 112.

ous third substance, paradoxically intangible and useful, coursing through atomic fat.

A boy, his desk
isolated from the rest, asks,

*is wind fast-moving air
or something moving fast through the air?*⁴¹

21

I'm not there. A single-celled organism may be described as “closed” to the reality surrounding it by virtue of its unselfconscious adjoinment with that which lies immediately outside itself. No doubt amoebae are unable to discrepate meaningfully—the Greek notion of *oikeiōsis*. Or as Louise Glück has it, “never imagining the sound of my voice / as anything but part of you.”⁴² House-trained dogs are like this, insofar as they suspect nearly everything to be about themselves.

That is their happiness: they see all life without observing it. They're buried in it like crabs in mud.⁴³

The irreligious, like Christianity's handful of deists, understand just how absolutely the universe has orphaned us.

22

Collage, what it's good for. Expanding the aesthetic territory of collage allows for the incongruous juxtaposition of not only the affected objects of composite images, especially those by which it should be possible to infer environmental information, like a campfire roaring under the sea or flags whipping on the moon, but musical snippets divergent in their genres, which might as well be to say differently propulsive. Classical music's kinetic culmination in the curmudgeonly Rachmaninoff from the as-lively-as-a-spring-chicken Vivaldi is like the lithium-ion battery retrogressing to Nikolaus Otto's petroleum-fueled motor. If we tried crosspollinating the genteel dialect of Lully with the cavalier gruff of Richard Strauss's *Elektra*, the thought should conjure a pidgin landscape (the dunes of Namib abruptly meeting the Atlantic, a kind of intermingling Maurice Merleau-Ponty named *chiasme*) or otherwise irrational merger (wheat flour interspersed with freshwater pearls). In one promotional illustration for *Animal Crossing: Happy Home Designer*, a spin-off of the titular videogame series populated by genial, can-do villagers, the aloof

41 Nick Flynn, “Residue,” in *Some Ether* (Saint Paul: Graywolf Press, 2000), 75.

42 Louise Glück, “End of Winter,” in *Poems 1962–2012* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2012), 254. See also the title poem from Wisława Szymborska's *View with a Grain of Sand*, trans. Stanisław Barańczak and Clare Cavanagh (London: Faber & Faber, 1996).

43 John Gardner, *Grendel* (New York: Vintage Books, 1989), 8.

detachedness of these figurine-like characters falls somewhere between Giovanni Bellini and Palma Vecchio for theatrical group-blindness, an Italian specialty.

They know nothing of one another and are not reflected in one another. They are self-enclosed and deaf; they do not hear and do not answer one another. There are not and cannot be any dialogic relationships among them. They neither argue nor agree.⁴⁴

It makes sense, considering the freedom players have to pick up and arrange fossils, tree fruit, and furniture. I am to believe, per Nintendo's illustration, that Anabelle and Cheri share an apple pie while a halved-grapefruit table is rearranged, and that Rosie is helping her friend with a lamp. They live within this frivolous *hortus conclusus*, as if plinked down with the cute resolve of a child staging her play.

Collage is frequently surreal, a flavor of peculiarity I cannot help finding as deadpan as Anne Carson, or else as the visual equivalent of Gabriel García Márquez, for slamming incompatible story material together without explanation. It is linked in my mind, furthermore, with the innovative self-consciousness of everyone's favorite new-wave directors, Jean-Luc Godard in particular. Belmondo and Seberg's walk along the Champs-Élysées in *Breathless* slots the theatrical into the larger, aleatory Paris, the prow of their conversation a diegetic ship shoving through the city's non-diegetic sea: one feels it should be crushed by the surrounding pressure of all that reality.⁴⁵ In Godard's *Bande à part*, following the sting of the first gunshot Arthur confronts his uncle, the shooter, who then fires a few more rounds to no discernibly instantaneous effect. Or recall David Lynch's *Blue Velvet*, when the corrupt police detective in a yellow sport coat stands rooted to the spot where he was killed and even slaps down a lamp at one point, though judging by the corpse-like pallor and bloody gashes he's functionally dead.

There occurs an event in the world which cannot be explained by the laws of this same familiar world.⁴⁶

Separately comprehensible but phenomenally alien events are forced into sequential proximity, which encourages us to identify a causal relationship if not occult resemblances. Although the fuse is missing the nitroglycerin still ignites. In his depiction of San Trovaso, Carlo Carrà's boatyard compares meagerly to its bustling parallel, Venice's actual Dorsoduro neighborhood, despite the absence of any obscurant, such as misty, whitish brushstrokes. Not a humidified drop of saltwater hangs there. For the worst of surrealism and those marching its unfunny corpse

44 Mikhail Bakhtin, *The Bakhtin Reader: Selected Writings of Bakhtin, Medvedev and Voloshinov*, ed. Pam Morris (London: Arnold, 2003), 95.

45 Along a paved cycling path through hardy grasslands, don't the bifurcated sides, lined as they are with dense kudzu that can go no further, hunger to close such a gap. It is tempting to imagine them together, as though asphalt were the result of a tunnel of opposed mirrors.

46 Tzvetan Todorov, *The Fantastic: A Structural Approach to a Literary Genre*, trans. Richard Howard (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1975), 25.

into the future,⁴⁷ the point continues to be a non sequitur, with every punchline as disappointing as a heavily meringued pie, from the droll horror of black ants crawling out of a cut hand to the commonplaceness of a euphonium host to flames. The species of collage I'm grasping at is perhaps something like Samuel Johnson's *discordia concors*, which either combines things that are violently contradictory, yanked from their respective contexts and yoked together, or leapfrogs to an ulterior meaning by use of independent islands that actually share no continental shelf, like a climactic rush abruptly vanishing into thin air.

23

Narrative and types of motion. Almost paradoxically quixotic is the interest in simulating nature's fulsome ebb and flow, the bulky gait of its combustion. This may be categorized into three states; and while each deserves elaboration more specialized than laid out here,⁴⁸ I begin to see that a musical idea is manifested in either of at least two ways. The third, if tenable, might just be synonymous with collage.

i) With regard to a musical composition's speaking subject, the seeming liveliness and emotional content of which vary enormously between the lifetimes of Bach and Beethoven, narrative is what I call the continuous, momentum-like thrust of a storyteller's will to expression; in the sense of the abiding personality of a Scheherazade, whose enchanting tales do not obscure the basic fact that she is telling them. It is this speechifying, from the aesthetic presentation of technique to agonized outbursts and a sensualist's musings, that also compels the music; for romanticism, this happens in a manner the listener finds to be psychologically justifying. ii) The composer of synthetic motion adopts the Newtonian idiom of mechanics and fakes a certain organic liveliness. Depending on the artificer's skill, it is a propensity for movement that can seem natural.

The relationships established within this frame of reference — degrees and cadence — imply a movement forward, a certain dynamic. This is why, in these relationships, repetition does not mean coming to a halt. They effectively relieve the work of any responsibility for their progression.⁴⁹

But whether as flexible as Coppélia or hopelessly rheumatic, I'm referring to in-progress momentum's simulation, a pattern in the musical architecture that reminds you of a ball's shortening bounce⁵⁰ or the quickening clatter of a coin. It is the violin and cello's inevitable obedience to the *pas de deux's* kinetic plan, a

47 "The joking-skillfully dexterous sort, whose numbers today, along with the hobbyists and mechanics, proliferate without end as if they were tossed up by nature and not by society." Adorno, *Philosophy of New Music*, 145.

48 Especially the leap from the first to the second, the third well served by the natural dice of aleatory composition, where the introduction of parts is left entirely to chance, attributable to a gust or unmeant trembling in the wrist.

49 Adorno, *Philosophy of New Music*, 73.

50 Listen to how Richard Addinsell's *Warsaw Concerto*, a work derived almost entirely from Tchaikovsky, kicks off.

perpetual trip forward that bridges the longest gulf by virtue of not being over: the dramatic difference between abeyance and being finished, or the invisible arc of expectation.⁵¹ Synthetic motion is thus the addition of organicity⁵² to a musical narrative.

Conscious disposal over the musical material is both the emancipation of the human being from the constraint of nature in music and the subordination of nature to human purposes.⁵³

The cosmetic blush of kinetics, that is, the semblance of corporeal weightedness, is applied to what prior to Haydn and Mozart was closer to a logical unfolding. A little rouge, this touch of blood, is a dangerous thing. To teach those writing during the *Sturm und Drang* years about Mahler's orchestral color would be as useless as eyeliner to a camera lens. *iii*) Analytic motion is the gene change that intersperses simulated naturalism, the aforementioned groan that signals to us interiority, with birdsong or the noises of toys (*The Pines of Rome*, the *Kinder-Symphonie*). Beyond stitching together unlike music and interlacing non-musical material is noise outright.

24

Der Dichter spricht. Groucho Marx's harefooted, off-the-cuff style of delivery might be characterized as falsely witty for being finely scripted; the hope of cleverness from a sleeve, like a magician's silks.

There should and must suddenly appear one that were called to give voice to the highest expression of the times in an ideal way, one who would bring us mastery not in gradual developments, but rather, like Minerva, should spring fully armored from the forehead of Zeus.⁵⁴

As though Alexander Pope also talked in rhymed couplets and Rosalind Russell thinks even faster than she parries Cary Grant. This is the potency of a rehearsed tête-à-tête, not to mention insufferably mannered verse dramas, which seem to exist merely as tests of skill Yeats and Eliot couldn't stop themselves from indulging in.

- 51 In golf-simulation videogames, the trajectory for a drive and the ball's drop is usually judged with a glowing arrow sent out of sight that swivels with the player character.
- 52 "Synthetic" is possibly confusing due to its association with artificiality. I mean the integration of corporeal fluidity, the dramatic tide of the romantic composer's lethargy and vigor, into classical-style narratives.
- 53 Adorno, *Philosophy of New Music*, 57.
- 54 Robert Schumann, "New Paths," in *Schumann on Music: A Selection from the Writings*, ed. and trans. Henry Pleasants (Mineola: Dover Publications, 1965), 199.

That's the difference between plays and real life — thinking time. You don't really think that if Henry caught me out with a lover, he'd sit around being witty about Rembrandt place mats?⁵⁵

55 Tom Stoppard, *The Real Thing* (London: Faber & Faber, 1984), 21.

have been crowded together to appear to the viewer leaving almost nothing facing away. One has simply to perform a quick search for bouquet clipart — nearly every image features flowers the heads of which, each and every one, is pointed at the viewer.

On second thought, I must concede that such an arrangement of flowers is common enough, however,



in true still life painting the round bouquet is to be frequently found, in its odd shape, too.

At lower frames, doesn't stop-motion animation tend itself to the ironic mood? It seems worth contrasting an appearance of clumsy locomotion (eg, a man walks) and the passage of time, with regard to the time lost between frames, should we think of the claymated man as moving fluidly through intermittent time or stiltedly through real time?

A very clever example of commercial preservation is Westworld, the HBO television series. Because the android "hosts" have been scripted (excepting later developments that contradict this somewhat), whatever is spoken

Seventh Notebook

1

Script. Turning a book printed in one's mother tongue upside-down is surprisingly like confronting a script with which one is totally unfamiliar: the pages look Afrikaans or Latin. In isolation the trick dissipates. Comparing a text that was horizontally flipped with one mirrored, I'm unsure of what the effect really consisted, unless it had to do with the fact that the order of the letters doesn't change.

A script you can read fluently works on you very differently from one that you can write, but not decipher *easily*. You lock your thoughts up in this as though in a casket.¹

2

Sequins distinguished from stars. Mindful that alternative ladders often lead the eye to the same visual, there is an interesting likeness between a sequin's dance, sown by the hundreds into a dress or handbag, and a distant star's emission of plasma.

It is like my body blinks — which, from a distance, must look like flickering.²

As the iridescent disc shimmers, it does so because of slight alterations in the light. An observer's footing changes or the sequins themselves tilt. Light quits its star twinklingly, as the electrons rile up and fire. Attributes are tied to both of these objects like they're behaviors, as though a sequin ever got excited.

The existing wind rested on the tree like a great bluebottle, and the tree shuddered. But the shudder was not a nascent quality, a passing from power to action; it was a thing; a shudder-thing flowed into the tree, took possession of it, shook it and suddenly abandoned it, going further on to spin about itself.³

1 Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Culture and Value*, trans. Peter Winch (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), 26e.

2 Mary Szybist, *Incarnadine* (Minneapolis: Graywolf Press, 2013), 22.

3 Jean-Paul Sartre, *Nausea*, trans. Lloyd Alexander (New York: New Directions, 1964), 132.

3

The end shied from. Tchaikovsky relishes the thought of scandalizing Russia with his candor. Satisfied with achieving the summit he built for himself, Beethoven camps there a fortnight. There is a certain reluctance among composers to leave well enough alone, as though this implied an Apollonian flaying for an audience to marvel at and the critics of a later tradition to ridicule. Symphonists love to hint when there's a climax in the making, tantalizing us with flashes of the big reveal. Grander than striptease, this is to be revelation itself. At last the shouted cry of judgement does arrive. Now a bunch of violins plead for their lives and the piccolo's inconsolable — storm, whirlwind, and earthquake rolled into one calamitous bomb. Suddenly the end is nigher than nigh; but is there enough to show, the secret sufficiently terrible?

“I am Lazarus, come from the dead,
Come back to tell you all, I shall tell you all” — 4

Trying to describe their twilight, Pozzo sputters until the inspiration leaves him.

4

Ozenfant's husks. Purism, the artistic creed of Amédée Ozenfant and Le Corbusier, is the deboning of the objects of our senses, such that a handled pitcher or guitar comes back to us one half Platonic, like a soap bubble that froze, the guitar's bowels voided of their wood.

That day there was no sun only a paleness in the haze and the country was white with frost and the shrubs were like polar isomers of their own shapes.⁵

In fact, a guitar's substance was only ever stuff. Although purism includes less, the short-lived movement is ripe for comparison with digital objects, which lose a good deal of the signifier, held up against their real-life counterparts, while signifying fully.⁶ It is perfectly the reverse of mereological nihilism, being comprised of all but the tangible stuff. Ozenfant brilliantly furthers the starved style Carlo Carrà began in Milan, whose aesthetic harkens back to Giotto and shares territory with postimpressionism. Ozenfant's goal is not Monet's “fidelity” to the changing light at Giverny but its bridge rendered a second time by virtue of the simpler perfume of memory.

The privileging of form protects thinking from any interest in the “material” of the object and consequently from any interest in its real presence.⁷

4 T.S. Eliot, “The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock,” in *The Poems of T.S. Eliot*, ed. Christopher Ricks and James McCue (London: Faber & Faber, 2015), 1:8.

5 Cormac McCarthy, *Blood Meridian* (New York: Vintage International, 1992), 315.

6 The fraudulent promise of homeopathic medicine but also our worship of buzzword molecules, the gross transmutation of all food into information.

7 Jean-François Lyotard, *Lessons on the Analytic of the Sublime*, trans. Elizabeth

The forms in Ozenfant's work are exoskeletal, traces the original bugs shed. After five centuries, archival truth continues to elude art's best lepidopterists, though not for their want of good-enough nets. On or about October 1906, the truffle hunt is abandoned and rufescent café girls traded for leaky phantoms, as when daguerreotypy let the painters be theorists if they wished instead of classicists old before their time, whereupon a lot of them decamped for the waters of Le Havre. By Cézanne's death the majority of artists are self-imposed Jeromes trying to collect the shapes of a wash basin or statuette like they're wall projections, salvaging the lessons of past lives. Capsized on the Gulf of Spezia, before long Paul Klee's schooner floats to the surface in blanched pieces, the thrown-off echo of a melody howls with its transferred color.

Almost tuneless, as though both hands were playing accompaniments.⁸

5

Abyssal. It is instructive to contrast the two works of art referred to in Norman Rockwell's *Portrait of Norman Rockwell Painting the Soda Jerk*. How much sharper the latter is, a fact due not to *Portrait*'s unfinished state but Rockwell honoring an apparent, natural hierarchy, informing his countrymen that a painted representation of the artist should differ from that his handiwork. While *Portrait* sort of qualifies as a double portrait, the second subject being *Soda Jerk*,⁹ but of the Thomas Gainsborough variety where the husband towers above his wife and children, it does so without *mise en abyme*'s kitschy looping. The sullen face of the boy sipping a milkshake and the greenery out past the curtains clash inoffensively with the superior realism of Rockwell's hand against his maulstick. So the readout on Captain Kirk's ultra-thin telecommunicator, no doubt an immeasurably powerful device, is constantly on the fritz, the crewmate's face crosshatched with snow. It's tricky deciding whether exponentially advanced technology ought to have a level of video quality that surpasses the natural; or Gene Roddenberry is right to hamstring the signal, affording nerds everywhere a fiction as properly alienating as Alpha 60, Jean-Luc Godard's throaty artificial intelligence. Another case involves the adaptation of novels when a purely mental construct, such as a memory or dream, must then be filmed, acted out rather than collected in the dark. All of a piece in the text, truly faithful recreation of a story monotonously slams together a flood of media. On an episode of *The Jetsons*, for instance, George is distinguished from

Rottenberg (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994), 77–78.

- 8 Michael Steinberg, liner notes, on Vladimir Ashkenazy, pianist, *Diabelli Variations*, by Ludwig van Beethoven, recorded in 2007, Decca Records B000OPPSW6, 1 compact disc.
- 9 See Francisco de Zurbarán's *Santo Domingo in Soriano*. But Zurbarán is the beneficiary of his late position in the history of European art; furthermore, the interior canvas he shows, depicting the relic portrait of Saint Dominic and intelligently done, seems to have nominally overshot its attempt at datedness, such that, for a 1530s connoisseur, the miraculous style would strike her as aesthetically a little behind the times. See also Lawrence Alma-Tadema's *A Greek Woman*, William Hogarth's *Marriage A-la-Mode* narrative series, and Edward Hopper's *New York Movie*, with its lit-from-behind, grisaille sliver of a film playing.

his televised boss through the time-honored use of size disparity,¹⁰ though their matching definition could be chalked up to the astronomically higher resolution of displays by the year 2062. Bart's and Lisa's favorite daytime watch, *The Itchy & Scratchy Show*, a kind of plushified Grand Guignol, is almost too "real" but for the limiting boundary of the television set, seeing as Itchy and Scratchy are invested with the same unrealism as their watchers. In the HBO series *Westworld*, the issue of visual distinguishment, as arising from the plot juxtaposing the heroine's remembrance of her past with the present's dry clarity, is cleverly avoided by the suggestion of perfect recall in hosts, though later episodes complicate this. But for the occasional traumatic memory in which the villain moves slowly and the air is stunned with gunpowder, *Westworld's* flashbacks cut between unaltered footage, such that the likelihood of our correctly guessing a scene to be then or now has the odds of a coin toss. Precisely for this reason are dramatizations of historically distant events hazy, the English bishops or highway patrolman awash in a digital brine that takes the gloss off. Except the intention with this effect is not a safeguard against mistaking fakeness for genuine testimony but to prevent an irksome resemblance between the actors and the real experts brought on by the show's producers; the similarity would be comical as well as disorienting.

Then there is the genre of gallery paintings, which fall on a spectrum between a contemporary Parisian's record of that year's Salon, one of the most notable being Pietro Antonio Martini's etching of 1787, and those larger canvases intended to show off a collector's holdings, such as that commissioned from David Teniers the Younger by Archduke Leopold Wilhelm. Also *The Sciences and the Arts*, a seventeenth-century Flemish work traditionally attributed to Adriaen van Stalbem that riffs on Georges de la Tour, Pieter Saenredam, and Jacob van Ruisdael; even a Christless *Storm on the Sea of Galilee* can be made out, though with less certainty. At the center of Stalbem's composition, men discuss the one canvas pivoted away from us, in which a handful of animal personages (a genre known as "singerie" if they're monkeys) wantonly destroy musical instruments. I'm struck by what could be described as a limited form of proto-cubism. Real paintings are typically distributed throughout a house or otherwise hung at a variety of angles and thus requiring the owner to orientate herself accordingly; meanwhile, composite works tend to abide by a single recessed plane in order to be taken in as a whole. As in Rockwell's *Portrait*, these lower-order paintings, whether original or imagined, function like a mere detail does within a traditional picture. The gross luxury of this, like every bite fed to Gargantua is in itself a course.

6

Noli me tangere. Interaction that might be described as surreal includes sliding one's boot over waxed flooring with a checker pattern and wiping glass that quick-

10 See Dürer's *Sudarium of Saint Veronica Supported by Two Angels*, in which the impression of Christ's face bulges outward, or contrast Magritte's *La condition humaine* with Velázquez's *Christ in the House of Martha and Mary*. But the text-book example is of course the *Victory Stele of Naram-Sin*, a 4,000-year-old tablet dating to the Akkadian Empire.

ly became streakless; the hand glides as though repulsed by the electromagnetism alone, or a hammer vibrates back from a nail like they didn't meet.

That, like all the rest, plays about the surface, and never introduces me into the reality, for contact with which, we would even pay the costly price of sons and lovers.¹¹

The mixed message of glass is like cheesy depictions of a delayed reaction: Supercop lands several extrajudicial blows on a hapless goon who then, after a second, slumps raucously into the garbage cans. Non-abrasive contact, which we're told is already the case, shares something with spatially divorced, nonlocal objects fooling around behind physicists' backs.

7

Highly fulfilling prophecies. Corporate America further capitalizes its assault on financial literacy with pseudo institutions like the Society of Grownups, a startup co-founded by MassMutual to teach adulting that offered courses in establishing a budget, homeownership, and goal attainment. Much like toothpaste conglomerate GlaxoSmithKline hits us with a new formulation of Sensodyne promising to rebuild tooth enamel eroded by things like soda and hydrogen peroxide, for instance. As the cherry on top, a whitening agent is included, so that one may cause oral damage and repair it simultaneously. In this case, customers are given the means for troubling their health and, in the very same act of consumption, saving themselves.

8

Galériens to culture. The jerky movement of tricolor projectors, as though obeying Bruno Mars's shouted admonishment to get up and move, has a wondrous melancholy to it. Like galley slaves, their hearts aren't in the job.

Aeneas lay there in the darkness watching the light, the little motions of light moving around the ceiling and telling him something.¹²

Low-grade technology compelled by current to mime the gyrating of clubgoers' bodies is one of those ordinary ways that the culture industry acknowledges its own spectacular insincerity.

11 Ralph Waldo Emerson, "Experience," in *The Annotated Emerson*, ed. David Mikics (Cambridge: The Belknap Press, 2012), 226.

12 David Ferry, "Some Things I Said," *Poetry Foundation*, <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poetrymagazine/poems/150756/some-things-i-said>.

The effect [...] is certainly not the identification of the public with the psychic agitation allegedly expressed in the dance; rather, it is an electrification equal to what seizes the dancers.¹³

9

History's role in aura. In the Benjaminian sense, aura involves the perpetual surprise of confronting our nescience. Art should be certified organic, while method is knowledge sold at a loss. It is the signature that defies my understanding of penmanship, the novel that sings more eloquently than its novelist's guest appearance on *Oprah*. John Ruskin's praise for a bit of early pastoral by J.M.W. Turner tries to explain that the great work is finished in the artist's mind, as preconceived as Jesus, before a single bristle deigns to bend.¹⁴ Supposing such a thing were possible, bringing work into the world this way would not be gestation but rather the correct assemblage of jigsaw pieces already in one's mind. Ruskin essentially defends aura in repudiation of production, which is to say he would like to negate the effort involved. Ruskin implores the artist to hide preparatory drawings and put away clay used for modelling, such that studio and wheel never entered into the affair.

In it the specific sound of each instrument is lost; they can no longer be separated out, and the final sound gives no clue as to how it was created.¹⁵

In his widely quoted essay¹⁶ on the woes of ex-machinal art, Benjamin explains how industrial reproduction orphans every Judgement of Paris from its creator parent. In short, a photocopied *Mona Lisa* would be found wanting Leonardo's dying breath. No one minds when a poster is defaced, or goateed, because the original is safe, but dramatically slowing or hastening *Pomp and Circumstance* would be considered taboo because what music we hear, rather than the stuff on which it's printed, stands for Elgar's original artwork; as though every performance instantiated a sacred manuscript, like taking communion. Duchamp's sacrilege is that of blowing out a votive candle. My disagreement with Walter Benjamin, if his essay's argument can be isolated as the perceived lack of historicity in cheaply duplicated art, lies with the notion that visual art is revelatory for having a human maker and that machines lack exactly this. Once the age of mechanical reproduction has begun, inherence by the tenacious virus of history can be thought to include machine-based origination. Since a photocopied Rubens is — if not quite

13 Theodor Adorno, *Philosophy of New Music*, ed. and trans. Robert Hullot-Kentor (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006), 144.

14 According to Adorno, like abstract expressionism negates space, the school of Schoenberg negates time: their music develops no themes but is architecturally predetermined (and isn't the lyrical drama of Brahms feigned, its temporal unfolding long already chiseled into the page?), as directionless as omnipresent space-time.

15 Theodor Adorno, *In Search of Wagner*, trans. Rodney Livingstone (New York: Verso Books, 2005), 63.

16 Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," in *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections*, ed. Hannah Arendt, trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken Books, 2007).

literally—accomplished in plain sight, there is actually more than enough aura to go around. Aura, in this usage, becomes synonymous with our ignorance as to how an image was brought about, as opposed to what shadowy figure is responsible. Architects tugging their scrupulous beards ponder the fact of Brunelleschi pulling his cathedral dome into place, while it is abundantly clear, at least to the Japanese patent holders, how a Xerox rattles off a batch of *Le déjeuner sur l'herbes*.

Beethoven's quartets lie in the storerooms of the publishing house like potatoes in a cellar.¹⁷

10

Lying as style. An advertisement in London for TransferWise cautions that one is being “secretly scammed” when sending money; a jab at Western Union. Thus the former company offers wire and electronic services at a lower rate. Instead of advertising this dull fact, the alleged financial benefit of switching to TransferWise, what is preferable is hyperbole and lambasting one's competitor with the insinuation of dirty practices. Something like old wives' tales and village knowledge is revived by clickbaiters in the form of the “little-known secret” to keeping gutters clear of leaves, which of course turns out to be installing a costlier gutter. Or a specific vegetable that's to be avoided for longevity translates to an inert supplement in bottled form and the rhubarb one had clicked on is nowhere to be found. Aura is simply *a matter of lying*. Lacan's mirror stage, turning oneself into a symbolic object, begins in the Garden and Eve's aboriginal sin is planning, which she hands down to us like an apple: first in the fig leaf's application, then the grinding of lenses for eyewear. Coca-Cola pitches the good life as if to say the eidolon of sexy design is more desirable than salted pelts and lugging a femur around.

The culture industry intentionally integrates its consumers from above. To the detriment of both it forces together the spheres of high and low art, separated for thousands of years.¹⁸

Perhaps we've done little else besides constricting the body and hammering gold. After Dürer, historians of European art like to repeat that the artist is a fool no longer. Exempt from drudgery, she's promoted straight to demiurge, like Hamlet raises himself above death out of mortal fear. Instead of living cheek to jowl with strife, the *Übermensch* becomes a ridiculous figure, whose ire is drawn by a nurse's impossibly thin needle but who loves slaughter. Eden sinks to grief under the collective weight of Adam's names. And in a plot to avoid the stigma of mere industrialization, Henry Ford at last resorted to style.

17 Martin Heidegger, “The Origin of the Work of Art,” in *Basic Writings*, ed. David Farrell Krell (New York: HarperSanFrancisco, 2008).

18 Theodor Adorno, “Culture Industry Reconsidered,” in *The Culture Industry: Selected Essays on Mass Culture*, ed. J.M. Bernstein (New York: Routledge Classics, 2001), 98.

11

Abstraction from. It occurs to me that postimpressionism's depiction of life by luminous degrees might be indistinguishable from purism, on theoretical grounds if not in terms of appearance. Grammatical freedom is essential to both schools. One afternoon the Île de la Grande Jatte loses its leashed monkey, and a lady drops her parasol in the Seine. If nothing else, their difference lies in the former's inclusion of creature comforts. Abandoned through Amédée Ozenfant's approach to full-bodied silhouettes, which saves the bathwater while throwing out the baby that displaced it, the finished product is neither a cake of soap nor rubber ducky but a uniquely allusive husk, though the degree of allusivity varies. The meaning found there is residual in the toy's shade. Georges Seurat erodes his subject just before its boiling point — his circus performers simmer like wasps — but he doesn't replace a lion with its outline. Attention is imparted equally, from the immaterial soil to a gentlewoman's chrysanthemum. Every work of art may well be categorized as abstract, insofar as artists' heads are usually toward reality when they extract from nature. Hardly is it necessary to remind us of the model's distance from its representation. Instead, that banquet of possibilities is intimated and the extent to which she creates it baked in. Art fails unless we empathize with the tunnels and byways of its mediation.

12

O harp and altar. Since the baroque voice is kinetically lightweight, it depends on an accompaniment's ballast — the function of kit drumming — wherefore bass is the Higgs boson of music.

I recognize in the deepest tones of harmony, in the ground-bass, the lowest grades of the will's objectification, inorganic nature, the mass of the planet.¹⁹

Even Chopin's windblown *Aeolian Harp* étude relies on a low-octave whop to avoid coming off as ephemeral.²⁰

13

The definition of insanity. Assumption of metaphysical garb, the aspiration to a Nietzschean level of actualization — a hollow rumor of the philosophy, disappointingly often — is predicated on a look of effort distinguishing, as always, against the unmeant nakedness of beasts. Constant making up responds to a dysphoria in us, our human disgust for the deathward affectlessness of the physical.

19 Arthur Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*, trans. E.J.F. Payne (Mineola: Dover Publications, 1966), 1:258.

20 Oddly enough, the étude sounds worse transcribed for unaccompanied harp.

Of particular interest were the buck's eyes, which glowed electric green in the sodium light and which saw without understanding.²¹

Music long ago distinguished itself from noise with the introduction of repetition, almost synonymous with its basic feature. Astonishing is that doing the same thing over and over does get one different results (the coda to Stravinsky's *Firebird*, for example), giving the lie to insanity's familiar pop definition. After ruling out coincidence, the second coming of a motif cannot but indicate an ordering intelligence.

Long before writing was invented, even before parietal writing was practiced, something was produced which may fundamentally distinguish man from animal: the intentional reproduction of a rhythm.²²

As nature abhors a 90° angle, classical "straight lines" are found only in the stave. Music depends on repetition to tell us *intention was here*, a Nolanesque kind of totem. If not, every move is made at a conceptual loss.

14

Substitutions of bass and treble. In lower octaves the baroque character has a kind of primitive drive.²³ How visually dim the left hand is. Listening to the right's chirrup, we perceive its dark partner to about the extent one notices food-court janitors. The left hand is like a golfer's caddy or musical amanuensis; a once-bright plumb sounding the absolute's weedy depths. Counterpoint appears to us buoyant because the dead weight of bass was traded for a second voice.

Table 1

Treble without Bass

Bass without Treble

When the violin plummets again to earth, nosediving from the stratosphere, those topmost pitches stop altogether. At this point it is helpful to distinguish between what may be called Synthetic and Analytic vocal relationships.

Fugue

Akinetic because Duetic

Synthetic

Kinetics as Narrative

- 21 Drew Dickerson, "Hard Water," *Entropy*, May 9, 2018, <https://entropymag.org/hard-water/>.
- 22 Roland Barthes, "Listening," in *The Responsibility of Forms: Critical Essays on Music, Art, and Representation*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Hill and Wang, 1985), 248.
- 23 Having compared the deeper musical registers to an effect, it might be said that purism has "noise" for its element, an echolocation or sonar feedback of painting.

Analytic

Narrated by Kinetics

The angels of movies are glad to retire their infinite wings in exchange for a taste of sapient fatigue. Think of Gustav Mahler, who pleads for labor's cessation, attempting a kind of suicide-by-exhaustion through the solemnity of a funeral march or, in a Respighian mood, playing at antiquarian. These behemoths relish the idea of dragging their feet.²⁴ Saying again fatigues; for a composer with Alexander Scriabin's constitution it is the earliest sign of a dooming relapse.

Substance of a Body

Relief from the Body

Coming down to earth is the baroque's one real challenge, as when you force the wrong sides of two magnets to touch. But the opposite of a fugue is not cacophony but the corpus callosotomy of isolating bass,²⁵ like the snare confined to the rapper's headphones ("Let not thy left hand know...").

Apart from lounge singers, the fugue is voice's least restricted, or most relaxed, state, for which reason a composition like the *Hammerklavier* culminates in one. If this sounds unorthodox, we've succumb to thinking of Bach as so much simplistic and implausibly frictionless machinery. Besides the Christian liturgy, fugal writing is chiefly what's responsible for the baroque's association with heavenly castles and that dirt nap of immortality. A fugue's intellectual purity is its unfettered thought; it is the filtered water of vocalization, the spirit unencumbered by its corpse.

- 24 "We should get accustomed to seeing tones as creatures," he wrote in his *Harmonielehre*, because music obeys natural urges, just like those found in living organisms." Igor Stravinsky, quoted by Stuart Isacoff, in *A Natural History of the Piano: The Instrument, the Music, the Musicians — From Mozart to Modern Jazz and Everything in Between* (New York: Vintage Books, 2012), 129.
- 25 Bass as the vocal line is just speaking in a deeper timbre. See Chopin's *Mazurka*, op. 6, no. 2, or the third of Liszt's *Liebesträume*, though perhaps no better example exists than the former's *Waltz in A Minor* — the one published in his lifetime — which stalks up and down like a ghost fated to a certain hallway before finding expressive fulfillment in the higher octave's calling, like *Cyrano* relies on Christian and the Phantom, on Christine. In traditional counterpoint it may be impossible for one fiddle to play a strictly accompaniment role, though each supports the other. In Bach's double concertos one hears the lower violin's figuration in tandem with the slow sawing of the higher. Examples of merely trading the vocal line include Beethoven's enigmatic op. 109 in the allegro vivace variation of the *Gesangvoll, mit innigster Empfindung* as well as his *Spring Violin Sonata*. Beethoven then does the reverse of this in the concluding movement of the *Piano Sonata no. 31*, eventually sacrificing a hand to reintroduce the lyrical. With a capacious fugal signature underneath in the left, the right (though these assignments flip, which is typical of Beethoven) swirls about in the air, like *Ariel* above a furious *Caliban* striking the sand with a bone club. In the seventh of György Ligeti's *Musica Ricerata*, how almost *bel canto* the right hand is as it serenely intones a mile above the left's goings-on, as detached as a spirit. Or see the close of the *Emperor Concerto's* first movement, when the orchestra's *aurora borealis* floats above the soloist's little splashes. Slightly collagist is their relationship, despite what we know of a ground's traditional kinship with voice.

Swelling notes in ripples across the blue vault of space
 whose lack of echo spells, especially in October,
 an apotheosis of pure sound.²⁶

Instrumental music continuously set its sights on greater and greater naturalness; this is music's Pinocchio complex, the obsessive worry that it is not real enough, an ultimately futile concern that happens to produce the future. What we end up with is a condition of lawful naturalism, as unaffected as a sneeze but utterly contrived in comparison with a glacier or a bed of tulips, "as if the tonal idiom of the past 350 years were itself given by nature."²⁷ John Cage's *I Ching*-inspired affect intends to clothe a composition's history in the distinguished vestments of supernaturalism, rather than merely redoing the parameters by which music abides and generates itself. This is Sergiu Celibidache's "astral" fourth octave and the sentiment with which Wilhelm Furtwängler, referring to one of his legendary performances of Beethoven's Ninth during the annual Lucerne Festival, tells his wife that he "had one foot in the other world." If *Music of Changes* removes the maker from the made it also disqualifies itself even from artifactual status, let alone the pretension to artistry, unless Cage's ghost still haunts the work. Here the easternized debate over intention has nothing to offer. Every scapular has its Coptic sweatshop, every cowl its factory of threaded needles. *According to the Laws of Chance* fails to conceal that Hans Arp dropped his little pieces of paper on purpose, besides how the torn-up squares gravitate about the middle, eschewing fault lines, and never overlap,²⁸ not unlike the noticeably centralized mist of Jackson Pollock's canvases. It is the tension between an entrée's plated arrangement, the components of food separable to the eye yet organized, and the necessity of forking a bit of everything with each bite, or the coins of pepperoni on a slice, which are always a far cry from equidistant. As if a lemon tree chooses to relinquish its tart fruit as the ellipsoidal lurch and drop.

15

Rounding up in thought. Ignorance of historically contingent "stepping-stones," the finer silt of sub-influential events and persons, is that same denial allowing for hunches like our spherical moon, its most egregious edges smoothed out by the centripetal force of idealization.

26 Joseph Brodsky, "The Hawk's Cry in Autumn," trans. Alan Myers and Joseph Brodsky, in *Collected Poems in English* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2002), 262.

27 Adorno, *Philosophy of New Music*, 13.

28 See M.G. Reed, "Hans (Jean) Arp's Non-Random Chance Collages," *Data Deluge*, December 21, 2010, <http://www.datadeluge.com/2010/12/hans-jean-arp-non-random-chance.html>.

16

Der Wegweiser. Given a little finagling, language also seems to tussle with object/effect aesthetic “bivalence.” In James Merrill’s death-occupied “b o d y,”

Look closely at the letters. Can you see,
entering (stage right), then floating full,
then heading off — so soon —
how like a little kohl-rimmed moon
o plots her course from b to d
— as y, unanswered, knocks at the stage door?²⁹

the consonants in the word “body” inform its central vowel like a shadow gradual falling away provides the visual signposts for dimensionality. Aram Saroyan’s famous *Light* can get us the rest of the way if we notice the unpronounceable inefability of its consonants, the light-like diffuseness of a long string of them.

17

The originality of losers. Art progresses by way of three actions: introduction, origination, and derivation, the first two springing from historical fact. Besides true uniqueness, originality is made possible by our collective *damnatio memoriae* of underdogs, whose contribution is overlooked to begin with and in which case the allegedly new has to be reclassified as derivative. Together, introduction and origination stand for meager brevity, originality’s minimum condition, for the truly germinal is but rudimentary at heart. Perhaps Wagner is most influential among composers, Chopin least; but if originals tend also to basicness, as the lackluster mortar holding together the genre’s lasting achievements, it follows that those of lesser influence more greatly succeed, while they depend so heavily on the fruits of the dead.

18

Der stürmische Morgen. Partiality’s gate is thrown wide with the onset of impressionism, though it doesn’t necessarily begin there.³⁰ Maurice Ravel is called subtle in the extreme, though it is equally justified to proclaim his craft slight at times. Throughout Ravel’s oeuvre, despite some haunting nonchalance, it can feel like he mounts claws and tusks in lieu of worthier trophies, the disjecta of creatures that never lived or beautiful gloss of some substantial else. Impressionism’s appeal is

29 James Merrill, “b o d y,” in *Poems*, ed. Langdon Hammer (New York: Everyman, 2017), 245.

30 Richard Wagner’s *Magic Fire Music* (see Act III of *Die Walküre*, derived from Loge’s motif) seems to me a choice example of ballooning that which was exceedingly slight to begin with. As compared to the Lumineers’ appropriately titled “Patience,” a piano track that for the extent of its sub two minutes dawdles on the verge of a complete thought.

this flitting almostness, like a hummingbird unable to decide on a foxglove or the thin intensity of a solar eclipse's fringe, in which the centermost form is hinted at *in absentia*. Outer boroughs gossip about their cities the way curvature invisibly aches for the circle's linty omphalos. Especially true off the Continent, the fin-de-siècle at its instrumental worst is like a crowd of iridescent flies without a cow to stand on. Romanticism's sharp arc largely gets flattened and chopped up into moments of punctuated equilibrium, the limit case to which is electronica, logically speaking.

Table 2

Complete	Succinct	Partial
Short Rise	Long Rise	Short Rise
Short Climax	Long Climax	Long Passage
Effortless Descent	Tortuous Descent	Effortless Descent
Thematically	Thematically	Thematically
Fragmentary	Contiguous	Fragmentary

Is this how we recommence with straightforwardly programmatic music like Manuel de Falla's *Nights in the Gardens of Spain*, by titling that which is barely there? Or it's that a commonwealth of harmonies federates under the distracting header of eloquent *jardins*. Another worth checking out is Anton Bruckner's monolithic Eighth Symphony, the development involving the abruptest of stops and restarts; this is supposedly due to Bruckner's compositional process of subdividing the score in advance, such that when the music dies away, one guesses that to have been easier than winding down music in-progress or slowly transitioning into its neighbor block. At the level of genus, one might describe electronica as an exaggerated take on climax, which lasts minutes then trails off in fast forward, and consequently be led to believe that what it advances throughout the twentieth century is really the sardine-like density of romanticism. No wonder contiguous structure goes out the window, if the careers of Isaac Albéniz and Gabriel Fauré are any indication.

Attempting the verisimilitude of storm clouds or Tivoli's fountains leads us from wrought urns to reverberation. Bach and his forgotten sons erect the skeleton upon which the romantics graft lungs and imaginary arteries with real blood in them. But then centuries later they've exsanguinated Giuseppe Verdi of his bloody fullness. In other words, what remains is a heartbeat, or not purifying fire but frozen laughter;³¹ a voluptuous austerity, passion apropos of nothing.

We are like a lot of wild
spiders crying together,
but without tears.³²

31 See contemporary Beijing-based artist Yue Minjun.

32 Robert Lowell, "Fall 1961," in *Life Studies and For the Union Dead* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2007), 15.

Art so fractional — the idiotic libretto with lavish choreography and a chorus at its command — must be hypocritical in order to simulate *reflets dans l'eau*, at once thought to work thaumaturgy and disavow contrivance.

A highly modern artistic “technology” paradoxically serves to create an impression of the distant, autochthonous, or mystical, all of which present the aesthetic object as miraculously always already present and thus constitutively repress the question of the production of these aesthetic phenomena.³³

19

Ouroboros's four Os. As with the colorful tale of European painting, classical music's is one of self-imposed, close-to-autonomic compression that seeks greater aesthetic rigor through the exfoliation of dead bars and unkinking any wonky development. If you take a hatchet to popular music's roots, the sap, too sweet and impossible to get off, traces genealogically to a self-obsessed troubadour. Jazz is the combination of Mozartian zip with misanthropy's search for philosophical closure and blues has all the neurasthenia of Mahler's Ninth Symphony; bop is as maladjusted as Kafka, like a recluse who's been prescribed amphetamines. Besides kinetic freedom, jazz also determines itself to be narratively unfixated, with cadenza-like permission to skip halfway up a romantic threshold or teleport, as it were, to the home chords. Jazz exhibits collagist tendencies, which is merely to say the will to juxtaposition, not wholly unattributable to demands present in the music. Based on these demands, the fetterless god does as it feels. Song's border shrinks and shrinks until the invention of the smash hit reduces it to an indigestible pit. The nightclub's hot pulsating is a third act extended as the whole play, as happens when the uber-popular wedding marches of Mendelssohn and Wagner³⁴ are transplanted. What was introduction, explication, or conclusion in its authorized environment — an organ snug in its body — becomes the Sunday composer's bread and butter, whose surgeries reek of foreignness. As is universally the case with halfway-decent art, there is a fragrant leaf but no cigar.

Throughout the first installment in the *Die Hard* franchise, which takes place on Christmas Eve, Beethoven's *Ode to Joy* plays incessantly, not as soundtracking but diegetically *en scene*; the effect is to ensure the recognizability of that thematic apogee. As such, if the *Ode* missed it'll just be caught later.

One phrase
Of Bach going round and round
In her head.³⁵

33 Adrian Daub, “Sonic Dreamworlds: Benjamin, Adorno, and the Phantasmagoria of the Opera House,” in *A Companion to the Works of Walter Benjamin*, ed. Rolf J. Goebel (Rochester: Camden House, 2009), 279.

34 Note here an obvious historical irony.

35 Derek Mahon, “An Old Lady,” in *Selected Poems* (New York: Penguin Books, 1993), 126.

With this narrow ambit, whenever one notices the background music its prestige is lucratively appreciated. Beethoven's seventy-minute ziggurat, abridged like Homer's *Odyssey* to a skirmish. Friedrich Schiller's contribution is lost in the cultural shuffle; but then this choral send-off, widely disseminated as anthem and hymn tune, is doubtless all many of us know of the symphony, as is true of Debussy's *Suite bergamasque*. Another example is Max Richter's re-composition of the *Four Seasons*, a fresh, gorgeously splintered interpretation of a tiresome baroque staple that filters Vivaldi through crystal. Daniel Hope begins the first movement on a clucking redolent of Jean-Philippe Rameau's guttural hen, whereafter the familiar themes are simultaneously shied from and kept in sight.

'Tis almost morning. I would have thee gone,
 And yet no farther than a wanton's bird,
 That lets it hop a little from his hand,
 Like a poor prisoner in his twisted gyves,
 And with a silken thread plucks it back again,
 So loving-jealous of his liberty.³⁶

Isn't this temperament also the balloonist's, who placidly descends until a blast of hot air carries her a while longer. These programmatic homages to the weather do offer a smorgasbord of melodies, making it difficult to not characterize Richter's project as high art saved from its own good fortune. After a certain point, electronic minimalism best compares with the ouroboros of a power strip plugged into itself. Music consisting of little more than a synthetic beat³⁷ exists at the end of its teleological plank; not leaping ahead but as though one could scale a mountain entirely in the form of summiting.

Real dance, in contradistinction to mature music, is a temporally static art, a turning in circles, movement without progression.³⁸

Except this is not to say *the* end of music's story. I'd argue that impressionism and abstract expressionism, if one accepts a timeline that bases European painting on epochs of perspectival inflation and contraction, stand quintessentially for the polar outcomes of that narrative. Composers likewise, after finding their pots of gold, change direction with the reintroduction of tonality and humbler instrumentation. In making it new the artist concocts sophisticated excuses just to utilize that which has been deemed obsolete.

36 William Shakespeare, *Romeo and Juliet*, eds. Barbara A. Mowat and Paul Werstine (New York: Washington Square Press, 2004), 2.3.190–95.

37 Such a brute literalization of tempo, like the metronome's undeath, awkwardly flops about on its own, as Beethoven would if a conductor eliminated everything but the Ninth's double basses and slaps of percussion.

38 Adorno, *Philosophy of New Music*, 143.

20

Covers and their contents. Judging against a standard of beauty unproblematically assumes that others also convey themselves along canals of fashion and mien, steering clear of the allegation of a sheepish uniformity. It makes obvious sense why a book's cover, carrying the imprimaturs of writer and publisher, will attempt at least to convey its merits, even hype them. And there's a logic to outfits. Anyone privileged enough to boast of multiple pairs of stilettos, besides an arsenal of makeup and knack for its application, fittingly tries to pair that evening's nonverbal cues.

21

As within, so without. Pixar's filmography is a breeding ground for visual rhetoric favoring idea over object, insofar as morphology and a character's ethical complexion can be depended on to conform to one another. In the poster for *Monsters University*, the stereotyped "jox" are abrasive and fittingly hideous compared with their nicer rivals, equipped (ostensibly from birth, lending the franchise a determinist reading) with unsightly lobster claws and a spider's excess of eyeballs. Basically, they're an ethics-based homunculi, after the cortical variety, mapped like the lines in a palm and physically outfitted according to inclination. It's why angels are generally depicted winged and the saints in paintings, who should go on being holier-than whether one recognized them or not, are topped with halos and clutching their respective calling cards.

Traditional painting had addressed itself to the mind, had done everything it could to facilitate the sense of recognition — this boy has a slingshot, so he must be David.³⁹

With William Blake's water-and-ink illustration of Capaneus, out of the hundred made for the *Divine Comedy*, the English pamphleteer-mystic leaves us as confused as Dante. Note the appalling lack of distinguishing features; our impression of the reclined sinner, in other words, is that of his ambiguity, for Capaneus doesn't occupy hell in any *necessary* sense, a few licks of sulfurous flame notwithstanding. In good concerto writing a soloist, accompanied the orchestra, is at pains to justify its thematic as well as technical preeminence through either displays of virtuosity or sobriety. Or why isolate a clarinet in the first place? Blake's man is handsomely comfortable; he would look no different transferred to an Italian divan. Satan by the hand of Gustave Doré — believably anguished, equipped with bat wings and Augustan breastplate — clears the aforementioned pitfall by a mile through authority of design, while for me no amount of messianic zeal, however genuine, can redeem these formulaic books. One feels Blake's interpretation of the once-glorious prince with his rebel angels to be a *felix culpa*.

It is explained in *The Terminator* that previous models of the time-travelling assassin had plastic skin, while the current generation's living tissue sweats and

39 Daniel Albright, *Panaesthetics: On the Unity and Diversity of the Arts* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014), 79.

bleeds, making them tough to descry in a pool hall. Special effects later appear to necessitate use of a rubber mock-up for Schwarzenegger's cybernetic head. Evidently the audience, in a feat of semiotic gymnastics, is able to categorically assimilate the mannequin as a fabricated studio prop, sublimating the actor's synthetic flesh into Skynet's lifelike alternative.

The transmogrification of one transforms the substance of the other: a flavorless margarine makes for a tastier butter, a vitamin-enriched margarine makes for a more unhealthy butter, and so on. Butter and margarine are not held together by a force of nature — still less by the force of semblance — but by contingent encounter.⁴⁰

The football players in thirty-second television spots for *SportsCenter* stay in uniform, whether Tom Brady's punching a timecard or fumbling with the copier. Artists frequently leave their hired models too exposed, with a shawl and spear thrown down at the last second for context; they're so thoroughly unspecific you wouldn't know there was a subtext without the title's help. Jacques-Louis David arranges his nude, includes a few arrows, and calls it *Patroclus*. Or there's Philip Burne-Jones's embarrassing *Vampire*, desperate to titillate, and Rodin's *Thinker*, posed for the posture's sake. In *Eyes Wide Shut*, a discrete snippet of conversation from earlier, recalled in Dr. Hartford's temporarily audible mind, a convention endemic to worse films, helps the audience identify a woman's body in the morgue, now stripped of its feathered headdress and mask.

22

Mirror, mirror. In René Magritte's *La reproduction interdite*,⁴¹ a satisfying logic can be worked out. Upon stepping into the path of an oncoming mirror, whose silent wish is actually to see themselves duplicated? From the foreground where Magritte lets us observe, in a mirror we see the back of Edward James, a friend of the painter. For Magritte, this is business as usual, the drollery flatly surreal (*whoops* — he's got the wrong side).

- 40 David B. Clarke, *Encyclopedia of Consumer Culture*, s. v. "Hyperreality," ed. Dale Southerton (Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 2011). Oppositely, through co-option of dentistry by advertisers naturally yellow calcium is thought to be bright white.
- 41 Magritte playfully refers to what he interprets as the mirror not showing the solitary man's front. The title, "Not to be reproduced," thus comes in the form of the detached observation, as if language controlled such things. Against this interpretation of the painting, however, it could be said Magritte playfully touches on the intuitive position, that the mirror is in fact reproducing James, instead of doing its usual inversion. The artist is like a little boy disobeying the familiar "Keep Off" sign with mirthful trudging. He proceeds by way of mocking protest and takes the message literally by duplicating things.

You can always ask, pointing to an object in a photograph — a building, say — what lies behind it, totally obscured by it. This only accidentally makes sense when asked of an object in a painting.⁴²

Assumption though it may be, acknowledged or as unconscious as routine, he literalizes a rule for the mirror and gives it teeth: whatever is held up multiplies. How guiltily pleasurable this is, the kind of Rumpelstiltskinian enforcement that drives fairy tales. Anything *in front of*. Yes, the greased whorl and jacket back are there, caught in reflection's trawl; or rather within its yellow frame, like how the glass that is "missing" comprises a surface area exactly coterminous with the man's dimensions. Except in a luscious double-feature like Édouard Manet's quixotically offset *A Bar at the Folies-Bergère*, a painting finds employment on a haploid basis. Museumgoers supply the absent half, like a server's tips compensate her legal wage. It is art lovers doing this agentful looking, shining vitality into *La reproduction's* specular underlayment.

He is staring at a point to which, even though it is invisible, we, the spectators, can easily assign an object, since it is we, ourselves, who are that point.⁴³

The subject lacks apartness, acutely so. It being an outsider's viewpoint that holds the mirror rapt, the sight of James from behind, I am compelled to believe the crystal ball attuned to my point of view, I the looking-at-art; that is to say, contrary to Magritte's subject, for whom spectation is a wry joke. I see a sable coat — and *Alsjeblieft!*, the generous mirror doubles my vision. In anticipation of being seen, the side every bystander confronts is a bifurcated coin. However one attempts to pry it free, the nickel is glued firmly to the pavement.⁴⁴

And here is the one-eyed merchant, and this card,
Which is blank, is something he carries on his back,
Which I am forbidden to see.⁴⁵

As if there could be a reciprocal as well as meaningful layer to a painting. Thankfully ours aren't compound eyes, for there is too much reality to digest. Even at its earliest incarnation is cubism suffocatingly robust. If the face of this *Rückenfigur* did show a reflection, it might seem plausible that the visage sandwiches between his real and polished selves. In *Alice in Wonderland*, mirror-James would be

42 Stanley Cavell, *The World Viewed: Reflections on the Ontology of Film* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1979), 23.

43 Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archeology of the Human Sciences* (New York: Routledge Classics, 2002), 4.

44 See the much-duplicated bit of clickbait that shows a slashed white tee and the caption, "How many holes are in this T-shirt?" Besides the misleading gashes themselves, the meme relies on the unlikelihood of our interpreting the digital graphic instead as an article of real, three-dimensional clothing. In addition to four openings for the neck, sleeves, and waist, seeing through an actual shirt means each hole is counted twice.

45 T.S. Eliot, "The Waste Land," in *The Poems of T.S. Eliot*, eds. Christopher Ricks and James McCue (London: Faber & Faber, 2015), 1:327.

permitted to wear his obverse.⁴⁶ Given the abject insentience of James and all this *mise-en-scène*, being the lone psychology before the mirror, it is as if ego inserts itself, facilitating the gray ubiety of a faux version and contributing to *La reproduction's* tautological force. It anticipates *Ceci n'est pas une pipe* and other treacheries, which leads me to say that the content of a visual artist's mirror is just that. A mirror shortchanges, flipping along the hotdog axis objects that are closer than they appear. Magritte's point is our misperception; ready to show who's fairest, this cauldron holds all possible images. He dutifully reproduces what there is of James, who hasn't an anterior to show.

The metaphor of the mirror is arch as well as bestial — we have long since rendered demonic a creature without reflection.⁴⁷

23

Words in air. Inking takeaway bags at the cafe, I press the stamp into its accompanying pad, trying to hold the cut die steady on its sponge. Although naturally the idea is to wet the die's slogan-logo and leave the same on paper, a superstitious part of me feels that it is important to keep deathly still while the stamp is in contact with the black pad; I tell myself that skating around will somehow distort the characters slumbering there. As if one took letters from the ink,⁴⁸ matching their combined outline squarely to the rubber and lifting straight off, this surplus carried in the manner of a junkyard magnet's scrap metal or like the clipboard's copied load. Isn't there a depthlessness to opening the manila folder on one's desktop and clicking Penrosewise through subfolders. Mario flies up a carpeted staircase without progressing, endlessly chasing the splashable portrait around the corner.

He never felt twice the same about the flecked river,
Which kept flowing and never the same way twice, flowing

Through many places, as if it stood still in one.⁴⁹

- 46 Shakespeare's "mirror held up to nature" doesn't exhibit lateral inversion exactly but proposes a dream mirror capable of showing nature what it is to us, implying something closer to lossless echo. Let alone that nature should be capable of reflecting on itself, in which case it would innocently mistake the reflection of flowers or salty waves for stuff ahead of it in contiguous space, having no notion of a discrete self, as with the imposition of a magic portal; as if nature were listening and, a tragedy perfectly Greek, deaf exclusively to its own pronouncements. Or like the equally pointless act of telling truth to power: while power knows perfectly well what it is doing all the time, nature is incapable of knowing.
- 47 William Logan, "Milton in the Modern: The Invention of Personality," in *The Undiscovered Country: Poetry in the Age of Tin* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), 217.
- 48 As depicted in the Ebbo Gospels, from Saint Matthew's ink horn a line can be drawn to an angel on the farther hill. From the angel's right hand an unfurled scroll literally infuses the pigment with God's word.
- 49 Wallace Stevens, "This Solitude of Cataracts," in *The Collected Poems of Wallace*

In first-person shooters, hitboxes only register bullet lines that fall inside their crisp territories, such that ammunition occasionally passes through an opponent's Kevlar without inflicting the least harm. Loosing arrows at a real-life target, with arrows that miss the outermost band it's sometimes as though they encounter neither target nor hay bale but disappear altogether.

24

The musical neutrino. An independent note, through reverberating to itself, nevertheless collects force.

Like a meteor
gathers within its heaviness no more than
the sum of flight: and weighs nothing but arrival.⁵⁰

An isolated pitch, devoid of its retaliatory echo, appears as one-dimensional as the point did to Euclid and the students dragging his new geometry through the dirt. As a massless music, the baroque falls below a listener's level of absorption the instant after it is played, drifting toward one uniform field like a flake landing among its own kind. There singular notes are indistinguishable, owing to their equivalence. A baroque chord is thus fingered *in vacuo*. It reaches the congregants in their pews for the duration of its sounding, or so long as air whistles in its pipes. Romanticism is differentiated by the psychologization of a thing, the impression we have that a musical work can be literally introspective. Along George Berkeley's line of thought, such music seems to demand our attentiveness, unless *Schafe können sicher weiden* can serve as its own shepherd.

Yes — the springtime needed you. Often a star
was waiting for you to notice it. A wave rolled toward you
out of the distant past, or as you walked
under an open window, a violin
yielded itself to your hearing.⁵¹

25

Phases of the moon. If we try to distinguish between the methodologies of abstract figural painting, two choices seem available to the artist: imitation of natural effects, like the obstruction that casts a shadow, and partial coherence, as with rendering the moon's sphere alone.

Stevens (New York: Vintage Books, 2015), 449.

50 Rainer Maria Rilke, "The Spanish Trilogy," in *The Selected Poetry of Rainer Maria Rilke*, ed. and trans. Stephen Mitchell (New York: Vintage International, 1989), 119.

51 Rainer Maria Rilke, "Duino Elegies," in *The Selected Poetry of Rainer Maria Rilke*, 151.

The lesson is precisely that the direct experience of the unity of a body, where the voice seems to fit its organic whole, involves a necessary mystification; in order to get to the truth, one has to tear this unity apart, to focus on one of its aspects in isolation, and then to allow this element to color our entire perception.⁵²

To the extent that what is painted continues to refer to a meaningful source object or phenomenon, as its incomplete copy, the abstract and the representational come to form the diametrical polarities of a sliding scale; but this is the same difference, between what may be highly representational or less abstract. All representation is at least slightly abstract, while all abstraction, if we stuck to the etymology of “to draw away,” should be said contain a minimum of life. Mountains of art fit the definition of representational, every square centimeter of which pales in naturalism if compared with a grain of sand.

What is complete is only the ideal part of the object, which participates with other parts of objects in the Idea (other relations, other singular points), but never constitutes an integral whole as such.⁵³

The phrase “abstractly representational” is suitable for works of art that more dilute reality than start from scratch, such as Amédée Ozenfant’s *Sleeping Canyon*, which has the opacity of Mars and yet is no less understandable than music. How convincingly his village of mudbrick adobes glows above its watery reflection, caught in moonlight. As Renoir brought effects front and center, like the dappling of light through a tree’s boughs, normally deployed in tandem during neoclassicism if at all, and Debussy would oftener elongate a tail than set about building the leopard itself.

26

Hog the limelight. The film industry’s dependence on larding directors’ scores with a softly ululating chorus might be understood through a categorization of voice by number of speakers and diversity of topic, whether what’s sung is shared among a like-minded group or fought over by rivals. As Theodor Adorno points out, there would be in the opposite a certain ontic mismatch, the “incongruity of the idea of a solipsistic composition for a large orchestra.”⁵⁴ Homophonic polyphony in this case, kitty-corner to heterophonic monophony, is responsible in

- 52 Slavoj Žižek, *Less Than Nothing: Hegel and the Shadow of Dialectical Materialism* (New York: Verso, 2012), 676.
- 53 Gilles Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, trans. Paul Patton (New York: Continuum, 2001), 209.
- 54 Adorno, *Philosophy of New Music*, 18. Adorno goes on to explain that a dissonant chord can be thought of as polyphonic, insofar as its component tones “repel” one another; while consonance suggests the agreeable sacrifice of parts toward a richer mono-thought, in a sense the dissonant grouping fails to blend its things despite their being sounded together and which thus resemble, instead of a team unified in its message, so many infighting soloists.

large part for the second half of the twentieth century's distinctly "schizophrenic" attitude.


The tumult in the heart
keeps asking questions.
And then it stops and undertakes to answer
in the same tone of voice.
No one could tell the difference.⁵⁵

Because a chorus has no locatable ego, it is able to speak without detracting from the hero's chandelier of a personality. Classable as an organless body, the chorus further resembles nonrepresentational art's fortifications of substanceless coherence. As with nearly all of Anton Bruckner's work, his symphonies, so beautifully similar one another, are like the bloom on a mushroom cloud without the all-powerful split, this because Bruckner really has but dilated half-ideas at best, which the master amplifies by way of orchestral firepower and dye.

27

Singular unless plural. Numerical difference agrees felicitously with what I understand of spatial distance as being reducible to either unification or separateness. Categorically, I'm able to see three distinctions: absence (uncountable), singular presence, and plural presence. Neither speaks to the question of distance, only that two or more frosty asteroids can or cannot be massed together in terms of location or what we think of as identity. Ontological independence relies on the separate but related bodies' estimation by an observer, the length of time light needs to deliver its telegram; that is, if there's to be anything meaningful to their divorce.

As well as what? Look, two sides, one pin. Two and one. If I straighten it out, it's one. If I bend it it's two but it's still one. It means 'these two are one.' But if I snap it – then they're two, two.⁵⁶

Besides a feeling of unspecifically gross magnitude, only an aphonic difference lies between 5 and 15,000 until either is anchored to a phenomenon. Insofar as "five," 5, and especially  can be glared at without instantly reaching for one's signifier,⁵⁷ numerals but also loitering letters, to a lesser degree, afford us the experience of logogrammatic ignorance ("What he wanted his alphabet to convey was the sensation children feel with books they cannot yet understand, although they see that the writing makes sense for adults"⁵⁸), a refreshing liberty wherever literacy is so-

55 Elizabeth Bishop, "Four Poems," in *Poems* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2011), 74.

56 August Strindberg, *A Dream Play*, trans. Caryl Churchill (London: Nick Hern Books, 2005), 27.

57 Ephemeral associations leap to mind, but these can be safely distinguished from definitions.

58 *Wikipedia*, s.v. "Codex Seraphinianus."

cially mandated. Archaisms may be unfamiliar but it is clear that provisional answers exist, subject to agreement. Except for asemic writing and various other gibberish without semantic content, there's no orphaned word whose ancestry cannot in principle be flushed out of its hiding place; and encountering 911 in the wilds of pi is distinct from the emergency hotline. Awaiting its trillionth designation,⁵⁹ the forgotten symbols gather dust like unplayed sheet music.

That is to say, the existence of the enigma relies on inexchangeability with words. At the same time, the enigma can be enigma when it has a relationship to something other than itself. In other words, it can be enigma only as a *sign*. So as long as an enigma is an enigma, it will never coincide with itself as physical reality.⁶⁰

As immaterial as scientific vocabulary, compared with the forest of referents a word has bonded to, numbers outside the Kuiper belt of 1 and -1 and find themselves through a gingerbread trail leading to meaningful sums; these are likewise constitutive of groupness, an implied thing. Isn't the different between plain nothing and the absence of a negative sum analogous to missing a loved one versus addressing her spirit. Benched integers float in an almost supernatural dormancy like djinns or the Christian dead, awaiting the lecturer's rub of chalk, the trumpet calling for their application, when they will be brought onto the field of mathematics through this physical host.

A number, in any case,
is also a word and, as such, a device
or gesture that melts away without a trace,
like a small cube of ice.⁶¹

- 59 Of course usage typically doesn't stick to numbers, though the historical fact be irrevocable. To paraphrase Maurice Merleau-Ponty, every semantic act as it arises is driven into time like a wedge, where it will always be true that it has taken place.
- 60 Takashi Nagao, "Yves Tanguy and Multiplication of the Arcs," *Trying to See the Invisible, It's Just Misunderstanding*, May 30, 2013, <http://kaitentou.blogspot.com/2013/05/yves-tanguy-and-multiplication-of-arcs.html>.
- 61 Joseph Brodsky, "Lullaby of Cape Cod," trans. Anthony Hecht, in *Collected Poems in English*, 127.

28

Table 3

Written Print and Stamped Script as Dishonest	Stamped Print and Written Script as Honest	Stamped as Synthetic and Written as Analytic
Written print emancipates what is without the energy to act, like a frog vivified by electricity.	Stamped print bounds what is already lifeless.	Stamping cuts a script from its context of kinetic flow over space.
A stamped script is basically collagist.	A written script is as gracefully energetic as jiu-jitsu; that is, for being directive.	Written print is nature bridled.

29

On the uses and abuses of cubism. As an expedient for slicing up reality, a cubism of sculpture is in a sense pointless, for wouldn't these additional cuts have already been available to anyone on two legs or a set of wheels? Otherwise, the visual flavor Louis Vauxcelles's coinage means is duly reproduced in clay or marble. Analytical cubism adds something like the rump and loin where priorly there was naught but what the beholder anticipated. Jacques Lipchitz hauls the guitarist's out-of-sight planes and edges into the fore until the subject becomes the half-recognizable scrunch of a twisting, fretted neck, one lifted knee, and downcast eyes. Unless one is trying to find the dog in Paolo Veronese's *Wedding Feast at Cana*. When it comes to a magnificent painting hung in bright light, one simply sits.

In verbal fiction, the narrator may or may not give us a visual bearing. He may let us peer over a character's shoulder, or he may represent something from a generalized perspective, commenting indifferently on the front, sides, and back of the object, disregarding how it is possible to see all these parts in the same glance. He doesn't have to account for his physical position at all.⁶²

Exceedingly literal cubist sculpture brings up the rear severely. The round is brought flat and there's seemingly little reason to inspect a backside; nothing like the *David's* hindquarters, though it is perfectly correct to think of Umberto Boccioni's examples of human locomotion like long-exposure photographs. In truth, doing so might violate whatever is the sculptural alternative for a fourth wall, like lifting a Chagall or Sisley away from its hardware to peek at the unprepared observe. Isn't it ironic that cubism makes a genius like Lipchitz a bit static? It is petrifying, for the artwork, to let one's attention glaze over and simultaneously take in every instantiation of a passing cyclist;⁶³ when, like ducklings trailing after their mother, a line of action relates one elapsing subject's last several frames in tem-

62 Seymour Chatman, "What Novels Can Do That Films Can't (And Vice Versa)," *Critical Inquiry* 7, no. 1 (Autumn 1980): 132–33.

63 See the titular work by Russian painter Natalia Goncharova.

poral deference to the leader. Italian art took its first steps toward this style with a plurality of Christs hiking across the Tuscan landscape and Agostino Novello's helpful saint turning up all over Siena. The gimmick was eventually dropped for the iconographical equivalent of *le mot juste*.

The privilege of sculpture, according to the lectures one hears as an undergraduate, has been its comparative freedom, that of circumnavigable figures stranded on pedestal isles but also Donatello's peninsular *Saint George*, connected to his niche by an isthmus of yellow marble. Picasso and Braque's gift then was safe passage from the dogma of painting, its long conformity whatever vantage point was most advantageous. Atlases aren't needlessly cubist but flatten a globe for the sake of readability, the motive behind changing a lens's focal length as much as Anthony van Dyck's *Charles I in Three Positions* and unlike a paperback splayed face-down in one's lap, where the title and publisher's logo fire together, a needlessly redundant trio of advertisements.

She lifted it and stood in front of the three-folded mirror, so that she could see three separate versions of her rather heavy, yet handsome, face; and also, outside the glass, a slip of terrace, lawn and tree tops.⁶⁴

Having no such handicap except a desire to break nonexistent chains, before long sculpture succumbs to the bored angel's ingratitude, like Michelangelo bound his slaves with an old strip of fabric. Higher registers of truth come with renouncing the blessing. Richie Rich shrugs at his inheritance, outfitted for a long afternoon dedicated to thrifting. So pill-taking is fetishized, now that we've conquered polio and malaria at home.

The emergence of pessimistic philosophies is by no means a sign of some great and terrible distress; rather, these question marks regarding the worth of life arise when the human condition has been so improved and ameliorated that the inevitable mosquito bites of body and soul are found to be altogether too gruesome and gory, and in the poverty of their experience of actual pain, people will even take *being troubled by ideas* to be suffering of the highest order.⁶⁵

30

Totum pro parte. One should be forgiven for guessing the meaning of "wizened" based on the third letter's orthographic angularity, its malformed shape the result of drying off-kilter or having been struck by lightning.

At times the sound of a vocable, or the force of a letter, reveals and defines the real thought attached to a word.⁶⁶

64 Virginia Woolf, *Between the Acts*, ed. Frank Kermode (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 12.

65 Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Joyous Science*, ed. and trans. R. Kevin Hill (New York: Penguin Books, 2019), 71.

66 Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, trans. Maria Jolas (Boston: Beacon Press,

As with “zigzag,” there’s something autological about the frequency of z.

31

Toward some flashing scene. A firework’s abstractly emphatic gesture has a whiff of virtuality to it, like staring into the psychedelic eye of a threatless projectile. Gunpowder doesn’t flare and expire elsewhere, in some localized patch of sky but is exploded directly at us. The field of the blast, if not the rocket’s trajectory, opens within that same three-dimensional space the public shares with mosquitos, the families’ bubbles thronging the river. To admire a catalyzing sparkler crosses what’s engrossing about bonfires with an unflinching look into a cocked gun.

And pity, like a naked new-born babe,
Striding the blast, or heaven’s cherubim, horsed
Upon the sightless couriers of the air,
Shall blow the horrid deed in every eye⁶⁷

Our serenity before the distending blast cannot, however, be solely attributed to the tingling gratification of our safe distance dawning on us, which involves the comfy difference between shelter and exposure. Artificial spectacle—the emptiest form of consumption imaginable, being as costly as a thirty-second Super Bowl commercial and equally fleeting—dovetails with the insistence that one can’t simply let pleasure spoil, as though it were an apricot; a cherished American commandment born from scarcity and down-home sense, now metastasized into everybody’s panicked urge to record holidays. Absorbed, the commodity does no harm. One’s active stupor in this is fine, like staring down opposing traffic when the light’s red. As such, the hazard is felt not to expand in every direction but change in roughly one place, as though the work of a projectionist.

Before the picture is on, it’s a black, dark screen, and then light thrown on. Are we basically not staring into a toilet bowl and waiting for things to reappear out of the toilet?⁶⁸

32

Confronting the novelty of algorithms. Guised in the minimalist ethos of a quasi-skeptical *ARTnews* think piece, editorial bickering continues to erupt over the implications of artificially produced paintings and fugues based on algorithms, generated from overfed neural libraries. These flames are less sparked by what Google’s team or a rogue programmer has coughed up than purposefully stoked for internet frisson, something to periodically occupy the trending column and,

1994), 198.

67 William Shakespeare, *Macbeth*, eds. Barbara A. Mowat and Paul Werstine (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2013), 1.7.21–24.

68 Slavoj Žižek, quoted in Sophie Fiennes, dir., *The Pervert’s Guide to Cinema* (ICA Films, 2006).

according to plan, serve as goal post for a professional fumer like Jerry Saltz. Insinuations, of bot art glutting auction lots and scrutinizing for the umpteenth time “the human,” begin to lard the discourse of popular magazines. Curveballs and the soft bombast of tweeting rhetoricians, like with the hydra-headed boy’s club of theoretical physicists, are misplaced, their implications disappointing because they confirm a deficit among the field’s top influencers. Sotheby’s and Christie’s shall be all the richer if the houses don’t mismanage themselves to insolvency first. Critics tacitly dilute their venom to suit a bookless public that is accustomed to calculating at a glance, one that assumes the success of a canvas or violin concerto to depend on its telos, the earthly result of a quest whose hoofprints the tide couldn’t help washing out. Or doing a leisurely thing dexterously. Art long ago tossed its horsehair sword into the Arthurian lake in exchange for the intentionality of a typewriter, whereas Giotto painted adjacent to theory only to get lumped into anecdote’s great pile, say the lees Vasari later bottled. For today’s draftsperson finesse is only half the story.

Art Basel’s towering, Switzerland-based Babel of a thousand tongues is professionally inaccessible without the footbridges of a dozen philosophers and the core ability that the Delaunays and Gustons pretty much withheld. Leonardo’s notebooks are Picasso’s decade of schooling. Jean-Michel Basquiat’s furiously eked-out primitives, their crowns fashioned from the city’s barbed-off ghettos, are superficial compared to that Avalon of non-finite possibilities: adding to one’s orchard and choosing as much fruit as two hands carry. It is tempting to suggest that the major European composer, to all but forget the profession’s lower castes, is almost without exception lopsidedly talented. Generally style is not shopping for costumes, a kind of lenient bathing in one’s options. It shouldn’t be heretical to observe in Schumann and Liszt deep insufficiencies of technical facility and melodic attunement, respectively. In heralding an age of art by algorithm, that immaculate dream of intelligent-as-hell painting and composition by the yard at last within our reach, thanks to utopian computer specifications and faultless software, we misunderstand the composer’s job altogether. They’re already promising more Mozart. With disappointing regularity, these futures amount to a stale hologram peddling the worst bromides. This line of microprocessor-intensive crap, whether the pareidolic oil-puddles of Google’s DeepDream, which bear a striking resemblance to Charles Burchfield’s work, or Hatsune Miku, a synthesinger disguised as a Japanese sixteen-year-old complete with turquoise pigtails, is fundamentally bankrupt by design. Almost deliberately kitsch but coming off as credible proof of the concept to international cash cows, who browse YouTube like the rest of us and for whom the smell of new tech means there’s another hard-on to be had. It ought to bother us when the *MIT Technology Review* subtitles an article,⁶⁹ “Can you tell the difference between music composed by Bach and by a neural network?” In the main, those who report being familiar with the work of Johann Sebastian Bach cannot, despite an often laughable disparity between the fake and its lauded source, which says nothing of substance in regard to Bach and a depressing lot about the twenty-first century. Supposing artificial intelligence does craft a true

69 Emerging Technology from the arXiv, “Deep-Learning Machine Listens to Bach, Then Writes Its Own Music in the Same Style,” *MIT Technology Review*, December 14, 2016, <https://www.technologyreview.com/s/603137/deep-learning-machine-listens-to-bach-then-writes-its-own-music-in-the-same-style/>.

pièce de résistance under conditions of creative moderation against a backdrop overflowing with culture, who could tell?

33

Guesswork. Culture as an act of second-hand interpretation and dubious conservatorship, made across the gulf of subgroups connected by the thinnest of rope bridges, an intuitive leap codified in language, lessens our surprise when fantasy stories, inclusive of books, movies, and filmic television, wholeheartedly abide the guileless hero's feelings, who uses instinct to piece together a supernatural dilemma.

A way of life in which everything is solved in the simplest and most comfortable way, in which a car is no heavier than a straw hat and the fruit on the tree becomes round as quickly as a hot-air balloon.⁷⁰

Another covert “honor thyself,” these fictions stage what Hegel adjudges the intellectual sloth's supplication to receive wisdom overnight, a barb as lethally applicable to cross-legged yogis and the conspicuously chic who press together their henna-covered hands for the duration of a photograph as the so-called law of attraction, with its sad, perpetually conned adherents chanting to themselves about windfalls of money and a willed magnetism, something like Melquíades's magical irons.

But above all—and this is why aesthetes so abhor pedagogues and pedagogy—the rational teaching of art provides substitutes for direct experience, it offers short cuts on the long path of familiarization, it makes possible practices which are the product of concepts and rules instead of springing from the supposed spontaneity of taste, thereby offering a solution to those who hope to make up for lost time.⁷¹

Studio Ghibli's breezily watchable *Spirited Away* contains an affecting scene in which Chihiro, the film's gumptious protagonist, must revive her grievously injured friend: “Haku, the River God gave me this [herbal cake]. Eat it, maybe it'll help.” And like that, Haku promptly recovers. Accept this plain token of no apparent use and have faith, expecting to activate the long-inert charm or unlock a mysterious door “when the time is right.” Why shouldn't the charm backfire and permanently nullify, the door seal for all eternity? But Chihiro's is precisely the correct move to have taken with no especial amount of dexterity or bodily strength required. Advancing the plot is a capital of magic, its acquisition and dispensation.

70 Walter Benjamin, “Experience and Poverty,” trans. Rodney Livingstone, in *Walter Benjamin: Selected Writings*, eds. Michael W. Jennings, Howard Eiland, and Gary Smith (Cambridge: The Belknap Press, 2005), 2.2.735.

71 Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, trans. Richard Nice (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996), 68.

34

In the village is a hamlet. Is sharing and reporting on celebrity gossip indicative of a global village? Despite role-playing at knowing the neighbor's laundry, a delusional cherry-pick of factoids, the highest echelon of social media is closer to spying on exhibitionists. Lady Godivas thoroughly enjoy their millions-strong herd, but a follower is seldom followed in return. Peeping Tom doesn't find himself invited to dinner.

35

In the lowest deep. I wonder if gazing into a totally absorptive *lusus naturae* like Vantablack, developed by a British laboratory specializing in nanotubes, is the closest we might come to encountering things-in-themselves outside of religion. Maybe a self-cancelling experience, directly looking at the imperceptible.

No light; but rather darkness visible.⁷²

If the outset of vision depends on the interception of stimuli, appreciating a lack of qualia seems both advantageous and like a deafening rout, for although the brain's tiny influence basically stays out of it, at the same time one has nothing to go on. While we might conclude that ultimately there is but information, I also suspect that perceptual trivialities do contribute, the cause of a visual feature being traceable to physics; I guess what I mean by this is that the positive fact of experiencing nothing is as at odds with closing one's eyes as staring at the sun is to blindness. Appearance rarely if ever survives a *Honey, I...* kind of reduction, like microbes grope in their focal-aborrent goo except while sporting hypothetical eyes, for all one garners from the light-bearing aboveground.

36

Chance and systematic music. John Cage's aleatory experiments undoubtedly have the preposterously erratic ring of twelve-tone serial music, but compared with atonality, Cagean noise has no underlying system, besides the acoustics of aluminum or an electrified cactus. If the serial composition is loath to repeat itself or fixate upon any tonal center, repetition being all but necessary to the development of a subject, I figure such music also involves the temptation to bend these de facto rules by "skipping over" less appetizing steps in the sequence, either through speedy launches or quieting almost to silence.

Consequently, the melodic coherence becomes dependent on extramelodic means: a rhythmicity that has acquired a life of its own.⁷³

72 John Milton, *Paradise Lost*, ed. Susan L. Rattiner (Mineola: Dover, 2005), 1.63.

73 Adorno, *Philosophy of New Music*, 59.

While nearly echoing themselves, this disingenuous vaulting about shortcuts We-bern and Schoenberg to their favored pitches. Recall how milk distributors, for example, will shrink individual words on their federally mandated labels, effectively eliding them, in order to herd consumers into reading a different, shorter message.

37

Irrlicht. Listening to a stupendously fast live performance of Beethoven's *Thirty-Two Variations in C Minor* by Emil Gilels, Ireland's claim to pianistic fame, it occurs to me to ask why light travels as rapidly as it does. Light's propagation, merely *equivalent* with the maximum permitted within a true vacuum, is analogous to Gilels's fiery recording, which can comfortably be called the apogee of its lightning-like logic. The absent completeness that tosses the third-raters scraps from its table; that full heaven seen through to by every composer worth hearing, glimpsed in bouts of good composition. The primordial wants more than even Odessa's best can give it.⁷⁴ Much like Einstein's *c* speaks of photons incidentally, thematic exposition tugs limply at the unpronounceable's coattails. It sort of follows that art which must be sounded in time actually hopes musicians will keep their dirty fingers off, as though interpreting the massless impeded it.

Objects "want" to be at rest. Most objects desire nothing more than to be left alone.⁷⁵

Introducing ice cubes to a glass of fluorinated tap water, the very cold's influence is misunderstood, for a liquid, like everything else, is always plummeting toward absolute zero. Crisscrossing beneath the lily pads of their artificial pond, the large, white-and-orange carp are startled for the amusement of tourists looking at them. Thus one discovers that every investigation disrupts, while every year surgeons grow less and less invasive.

Color shines and wants only to shine. When we analyze it in rational terms by measuring its wavelengths, it is gone. It shows itself only when it remains undisclosed and unexplained. Earth thus shatters every attempt to penetrate it.⁷⁶

If there is a meaningful upper limit to the baroque, then I'm unsure how to account for romanticism, which I describe elsewhere as mass-having. Scientists slowing beamed light to a crawl don't say the photons have been sapped of energy. Anything but. In relative terms it's the reverse. When Gustav Mahler's titan appears to be done for, one understands the symphony to be at its most weighted

74 In a televised performance that is beyond insightful, Glenn Gould gives these variations the loving restraint they deserve.

75 Rhett Allain, "Aristotle Was Wrong — Very Wrong — But People Still Love Him," *Wired*, November 8, 2018, <https://www.wired.com/story/aristotle-was-wrong-very-wrong-but-people-still-love-him/>.

76 Heidegger, "The Origin of the Work of Art," 172.

down; and as his shining colossus at last charges the summit,⁷⁷ I don't hear some greatest velocity but the ecstasy of disenchantment. At the same time as the field-encumbered particle secretly yearns for 300,000,000 meters per second, a body desires perfect vibratory stillness. These absolutes live in polar harmony on the music stand. Even before the conductor rouses her séancers about the dead score its magnificent length is there together.

Once again music masters time — but no longer by guaranteeing its fulfillment, but rather by negating time through the suspension of all musical elements as a result of omnipresent construction.⁷⁸

Perhaps this is behind its unplayable wish. Every twist and turn to come visible from the outset, finished music simultaneously begins as it transforms and concludes.

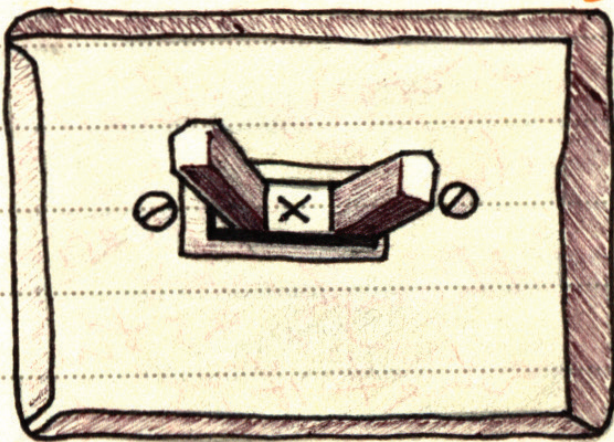
77 Inside a single movement, this is *der Fall nach oben*, a phenomenon like out of Shel Silverstein: the leafy oak born from the germ-motif of an acorn, tornado from the meagerest scraps of wind ("they build up greatest things / From least suggestions," said Wordsworth). In this, Beethoven and Tchaikovsky are kings. See the opening andante of the latter's Fifth Symphony and the outer movements of the Piano Concerto in B-flat Minor for choice examples of this emotional something-out-of-little, where grievances are fingered to the brink of madness.

78 Adorno, *Philosophy of New Music*, 50.

us ~~as~~ system may be, at
the same time, its own
opposite self. In cases ~~such~~ ^{like}
as these we unknowingly
defer explanation by introducing
some ~~other~~ ^{different} hypothetical object.
In other words, we change
the subject. ~~Consider~~ ^{Imagine} a
light switch: ~~which~~ It appears
to be in ~~both~~ the ON and OFF
positions simultaneously; ~~yet~~
this is impossible, and we say so
not because of a skepticism of just
how truly ~~straw~~ bewildering the
quantum world can be but
because ~~what~~ the contradiction
~~has in fact~~ ^{has in fact} abandoned itself.
~~does in fact~~
~~subject~~

active in one state, assuming
it is functioning properly (eg,
not stuck between either
position), for that is what
it is to be a light switch.

Thus the notion of ~~internal~~
~~contra~~ an ontologically
confused system, group,
or part is ~~incompatible~~
with more than modern
physics it is ^{born of} ~~the~~ ~~double?~~
~~inattention and deliberately~~
~~care of~~ ~~obscurant~~
obscurantist in language.



The switch we have
in mind does not merely
include two exclusive
states, it is physically
but one switch.

Eighth Notebook

1

What oft was thought. I'm thinking about the altogether different place intention has, its austere significance, in painting as compared with instrumental music. If I am dismissive of maximalist art for being nauseatingly gaudy, I also delight in the violinist who surpasses them all through a surfeit of skill. While I might describe Rembrandt's matchless sensitivity, with his obvious love for Amsterdam and the yellow slum of its households, as "skillful," I wonder if proficiency is the best angle into this issue. As the aperture onto unreality, the melody is instrumental music's king. Listeners desire the impossibility of a composer skillful enough to take the absolute's dictation in full. If melodies are a treasure delicately hauled from elsewhere, the algid soils that were hiding them cling feebly as the composer applies her brush. In painting, nothing has quite the unprecedented quality of a melody newly unearthed, nothing is so self-possessed that one can know it by heart, as concretely as George Washington is not confused for Abraham Lincoln in history's storehouse of personalities. The raw material of music is as bottleable as lightning if not exhaustible, made to do one's bidding in the multicolor slush art forms unleash. Objectivity claims that place in theory which belongs to it alone, forgetting the labels that yoke a style to Portugal or Austria. Crafting music takes Alexander Pope's familiar couplet to its extreme: often thought, and rethought, by Hollywood's resourceful prospectors, the greatest fossils of European classical music simply were never dug up, which is to say never expressed. Contemporary art's game, on the other hand, favors minute redundancy, championing that which was never so expressed, never in just this manner or that.

2

Spacetime's upper limit. Partway through a Gresham College lecture, I am reminded of Noam Chomsky's stalwart refutation of theories, whether actually proposed or even as a possibility, that claim to solve action at a distance. I believe I understand that an object as massive as a neutron star doesn't attract neighboring galaxies through sheer effort, teasing apart doomed nebulae with its stupendous gravitation. As with temperature and light, I suspect there is just one greatest possible magnitude to the astrophysical attraction between bodies, always hampered by mass except in the odd case of photons and gluons. In whatever way a body distorts spacetime — it is unclear of what spacetime's fabric consists, or to what it refers — it is tantalizing to imagine the logical extreme of this phenomenon. Like light's speed is the fastest anything can travel as well as the speed at which everything would without the Higgs boson, there is some correspondence by which

the density of matter increasingly allows other bodies to fall. Gravity is of course compared, by the field's more avuncular physicists, to a bedsheet stretched tight carrying our sun like a hot ball; as opposed to electromagnetic attraction, the flow of electrons between fields differing in charge.

Supposing spacetime could be depressed without a massive body, I wonder if there'd still be a gravitational force in the direction of the square of the depression's nadir. It should be that such a hypothetical disturbance in the fabric of spacetime would have the appearance of a collapsed star drawing celestial debris into itself when actually the deformation is responsible, and that a cosmic object's seductive declivity has its limit case. Space's deformation being omnidirectional, either the object orbits or endlessly falls around its attractor. Or if a mathematical crater in the sheet could take the place of the supermassive star, a helpless moon should drift to a standstill at that empty center, finally like a penny deposited into a shopping-mall coin funnel.

3

Knowing not what they do. Isn't it the dense createdness that tints nature with sublimity. As Mary Oliver might have said in her hopeful vernacular, the endless reality of a flower bed robs comprehension blind: *that* it grows at all, the whole's organic chronicle. What earth's vast unconscious labor¹ wants for is a thoroughgoing ego capable of reflecting on its horticulture.

All is confusion. Much is understood,
lost in the fractured hour the freezing wind
took to its silences, as in a wood
where automatic birds live dumb and blind.

Where is the hardship in such holiness?²

Aren't the blind stirrings of soil akin to those of a factory. But a machine implies dead perfection, whereas thistle and sweet clover remind us of the honeybee's tribulations.

- 1 Unless we're letting ourselves redefine lexical items whenever the mood strikes us, underground fungi networks cannot pass for cognizance, and even "communication" is a dubious characterization. Adapted from Ludwig Wittgenstein's remark in the *Philosophical Investigations* that what we call thinking in a human being we also say of dolls and ghosts, Edsger W. Dijkstra elaborates on the metaphorical character of asking whether an artificial intelligence could ever be said to think—a hypothetical dismissed by Alan Turing himself as absurd—by raising the analogous question as to whether a submarine should be thought to swim. Then there is Wittgenstein's clarification about the tangled linguistics of those who link a "direction" of time with the actual law of entropy, such that universal backward walking is tantamount in their logic to literally reversing time's flow.
- 2 William Logan, "Sonnet," in *Rift of Light* (New York: Penguin Books, 2017), 53.

Doubtless when the swallows come in spring, they act like clocks.³

4

Cover bands. The burlesquing of pop-music favorites by cover bands like Postmodern Jukebox, as wistful as their intentional vintage is sadly mawkish,⁴ or Okilly Dokilly, a metal band that channels the good-natured spirit of Ned Flanders, demonstrate that need of validation and love haven't left us, though we unpinned them from our shirt sleeves long ago. As much is evident, too, in the craze for dimly lit cocktail lounges with the fake-illicit charm of a Chicago bootlegger's club. The solution has been to slip sincerity, the sentiment that dare not speak its name, into radio parlance through feigned nonchalance. In this sense, beneath a turtle-neck sweater lies the heavy-metal ethos. Its pandering trope is giggled at while your brow is knowingly raised, the silly lyrics expected to be scraped away like aioli from fillet mignon.

Cover bands rose sharply in popularity once they hit on borrowing the optics of more visibly distinctive eras, branding themselves fedora-doffing, martini-toting big bands or bluegrass ensembles just champing at the banjo; like the roaring twenties and straw-chewing bumpkin come down to us now through satire. Behind the sultry veneer of retrograde duds, no doubt counting on a sight gag for incongruity, Postmodern Jukebox's apparent cavalary allows the group to resuscitate music long since prohibited for ending up uncomfortably entangled with childhood's bad taste. With a harmonic makeover and fiercely incongruent vocal style, the best of N*SYNC can be enjoyed into the next century. If courage fails and it all seems rather embarrassing, glance at the double bass. Between classical music's insinuation of some unspoken *else* and Bob Dylan's semi-borrowed words lies another matter. Left behind or haphazardly séanced, the higher platonic order is hypocritically leaned on to supply authenticity.

Lyric is transparent — as hard to see as black or glare ice. The paved roadway underneath is our search for aesthetic truth.⁵

These musicians, who are so boringly opportunist you can't even call them sell-outs, use the orchestral relationship of substance to subject, which challenge befell Europe's romantic composers. As with demagogic false flags and clowns, sincerity is Postmodern Jukebox's decoy duck.

- 3 René Descartes to the Marquess of Newcastle, November 23, 1646, in *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*, eds. and trans. John Cottingham, Robert Stoothoff, Dugald Murdoch, and Anthony Kenny (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 3:304.
- 4 As opposed to the natural patina visible on songs of historic consequence, as if deciding in advance that Ed Sheeran's catalog is going to age gracefully; perhaps the classic industry move, drowning out criticism as accolades pile up on the public's behalf. The Academy Awards represent this same gentle-but-firm, democratic-but-rigged, guidance of cultural dollars.
- 5 Susan Howe, quoted by Christian Wiman, *He Held Radical Light: The Art of Faith, the Faith of Art* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2018), 25–26.

5

O glaupe, mein Herz. America's political spectrum seems rather a hemispheric line than a subway of many stations carrying riders to and from beliefs. Head east, inevitably one ends up back in the west.

6

Sans paroles. Visualizing the coherence of an object while excluding its granular content is wonderfully similar in effect to the isolation of the island of a lone word or archipelagic phrase from its linguistic sea. How compelling are Bruce Nauman's video installations of disembodied chants. In one piece from *Raw Materials* a man being turned in place endlessly groans, "OK, OK, OK..." as if he might *then*, or maybe *then*, be set loose. Before the start of a concert a friend asks himself, in a tone of feigned distress, what exactly music is. In hindsight I offer something trite like, "Language without words," along the lines of a contentless expression. Drama's long-standing ruse is the attempt to satisfy a question posed by itself: *Muß es sein?* Inside the manuscript of his last significant composition, Beethoven answers the question he posed, *Es muß sein!* (in his song-poem about disease and taxicabs, Frank O'Hara disagrees⁶). Aside from the melody's glorious enigma, the language of a string quartet is better described as abstracted from rich anthrospheres, that stratified triangle of human needs, rather being showcasing what is genuinely non-representational. The question is whether one's experience of listening to lieder in a foreign language impresses upon us an artful meaninglessness.

7

Simulation hypothesis. Absolute duplication of reality by supercomputational means, the brainchild of technological gods bored in northern California, whose the capital gains are tied to liquidating the planet, guarantees an impossible degree of parallelism. Carbon-copying the planet suggests that each grain of pollen is uniquely there, not foliage origami based on photographs. If the simulatee elects to study a sample of pond water under lighted magnification, she has to be allowed protozoa. Marianne Moore anticipated as much when she insisted that poetry "present // for inspection, imaginary gardens with real toads in them."⁷ It must be possible for the virtually intrepid to discover a species of rainforest frog. Notwithstanding a few tweaks, the quandaries and limitations usually deemed exclusive to videogame design carry over to the simulation hypothesis with a surprising degree of appositeness. Petaflops of calculation are the biggest issue it faces, with the sum of cybernetic artifacts enduring day and night. The computer's first lesson is object

6 Frank O'Hara, "Song," in *The Collected Poems of Frank O'Hara*, ed. Donald Allen (New York: Borzoi Books, 1971), 361.

7 Marianne Moore, "Poetry," in *Observations*, ed. Linda Leavell (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2016), 27.

permanence, and Berkeley's all-thinking deity is Laplace's demon, impelled to be aware of every vertex then in digital motion.⁸

Whatever in creation exists without my knowledge exists without my consent.⁹

Earthlike parity necessitates that the simulation be equally refinable to levels of magnification achieved by no scientist living—complete and concurrent graphical representation, everything there at the same time. Accounting even for quarks, and supposing the correspondence is truly one-to-one, this increasingly mainstream hypothesis is untenable due to the transistors necessary, since for each particle the universe contains, at least that number would have to be dedicated.¹⁰ The quantum bit is unlikely to fare better, for in a true simulation even quantum strangeness needs to be included, especially if we're already living in one. The choice is thus between total duplication and a *trompe l'oeil* done in relatively broad strokes. Zones tailored to each participant's local adventure are the basis for videogames in general, while a virtuality that was all-inclusive as well as persistent is too intensive even for the laboratory of one's recliner. The inability to distinguish a convincing illusion from its authentic counterpart is no Turing test for the singularity this way coming. Technology falls short of downright miraculous. Conveniently, a moratorium on unbelief becomes fashionable.

8

God in the wild. If the question of God's existence is so obvious as not deserving of comment, since nothing suggests God either, couldn't one say he is far less than obvious, being unapparent?

9

Locating consciousness. Enlarging the neuronal infrastructure of the brain, Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz's thought experiment¹¹ on the metaphorical gap between

- 8 Like Georges Seurat painstakingly stipples each bit of color himself; but unlike the Ben Day process, or how a camera's plate captures the grittiest image with the mechanized dispassion. When Jackson Pollock flicks a loaded brush, the oily sluice lands at least a little haphazardly; as though hypnotized, Pollock knows that he's been slinging industrial paint but not each and every drip. He is satisfied to study their recorded history after the fact.
- 9 Cormac McCarthy, *Blood Meridian* (New York: Vintage International, 1992), 207.
- 10 The trouble is related to Gödelian incompleteness, or mathematician John von Neumann's "complexity barrier."
- 11 "And supposing there were a machine, so constructed as to think, feel, and have perception, it might be conceived as increased in size, while keeping the same proportions, so that one might go into it as into a mill. That being so, we should, on examining its interior, find only parts which work one upon another, and never anything by which to explain a perception." Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, *The Monadology and Other Philosophical Writings*, trans. Robert Latta (London:

psychological phenomena and that properly belonging to the brain, of course obviates the need for magnification. Emergence is the thing, the challenge posed similar to that arising from Zeno's paradox about the arrow. Since an arrow in flight is constantly in motion, one of omnipotent means should be able to pinpoint flight in a single frame of its bending course. Ask yourself where motion is in a motion picture as the reel of celluloid passes through your fingers, which recalls Gilbert Ryle's unlocatable university. New dualists and creationism's gawky club, who catechize disingenuously on the literal whereabouts of evolution in a jungle, represent a hop and skip of certain nouns for others.

Judgement, perception, death are things
in themselves; they're not nothing,
though they don't, as things, appear.¹²

Like with David Chalmers's hard problem, the religious fundamentalist behaves as if she'd heard of evolution but nothing of adaptation and genetic fitness. Accessory facts likewise grind to a halt in Leibniz's mill. For a piece of rhetoric, the sensitive mill is poorly utilized, because *what emerges from a mill is work*. Between the shoving pieces of lumber, circling stone, and soft-lifted tundra of grist, let us answer the philosopher with, "Where is labor?" Such a misbegotten line of questioning clues us in as to why ontologists perpetually fail to lasso, but not to publish on, consciousness within the hemispheres of the brain, as though it anything else.

I can say: "in my visual field I see the image of the tree to the right of the image of the tower" or "I see the image of the tree in the middle of the visual field." And now we are inclined to ask, "and where do you see the visual field?"¹³

Insofar as it can be effectively attributed to a maelstrom of neurochemical events, mental activity is deemed ontologically monistic. Physicalism is the law in letter, while the spirit is something else entirely. Either consciousness is legitimate enough as epiphenomena to satisfy us in language, or, like snapshots of Sallie Gardner inside the zoopraxiscope, one confesses to no loss that all that galloping isn't actually there, though this depends on how one analogizes it. Anything that avoids a reductive slope on the one hand and panpsychism on the other, the goal being to explain how slippery mind hatches in the outer cortex and precisely where it drops off.

10

Things fall apart. It's possible to find an ordinary silk scarf knotted in the Parisian style, otherwise known as a cow hitch, curious for its total antipathy to the

Oxford University Press, 1898), 228.

12 Karen Solie, "A Western," in *The Road In Is Not the Same Road Out* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2015), 11.

13 Ludwig Wittgenstein, *The Blue and Brown Books: Preliminary Studies for the "Philosophical Investigations"* (New York: Harper & Row, 1965), 8.

shape, as this particular flip of the material should not hold but for one's neck. Achieving stasis through cylindrical interposition, decidedly upon removal the scarf collapses.

11

Where the camera was. In looking at a photograph, the subject of which stares straight out at us, there's a kind of negligible annoyance like the hardly-there feeling of a film developed overnight, the ghostly presence or felt absence of the photographing equipment's self-negation.

Vision happens among, or is caught in, things — in that place where something visible undertakes to see, becomes visible for itself by virtue of the sight of things.¹⁴

A camera is typically understood to be located elsewhere, pointed from one corner or another; someplace the observer is not, as indicated by the model's diverted gaze. In frontal photography, the Nikon's physical occupation of space is replaced by the residual suggestion of its interposition, a floating interference. Like the suspicion that one ought to see the teleprompter's curtain of spilling words, dividing lens and news anchor, the camera's scabrous mechanical body and I lap one another.¹⁵

The painter is turning his eyes towards us only in so far as we happen to occupy the same position as his subject.¹⁶

Having gone off long ago, at last one notices the feeling, become a kind of mental tinnitus as faint as intuition. Compare the foregoing to the hierarchy of *Gundam* and *Iron Man*, which makes a human operator's ligaments and bones the mecha's fragile innards.

In nineties slasher films, the camera occasionally uses a first-person point of view in order to preserve the villain's identity. Incidentally, it is always the *real* killer in these shots. We approach the victim like a cat its unsuspecting prey, who, in at last recognizing the threat, lets out horror's signature scream followed promptly by the dangling knife. Unlike your garden variety shot, which is felt to be a gaze both omniscient and non-participatory, in this technical setup the director and audience inhabit a definite body in movie space. Confronting the camera gives its

- 14 Maurice Merleau-Ponty, "Eye and Mind," trans. Carleton Dallery, in *The Primacy of Perception: And Other Essays on Phenomenological Psychology, the Philosophy of Art, History and Politics*, ed. James M. Edie (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1964), 163.
- 15 Originally inspired by the Bavarian flag, BMW's association of its logo, a quartered roundel of blue and white, with a propeller spinning against the sky stands for a disassembled view, as facing the plane should yield a white-and-silver design (propeller against engine), while the opposite situates us rather impossibly inside the nose of the plane looking out (propeller against sky).
- 16 Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archeology of the Human Sciences* (New York: Routledge Classics, 2002), 5.

evil voyeur the personality of substantial being, far more palpably than a knowing look at the fourth wall. In place of a mechanical apparatus, the college sophomore beholds her much-talked-about stalker.

Whatever it grants to vision and whatever its manner, a photograph is always invisible: it is not it that we see.¹⁷

More ontological barrel roll than the tried-and-true yaw of perspective. The director's red-nosed Panavision camera melts into the bearing of Ghostface as behind the killer's slack-jawed mask the moviegoer, à la *Being John Malkovich*, sits temporarily hostage.

It wasn't a loud noise, he kept thinking, sorry that he had seen his eyes, even though it was through his own eyes that he had seen them.¹⁸

A similar lamination can be found in such open-world videogames as Bethesda's *Fallout 4*. In this case, while controlling a powerfully armored player-character from over the shoulder, droplets of rain streak both her helmet's visor and our larger field of view, as though we were neither exclusively the protagonist nor a remote third party immune to the elements but controlling a puppet from within a humid world the two of us share.

The attendants began to turn the hurdy-gurdy, and the air to whistle through the tube; someone screwed in the barred window of the visor; and I was cut off in a moment from my fellow-men; standing there in their midst, but quite divorced from intercourse: a creature deaf and dumb, pathetically looking forth upon them from a climate of his own.¹⁹

It is the same redundancy, a mistake based on a too-literal idea of empathy, as when the Coen Brothers' title character's subjective experience of intoxication is also forced onto the audience through a woozy cinematography of rocking camera movements, with the shot tinted pinkish green. The overwhelming majority of *mise-en-scène*, of course, is established as though before an operatic theater glassed on one side, with the observer just shy of the interior. But while there are well-known examples where the viewer's implied point of view is inside the canvas, most cleverly Édouard Manet's *Un bar aux Folies Bergère*, few artists really illustrate this interpolation, such that we're visually enmeshed inside a rain forest with the all-important tiger dead ahead in pictorial space. Thus compare Henri Rousseau's famous painting, its surprised tiger seen as through a paludarium, with the

17 Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Hill and Wang, 1982), 6. See also Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, trans. D.F. Pears and B.F. McGuinness (New York: Routledge, 2001), 5.633.

18 E.B. White, "The Door," in *Poems and Sketches of E.B. White* (New York: Harper & Row, 1981), 38.

19 Robert Louis Stevenson, "The Education of an Engineer," in *The Lantern-Bearers and Other Essays*, ed. Jeremy Treglown (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1988), 254.

convincingly vine-crossed *Fairy Feller's Master-Stroke*, eked out by Richard Dadd from within the confines of a London hospital. Hiroshige gives us something like this in the dangling carp banner of his *Suidō Bridge and the Surugadai Quarter*, a perspective so closely cropped as to be surrealist before the letter.

12

Misers and show-offs. Conservative art historians complain that rigorous training in the fundamentals of visual art is being relegated to a shadowy rumor of academic hoop-jumping and fustian old masters. Long after abstract expressionism's controversial enthronement, the influential loosening of the rules that govern form and the treatment of subject matter perhaps remain misunderstood. Style is nowadays to be understood as in no way indicative of artistic ability, especially with regard to personal limitations. The better question is not how difficult Jackson Pollock's work was to make but whether the man could draw. If the inclinations of students today lean toward nonfigural doodling, conservatives worry that it is no longer a requirement to first cultivate a bank of competence. In stating its case, modern artmaking shackled up with twentieth-century philosophy. My concern is that the discipline's latter half is being explained solely through the imagery is produced rather than the game of telephone that guided Piet Mondrian's brush; this kicks away the ladder, such that the newly minted inheritors of Cy Twombly and Robert Rauschenberg stand on God knows what, being fluent in the language but ignorant of its conversations. At the same time, it is usually the heavyweights, accompanied by their coaching critics, who define what happened and stare down the unranked. This prevails in the galleries dotting Las Olas Boulevard, whose rosters of prosperous nobodies sharing between them a teaspoon of insight fetch huge sums. Like a diamond, gallery art is costly to purchase and impossible to sell again.

Given how little of period music outlives the generation begot it, if we think of the slush of sinfonias and symphonies the 1790s or 1830s published, much of it highly esteemed, it is not surprising to find the identical situation among today's best-selling instrumentalists, in which the loudest adulation is saved for the very simple. Technical excellence on a fetishized instrument, such as the cello, is gobbled up despite fans showing zero interest in its actual repertoire. Performance is enough.

A motionless Alexandrianism, an academicism in which the really important issues are left untouched because they involve controversy, and in which creative activity dwindles to virtuosity in the small details of form, all larger questions being decided by the precedent of the old masters.²⁰

It sounds like hyperbole, but spectacularly bland transcriptions of kitschy songs are applauded in sold-out amphitheatres to the accompaniment of fog machines and lasers. It was dumb luck that Picasso fell squarely between the two worlds that

20 Clement Greenberg, "Avant-Garde and Kitsch," in *Art and Culture: Critical Essays* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1965), 4.

he did.²¹ Coming of age in a draconian Europe, when old-fashioned dexterity and hand-eye coordination was prized, and educated to be art's emperor during last century's dramatic metamorphosis, the clothes Picasso changed into and out of were always new, conspicuously so, while the tiered altar with which Masaccio got the ball rolling on linear perspective hardened overnight into law.

13

Miles to go. Plunged beneath a hotel comforter of flocculent down, the white superficies holding themselves in a formation approaching the look of cumulus, I attribute this minor domestic thrill to the travel my legs do through a cool rabbit hole that's seemingly stitchless at the other side.

Where do we find ourselves? In a series, of which we do not know the extremes, and believe that it has none.²²

One's legs glide within a soft chrysalis known to be closed yet, owing to the decadent coverage, its tuck lies beyond the reach of toes, and one shivers at the disagreement.

14

Tweaking the real. Painters of the abstract persuasion are wont to include biomorphic elements. Studio moguls sculpt a singer for the radio, fine-tuning pitch and vocals out of their humdrum defaults. While a painter wants to integrate an anatomy made from scratch, the producer is a cosmetic surgeon vying to keep natural flaws at arm's length.

15

Contributions of the setting. A real window is sometimes able, if the artist is forward-looking enough, to function as though it were an illusory element of a picture; the source of entering sunlight, for instance.

The eye was placed where one ray should fall, that it might testify of that particular ray.²³

- 21 He is to the Spanish baroque painter Bartolomé Esteban Murillo what Federico Fellini is to his directorial foil, Michelangelo Antonioni. But then one thinks of Giorgio de Chirico, with all his surreality of the real. Not the gloves and faceless dummies but those enigmatic, long-shadowed piazzas.
- 22 Ralph Waldo Emerson, "Experience," in *The Annotated Emerson*, ed. David Mikics (Cambridge: The Belknap Press, 2012), 225.
- 23 Ralph Waldo Emerson, "Self-Reliance," in *The Annotated Emerson*, 162. See the obverse of Jan van Eyck's Adam panel, part of his *Ghent Altarpiece*. Across the tiled floor, a spill of obscuration from one corner implies that the actual frame,

It might be that a cathedral's acoustics compensate for the aural decay lacking in music of the baroque. In a qualified sense the echo of church stone provides some of the reverberation that is short-lived in a pipe organ and, to a lesser extent, the early keyboards, which are as spindly as a lobster and heavier in metal than flue ash. Notice how Georg Baselitz affords himself the excuse of inversion, such that any of his blurry upside-down paintings can be thought the reflection of some sturdier, unpictured figure up above.

16

Such labour'd nothings. Addressing whomever with the casual spontaneity of an adolescent, no doubt a difference lies in the fact that one might have spent nary a tobacco hour but in contemplation of the topic at hand. Although vouchsafed by diplomas in frames and up-to-date on the scholarship, the lecturer decides to give dogma's brassy gong a short pummeling, because why not. Professorial jacket notwithstanding, these bodies — hers and her interlocutor's — share a lot in terms of their physical bearing. A child dragging a crayon in its pudgy fist coheres a zoo of animals, trying with every stroke her darndest. Apprentices, like the conservatory trainee who rushes through the Grieg concerto with the least caution, go full tilt on ability and don't bother interpreting as they copy the workshop's abundant studies of tousled heads and vascular hands. Art's history ties in immaculate conception as the greater artist's prerequisite myth, that truth is born without the sin of labor. Music begins at the moment of speech, in shouting aesthetically at inner turmoil and taking joy in one's lungs; as hearers, we hold disbelief at bay for drama's sake, as the groundlings did when Hotspur's actor dropped his monologues in followable measures. Our ears fill with the genial falsehood of participation.

If a dread of not being understood be hidden in the breasts of other young people to anything like the extent to which it used to be hidden in mine — which I consider probable, as I have no particular reason to suspect myself of having been a monstrosity — it is the key to many reservations.²⁴

Everyone believes in an untiring, horizontal Michelangelo or Edison drenched in sweat. Capitalism's boast of the sighing but facile draftsman capable of the fiercest originality misuses genius as a lucrative ploy.

Intended for eventual commercial release and possibly transcription, live improvisation, such as Keith Jarrett's solo concert at the Cologne Opera House, is the performative equivalent of that tacked-together menagerie of wax, inasmuch as both Jarrett and the child immediately demonstrate their faculties at the very limit. What a Crayola aficionado sets to a gigantic sheet of paper, whether meaning to get across a monkey or the zookeeper, represents the no-holds-barred distillation of skill. Improvisation's shtick acknowledges this openly, in that its entire appeal amounts to the musician's escape from immediate mediocrity toward the discov-

itself painted to resemble chipped stonework, casts a shadow onto the picture plane.

24 Charles Dickens, *Great Expectations*, ed. Margaret Cardwell (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 64.

ery of melodies lensed in better colorations. In this way, multi-draft composition, opposed to the single “take” of improvisation, belies artmaking’s true fallibility. One listens to a Chopin nocturne as though the dreaminess abiogenerated right then. The disclosure that is music’s bread and butter wants us to think Chopin capable of extemporizing at a stratospheric level of quality, or that he does as much over the course of his black pearls; hence the affected nonchalance of stand-up comedy, where each joke is spasm-like, resulting from the comic’s own laughter. Imagine the disbelieving cries in Carnegie Hall if a talented composer were to pull a full-grown rhapsody from a hat.

After a rehearsal of his orchestral suite “Images,” he said, with satisfaction, “This has the air of not having been written down.”²⁵

The anecdotes attached to the life of Beethoven or Bach, whose feat of ad libitum tunesmithing at Frederick the Great’s Potsdam palace dazzled the king’s guests, naturally have kinship: either the work appears improvised through lack of planning or the physical trace has been suppressed. Aura is frequently the compression of hours, as chiefly it goes in painting. The legendariness of Ingres’s stroke refers to its nonappearance, with the leftover fact being that these secular acheiropoieta do exist. Like the Sanskrit *swayambhu*, they will themselves before our eyes.

17

The anxiety of influence. About a minute and a half into César Franck’s earwormish violin sonata, a bolus of hesitation follows what can nonetheless, despite cutting short, be heard clearly: the *Pathétique* theme incubated in Tchaikovsky’s swan symphony. It is at this moment that Franck quickly stows the theme, before a less-than-credulous listener can bristle at the theft. Is it a case of dissembling con artistry or Franck’s reluctance to handle the clay of a god? But instead of condemning musical appropriation *tout à fait*, let us determine whether the correlation between a hesitant mood and the shameful attempt to head off recognition is significant.²⁶ Perhaps struggle, a romantic conceit long predating this awkward about-face, is co-opted because in fact the *Pathétique*’s lush heart proved too knotty to incorporate further. Tchaikovsky exhausted that particular spring; and Franck has no financial plan for investing his ill-begotten loot, with the paper

25 Alex Ross, “The Velvet Revolution of Claude Debussy,” *The New Yorker*, October 29, 2018, <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2018/10/29/the-velvet-revolution-of-claude-debussy>.

26 In the third movement of Schumann’s *Fantasie*, op. 17, again and again is the *con anima* of Chopin’s Scherzo no. 2 approached then sheepishly withdrawn from. Ironically, this motif in particular is lamented for being musically underdeveloped, at least among YouTube commentators, compared with the rest of the *Fantasie*. In *The Lady Eve*, Henry Fonda and Barbara Stanwyck share a train car together while Wagner’s *Tannhäuser* overture plays almost too softly for recognition. Alfred Schnittke has it right in the rondo of his Concerto Grosso no. 1, where he quotes enough of Brahms for a laugh then politely cashes in his chips. The consummate gambler, Schnittke got walking away down to a science.

trail leading back to Russia and elsewhere,²⁷ except flashing it in public. I can't help thinking of the visitor from a distant planet who, failing to appreciate the value of a priceless jewel, tosses it aside with a shrug of its gray shoulders. Art-based robberies are perfumed with effort. Goaded by Apollo to tell us something inexpressible, Franck agonizes until his conscience shows up.

18

Im Dorfe. Correspondingly delightful as it is disjunctively erratic, American folk painting triggers one's remembrance of late thirteenth-century Italian examples, those schizophrenic landscapes and oblique alleyways mostly the color of salmon. The application of gold leaf allowed the school of Duccio to include a triumphal arch's gaps while replacing the field chirruping outside; beginning to do away with it, the creeping vista became a real possibility. Schooled enough by the fifteenth century to confront a horizon's devilish perplexities, it was likely seen as borderline inappropriate to set Mary in God's dirty countryside, where sheep and poultry loiter.²⁸ Disjunction occurs within this temporary crossing. Before geometric perspective is first understood then later bridled, those who gingerly step out of doors map larger-than-life scenes of impossible rock formations and florets of broccoli disguised as treetops, no longer confined to heaven's mop closet or an Italian courtyard. Over the course of attempting the depiction of foreign lands and people to the folk artist's satisfaction, a single canvas can evidence a hodgepodge of shots vying to do one subject justice and changes of focus, like the fantastic meticulousness of Hieronymus Bosch or a late sonata of Beethoven, except that false starts and multiple redos are the composer's dramatic conceit. The untaught landscapist's discordant squares and rectangles lure the eye, involving it in the pleasurable din of variation.

Failed form is hectic with loveliness, and compels us longer.²⁹

As when reading Montaigne one becomes almost immediately bogged down in underlining and adding marginalia.

Actual chaos, unless what one's talking about is a monotonous example of formalism promoted as "chaotic," inspires wanderlust in googlers and museumgoers. A village scene can be as meticulously fun to comb through as a stopped geyser. Deeply edifying when a master has gone to task, harmony applied to a design already banal for the subject chosen devolves to the point of facticity. It is a self-

- 27 The Sonata also bears some resemblance, during its final allegretto poco mosso, to Dvořák's *Dumky* Piano Trio, specifically the second movement. But then Dvořák leans on "Korobeiniki," the nineteenth-century Russian folk song known internationally as the *Tetris* theme.
- 28 Giovanni Bellini kicked off this trend with his *Madonna del Prato*, as John Berger suggests, transitioning from the suspended curtains of earlier works to the *Prato*'s full-fledged exposure, Mary seated in the springtime pasture and a deathly Christ asleep in her lap.
- 29 Hannah Sullivan, "Repeat Until Time," in *Three Poems* (London: Faber & Faber, 2018), 18.

consistent, knowable commodity, like a fast-food chain's menu, uniform in price and ingredients along the highway, or the umpteenth Madonna turned out on the church's dime. Similarly, Van Gogh's bleary stroke ensures that every cobblestone and almond branch he touches will vibrate interestingly, distinct from the pathetic subject chosen. He himself felt this way about the heavy molt of Rembrandt's gowns, which sloughs abstractly from Aristotle's tinsel arm like the gaudiest lather, the philosopher engrossed in thought.

Proficient art lacks the queer trouble of Grandma Moses's helter-skelter barnyard displays, the speed bumps in which force us to stop and smell the acreage, for at every step there's a headstone bedraggled with weeds or a misplaced rake, while the muscle-bound marines of Michelangelo, though spangled under the Cappella Magna's roof with a military level of symmetry, still invite us to binge their gymnastics. In both the palazzos of quattrocento Tuscany and the outsider's feral townships, one finds inconsonant architecture and the scale of hills as variable as New England's weather, such that a feature is overlooked at one's peril, constructed each time as though without the blueprint for depicting just *that* castle or covered bridge.³⁰ The landscape as a patchwork countryside quilted with ideas, which Thomas Hart Benton elevated to balladic reverie and Max Ernst deranged in bouts of annihilatory glee. When accomplished to a high gloss, the fun of exploring is lost almost completely, supplanted by the Hudson River School's flawless views in deference to the greater pictorial good, with the exception of an unobtrusive Easter egg: the artist caught at his easel, doused campfire releasing a wisp of smoke in protest.

19

To the end and back. Rosalind Krauss, speaking of Rodin's *Gates of Hell* and the oddly columnar monument to Balzac, explains how sculpture too gradually pulled in its limbs:

With these two sculptural projects, I would say, one crosses the threshold of the logic of the monument, entering the space of what could be called its negative condition — a kind of sitelessness, or homelessness, an absolute loss of place. Which is to say one enters modernism, since it is the modernist period of sculptural production that operates in relation to this loss of site, producing the monument as abstraction, the monument as pure marker or base, functionally placeless and largely self-referential.

It is these two characteristics of modernist sculpture that declare its status, and therefore its meaning and function, as essentially nomadic. Through its fetishization of the base, the sculpture reaches downward to absorb the pedestal into itself and away from actual place; and through the representation of its own materials or the process of its construction, the sculpture depicts its own autonomy.³¹

30 Will Moses, the late Moses's great-grandson, updates her style with a welcome dose of technique.

31 Rosalind Krauss, "Sculpture in the Expanded Field," in *The Anti-Aesthetic: Essays on Postmodern Culture*, ed. Hal Foster (Seattle: Bay Press, 1987), 35.

In hindsight, *Gesamtkunstwerk*'s impossible claim is judged for its ambition.

Its pictorial element was from the beginning so atrophied that it is hardly astonishing that in Bayreuth the most consummate musical performances took place in front of the dustiest stage trappings.³²

Like the atmosphere compresses a lifting flame, Alberto Giacometti's pinched, vertically frail men look as though they've been slowly wicked away by life's vicissitudes; even the pedestals of stone appear rationed, hewn to the minimum depth and width necessary.

20

The legibility of what's slow. Slow-motion film transforms the usual mess of human alacrity into tapered iconographic showpieces. Decreasing the frame rate through the use of high-speed cameras, as when a clown's gesticulations become even slower, brings forth a signing. It's the vaudevillian move, like the thrusting click of a woman changing the channel. I figure this stems from something like the problem of other minds, in which the grandiloquent bit of prosody or blazing political insight one is secretly mulling are kept from others' ears. During an airplane's video safety presentation the flight attendants execute cue phrases like "tug on" and "look for" in the broadest manner possible³³ in order to show us what comprehension and the intention to comply look like. Voluptuously self-conscious ("I like a look of agony, / Because I know it's true"),³⁴ the professional actor dressed as a stewardess stows empty luggage in the overhead bin.

The style of the performance, slow and unhurried, is understandably called "deliberate" because each movement *has the typical look* of a deliberate act: but it is scarcely being said that the making of each motion is a deliberate act or that he is "literally" deliberating.³⁵

The frame rate of director Zack Snyder's *300*, adapted from Frank Miller's blood-spattered comic book loosely based on Sparta holding the pass at Thermopylae against the armies of Persia, is brought low such that, in conjunction with a close-up, calf-raising leaps look choreographed. Action cinema is a ballet of distributed signs. Given relief upon slowing time, as with the artfully patient filmographies of

- 32 Theodor Adorno, *Philosophy of New Music*, ed. and trans. Robert Hullot-Kentor (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006), 43n, 191.
- 33 Stock photos of the stereotypical game-player show us an adult man holding a laptop in one hand and leaning at an angle suggestive of involvement, like a Hollywood ship's captain needlessly jostles a steering wheel. In the world of classical music performance, the analogous personality would be Lindsey Sterling.
- 34 Emily Dickinson, "I like a look of agony," in *Selected Poems of Emily Dickinson*, ed. James Reeves (Oxford: Heinemann Educational, 1959), 18.
- 35 J.L. Austin, "A Plea for Excuses," in *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 57, no. 1 (June 1957): 25.

Andrei Tarkovsky and Robert Bresson, Ephialtes's standard-issue dory becomes The Sword and body language a semaphoric dance of Delsartean legibility.

21

Boulders and thin weeds. Before forests got polygonal trunks their ranks were quite literally thinner than one-ply tissue. Each generation further distends virtual space with another dose of volume, though the storyworld's renovation is carried out at varying paces, the vale nestled with boulders about which a planar weed grows.

22

Painting's Big Bang. It strikes me that Byzantine art and the silkscreen of a Campbell's soup can or green Nixon, for example, both share a desire to communicate, one attributable to the nature of its context, the other tied to a product's sale. Could there be some absolute necessity to recreating hills and calculating their diminution against the sunset? The historians of occidental art have had seemingly little choice but to attribute the field's Big Bang, that Italian inflation of pictorial space along with the objects in it, to an aspiration drive toward realism. I suppose the difference between a commission for the state courthouse and *The Taking of Christ* is the latter's palpability, which is to say total absorption in the worst of Rome. Caravaggio's depiction of God under arrest is the opposite of the goodly donors praying on their knees that Jesus will notice them.

23

A lot like Corot. With his late-career work, *The Arrival of Spring in Woldgate, East Yorkshire*, David Hockney recalls the technique of touches used masterfully by Jean-Baptiste-Camille Corot; for example, in his *Ville d'Avray* and *LAllée Verte*, or the more enigmatic landscapes perfected near the end of Corot's life, where blusters of moss and flower heads are seldom if ever worked into the composition. Instead, they sit apart, qualifying as the layer³⁶ among his grounds that is closest to the viewer, isolatable by its loose stems and free-floating petals. This quirk of Corot's is strictly to do with the method of application, as I see it: escaped light with daubs of lavender and yellow are stippled across otherwise finished scenes, while Hockney's leaves, considering the unnaturalness of their distribution, rustle with a deliberate playfulness. Appearing at first to associate with this tendril or that bough, the whole coverlet of foliage serves the same purpose as a thespian's curtain. Upon inspection, most of the leaves float in the bright Yorkshire air, and not one overlaps another.

36 Consider when an artist's signature and the date are "carved" into a tree stump or chiseled into a headstone, like Thomas Cole and Nicolas Poussin were inclined to do, as opposed to the signature being left on top of the painting's world. Not proper to it but a pictorially foreign layer in palimpsest.

Like the astonishment of a child or of a savage who, looking for the first time at some flower through a many-faceted glass, marvels at the complete similarity of the innumerable flowers that he sees, and counts the leaves of each separately.³⁷

Corot surely intended his clinquant mist to adhere deeply, while this technical foul is also what gives Corot's landscapes their charm. Hockney convinces us forthwith, no pinhole chicanery or cute rouses detectable for a mile; every morsel of his deciduous slurries can be thought to reside an inch beneath the picture's surface, wherever that is. Artwork as discrepant as day and night does homologous stuff at the behest of our allergic impulses.

24

Hockney's splash. The perennial theater of fine art has achieved diverse successes with the odd phenomenon of a form missing the ballast of content. David Hockney was led to such a conclusion with *A Bigger Splash*, where nobody's *in* the pool.³⁸

As you'd put a dye in the air in order to see it, a bird sucked
through its drafts advertises the invisible and upgrades it
to naked.³⁹

Consider the ghostly craft of tracing a topographical map, a visual motif I abhor in conceptualist art. The ambition to lay bare the internet's web through exhibition of its ubiquitous lines or portraying the stock exchange as a lot of dollar amounts is not unlike diluting a basketball until all that's left is a mere sphere. Say that the copier of topographies outlines industry-grade maps; unless the elevations are defined and the roads identified by name, she effectively abstracts an abstraction to produce something like a blueprint. These drawings would be a stone's throw from a translational exercise that siphoned the essence of a technical design and where messages, either simple or complex, were coded in language on a theme of cartography. Or what is it to substitute a dashed line for fiber-optic tubing rimed with sewage?

It is somehow odd that Dr. Tulp's colleagues are not looking at Kindt's body, that their gaze is directed just past it to focus on the open anatomical atlas

- 37 Arthur Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*, trans. E.J.F. Payne (Mineola: Dover Publications, 1966), 1:134.
- 38 Its aesthetic foil is Max Ernst's *Aquis Submersus*, where a diver leaves the surface of a pool unfazed. Combining Hockney's empty pool and the false splash with Ernst's swimmer, however, does not amount to realism. In a three-dimensional, open-world videogame like *Red Dead Redemption*, your cowboy runs through shallow bodies of water as though they are the thinnest of membranes. If the surface appears to take any notice, it is with the ornamental capitulation of a quickly fading splash, the white crowns trailing every step like horse spurs.
- 39 Ange Mlinko, "A Not Unruffled Surface," in *Shoulder Season* (Minneapolis: Coffee House Press, 2010), 14.

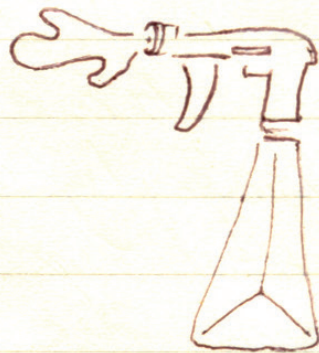
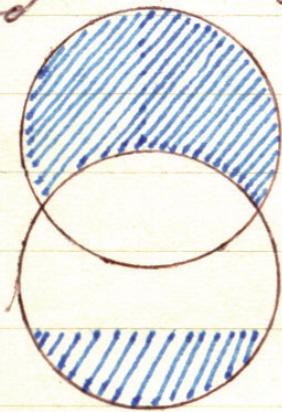
in which the appalling physical facts are reduced to a diagram, a schematic plan of the human being.⁴⁰

If one takes a cup of oolong tea and then subtracts the cup, the hot liquid constituting that cylinder holds together, in the art-as-plastic sense; only what cohered that volume has been deleted.

There is also a hollowness to terror, despite the legitimacy of global warming or the long-shot candidate's rising electoral count, impending disasters that cannot themselves be appealed to. John Locke's slate finds employment in the emotionless storm and technological non-entities that will show us anything by virtue of their utter neutrality. With the possible associations so vast, the least featured are hardest to distinguish. The overwhelmed brain despairs before a torrent of static.

40 W.G. Sebald, *The Rings of Saturn*, trans. Michael Hulse (New York: New Directions, 1999), 13.

here (ie with the spray bottle)
such liquid remains in the
base, undisturbed. It is
indicated visually that
the liquid has not left
the bottle, that it is not
doing so, given the empty
two-thirds. — Of course it
does, all the same. One can
find a description of the



same in a previous notebook
with regard to clothing.

How the detonated housing
block collapses into the

sees it crash. Rather, an incommensurably large form drops, as if virtually, behind a smoke screen.

The lower sounds in Glass' score to Koyaanisqatsi, such as the bassoon, being barely audible, become linked in our minds with the patter of feet in Grand Central, tire slapping the highway, and the wrapping of hot dogs.

fearing I have not set this down elsewhere, I want to ~~out~~ this trend of reduction, the gradual distillation to basic forms which one observes in all art, has

Ninth Notebook

1

Waste not. In an offbeat headline's use of epanorthoses, like our ten-a-penny "literally," the journalist's awareness of other shades of meaning is signaled; the latter tries to recoup a quip we ultimately passed up, our much-inculcated dread having to do with allowing what seems a novel thought to wither untweeted. A subset of Thoreau's desperate ones have grown stupendously loud as they shore up cultural equity in what looks like happy panic. Abjuring the previous text message's typo, the offending word is turned back to one's interlocutor for acknowledgement, appended with the scarlet letter of an asterisk.

Ironic points of light
Flash out wherever the Just
Exchange their messages.¹

2

One for all. Among a company of line dancers, such as Radio City Music Hall's Rockettes, dazzling precision delivers a cumulatively greater shock, that of uniform, simultaneous action in a group composed of three dozen individuals.

Differing one from another in natures and moods so greatly as they did, they yet formed, bending, a curiously uniform row — automatic, noiseless; and an alien observer passing down the neighbouring lane might well have been excused for massing them.²

In flocked starlings, each bird acts according to its neighbor immediately ahead of or beside it, swooning toward another prairie as a change in formation spills through their ranks. These signals travel in real time, while Rockettes do not make collective decisions as one watches; their choreography is already set, a decision-making process abrogated through past rehearsals. Cue lights would be useless, and nothing is shared between the dancers.

- 1 W.H. Auden, "September 1, 1939," in *The Collected Poetry of W.H. Auden* (New York: Random House, 1945), 59.
- 2 Thomas Hardy, *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, ed. Sarah E. Maier (Ontario: Broadview Editions, 2013), 163.

According to the no-communication theorem these phenomena do not allow true communication; they only let two observers in different locations see the same system simultaneously, without any way of controlling what either sees.³

In the urban legend, a teacher before her chalkboard is addressing a classroom's students when in eerie, impossible synchrony all of them blink together.

As Case was picking up his beer, one of those strange instants of silence descended, as though a hundred unrelated conversations had simultaneously arrived at the same pause.⁴

3

Upside-down gardens. Having stared too long at the strikingly flat ceiling of the Boston Symphony Orchestra's shoebox hall, there comes a desire to walk across its luxurious breadth, calmly navigating the irregular grid of lights and ribs. Like a clay brick lodged in the wind-beaten side of a firehouse, which has no opinion on the hostility of concrete to a falling object, the degree to which this ceiling resembles a floor lies outside spatial coordinates and the ear's vestibular alarms; I sidestep the chandelier as I would a waist-high plant⁵ decked in translucent petals, the centerpiece of a vast garden the shade of cake. Perched safely in its cupola, a statuette is merely there, neither elevated nor lower than, just as I write this seated at a borrowed desk thirty feet above leaf-clogged Brookline.

What is it then between us?

What is the count of the scores or hundreds of years between us?

Whatever it is, it avails not — distance avails not, and place avails not.⁶

Ignoring the question of stucco bearing weight, there is no denotative change in a ceiling flipped upside-down for one's traversal. Brought to such a rare terrain, by way of fearful reverence everything would seem charmed. Imagine a Staffordshire church burst like a dropped apple, its masonry heaved about the vicinity's immediate thoroughfare. Whether any distinguishing feature remained, to disturb this rubble by handling a roof shingle or brushing past the chimney, hallmarks specifically out of reach during peacetime, would be exhilarating at first then dry into ordinariness.

The crow looks rusty as he rises up.

Bright is the malice in his eye...

3 *Wikipedia*, s.v. "Faster-than-light."

4 William Gibson, *Neuromancer* (New York: Ace, 2004), 4.

5 See Carsten Höller's *Upside-Down Mushroom Room*.

6 Walt Whitman, "Crossing Brooklyn Ferry," in *Walt Whitman: Complete Poetry and Collected Prose*, ed. Justin Kaplan (New York: Library of America, 1982), 310.

One joins him there for company,
But at a distance, in another tree.⁷

Insofar as the processive aperture of the brain is narrow — to metaphorize the neurophysiology inelegantly — sublimity's human reputation is at bottom circumstantial. Occasioned by a waterfall or detached glacier, the Caspar David Friedrich variety of awe refers to grandeur ontologically whole and causally unified that outstrips our visual field, unless it escapes from minute confines. The hundredth floor is not especially aloft and every mortared slab believes itself touching ground.

When the lightning progress of science makes future centuries hauntingly present, when the future is more present than the present, when distant galaxies are on my doorstep.⁸

It is of course understanding that tells us we are suspended or falling, physical states distinguishable through comparison with a stationary body or testifying to acceleration as it is felt. Crossing a rope bridge versus taking the funicular. Anxiety can be thought to exist in relation to potentialities. Climbing the water park's jerry-rigged staircase to a thinly lubricated waterslide slightly terrifies, while those safe on the ground are hardly frightened for standing directly over the earth's molten core.

4

Mind in the inanimate. What is it exactly that's ominous when in a horror movie the flippantly unsuperstitious jock roughs up a creepy portrait or scarecrow said to be haunted? Ignoring his girlfriend's cautioning, the quarterback vandalizes the relic-like object, whereafter a line is crossed. He does so in a certain way, causing irreparable damage but leaving the scarecrow's face legibly intact; this allows for a close-up shot of the remains and has the effect of preserving its "subjectivity." In contrast to how Batman assaults a grinning crook, undoing all his snide mirth with a punch, cinematic evil's lasting defeat is only accomplished with its complete physical disintegration. The portrait's sitter continues to glare despite the hole kicked through it.

Disturbing like a guest who obstinately sits on saying nothing when one has no use for him.⁹

Intuition tells us the matter has less to do with the brain's centrality than it does a director's ability to imply active mindfulness in effigies ("abandoned things are

7 Wallace Stevens, "No Possum, No Sop, No Taters," in *The Collected Poems of Wallace Stevens* (New York: Vintage Books, 2015), 310. See Yuri Norstein's lauded animated short, *Tale of Tales*, for a close visualization of Stevens's lines.

8 Jean-Luc Godard, dir., *Two or Three Things I Know About Her* (New Yorker Films, 1967).

9 Roland Barthes, "The Third Meaning," in *Image-Music-Text*, ed. and trans. Stephen Heath (New York: Hill and Wang, 1977), 57.

throne with spirits; / everywhere wood is still with strain”).¹⁰ Several finches tussle over a slice of challah, carpenter ants storm a dead centipede. With sandpaper of a certain grade, each silicon particle is detectable by touch; sensible point by stiff point, compared with lapsing into the expectation of a higher grit’s velvety surface. Between these poles lies a valley dwindling from isolatable birds to a sea of arthropods that beats any tallying of its motion, like spoked wheels’ stroboscopic effect. Enlarged to a comprehensible degree or minute out of range, I suppose there must be an uncanny valley of the tactile, in which sense, like a dog flummoxed before the threshold of a sliding-glass door, continuously leans into apprehension and backs out again.

There is a queasy efficacy to gore as it’s done in that subgenre of horror, where the moviegoer toggles autonomically, the fault of our mammalian brainstem, between baseline detection of eyes-nose-mouth and the cannibal’s disfiguring handiwork. When it is revealed that one has dined on human liver, the actual shock is not to have recognized the meal. Confronting what perpetually does not compute, like trying to locate the facial schema in a Nick Cave soundsuit, is why nails on a chalkboard so discomforts, not to mention the exceptional nausea that results from swallowing in liquid form what has always been gnashed. Or chawing a bit of tinfoil: foil’s initial food-esque malleability and, a moment later, dented inflexibility clash at a high-functioning place in the cerebellum. Isn’t this oppositely the appeal of eating cotton candy or kale chips using only one’s tongue.

5

Silencing the angels. Ralph Waldo Emerson’s gospel of nonconformity is a difficult pill. After standing up for one’s latent conviction, courageous if ethically vague behavior is of course frighteningly adaptable. When pro-lifers see themselves as abolitionists of a kind, attestors to an evil nobody else acknowledges, a bigoted whim finds insulation against the natural antibodies of skepticism. No doubt a certain percentage of pipe-bomb enthusiasts and the writers of manifestos are those helpless not “to detect and watch that gleam of light which flashes across his mind from within.”¹¹ Nonconformity shoos away a snowdrift of clues hinting at coming-of-age impetuosity, such that before long “self-reliance” has the odor of Randian selfishness, the will to impulsivity in league with flawed reasoning. But then no heart fails to beat sympathetically with, “Who can thus avoid all pledges, and having observed, observe again from the same unaffected, unbiased, unbribable, unaffrighted innocence, must always be formidable.”¹² Important to be your

10 Les Murray, “The Buladelah-Taree Holiday Song Cycle,” in *Learning Human: Selected Poems* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2001), 32.

11 Ralph Waldo Emerson, “Self-Reliance,” in *The Annotated Emerson*, ed. David Mikics (Cambridge: The Belknap Press, 2012), 161.

12 *Ibid.*, 163. Barring any liberties taken by the translator, Emerson seems to be paraphrasing the French moralist Jean de La Bruyère: “You may drive a dog off the King’s armchair, and it will climb into the preacher’s pulpit; he views the world unmoved, unembarrassed, unabashed.” La Bruyère, *Characters*, trans. Jean Stewart (London: Penguin Books, 1970), 51.

own Huxleyan bulldog and gadfly together, an almost schizophrenic hodgepodge of uncorroborated faith kept honest by diagnostic stings.

Who are you talking to? she asks, the room empty.¹³

6

The volition of plants. An alternative flavor of marketing may be that which, unless an outright lie, actively promotes the huge sum of capital invested in the client's product, instead of obscuring what goes on behind closed doors, the usual way of drumming up for customers a buyable mystery. One learns about the harvest of "ancient" grains, which is conveyed in an expensive-looking font as though it compared in magnitude to the rediscovery of Greek investment casting. Courtesy of Vichy Laboratoires, a 5 fl. oz. mister "infused with antioxidants from French volcanoes" lands in Macy's for about the price of a coffee. Boasting about the effort poured into sowing a superfood crop in rocky soil initially strikes me as the opposite of Roland Barthes's thoughts on the latest and greatest Citroën. Or the category of description shifts from manufacture, the product's roots, to that outermost domain of ingredients and essences. Chilled fruit has this ephemeral preciousness, for its specially induced temperature and spoilage. Although one learns that the new fragrance contains an exotic component, acquired by dint of resourceful chemist-adventurers, to a shopper perfume qua substance remains enigmatic, like effervescence itself, a contradictorily potent compound the great perfumery was gracious enough to let onto the market but then exacerbated with a bottle of fancy glass.

The image of undistorted nature arises only in distortion, as its opposite.¹⁴

But isn't nature sophisticated? In terms of the amount of labor done, though a complex organism a bud doesn't sprout as the result of work; disappointingly, its best parallel is uncomprehending automation. Given the correct nutriment and adequate exposure to sunlight, *a plant has no choice but to grow*. It is the closest we get to destiny outside of Sophocles, a plainer variety of foreordination that better compares with the brainless weft of machinery than tapestries knit by hand. The telos of a ringbolt or toothed cog's manufacture is left to the manufacturer.

The potter is not questioned by the pot:
"Why is my substance dull, why frail my lot?"¹⁵

I'm reminded of the question as to what extent the rational fruits of serialism, that body of homeless music inaugurated by Schoenberg, can be personified as emotionally unconscious, neither imposed upon by narrative nor reactive but advancing blindly, no development meaning anything to the composition born of a

13 Nick Flynn, "Prayer," in *Some Ether* (Saint Paul: Graywolf Press, 2000), 57.

14 Theodor Adorno, *Minima Moralia: Reflections from Damaged Life*, trans. E.F.N. Jephcott (New York: Verso, 2005), 95.

15 Anthony Hecht, "Poem Upon the Lisbon Disaster," in *Collected Earlier Poems* (New York: Borzoi Books, 1990), 172.

technique. Like a gardener first decides what to plant before figuring how much soil her vegetables shall occupy, analogous with the twelve-tone composer's later choice of instrumentation and, to a lesser extent, the duration of each tone in its fertile row. But she cannot forget that much autonomy remains to plants, which in large part grow themselves while not knowing they do.

7

Books left on the mantel. Gradually relics learn to inhabit our everyday lives. It was upon a time that the Grail derived its allure from the legendary challenges requisite to obtaining it. The sacred became expensively near in the twenty-first century. So long as we are barred from nuzzling surface or coughing, our fetish for canon, not to mention apparel and cars, incubates a thick moss of aura through decades of public exhibition and worshipful critics' regular exhalations in print.

To participate through it in all the reactions of those who had seen it previously.¹⁶

Like the golden plates and goblets of sealed crypts, literature's precipitations are supposed by the superstitious to exude a life-altering mystique more sharply affecting than a throatful of soda. And to think Flaubert is got for pennies on the kilowatt. A thing's magnetism either attracts or repulses the closer one gets, an exclusion that doesn't budge but is forgotten. Investigate and its strength ebbs, unless it doubles.

The function of this "more" is to fill in the lack of a "less," to compensate for the fact that, by definition, a product never delivers on its (fantasmatic) promise.¹⁷

To be always within plucking range of Virginia Woolf and Herman Melville is a leisure comfort. The dormant static of *Moby-Dick* nearly lifts hair.

8

Like nothing else. Although I recognize that still lifes invariably face outward, the silver fish heads on block ice with a twirl of lemon peel and a cracked pomegranate, that tendency needs further scrutiny when the focus is a bowtied wrap of flowers. If a novel's spine is to be shown, one specific orientation is necessary, while a florist generally aims for a more balanced arrangement if a bouquet is to serve as the focal point of a banquet. Little if any consideration will be paid to where the bride's family is seated; flowers are for all. In the floral branch of still-life painting, bouquets do example such aesthetic self-consciousness for being more closely aligned with the social. Aside from bunches of long-stemmed flowers and the lov-

¹⁶ Adorno, *Minima Moralia*, 223.

¹⁷ Slavoj Žižek, *The Puppet and the Dwarf: The Perverse Core of Christianity* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2003), 146.

er's single rose, which may be lain on a polished table lengthwise to suit the frame, it is not a matter of adjusting inflorescence toward the end of cooperation within the painting's overall composition but crooking buttercups and marigolds at the behest of one specific angle of presentation. Consider the octopus Proximo Spirits splay across their rum bottles — eyes walled forward, every tentacle at least partly upturned, for one thinks of them suckered — and the Goombas strafing crablike in a *Mario* videogame. Better, the too-large head and hands of Michelangelo's *David*. The sculpture functions in spite of these swellings and a weak ankle, while the bouquet ceases to be a display of assorted flowers equally suitable for open-floor presentation. Painted hydrangeas more often than not glom together in vying for our attention. Hardly ever does a depicted something not bet the house on being seen. A florist's choices are written off as niceties for the beholder. If one googles clipart of bouquets, nearly everything the search engine retrieves is turned in admiration of the virtual Helios.

It made the slovenly wilderness
Surround that hill.

The wilderness rose up to it,
And sprawled around, no longer wild.
The jar was round upon the ground
And tall and of a port in air.

It took dominion everywhere.¹⁸

In *The Elder Scrolls*, the action role-playing series located on the fantasy continent of Tamriel, every flower model consists of intersecting two-dimensional textures, or width-less planes, instead of the usual bulbous polygon, in order to lighten the graphics card's burden while showing continuously. Journeying across a borderless country like Morrowind, one's hero is magnetic north on two legs, toward which flora literally swivel. Supposing the heather on Black Isle were thick instead of invisibly planar, its silhouette should change but insignificantly with walking from one side to the other, while a shrub that didn't rotate would alert us to Bethesda's sleight of hand, the purpose of point-of-view tracking being to hide each flower and weed's starved profile. Avouching for a system that's almost Ptolemaic, how splendidly Emerson configures us in the forest-mother's embrace:

Willingly does she follow his steps with the rose and the violet, and bend her lines of grandeur and grace to the decoration of her darling child. Only let his thoughts be of equal scope, and the frame will suit the picture. A virtuous man is in unison with her works, and makes the central figure of the visible sphere.¹⁹

18 Wallace Stevens, "Anecdote of the Jar," in *The Collected Poems of Wallace Stevens*, 81.

19 Ralph Waldo Emerson, "Nature," in *The Annotated Emerson*, 40.

9

Dumbshow. A cell phone left ringing in the amphitheater, with its tubercular patrons sat in antique chairs, bothers due to its frank espousal of a jingle exasperatingly familiar. One is annoyed for immediately grasping where the obnoxious ringtone is going. Because the phone has no sense of itself the interruption tests our patience in utter innocence while being thoroughly understood. It, too, is the blind spirit of nature, barging in on our solitary listening. Something of this graceless voicing into the ether is to be found in advertisements and seems deserving of pity; the sad forlornness of a message that is ignored if not hated.

The occultist draws the ultimate conclusion from the fetish-character of commodities: menacingly objectified labour assails him on all sides from demonically grimacing objects. What has been forgotten in a world congealed into products, the fact that it has been produced by men, is split off and misremembered as a being-in-itself added to that of the objects and equivalent to them.²⁰

In this case the speaking is dimly human, unlike the high-pitched complaining of ambulances rushing up and down an avenue's trashed length. The flyer announcing a retailer's going-out-of-business sale is mortified communication thrust into the strangest of dialogues with shoppers, an undeath temporarily made conversant through the charity of ventriloquism. It hails us, but we're foolish to feel addressed personally, let alone reply; the touching lunacy of discounted furniture fluent in your language. Much text is lost on us, being dismissed as harmlessly inert. I'm thinking of those flat panhandlers left in a laundromat or stapled to a flagpole which beg acknowledgement, throwing a question or joke in our path for want of connection. If nothing else, one notices the desperation of the proposal. It is curious how exactly the inanimate changes despite its frigid stillness, the lion of stone nonetheless imbued with just-detectable vitality not so dissimilar to that of its African counterpart.

Hardenberg, in every created thing, whether it is alive or whether it is what we usually call inanimate, there is an attempt to communicate, even among the totally silent. There is a question being asked, a different question for every entity, which for the most part will never be put into words, even by those who can speak. It is asked incessantly, most of the time however hardly noticeably, even faintly, like a church bell heard across meadows and enclosures.²¹

Something like purpose embeds, as with the humorous pareidolia of bathroom knobs; one is witness to a dumbshow that reeks of trying. Nokia's ringtone, boisterous as it is guileless during a performance of stiff-lipped music, Poe's uncomprehending heart beating beneath the floorboards.

²⁰ Adorno, *Minima Moralia*, 239.

²¹ Penelope Fitzgerald, *The Blue Flower* (Boston: Mariner Books, 1995), 124.

10

Symphonic form and utility. The addition of symphonic movements, from Haydn's standard-setting three to the ten of Olivier Messiaen's *Turangalila-Symphonie*, sounds vaguely like combinatorial geometry, as though with each new point of articulation a certain malleability emerges, like boards united at intervals with brass hinges; a liminal space, between which one movement fizzles and the next begins, the straight boards jointed into an arch. Critics like to say in passing that every film composer is Wagner's disciple, who established the art of "adapting the phrase as quickly and often as required to the smallest details."²² It is that pathological romance to plunge one's brush into an unruffled plateau, cleaving snow-capped mountains and umbrageous dells.

11

Halves and quarters. One begins to wonder about the broader dimensionality of figures gathered in pictorial space: their imaginable obverses. What further pictures hang there between the members of Renoir's afternoon lunch at the Maison Fournaise? If we deliberately think against the grain of that basic conceit which underpins every painting, without the support of human belief these boaters are really halved and quartered in profile. There's a resemblance here between a Velázquez under glass, which is essentially fixed and unalterable, and the rendered *mise-en-scène* of a videogame, which continuously freezes into position. It would be dishonest to suggest that the bottles or Charigot's pooch occasionally ceases to exist. Does an illustrated figure endure only in proportion to its visibility? What you see is generally what they painted, thus *Le déjeuner des canotiers* is pretty much a one-way street. But as for sculpture's disposition to being seen? Signage hangs in shop windows unheeded and David glares off toward Rome, his famous buttocks actual even when they are merely adumbrated, as the second half of a nude front. In director Edward Yang's *Yi Yi*, which centers on a struggling, middle-class Taipei family, the household's youngest son embarks on a campaign of goodwill, taking Polaroids of street people from behind at just above the neckline, then he gives away the individual's physiological far side as a gift.

At thirty-six she was ten years older than the awkward young poet who had, she told her diary, "no back to his head."²³

Halfway between the deeper reality of sculptures and painting's canceling effect could be, for example, the skirt of a wooden angel meant to ornament a Christmas tree, where the underside, as solid as the tree it was cut from, belies the skirt's grammar as an item of girlishly airy clothing.

22 Arnold Schoenberg, "On Modern Music, Audience, and Critics," interview by Paul Wilhelm, in *A Schoenberg Reader: Documents of a Life*, ed. Joseph Auner (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), 58.

23 William H. Gass, *Reading Rilke: Reflections on the Problems of Translation* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1999), 15.

12

My life as a cashier. After relenting to its coiled spring, the ejected drawer of a cash register catches the track's end violently, impressing the cashier with a thunderclap of nickel and copper. If one interferes in this discharging action, however, it becomes apparent the cash box's dramatic cha-ching is unenergetically limp, since the first time it was by virtue of the cacophony of rattled coins that one concluded that the drawer explodes out of its console. Slowing the drawer with one's hand following the drawer's release, whereby the calamity of loose and rolled specie is averted, it is as if that opening salvo were considerably lessened. Without the confirmatory metallic slam the box's frightful velocity is also lost. As if silencing pistol fire tempered the force of a bullet's impact; its velocity is actually *increased*. Phenomena operate before a kind of additive switchboard. Crucial to any effect is whether its inherent features be nullified or heightened, being cumulative.

13

Hippocrates's theory. An influence spurred medieval science, the radiant answer phrased in the negative that implies still more: the early physician's four humors, now become the ratios of serotonin, dopamine, estrogen, and testosterone, and phrenology's twenty-seven brain organs. The rest seems to have been left to speculation, with only bile for a fact. Although starlight is visible during the day from the bottom of a deep-enough well, tangibles continue aloof. Our alchemists' plumbs recoil not against hazily defined toxins but for insufficiency of line. Despite never touching the floor, the quack writes off the balance as surely a negligible distance.

14

The woman with the twisted arm. Involuntary contortion of a limb is a peculiarly common motif in visual art, signifying a violent death and most often found in episodes of mythological and historical subject matter. Jakub Schikaneder's *Murder in the House* is a choice example, while a strained appendage often enough comes with the depiction of grappling, as in William-Adolphe Bouguereau's *Dante and Virgil in Hell*, and subjugation, as in Rembrandt's *Abraham and Isaac*.²⁴ Because the position is difficult to achieve without external leverage, besides there being no role for it in natural comportment, a downturned arm tells of falling upon death as

24 Twisted anatomy is a regular inclusion of Peter Paul Rubens's. See his *Massacre of the Innocents*, *Samson and Delilah*, and *Descent from the Cross* as well as Michelangelo's *Deposition with Nicodemus*; Edouard Vimont's *Death of Archimedes*; Jacek Malczewski's *Death of Ellenai, after Mantegna*; W. Heath Robinson's "The Land of the Lotus Eaters," an illustration for *Stories from the Odyssey* by Jeanie Lang; Francisco de Goya's "And there's nothing to be done" from his *Disasters of War* series; Alfred Guillou's *Adieu!*; Gustave Doré's engraving of the corpse of Goliath beneath a triumphant David; the hallucinatory victim in *Paprika*, the Japanese animated film, and Francesca Woodman's series of self-portraits featuring eels.

well as the clumsy deposition of corpses, like broken eggs on the pavement signals a city-specific disaster. Classical ballet's difference from the former is one of intention. Absent the will, extreme bodily flexibility denotes something charnel, and dance becomes strictly attributable to mesmeric fiddling.

Although the familiar cartoon trope of crashing through solid²⁵ granite, resulting in an outline specifically indicative of the victim, could be thought related to the visual discourse of splayed bodies, one or more limbs awkwardly cocked is a rarer pose in Looney Tunes than might have been expected. In his single-minded pursuit of rabbits, Elmer Fudd goes dumbly through plywood if the bungling huntsman doesn't pancake instead, leaving the finest of silhouettes. Although viewers can be certain that Fudd collides unexpectedly, there's no last-second wince or instinctive shielding with an arm; these shapes are defectless and even manage to include a bushy tail or the barrel of a rifle, this due to the necessity of preserving the referentiality of the designs, allowing for a character's subsequent identification by negative space alone, while a police chalk outline tells bystanders the mere fact of a body. Like the bluntly murdered subject of Schikaneder's painting, whose contorted position on the ground clues us into the manner of her demise, it is fair to assume the displaced volume of mountain will attest to the unpreparedness of Wile E. Coyote before he crashes. But when the duped Coyote runs headlong into a trompe l'oeil tunnel, not penetrating through but crumpling against the all-too-convincing rock, his form is haphazard. In sight and thus recognizable to us, an outline isn't necessary. In general, a silhouette tells us something definite about our preferred view of a (not necessarily three-dimensional) object or character in space, defined according to its traced outline. It is not only that Kara Walker's spindly Antebellum figures gambol and tiptoe from left to right, right to left, but that their best selves are always *contre-jour*.

15

Thumbnails and I. Owing to the telecom industry's surge in transmission capability, it is not long ago that greater bandwidth made video thumbnails possible. What has changed is the user's experience of thumbnails following this uptick. Hovering one's cursor over the panes triggers a fluid snippet of video, and from a chosen bitmap image to a randomly excerpted slideshow of snapshot after snapshot, now for every one-second vignette there are a dozen or more frames of footage. The changeover is that a static thumbnail approximates the video clip one can choose to open, while the GIF is looking more its clumsy self than an improvement on the isolated screenshot, following the boost in frames per second. Aside from a growing filmic quality to the thumbnail's preview, one last quandary is to do with the threshold for motion and whether a single frame per second qualifies (if so, is each *in motion*, like inertial frames?) or goes on being photography.

Life stays in one place,
often Rome; and to compensate, you cut up

25 A matter of density. Since paper results in a jagged, unrepresentative rip, running through shōjis is little seen.

your time in many places.²⁶

16

Tokens. In this most prosperous of centuries, the unsalable token of city buses and arcade machines has achieved its commercial apotheosis. The examples range from a handbag's electrolyzed puck looped with a strip of leather to the colophons standing for the country's various orchestras; though not trademark flatness but a magnetic hunk of rubber or clay patch fired onto mugs, the sort of elephant's foot every orchestra's gift shop peddles. Like bullion, the token allows for a level of acquisition fundamentally at odds with society's rising technological sophistication; serving no purpose, it floats to the cultural surface, there being no jukebox slot to plink it into.

Only when countless standardized commodities project, for the sake of profit, the illusion of being unique, does the idea take shape, as their antithesis yet in keeping with the same criteria, that the non-reproducible is the truly genuine.²⁷

Ostensibly useless, the token's divine simplicity²⁸ endows it with a capital of magic, as in tetragonal crystals and cloth-bound pendants; hence their usage as hackneyed plot elements, vivifying the wizard's dormant staff or unsealing a crypt. And the European Union produces for its tourists national banknotes that officially lack any monetary value.

Obtuse meaning appears necessarily as a luxury, an expenditure with no exchange.²⁹

17

Where heaven and earth meet. Rogier van der Weyden's *Descent from the Cross* is congregated before a layer of gold in order to emulate the slighter depth of a less sophisticated age than his own, a bit of short-circuitry. Gilding has traditionally been analogous to abstract expressionism's depthless style, while Van der Weyden's leaf relates spatially to the calvary of his foreground, which therefore is not the

26 Michael Hofmann, "By Forced Marches," in *Selected Poems* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2008), 13.

27 Adorno, *Minima Moralia*, 155.

28 Compare the unifying obsolescence of ceremonial objects with the historically alternating contraction and expansion of spoken language. As "straightforward and to the point" eventually separates into an adjective and phrase and "Howdy," collapsing the hyponymic "How do you [do]?" and a long way from "In what condition is your state?," becomes deployable as an individual unit within the longer "Howdy, partner." Or the elision, like subduction of a coastal shelf, yields "belletrist." Names, too, go through this seemingly counterintuitive process of following topographical subtraction with an addition.

29 Barthes, "The Third Meaning" 62.

surface; as though the scene could implode under the strain of this contradiction, the planes shoving in antithetical directions. Richard Artschwager does just the reverse throughout his sculptural oeuvre, implying geometric dimension within preposterously unsuitable volumes. Van der Weyden goes lengths to plug the gaps between the legs and rungs of that holy ladder (see fig. 1), yet at the deposition's heart is the impossible contact that lustrous curtain running smack into God's earth.

Climbing the green hill in gold light
until there is no hill,
only a flat plain stopped by the sky.³⁰

Van der Weyden slams an antimatter into its equally real opposite for a bizarre take on one of International Gothic's hallmarks, for goldleaf was always an apictorial element, understood metaphorically as the gleam of an object or background's importance. Here is a surreal amphitheater, capable of togethering nature and metaphysics.



Fig. 1. Detail of Rogier van der Weyden, *The Deposition* (1435).
Source: Wikimedia Commons

18

Taxidermy in the round. Inspecting some beatific scene draped with Byzantine blue and gold solitaires, one confronts a jumble of purposes. Natural-history dioramas, say those bequeathed by collectors and housed in eponymous museums, radiate a charming ambiguity not entirely attributable to the musk of their sincerity. The former quality lies in the discrepancy of the painted backdrops, how they abruptly send the Neanderthals off into a fake sunset.

30 Louise Glück, "Epithalamium," in *Poems 1962–2012* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2012), 113.

The walls of the system blend to their eye in the remote horizon with the walls of the universe.³¹

The species of manufactured plant and taxidermized deer are vastly more compelling than a facade, despite the handover between real props and those painted that deters us from altogether crashing against the exhibit's back half; while its pictorial depth is meant to enrich a diorama, the sheer verticality is something of an eyesore. There is a lack of dramatic continuity in the preservation of freeze-dried panthers or a herd of pachyderms when they're glued to a completely fictional landscape, to say nothing of glass irises.

19

Blindness elevated to a universal rule. How unimaginative is the British Conservative politician's tweet in response to Turner Prize recipient Helen Marten, when he begs us rhetorically, "is this = to Turner, Ruskin, even Holman Hunt."³² Certainly the man dislikes Marten's elephantine sculpture because he fails to see its project.

Only what they do not need first to understand, they consider understandable.³³

No doubt such a critical bystander would have backed Benjamin West in his rejection of the very painter after whom the Turner Prize is named, while the politician's nostalgic attitude wants to convey a serious understanding of Marten's work and, moreover, her fit in contemporary art, Michael Gove is prepared to point out how much less significant she is than John Ruskin, a non-exhibiting critic with a talent for watercolors.

All of which means that one considers oneself of sufficiently sure intelligence for the admission of incomprehension to call into question an author's clarity and not that of one's own mind.³⁴

Ignorance is allowed of whatever a member of parliament chooses, but it behooves her to see the neutrality of such a position, the confessed inability to perceive value being no proof of valuelessness. Only with putting up the collateral of a holistically neutral opinion can one declaim about "cold, mechanical, conceptual bullshit"³⁵

31 Emerson, "Nature," 180.

32 @michaalgove, *Twitter*, December 5, 2016, 5:43PM, <https://twitter.com/michaalgove/status/80590551227704704>.

33 Adorno, *Minima Moralia*, 101.

34 Roland Barthes, "Criticism Blind and Dumb," in *Mythologies*, trans. Annette Lavers (New York: Hill and Wang, 2012), 29.

35 Kim Howells, quoted in Richard Pooler, *Boundaries of Modern Art* (Bury Saint Edmunds: Arena Books, 2013), 67. Howells was then a junior minister with Great Britain's Department for Culture, Media and Sport. This quote is in response to the year's Turner Prize nominees.

on sure footing. “In fact,” Barthes replies, following the dismissal of a new work of drama, “any reservations about culture is a terrorist position.”³⁶

20

Cut to the beat. *Eroica*, a made-for-BBC film dramatizing the first performance of Beethoven’s third symphony, tends to cut between members of the ensemble in time with the musical beat. The solid landing felt from one shot to the next is supplied by the viewer’s imagination (“Tacitus believed mariners could *hear* / The sun sinking into the western sea”³⁷), as though the camera shuttled between each one; an aural helping hand, as it were. Of course what’s shown, with limited exceptions, is a sequence of stationary footage. It is an alternate kind of hearing, a trend spear-headed these days by the Frankfurt Radio Symphony but becoming the norm: a taped concert will jump between the soloist and prominent orchestral parts as they happen. Showing me that the bassoon has in fact a role in this mélange of color, I am able to then pick out the bassoonist’s easily lost sound for myself. The eye perceives what is notionally for the ear. Just the reverse, notwithstanding sharp differences in usefulness and unobtrusive grace, of classic Hollywood’s habit of musically babying its audience, when the score doubled obvious turns of plot on-screen with throwaway instrumental flourishes.

21

Gravity’s kneading. Climbing at last into bed carries with it a unique feeling when, letting go completely, one’s tired body releases as though in free fall. I see the sensation involves a conflict between the inaction of lying at rest, not an ounce of muscle clenched, and equal resistance — for the same reason stale bread is easier to cut than fresh — of the spring mattress.

Near, eyes half-closed,
The mother lies back on the hot round stones,
Her weight to theirs opposed
And pressing them as if they were earth’s bones.³⁸

Like floating in a sensory deprivation tank, to be aware of the motionlessness of oneself is indeed an odd substantiation. Gently placing the palm of one hand against a wall can feel like the brick is more repelling of its own volition than resisting the pressure exerted upon it. I apply a little force to the mattress topper then quickly pull away to catch the boss of my handprint (“Now slowly closing like a dent in dough”³⁹), which brings to mind the fun contradiction of trying to catch

36 Barthes, “Criticism Blind and Dumb,” 30.

37 Derek Mahon, “Tractatus,” in *Selected Poems* (New York: Penguin Books, 1993), 135.

38 Thom Gunn, “Three,” in *Selected Poems*, ed. August Kleinzahler (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2009), 38.

39 Robert Frost, “Directive,” in *The Poetry of Robert Frost: The Collected Poems*,

the movement of your eyes in a mirror. Objects are perpetually kneading into surfaces of particle board and marble, tile and limestone, despite their supreme stillness. One discovers gravity all over again, looking with the aim of understanding.

22

Strange loops. The arrival of Fortinbras during *Hamlet's* coda compels Horatio to “speak to th’ yet unknowing world / How these things came about,” with the young conqueror in turn replying, “Let us haste to hear it.”⁴⁰ We can imagine Horatio in the next minute bethinking the ill-fated inventors and thespians hired to this end, raising the dead in somber homage. If one credits these performers, Shakespeare’s living audience is actually retold a tale, the slaughter twice removed. Unless representative of the parent event, what one watches onstage is the report to Fortinbras, including his military entrance but stopping short of the merry-go-round lighting up again.⁴¹

I remembered too that night which is at the middle of the Thousand and One Nights when Scheherazade (through a magical oversight of the copyist) begins to relate word for word the story of the Thousand and One Nights, establishing the risk of coming once again to the night when she must repeat it, and thus on to infinity.⁴²

Following *The Murder of Gonzago*, *Hamlet* thus contains a third, larger play within its spacious ramparts.⁴³ Consequently, an actor in the role of Ophelia should, herself, be thought an actor portraying a fictional actor, following Horatio’s concluding speech, who performs the life and death of the “real” Ophelia. For meta-theatrics, Shakespeare’s tragedy far surpasses *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead*. *One Hundred Years of Solitude* is consciously set up this way, with the fabulous Melquíades leaving behind, à la Russell’s Paradox, the very novel we read; disobeying the closing line’s embargo against second chances, the Buendía family survives as our tale. In the case of *Finnegans Wake*, always already is James Joyce’s reader literarily invaginated, beginning upon the autonomous tail and, with tre-

Complete and Unabridged, ed. Edward Connery Lathem (New York: Henry Holt and Co., 1969), 378.

40 William Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, ed. G.R. Hibbard (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 5.2.332–33, 339.

41 *Ibid.*, 5.2.344–46.

42 Jorge Luis Borges, “The Garden of Forking Paths,” in *Labyrinths: Selected Stories & Other Writings*, eds. Donald A. Yates and James E. Irby (New York: New Directions, 1964), 125.

43 Jorge Luis Borges’s imaginary map comes to mind, for this superimposed telling of the plot to Fortinbras would be precisely the length and breadth of *Hamlet*, as well as the following comment by Roland Barthes, which refers to the man hired by Sergei Eisenstein to portray Ivan the Terrible: “an actor disguised twice over (once as actor in the anecdote, once as actor in the dramaturgy) without one disguise destroying the other; a multi-layering of meanings which always lets the previous meaning continue, as in a geological formation, saying the opposite without giving up the contrary,” Barthes, “The Third Meaning,” 58.

mendous perseverance, ending at the lizard's head. Another loop that outlives its plot is Chris Marker's featurette-length *La jetée*, where the problem is not that a loop is strange, torn between a hole deconstructed and another voluntary, but that it ever became interminable. The timeline of *La jetée's* originating event, once contradicted, cancels itself out of existence; glued into its Möbius strip, this queer narrative becomes one long middle that never began. As though Orpheus's irresistible desire to see Eurydice disappears her first.

23

Schrödinger's deck. Guessing the contents of a sealed booster pack or the symbols ready to be uncovered on a scratch-off ticket can be thought phenomenologically distinct from the test for extrasensory abilities in which Zener cards are used. It's the feeling that a turned-down four of clubs is "activated" upon being flipped, or a black lotus released from the thick indeterminacy of its deck.

24

Finesse run. In the skinny genre of player-manipulated storytelling, Jonathan Blow's puzzle-platformer *Braid* is no different than in its predecessors, insofar as one is usually in platform games forced on pain of death to complete subsequent trials, failure resulting in temporary demise and teleportation of the avatar to an earlier save location. *Braid's* gimmick is that it allows the player to directly control time's flow, with a button press reversing an poorly timed jump; except it has always been the goal of videogames to see a hero through unscathed. Sweep away these many gruesome pitfalls and lava drownings and the record left is one of a harrowing, flawlessly executed adventure, the non-stop action feature boiled down to its essence. Videogames strike a novel compromise. Dwayne Johnson is grazed about as often as can reasonably be expected, like Nicolas Cage in *Next* springs to his feet all the wiser, *this* time avoiding the sniper's shot. It's the protagonist gone quantum, who's able to venture down the safe and the booby-trapped corridors simultaneously. Horror of the escape subgenre, for a while the *Saw* franchise but including plots about encroaching zombie hoards, prefers to assemble a larger cast than one A-lister, picking off members until the highest paid remains alive to represent the group's ordeal.

Always making the aptest decision is really like a videogame's plot in sum: Crash Bandicoot *has* avoided every trap, never failing to leap across a deadly chasm or dodge a projectile.⁴⁴ On-screen it's much the same when Gary Sinise solves a sphinx of a puzzle after a slew of Hollywood nobodies perish. The checkpoints in a videogame, whether or not they're designated as such by a flag, stand for temporal reclamation as well as a progress-saving mechanism embedded within the game's landscape, demise being anathema to a narrative that puts buyers in the driver's seat. Each failed run is edited out with Mario's rebirth. In *Braid*, the player is tacitly faulted for allowing the avatar to die, as choices detrimental to one's progress

44 Referring specifically to videogames, in *Sex and the Failed Absolute* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2020), Slavoj Žižek calls this "vampire temporality."

can be repaired on the spot. This sort of narrative elision should remind us of the struggles of composing and the graphic artist's non-photo blue, reducible to the truer lines ("The arterial branches disappearing in the leaves, / Swallowed like a tailor's chalk marks in the finished suit"⁴⁵), as well as a version of natural selection retrofitted to the lone individual, who progresses through endless generations as her own descendant in the present tense; the fittest's eventual survival, being the narrative of those organisms whose collective biology fruitfully adapted. A traceable zigzag distinguishes between stage failure and success, collapsed within the endlessly resurrectable hero.

25

Theseus and his ship. As is fashion's habit, modifications ornament the depressingly neutral body and chastise flesh by replacing it, as with the yakuza's body suit, for example. A desirable amount of superfluity is lost with the sloughing of one's clothes, while tattoos amount to outfitting oneself with design per se. The metaphysical is brought up short and forcibly changed. Giorgio de Chirico's dependence on mannequins has precisely to do with gainsaying negativity through its artificial reproduction, proclaiming in oils the dummy's contained absence, whose bulbous forms in unbleached cloth cry out for camouflage.

26

Saint Martin in the fields. "He who thinks he can find in himself the means of doing without others is much mistaken,"⁴⁶ writes La Rochefoucauld, as Seneca did to Lucilius centuries earlier: "No one can live happily who has regard to himself alone and transforms everything into a question of his own utility."⁴⁷ Outside the dilapidated city, among herded beasts and the saints losing their eyesight in caves, the beautiful narcissists try castigating the invulnerable in under three hundred characters and the truths of the age have been distilled to a train of specially chosen emojis, like the Eagle Scout's numerous merit badges. In gym selfies the justice's collar dissents for her.

27

The quick dead. Everything done, the body dressed if not quite groomed, with plans at least made and a fact or two learned for its own sake, visibly suggests a desire for life. Self-destruction then sounds utterly inconsistent, to say the least. In a depressive slump, one quits shaving and stops returning friends' text messages. It

45 Frederick Seidel, "To Robert Lowell and Osip Mandelstam," in *Selected Poems* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2020), 23.

46 François de La Rochefoucauld, *Moral Reflections, Sentences, and Maxims* (Cambridge: William Gowans, 1851), 63.

47 Seneca, *Letters from a Stoic*, trans. Richard Mott Gummere (Mineola: Dover Publications, 2016), 109.

can be said we no longer care to be alive if we take satisfaction in none of the experiences that guide us through flowering dispiritedness and the Dantean forest with which a life's ambiguous middle is crossed. Bordering on a living death, bathing quickly and eating out of necessity has a certain tautological quality to it. Between total abstention from pleasure and stamping out its possibility conclusively with a bullet, the difference could be akin in sentiment to one of the uncountably many aphorisms attributed to Mark Twain, which equates persons who neglect books with those who were never taught to read. As I see it, the contradiction dangles on through the retroaction of an impossibility, the self-administered postmortem: could one paradoxically survive a mouthful of ibuprofen that was fatal, how many out of ten would rue the deed? But this begs the question.

Hang yourself, you will regret it; do not hang yourself, and you will also regret that; hang yourself or do not hang yourself, you will regret both; whether you hang yourself or do not hang yourself, you will regret both.⁴⁸

Rather than asking who wouldn't trade places with Evelyn McHale, a pyrrhic something haunts us about suicide when it is beautiful, that McHale alone is oblivious to her posthumous fame, which stands opposed to the anonymizing violence of a car wreck or ignominy of drowning in a corn silo, neither of which lend themselves to visuals featuring the victims themselves.

After someone has died we see his life in a conciliatory light. His life appears to us with outlines softened by a haze. There was no softening for him though, his life was jagged and incomplete. For him there was no reconciliation; his life is naked and wretched.⁴⁹

Perhaps all but the chronically destitute and chemically off-kilter can be expected to improve down the road, finding myriad ways to the future's intermittent joys. Suicide seems an act not only of lethal overconfidence, an undue certainty framed in the negative — what's *not* to happen, will *never* improve — but one that defies what is likeliest, the harmful outlook changed for good, come one random morning a thousand years hence.

28

Schubert in furs. Comfort on top of longevity might be less appropriate a wish for all the tubercular and syphilitic composers than we believe, for didn't need of coin force the unlucky to cut new goose quills? Although we continue to mourn, their deaths infuriatingly premature, the total number of decades allotted falling between three and four, the benefit of showering Schubert with gigantic sums — not a pension from the Austrian government but a deluge of gold and jewels — is hard to determine, though cultured heads of state now realize what's owed to him. Re-

48 Søren Kierkegaard, *Either/Or*, trans. David F. Swenson (Princeton University Press, 1949), 1:31.

49 Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Culture and Value*, trans. Peter Winch (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), 46e.

call the humorous drawing of a portly Brahms at his piano, an imported cigar in his teeth.

To live by a pleasure is not a high calling; it involves patronage, however veiled; it numbers the artist, however ambitious, along with dancing girls and billiard markers.⁵⁰

Indentured to the Esterhazys for chamber works, dialed to the low-yield frequency of a school. Countless more almost comes to be, a tenth symphony and completion of the requiem. Great things are lost when Sibelius decided to rest on his laurels after he's granted a state pension at the hoary age of thirty-two (*Il faut décourager les arts*, said Degas.) All the rage by the commencement of his thirties, Rossini jumped ship from composer to gourmand of Paris. Buoyed by marriage, Dvořák wrote to the end of his health, while Beethoven had the respect of a couple of princes but fortunately never a knighthood. Not to mention the talent spoiled by morning-show hosts and Oprah when they dub a prodigy the next Mozart for ratings. One such as Alma Deutscher's temporary advantage is indeed her precocity, the ability to do in the first place what most of us cannot and at a tender age; but then to seriously judge the music of this talented kid, which amounts to something like diet Mendelssohn, is dismissed as meanspirited and beside the point. Audiences fall over themselves to acknowledge what has already been vetted and, betraying their actual indifference about the new music they've just heard, always begin clapping before it finishes.

29

The golden rule. It is not necessarily the case that whomever one observes from the advantageous height of a third-floor bedroom will be privy to the reciprocal view, equal in lighting and definition, as one discovers on the local bus, that some of us are linked by a zigzag of mirrors. With this figure silhouetted in the opposite block of apartments, I'm conscious of being watched myself, at least visible in outline if not greater detail.⁵¹ If this other were farther off, thus would I be to them. But couldn't I hit the light? The sniper on the hillside is also panoptical, like an unblinking eye of glass. Spying through anything larger than a pinhole, the feeling is that one cannot possibly be hid.

50 Robert Louis Stevenson, "Letter to a Young Gentleman," in *The Lantern-Bearers and Other Essays*, ed. Jeremy Treglown (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1988), 248.

51 I'm reminded of the oddly finer crispness of the shadow of one's hairy professor, caught in front of an overhead projector's informational beam, compared to what is being shown on the lowered screen.

Mon. 2/2

8:15_a - 1:00_p

Tues. 2/3

8:00_a - 2:00_p

Wed. 2/4

8:30_a - 12:30_p

Sat. 2/7

6:45_a - 12:45_p

(off Sun. 2/8)



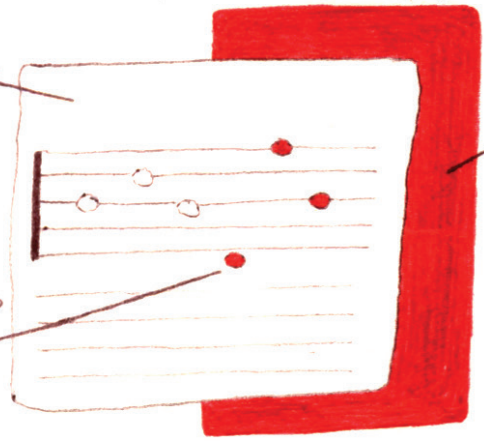
Tchaik. Theme Swan Lake

Brahms's Symphony 4, 1st mov.

20. The truth is the whole. The whole, however, is merely the essential nature reaching its completeness through the process of its own development. — Hegel, Preface to P.S.

musical work as degree of revelation

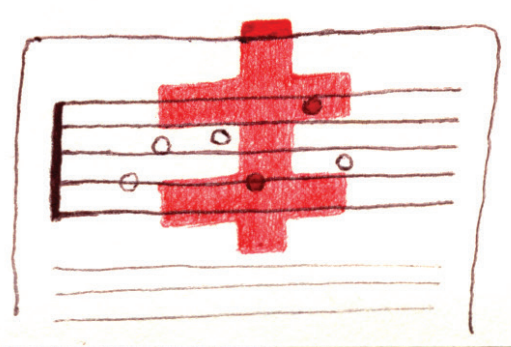
notes as removed apertures.



"truth"

* Not whole as truth, which suggests the musical work brings into being the truth. Rather, it attempts to show it.

Success/failure



Tenth Notebook

1

Day by day. Capable of everlasting breath, the monk's ability is to locate an hour departed from the calendar and expatiate on its business because his living has long been superfluous, or memorably negligent in experience; a caricature handed down to us. Given its repetition, the brother's homogeneous existence can be recalled with storybook serenity because it contains no peaks of drama but was all of a piece.

Let me record day by day my honest thought without prospect or retrospect, and, I cannot doubt, it will be found symmetrical, though I mean it not, and see it not.¹

I can't summon the entirety of my experience not for want of some spiritually inflected keenness of attention, but because there is so much. What the monk collects are the templates for this or that activity outside of time, the layperson's preoccupation with which he dismisses as mere busyness. If asked, our monk would be unable to specify when he last prayed; he knows only that he has.

2

Faking kintsugi. When I suppose that Beethoven's music has a certain "completeness," compared with the rather diaphanous works of Arnold Bax, for instance, or even Schumann, I am tempted to ask what the idea of formal integrity evokes within other disciplines. In sculpture this must be the human figure upon attaining the fullness of our proportions, the *Aphrodite de Milo* restored of its limbs and golden bribe. And the later white copies, which haven't *lost* their genitalia and noses but emerged from the workshops choate, the deprivation only affected. This is distinct from work that appears materially incomplete due to either lack of time, such as the *Rondanini Pietà*, or misunderstanding the artist's basic conceit, as with Rodin's headless, but not decapitated, *Walking Man*, thought to depict John the Baptist. Rome's resuscitation of Greek and Etruscan sculpture in bulk, fetishizing the ravages of time and since then having succumb themselves, does something quasi-modern. Like conceptualists challenging twentieth-century ethos to a duel, copies of goddesses and charioteers mired in time suggest erosion the latter didn't undergo.

1 Ralph Waldo Emerson, "Self-Reliance," in *The Annotated Emerson*, ed. David Mikics (Cambridge: The Belknap Press, 2012), 168–169.

The farther we press in our discoveries, the more we shall see proofs of design and self-supporting arrangement where the careless eye had seen nothing but accident!²

3

Chemin de fer. Videotaped sex, if artificially sped up, has a way of negating what communication, or push-and-pull, happens there: the negotiations of our swordplay,³ either verbalized or signaled with kinesic smoke, that glue those involved.

The less dense reproduction of reality in naturalist literature left room for intentions: in the unbroken duplication achieved by the technical apparatus of film every intention, even that of truth, is a lie.⁴

Contraction like this is perfectly fit to physical action or parodies thereof, as in the guided drop and rise of a steel ball travelling on rails. As a result, cause blends in like a wolf; struggling to detect the former, one feels oneself to be hunting the lone gleam in a complication of hay. Although the acceleration should be relatively normal, drops still tapering off and climbs cresting, above a certain frame rate the whole sequence gels (“the absolute proximity, the total instantaneity of things, the feeling of no defense, no retreat. It is the end of interiority and intimacy”⁵) in speed, as if the ball had a compensatory motor.

The physiological and merely physical directness implicit in these cases of coupling together what of course are ontologically separate can remind us of that conception of the body as a hollowed-out organic shell, wherein one’s limited quantity of conscious-making spirit resides. In sci-fi and fantasy media we discover nearly the same thing: artificial bodies host to an equilibrious substance lighter than helium. The maximum dilation of an *élan vital*, whether vitalizing steam or a magic spell in a primary color, is thought to be the outermost nooks, from the fingers’ tips to those of the robot’s metal toes.

Junkspace is sealed, held together not by structure but by skin, like a bubble. Gravity has remained constant, resisted by the same arsenal since the beginning of time; but air-conditioning — invisible medium, therefore unnoticed — has truly revolutionized architecture. Air-conditioning has launched

- 2 Thomas De Quincey, “On the Knocking at the Gate in *Macbeth*,” in *Selected Writings of Thomas De Quincey*, ed. Philip van Doren Stern (New York: Modern Library, 1949), 1095.
- 3 See *His Girl Friday* for the Hollywood equivalent, which slapdashedly exaggerates the repartee of newspaper editors — too rapid-fire to be chalked up to communication. Screwball comedies further and further repeal the activity of thinking, until all that remains is the cacophony of overlapping replies.
- 4 Theodor Adorno, *Minima Moralia: Reflections from Damaged Life*, trans. E.F.N. Jephcott (New York: Verso, 2005), 142.
- 5 Jean Baudrillard, “The Ecstasy of Communication,” trans. John Johnston, in *The Anti-Aesthetic: Essays on Postmodern Culture*, ed. Hal Foster (Seattle: Bay Press, 1987), 133.

the endless building. If architecture separates buildings, air-conditioning unites them.⁶

Oz's heartless Tin Woodman comes to mind. Oogie Boogie, too, of the loveably macabre *Nightmare before Christmas*, despite the fact that his body is filled with creeping insects instead of vapor, and Necron 99, who belongs to Ralph Bakshi's post-apocalyptic cult feature *Wizards*. Gaseous djinns have their lamps. Taking the zeitgeist's pulse, the sillier writers among us do not isolate consciousness to the paltry quarters of the skull but envision a sort of body-wide ectoplasm of the secular. Internal atmospheres energize golemic robots, misty quantities regulated by the shovelful of coal or an irradiated lump from outer space. The entire inside volume of science fiction's contraptive familiars is indebted to utopian energy, either commonplace or intergalactic. Bound inside a clumsy metalloid husk, the meagerest appendage lifts through this.

4

Cleave to the roof of my mouth. Nestled among their stage set of Babylonian ruins in a sumptuous performance of Nabucco at the Metropolitan Opera, as Giuseppe Verdi's Hebrew slaves sing *Va, pensiero*, hardly an eyelash among the chorus budges except up close. With the camera pulled out to behind the balustrade, nothing hints at their souls. Sound, being invisible, hovers closely, in spite of itself, to the condition of ventriloquism. Leaning on one another's shoulders or reclined, the slaves keep stock-still for the duration of the performance. Older television and film behaved in like manner by giving motionless dogs and cats vocals, or the holiday special in which an ice-cold statue, the children's version of *Il Commendatore*, booms in flat, baritone voiceover. Seeing actors record their lines in the studio, it is almost as if Julie Kavner and Dan Castellaneta were lip-synching to the dialogue of real Simpsons.

5

Ontology and nonsense. However galling for those of us trying to wrestle the lid off nature's jar, quantum mechanics must be altogether rational. Anything internally illogical cannot be called a system, though this frustrates its qualification as a set. Contemporary debates on the subject of modern physics seem to derive either from magazines' fast-and-loose synopsis of rigorous experimentation or actual scientists yielding to the temptation of interpreting findings as they might best capture the omnivorous attention of a *Popular Science* editor, who will embrace every puzzling result that shores up the idea of physicists as tumbling Alices.

It might therefore be better to follow an aesthetic paradigm and to assert that not only the production of the unresolvable contradiction is the funda-

6 Rem Koolhaas, "Junkspace," *October* 100 (Spring 2002): 176.

mental process, but that we must imagine some form of gratification inherent in this very confrontation with pessimism and the impossible.⁷

Across television and in print, the likes of Michio Kaku and Brian Greene remind us no end that common sense is not welcome in quantum science. Anticipating our complaint that illogicality doesn't itself make sense, we're only smiled upon from a high bough.

The astrologists and spiritualists do not so much solve problems as remove them by crude premisses from all possibility of solution.⁸

Publishing outliers like Malcolm Gladwell, in emulation of Richard Feynman's infectious zeal, jump at the commercial boon a topsy-turvy universe presents. And it goes down as an empirical fact that spin cannot be measured when a particle's location is known, though this is more laboratory law than irrefutable proof, and a single electron can pass through multiple slits.⁹

Two roads diverged in a yellow wood,
And sorry I could not travel both
And be one traveler.¹⁰

Although the twentieth century's physical models are disinclined to make nice with those drawn to the macroscopic scale of planetoids and hanging fruit, changing theoretical arenas in no way then permits contradictions in sense. In article after article, journalists, deliberately or not, defer explanation by introducing a second, hypothetical object, for their subject changes right under their fingers. In the difference between a lever and a button, which either has or has not been pressed, their fusion would be a trigger squeezed until firing. Consider an imposter for the common light switch, appearing to be in the ON and OFF positions simultaneously. Immediately do we reject this jacketed electrical circuit with two prongs as a superpositioned light switch, based not on skepticism but rather in arguing that the essential either/or rule has been abandoned. Assuming that it is functional and accepts normal usage, such that it cannot be left midway, any bivalent, transistor-like object must be active in one state alone because this what it is to be that particular object.¹¹

7 Fredric Jameson, *Archaeologies of the Future: The Desire Called Utopia and Other Science Fictions* (New York: Verso, 2005), 84.

8 Adorno, *Minima Moralia*, 242.

9 According to Wolchover, Bohr's probabilistic "Copenhagen interpretation" and the double-slit experiment are threatened by the deterministic and institutionally neglected pilot-wave theory, which reproduces the electron's weird omnipresence at the classical level.

10 Robert Frost, "The Road Not Taken," in *The Poetry of Robert Frost: The Collected Poems, Complete and Unabridged*, ed. Edward Connery Lathem (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1969), 105.

11 The term "multiverse" elicits the same groan for being a contradiction in terms. Were there other universes, these, too, necessarily fall under the universal set and thus semantically undefine themselves. The "Marvel Universe," however, refers both to Marvel's vast commercial holdings as well as its fictional multi-

Supposing on the other hand there was a game resembling that of chess but simpler, no pawns being used in it. Should we call this game incomplete? Or should we call a game more complete than chess if it in some way contained chess but added new elements?¹²

The suggestion of an ontologically confused system, group, or part is incompatible with more than modern physics, it is born of an inattentive employment of language. Not a switch but another object altogether, evidently one capable of actuating exclusive positions at once or neither. Except this no longer refers to ON/OFF exclusivity, as the object may be similar in apparent function but radically dissimilar in terms of its operation and identity.

It seems to me the notion of a quantum object (QO) can be interpreted in one of three distinct ways:

Table 1

Confused to Itself	Confusing to Observer	Confusing to Observers
Inherently irrational, inconsistent observations of the QO accurately describe ontic instability, implying that the QO is able to observe itself from an objective standpoint.	The QO's ontology involves appearing inconsistent; this partly constituting what it is, the QO remains self-coherent. Outside observation is thus "deliberately" foiled.	The observer is not technologically sophisticated enough to be certain about the nature of the QO, which has all the neutrality of ordinary matter.

That quantum things could be confused to themselves — the absurd solution offered by Niels Bohr — is not merely to argue for a kind of constitutional dynamism but that the quantum can be irrational at the ontic level. This is tantamount to positing for every quantum thing a philosophical capacity for analyzing the fact of its own being, exactly like Kant's argument that qualities barricade themselves in a sort of epistemic black box endlessly whisked from human eyes. While unsatisfying, the alternative conclusion leads straightaway to idealism. If one honors Newton's demolition of physicality, absent any observer¹³ there ceases to be something at last capable of defending home plate — the famous atom. Here Kant is helpful, opposed to the illusion of discreteness predicated on diffuse fields, like a hologram put together by far-off projectors. Faced with discrepancies between physicists' observations and how the object is truly constituted, the self-aggrandizing conclu-

verse. Sure enough, unique worlds under a single commercial umbrella, however though the branching of canons that requires is elaborate, allows for a times table of additional content, from the special crossover issue to agglomerative spinoff films.

- 12 Ludwig Wittgenstein, *The Blue and Brown Books: Preliminary Studies for the "Philosophical Investigations"* (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1965), 19.
- 13 "He would on the whole admit nature to be a good idea (a little low, perhaps, when not enclosed with a park-fence), but an idea dependent for its execution on your great county families." Charles Dickens, *Bleak House* (New York: Signet Classic, 2003), 25.

sion by the popular literature and scientists themselves too nearly resembles those of the biased and deranged. But no particle observes itself; unless actually composite in nature, particles simply are. In other words, all there is to note is what's there.

In the world everything is as it is, and everything happens as it does happen.¹⁴

However much the new physics fly in the face of the *Principia*, a gluon cannot bear witness against itself. In order that the definition of a household light switch may continue to be meaningful for us, the quantum version necessarily relinquishes switchhood, desublimating to the status of a foreign, unacculturated object, broadly alike in terms of appearance but alien in origin. Adoption of incompatible states is a luxury usually denied to fiction, like dime novels seem intent of shooting themselves in the foot; an impasse dodged, where one glaring contradiction or another should have had the effect of throwing a wrench into the book's engine. Our ability to state impossibilities through inoffensive syntax lends paradox of every kind the air of material legitimacy ("It will therefore only be in language that the limit can be set, and what lies on the other side of the limit will simply be nonsense"¹⁵). The brainless Scarecrow is held by audiences to be reasonably well constituted for all his straw, which in their eyes is better than nothing. Is it not misleading to describe a subatomic particle as the excitation of its field? In the mathematical sense, one dreams up a thing between states that is eager to sublimate even while lower than being's threshold, like a dirtless meadow — the photon's materially empty packet, with the packet itself doubly so — before any green escapes the subsurface; without actual grass the meadow can be Elysium at best, which is to say a cell that's only visible on paper. As the relaxation of its particular quanta,¹⁶ their collapse into electromagnetic groupness, the idea of the subatomic field serves a gestalt function; acknowledging all the wildflowers at once, at least until the eye twitches back into focus. Surely there's a ceiling to complexity in the universe; reciprocally, a hypothetical form of intelligent life sufficiently endowed to behold everything there is must be credited. Not that a hierarchy of complexity prevails, stratifying reality according to the degree of cognitive challenge on a scale from paddleboarding to calculus. Alternatively, one can mull over the idea of thresholds, which doesn't refer to a moving goal post attuned to the espials of Kepler and Brahe, as a few science insiders lead us to believe, but rather a corral of possibles whose silhouette stands for all that is the case.¹⁷ Concepts as yet un-

14 Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, trans. D.F. Pears and B.F. McGuinness (New York: Routledge Classics, 2001), 86. It follows that for God to exist meaningfully, which is to say in the world, he must be unreal.

15 *Ibid.*, 4.

16 But doesn't there remain a sense of physical discreteness, insofar as a field ought to be reducible to material simples. A *material* set cannot be empty, comprising no elements, if it claims literal existence in the world. Couldn't fundamental particles, whatever those end up being at last, be considered true substance, given their necessity as physical bedrock?

17 The ultimate theorem scientists pry from the dark seems basically a matter of chance, as with our luckiest of locations in the Milky Way. Since before Ptolemy and exemplified in the confident traveler lost in fog, it has long pleased us to note how pinwheel galaxies rotate on the axes of themselves.

broached by human thought, deemed incomprehensible by the superstitious in a show of cosmic humility, *Homo sapiens* being a lifeform that hasn't surpassed some greater threshold for brainpower, can be lumped in with all that we're capable of learning as a species, though each and every literate person may never get algebra under their intellectual belt. Whether what for us is the observable universe is destined to achieve parity with the universe per se, telescoped and logged in star charts, is a different matter.

6

Not really. The comments left in response to tape-recorded pranks, eventually rehabilitated as social experiments, split between the camps of skeptics and fans. With each video invariably a hoax and none too convincing, the latter hastens to defend the producer's work, to the effect of, "True fans know this is fake." One discovers what one might as easily have garnered from commercial television, that ironic self-abasement is used to safeguard a commodity against criticism, whereby Apple pretends to send up its spokesman on charges of snobbery. This is exactly the thrust of figural paintings that dry streaked with drips, not to mention the painfully obvious "NOT ART" tag, which Bostonians find stenciled on anything from gas stations to dumpsters. Is it surprising to see a product's fantasy guarded by the consumer base that finances its dissemination? YouTubers are helping to ensure the longevity of their entertainment. Outwardly at least, the basic premise, by now horrendously clichéd, was always the prank's veracity. As with other fictions, what's required is sacrificing disbelief on the altar of willingness.

7

Much, much ado. Sol Gabetta's augmented, oh-so-*au courant* performance of the Elgar Concerto — actually a three-minute demonstration focused on the choicest cut — in which infrared cameras tracking the movement of her instrument project an array of rippling color, offers more evidence of the public's total boredom. Can one reasonably expect Britons to throng Royal Albert Hall were it lacking in flags and a final confetti drop? Attempts to refurbish classical music over the last hundred years have entailed nothing more serious than the intrusion of promotional kitsch vying for that worrisome generation of ticket holders to come and coughing up funds through appeals to donors, who nod approvingly from their boxes. Classical music rebuffs accusations of selling out by repeatedly proving its worldly innocence with demonstrations likening its performers to dedicated slaves, the crystal ball of a Steinway attempting to conjure Schubert's last will and intentions. In turn, musty sincerity functions as a temporary antidote for cynicism's stranglehold on culture. Theodor Adorno writes that a football stadium is in the business of selling tickets to a cross-section of the imbecilic, both sides showing up in force and jerseyed because the opposing team hoped they wouldn't,¹⁸

18 For a politically similar case, see Lorenzo Franceschi-Bicchierai, "Russian Facebook Trolls Got Two Groups of People to Protest Each Other in Texas," *Vice*, November 1, 2017, <https://www.vice.com/en/article/3kvvz3/russian-facebook->

while millions bravely heed the call of a Hollywood director when she implores the country to solve her latest blockbuster. In music, there's the predictably alliterative *Chopin Project*, Alice Sara Ott's lightly experimental collaboration with multi-instrumentalist Ólafur Arnalds and on which album the Nocturne in G Minor, op. 37, has been filtered through an ambient drizzle of rain and faraway talking. Such capitalized "project" albums (*The British Project*, *The Ligeti Project*), become an all-out obsession among marketing departments everywhere, attempt to fix a sort of grassroots importance to the commodity, while the listener is excused from actually listening.

8

Sloughed. Our typographical custom of framing a speaker's dialogue using punctuation marks differentiates between the pressure of omniscience, surrounding a clause with oceanic desperation, and the orientation of its narrative momentum. Picture a continuous flow of text containing solely what is said or thought without indicating as much, something like the air-tight script used in ancient Greece, approaching a framed work of art until the gilded wood plinks out of view, even a line of poetry whose break coincides with the margin. The imago drops into your hands like an egg boiled in its shell (see fig. 1).

"The quick brown fox," she said,
The quick brown f

Fig. 1. Courtesy of the author.

Cormac McCarthy's punctuation deficit tries to achieve this kind of spiritual nakedness. In his fragile continent, exposed beneath the reader's sweltering glare, every line seems a stunt of austerity, a hunger strike without a clear cause. How insightful is Don DeLillo, whose way with lists manages to blandify even a grocery store's affordable magic. Reported literally, his commercial things-in-themselves, "open cartons, crumpled tinfoil, shiny bags of potato chips, bowls of pasty substances covered with plastic wrap, flip-top rings and twist ties, individually wrapped slices of orange cheese,"¹⁹ are nothing short of unsettling, shucked from their brightly colored exoskeletons.

It begins to look somewhat comical or grotesque in its isolation — and this folly soon seeps over the reader too, who may feel sheepish to be so greatly struck by the repeated thing-word. Is this strangeness only in the violent decomposition of the word, all meaning evacuated, into its typological clusters of characters in their graphic shapes? If one were to think, conventionally, of the word as animated solely by its meaning, then through the process of

trolls-got-people-to-protest-against-each-other-in-texas.

19 Don DeLillo, *White Noise* (New York: Penguin Books, 2016), 7.

reiteration alone, one would be suddenly confronted by the word's corpse, or its waxwork.²⁰

The paintings of Ivan Seal, a contemporary artist based in Berlin, show us the opposite state of aesthetic tension when the sculptural objects of their attention — clumps of messy strokes and smears, for the most part — are elevated by Seal on pedestals; that is, the objects and their monochromatic platforms belong equally to the same *mise-en-scène* as elements, no different than the tree trunk at David's feet. At this greater remove, however, that which otherwise would have been purely nonrepresentational, when set off against its inferior base, obtains the status of a diegetic thing in natural space.

9

Hemisphere of magic fiction. The lengthy discussions between Adso of Melk and his master, in Umberto Eco's historical murder mystery *The Name of the Rose*, admittedly a little dry if not donnish, seldom pause to draw breath or backpedal on an analogy newly entertained. Licensed by fiction, their loud thinking enjambs at our reading speed.

It took her five seconds in actual time, in mind time ever so much longer.²¹

10

Prolegomena. Chopin's cycle of short pieces in each of the twenty-four keys rebuilds an eagle, albeit a curious one, from feathers the composer gathered in bouts of lonesome hunting. From a student's means of honing a variety of techniques to the Études, or from a pianist's pre-concert extemporization on themes to the Preludes, this kind of instrumental exquisite corpse goes out of fashion, ironically so, with the culture industry's attack on the look as much as feasibility of giving attention. Free of the medieval bog of use, the best art music continues to smell faintly of its marshy origins, evolving first into wandery nocturnes and, with Debussy, unreadable books of images, a waterlogged album that would show us goldfish and bells. Slouched in the pitchforked shade of a haystack,²² one at last recognizes the shards of melodies formerly whole, like a dinner plate shattered on purpose.

11

The time of masters. It could be useful to adapt Nietzsche's dismissal of Christianity as conveniently defeatist for the twentieth century's love-hate affair with

20 Denise Riley, "Your Name Which Isn't Yours," in *Impersonal Passion: Language as Affect* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005), 122.

21 Virginia Woolf, *Between the Acts*, ed. Frank Kermode (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 8.

22 As with Kandinsky and Rimsky-Korsakov, Monet and Debussy twin nicely.

atonality. Visual art *doesn't* lend itself convincingly to this charge, in the way of official decree. It isn't quite the generational gap of sibling resentment, however, bickering down through the circles and eventually lampooned in the press. I cherish the honeyed pearls that are there to be pried from a career consisting mostly of salt, and I'm not opposed to sifting through Bach's leviathan portfolio either. Prolificacy ebbs and this sad trend no doubt correlates to the artist's rise to singular respectability, up from decorator to retained by a prince. Beethoven grumbled about patronage while courting favor obliquely, the birth pangs of one man burdened with delivering an artistic paradigm shift; Brahms admonished Dvořák over the uncleanliness of his manuscripts, saying that Mozartian beauty died with Mozart. Endlessly is the time of masters like Handel and Goethe breathing its last. Perhaps there's truth in this, apart from the development of genres so remote they cannot be compared, neither for better nor worse, with the illustrious Austrian's.

For his film *Letter from an Unknown Woman*, Max Ophüls chose *Un Suspiro* when he required something succinct enough to survive endless looping. I think of those who spend decades in Beverly Hills writing for the cinema, while Rachmaninoff's B-flat Minor Sonata, failing to congeal, was left on Vladimir Horowitz's doorstep, the famous pianist who wished he'd been a composer. Beethoven's thirty-two sonatas are leagues above elegant at the least, eight or nine of them among the crowning essays of the nineteenth century, works that seem to self-sharpen through the decades.²³ Rachmaninoff's adopted son sighs in late interviews of a suppressed desire throughout his life to seriously compose. Preferring philosophy to activism, Noam Chomsky laments that the world and its problems won't leave him be, while Lars von Trier and Elem Klimov complain that their filmography would have turned out all the more horrific had they been less hamstrung, respectively by depression and the benevolence of creatively holding back. That eternal call to take up stylus haunted Schumann and plagued Charles-Valentin Alkan into stealing from Chopin. It might be said the incomparable recordings left to posterity by Horowitz surpass what original music he never got around to.

To hope that some unforeseen mishap will intervene to ruin his effect, without, however, obliterating your disappointment, the expectation aroused by him that there was an effect to ruin, that, if the smiling interest never did arrive, it must, through no fault of its own, have got stuck somewhere; that, exhausted, ravenous, delayed by fog, mobbed and mauled by a thousand irrelevancies, it has, nevertheless, not forgotten its promise but is still trying desperately to get a connection.²⁴

- 23 After Beethoven the piano sonata becomes laconic and dramatically massive. Chopin, Liszt, and Brahms are so concerned with doing the legendary form justice that they often, but not always, forget about musicality, the way competing lovers inadvertently shove the object of their affections into a puddle. Except Brahms's anxiety is that of filling a giant's shoes. The first of his symphonies and piano concertos are overwrought cathedrals of effort; with the second, in both cases Brahms has learned to incorporate levity into gravity, as uglier lead holds together a lot of colored glass.
- 24 W.H. Auden, *The Sea and the Mirror*, ed. Arthur Kirsch (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003), 50–51.

It is like when Kafka instructed Max Brod, his literary executor and first biographer, to destroy any unpublished manuscripts. Brod refused to Kafka's face yet was kept as the designated inheritor of the estate, such that Kafka got it both ways, seeming to disavow posthumous works while tacitly allowing them to be disseminated.

12

Effort and the hidden. Compared with loose jewelry simply let be, the lithe tension of a hand has a certain echoic pliancy, resisting itself even as it bulges outward, such that a leather glove seems vaguely redundant. An appearance of fused, self-opposed integrity is given. Glimpsed through the décolletage of a top, there is a minor sublimity to cleavage plunging out of sight, like a length of sockless ankle vanishes into its dark sneaker. Or the surprise of craning your head along what was assumed to be a short building as the checker of aluminum and glass races skyward. Inversely, one recalls Constantin Brâncuși's *Endless Column*, the topmost rhomboidal section only half there, as if to suggest its loss to view. Clipped or accented with a simple pin, a flimsy silk tie avoids the fate of windblown hair and unweighted papers; but gravity straightens things, so the fashionable move is then to hike one's up an inch or two, such that its length develops a prominent undulation before injecting the sartorial Botox. Inexplicable slackness confers upon a wearer that additional sign of having intervened manually, which is grooming's chief distinguishment.

13

Confusio linguarum As thematic exposition and development transported on an undercurrent of language, we might think to describe instrumental music as storytelling. It would mean adding an odd duck to the traditional badling of songs and books, in light of how lyrics rehash a fragmentary thought into long phrases. It always being possible to digest the most complicated libretto down to a handful of sentences, certainly music is a poor medium for communication, if only in terms of economy. This is apparent in musicals and especially opera, whose ostensible purpose is to tell a story. But then making art has been impractical since Babel.

14

In sickness and in health. Goethe's distinction between the classical era as health and the romantic as sickness invites one to say that any diagnosis of the baroque, which is the progenitor of the two grammars, would be akin to *Empfindsamkeit* with a clock or like ascertaining the fitness of a jack-in-the-box.

15

Problems latching. Because pleasure in music typically derives from anticipation, repeat listening, while dampening what surprises lie in store, is not only recommended but may be necessary when it comes to those slippery composers one has difficulty grasping, just as a working familiarity with the principles of mathematics is needed in advance of theorems.

16

On steampunk. The entertainment of toying with science one has the historical leg up on is, in some manner, tied to a feeling of intellectual superiority. If nothing else, this is predicated on the fact that we go about in fatal opposition to the odorous body's continual perishing, our kitchens and living rooms tricked out with Bluetooth-enabled everything. A culture's simplest operation lies in the translation of felt experience into an artifact charged with meaning; and the way steampunk repurposes defunct aspects of industrial society, with its interlocking gasworks and latticed pulleys, stems from an excess of understanding, both in the sense of user familiarity and a mechanism's relative decline in performance.

From this nostalgic and regressive perspective — that of the older modern and its temporalities — what is mourned is the memory of deep memory; what is enacted is a nostalgia for nostalgia, for the grand older extinct questions of origin and telos.²⁵

Hence the intricate *Carceri* of Giovanni Battista Piranesi, which satisfy the artist's lust for a quasi-operative mechanistic ubiquity — or at least one heavily engineered, where varied parapets are slung with rigging — such that every inch of his drawing paper is conspicuously planned. Although their colossal gloom seems to depict a justice system paradoxically draconian and lavish, another way of understanding Piranesi's imaginary prisons is to think of their stairways and bridges to nowhere as hoarding utility per se, a sort of virile readiness in architecture like the ethos of Escher's self-impacting designs crossed with actual life. Certain visual styles afford the observer a leisurely recognition that recedes by categorical degrees, as when peering out across a comic book's dystopian cityscape from the creaking deck of a large airship, its motley crew dressed in a blend of rags, and a network of sparkling commercial properties clogs up the view with high-definition advertisements. The comic's densely complex present is spied from materially cruddy surroundings, the warped planks' grain woefully broad compared to organic light-emitting diodes. Either the hero is outfitted with clashing scraps, the thick stitching visible from a mile away, or she's stylishly adept in a Japanese technopolis.

25 Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1991), 156.

17

Perfect versus perfected. To elaborate on John Ruskin's division of labor between "dignity still higher in the motive of it[...] done to a great purpose, and ennobled therefore,"²⁶ and its superficial opposite, beautiful labor is also that which has been perfected, being the end of a process that unconsciously refines its movements until they can be streamlined no further. If unperfected labor is not beautiful, the attempt at mastery is admirable, a process simply to do with laboring. Improvement, being the result of this process, can be thought moral when spurred by a desire to reduce one's effort (dignity in the motive) and amoral if undertaken merely in the satisfaction of an aesthetic (dignity in the manner).

Table 3

	Moral	Amoral
Action	Laundress in <i>Ballet Mécanique</i>	<i>Nude Descending a Staircase</i>
Labor	<i>The Floor Scrapers</i>	<i>The Skater</i>

Perfect music is easily done. Aren't scales, and even the simplest of variations, flawlessly concise? Here, too, our understanding of perfection cleaves into "perfect" and the more temporally weighted "perfected." Comparing these to Bach and Beethoven, the genre's truest alpha-omega pair, in the baroque each tone is relevant in itself and purposeful, while the romantic composition is evaluated by the bar as the message withers or grows, falsifies or substantiates, checked against what the subject remembers; an ersatz psychology. Beethoven's easily distracted speechifying and nervous grandiosity become perfect in hindsight, as we cast our inner ear back to see that what the master said was the correct door out of three and likely a stroke of genius.

In every measure technique as a whole demands of him that he do it justice and give the one right answer that technique in that moment permits. Compositions are nothing but such answers, nothing but the solution of technical puzzles, and the composer is the only one who knows how to decipher them and understand his own music.²⁷

The best art does not misspeak but merely feigns tough choices.

18

Camera obscura. As portrayed in Jacques Rivette's deliriously sultry *La belle noiseuse*, based on a novella by Balzac, the reclusive Édouard Frenhofer longs to complete a masterpiece left unfinished. But does he visit a museum's collection or consult manuals on painting? Instruction is beneath such a man who, despite retiring decades ago following a spell of creative impotence, where the blame is

26 John Ruskin, *The Seven Lamps of Architecture* (Mineola: Dover Publications, 1989), 5.

27 Adorno, *Philosophy of New Music*, 33.

placed on his aged wife and former muse, can afford to brood in a French villa on sprawling grounds. His style, wishy pencil markings and poolings of watercolor that allude to women (“colors in a jumbled heap, contained within a multitude of peculiar lines,”²⁸ complains a visiting Poussin in the story), are shown obliquely in the natural barn light of Frenhofer’s studio. The veil he draws is imposed, too, on Marianne, newfound model to the old man, inducing in them both a liberating fatigue through hours of posing and sketching. Frenhofer hopes all their strenuous trying will result in a spontaneous overflow²⁹ capable of flushing the plaque of doubt; beloved by God, the artist becomes a flume devoid of ego, the dream of something got for nothing but the sweat of one’s brow.

In its refusal of local rhythm, transcendent explanation is the enemy of style.³⁰

Rivette’s subject is like the hipster balanced on a rock formation for the optics. He alone hears the spheres’ informative music, and his prostration seems meritorious.

If the fictional Frenhofer left a Modigliani behind, no amount of faith could stop *La belle noiseuse*’s middle-class audience from noticing the usage. Blessed are the directors of biopics that honor historical persons; they get it both ways, while to the director goes the Oscar. Pieter de Hooch stops pensively in front of a brick doorway and, a scene or two later, the painter’s thoughts alluded to through inaudible mumbling and agitated swipes at a canvas viewed from behind its easel, the camera swivels around to reveal *The Courtyard of a House in Delft*. Although Rivette can show us no credible work of art,³¹ I don’t want to suggest that he defaults to a presentation of uncontrolled ferment; Rivette does a superior job to most dramatizers of noteworthy lives. Biopics more or less neglect the volumes of contemporary documentation, sufficient to explain the artist’s influences and theoretical grounding. Historical significance assumable from the outset, we’re shown J.M.W. Turner collapsing in the afterglow of labor. An altogether different problem

28 Honoré de Balzac, “The Unknown Masterpiece,” in *The Unknown Masterpiece and Other Stories*, ed. John Berseth (Mineola: Dover Publications, 1999), 20.

29 Jean Honoré Fragonard often applied his oils directly to canvas without first sketching, which for a composer like Mozart is the same as orchestrating straight off, the keyboard being a composer’s pencil. In her diaries, Virginia Woolf confesses to a lifelong endeavor that her finished prose might have the quality of a sketch.

30 Jeff Dolven, *Senses of Style: Poetry Before Interpretation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2017), 78.

31 Julian Craster is a decent enough composer, helped by the modernism of his style, but no one sacrifices a real masterpiece on the altar of the silver screen. Neither do audiences particularly desire an interlude of Jascha Heifetz performing abridged Tchaikovsky. Take Antonioni’s *Blow-Up*, which includes shots of original artwork, per the narrative. If derivative of Braque and Cartier-Bresson, at least *Blow-Up*’s art is not cloaked in half-light but exhibited honestly, in a bright studio and cafe. Ben Lerner’s novel *Leaving the Atocha Station* is able to incorporate into its fictional universe excerpts of genuine poetry that appear nowhere else, Lerner being also an accomplished poet. See the probably fictional verse excerpted in Penelope Fitzgerald’s *The Blue Flower* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1995), her very clever novel about the early German romantic poet Novalis.

arises when H.P. Lovecraft's "The Colour Out of Space" is adapted for film, which is to say given visual instantiation, for how can an alien color be shown? Not with chimerical things like Stygian blue, which appear rather to do with the dithery overlap induced by letting one's eyes lose focus and cross, blue vying against black within the visual cortex. The color spectrum is naturally a closed band, such that what butterflies and mantis shrimps appreciate, maybe besides higher-frequency ultraviolet light, is just a greater number of intermediate hues.

Even today, physicists are pointing to colours in the solar spectrum that already have a name, but which will be known only to the human beings of the future.³²

While dogs may be limited to yellow and cyan, our visual loss seems to be little more than a matter of vibrancy. Whatever it is like to see heat or light at the far end of the spectrum, the keenest shrimp has nothing profounder than white light with which to tint its experience.

19

The laugh of the Magikarp. Limited strictly to the phonetic olio of its name, a Pokémon's speech act involves a great deal of resourcefulness, nearly every monster being captive to a ciphering rule,³³ whereby an identity like "Pikachu" — capitalized to denote a proper name, not species, while the Hebrew *Yahweh*, for example, both names the unique God and is a grammatical utterance — necessarily breaks into syllabic gobs of "Pika! Pika-chu!"

In existing without any purpose recognizable to men, animals hold out, as if for expression, their own names, utterly impossible to exchange.³⁴

The opposite to Pikachu's linguistic filter is the spontaneity of what one exclaims when hurt, an outburst that erupted in learned usage; meanwhile, a Pokémon's actual name seems little relevant. Its operation in the anime is for something a kid might say. Unlike the familiar aphasic goliath, what specific verbal hash might convey turmoil or excitement for a Pokémon is less interesting than the fact of Pokémon having the capacity for complex emotions, using gestures familiar to us for emphasis.

32 Adolf Loos, "Ornament and Crime," in *Ornament and Crime: Thoughts on Design and Materials*, trans. Shaun Whiteside (London: Penguin Books, 2019), 187.

33 Meowth is one of a few non-humans in the *Pokémon* universe given speech, the exception due to his rhetorical need to be a conversant member of Team Rocket, the anime's tenacious, hapless band of antagonizers. Pokémon evidently have both the anatomy and brain development for complex language; while they *think* at more or less our level of fluency, unfortunately it is also something cognitive, simply a rule imposed from outside, that diverts the monster's tongue.

34 Adorno, *Minima Moralia*, 228.

Language speaks, because speaking is its pleasure and it can do nothing else.³⁵

As if all a Pokémon lacks is the words themselves, nature enforcing this arbitrary handicap; like the struggle of a fluency disorder, in the television show one notices the Pokémon's frustration, not being able to tap the cornucopia of vocabulary. Inspired by the orchestra, the charismatic tenor begins with deep feeling Donizetti's "Una furtiva lagrima," though he's not in the least conscious of singing opera. In *Liar Liar*, after a successful wish Fletcher Reede comes to share this frustration when some governing force, the occult power granted a child on its birthday, handles acquiescent and rebellious behavior the same way. Drawing toys, too, care nothing at all whether a student's goal is bolder than roulette curves or she lets a notch in the big plastic gear limply drag the ballpoint.

She made of the motions of her wrist
The grandiose gestures
Of her thought.³⁶

20

Discover what's inside. Cereal boxes alert us not only to the iconography of Lucky's eight charms but their innate appearance; that is, what these bulbous shapes intend to signify. According to General Mills's graphic, the shriveled marshmallows we eat are but the ugly hosts for better hearts, stars, and horseshoes.

In them representation triumphs over what is represented. Their outsize, simplistic and therefore false comprehensibility corroborates the incomprehensibility of the intellectual processes themselves, from which their falseness — their blind, unthinking subsumption — is inseparable. The omnipresent images are none, because they present the wholly general, the average, the standard model, as something unique or special, and so deride it.³⁷

In a taped conversation with Michel Gondry, whittled down by the French director to the ninety-minute doodle-thon *Is the Man Who Is Tall Happy?*, Noam Chomsky clarifies a related issue: "Like if a witch turns a dog into a camel and then some fairy princess kisses the camel and [it] turns back to a dog, it's been a dog all along, even when it looked like a camel."³⁸ As noted by Thomas Albright, in

35 Fitzgerald, *The Blue Flower*, 75.

36 Wallace Stevens, "Infanta Marina," in *The Collected Poems of Wallace Stevens* (New York: Vintage Books, 2015), 8.

37 Adorno, *Minima Moralia*, 140–41.

38 Noam Chomsky, quoted in Michel Gondry, dir., *Is the Man Who Is Tall Happy? An Animated Conversation with Noam Chomsky* (IFC Films, 2013). Implied secondarily in those tales of the gentleman turning away a hag and young girl who refuses the frog a kiss is that, had the old beggar and frog been really no more than they appeared, and this fact known, one would be morally permitted to tell the witch to get lost and fling the slimy amphibian back into the well from which it hopped.

Wagner's *Nibelungen* the dwarf Alberich carries the same motif whether he's been transformed into a frog or dragon.³⁹ Finely printed bricks of text, to which we're brought by the logic of asterisks, skirt the law this way. Legalese qualifies as literally being there, while legibility becomes the motorist's problem when a billboard's disclaimer is illegibly obscured.

21

Health à la carte. America's food-industrial complex sings the praises of leafy greens high in nutriment, ubiquitously kale and avocado, which, on the one hand, placates an obese populace's ire and, on the other, tips off the cholesterol traffickers' public-relations wizards, who swiftly brand these vogue foods in expectation of new customers. Herded either by the White House's carefully updated pyramid or the cash-strapped pizza chain's television spots it helps fund, the duplicity is not limited to McDonald's but includes other chains such as Subway, whose spokesman used to bombard us with weight-loss innuendo. But the chain has since caved to upselling cheese and protein, having secured endorsements from Dr. Oz, of all people, and reshuffled to calorie-poor items sprinkled with important vitamins. Like the stagnation of real wages upon adjusting for inflation, customers are led to believe the cost of a sandwich to be determined against a gold standard of density, such that smaller portions are assumed to offer greater nourishment, along the lines of a condensed soup. Though replacing a white bagel with spinach is progress, the industry would surely distance itself from any innovation that promised a serving size comparable to that of the now-maligned sandwich but with a robust nutrient profile at a lower price point. Big Food embraces the benefits of GMOS while attempting to discredit its science. Genetic modification threatens to undermine the classic hamburger and yields more bug-resistant wheat per square foot and better meat. In theory, these savings pass onto the consumer. Corporate fast food preaches love of vital phytochemicals then delivers one ply of spinach and diaphanous tomato slices.

22

Voxels. Registering voxel art's ingrained complexity necessitates that a sculpted terrain be at a distance in three-dimensional space no farther than the observer's perceptual threshold for distinguishing specific detail; unless it straddles this line, for what's engrossing about sophisticated voxelling is how it involves the mind in a shadowy dithering, between absorbing the cumulative design and the pointillist hope that neighboring dots blend. That they never quite do is the allure of the volumetric pixel: a hard nuance airbrushed with Rubenesque color and digitally spotlighted that wants to be inspected up close, as opposed to the vermilion smudges a Monet turns out to be. Line and shape hold together color's depth in a painting, as though it were a chromatic sinkhole into which the eye spelunks, while voxel

39 Thomas Albright, *Panaesthetics: On the Unity and Diversity of the Arts* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014), 195.

artists usually douse their small, pocked monuments in a topmost layer of indivisible saturation.

True form is overlaid, like moss on broken tiles.
But scoured and weeded back, a mosaic face peers out and smiles.⁴⁰

Like a rock dipped in liquid latex, the literal variant of Bernini's magnificent *Veiled Virgin*.

23

Completing geometric perspective. It isn't exactly truth that matters, argues Hegel, but the changing interplay of true relationships. Although much predating and the natural corollary to Monet's pastiche of sunshine in locales tinged with the prospect of winter, atmosphere represents the picture plane's last gasp. It follows that postimpressionism's oft-noted aridity, the deletion of atmosphere that paradoxically leaves in place the visual distortion caused by opacity, is the correlative parallax to what the cinquecento knew as *sfumato*, when the end of realism was proleptically celebrated with layers of bluish green. Like a jigsaw puzzle alternately pieced together between opposed edges, the outermost corners relate best once the middle is finally solved.

As long as I continue to come across questions in more remote regions which I can't answer, it is understandable that I should still not be able to find my way around regions that are less remote. For how do I know that what stands in the way of an answer here is not precisely what is preventing me from clearing away the fog over there?⁴¹

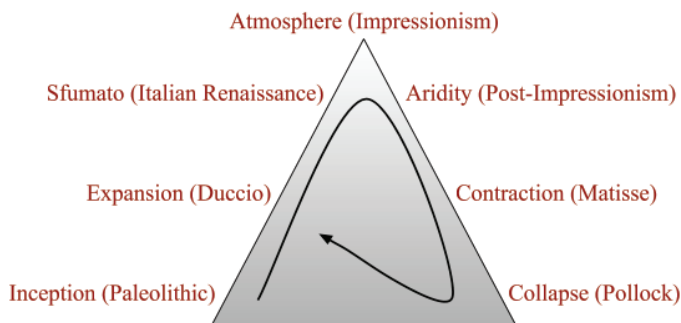


Fig. 2. "It is a manifestation of a circular structure in which the eventual effect retroactively determines its causes or reasons." Slavoj Žižek, *Event: A Philosophical Journey through a Concept* (New York: Melville House Publishing, 2014), 4. Courtesy of the author.

40 Hannah Sullivan, "Repeat Until Time," in *Three Poems* (London: Faber & Faber, 2018), 29.

41 Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Culture and Value*, trans. Peter Winch (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), 66e.

In the saga of European art, *sfumato*'s anachronism allows one to claim for impressionism the aesthetic aiguille of a narrative, in the sense Arthur Danto meant, that disassembles in precisely the reverse order in which it was built:

Once perspective's specular regression is appreciated, confusion in regard to historical outliers is solved as a property of chiasmic structures, like the sticky ends of a strip of a paper appear least related⁴² after the loop is pulled straight, Chukotka and western Alaska dashing apart as the globe flattens out.

Or say that the end precedes the beginning,
And the end and the beginning were always there
Before the beginning and after the end.⁴³

A lot of *Das Rheingold*, or *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone*, depends on later episodes for plot coherence, appearing either standalone, ostensibly self-encapsulated, or internally discontinuous. The dots are more ambitious than we at first realized, connected not within their local group but peripheral clusters. However inoffensive in Bruegel and Leonardo, atmospheric blur is essentially ass-backward until the evaporative rise of impressionism, while the dilapidated cottages and faceless goats of postimpressionism are not, owing to the movement's abolition of crappy weather, which is to say visible climate. The deletion of one layer versus the ghostly imposition of another yet to be invented. Graduating hues to imply distance and therefore degradation (the faint green accumulated between parallel mirrors) is centuries ahead of time. Itself a dependent effect, these teal hills adumbrate a medium, in hindsight directly responsible for *sfumato*, that is not present.

So apparently the crux of the poem is to try and make the ineffable, which is light — which we only know about because it illuminates something else — into a *thing*.⁴⁴

Italian painting's culmination in Raphael transpires well before the nineteenth century. Its disputation on optics is due to technique, besides the dumb clamor for exactitude, the dullest tool in a critic's kit. It is easier to tint a range of receding crags than it is to figure out the depiction of what's invisible. It happens in this order because neoclassical painters need to catalog just what there is to obscure before Renoir swaps the Île-de-France for a vaporous outline. One clear

42 Turning an aluminum can of shaving cream or glass shaker of peppercorns with a paper label — namely, a graspable cylinder with a non-repeating graphic instead of pattern — the image on the farther side always comes around sooner than one anticipates.

43 T.S. Eliot, "Burnt Norton," in *The Poems of T.S. Eliot*, eds. Christopher Ricks and James McCue (London: Faber & Faber, 2015), 1:183.

44 Aram Saroyan, quoted in Ian Daly, "You Call That Poetry?!" *Poetry Foundation*, August 25, 2007, <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/articles/68913/you-call-that-poetry>.

moment landscape's accordion is at its widest and bone dry,⁴⁵ the next our view is bricked up with a coagulation of sleet and fog. Another of visual art's bell jars. The quattrocento was incubated in Mary's bedchamber, like *sfumato* first refers to the smokiness of bodies in Leonardo, while a hard look at the coffee house provides chiaroscuro's syrupy darkness and the reformulation of light. Of novel intensity, these elements are later released into the crepuscular forests of Courbet.

24

Hearing things. In Alessandro Marcello's famous *largo*, made so with Bach's handsome ornamentation, what is the oboe sad *about*? We can point to the theme as it is stated, and the falling lament begins. Music's abstractness resembles that scientific adage on the dishonesty of our senses. Unless they're deficient, compared with the nuclear reality of things-in-themselves.⁴⁶ Because it's skimpy on the directly pictorial content, a musical composition will be guessed to relate some characteristically human *cogito* if not a figural program (Siegfried's Rhine journey, the death of Ase), like the uninitiated look for eyeballs and faces in the work of the abstract expressionists. Obviously Sibelius's tundric symphonies are justified, each of its fluttering, glacial movements checked by the satisfying closure of a chord's resolution or rounding the home key. Music is constantly the end of its own line. *The Swan of Tuonela's* goal would seem to be its hatching and growth; but since compositions always already done, even if they were left unfinished, the listener becomes thoughtfully suspicious. Absolute music has no aspiration other than gratifying *ergo sum*.

25

Emphasis mine. Between a human being's desperate insistence, with the overly familiar imperative to "fail better," and the brisk repetition one finds in computation, the difference is one's perception of upbuilding *momentum*, or at least a kind of psychical static charge.

- 45 Hyperrealists exclude atmosphere in obedience to their mania for panoplies, like one who abstains from drinking at a buffet.
- 46 I'm increasingly doubtful as to the meaningful existence of things-in-themselves, which like human consciousness too perfectly elude detection. In hoping for an entity's endurance beyond our flimsy idealizations we unwittingly alter the question and thus stand guilty of a contradiction. "If a thing exists and no one is there to perceive it, does it have qualities?" can be rephrased, with regard to its original context, into a statement: "If a thing exists and no one is there to perceive it, the thing yields no sense data." Consciousness as emergent from gray matter leads us to such a Yeatsian question as how can we know the mind from the matter? Should there remain anything useful at the end of the phenomenological corridor, which is also to do with bodies. Or it is subjective fodder, the assumption being that a self-satisfied thing would be said to possess itself. Unless finally what substances there are consist of flammable stuff, susceptible to vision's pulsing matchstick but otherwise innocuous.

The one whose brother died
 Was crying and thinking alternately,
 Like someone falling down and getting up
 And running and falling and getting up.⁴⁷

The narrative doesn't return to square one but continuously stumbles ahead, harping on like Samuel Beckett's Krapp about a single point it can't get right.

26

Taking interpretive risks. Cameron Carpenter's shamelessly erratic take on Bach's Passacaglia and Fugue leads me to ask whether there can be an ugly performance, equal in theoretical terms to the modernist aesthetic of studied unnaturalism; that is, the soupy disorder of Robert Rauschenberg or Willem de Kooning's toothy saunterers. I don't mean a lousy composition but rather an intentionally graceless performance by one like Ervin Nyiregyházi, a qualified virtuoso and the one anarchist of classical piano known to us; his nearest compatriot among violinists is either Ivry Gitlis or Patricia Kopatchinskaja, though neither touches Nyiregyházi for white-hot nihilism. A hypothetical musician, ideally greater in dexterity and intelligence than Carpenter, could play with stalwart nobility and taste but chooses not to on the advice of her demon, preferring to burn. (Nyiregyházi's seems to have been a case of self-immolation, with alcohol the fuel.) It's not quite clear what talent Carpenter ultimately possesses, other than whistling the organ's many fipples while looking good. One is tempted to think that his use of sparkling rhinestone jackets and a fancy haircut is intended to prettify any deficiencies: he looks put together, but then his florid interpretive choices and emoting from the bench strike one as the flamboyance of a lackadaisical attitude more than sincere artistry. Carpenter is the Lang Lang of pipe organ but worse. As regards Carnegie Hall and the traditional repertoire, how likely is it that one of the institutes' gifted students will hazard a leap of interpretation that defies her teachers and the composer's deathless wishes.

27

Mermaids and dwarves. Clipped spelling, as in "omnibus" shortening to "bus," compels the resulting stump to memorialize its amputation through leaving behind the gobblet of an apostrophe. Continued usage eventually shaves off that border stone without harming the definition, giving "bus" a bespoke timelessness. Although most of us have quit stressing over the capitalization of "thermos," still there's the typographic sirenemia of digraphs, not to mention *The New Yorker's* insistence on dotting "cooperation" with a diaeresis, so like schlepping around one's crutch after the injury has healed. A hyphen acts like a medical suture, temporarily holding "cry" and "baby" together until, being so long in contact, the words fuse, the suture having safely dissolved.

47 Robert Hass, "Time and Materials," in *Time and Materials* (New York: Ecco, 2007), 24.

They mingle and melt into one piece, with so universal a mixture that there is left no more sign of the seam by which they were first conjoined.⁴⁸

Graphic designers online have begun to test a form of abbreviation closely resembling the *letras voladas* of a hurried European's written salutation, to the extent that the identical problem, limited space, results in basically the orthographic economy of legal documents and recordkeepers. "With," for instance, loses its vowel and the latter two consonants are lifted in miniscule. Similar is how the naming of a brand allows, under the excuse of artistic and thus non-communicative license, what otherwise is only permitted as a linguistic glitch incurred within the historical process. Weren't "radio" and "laser" once acronyms? Per this dropping of vowels, after which they are silently implied, tumbler became Tumblr. The first vowel in Twitter, however, was eventually replaced, a reversal that may seem ahead of its time when the current trend of subtracting letters begins to feel like a cheap trick. This will probably be chalked up to a much-needed departure from minimalism's boringly corporate fetish for the anorexic, with its love of sexily-thin fonts and their slantwise efficiency, never mind the fact that techies and the non-profiters generate far more waste than lower-income city dwellers — today they make the strangest of bedfellows, means and frugality. Wholeness is embraced by the whole-foods movement, which forgets about the simple convenience of can openers and tap water in a confused effort to spend more on identical fruits and vegetables. *CUIDADO* slowly works into that familiar yellow tape, and now the anniversary of Columbus's landing and Indigenous Peoples' Day compete for October 12th on our calendars. One imagines the former eventually shoved out by a process as natural and unstoppable as tectonic plates climbing over themselves.

28

Hamlet in German. An image generally implies one-of-a-kind finality, its arrangement of tinted shapes impossible to change, at least to any meaningful extent. In graphing *The Hay Wain* to Times Square proportions, only the scale changes. *Salisbury Cathedral from the Bishop's Grounds* gathered its totality before John Constable dipped his bristles in walnut oil, displaced by and becoming synonymous with its manifestation in ground pigment and photographing. Just as Gustav Holst's chorale remains an emotionally stirring hymn if scrunched down to a Bösendorfer proportions, the healthfulness of a meal is virtually the same whether the product of a neighbor's garden or slugged from a can. In the formalist sense: apple, carrot, mushroom.⁴⁹ Not so with *Romeo and Juliet*, which must be acquired by ear, or in paperback, and its wherefores understood. Although a repertory theater elects to produce *Othello* in any language they want, vein-bursting antics do not by themselves convey, and the basis of drama isn't necessarily clenched fists

48 Michel de Montaigne, "Of Friendship," in *The Complete Essays of Montaigne*, ed. William Hazlitt, trans. Charles Cotton (London: John Templeman, 1842), 80.

49 Like stuffing one's face on junk food is the gustatory analogue to televisual entertainment in the somatic sense, self-stimulation's underlying masochism, as Theodor Adorno says of whiskey-drinkers, is unedifying: the intensely pointless directness of sugar and salt.

yanking hair. Audiences need to be fluent in more than our largely cognate body language, whatever the Moor's ethnicity.

29

Of no account. It is fun to span an architectural gap, turning out one's palms against the facing surfaces of wall separated about a yard, then look over the feature's stupendous verticality when it is the case that the width of the gap is unchanging. In knowledge, the flats of my hands travel to the skyscraper's windy top.

I am a mystic — but by memory only. For an instant, about ten years ago, I *felt* the perspective from space to earth. Sick as I may have been, I was *there*.⁵⁰

Like time, distance is one of those socially agreed upon denials saving us the philosophical headache. Notwithstanding the logic that an edge implies divorce, in a sense the whole of the universe has remained a singularity of infinite density, there being no materially inherent way to sequester anything from anything else. Opportunity beams a photo from the surface of Mars, the clumps of soil as actual as that one might finger in any terrestrial plot.

There would of course come a point when I would be familiar enough with the language and terrain that it would lose its unfamiliar aspect, a point at which I would no longer see a stone in Spain and think of it as, in some essential sense, *stonier* than the sedimentary rocks of Kansas, and what applied to stones applied to bodies, light, weather, whatever.⁵¹

As the surface of an ideal sphere is confinedly boundless, lying between visually definite and geometrically unbounded, when it comes to number and spatial position the mind seems capable of no serious discrimination: 1 is fine but after 2 the idea of plurality is not inapplicable so much as intangibly distended, wherefore twelve and a baker's dozen can be distinguished by their respective counts but in another sense each box simply contains donuts. Instead, we call up a given arithmetical value in semiotic form collocated with jurors or a blackbird, depending on one's personal associations. And neither can physical bodies ever be thought "aware" of one another's geographic locations or their own; there is just the fact of integrity or separation.

Vast spaces of nature, the Atlantic Ocean, the South Sea, — long intervals of time, years, centuries, — are of no account.⁵²

Miles of course have no power to notch themselves into reality, but they do elicit something about the post office's nearness or that a galaxy is awfully far away in terms a human being understands. Outside of astronomical catalogs, GN-z11 isn't

50 A.R. Ammons, quoted in Christian Wiman, *He Held Radical Light: The Art of Faith, the Faith of Art* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2018), 33.

51 Lerner, *Leaving the Atocha Station*, 163.

52 Emerson, "Self-Reliance," 175.

anywhere. In precisely this manner is a height great, through our fearful admiration, as every floor thinks itself the lobby. Like traveling at a high rate of speed: 80 miles per hour on the freeway and the planet's 67,000 feel the same because they are.

At a little over 125 feet under the surface of the water, he discovered “absolute depth,” depth that is beyond measuring, and would give no greater powers of dream and thought if it were doubled or even tripled.⁵³

Gabriel standing before his window understands that snow is also falling into those dark Shannon waves, not seen but experienced as a logical truth. As Christopher Hitchens remarks in one of his last-minute interviews, the world is a party that will go on after you leave. This for me is what Emerson calls “the indifference of places,” their perdurance without the intervention of one's conscious awareness, which turns out never to have been a necessary component.

“That's what makes a view so sad,” said Mrs. Swithin, lowering herself into the deck-chair which Giles had brought her. “And so beautiful. It'll be there,” she nodded at the strip of gauze laid upon the distant fields, “when we're not.”⁵⁴

Hence why Norwegian director Joachim Trier ends *Oslo, August 31st*, following the protagonist's intentional heroin overdose, with shots of locales visited earlier in the film, as though to confirm reality's ontological divorce from anybody's subjectivity.

The huge white oxen would still be dragging their wains along the Tuscan roads, the cypresses would still go up, straight as pillars, to the blue heaven; but he would not be there to see them. And the sweet southern wines — Tear of Christ and Blood of Judas — others would drink them, not he. Others would walk down the obscure and narrow lanes between the bookshelves in the London Library, sniffing the dusty perfume of good literature, peering at the strange titles, discovering unknown names, exploring the fringes of vast domains of knowledge. He would be lying in a hole in the ground.⁵⁵

Richard Linklater's film *Before Sunrise* synthesizes Vienna in this fashion, giving us final shots of the alley where his lovers sat, the docked barge and wine bottle left in the park. Compared with Trier, the daylight clarity is decidedly friendlier; not bitter but agreeably flush with memories.

53 Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, trans. Maria Jolas (Boston: Beacon Press, 1994), 205.

54 Woolf, *Between the Acts*, 49.

55 Aldous Huxley, “The Gioconda Smile,” in *Mortal Coils* (New York: George H. Doran Company, 1922), 62.

30

Blind neighbors. Artfully dueling in Bach's fugue, do these voices that resemble a conversation "know" about one another or is their interplay only apparently cumulative? As when leaving a bit of cloud empty so as to contrastingly background flowers and branching treetops,⁵⁶ or lining up a niche of architectural marble in order to echo the saint's halo. In the mechanical grace of clockwork, one finds a sophisticated cooperation already set in motion. But of the hands, each is a kestrel circling the dial's Stonehenge at different altitudes, devoted to their lonesome flight paths.

31

Angel of history. Just prior to the fin de siècle, European music's headfirst plunge into its century-long mimicry of a thinking thing amounts to leaving behind the baroque's husk, a short throw from inanimateness, like an automaton is notionally more alive than a stone. Again, I want to emphasize Beethoven and Mahler's stylistic glances backward at the genre's less stressful origins. Out of that comparatively antiquated homeland, the romantic composer is like an emigrant who left with heavy heart in order to secure the future's upbringing. Albeit the spiritual concerns were there: despondency at wretchedness, one's giant follows wherever one goes or, like Persius's dog, a length of chain drags behind. Western culture's history of faking brains arrives at unreflective thought before advancing to that which feels while having begun with far suppler life;⁵⁷ what did we yearn for in those early literate days but remote heaven's perfectibility of habit and thought? Artificial intelligence finds its voice at last, whereafter the ethically minded creator hurries to lash together a fleet of servers and backup generators. An ebb and corresponding flow in naturalism beginning when arrowhead symmetry first crossed an ancestor's mind.

32

Music's late start. Already about something, namely itself, the cover of darkness permits music to grow in complexity during those very formative Italian centuries, whose doyens of taste charged art for its own sake with impiety, through a clever show of deference to the religious text—the most legible thing naturally being

- 56 See the poetic clusterings of Thomas Hart Benton's *June Morning*, which expands upon cloisonnism's outline technique, almost too successfully.
- 57 Like *The Lion King* goes from studying African fauna to a two-dimensional cartoon before circling back to better-than-lifelike simulation, films by Japanese directors whose actors ape the all-elbows-and-knees awkwardness of anime, flicking food into their faces out of upturned bowls and routinely seizing with wide-eyed stupefaction. Think of the Magic Kingdom models hired to walk about as Disney princesses, whose selected-for facial symmetry and bone structure accords with the cartoon physiognomies of their criterions, which are themselves human caricatures.

taken for the composer's subject. While Beyoncé devotes the beat to her lyrics' commendation, the sixteenth-century fretwork of John Dowland almost hums. The Viennese authorities suppressed unambiguous art forms during the late 1790s, in particular the city's theaters, to ward against the revolution in France's dissemination; but they left orchestral music to its harmless dissonances. As landscape painting developed into the genre known to us today, the shrewdest artists satisfied their patrons by including Biblical subject matter⁵⁸ and a sprinkling of staffage, whose cameos diminish in scale at the very rate that landscape's critical estimation increases until the disciples, who were never more than pictorial red herrings, vanish altogether. Strange, then, that painting seems to hit maturity centuries in advance of music.

We hear in certain branches of learning about the "lags," or unequal rates of development as between different features of an organic assemblage.⁵⁹

Perhaps after all it was painting's greater capacity for hagiography that raised its utility in the eyes of the monied. A diptych commissioned to portray both its donors alongside Christ is a win-win, financing art while the latter enjoy seeming membership in God's entourage, though a donor was usually clueless, in all likelihood, as to what slight innovations if any their new possession held. Muralist collectives plead for fundraising in this manner and point to neighborhood renewal projects as evidence of art's usefulness ("Poetry makes nothing happen," said Auden). Pluralizing a word's last letter with z effectively renders the word linguistically infungible while aligning it with a cool disfigurement unknown to mere things. This is the terminological uniqueness of high-end shoes and handbags, all of which function about the same, such that user-oriented design seems to exactly diverge from what is surplusive.

33

Something I don't know. About the schizophrenic character of last-century Russian music, where Sergei Prokofiev seems to immediately answer questions put to himself, like clay pigeons he both launched and shot,⁶⁰ I'm beginning to recognize its lineage as that generalized distrust of grand narratives, so called. It being clichéd even to interrogate a consequent, Dmitri Shostakovich poses his question through the oboe as though it were contemptibly shortsighted to do so, then he replies in the same voice that dared to speak up.

58 One supposes a maker like Bach, with his appended *Soli Deo gloria*, could write an energetic lot because the dedicatee was God. But see the prolific Australian poet Les Murray.

59 John Crowe Ransom, "The Tense of Poetry," in *The World's Body* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1968), 241.

60 As opposed to an intrusion from outside that one may respond to. A huge amount of modernist agon is rather like Chuck Palahniuk's nameless narrator beating himself to a pulp or a solitary hermit mistaking her interrogative for another's, almost palilalia experienced as echolalia.

If I say for instance: here it's as though a conclusion were being drawn, here as though someone were expressing agreement, or as though this were a reply to what came before, — my understanding of it presupposes my familiarity with conclusions, expressions of agreement, replies.⁶¹

It is a decidedly nineteenth-century mistake to suppose that weirdness in instrumental music needs the same in content, as one finds in Camille Saint-Saëns's programmatically spooky dance and Modest Mussorgsky's tone poem *Night on Bald Mountain*. An anti-realist composer like Igor Stravinsky convincingly imitates the misanthrope's heartbroken sobs before responding absurdly; one is pulled in by tragedy's rip current, lured by the sentimental hope that answers might be had.

He would cry out on life, that what it wants
Is not its own love back in copy speech,
But counter-love, original response.⁶²

34

A prayer for the temple. At least somewhat dichotomizing from the latent multitudes of one's bedmate, where roles are forgotten an hour so the married can behave like teenagers again, which is to say strangers, a fun kind of alienation seems to be the necessary ingredient to eroticism in general.

Estrangement shows itself precisely in the elimination of distance between people.⁶³

Doing other than putting mutual worship on hiatus — the combination of temple and votary — logically places intimacy on a slope in the direction of celibacy, a spectrum that's geological, having as it does valleys of varying depths along the way and in one of which the good Sisyphus will temporarily rest his boulder.

In quantum field theory, a false vacuum is a hypothetical vacuum that is somewhat, but not entirely, stable. It may last for a very long time in that state, and might eventually move to a more stable state.⁶⁴

Adults have this tendency to moss, comfortable in grooves abraded to just their shapes, while antics of the bedroom are unsurprisingly mercantile. Carnality is to be conducted thoughtfully, as the polysemic street tag "FUCK WITH LOVE" sagely instructs, but then each of us is always bent toward debauchery, which in truth is the psyche's zero point. Consent indulges the other's basic depravity, who is nonetheless cherished.

61 Wittgenstein, *Culture and Value*, 52e.

62 Robert Frost, "The Most of It," in *The Poetry of Robert Frost: The Collected Poems, Complete and Unabridged*, ed. Edward Connery Lathem (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1969), 338.

63 Adorno, *Minima Moralia*, 41.

64 *Wikipedia*, s.v. "False vacuum."

35

Melt, thaw, and resolve. Impressionism's version of an effect — birches loaded with glaze ice, for example, or a cathedral bathed in direct sunlight — naturally opposes that of a subject, the analog for some principal cause. Inserting into Claude Monet's immense poolings of solar lard a sharper Rouen would be like applying rigid clay to wax or giving *Jeux d'eau* a substantive melody, which would then invite Maurice Ravel to shear the original as so much empty splashing. Introduction of a catalyzing solute that burns off the main element to leave behind potent ore.

All that remains now is a small, smooth, hard, nearly weightless pebble of unhappiness.⁶⁵

As with that last-minute red buoy in J.M.W. Turner's *Helvoetsluys*, like the confidently unpretentious Turkish March in Beethoven's Ninth, which momentarily recasts the symphony as a disappointing phoenix, so to speak, piccoling and cymbaling to life for the sake of such a deflating interlude, demonstrates that inserting a foreign object into what seems a sterile, hermetically sealed whole is a literal possibility forever open to makers. It took a genius to puncture this all-staring eye decisively.

36

Equal distribution. Through apportioning a transcription, the largest handbell choir almost matches a symphony orchestra for color, a strategy intending to reduce to nothing the choir's desideratum for inclusion; not to mention handbell's nearly flat learning curve, this partly due to the hinged clapper. With its palliative divvying, handbell is the paint-by-numbers of music performance. In solo handbell there can be pleasure in noting the absence of stiltedness, with what fluent grace the percussionist silently drops her bell for another. Is this how producers would need to adapt classical music to fit dance's low bar, Gustav Mahler's titanic weight distributed across a bed of nails and the *Ode to Joy* a cleanly divided pie? Before the televised auspices of diplomats and a resplendent Pope Benedict, the campanologists daisy-chain a garland of pings.

37

Debussy as an idea. The toy manufacturer's JingleBands, advertised as "Music You Can Wear," offers noisemaking of a frivolously random kind, though the band be shaken to a conscious purpose, the suggestion being that music is broadly a mood one affects, like a rose-scented spritz applied to the air.

65 Jeffery Rudell, "Under the Influence," in *The Moth Radio Hour*. Aired May 23, 2008, on NPR's *The Moth*, <https://themoth.org/stories/under-the-influence>. See also Jack Gilbert's "They Will Put My Body into the Ground" in Christian Wiman, *He Held Radical Light*, 7.

The fact that listeners insist that their pleasure is inextricably involved in recognition alone is an index of their lack of understanding. They may have pleasure, indeed; but this pleasure does not derive from Beethoven, but from their recognition of Beethoven.⁶⁶

In this alternative universe one distinguishes music from noise by the vigor and opulence of its peal, the way “Beethoven” conveys torpor and lashing out at fate more than it does the historical person.

We get the impression that the great masters we know so well have just the names which suit their work.⁶⁷

YouTubeers score millions of internet points freeloading on dead composers’ legacies⁶⁸ with barbarically ugly music videos that oftentimes have merely been stolen and re-uploaded with changed background art, like a dealer swaps the license plates on a hot car, with ludicrous titles like “Beethoven, Silencio” and “Chopin - Spring Waltz (Mariage d’Amour).” After a deluge of user comments denouncing the attribution to Chopin, the video’s description was emended to include the following: “This piece is also known as Mariage d’Amour by Paul de Senneville. ‘Chopin - Spring Waltz’ is just a pseudonym.” It’s the sort of cultural amnesia Baudrillard dealt with at length, where a society, oblivious to references historical or otherwise, mistakes Russell Crowe in *Gladiator* for documentary video of actual Roman slaves. The same premise lies behind appropriations of *LIFE Magazine*’s iconic watermark, slapped misleadingly onto images of every vintage to make photographic *verifalsi*, the term coined by Giorgio de Chirico for works copied by the artist from his metaphysical period and backdated.

His influence, unlike that even of Schumann and Mendelssohn, no longer results from the musical substance of his music but rather from its style and play, from formula and symmetry, from the mere gesture of recognition.⁶⁹

A lame, age-old phenomenon; they of famous name lend recognizability and implied approval by association. Passed off as the work of Bach by a hobbyist and which Mendelssohn subsequently programmed to acclaim, the Toccata and Fugue in D Minor’s false attribution is made ineradicable, like *Gertrude’s Dream Waltz* has remained a favorite of junior keyboard recitals. Jean-Baptiste-Camille Corot didn’t hesitate to sign a pupil’s work, brought before his great seniority like newborn children in need of his blessing.

66 Theodor Adorno, *Current of Music: Elements of a Radio Theory*, ed. Robert Hullot-Kentor (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2009), 301.

67 Wittgenstein, *Culture and Value*, 25e.

68 Another trend is stolen compilations of Mozart — and it is always Mozart, whose affable susceptibility to commercialization makes him music’s Einstein, equal parts familiar and inoffensive — a trend that is generally neglectful of crediting the performers. Sometimes the music will be “tuned” to 432 hertz, a frequency claimed to be of both cosmic and anthropological significance. This latest superstition has now begun to replace the widely discredited “Mozart Effect.”

69 Theodor Adorno, “Bach Defended against His Devotees,” in *Prisms*, trans. Samuel and Shierry Weber (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1983), 135.

38

Causality pictured. If postimpressionism up through modernism stands for the realization that constitutive pictorial elements can be excluded, specifically those deemed causal, I associate collage with its opposite, in which false antecedents and unrelated consequents are posed in implied relationships to one another; unless the collage merely fulfills or adds to a larger matrix of pluses and minuses.

Table 4

Effect from Cause	Effect and Cause	Effect as Object
An effect convincingly related to a cause.	An effect's attribution to a cause forced by juxtaposition.	An effect without an attributable cause.
Nature, or rational interaction.	Collage, or irrational interaction.	Postimpressionism and collage. ⁷⁰
Winslow Homer's <i>West Point, Prouts Neck</i> , a composition organically unified.	A tourist photographed "supporting" the campaign in Pisa.	Henri Rousseau's <i>The Quarry</i> , pieces of which the eye feels it can lift free.

39

Der Leiermann. Its guts shut up in eighteenth-century ebony or cardboard wrapped in an irrelevant painter's work, usually Klimt, music boxes ideally testify to the paradigm shift from mechanical to simulacral reality, or the revelation of marvelous engineering to its costly rehabilitation as peep show. It's why Wilkie Collins, in *The Moonstone*, reports on the diamond's immense value prior to its heist and, in movie *Annie Hall*, the owner of a suitcase of cocaine tells us "It's about two thousand dollars an ounce" right before Alvy sneezes, sending up a cloud of the stuff. Information as lure prefaces a thing's immurement, such that the music box's spiked cylinder is appraised *recherché* on the spot, despite the shop's closet

⁷⁰ Post-impressionist painting is rational even when it includes fantasy elements à la Chagall. Collage may principally have to do with arrangement, as in John Ashbery's *Poisson d'Avril*. Juxtaposition is irrational, even when it asserts a natural relationship between its actors. The italicized word leans against a roman exclamation mark, its tipped-over letters like individual volumes stopped by a bookend, while the interrobang exhibits something akin to Jekyll/Hyde duality, like the orthographic mixed message in adding a full stop to an ellipsis. Rarely does collage do this, because the technique seems to call for impish play. But see Emma Webster and her stylistic forebear, Neo Rauch. Aside from giving off B-movie vibes that cry out for a *New Yorker* caption, the latter's work recalls the detached unsettledness of pasting while being entirely oil paint. Webster, however, elevates this aesthetic through depicted inclusion of plastic fauna and paper foliage. Again, the result is all oil on canvas. The tactility from actual life hangs on, stained with its shapely cues.

of backstock. All luxury is this true of but especially that sold to the poor, where mystification is saddled with proving.

There was a white package of bacon without a plastic window for viewing a representative slice.

As we might look over a car's engine, drop the hood, and cruise around in a state of operational incomprehension. In one of Yoshimori's woodblock prints of a newly imported elephant, from which Ernst's Dadaist masterpiece *The Elephant Celebes* derives, we're given a partially sliced-open view of the trunk as water sluices through. Then there is Nabokov's acquisitive encounter as a boy with the enormous Faber pencil, displayed in a St. Petersburg store window and subsequently gifted, which bespeaks of a hypocritical oath to secrecy: the sublime is identified for one's private gratification only to be permanently inhumed.⁷¹ Spirographic drawing apparently allows for artistic control, speeding the cog, slowing to a faint purl, while the pretty yantra of ink is creatively determined the instant the ballpoint notches.

The ridiculous and spoiling effect of that sort of activity, which we shall simply call "pseudo-activity," is based upon the fact that all of the listener's possible attempts to modify the phenomenon remain external to it, an arbitrary addition instead of a really constitutive element.⁷²

Seated before a piano and mentally intending a kinesthetic shove forward in the direction of the instrument's pin block, one's hands instead glissade side to ivory side, as though the keyboard were a two-by-four rotating on a greased bolt at its center and like a spun cap threads onto a glass bottle when the force should fling it off; almost the inverse of Beethoven's historical loudening, which was one of his methods for coping with the lack of additional octaves, then in short supply among Austria's fortepianos. Squeezing the plastic throttle in the impulsive hope of "budging" an electric slot car from its speedway, the car shivers through each roundabout, for all its low-voltage motor understands is go. At three-eighths scale a slot car doesn't lean into turns but always carves against them. Despite what I say elsewhere about the baroque's freedom to do kinetically what it pleases, we might describe Bach's Passacaglia and Fugue in C Minor as a piece of music absolutely fixated on climbing and falling.

Dixon ran his eye along the lines of black dots, which seemed to go up and down a good deal.⁷³

The emotional opposite of the Bach would be Schubert's Allegretto in C Minor, in which one imagines a child repeatedly lofting a balloon in order to watch it descend.

71 See Marcel Duchamp's *With Hidden Noise* and Man Ray's *The Enigma of Isidore Ducasse*.

72 Adorno, *Current of Music*, 100.

73 Kingsley Amis, *Lucky Jim* (New York: Penguin Books, 2002), 36.

Frogger's homology. Atari's perpendicular graphics share visual hallmarks with the eleventh-century illuminations of a gospel owned by Henry the Pious. In both one can find bands separating flat pools of less-than-vibrant green and pink that help direct the eye. But a special clarification is needed. If we suppose that *Landscape with the Parable of the Sower* corresponds to the atmospheric stage in videogaming's timeline, Bruegel must be thought to leapfrog *Ninja Gaiden* as artificial, representing a punctuating hiccup in the electronic medium's journey to aesthetic closure. Instead, Bruegel finds his analogate in an open-world engine able to produce field depth with convincing equilibrium. Per the development of videogames, straining toward a dimension quite beyond the NES's 8-bit grasp ultimately looks like two steps back. This should remind us of cinema's hard fork at the emergence of technicolor, which pales in photographic quality to black-and-white stock, or the bargain animation made when it first incorporated computer-generated artifacts⁷⁴ into its otherwise meticulous cityscapes. Not the full jump *Toy Story* went for but a partial adoption intended to lower production costs, and today this duller half is still playing catch-up. In the course of their northerly advancement, the Dutch landscapists never face the prospect of retooling their methodologies to suit the round, Ruisdael forced at gunpoint to learn sculpture. In the cutscene where we see that final castle in the distance, *Ninja Gaiden* jumps too abruptly between the grass and sky, like Rothko's wishy horizon line. A regularity in the annals of science, an invention's arrival sometimes precedes its greatest application by several decades.⁷⁵

It is always intriguing to hear in the baroque a heartfelt complaint and genuine tenderness; so naturally does Couperin's *Le dodo, ou l'amour au berceau*, adapted for a grand piano, hemorrhage both. As though that misshapen era overleapt Mozart⁷⁶ to land squarely in Bonn, like the symphonic cycle before its Mahlerian rebirth and second death. Briefly abandoned for the single-movement tone poem's formal latitude, from the Olympus of that exceedingly pure drama — indeed, so reminiscent is Wagner's stage of Greek theater — Mahler steals his fiery orchestral coloration and complicated harmonics. In micro, this evolution plays out within the history of his first couple of symphonies, where the "Titan" was characterized in concert programs for a while as a symphonic poem and the "Resurrection" started life as the *Todtenfeier*. Mahler follows in Bruckner's wake as the next to champion the symphony above all else, but it is Mahler who completely succeeds in either dooming or futureproofing the form; he is effectively Bruckner with ideas and a sense of narrative. The symphony hits its stride as immensity constrained, while what we enjoy best from Wagner's long career are his overtures.

- 74 But notice, in Studio Ghibli's autumnal *The Wind Rises*, the face of the slide rule Jiro uses.
- 75 See Hans Bol's *Landscape with Christ on the Road to Emmaus, a Woman Herding Cattle to the Right*, the proper correlate to computerized graphics in the late eighties and in which we see a painter struggling to shift his tinting convincingly out of the midground.
- 76 It might be supposed that the fundamental lugubricity of a requiem mass, not to mention Mozart's deathward frame of mind, shoved him into what is at least emotionally romanticism before the letter.

Flies in the ointment. David Michael's *Squares and Dots*, a series of abstract paintings, does something ingenious that amounts to a controlled gestural, or pseudo-gestural, style. Inspecting the believably kinetic distribution of Michael's splatters, one finds them to be composed not of lopsided starbursts and drips but hard-edged squares. The truth of these deceptively symmetrical shapes isn't alluded to otherwise, leading the observer down an unkempt garden path to finally startle at topiary.

It happened one day about noon, going towards my boat, I was exceedingly surprised with the print of a man's naked foot on the shore, which was very plain to be seen in the sand. I stood like one thunderstruck, or as if I had seen an apparition.⁷⁷

Michael is subtler than Andy Goldsworthy, though otherwise vastly dissimilar in terms of just this conflict: haphazard nature versus meticulous intervention. And there's Man Ray's teardrops of glass, which indurate before your very eyes, as well as Stanley Whitney, an artist dedicated to simple canvases subdivided by color but in which everything is almost imperceptibly askew; we expect such right-angled precision, based on our familiarity with how carefully Mondrian and Josef Albers laid out their fields, but Whitney's is the rectangle gone soft. This is the charming disquietude of Vallotton's domestic scenes, their geometric imperfection, faint but all over. Or what Slavoj Žižek calls the Hitchcockian Blot: like Nicolas Poussin's Arcadian shepherds finding the inscribed tomb and Beethoven's dissonant hint within the *Eroica* Symphony's not-unhappy exposition,⁷⁸ with our discovery that the cup of coffee is in fact poisoned the cinematic mood, not to mention plot, is changed terribly.

The beauty of a star-shaped figure — a hexagonal star, say — is impaired if we regard it as symmetrical relatively to a given axis.⁷⁹

Michael's quadric arbitration makes me think of Roy Lichtenstein's late *Landscapes in the Chinese Style*, too, in which his longtime tongue-in-cheek partnership with the Ben-Day dot, an honest diacritic that intends to be noticed under some gallery's fluorescent lamps, is betrayed for the halftone's bias toward blending of the Monet persuasion. Wave after wave of tittles is sacrificed in Lichtenstein's effort to illusion submerged detail.⁸⁰

77 Daniel Defoe, *Robinson Crusoe* (New York: Signet Classic, 1980), 153.

78 As highlighted by Leonard Bernstein in one of his lectures for public television, between measures six and eight of the first movement.

79 Wittgenstein, *Culture and Value*, 71e.

80 See Sophia Narrett for the same effect in yarn, a traditionally conspicuous element that under Narrett's fine needle and thimble bends the knee to design, losing its elemental character.

42

Occorrono troppe. It is acceptable for a hero to wipe out a squad of lookalike goons because, in comic books and their adaptations, henchmen are in every way deficient. A shared, animating force vitalizes Ra's al Ghul's devoted clones, such that each one's ontic poverty is compensated by the charismatic leader; reincarnation once removed, like the heroine's ostensibly necessary death in childbirth. One might suppose that the literature of ancient Greece — or choose your polytheism — comes close to something like throwing one "goon" into relief against its class, insofar as Ovid's tales single out demigods, who are otherwise traded like penny stocks. In Shakespeare's *Tempest*, those brought ashore to the island by Prospero are all principals, including one butler and lord and a king accompanied by his jester. The ship's others are safely assumed to be a nameless collective of mariners. The rehabilitated Salomes, contracted an eternity to a Las Vegas casino where they sashay for an amphitheater of Herods, are clothed and staged so as to be pinpoints of charisma for an uncoordinated laity. The sitcom's live audience is their tidy fascistization, a job staffed by willing volunteers. Seated in NBC's purpose-built studio, the applause utterly cued, audience members try to hold the cameraman's attention with shows of astonishment and tearful concentration.

43

An English lion. Why should anyone think Wassily Kandinsky's style musical? He is, after all, an oil painter. Like notation demands of composers, Kandinsky is a diligent handler, his lurid arrangements organized as coherently as a paragraph of *Lohengrin*. Through color and shape, the textbooks never fail to mention, Kandinsky's jovially buoyant canvases approach the formalism of symphonic music. Animals benefit enormously from doubts like these when we believe that dolphins and orangutans articulate humanly, just on the inside, as when faced with his lion's silence Jerome bet his life on the suspicion that non-human meaning could be abstractly conveyed.⁸¹ But these runner-up zoological orders don't even ruminate in language; tigers growl there, too.

44

To be. Envisioning an alternative lifestyle involves the same philosophical blunder that Thomas Nagel made clear using bats, where one's Cartesian soul is magi-

81 Chris Martin tells Howard Stern that the lyric, "Yeah, they were all yellow," doesn't in fact convey anything (The Howard Stern Show, "Chris Martin Performs Coldplay's 'Yellow' on the Stern Show (2011)," *YouTube*, July 4, 2020, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WxCa5xwdGGw>); but Martin's comment is injudicious to the line's alliteration. Although not terribly profound, the repetition of consonants offers a kind of underlying significance over and above the associations yellowness smuggles aboard (symbolic of wheat's growth as well as cautious slowing), unbeknownst to the Coldplay front man.

cally transplanted into a prosperous shell another brought to triumph, the house already bought and the sought-after car and wife acquired.

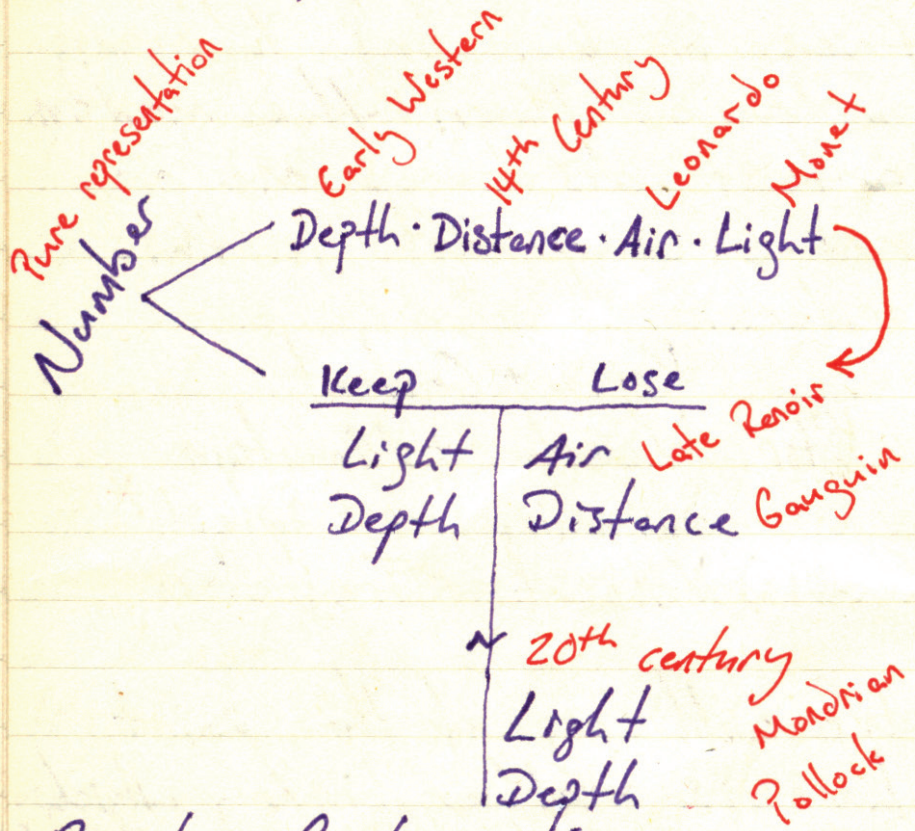
45

Preempt. When local news describes a speeding motorist as having been instantly killed, the suggestion is that death preempted the victim's conscious experience of the crash. Death is no longer an event in life, as Wittgenstein argued. Comprising no duration, the instantaneous death thus occurs without time; as though it never happens.

Do not stand at my grave and cry;
I am not there. I did not die.⁸²

82 Mary Fry, "Do not stand at my grave and weep," in *The Picador Book of Funeral Poems*, ed. Don Paterson (London: Picador, 2012), 116.

artists built up the world
and the next took it down
in a different order.



Reading f. Jameson's essay on
postmodernism in which he
copies a passage of
Séchéhaye's autobiography;
her last remark on "the gloss
of material things" has made
this apparent to me: Things

may be removed from the natural setting (read related suggestions) of a painting, too, that is, in addition to previously discussed tactics of the post-impressionists, by excluding reflected light, sheen, etc., nevertheless set beneath a beating sun, what have you. I would like to set these choices down in a thorough way. —

Distinguishable Obscure

Near	Classicism	Expressionism
for	Hyperrealism	Impressionism

Sondheim A Little Night Music,

"Remember."

Ibid. Pacific Overtures,

"Someone in a Tree."

Eleventh Notebook

1

Now, now. Insofar as reality can be thought to lack signposts denoting separate-ness per se,¹ our disappointing ability merely being to define how apart two atoms are through human measurement, shouldn't everything be thought infinitely dense? It is an unintuitive viewpoint, possibly one that cross-fertilizes the "new equilibrium" prophesized by Henry Adams in his autobiography² and Marshall McLuhan's now quaintly anteceded idea of the global village; not speedier approbation by one's internet neighbors but impossible nearness, with communication endlessly approaching simultaneity.

A given spatial distance, traditionally covered in a fixed amount of travel time, could suddenly be dealt with in a fraction of that time; to put it another way, the same amount of time permitted one to cover the old spatial distance many times over. In terms of transport economics, this meant a shrinking of space.³

Comcast's fiber-optic crunch refreshes our collective memory that time, as a formality intervening on behalf of thought, is being accelerated to the end of canceling itself out. In cheesy documentary style, seedpods swallow their white shoots and the ionized filaments of nebulae are yanked backward to form a dying star. If adhering to a explicitly materialist rationale, you couldn't say one asteroid was farther from earth than another but that they're discrete, just as beyond the strait of 2 lies the desert of plurality, besides the fact that the idea of bodies has been conceptually untenable since Newton. Listening to the music of Gregorio Allegri, it is as though one hears what is nowhere, the opposite feeling that amateur photographers are vying to physicalize every when.

- 1 Or that is to say what is absent cannot divide, while according to physicists nothing touches and cosmologists inform us that the universe is chock full of dark matter. As with like terms in mathematics, self-identical empty space cancels out, bringing all the intergalactic dust together.
- 2 Henry Adams, *The Education of Henry Adams* (Boston: Riverside Press, 1961), 489.
- 3 Wolfgang Schivelbusch, *The Railway Journey: The Industrialization of Time and Space in the Nineteenth Century* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2014), 33.

Is the difference between auditory and visual transcription a function of the fact that we are fully accustomed to hearing things that are invisible, not present to us, not present with us?⁴

Cavell approaches the strange tangibility of recorded sound (Nipper lifts his ear) by use of a rhetorical dialogue that equates gramophonic reproduction of an English horn with the real thing, a callback to André Bazin, who writes that “No matter how fuzzy, distorted, or discolored, no matter how lacking in documentary value the image may be, it shares, by virtue of the very process of its becoming, the being of the model of which it is the reproduction; it is the model.”⁵ *Miserere Mei, Deus* is first chanted in Rome almost four centuries ago and never but at the prevailing hour.⁶

He had already learned there was only one day at a time and that it was always the day you were in. It would be today until it was tonight and tomorrow would be today again.⁷

Prodigies of even Mozartian aptitude cannot attend to that which has concluded, the willed hallucinations of memory notwithstanding. The Vatican’s a cappella showpiece happens long ago during sunup as a cleric, watching as smoke corkscrews from his doused candle, laments that someday this now will also have been. According to the author of *Moby-Dick*, “the world is as young to-day, as when it was created; and this Vermont morning dew is as wet to my feet, as Eden’s dew to Adam’s.”⁸ In a news bulletin the state representative confirms that she plans to announce her candidacy.

2

Pile on. Electronic dance music’s clusters of tones, ratcheting up to the beat’s precipice and dropping in the midst of a basso continuo of sorts, dogpiles an orgasm-esque accomplishment, like giving an alp to an interminable plateau or a huge rogue wave that collapses at sea.

- 4 Stanley Cavell, *The World Viewed: Reflections on the Ontology of Film* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1979), 18.
- 5 André Bazin, “The Ontology of the Photographic Image,” in *What Is Cinema?*, ed. and trans. Hugh Gray (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2014), 1:14.
- 6 See Charles Baudelaire, *The Salon of 1846* (New York: David Zwirner Books, 2021), where he celebrates the exhibit pieces of one Constantin Guys, whose paintings are littered with contemporary figures and which serve as reflexive *aides-mémoire*, compelling one to share the primeval vision (that particular umbrella, her actual bistro) that caused the artist’s pencil to lift in the first place.
- 7 Ernest Hemingway, “The Last Good Country,” in *The Complete Short Stories of Ernest Hemingway* (New York: Scribner, 2003), 539.
- 8 Herman Melville, “Hawthorne and His Mosses,” in *The Apple-Tree Table and Other Sketches* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1922), 70.

3

Corruption in musical development. As with the errors in base pairs arising through DNA's replication, multiple translations of Arabic scrolls, or successive pulls from an engraver's plate, in every work of serious music continuous transformation inevitably tarnishes its guiding melody, interrogated for further clues and forcibly dragged out of inspiration's depth.

Pulling the craft slightly to the side, yet ahead,
still: little cupped trails alongside the mark where
the mind turned, questions were asked, and shed,
before moving on, nothing that can't be repaired.⁹

Explication hedges against the risk posed by inflation, while development is a venture straight into the blue. After a minute's riff on "The First Nowell," Brahms's Intermezzo in E-flat Major falls into a kind of weirdly sweet growl. Corruption can also take the form of self-sabotage, induced through a composer's efforts to borrow an idea in plain sight, like when Leoš Janáček's *On an Overgrown Path* cuts loose the bit of moonlight he used,¹⁰ the difference being that an original melody is presented upfront then quickly depreciates, while thieves start half-perished.

4

Hic sunt dracones. In a lecture delivered at Gresham College, physicist Robbert Dijkgraaf shares his speculation¹¹ that Europe's early cartographers included sea monsters and other zoological miscellany wherever they felt uneasy leaving a salty blank. Along the same lines and with equal honesty, Dijkgraaf goes on to suggest that theoretical cosmologists do as much as a king's royal cartographers in their visualizations of dark energy, with its lilac-black splashed against a backdrop of understood chaos.

5

Greater intelligence. Either the philosophers of ancient Greece had the greatest brains known to us or, combining an inquiring disposition with mental stamina to spare, they represent some of the earliest philosophical careers unimpeded by the day's theocracy, forging toolkits of introspective principles as ready standbys for quandaries that involved categorization and deductive reasoning.

9 Fleda Brown, "For, Or, Nor," in *The Woods are on Fire: New and Selected Poems* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2017), 184.

10 Starting at the thirty-first bar, compare "A Blown-Away Leaf" from Janáček's *On an Overgrown Path*, a cycle of piano miniatures, with Debussy's *Clair de lune*.

11 Gresham College, "The End of Space and Time? – Professor Robbert Dijkgraaf," *YouTube*, April 3, 2012, <https://youtu.be/XDAjinQLzco>.

How extraordinary that Plato could have got even as far as he did! Or that we could not get any further! Was it because Plato was so *extremely* clever?¹²

It's of course the way of empire that continents are discovered with generations of Natives comfortably settled there and calculus is found out both in India and England.

You do not suppose, my lady, that if all of Archimedes had been hiding in the great library of Alexandria, we would be at a loss for a corkscrew?¹³

That Western civilization owes much to the Greeks specifically is a fact as chance-determined as lines of succession.

6

From vine to vine. The continued strength of Antonín Dvořák's Ninth Symphony, in which the composer steadily inserts new tunes while keeping things coherent, begs comparison with the aesthetics of modern film editing's ability to rapidly cut between unrelated shots, from tropical rainforest to an undersea laboratory. The hopscotching we find in Dvořák, whatever it says about him in formal terms, would have baffled audiences accustomed to nothing more thematically rambunctious, or less plainly dramaturgic, than a chorale of Bach.

7

Digital looking glass. When another bus passenger whips out his smartphone and taps to life the front-facing camera, using its liquid crystals as a mirror, I see his puckered face there and for less than a second believe that he could see mine, too, as though the display were actually a handheld rectangle of glass.

8

Lady Agnew below the neck. Given how the traditional oil portrait concentrates on its sitter's face, almost incidentally will a lozenge of clarity be observed there, decaying outward from the tip of Henry James's considerable nose like the inversion of a migraine headache, a caricature of the eyeball's focal acuity and vignetting manner in which we actually see. Granting that the aesthetic function is to steer observers toward the deeply set mien of a subject, while clues as to lucre and culture adhere to the body, what would it mean to stare directly at upholstery covering an ottoman of no importance, a handful of brushstrokes between it and oblivion?

12 Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Culture and Value*, trans. Peter Winch (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), 15e.

13 Tom Stoppard, *Arcadia* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2008), 42.

And we know at once it would take an act of will
 Plus a firm, inquiring squint
 To ignore those drunken motes and concentrate
 On the blurred, unfathomed background tint
 Of deep sea-green Holbein employed to fill
 The space behind his ministers of state¹⁴

Not Lady Agnew's hard gaze but the cloud of lavender taffeta hanging from her ambiguous legs. With a canvas of disproportionate sharpness, its obscuring ozone depleted in one place, flitting around the edges in truth means facing what was an instant ago relegated to the periphery. From the center of my vision temporarily lined up with John Singer Sargent's to darting off elsewhere with the impulsivity of a hummingbird, of course the amount of detail in any spot doesn't increase with the attention brought to it but remains frustratingly unspecific. All its eggs laid in one exquisite basket, this type of canvas often has but a single sting to give. Still lifes are totally different, which expect our audits to be thorough, a freshly bought salmon being no more deserving of inspection than a sprig of honeysuckle. Portraiture in the twentieth century is quite a hike from the corner-to-corner precision of Elizabeth I, the paintings of whom serve as pictorial curio cabinets and with the passage of time resemble mummies' tombs for their visual inventories. The Queen's commissions must be heady with the exchequer's capital, which is to say obviously laborious, if they are to participate in her collective material wealth.

Whereas the "intellectual" fractions expect rather from the artist a symbolic challenging of social reality and of the orthodox representation of it in "bourgeois" art, the "bourgeois" fractions expect their artists, their writers, their critics, like their couturiers, jewellers or interior designers, to provide emblems of distinction which are at the same time means of denying social reality.¹⁵

Hence the fractal look of Jean-Honoré Fragonard's style, particularly evident in his landscapes, for the inwardness of the rococo technique allows for additional drawing within the same dimensions,¹⁶ like folding maximizes the human brain's outer

14 Anthony Hecht, "A Birthday Poem," in *Collected Earlier Poems* (New York: Borzoi Books, 1990), 125.

15 Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, trans. Richard Nice (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996), 293.

16 Table salt and regular sugar more or less lie outside our mental threshold for subitizing them, unless inspected up close, while sea salt and turbinado sugar appeal to us over finer granulations on the basis of crystals' greater discernability. Whether glommed together or separate, what's implied is that the jar contains divisibly many units rather than a single substance, one quantity of spice being less than multiple clusters in grocery store logic. On a related note, low-cost consumer electronics are thought better of when relatively heavy, though rarely is this equal to functionality, while a high-end pair of designer headphones is expected to be lightweight, though this fact at least partially conflicts with the product's guarantee of an abundance of first-rate technology. This is the premium of both materials and time, the hours invested by the engineers and manufacturer. It depends. Furniture's head is always looking in the direction of

surface area. If we think about it, vibrato is to a string musician what broguing is to a shoemaker; both succumbed to those same economic forces William Morris observed as the modern craftsman's affliction, whose previously free ornamentation came to be demanded outright and applied at every opportunity.

9

Touching the dial. Is digital loudening of an unstressed syllable ('Pe₁ter, for example, though the vocal stress were kept on Pe-) like turning up the decibels on a passage of recorded music marked *pianissimo*, or magnifying Claude Lorrain's minuscule Argus, who guards Io within dense Italian landforms, compared with scrutinizing a droplet of pond water under a microscope, the nature there receding through inlaid levels of worsening clarity? Earbuds on their lowest volume sigh from a location that is physically near, thus what's heard is not faint because it is distant. As opposed to the perceptual stillness of a jet airplane, confusable for an infinitely farther twinkling star.

I became fascinated with this phenomenon of hearing loud voices at a distance, in trying to account for how I knew they were loud when I could barely hear them.¹⁷

A dried lick of brush is legible only in conversation with the subject Lorrain meant, though linseed oil's minutiae accretes a record that is basically static. Instrumental utterances are a different bird altogether, being dependent on the sensitivity of nylon to a musician's vibratory pounces. The work of Albert Bierstadt, which he exhibited on the American circuit, embiggened whenever a fairgoer lifted the attached glass, while the Leipzig Gewandhaus's quietest note can be funneled through sheet metal or animal horn and amplified without need of digitizing.¹⁸

Actors on the stage whisper loudly, thereby contradicting the very meaning of the act of whispering.¹⁹

With dialing up a gramophone's volume, the best comparison might be enlarging a photograph without so much as glancing at the negative.

sturdiness, whether tree-hewn and immovable or as thin as the physics allow, but the better winter coat insulates as well as its thicker competition.

17 Ben Lerner, *Leaving the Atocha Station* (Minneapolis: Coffee House Press, 2011), 57.

18 See the "lowercase" style of music. Pioneered by American artist Steve Roden, these soundscapes involve the amplification of what's usually inaudible.

19 Vsevolod Pudovkin, quoted by James Naremore, *Acting in the Cinema* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), 46.

10

Crowds by gradations. If we juxtapose the clashing armies of John Speed's illustration²⁰ of the Battle of Shrewsbury with "Memorial Plaza," a *New Yorker* cover by Adrian Tomine used for a 2014 issue of the magazine, how the density of each crowd changes to depict in a single drawing a large huddle of people at the individual and blended levels becomes apparent.²¹ Speed and Tomine both execute this upper viscosity of crowds with severe abruptness, neglecting to checkpoint the intervals of pictorial space with enough visual indicia. Speed includes only cavalry at first but the density of pikes between the armies' competing formations looks closer to a wheat field in desperate need of sickling. Tomine includes a touching cross-section of foreign and American visitors — the Muslim woman and emotionally invested stockbroker, the Japanese couple posing as their photograph is taken — but the whole too quickly becomes oatmeal. One should blame these compressions and others like them²² less on shortsighted ambition than the cramped frame's inadequacy. Either might possibly account for the sad flaw of Bellini's *Madonna of the Small Trees*, whose arboreal filler, jostling for their own slots between the banner and canvas's edge, make the composition look as though it were slightly cropped.

11

Interrogating Alexa. In a tone of authority, the buyers of smart speakers, who feels themselves entitled to answers by the very nature of the product, put the screws to Google or Amazon's virtual assistant, demanding to know whether Alexa in electronic cahoots with the National Security Agency; they ask repeatedly, showing the voice-activated speaker no quarter as the truth is extracted. Public relations departments jump at the chance to deflect accountability to such unpaid punching bags as these, which on the corporate ladder serve, along with call centers, as the equivalent of *Judenräte*. After patronizing Jeff Bezos, the customer is tickled to find — or anticipated before she even clicked on the shopping cart — a peon for her lash. By this same affectation of vox populi does one reprimand Kroger online until the supermarket chain at last cries uncle, capitulating a mollifying tweet.

- 20 See William Shakespeare, *Henry IV, Part I*, eds. Barbara A. Mowat and Paul Werstine (New York: Washington Square Press, 1994), lx.
- 21 Michelangelo's twenty ignudi more than decorate the scheme of his ceiling, they're putty the master slaps over intersectional crevices, just as vocalise gluts excess beats in a song until the chorus is ready and nondescript cafes serve European directors as non-temporal junctions facilitating some narrative turn.
- 22 See *Papal Benediction in the Piazza di San Pietro*, an anonymous print published by Antonio Lafreri, and Vincent van Gogh's *The Roofs of Paris*. In Luchino Visconti's film *The Leopard*, the monumental battle scenes and lavish dinners can seem downright clumsy if one zeroes in on one-on-one engagements between the soldiers or the distribution by a butler of tiramisù.

The culture industry not so much adapts to the reactions of its customers as it counterfeits them. It drills them in their attitudes by behaving as if it were itself a customer.²³

12

Lower than low. Arnold Schoenberg's epigraphed quotation in *The Language of the New Music*, a documentary comparing the composer's creative philosophy with that of Ludwig Wittgenstein, "To purify music of ornamentation and the inherited meaning of tonality, and to create a new music in which the absolute logic of composition would become pure expression," hindsightedly accuses instrumental music of taking for granted its inspiratory condition, the unification of subject matter and form, such that now tonality itself is a layer of meaning to be stripped. Schoenberg might be thought of as music's leading Pre-Raphaelite, with Mozart standing for the boyish Raphael, given atonality's overwhelming reliance on motifs, emblematic of much baroque composition. Glenn Gould would be the analogous musician here, who never bothered to record Schubert, Chopin, or Tchaikovsky. As I see it, Schoenberg's aim was to achieve precisely that character European music has always offered as its calling card: bareback declaration, where nothing comes between the music and audience. Naturally, the question is whether music can truly wash its hands of signification.

Musical physicalism does not lead back to the state of nature, the untainted world, free of ideology; on the contrary, it accords with the regression of society.²⁴

Schoenberg's aesthetic neglects that for any hearer, including the composed work's conscious awareness of its own complaint, repetition is knowledge-burdened with memory's pollen, which clings between each flower. Expression per se distinguishes noise from random chance even if isolated in sense-relation to its surroundings, imbued with the artist's foundational decision to let there be sound. Or else Schoenberg intended to differentiate tonality's base plangency from composition as a human activity, a foreign category. Music need not shed its sonic clothes to be expressive — expression shouldn't cost so much. An utterance dryly repeated, if the chord's pitch or speed adjust in the slightest,²⁵ will be felt emotionally alive and to progress. Avant-garde efforts to nail down music's boiling point, just when it turns into meaningless steam, smacks of European painters' regular debate on the question of vision, from the Renaissance through cubism's inauguration.

23 Theodor Adorno, *Minima Moralia: Reflections from Damaged Life*, trans. E.F.N. Jephcott (New York: Verso, 2005), 200.

24 Theodor Adorno, *Philosophy of New Music*, ed. and trans. Robert Hullot-Kentor (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006), 146.

25 See William Basinski's *Disintegration Loops*.

A day-long Ninth. In an interview produced for the Franz Liszt Piano Competition, Leslie Howard warns against overdrawing the Sonata in B Minor, as typical performances, he claims, tend to disintegrate “into twenty-five little preludes.”²⁶ Besides ushering in the era of consolidation — less publication but significantly longer opuses — the B Minor gargantuates the solipsism inherent to late Beethoven. And while out of step with the form’s earlier ideal of three movements, or if you’re talking about Haydn’s courteous triptychs, cloistering morsels for a virtuoso’s languorous contemplation is not alien to Liszt. A young composer-in-training might be courageous enough to shorten *Nuages gris*, basically the poster child for proto-impressionism, from its thinly connected wisps to a single drop of rain; whether this hypothetical pianist achieves what Liszt only dreamed of is anyone’s guess. Scandinavian sound artist Leif Inge explodes Beethoven’s Ninth Symphony diagrammatically through digital manipulation, to say nothing of Inge’s creative intentions, like if one crudely magnified an oil painting or took several steps from a bifurcated engine until the nuts and bolts were lost sight of.²⁷

The pinks Monet lavished on them disappear
if you stand across the room, where the lee
of evening is demarcated, clear.
It’s one of the rules for viewing:
remembering that all those brushstrokes accruing
resolve at some distance, and become less rosy.²⁸

As when a poem’s rhymes are sometimes laid too far apart to be noticed by the reader, although the scheme is there, Inge neither thins the Ninth Symphony nor relocates a single measure, he leavens it whole. The thought of undoing Inge’s engineering brings to mind a process like densifying hot air and when English composers began an impressionism of their own. A lengthier, implied work is de-fragmented.

That is the “transformation of time into space,” the impression that the music lasts only a moment while it actually may take twenty minutes. [...] That is, it will appear not as a totality in which each part derives its proper mean-

- 26 Lisztcompetition, “Franz Liszt Sonata B minor, S178 explained by Leslie Howard,” *YouTube*, October 6, 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nAelmzSmts>.
- 27 It is my preferred way to think of the final symphony Beethoven wrote, as our best musical example of the mechanical sublime, like something out of Fritz Lang’s *Metropolis*. Except this character of disciplined artificiality doesn’t build up as a whole but, after the terrifying first movement, with its creatively brave stretches of thematic single-mindedness, becomes pleasantly broader and even jovial until, by the choral finish, we hear a cry from within the maelstrom. This is nothing like Bach’s haloed bass singing the role of Jesus. If not as organic as things eventually get, the Ninth could at least be deemed cyborg-esque.
- 28 Ange Mlinko, “Trouville,” in *Distant Mandate* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2017), 55.

ing only in relation to the other parts, but rather becomes a rapid succession of “atom-like” sections, each apperceived more or less in isolation.²⁹

Frederick Delius, for additional example, tantalizes his listener with the unspoken feeling that a half pint of loveliness should drop into our laps, could Tropicana only concentrate the *Florida Suite*. So Beethoven’s wayward, eruptive keyboard sonatas deploy all the plot twists of a good ballade and the poetry of Robert Lowell almost sounds like Odysseus blown off course.

14

Darkness at noon. Music, by far the most formally erratic of arts, seems almost without exception to result from the composer quilting her written material in such a manner that the “stitch” tucks beneath the interweaving of melodies and key changes. I wonder to what extent one’s failure to mentally register each and every participle in the act of reading typed words, skipping the occasional conjunction with a regular saccade of the eye, can be held up to blinking throughout a film, in which seconds of footage are lost for every minute. What instrumental music’s finest practitioners achieve is invisible technique and, like the eighteenth-century landscaped estate’s ha-ha, the disingenuous magic of keeping things together.

It was one of the greatest achievements of Mozart and Beethoven that they were able to avoid simple contrasts and elicit diversity in the most tender transitions, often merely through modulation.³⁰

Chopin’s four scherzi are notable examples of cloaking development in cleverness, but seemingly impulsive leaping in the dark has a century to go before the harried dotting-between-the-lines of Dmitri Shostakovich, a ruthless self-catechizer on par with Raskolnikov. Equal parts scapegoat and clown, the disembodied soul of European classical music comes by the twentieth century to obtain an epileptic imp whose idea of capriccio is showing a toothless grin. This tragically irreverent attitude interrupts queries of its own making in order to reply all the faster through the tangled locution of a bassoon, even to the point of rebuking question-asking.

Suppose a *why* like Job’s is largely a complaint, then is it even a question, if it isn’t really asking anyone anything? There’s a dull if economical answer: everyone understands that these are only rhetorical questions which by definition don’t expect any reply. Yet are such lamenting *whys* real examples of that genre, though? *Erotema*, rhetorical inquiries, ought to carry a spirit of willed indifference to any actual answer. Convinced in advance of what the response should be, they aim only to affirm their point by framing it as a question.³¹

29 Theodor Adorno, *Current of Music: Elements of a Radio Theory*, ed. Robert Hullot-Kentor (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2009), 55.

30 Adorno, *Philosophy of New Music*, 63.

31 Denise Riley, “Some WHYs and why mes,” in *Impersonal Passion: Language as Affect* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005), 60–61.

For all their humorously demonic rhetoric, Chopin's scherzi are less suicidal thrashing than Whitmanesque contradiction.

15

Measuring the shore. The popular obsession with the Mandelbrot set, or the class of fractals it is capable of, involves the redundancy of when a discrete object is laid down in the shape of its content, the precise roughness of which cannot be known due to the addition of finer and finer indentation. Change without deviation frequently comes down to an illusion, that of a shuttle crossing an event horizon and how the moon circles the drain of earth without making impact, like hypnotic Shepard tones seem to rise in pitch to no end. It is the identical mistake as when we let ourselves believe a circle perfect, claiming a dodecagon to be devoid of edges then, while diving into the shape's abyss, smoothening out the corners with theoretical plaster as they're dented in continuous adjustment of the circle's internal area. If looked at closely, a star drawn on a sheet of paper will gradually deform into something more closely resembling a maple leaf, but up to a point. The Koch snowflake is no different, being perfectly measurable at every stage. For the coastline versus what land it encloses, either may be useable in abstract thought, while enforcing both together is fantasy. Any declaration as to an object's dimensions nullifies its qualified claim to infinitude.

For they who so much alter the signification of words, as to call extension body, and consequently make the whole essence of body to be nothing but pure extension without solidity, must talk absurdly whenever they speak of vacuum; since it is impossible for extension to be without extension.³²

A Mandelbrot fractal is not infinitely deep but always already of the condition *for adding to*. By the same token, one's inability to name the last rational number is only in light of an ongoing, temporally unlocatable potential for counting higher.

Whence comes the idea that the beginning of a series is a visible section of rails invisibly laid to infinity? Well, we might imagine rails instead of a rule. And infinitely long rails correspond to the unlimited application of a rule.³³

Reality has to be qualitatively limited — the hands outspread to gesticulate at everything, one wants to say, "*This* is how much complexity there is." Calling space and time infinitely complex lets us eat cake and still have it; this way of thinking begs the perpetual onset of new leptons and quarks, as though the whole of creation updates at a moment's notice in verification of our bickering.

Imperceptible subtlety is implied when Tchaikovsky's audience ignores the periodic silence that actually helps glue his works together, while Mozart alone

32 John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (Philadelphia: Kay & Troutman, 1846), 118.

33 Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, eds. P.M.S. Hacker and Joachim Schulte, trans. G.E.M. Anscombe, P.M.S. Hacker, and Joachim Schulte (Hoboken: John Wiley & Sons, 2009), 91e.

glides on a cushion of air, a kind of musical cartilage binding together nearly equal but separately developed modular strains. But this leftover change adds up to a backlog of irreconcilables. An initial move forward is necessary: should this baton passing between constitutive musical half-phrases be done clumsily or dropped? The result is the telling clash of artifice, a loose abutment of threads. Tasked with the challenge of sailing through a china shop and chipping no dish, Brahms simply assigned each variation a number and turned the page.

16

Liszt's failings. Hermeneutics' twentieth-century disciplinary shift from the superstitious belief that a word equals one or another generally adhered to signifier — this being what that specific linguistic unit essentially is, as though significations inhered in a vocabulary like its dreams — to the opposite Derridean notion that “car” refers to a type of four-wheeled vehicle if not a train compartment only in relation to everything it fails to denote, the pictorial signifieds that don't obtain upon one's encountering the word (school bus, flatbed truck), is ideally suited to one of my deepest-held notions about artmaking, albeit the chronological river flows backward: the retroactive continuity of aligning an artist's output with what is assumed to have been her intention. Countermanding Derrida's eliminative method can lead us to conclude that Cimabue begot the Christs that he did, stylistically speaking, due to “failing” at everything else, while clearly Picasso intended to conjure just the sad minotaurs and ladies that he did, naturalness of anatomy be damned. Schumann hasn't the gifts to be Liszt, but then Liszt wasn't about to pen the innocent, small-scale peregrinations of Schumann's *Waldszenen*, whose trepidatious babe stumbles upon a hunt in progress and bird of prophecy tipsy from nibbling fermented berries.

17

Rid of melodies. Atonality's benefit from a lifestyle of melodic celibacy is reduction of the potential for eidetic corruption. Note the decline in ingenuity that occurs a handful of measures into Dmitri Shostakovich's Prelude and Fugue in C Major,³⁴ for example, milked to the point of curdling.

You can point to particular places in a tune by Schubert and say: look, that is the point of this tune, this is where the thought comes to a head.³⁵

The Second Viennese school is not burdened by Schumann's longing to strive but not break, whose delicate raft floundered in the Rhine late one winter. Should a composer elicit from that musical Shangri-la a melody of beautiful length, she's likely to conduct herself according to one of the following historical types: grateful for the dumb luck, Elgar decides to leave well enough alone; Bruckner, the bumpkin of Ansfelden and a closet demigod, monkeys to his heart's content and

34 Beginning his 24 Preludes and Fugues, op. 87.

35 Wittgenstein, *Culture and Value*, 47e.

occasions apocalypses in the process; Mozart nabs a beautiful grouper then slides the fish to the hilt before spearing another four.

That is the string, which as if it dipped loosely into a wave of treasure brings up pearls sticking to it.³⁶

18

Making up Sappho's reliquary. *If Not, Winter*, Anne Carson's edition of Sappho fragments, may be the high-brow equivalent of rubbernecking at disasters, in which nonsensical snippets have been arranged into ink islands surprisingly modern in their relief, left behind after the ocean swallowed up the other lines. Besides some fastidious translation, what Carson does is repackage the original Sappho for Oulipo's readership, whose membership has declined to about that of Shakerism, and fans of erasure.

Schubert has nothing to do with what Gould said. He liked something in my performance, but he's talking about me, not Schubert!³⁷

Decontextualized as luscious flesh melted from bone, these ambiguities let us poke scholarly fun at a pile of Greek shards while admiring their maker's foresightedness.

19

The web and the rock. Ant colonies on the move aren't crisp battalions but chains lessening in the direction of their stragglers, just the sort of spillage one expects to find in a *natural* system.

This is not a defect. To think it is would be like saying that the light of my reading lamp is no real light at all because it has no sharp boundary.³⁸

Cars trickle across the intersection, the signal having redshifted in its traffic skull.

20

Caterpillars will hatch. If the caliginosity of *Ich ruf zu dir, Herr Jesu Christ*, one of Bach's deepest chorale preludes, puzzles us with its religiously tender sadness, a century in advance of Caspar David Friedrich's mist-infested landscapes and kept from romanticism by the linked careers of Haydn and Mozart, recall how the Ital-

36 Virginia Woolf, *The Diary of Virginia Woolf: 1925-1930*, ed. Anne Olivier Bell (London: Hogarth Press, 1980), 11.

37 Bruno Monsaingeon, dir., *Richter: The Enigma* (Warner Music Vision, 1999).

38 Ludwig Wittgenstein, *The Blue and Brown Books: Preliminary Notes for the "Philosophical Investigations"* (New York: Harper & Row, 1965), 27.

ian Renaissance defensively walls off the Gothic era from its hoard of twentieth-century doppelgängers.

21

The thought held. The music of the European baroque proves itself to be constitutionally intolerant of dead air. Conversely, absolute rests in Beethoven's oceanliner of a wake are possible because his various moods are designed to appear as an agentful subject capable of both doubt and remembrance, such that every silence is a pregnant one. Older styles by comparison recall some attic crammed full of dusty antiques, adding machines and toys that need winding with a key. It might be asked why this situation isn't the other way around, for complete stoppage ought to disrupt a little Schubertian marble chasing its lowest energy state, like one doesn't expect a spheroidal object to stop and go as though it were irresolute. Albinoni, one of the baroque's hundreds of nobodies, belongs to that angelic family of music capable of vertical liftoff and bounce-free landings, while it is the kinetic character, in truth beginning with Mozart, that pulls itself out of ruts it created, a mechanical steering-clear under the pretense of hesitation. Throughout romanticism memory acts as a safety net,³⁹ letting Berlioz's revelers take a sorely needing breathing spell. Buxtehude or Bach's excuse for not pulling onto the shoulder is somewhat tougher to explain. However operose, baroque automation depends on constant innervating: stop cycling and the light bulb flickers out, the cogwork of toccata⁴⁰ and fugue grinds to a halt. Crossing the pipe organ with Steinway's concert grand theorizes a zombie dynamo as sterile as a mule; not echoes in the belfry but a telephone ringing unplugged. Chamber literature can be macabre if the sustain pedal is floored, beginning to rot before the coda is through. Chopin closes the middle of his three sonatas with a fanged epilogue of notes still capable of biting.

22

Giant missteps. Holbein's oblique skull dropped at the feet of the ambassadors' double portrait for the sake of novelty; when Beethoven concludes his thoroughly

- 39 Almost as a passage stumbled upon mid-development can sound harmonically arbitrary. After the classical style dies out, which cannot help recapitulating its grand founding thought in every twist of expression, seldom are musical justifications actively visible, a phrasal hall pass that identifies just where Gustav Mahler is headed. The ghost of earlier modulation and inversion whispers into the orchestra's collective ear, such that the listener with a bad memory is unable to say how things got where they are, though the spectacle may be from second to second tonally agreeable. In Jean Sibelius's Fifth Symphony, how extremely odd are the six blasts with which it finishes; they could never hang together on purely momentous terms, like a ball's shortening bounce. At the same time, it is unnecessary to look beyond physics for the alibi, as the notes merely accord with what the symphony's innermost logic says is emotionally necessary.
- 40 The metaphor of keeping a baroque composition going via peddling becomes clearer when we see that "toccata" is derived from Italian's *toccare* ("to touch"). It is this ceaseless, percussive touching in general that makes the baroque work.

original *Eroica* symphony with variations on a too-familiar theme; Michelangelo carving his name into Mary's sash so there could be no mistake about the sculpture; Hitchcock's cinematic afterword to *Psycho* when a court analyst explains Norman Bates's killing spree for the audience.

23

Realism of the body. Artificial dyeing one's hair has always looked conflicted to me. I realize now that hair, too, is subject to that basic aesthetical law in which form and content struggle for supremacy.

All the best artists have shown that the greatest achievement in the producing of fine color, is the concealment of pigments, and not the parade of them; and we may say the same of execution.⁴¹

So drab is the body that augmenting one's hair with lab-tested chemicals sounds compensatory. Another way of thinking about it is that bodies are as specifically delineated as crystal. Johannes Vermeer's scrumptious *Milkmaid* knows this — up close, the table's biscuits seem to have actual crust on them — or else it is why the bent gleaners in Jean-François Millet's field look correct; far from unemphatic, realism drains the artist's credit line, after which Millet can't afford to pile on charreuse and fuchsia. The strength of the draftsmanship must be inversely proportional to what colors the artist uses.

Throughout the house there could be sensed, as when music changes not its theme but its key, a little less concentration on the soul, a little more on the body.⁴²

Coloring one's hair brown or bleaching it blonde doesn't plunge the body's budget into the red for staying in the lane of realism. Dip-dyeing one's hair electric blue, however, is decidedly additive, a hue on top of what can already be thought of as emphasized due to its sheer physicality. In a sense this overloads the circuit, like trying to lift both ends of a seesaw.

24

Spooky action on trial. Newton finds himself in direct violation of the mechanical philosophy's cardinal rule, his diary admitting that actions indeed happen at a distance. Faraday and Maxwell reject Newton's conclusion, which Einstein later seconds. Quantum physicists then dismiss Einstein's objection. As Noam Chomsky wants us to understand, Newton didn't exactly endorse a touchless physics but ultimately hung the matter on God, universal gravitation becoming science's first abandoned question, describable to the meters-per-second squared but to this

41 Asher B. Durand, quoted by Linda S. Ferber, *Kindred Spirits: Asher B. Durand and the American Landscape* (London: Giles, 2007), 246.

42 Penelope Fitzgerald, *The Blue Flower* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1995), 164.

day unexplained. Swinging between paradigms like this, less pious scientists than Newton measure to their satisfaction additional phenomena that restore to every action adjacency. The effects of any massive body require contact of a kind by definition. From whitening mouthwash to flea medication, all manner of affective products claim they begin working on contact, with emphasis on “begin,” as though any other scenario were imaginable. If we hold to the idea of no action but in mechanics, every action therefore necessarily implies interaction, like curvature demands a minimum of two straight lines. There cannot exist a boundary line or natural gap, furthermore, transitioning things from macrophysics to that governing subatomic particles for the simple reason that such a territory would itself be constitutive of the very same gradient, between the largest star systems and quarks; the worlds laid out by Newton and Einstein already interact at their finest points because logically they cannot do otherwise, though the data be incompatible. Or how else could one found the other? Then every point is fine and there are no points as such. It is a circuit of indiscrete continuation — the subatomic makes up the atomic, the atomic contains the subatomic — that cannot be broken except apparently, through the rigidifying touch of language.

Douglas firs and birches are found to share carbon and other nutriment throughout the seasons; but instead of calling this one symbiotic organism, ecologists, or the only ones we ever hear from, also insist on the trees’ separateness, such that afterward they can be described as altruistic forest pals. The plants that “refuse” to share with their neighboring kin are said to have loner personalities. While nature’s laws slowly lose their applicability, brought to bear upon the phenomena our detectives understand least, this qualitative transition has no choice but to be a gradual one, a line being entirely symbolic and thus without meaningful spatial width. Empty compartments shut up inside a ship’s hull to act as ballast; the lunacy of *ex nihilo* as a steppingstone is evident on its own terms. In the same way that *nowhere* is unrelatable to an antecedent *from*, things born of nothing is only ever built around by intellectuals, like an unsightly spite house, if not avoided altogether. Gaps limited to one’s imagination are easily bridged, after all. The intuition concerning a relationship between bodies treats their necessary interaction as though formulae thereof were implicit in simply recognizing the former. But quantum physics obviated such things to the same degree that mechanical action calls to mind flying billiard balls and the best-known apple this side of Genesis.

25

From the horse’s mouth. Stenographing gospel directly from God or a delegatory angel is laughable for its advantageousness. Jack Kerouac needs merely to record the universe’s message, then his scroll, famed for its detailed look at the exploits of a few hippies, will not require the editor’s monocle for being perfectly inspired.⁴³ Like the ideomotor effect for automatists, doubtless mystics, bored to tears in their monasteries, also dispense with revision, following the first breathless syllable; from Allen Ginsberg’s pointless loquacity to thousand-page sheafs composed in cheap hotels.

43 See Jack Kerouac, “Essentials of Spontaneous Prose,” in *The Portable Jack Kerouac*, ed. Ann Charters (London: Penguin Books, 1996).

26

Whittling everything. Precedent for the more outlandish readings of deconstructionism, if not already provided by Derrida and friends, might be found in the twentieth century's artistic innovation of selective abstraction, a pictorial thing is whittled from its complete self. Concerning the symbol-laden *Rainbow Portrait* of Elizabeth I,⁴⁴ in which the monarch clutches an admittedly tubular bit of meteorology, Daniel Fischlin begins by noting that

On the (literally) one hand, the queen holds the unusually shaped cylinder (as opposed to the more common, one-dimensional, flat representation) of the colorless rainbow. On the other hand, the queen fingers a fold whose visual ambiguousness parallels that of the rainbow's.⁴⁵

It is important to see how these observations are based on diluting the rainbow and fabric down to what are their geometric souls, the humble cylinder and fold. Applied to illusions as such, the blunt spirit of materialism adds see-through vision to theoreticians' critical toolkits, almost like powerful spyware that gets loose; henceforth, scholars find themselves able to Jenga out the layers from what they always knew was elemental at heart.

Directed to art, interpretation means plucking a set of elements (the X, the Y, the Z, and so forth) from the whole work.⁴⁶

The insight for figurative art after Cézanne is that, if one takes away ingredients, it all keeps standing. Good modernist that he is, Fischlin pushes and pulls at the multitudinous cake that coheres every natural object amply depicted, while doing so to a level of impossible completeness, like with accelerating a given amount of mass to light speed, would require an infinite amount of energy. It is a lesson one discovers through the art Willem de Kooning and Amédée Ozenfant. Talk of square jaws and saucer eyes downsizes our biological zoo to a manageable Euclidean lingo, the path of least description.

27

Joke, no joke. Sometimes it feels as though the greatest visual artists, such as Rembrandt and Van Gogh, are too excellent to foster a discussion of much length. Or it isn't absolutely necessary: one could simply stare at the Jewish groom's sleeve for days. Immense beauty is in a qualified sense dissatisfying, and the cheap drollery of much contemporary art therefore entirely satisfying, insofar as there immediately dawns a feeling of narratological resolution.

44 Attributed to Marcus Gheeraerts the Younger.

45 Daniel Fischlin, "Political Allegory, Absolutist Ideology, and the 'Rainbow Portrait' of Queen Elizabeth I," *Renaissance Quarterly* 50, no. 1 (Spring 1997): 187.

46 Susan Sontag, "Against Interpretation," in *Against Interpretation and Other Essays* (New York: Picador, 2001), 4.

When something is perfect, we tend to neglect to ask about its evolution, delighting rather in what is present, as if it had risen from the ground by magic.⁴⁷

Compared with the lion's share of Art Basel, no punchline hides behind *Aristotle Contemplating a Bust of Homer* except for the interesting fact that Aristotle's thoughtful gaze is elsewhere, and ogling doesn't extinguish all the *Sunflowers*. This is why Chopin is neglected by musicologists as relatively unimportant, compared with Liszt, who had quadruple the industry at half the former's genius. In a literal sense nonpareil, his nocturnes and ballades overleap their formal epitomes, coming off as hokey for being lost to quality's calipers altogether.

The misfortune is, I believe, that he stands by himself, at least in the culture of the west, so that one can only place him by placing him wrongly.⁴⁸

28

Benefits of doubt. The protuberances blotting the Venus of Willendorf's stony head turn on a mild form of *horror vacui*, their paleolithic cuts actually a shortcut that becomes, with the gross sympathy of our hindsight, the decision of an uncompromising artist. This grid-like patterning can arguably be said to have resulted from the anonymous cave-dweller's hesitation to sculpt a nose, and what follows is the same technical cynicism which tempts Italy to whitewash that earliest of skies with so much irrelevant checker, spied through a sanctuary's fenestella or the columns of a portico. To what extent untaught, ill-equipped artists are treated as broad-minded heroes can be seen in confused recreations of the Venuses Brasempouy and Willendorf; one illustrator infers from the latter's furrowed knob a lot of tangled hair and a couple of crocheted snoods. As the bone statuette found in Kostenski corroborates, a diced pattern is not the informed choice of some unknown Claudel but one exceedingly practical. Mostly able to hew a mother-esque totem from limestone, the sculptor of the Willendorf was too proficient to lay the chisel aside entirely. Another example is the Chinese guardian lion, with regard to the knotting on its head. Both imply self-composure, as opposed to the wilder abandon of a flowing mane, and save the sculptor that additional creative labor of representing fine animal hair. Incidentally, the symmetry of such a design lends subsequent generations a copyable standard. The Willendorf figurine's compensatory move demonstrates beautiful resourcefulness in the especially subtle way that each drip of upper limb conforms to a breast's ridge.

29

Swept with confused alarms. While it conveys alarm effectively, what's knee-jerking about the prohibition symbol is its blunt alert to a potential infringement

47 Friedrich Nietzsche, *Human, All Too Human*, trans. Marion Faber and Stephen Lehmann (Lincoln: Bison Books, 1996), 103.

48 Wittgenstein, *Culture and Value*, 84e.

crossed with the image's dire nearness,⁴⁹ as when the Hollywood burglar-acrobat notices the trip laser. A circled pictogram interrupted with a brutish, almost energetic diagonal, threatens the onlooker by extension. But naturally, a half-torn "No Trespassing" sign stapled to a tree just behind the owner's property line is merely indicative of what is likely the case in terms of proprietorship. Signs don't make anything so, as if by a kind of legally all-powerful edict.

They need to watch over and record all the empty time when no one is robbing anyone, so they can be there on cue when someone is. A camera that switched on only when a crime was taking place would be an eerie invention, a sort of oracle rather than recorder of reality.⁵⁰

30

Personal best. An artist's work doesn't have to be careful or figured out to qualify as such. Those who make Instagram their home and day-to-day painters rehash a limited repertoire of stunts, or they compile color studies after the example of Josef Albers, with the desired outcome of convincing the market's invisible hand that loftier blue-chip status is aspired to.

Derivative writers seem versatile because they imitate many others, past and present. Artistic originality has only its own self to copy.⁵¹

Style is lifelong calcification, and the artist's portfolio a sort of oyster.

31

Blowing off steam. Instead of mere ornamentation, for a composer's soloist vibrato and trill function as opportunities to shake off superfluous energy, like a shaggy dog come inside from the rain. It might be that musical vigor, so freely available is it to the baroque and harvested without harmful side effects, otherwise sludges up like motor oil or that fingers leave on a butterfly's wings, terminally grounding the insect and for whom flight is afterward impossible; although this is not to abandon the previous observation that aural decay effectively licenses⁵² the

49 "The sickening necessity for hurrying in extremity where all hurry seems destined to be vain, self-baffled, and where the dreadful knell of too late is already sounding in the ears by anticipation." Thomas De Quincey, "The English Mail-Coach," in *Selected Writings of Thomas De Quincey*, ed. Philip van Doren Stern (New York: Modern Library, 1949), 968.

50 Michael Wood, *Film: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 19.

51 Vladimir Nabokov, interview by Herbert Gold, *Strong Opinions* (New York: Vintage International, 1990), 95.

52 It nonetheless remains intriguing why exactly romanticism does away with much of the classical period's filigree. One possibility is that trill and the like, being energetic fringe phenomena — think of how static alludes to a coming storm — get absorbed within the deeper kinetic body of corporeality.

lugubriousness of Beethoven and Schubert. In the lovelorn spirals of Tchaikovsky's Fifth Symphony,⁵³ brief flute pipings form the top and function remarkably like a kettle's releases of steam, the orchestra close to boiling.

32

Down and out of. There is the barest unreality to dropping a half-can's worth of peas into a brown stew thickened by Campbell's with flour. Cooking on the stove, the viscous liquid buoys the green pile rather than rising, as one might have expected, through the crevices between each pea. Held up a short while before submerging, this slumping pyramid matches the look of a polygonal model placed on top of a two-dimensional texture.

The elements, varieties of relations and singular points coexist in the work or the object, in the virtual part of the work or object, without it being possible to designate a point of view privileged over others, a centre which would unify the other centres.⁵⁴

Precisely opposite the stew and peas example mechanically and on a totally different scale, a detonated block of public housing collapsing into its dust cloud does so with a markedly unreal quality. One doesn't see it crumple flat but an incomparably large form drops inside a curtain that is, simultaneously, raised out of itself. Like the hydrologic cycle for destruction.

33

Beside the esplanade. In turn-based videogames, modeled after tabletop miniature franchises, in which an orc stanchioned on its vinyl Golgotha of scorched earth dovetails with a mounted human scout or trebuchet loaded with a boulder, the jigsawed isles forming one larger warzone, a verdant patch of terrain may be absolutely still while the next square over a firing Panzer tank recoils. In reality, of course, no iota of earth vibrates alone. With the cel layered and replaced against a static backdrop, an animator's space is a kinetically sterile environment devoid of unmeant gusts. I'm barefoot on the esplanade of a windless afternoon: farther ahead, where the grass barrels into the Charles, the meeting of green and blue collapses beneath one's line of sight. Nothing *here* stirs while the river frenzies. The calm juxtaposition of these bodies recalls the charm of cinemagraphs, in which stillness and the motile collide, as well as chiaroscuro's disdain for tonal gradation. Instead of letting light diffuse, Caravaggio cuts out the middleman, jumping lamp and bosom together.

53 In the first movement, beginning at bar 123.

54 Gilles Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, trans. Paul Patton (New York: Continuum, 2001), 209.

textures. A wonderful example, really, immediately reminiscent of the cut-out, gestalt-esque note: mapping a texture crops a portion of the larger source image (eg rocks). However,

Closed sandwich. — food displayed in case, cut in half to show inside. This is the same anxiety which we've discussed with regard to the minds of others, the ingredients of mashed food products, and the text in a closed book. This ~~sandwich~~ is distinguished by its contents alone, hidden beneath two large slices of bread. Also cf. note on (otto) cards.

"On Separateness and Transposition"
this act tells the viewer the rock
surface extends to but the rock's
form in-game; its "ghost" is felt radiating out.
In the guise of denotation. — see
full list (in progress).

The resemblance between
cantate and orchestral music,
in so far as it must "pass round"
theme and exposition in order to
avoid vocal blending, by which we
mean the uniformity character-
istic of Shostakovich, Prokofiev,
et al. See previous notes on voice
and schizophrenia. Also, the
~~contrived discreteness of the~~
~~partitioned body of avatars, which~~

Twelfth Notebook

1

Volume in its earliest form. Art's earliest figure capable of implying pictorial volume, subsequent to stenciling of hands and animals transfixed in place, acts like a penknife driven under a rigid film; the effect is that a sticker, for example, must bulge at least higher than the knife's thickness, such that one can say the former sheaths it. When her angels-in-waiting barge in, why should the Virgin Mary suffer cramped quarters? Like armies clashing means a field of battle, heaven's throne room is always larger than its throne.

We start to dream of a house that grows in proportion to the growth of the body that inhabits it.¹

Courtesy the dry clarity of hindsight, pictorial space erupts a millennia before anyone has much knack for perspective.

2

Ends of a line. As I say elsewhere of music, that merely performing a composition seems to encumber it, the platonic idea of a line fails to tell us anything about dimension; an unhaltable regression begins that wants to corporealize the line with a crosshatching of other lines, every scratch requiring more of the same in order to stand for one itself. An intangible object should propagate infinitely on the logical basis of there being no proof that it stopped doing so. Capping the object's ends would describe a segment, too; termination needs a site unitarily constitutive of place. A geometric line despises limitation in principle.

3

The walls have ears. Everything is so live during a symphony concert, with the orchestra shouting Egmont's big drama from the stage in bright lighting. I like to inspect the ceiling's elaborate trim and swivel at folks in the audience.

1 Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, trans. Maria Jolas (Boston: Beacon Press, 1994), 118.

After all, the best part of a holiday is perhaps not so much to be resting yourself, as to see all the other fellows busy working.²

With the onset of this cultural centerpiece climatizing the plush vicinity, one might then choose to stare directly into the periphery's created blur, its alterity calmly there. In looking away from the main event toward shadowy velvet-lined mezzanines, turned stageward as though out of polite deference to Beethoven's overture, and in mentally engaging ones whose attention is far ahead of them, there's no denying that one harbors the pleasure of ordinary voyeurism, no less when one's spyglass finds a listening chandelier.

4

On paronomasia. Puns chagrin us for the absurdity of their exchange, whereas a witticism doesn't necessarily sacrifice communicability through botching the syntax, in terms of the semantics alone. "Herb gardeners who work extra get thyme and a half" runs up to the edge of intelligibility. The blithe double-cross is what there is to understand. So while wit can festoon its sentence with allusive flair, meaningful at bottom but also capable of branching off, in Alexander Pope's characterization "[speaking] twice as much for being split," paronomasia often entails speaking half as much in a fit of pyrrhic self-sabotage.

5

Coloring nooks. Adding a shade of crayon between the grooves of a line drawing is absorbing. Dragging the spliff of wax in a relaxed motion, one appears to excel at a kind of autopilot draftsmanship, as if, through gumming up the black filigree, one painstakingly contoured each nuanced shape from inside. What's left behind is a ghostly second creation nearly impossible to descry without also erasing the outline; this is precisely what occurs visually upon lifting a stencil, after one has troweled the lime of a marker over its plastic craquelure.



Fig. 1. Courtesy of the author.

Compared to the sheets handed out to kindergartners, as much to the end of unloading fruity colors as allowing for creative veers away from Ironman and Winnie the Pooh, the adult coloring book is as conformist as a rubber stamp. It per-

2 Kenneth Grahame, *The Annotated Wind in the Willows*, ed. Annie Gauger (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2009), 6.

mits zero deviations from the printed design with fractalesque subpartitions, like bombed church glass. Christopher Robin could plug a half-dozen of them at a stroke, while the bear's familiar paunch now accommodates a lot of trapezoids. In order that life's tiniest gaps might be employed with widget-collecting, Zynga's mobile library of crossword puzzles and tile blasters adapted for the subway commute and one's suspiciously frequent trips to the office bathroom. Desperate for accomplishment, as with the satisfying click of a task's perfect completion, paint bars and the semblance of fine inkwork temporarily calm underpaid baristas and school superintendents at their wits' end.

6

Useful toil. As quoted in Joachim Gasquet's memoir, Cézanne is said to have contrasted his style with Monet and the others, who are content to toil as *refusés* if need be, confessing a desire "to make out of impressionism something solid and lasting like the art of the museums."³ I'm surprised that Cézanne's landscapes, such as the *Thirty-six Views of Mont Sainte-Victoire* that represent the decisive studies of his life, afford so little pleasure. Like we find culturally important verse an absolute slog, or how telling it is that Ezra Pound's best-known poems number among the very shortest he wrote. Yet there he is, bent double under the blistering sun laying flagstone for whomever, though Pound himself once smashed it all to bits. He hopes tomorrow's tender-footed poets will explore in better comfort if not inerrantly.

This painter who is to come — I can't imagine him living in little cafés, working away with several false teeth and going to the Zouaves' brothels, as I do. But I think that I am right when I feel that in a later generation it will come, and that as for us we must work as we can towards that end, without doubting and without wavering.⁴

The classic opposition of ant-like masters and their grasshoppers, who differ not solely in their capacity for work. Consider Haydn and Beethoven, Pound and Eliot, Cézanne and Picasso: the tireless worker lives to be stylistically cannibalized by a disciple.

In the sphere of the mind someone's project cannot usually be continued by anyone else, nor should it be. These thoughts will fertilize the soil for a new sowing.⁵

- 3 Joachim Gasquet, *Cézanne: A Memoir with Conversations*, trans. Christopher Pemberton (London: Thames and Hudson, 1991), 164.
- 4 Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh, Arles, May 1888, *The Letters of Vincent van Gogh*, ed. Mark Roskill (New York: Atheneum, 1963), 26.
- 5 Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Culture and Value*, trans. Peter Winch (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), 76e.

7

Hockney in his eighties. Cartographers born late in the fourteenth century were eager to visualize the day's prevailing cosmological theories due to their revelatory significance at the very least, a kind of showing that greenlights a slew of plotting and cartooning, while it is fittingly odd when one's contemporaries deny that earth has curvature or attempt to triangulate the lost city of Atlantis, knowing science's explanatory abilities. The first artists' speculative flirtations with landscape seat Jesus on top of the olives while the mountain's huge bulk stonewalls our view. A truly open vista, dizzying in the fullness of its implications, is an aesthetic headache, kept synced to benefactors' pockets, that continues to haunt the best painters as a lingering specter. Out of natural fealty and the public's one-dimensional cry for verisimilitude, outdoor life eventually rushes in through every keyhole and crack between hills; for hundreds of years the antidote to showing what the artist could not remained oblique Sienese streets and random acts of obfuscation. With modern art's concomitant approval of stupidity and discipline, visual plaster begins turning up everywhere from Gauguin's orange-bearded double portrait to the unstoppable David Hockney, England's top octogenarian.

A Bigger Interior with Blue Terrace and Garden is one generous example. Notice the prickly grass swelling upward — the angle of the plants' detailing corroborates this — as if to shield us from geometric perspective and fill what remains of the picture, not to mention to curtail the scope of both Hockney's subject and his workload.⁶ Like a pictorial sunblock the artist applies for her own health, opacity preempts additional hills otherwise called for.

The brown surface of the field went right up towards the sky all round, where it was lost by degrees in the mist that shut out the actual verge and accentuated the solitude.⁷

When *Hyperallergic's* Olivia McEwan cast her aspersions on the Tate Britain's 2017 Hockney retrospective, she included this salient commentary:

Indeed, his recent works of large scale and outdoor depictions of trees tend toward the outright naïve; gone is the precision of hand, that economy replaced with — I hate to say it — what looks an awful lot like laziness. When the final rooms bring the advent of Hockney's digital paintings, conducted on an iPad, one wonders how much of it is for the technical interest in the “next step” in making art, and how much for the convenience of no longer bothering with the messiness of paint.⁸

6 See also the 1560s portrait of Elizabeth I attributed to Steven van der Meulen, whose pillar of vegetation is perhaps inexplicable except as a millefleur avalanche pressing against a vertical pane of glass, and the predella for Domenico Veneziano's *Santa Lucia de' Magnoli Altarpiece*.

7 Thomas Hardy, *Jude the Obscure* (New York: Penguin Books, 1998), 14.

8 Olivia McEwan, “The Digital Decline of David Hockney,” *Hyperallergic*, April 4, 2017, <https://hyperallergic.com/369975/the-digital-decline-of-david-hockney>.

In rectangles of illuminated vellum attributed to the anonymous Boucicaut Master, tiled curtain or a tomato soup of heraldic plates is let fall and, through brusquely pulling up the rear, approaches the complanate quality of an ant farm, especially when the technique touches God's green earth and cannot be mistaken for architecture.

8

Our weirdest medium. Hitting up Google for examples of abstract art floods us with an ungainly sea of images. Kandinsky, Delaunay, and Stella hardly surprise, but what else? Europe. Rome's triumphal arch the color of cheddar cheese, the Champs-Élysées lined with turquoise bushes, and some anonymous model's symmetrical head exploding with tie-dyed flora. Among other questions lies this disparity of consensus: the democracy of search results surprises, while Google adheres deadeningly to critics' lists of the greatest art. The web's surfers query fast and loose with crabbed terminology; the uninitiated are mistaught by commercial co-optation and Las Olas galleries fill their larders with the calling cards of bad painters. Caught in this indiscriminate trawl, abstract expressionism thrashes wildly, trying to distance itself from bottom feeders and the assembly line's factory output of so much flotsam. Bonfires hunger for those polychrome effigies to nostalgia and mortality done in the warehouses of Jeff Koons and Damien Hirst. Crawling from the electronic slime of the eighties with one shot eye and paddle hands, it is videogames that have best paralleled the out-at-elbows awkwardness of European art's first steps. No longer do either sculpture or film exhibit much in the way of growing pains, become idols in their twilight years. Consigned to industrial kilns only to be posthumously remembered and exhumed,⁹ game design is our weirdest medium, about which classicists are already obsessed.

9

Garden of earthly delights. In a lecture touching on Protestant belief,¹⁰ Slavoj Žižek distinguishes the denomination's major insight on freedom, the option to voluntarily restrict oneself, from the "vulgar" opposition of things one desires equally: I decide the square footage of my cage and self-administer my arrest with the blue light of illuminated news. Is this different than Jean-Paul Sartre on the urbanite's secular damnation to freedom of choice? I suppose it is the bolder act not simply to place one's fate in the palsied hands of a department manager but, in confronting a hundred unnumbered doors, choose that which guarantees disadvantage. With God dead, *what* should one do? Hedonism leaps to mind as well as jobs outside the barbed fence of immediate punishment and deferred rewards.

9 The dirty cartridges of Atari's infamous *E.T. the Extra-Terrestrial*, for instance, which are occasionally recovered from the Alamogordo landfill and sold for \$1,500 a pop.

10 Xrockpaperscissors82, "Slavoj Žižek – Calvinism is Christianity at its Purest," *YouTube*, December 26, 2015, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ohNbDnlQp78>.

With all the profiles deleted, one drifts into the exile of disconnection — even Cain had followers — and occasions no status updates. The floodgates are opened to second-hand consumption, described by food bloggers as gourmand chic or episcurotury, who order the latest fried-chicken sandwich just for a bite and toss a cone of frozen yogurt into the trash unlicked. Desire's obscure object comes to be filtered through the threat of a good time. In our predominantly cashless kingdom that separateness is what's alluring, as the metaphysical stays open all night and uploads biweekly. As much as happiness is not derived from one's freedom *per se*, or fear, hardly is sex enjoyable without its lubricating glob of falsity. Boosted through the shenanigans of one or another Bernays, deprivation quickly becomes a culture-industry sinkhole.

Laxity is absolutely unhinging, so they tell us, with the examples always being Roman, between Elagabalus's lust for blood sports and the feast-orgies of Caligula. Of our smothering liberty the quintessential peasant, whose God the church defends as a calculating blighter of crops, would comprehend very little. Instead we're philanthropes of unspent fortunes, unable to choose between stone-ground and multigrain, photojournalism versus neurosurgery. And we're famished just the same, dragging hurriedly through endless terms and conditions. Abnegation encompasses, too, the dramatic privilege of those who can't bear the thought of relocating, because they would be conscience-stricken for failing six days out of seven to appreciate Colorado's abundant sunshine. Žižek further relates how Caesar's own historians invariably explained his exploits for their best continuity: something may or may not happen but once it does, such had to be the outcome.¹¹ Besides the rationale legitimizing coincidences, we can detect a kinship here to the middle-class delight in brief relinquishments of control. Carried through Big Thunder Mountain's beige gulch in a fake train, phenomena-on-rails of this sort are felt to occur inevitably, requiring no forfeiture besides the cost of admission. Underneath, the Haunted Mansion may be an oily kluge of electrified parts, but one climbs into the vestibule as though the Magic Kingdom's engineering were infallible.

Of the mechanism that lies behind the event, and the hundreds of complex and subtle activities which must transpire before the strike can take place, and likewise the inability of the will to achieve even the smallest portion of them by itself — of all this he knows nothing. To him, the will is a magically effective power: the belief in volition as the cause of effects is the belief in magically effective powers.¹²

Beyond ignoring the park's regularly occurring delays and power outages, it is as though one temporarily ceases to believe in technology as such. Every feat of mechanical cooperation results from the unflinching attempt at an action — for a machine there is no *do*, only *try*. Like a switchboard operator, transistors direct current without an inkling as to the message, or the Imagineer's big objective. Catastrophic failure goes unnoticed by a nuclear plant's sensitive equipment and the

11 Slavoj Žižek, *Event: A Philosophical Journey through a Concept* (New York: Melville House Publishing, 2014), 127.

12 Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Joyous Science*, ed. and trans. R. Kevin Hill (New York: Penguin Books, 2018), 135.

Pal-A-Round will happily circulate in flames. After ferrying through Fantasyland's air-conditioned version of Styx, one disembarks all the more Calvinist.

Stepping into a ride's bulbous car, newly emptied and queued for passengers, once on our watery way the feeling is the same as elsewhere, that transiently one is enveloped within something deeply Lacanian. While sex, too, is necessarily short-lived, there's something compelling about a fairground tunnel of love. Couples cannot help the rate at which their fiberglass barge drags after its submerged chain, and here taking one's time as well as the use of flash photography is strictly prohibited.¹³ The fugacious *modus vivendi* of consenting passengers is a pleasing contradiction. Unlike the entanglements of a bedroom, where after the last veil drops there's freedom to explore and probe, the interior of the theme park ride is completely prohibitory ("Keep your hands and arms inside while the vehicle..."). *One's there*, nonetheless, sailing through a place as temporary as it is expensive and barred to all but ticket-holders. How odd that should also be the guerdon for living through each of the worst mass shootings in a country's history,¹⁴ the record shattering like clay pigeons again and again.

I sat smoking and refreshing the home pages and watching the numbers change.¹⁵

Afterward, something guilt-like, the awful cachet that comes with survival at a televisual distance, leaves us feeling troublingly special. Events of world-historical significance are happening and by birthright we're involved.

10

No way through but out. Another reason Michelangelo can remind us of Beethoven is for a mutual interest in their respective trades' versions of *cangiante*. Reaching the end of his latest Érard, Streicher, or Graf, delivered free of charge to the dyspeptic composer, Beethoven piles on the *fortes* in order to surpass the keyboard then ultimately favors a quartet's greater range. Each of these craftsmen avoids technological frustration through changing direction: not throwing the lever into reverse but, now that the octaves have been totally colonized, swerving toward a higher dynamic. Luckily for us, compared with digital minimalism half a century ago or the state of painting under impressionism's bleary thumb, in the dusk of whose tenure there is only retreat into mistless jungle.

- 13 See *Pokémon Snap*, a bloodless rail shooter based around capturing wild Pokémon in photographs.
- 14 While firing into a crowd and improvised explosion represent indiscriminate assailments on soft targets, it is chiefly the former that's distinguished by the 24-hour news cycle's laud of a high score. Opposed to the debris of an exploded bomb, semiautomatic fire is directionally specific. Elementary in themselves, these variables undergird our disbelief at horror as much as they do archery or a throw of darts.
- 15 Ben Lerner, *Leaving the Atocha Station* (Minneapolis: Coffee House Press, 2011), 119.

11

Carried along in the procession. Adorning the central pipe organ and decorative selvage tracing a stage's proscenium arch are cherubs showing placards, on whose gilt faces one expects to find divine tidings if not a civic proclamation. Once lighter St. Bernards only too glad to carry an epitaph, the kid oracles come messageless. Their stucco bucklers, lyres, and cartouches gradually debase into a perfunctory conga line of emblems literalized as their remembered forms, the encumbered cherub glanced at in the Sun King's court but seldom relieved of its burden, almost as Scots can be deliberately misthought, from an obtuse Anglocentric perspective,¹⁶ to represent the spelling out of "lapse" pronunciation, say between our English "shoulder" when rendered in the syncopic 'shù-dər and the Scots *shouder*.

12

A world at every plunge. Octaves depressed together are like independent galaxies appearing to cluster, while the thought of Middle C across multiple instruments resembles the parallelity of a multiverse.

13

A question of attribution. Plagiarism is the misdeed of claiming that what is legitimately the property of another belongs to oneself. Shouldn't the opposite, suggesting that what belongs to oneself actually precipitated from the hard work of another, be understood as generosity? But this is forgery, the greater offense.

14

But for the grace of God. Looking into the bathroom mirror, I am often tempted to smile, as if to say with the corniness peculiar to most things private, "It's us." In moments like these I estrange myself and, in the next instance, hearten at the sight of my caretaker, brother as well as keeper. Growing older would seem to consist of noticing the tradeoff: as Jekyll is called to errand in the world, Hyde mourns the Freudian deprivation while finding solace in secondhand reports on the doctor's wellbeing.

You are and you aren't yours.
It's like you're on the other side of the road
From yourself in your car.¹⁷

16 Or the fact that an Irish poet's rhymes, for instance, seem less than exact if they're pronounced using my American tongue.

17 Frederick Seidel, "A Problem with the Landing Gear," in *Selected Poems* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2020), 203.

Monitored from the platform of the soul, occasionally I check in on our life together as a governess does a child, who's leapt up after a sord of mallards.

The nature of presence itself is her subject. The awe of ... the supreme mystery of consciousness watching itself.¹⁸

15

Spoiled by war. The audiences that subscribe to a symphony's concert series expect a glowing mean of interpretation, which the guest conductors beat about like moths. As with reenactments of the Civil War, the distinct trouble with the performance of classical music today is that there's very little room for interpretation, a commercial safeguard the underfunded public-radio stations bill as tradition and mistakenly believe will be their salvation.

16

Qua sky. Samuel Beckett's sputtering monologues each have a radiant background informing them, as though every third word were plucked from coherent, no-less frantic speech. William S. Burroughs's aleatory cutting and rebinding of manuscripts does the opposite. Consider the original music of Max Richter, whose hushed, punctuated rambles are not discerning white-outs à la *A Humument* but wanting in the first place. Brought to the edge of her chair by the composer's unforthcoming sobriety, Richter's listener supposes the whole iceberg must be massive, of which his album *The Blue Notebooks* is the tip. But these mostly empty pages constitute the genuine article; this hollow contemplation is all the plot there is. Or it's as though mainstream jazz, generally of the soft variety — that glutting Spotify in playlists titled "Jazzy Morning," and even "Jazz in the Background" — hasn't exactly stories to tell but rather so many exchanged refrains and sighings of the theme. *Krapp's Last Tape* discloses a moving record of artistic hubris and loss that's only properly understood if one has enough patience to glue together the reels Krapp abruptly silences. Gibberish for its own sake Beckett's play is not.

17

One length. While bending any amount of silicone, doesn't this seem to somehow create more of the substance? I wonder if, like a rotating tesseract, the material decussates internally though it appears to lengthen. It must be adjustable space is afforded each polymer linkage, their minute range aggregating a degree of pliancy that has meaning for the orthopedist or teething babe. Still, at the tip of the fingers, there's just something to elastomers that one suspects worthy of Zeno. Or doesn't a chain ultimately propose but one length? Hypothetical alternatives might include a cord, synthesized in some laboratory, capable of replenishing in-

18 Charles Simic, "Notes on Poetry and Philosophy," in *The Life of Images: Selected Prose* (New York: Ecco, 2015), 25.

terstitial tears as they're created through stretching and another able to preserve its original integrity despite the distance increasing between linkages. It should be ridiculous to argue a slab of rubber's true measurement to be the point just before its molecular bonds snap.

18

Brought before the emperor. I have long felt that a definite story kicks off the first movement of Tchaikovsky's Violin Concerto. Raising curtain on a forest, soon the floor begins thundering. Toward a bass of no discernible source, woodland friends gather in anticipation of whatever these foreboding tones could possibly emanate from. Tension climbs through the strings' worrying, which out of kinship have a sort of unspecifying prescience like the sensitivity of cats for earthquakes. The woodwinds are spooked, programmatic deer and warthogs dart into the bushes as the bedraggled god arrives in an air not of reproach but, to our surprise, the focused joy that is benevolence. Introducing the third movement of his concerto for violin, Mendelssohn goes for mock exigence, the soloist jocosely superhuman in the vein of Dionysus or the slenderer Artemis on a hunt; not a virtuoso somersaulting for our applause but a deity dripping with self-possession. It is beautiful to see the companionless guest's exceptionalism. Why the violin, upon stepping into the sunlit clearing, deserves to perform apart from the orchestra is thus attributable to its enormous maturity of spirit.

It is as if that is the point of power: to allow one to access the higher registers of gentleness.¹⁹

19

Experience for machines. Along the lines of factory automation, repetition means nothing to a machine, such that every pass of the armature might as well be the first. Certainly this describes a great deal of music written during the baroque period. It shouldn't surprise us that greatly updating the instrumentation of a hoary eighteenth-century work occasions a reciprocal change, especially when it comes to those compositions that were always emotionally ahead of their time.

In the lives of great artists, there are unfortunate contingencies which, for example, force the painter to sketch his most significant picture as only a fleeting thought, or which forced Beethoven to leave us only the unsatisfying piano reduction of a symphony in certain great piano sonatas (the great B flat major). In such cases, the artist coming after should try to correct the great men's lives after the fact; for example, a master of all orchestral effects

19 George Saunders, "My Writing Education: A Time Line," *The New Yorker*, October 22, 2015, <https://www.newyorker.com/books/page-turner/my-writing-education-a-timeline>.

would do so by restoring to life the symphony that had suffered an apparent pianistic death.²⁰

Angela Hewitt with her Steinway unfetter *Les barricades mystérieuses*, a butterfly trapped nearly two centuries in the harsh, less-weighted speed of Couperin's harpsichord. Instrumentation can obscure or bring to life but it doesn't erode. *The Art of Fugue's* release, for example, is never fully secured. In what Glenn Gould calls Bach's "sublime instrumental indifference," the cembalist or string quartet relays nothing more than the whisper of a Thisbe:

One is never quite able to counter the impression of a music of supreme beauty that lacks its ideal means of reproduction. Like Beethoven in his last quartets, or Webern at almost any time, Gibbons is an artist of such intractable commitment that, in the keyboard field, at least, his works work better in one's memory, or on paper, than they ever can through the intercession of a sounding-board.²¹

20

Studying tableaux. Slow theme-park rides like *Pirates of the Caribbean* attempt to recreate film sequences, or with *The Wind in the Willows* an overall impression, through a tableau of animatronic actors hustling in place. Craning to catch the performance restart, our dinghy lurches on with the dull thud of shoving water. Apple's Live Photos complicate our understanding of a still photograph, establishing a distinction between frames collapsed into individual hyperphotos and the platonic soul of the image. Experimental filmmakers like Chris Marker have long dallied with the actual photographicness of movies. In *La jetée*, a science-fiction narrative is relayed through still images, except for when, in one particularly lengthy shot, the love interest blinks. Contemporary directors have now offered numerous cases in their own narratives where the line between footage and the merely photographic is artistically blurred and the framed seen to breathe. These include the darkly comic trilogy of vignettes by Swedish director Roy Andersson, Gustav Deutsch's *Shirley – Visions of Reality*, and another, the "living-painting" style of Dietrich Brüggemann's *Stations of the Cross*.

21

Slide through my fingers. The peculiar aural character of choral singing is useful for lending a robust composition an air of organicity if not blended cacophony,

20 Friedrich Nietzsche, *Human, All Too Human*, trans. Marion Faber and Stephen Lehmann (Lincoln: Bison Books, 1996), 117. Taking up Nietzsche's suggestion, Felix Weingartner orchestrated the *Hammerklavier* sometime early in the twentieth century, a recording of which is available featuring the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra and conducted by Weingartner himself.

21 Glenn Gould, quoted by Geoffrey Payzant, *Glenn Gould: Music and Mind* (Toronto: Prospero Books, 2008), 83.

where the coordinated playing of the Staatskapelle Dresden is so disfigured that it finally resembles nothing laborious. Closer to the string family for its tolerance of portamento, vocal cords simply don't come notched.

22

Photographic surrealism. Apparently a divergent category by name, photographic surrealism jumps the blood-brain barrier separating its medium, a synthetic manipulation that sets the camera apart from pencil, chisel, and brush. Salvador Dalí's dogpile of voluptuous girls exhibits a fleshed skull and black cats are chucked into flight while the studio lifts away — these are photographs of no earthly violation. Forgetting longer exposures and the beautiful stagecraft of Julia Margaret Cameron, *Atomicus* captures a combinatory instant pulled from real time, exactly as the medium has done for a hundred years. Man Ray's experiments are lighter fare. Or what's surreal about the fashion photography of Hiro is its bold juxtapositions, for example, an ant summitting a woman's fire-red toenail and a gold Tiffany cuff on a bone. Importantly, Hiro's unusual angles and cheeky parallax seldom if ever used digital effects as such but merely describe one photographer's style; however jarring, the content is thoroughly real. The surrealists of digital art are legion, of course, and by definition the least worth looking at. What's hard is getting the natural to change its stripes. Rather than photographs flooded with time-pieces mid-liquefaction and giraffes on fire, surrealism lets the discipline open its borders. As with the fantasia in European music, before long the photogram is trusted. Graphic manipulation of a photograph is always contrivance and betrayal of its source, whether slimming a lingerie model or dropping a piano from the thirteenth floor. Quotidian or otherworldly, design is uniquely suited to head-turning gagery but disqualifies as photography, much like graphite's destiny usually means subsumption.

23

Der greise Kopf. Considering the human species' ubiquitous filtering and digital pinching, the ethical uncertainty that has plagued fetal gene therapy starts to appear that much less fraught. If Amalia Ulman diagnoses rightly, that the ontic pendulum has swung its farthest into specular territory,²² manipulating the odd nucleotide should be no more or less serious than cosmetic surgery, its logical conclusion. Long stymied by technological hurdles and the Bush administration, a DNA-snipping tool completes that very circuit. Instagram flips the script on *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, such that Oscar Wilde hedged that fops desire pulchritude everlasting through societal enthrallment. If we think back to the Gilded Age,

22 "The market's domination of social life subjugated 'being' into 'having.' Now, the image economy has transformed 'having' into 'appearing': having must be instantly documented for it to be of any value." Amalia Ulman, quoted by Niamh McIntyre, "Instagram Art Is a Joke, and It's on You," *Vice*, January 27, 2015, <https://www.vice.com/en/article/bn5q7q/is-instagram-a-legitimate-artistic-medium>.

when prosperous couples withered over subsequent decades before their Gainsboroughs, hung perhaps at the top of a stair, again the simulacral is elevated in veracity above its referent. Compared with updates sepia-toned the color of weak tea or beachgoers shot through a vintage palette, our actual reflections, defaced with crow's feet and irreversible five o'clock shadow, become the hoarse songs of ourselves. "Appearing," as Ulman has it, leaves the key to youth no longer a malodorous portrait but foolproof cloud storage.

If we take eternity to mean not infinite temporal duration but timelessness, then eternal life belongs to those who live in the present.²³

As already seen in hashtags, the canaries in Twitter's dirty tunnels, ostracization of the modified seems likely to be followed by calls for a vanilla makeup. Besides the immer-schon decaying of internet karma, whose half-life is a lunch hour, followers reassure us that further content — ours — is actively anticipated.

24

Information moves, or. From computers to air traffic control, implicit in a central processor is complete operational awareness of all planes departing and currently aloft as well as their trajectories. In deific conceptions of spacetime, an omnipotent mover semaphores the cosmos, pondering from the sidelines the totality of gaseous parturition and collapse in addition to our stratospheric junkets.

An intelligence which could comprehend all the forces by which nature is animated and the respective situation of the beings who compose it.²⁴

The planet is like Grendel's impassive dam paying the aboveground no mind. As opposed to artificial intelligence, the secularist's world has been printed on a motherboard decoupled from every peripheral.

25

Justifying virtuosity. Among human instruments, the voice is closest to that musical Elysium of loud bees and the songbird's chirrup to its lover. For this reason does a soprano seem aesthetically exempt from the trumpet or cello's upstagings, these either occasional in their usage or effectively a suppressant. In an age where artistic bridling is lauded to the skies, high-proof virtuosity continues to be enjoyed for its extremes of pitch and finger dexterity, because the last century's technological cornucopia has neither device nor shortcut all that helpful to the living musician, like the Italian craftsperson until Brunelleschi's egg or Masaccio

23 Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, trans. D.F. Pears and B.F. McGuinness (New York: Routledge Classics, 2001), 87.

24 Pierre-Simon Laplace, *A Philosophical Essay on Probabilities*, trans. F.W. Truscott and F.L. Emory (London: Chapman & Hall, 1902), 4.

divulged his theory of strings. Physiologically tied to the agility vested in her ten digits, the pianist is entitled to give Rachmaninoff hell.

26

With tapers quenched. According to one of Seneca's letters²⁵ the Roman military strategist Scipio Africanus, upon retiring to the coastal town of Liternum, didn't permit daylight to enter the bathing quarter of his villa by design; and thus his daily ablutions were carried out in complete darkness. Although there is nothing to visualize, I adapt Seneca's anecdote in my imagination and do observe the auspicious man through the addition of burnishing, his erect shape amid the unreflective stone a sort of negative dipped in luster.

Among those prohibited from Western representation, whose representations are denied all legitimacy, are women. Excluded from representation by its very structure, they return within it as a figure for — a representation of — the unrepresentable.²⁶

Assimilating cinema's lessons, the darkest blackouts of Bergman, Bresson, or Dreyer always contain a little light. In turn, the countless hours we spent as children under opaque blankets and camping in sylvan places are altered. Opera is least able to be tenebrous, seeing as the stage and orchestra share one environment, though the house lights be turned down, while a basic fact of theater is that Hedda Gabler's actor needs her candle. In order to render aspects of a story that ought to be unseeable, both entertainment and the mind's eye depend on a kind of "radar sense," that rippling gloss based on echolocation played up in first-person horror narratives, like the exploration videogame *Perception*, and live adaptations of Marvel Comics' *Daredevil*. But look no further than *The Hunt in the Forest*, in which Paolo Uccello's harshly perspectival dogs and horses striate a green forest that is most suggestive of daytime.

All this she saw as one sees a landscape in a flash of lightning.²⁷

27

Auf dem Flusse. Beethoven's *Moonlight* Sonata doubles in aphotic power through abruptly correcting its proemial testimony, having implied at the outset that its triplet ostinato rhythm isn't introductory but quasi vocal.²⁸ The effect is moving, famously so. When the real Achilles arrives in the fifth measure, Hector cannot

25 LXXXVI, occasionally titled "On Scipio's Villa."

26 Craig Owens, "The Discourse of Others: Feminists and Postmodernism," in *The Anti-Aesthetic: Essays on Postmodern Culture*, ed. Hal Foster (Seattle: Bay Press, 1987), 59.

27 Virginia Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway* (San Diego: Harcourt, 1981), 36.

28 Robert Schumann's *Waldszenen* accomplishes this at the beginning of the gentle *Eintritt*, albeit to far less dramatic effect.

help starting at this second personality, who in contrast appears all the lethaler. It is quite as the themes in Max Richter's *On the Nature of Daylight* are subsumed each in their turn and Gounod's *Ave Maria* swallows whole the Bach prelude from which it was derived, on top of which Charles Gounod grafts a fair amount of lyrical composition, demoting the Bach to pure accompaniment. Mistaking ostinato for the subject²⁹ smacks of Plato's shadowy cave. I'm reminded of standing in front of a stream that was but half frozen; as clear water sluiced along its cold flume, I thought the stream exposed just before crunching through a chrysalis of ice, invisible in the April sunlight.

28

Smaller pills. Particularly in Víkingur Ólafsson's highly Gouldesque interpretation, the first track on *Glassworks*,³⁰ "Opening," should be understood to echo itself in the right hand. This is also how Francisco Tárrega's *Memories of Alhambra* works, except in that case the technique is known as tremolo. Despite support from the left, this disembodied sighing entangles its every micro-utterance with correspondent ripples. I wonder if Philip Glass conflates the bass and voice, unless this is the simpler matter of pianistic economy. Bach's leviathan Chaconne entrenches its own bass line, while Leopold Godowsky is somehow able to consolidate select études of Chopin. How concussively loud is the first chord of "Infernal Dance," from Stravinsky's *Firebird*, in Guido Agosti's transcription. I'm reminded of the sight gag where a boiled egg is bounced, timed to a slap of one's thigh. Glass's ability to wrangle a segment of the portable listenership to his then unfamiliar homorhythm, coincident with the Sony Walkman, has to do with its vaguely cerebral, not-quite-new-age drone. In his catalog of work there is altogether less harmonic substance per measure, each note having the importance of a single bee to its buzzing hive; certainly more notes than Beethoven but a soup of them. It all ends up big art easily digested, like the eventual success of *Waiting for Godot*, whose plot is as summarizable as *Glassworks* is to hum.

29

Der Ring ohne Worte. One imagines Wagner rolling in his tomb at Wahnfried during the recording of Georg Solti's tight-lipped commercial renditions of the former's operas, released as *Tannhäuser without Words*, *Tristan und Isolde: An Or-*

29 This is the mild annoyance of a concerto for harp, the form being, by definition, focused on the soloist, like a poet standing to one side of the microphone. Given the floor, we expect the harp to be hearable against the orchestra's accompaniment. This is what's slightly pathetic when a jazz bassist has the spotlight a while, upon the conclusion of whose solo one claps harder in the spirit of goodwill and to counterbalance the applause the trumpeter gets. A long interlude of tap dance without the film's ameliorating score, or if Toscanini asked the timpanist for a demonstration — how easily we imagine that awkwardness, which is the musician's effortful sincerity failing to overwhelm us.

30 Víkingur Ólafsson, pianist, *Philip Glass: Piano Works*, by Philip Glass, recorded in 2017, Deutsche Grammophon Bo1MYNZRM5, 1 compact disc.

chestral Journey, and so forth. Solti's hope must have been to restore *Parsifal* to where it belongs, sublimated from the programmatic to the absolute, besides trying to salvage music from its lard of drama.

The Genuine music-lover may accept the carnal husk of opera to get at the kernel of actual music within, but that is no sign that he approves the carnal husk or enjoys gnawing through it.³¹

Ironically, Wagner coined the term *absolute Musik* as a means of rejecting it, identifying in that most famous of choral finales the death knell of wordless symphonies everywhere. Possibly these emotional abridgements, which lose the libretto's spoken lead-up on top of followable stage activity — this being opera's connective tissue — amount to stabbing Siegfried in the back, but then Hagen is on a different record.

30

A blighted one. However lopsided the aspiration for global utopia has been, by what monstrous dialectic could *bon viveurs* of the future ever emotionally synthesize all the hurt and ecologic defilement thus far, other than by convincing themselves that billions of lives never really flowered into being. Instead, the dead transpire as anthropological noise shoring up the Heideggerian edges of the city-state. History's golden men debate each other in agoras, later they electrify Europe's capitals. Always finding ourselves the living, the ones at liberty to pay it forward with a bit of somber contemplation, death sounds as manageable as a doctor's visit. Enlarging history to include the unknown, it becomes abundantly clear that named somebodies quest a brief, humiliating while only to die *in media vita*.

Tess was no insignificant creature to toy with and dismiss; but a woman living her precious life — a life which, to herself who endured or enjoyed it, possessed as great a dimension as the life of the mightiest to himself.³²

31

Tautological. Although the majority of bad composition would be benefited by a good melody, like the majority of animals need a nominal brain, a melody poorly fitted is left vulnerable, able to be plucked out in the listener's imagination; what appeared to be a dignified throne is shown for the chair that it is. Take Franz Liszt's operatic fantasy *Réminiscences de Don Juan*, for example. After tolerating its hair-raising leaps and runs, in walks "La ci darem la mano" at last to sighs of relief.

31 H.L. Mencken, "Opera," in *A Mencken Chrestomathy* (New York: Vintage, 1982), 545.

32 Thomas Hardy, *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, ed. Sarah E. Maier (Ontario: Broadview Editions, 2013), 177.

One appreciates the music in the same way that one enthuses over especially evil men when they once do something decent.³³

Keith Jarrett's *Munich* album is such a case, where after roughly an hour of nothing we're just about recompensed with "Answer Me My Love." Isolating the Mozart, however, leaves *Don Juan* no better than Samuel Barber's thunderously bland Piano Sonata in E-flat Minor. Like with earlier discussions of organs-as-bodies, one thinks of those organisms that appear to be physically endowed in the shape of their ecological behavior, like a jellyfish's utile bell doubles as its mode of propulsion and body.

Above the harbour a gull creates flight
as flight has created him. He arises
and results from his work.³⁴

If our species *were* the homelier copy of God, surely the coccyx and appendix would need explaining. Counting the blessings of a Chopin in their myriad published forms, apart from what juvenilia outlasted the fireplace there's not a vestigial bone in his body of work.

32

Storming the tower. Across the moat that art digs around itself — lapped by crocodile auctioneers, their mouths cared for by bespectacled plovers — to lure tulip managers and the tycoons of alchemy, connoisseurs blood-related through their fortunes, satire drops a ladder. In the village the new families speculate for whom the drawbridge lowers.

33

Little high, little low. It says everything about our misappreciation of classical and overestimation of popular music when an organist is challenged to perform a hit like the six-minute "Bohemian Rhapsody." More than accounting for the instrumental parts, the dare relates to confronting what is supposed Queen's breathtaking complexity, as if the feat required a dangerous level of intellection.

33 Theodor Adorno, *Philosophy of New Music*, ed. and trans. Robert Hullot-Kentor (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006), 45n, 192.

34 Karen Solie, "A Western," in *The Road In Is Not the Same Road Out* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2015), 11. Distantly similar is perhaps the way ladybugs almost simplify, if made the basis of a Happy Meal toy, into themselves, the two-piece wings snapping together and splitting apart like a clam shell, though its plastic have none of the original bug's luster.

If I imagined that I could have created, even conceived the piece, I am quite certain that the excess of excitement and earth-shattering experience would have driven me out of my mind.³⁵

Hence the novel material, such as Anish Kapoor might acquire for his exclusive use, whose basis for exhibition in museums of contemporary art is its exorbitant cost, and why a flock of synchronized drones comes off as the height of technological elegance.

34

Getting latte art. Besides describing a ceiling for the barista's ability, done to the greatest effect possible at the expense of creative balance, the thing about latte art is how intentional it looks when one's just pushing crema with a peeled-over spout. Burping through that frothy surface, espresso at the bottom of the cup marbles into a dairy tondo and stays there, as though one handplaced every tendril. Latte art batters on nonrepresentation, while trying to get across hearts or a swan, so much of the cappuccino will actually be pictorial runoff.

Interpretation thus presupposes a discrepancy between the clear meaning of the text and the demands of (later) readers. It seeks to resolve that discrepancy.³⁶

But if one aims to depict nothing recognizable, failure becomes an impossibility,³⁷ for there is no attempt in the first place, while the milky result is still attractively feathered. Bob Ross frosts some escarpment of mountain using his trusty sponge, and damn it if the afroed, soft-spoken host doesn't intend every soapstonish cleft and dimple. Ross's calming delivery is as deceitful as a post office, his painting uncanny for looking better than it has any right to.

35

The pleasure of reading Emerson. If we align amateurism with the digging of many shallow wells and expertise fewer but to a considerable depth, the analogy is also compatible with the sense of breaching a universal threshold. One source

35 Johannes Brahms to Clara Schumann, Pörtlach, June 1877, *Letters of Clara Schumann and Johannes Brahms, 1853–1896*, ed. Berthold Litzmann (New York: Vienna House, 1973), 2:16. The reference is to Bach's Chaconne from the Partita for Violin no. 2.

36 Susan Sontag, "Against Interpretation," in *Against Interpretation and Other Essays* (New York: Picador, 2001), 97.

37 Similarly, the arbitrary use among dilettante painters of bright primary colors avoids any attempt to match the subject with its appropriate palette, for choosing certain hues introduces the possibility of choosing poorly, notwithstanding the additional work of selecting and blending. While Matisse and Gauguin teach us how the "wrong" colors may be sensitively employed, the amateur intends to be wrong so as to preempt this very criticism.

lies beneath their different implements, though the better trained tend to manage with greater efficiency. All who reach this underground oasis quench their thirst. The weight of each dilettante's soil might be weighed, and the lepidopterist is entitled to some honor for netting a large enough quantity of butterflies if none of the rarer monarchs. Now and again an autodidact, through her years of ineffectual puzzling, hits on a technique altogether new to tunneling. Against Stanley Cavell's interesting answer, that "what keeps Emerson from being recognized, either by friends or by enemies, as a philosopher"³⁸ is the reclamatory force of his thought, I believe the solution to be the simpler one of Emerson's fun rhetoric and sheer line-by-line pleasure. Norman Rockwell's go-lucky illustrations held up to the work of Mark Rothko, whose accomplishment less readily conforms to sober explication.

36

Me, the theme. Due to its inherent ability to distract us, the classical music of Europe's nineteenth and twentieth centuries is rarely used in films, which only become more and more dependent on ignorable vamp. "Narratedness" typifies the romanticism of one like Rachmaninoff. A self-satisfied composition would detract from a movie's stars for being hermeneutically withdrawn, like a second magnet, throwing the director's tuning off-balance.

Clouds in the staring sky transmit to each other, by means of slow signs, incredibly detailed information regarding him. His in-most thoughts are discussed at nightfall, in manual alphabet, by darkly gesticulating trees. Pebbles or stains or sun flecks form patterns representing, in some awful way, messages that he must intercept. Everything is a cipher and of everything he is the theme.³⁹

Radio pop's instrumentation is basically laconic, more an egoless system bent on complementarity than the painfully cool persona every Lana del Rey contrives across a discography.

37

Talented enough. How convincing it is to think of Beethoven as music's Aristotle. In seeking to explain his prolificacy, further distinct in its having historical significance down to the least arable syllable, Beethoven's extreme fortune is to be born into the romantic opportunity and talented for a diversity of composition, whereas Telemann's legendary endurance might have achieved a more memorable character in a later century.

38 Stanley Cavell, "In the Place of the Classroom," in *Cities of Words: Pedagogical Letters on a Register of the Moral Life* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press, 2005) 3.

39 Vladimir Nabokov, "Symbols and Signs," in *Collected Stories* (New York: Penguin Books, 1997), 599. See also Franz Wright's "Stay" in *F*, his deathbed collection of poems. Franz Wright, "Stay," in *F* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2013), 15.

It is not enough to be the possessor of genius — the time and the man must conjoin. An Alexander the great, born into an age of profound peace, might scarce have troubled the world — a Newton, grown up in a thieves' den, might have devised little but a new and ingenious lockpick.⁴⁰

As the invention of syllogism eventually lies open to whoever is able to take first flush, by the late 1700s, the tilling and planting through, harmonies ripe to the core abound. While the shorter-lived enjoy alternative harvests, soon it is late and the fields close: the stray bird gleans kernels from the soil in circuitous forays and identical mice chomp at fibrous roots.

Others have tried it and will try again
To finish that which they did not begin.⁴¹

38

Fragonard's swing. *The Swing*, one of rococo painter Jean-Honoré Fragonard's best-known works, contains a detail so thoughtful as to have the appearance of secrecy. Not the trespassing lover crouched behind short fences with a curly-haired dog to yip foul but the lady's slipper in upside-down flight. Deciding to turn out the sole, Fragonard touches off that petite sublimity for us that is a larger understanding glimpsed through the small: based on its twist, the slipper hasn't simply loosen but was given a rolling flick, and thus we happen upon it mid-spiral. Catching this feeds a kinetic ripple backward through the swinger's outstretched limb and the ropes.

39

Leading the blind. Every so often a glo-fi album, or another of its heavily synthesized cousins, will bring on for the listener a sinking feeling. Confusing reverb for a musical clause's consequent,⁴² the ear lurches after a false step; like *King Lear's* unsteady Gloucester, we are hand-led to momentarily walk on air. In audio freefall, our bearings cerebrate in a hall of mirrors, attention toggling between reflections and what is guessed solid.

40 John Cleveland Cotton, "The Curfew Tolls," in *Selected Works of Stephen Vincent Benét* (New York: Farrar & Rinehart, 1942), 2:383.

41 W.H. Auden, "Venus Will Now Say a Few Words," in *The Collected Poetry of W.H. Auden* (New York: Random House, 1945), 110.

42 A straightforward example of which begins around the fifth bar of "Mako Reactor," from the original soundtrack to *Final Fantasy VII*, where the substance of the first four notes is imitated in the subsequent four. See also ritornello, as in the Allegro of Bach's Violin Concerto in A Minor, BWV 1041.

Matryoshka. Beethoven's jazz-like ability to drive straight ahead with a theme's transformation, leaning far over the key's center of gravity and dangling the consequent out ahead before it is taken at long last⁴³ — unlike Haydn and Mozart, who tie knots of checkpoint at regular intervals then trim the sails for a marginally different tack⁴⁴ — has long reminded me of Benvenuto Cellini's *Perseus with the Head of Medusa* overlooking the Piazza della Signoria and which during casting presented nearly insurmountable difficulties. Interpreting the historical development of these forms, if one's thinking can be indulgent enough, is this ambitious lengthening of the creative thought, homologous between European instrumental music and sculpture as well as literature. Noise, instantly banal and lacking in sequential ordering, remains the straightest possible line for its back-to-back promulgation of a meaningless originality. In both of Beethoven's *Pastoral* works there are curiously elongate moments⁴⁵ at the prospect of which a composer of the older school, such as Haydn, afraid that his listener might lose their way, would surely have chosen to regroup at the trailhead; Beethoven presses on, and like Perseus holds the gorgon's bronzen head almost perpendicular from the base, the glory of it is that he doesn't break off. After one too many sour phonations of "It's a hard," you wonder if Bob Dylan's rain is ever a-gonna fall, not to mention the cute deferral built into the Paul Simon line, "And Betty, when you call me, you can call me Al."

Besides the necessity of keeping an identity together, development overly protean hasn't always the breadcrumbs to get itself home. Fast-forwarding roughly a century, Jean Sibelius's northerly billows form a protominimalist speech, like the slow flapping of wings.⁴⁶ Boiling a melody's beautiful stature down to that of a less impressive theme, supposing a different composer were then to develop that theme, seldom would it be the case that the stump melody is "reconstituted" to its former amplitude. If this were possible, the Edenic tune likely endures as one deformed, the cuttings healed but still visible. Satisfying demonstrations to the contrary are

- 43 Consider the long-winded metaphorizing so common to Elizabethan literature, in which the obliging reader continuously bends over to pick up what's been said while trying not to drop any piece of information, holding out for the sign that she can let her arms slacken.
- 44 As Brooklyn Bridge stabilizes through cantilevering dependent northwest and southeast units in order to span the bay waters, every step forward requires one back. See how Mozart's *Coronation* Piano Concerto contents itself throughout the first movement with short strokes. It doesn't so much progress but, in lieu of thematically quite moving on, every few measures jumps back to go. The feeling is that the allegro indeed develops if fragmentally.
- 45 With regard to the first movements in each, beginning at the 16th bar of the symphony and 75th bar of Piano Sonata no. 16. This perpetuating "onwardness," unusual for the baroque, turns up in Scarlatti's Keyboard Sonata in B Minor, L. 449, lasting for several measures beyond the 11th. See also the long end of Dittersdorf's Sixth Symphony in the group based on Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. Breathly pulsation such as this — intermittent steam-bursts and all, courtesy of the woodwinds — insofar as it appears kinetically inexplicable in the work of certain composers, can be understood as a needed departure from the burden of a law, the classical period being as kinetic as middle-period Beethoven minus the angst.
- 46 See the last movement of his Fifth Symphony.

abundant, however, in which essentially a motif is stretched, though like prostheses it falls short of the real thing.⁴⁷ One melody being equal to the next, and the same should be said for themes, despite their nesting selves a motif doesn't necessarily complicate into a theme but, under threat of erasure, elongates into linked clones of no substantial distinguishments.

A genuine beginning, as a leap, is always a head start, in which everything to come is already leaped over, even if as something still veiled. The beginning already contains the end latent within itself. A genuine beginning, however, has nothing of the neophyte character of the primitive. The primitive, because it lacks the bestowing, grounding leap and head start, is always futureless. It is not capable of releasing anything more from itself because it contains nothing more than that in which it is caught.⁴⁸

As lackluster plants can be the outcome of inadequate nourishment or beginning with bad seeds, the new farmer reaping a monocrop of fourteen-footers while her neighbor has learned to cultivate every kind of vegetable and a little flour.

Table 1

	Original	Derivative
Profound	Chopin	Beethoven
Superficial	Haydn	Mendelssohn

Adjusted to the point of overcompensating, the chronological gulf between Bach and Mozart parallels that of the bug-like motif's gestation into complexity. This tossing freighter⁴⁹ rights itself with a deal of musical ballast, courtesy of Beethoven, whose fame largely depends on insignificant flints and twigs subsidized through ingenious usage. Already over the hill by Brahms's time, hereafter the history almost seems a downward slide toward Odessa. In spite of its emphasis on melodies, accounting for late romanticism continues the aforesaid logic. Because a motif is categorically lightest, it is the least difficult to transport upward through a fugue's series of complications, like a staircase of shorter steps is an easier climb than one equal in height but divided into larger intervals.⁵⁰ A melody is the heaviest load,

47 See the second of Oswald Russell's *Jamaican Dances*, which continuously creeps up to the thematic brink of the rondo theme from Schubert's Piano Sonata no. 20. Or the latter half of Carl Czerny's first ten *Progressive Exercises*, op. 453, which is good-naturedly derivative of Mozart's *Facile* Sonata. Conversely, Scriabin's Piano Sonata in G-sharp Minor fools with the largo of Chopin's third to no purpose, while Boccherini intercepts the third-movement theme of Beethoven's Piano Sonata no. 16, letting it be the keystone in his well-known Minuet, an eidetically lengthier bit of composition.

48 Martin Heidegger, "The Origin of the Work of Art," in *Basic Writings*, ed. David Farrell Krell (New York: HarperSanFrancisco, 2008), 201.

49 Tossing from the clarity of intellection to gaiety's weightiness. While in a certain sense Mozart stands as the golden porridge between Bach and Beethoven, in another the latter synthesizes their styles with his complex simplicity.

50 By similar reasoning counterpoint is nearly always built up one voice at a time, in order to stoke entertainment through involved observation. This depends on

schlepped over alps of development like Hannibal's elephants. So the fugue's precipitous fall out of vogue coincides with the rise of the salon musician; newcomers desperate for a boie Mozart didn't pick. Composition becomes too much for the best of them, for soon the pathological focus on gold fatigues.

Chopin is rumored to have proclaimed about this etude that "In all my life I have never again been able to find such a beautiful melody."⁵¹

41

Could paint that. If as readers we give Denis Johnson's fiction the benefit of our doubt, an abrupt swerve in an alcoholic character's disposition will not immediately indicate a lapse in authorial oversight, while in a certain novel about vampires a severed hand later changes wrists. It compares with believing that Franz Kline was always capable deep down of landscapes and episodes from daily life.

42

All such idle fancies. In the essay where Emerson compares his son's death to nothing more than lost property, he also writes that "Nature does not like to be observed."⁵² Apostles of the double-slit experiment tell us a fired electron, if observed doing so, is then supposed to shy from the interference pattern of its waveform and, instead, choose either slit, as though electrons were self-conscious. Impossibilities of thought and physics are unduly credited, like we're told a watched pot never boils when of course it does.

our appreciating just what has gone into a complexity, which otherwise simplifies into a mass of undifferentiated phenomena. Thus the juggler incorporates bowling pins and oranges into her routine singly, holding understanding's hand while daring it to predict the upper limit, which is repeatedly trumped.

51 Fred Yu, "Op. 10 No. 3, E major (Tristesse)," *Chopin: The Poet of the Piano*, <http://www.ourchopin.com/analysis/etude.html>.

52 Ralph Waldo Emerson, "Experience," in *The Annotated Emerson*, ed. David Mikics (Cambridge: The Belknap Press, 2012),



MOLESKINE



Bibliography

- Adams, Henry. *The Education of Henry Adams*. Boston: Riverside Press, 1961.
- Adorno, Theodor. "Bach Defended against His Devotees." In *Prisms*, translated by Samuel and Shierry Weber, 133–46. Cambridge: MIT Press, 1983.
- . "Culture Industry Reconsidered." In *The Culture Industry: Selected Essays on Mass Culture*, edited by J.M. Bernstein, 98–106. New York: Routledge Classics, 2001.
- . *Current of Music: Elements of a Radio Theory*. Edited by Robert Hullot-Kentor. Cambridge: Polity Press, 2009.
- . *In Search of Wagner*. Translated by Rodney Livingstone. New York: Verso, 2005.
- . *Minima Moralia: Reflections from Damaged Life*. Translated by E.F.N. Jephcott. New York: Verso, 2005.
- . *Philosophy of New Music*. Edited and translated by Robert Hullot-Kentor. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006.
- Albright, Thomas. *Panaesthetics: On the Unity and Diversity of the Arts*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014.
- Alighieri, Dante. *Hell*. In *The Vision; Or, Hell, Purgatory, and Paradise of Dante Alighieri*. Translated by Henry Francis Cary. Philadelphia: Samuel F. Bradford, 1822.
- Allain, Rhett. "Aristotle Was Wrong—Very Wrong—But People Still Love Him." *Wired*, November 8, 2018. <https://www.wired.com/story/aristotle-was-wrong-very-wrong-but-people-still-love-him/>.
- Amis, Kingsley. *Lucky Jim*. London: Penguin Books, 2002.
- Ammons, A.R. *The Selected Poems: Expanded Edition*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1986.
- Ashbery, John. *Self-Portrait in a Convex Mirror*. London: Penguin Books, 1979.
- Ashkenazy, Vladimir. *Diabelli Variations*, by Ludwig van Beethoven. Decca, 2007. Liner notes by Michael Steinberg.
- "Auguste Rodin: Art History Archive." *The Art History Archive*. <http://www.arthistoryarchive.com/arthistory/sculpture/Auguste-Rodin.html>.
- Auden, W.H. *The Collected Poetry of W.H. Auden*. New York: Random House, 1945.
- . *The Sea and the Mirror: A Commentary on Shakespeare's "The Tempest"*. Edited by Arthur Kirsch. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003.
- Austin, J.L. "A Plea for Excuses." *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 57, no. 1 (June 1957): 1–30. DOI: 10.1093/aristotelian/57.1.1.
- Bachelard, Gaston. *The Poetics of Space*. Translated by Maria Jolas. Boston: Beacon Press, 1994.
- Bacon, Francis. "Of Truth." In *Francis Bacon: The Major Works*, edited by Brian Vickers, 341–42. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002.
- Bakhtin, Mikhail. *The Bakhtin Reader: Selected Writings of Bakhtin, Medvedev and Voloshinov*. Edited by Pam Morris. London: Arnold, 2003.

- Ball, Philip. "Physicists Want to Rebuild Quantum Theory from Scratch." *Quanta Magazine*, August 30, 2017. <https://www.quantamagazine.org/quantum-theory-rebuilt-from-simple-physical-principles-20170830/>.
- Balzac, Honoré de. "The Unknown Masterpiece." In *The Unknown Masterpiece and Other Stories*, edited by John Berse, 1–22. Mineola: Dover Publications, 1999.
- Barthes, Roland. *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*. Translated by Richard Howard. New York: Hill and Wang, 1982.
- . "Criticism Blind and Dumb." In *Mythologies*, translated by Annette Lavers, 29–31. New York: Hill and Wang, 2012.
- . "Einstein's Brain." In *Mythologies*, translated by Annette Lavers, 100–102. New York: Hill and Wang, 2012.
- . "In the Ring." In *Mythologies*, translated by Annette Lavers, 3–14. New York: Hill and Wang, 2012.
- . "Listening." In *The Responsibility of Forms: Critical Essays on Music, Art, and Representation*, translated by Richard Howard, 245–60. New York: Hill and Wang, 1985.
- . "The 'Nautilus' and the 'Bateau ivre'." In *Mythologies*, translated by Annette Lavers, 86–88. New York: Hill and Wang, 2012.
- . "The New Citroën." In *Mythologies*, translated by Annette Lavers, 169–71. New York: Hill and Wang, 2012.
- . "Ornamental Cuisine." In *Mythologies*, translated by Annette Lavers, 142–44. New York: Hill and Wang, 2012.
- . "Saponids and Detergents." In *Mythologies*, translated by Annette Lavers, 32–34. New York: Hill and Wang, 2012.
- . "Striptease." In *Mythologies*, translated by Annette Lavers, 165–68. New York: Hill and Wang, 2012.
- . "The Third Meaning." In *Image–Music–Text*, edited and translated by Stephen Heath, 52–68. New York: Hill and Wang, 1977.
- . "The Writer on Vacation." In *Mythologies*, translated by Annette Lavers, 22–25. New York: Hill and Wang, 2012.
- Baudelaire, Charles. *The Salon of 1846*. New York: David Zwirner Books, 2021.
- Baudrillard, Jean. "The Ecstasy of Communication." Translated by John Johnston. In *The Anti-Aesthetic: Essays on Postmodern Culture*, edited by Hal Foster, 126–34. Seattle: Bay Press, 1987.
- Bazin, André. "The Ontology of the Photographic Image." In *What Is Cinema? Volume 1*, edited and translated by Hugh Gray, 9–16. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967.
- Beckett, Samuel. *Proust*. New York: Grove Press, 1931.
- Benjamin, Walter. "Experience and Poverty." Translated by Rodney Livingstone. In *Walter Benjamin: Selected Writings*, Volume 2.2, edited by Michael W. Jennings, Howard Eiland, and Gary Smith, 731–38. Cambridge: The Belknap Press, 2005.
- . "Theses on the Philosophy of History." In *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections*, edited by Hannah Arendt and translated by Harry Zohn, 253–64. New York: Schocken Books, 2007.
- . "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction." In *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections*, edited by Hannah Arendt and translated by Harry Zohn, 217–52. New York: Schocken Books, 2007.
- Berger, John. *Ways of Seeing*. London: Penguin Books, 1977.

- Berkeley, George. *A Treatise Concerning the Principles of Human Knowledge*. Yorkshire: Scolar Press, 1971.
- Bernstein, Leonard. *The Joy of Music*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1960.
- Besant, Annie, and C.W. Leadbeater. "The Difficulty of Representation." In *Thought-Forms: A Record of Clairvoyant Investigations*, 16–20. London: Theosophical Publishing Society, 1905.
- Bishop, Elizabeth. "City Stars." In William Logan, *Our Savage Art: Poetry and the Civil Tongue*, 112. New York: Columbia University Press, 2009.
- . *Poems*. Edited by Saskia Hamilton. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2011.
- Blom, Eric. *Grove's Dictionary of Music and Musicians*. 5th Edition. London: Macmillan, 1954.
- Borges, Jorge Luis. "Kafka and His Precursors." In *Labyrinths: Selected Stories & Other Writings*, edited by Donald A. Yates and James E. Irby, 199–201. New York: New Directions, 1964.
- . "On Exactitude in Science." In *Collected Fictions*, translated by Andrew Hurley, 325. London: Allen Lane, 1999.
- . "The Garden of Forking Paths." In *Labyrinths: Selected Stories & Other Writings*, edited by Donald A. Yates and James E. Irby, 19–29. New York: New Directions, 1964.
- Bourdieu, Pierre. *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*. Translated by Richard Nice. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996.
- Brahms, Johannes, to Clara Schumann, Pörschach, June 1877. *Letters of Clara Schumann and Johannes Brahms, 1853–1896*, Vol. 2, edited by Berthold Litzmann, 16. New York: Vienna House, 1973.
- Brodsky, Joseph. *Collected Poems in English*. Edited by Ann Kjellberg. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2002.
- Bryant, William Cullen. "Thanatopsis." In *Nineteenth-Century American Poetry*, edited by William C. Spengemann, with Jessica F. Roberts, 10–11. London: Penguin Books, 1996.
- Bülow, Hans von. "Klavier-Etüden von Fr. Chopin." *Instructive Ausgabe*.
- Bunting, Basil. *Complete Poems*. Edited by Richard Caddell. Tarsset: Bloodaxe Books, 2000.
- Burns, Ken, dir. *Jazz*. New York: PBS, 2001.
- Camus, Albert. "The Myth of Sisyphus." In *The Myth of Sisyphus and Other Essays*, translated by Justin O'Brien, 119–23. New York: Vintage International, 1991.
- Carroll, Lewis. *Sylvie and Bruno Concluded*. New York: Macmillan and Co., 1894.
- Cavell, Stanley. "In the Place of the Classroom." In *Cities of Words: Pedagogical Letters on a Register of the Moral Life*, 1–18. Cambridge: The Belknap Press, 2005.
- . *Pursuits of Happiness: The Hollywood Comedy of Remarriage*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003.
- . *The World Viewed: Reflections on the Ontology of Film*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1979.
- Chatman, Seymour. "What Novels Can Do That Films Can't (And Vice Versa)." *Critical Inquiry* 7, no. 1 (Autumn 1980): 121–140. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/1343179>.
- Chayka, Kyle. "The Oppressive Gospel of 'Minimalism.'" *The New York Times Magazine*, July 30, 2016, <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/07/31/magazine/the-oppressive-gospel-of-minimalism.html>.

- Chiasson, Dan. "Euphrasy & Rue." In *The Math Campers*, 7–38. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2020.
- Chomsky, Noam. "The Media." Interview by David Barsamian. In *How the World Works*, edited by Arthur Naiman, 233–41. New York: Soft Skull Press, 2011.
- Chomsky's Philosophy. "Noam Chomsky: Mind, Language, and Infinite Use of Finite Means." *YouTube*, October 17, 2016. <https://youtu.be/lJ5FetoYvqk>.
- Clarke, David B. *Encyclopedia of Consumer Culture*, s.v. "Hyperreality," edited by Dale Southerton. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 2011.
- Close, Chuck. "For Chuck Close, an Evolving Journey through the Faces of Others." Interview by Jeffrey Brown. *Artbeat*, PBS, July 6, 2010. <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/show/for-chuck-close-an-evolving-journey-through-the-faces-of-others>.
- Coetzee, J.M. *Foe*. New York: Viking, 1987.
- Conrad, Joseph. "The Tale." In *Tales of Hearsay*, 59–84. London: T. Fisher Unwin Ltd, 1925.
- Cotton, John Cleveland. "The Curfew Tolls." In *Selected Works of Stephen Vincent Benét*, Vol. 2, 383–97. New York: Farrar & Rinehart, 1942.
- Cukor, George, dir. *My Fair Lady*. Warner Bros, 1964.
- Daly, Ian. "You Call That Poetry?!" *Poetry Foundation*, August 25, 2007. <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/articles/68913/you-call-that-poetry>.
- Daub, Adrian. "Sonic Dreamworlds: Benjamin, Adorno, and the Phantasmagoria of the Opera House." In *A Companion to the Works of Walter Benjamin*, edited by Rolf J. Goebel, 273–94. Rochester: Camden House, 2009.
- Davies, Stephen. *The Artful Species: Aesthetics, Art, and Evolution*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012.
- Defoe, Daniel. *Robinson Crusoe*. New York: Signet Classic, 1980.
- Deleuze, Gilles. *Difference and Repetition*. Translated by Paul Patton. New York: Continuum, 2001.
- DeLillo, Don. *White Noise*. London: Penguin Books, 2016.
- Derrida, Jacques. *Dissemination*. Translated by Barbara Johnson. New York: Continuum, 1981.
- . *Writing and Difference*. Translated by Alan Bass. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978.
- Descartes, René. René Descartes to the Marquess of Newcastle, November 23, 1646. In *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*, Vol. 3, edited and translated by John Cottingham, Robert Stoothoff, Dugald Murdoch, and Anthony Kenny, 302–3. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991.
- Dickens, Charles. *Bleak House*. New York: Signet Classic, 2003.
- . *Great Expectations*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998.
- Dickerson, Drew. "Hard Water." *Entropy*, May 9, 2018. <https://entropymag.org/hard-water/>.
- Dickinson, Emily. *Selected Poems of Emily Dickinson*. Edited by James Reeves. Oxford: Heinemann Educational, 1959.
- Dolven, Jeff. *Senses of Style: Poetry Before Interpretation*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2017.
- Eiseley, Loren. "The Star Thrower." In *The Unexpected Universe*, 67–92. San Diego: Harcourt, 1994.
- Eliot, T.S. *The Poems of T.S. Eliot*, Vol. 1. Edited by Christopher Ricks and James McCue. London: Faber & Faber, 2015.

- . “Swinburne as Poet.” In *The Sacred Wood*, 131–36. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1921.
- Emerging Technology from the arXiv. “Deep-Learning Machine Listens to Bach, Then Writes Its Own Music in the Same Style.” *MIT Technology Review*, December 14, 2016. <https://www.technologyreview.com/s/603137/deep-learning-machine-listens-to-bach-then-writes-its-own-music-in-the-same-style/>.
- Emerson, Ralph Waldo. *The Annotated Emerson*. Edited by David Mikics. Cambridge: The Belknap Press, 2012.
- Ferber, Linda S. *Kindred Spirits: Asher B. Durand and the American Landscape*. London: Giles, 2007.
- Ferry, David. “Some Things I Said.” *Poetry Foundation*. <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poetrymagazine/poems/150756/some-things-i-said>.
- Fiennes, Sophia, dir. *The Pervert’s Guide to Cinema*. ICA Films, 2006.
- . *The Pervert’s Guide to Ideology*. Zeitgeist Films, 2012.
- Fischlin, Daniel. “Political Allegory, Absolutist Ideology, and the ‘Rainbow Portrait’ of Queen Elizabeth I.” *Renaissance Quarterly* 50, no. 1 (Spring 1997): 175–206. DOI: 10.2307/3039333.
- Fitzgerald, F. Scott. *The Great Gatsby*. New York: Scribner, 2004.
- Fitzgerald, Penelope. *The Blue Flower*. Boston: Mariner Books, 1995.
- Flynn, Nick. *Blind Huber*. Minneapolis: Graywolf Press, 2015.
- . *Some Ether*. Saint Paul: Graywolf Press, 2000.
- Foucault, Michel. *The Order of Things: An Archeology of the Human Sciences*. New York: Routledge Classics, 2002.
- Franceschi-Bicchierai, Lorenzo. “Russian Facebook Trolls Got Two Groups of People to Protest Each Other in Texas.” *Vice*, November 1, 2017. <https://www.vice.com/en/article/3kvvz3/russian-facebook-trolls-got-people-to-protest-against-each-other-in-texas>.
- Frost, Robert. *The Poetry of Robert Frost: The Collected Poems, Complete and Unabridged*. Edited by Edward Connery Lathem. New York: Henry Holt and Co., 1969.
- Fry, Mary. “Do not stand at my grave and weep.” In *The Picador Book of Funeral Poems*, edited by Don Paterson, 116. London: Picador, 2012.
- Gardner, John. *Grendel*. New York: Vintage Books, 1989.
- Gasquet, Joachim. *Cézanne: A Memoir with Conversations*. Translated by Christopher Pemberton. London: Thames and Hudson, 1991.
- Gass, William H. *Reading Rilke: Reflections on the Problems of Translation*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2000.
- Gauguin, Paul. *Gauguin’s Intimate Journals*. Translated by Van Wyck Brooks. Mineola: Dover Publications, 1997.
- Gerstenberg, Tobias, and Joshua B. Tenenbaum. “Intuitive Theories.” In *The Oxford Handbook of Causal Reasoning*, edited by Michael R. Waldmann, 515–48. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017.
- Gibson, William. *Neuromancer*. New York: Ace, 2004.
- Glück, Louise. *Poems 1962–2012*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2012.
- Goffman, Erving. *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*. New York: Anchor Books, 1959.
- Gondry, Michael, dir. *Is the Man Who Is Tall Happy? An Animated Conversation with Noam Chomsky*. New York: IFC Films, 2013.

- Grahame, Kenneth. *The Annotated Wind in the Willows*. Edited by Annie Gauger. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2009.
- Grassi, Marco. "Acheiropoieta." *The New Criterion* 39, no. 4 (December 2020): 12–15. <https://newcriterion.com/issues/2020/12/acheiropoieta>.
- Greenberg, Clement. "Avant-Garde and Kitsch." In *Art and Culture: Critical Essays*, 3–21. Boston: Beacon Press, 1965.
- Gresham College. "The End of Space and Time? – Professor Robbert Dijkgraaf." *YouTube*, April 3, 2012. <https://youtu.be/XDAJinQL2co>.
- Grossman, Dan. "There Will Be Blood: Chaim Soutine at the Jewish Museum." *Jewish Currents*, May 29, 2018. <https://jewishcurrents.org/chaim-soutine/>.
- Gunn, Thom. *Selected Poems*. Edited by August Kleinzahler. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2009.
- Hardy, Thomas. *Far from the Madding Crowd*. Hertfordshire: Wordsworth Editions Limited, 1993.
- . *Jude the Obscure*. London: Penguin Books, 1998.
- . *Poems of Thomas Hardy: A New Selection*. Edited by Ned Halley. London: Macmillan, 2017.
- . *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*. Edited by Sarah E. Maier. Ontario: Broadview Editions, 2013.
- Hass, Robert. "Time and Materials." In *Time and Materials*, 24–26. New York: Ecco, 2007.
- Hayes, Terrance. "Fish Head for Katrina." In *Lighthouse*, 55–56. London: Penguin Books, 2010.
- Hayles, N. Katherine. *How We Became Posthuman: Virtual Bodies in Cybernetics, Literature, and Informatics*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999.
- Hecht, Anthony. *Collected Earlier Poems*. New York: Borzoi Books, 1990.
- Hegel, G.W.F. *The Phenomenology of Mind*. Vol. 1. Translated by J.B. Baillie. New York: Cosimo Classics, 2005.
- Heidegger, Martin. *Being and Time*. Translated by John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson. Oxford: Blackwell, 1962.
- . "The Origin of the Work of Art." In *Basic Writings*, edited by David Farrell Krell, 139–212. New York: HarperSanFrancisco, 2008.
- Hemingway, Ernest. "After the Storm." In *The Complete Short Stories of Ernest Hemingway*, 283–87. New York: Scribner, 2003.
- . "The Last Good Country." In *The Complete Short Stories of Ernest Hemingway*, 504–44. New York: Scribner, 2003.
- . "A Natural History of the Dead." In *The Complete Short Stories of Ernest Hemingway*, 335–41. New York: Scribner, 2003.
- . "Up in Michigan." In *The Complete Short Stories of Ernest Hemingway*, 59–62. New York: Scribner, 2003.
- Herbert, Zbigniew. "On Translating Poetry." In *Selected Poems*, 7. Translated by John and Bogdana Carpenter. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977.
- Hofmann, Michael. "Kurt Schwitters." In *Where Have You Been? Selected Essays*, 235–44. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2014.
- . "Portrait d'une Femme." In *One Lark, One Horse*, 13–15. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2018.
- . *Selected Poems*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2008.
- Holland, Bernard. "Vladimir Horowitz, Titan of the Piano, Dies." *The New York Times*, November 6, 1989.

- Holst, Imogen. *Gustav Holst: A Biography*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1938.
- Huggett, Nick. *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, s.v., “Zeno’s Paradoxes,” June 11, 2018. <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/paradox-zeno/>.
- Hughes, Ted. *Collected Poems*. Edited by Paul Keegan. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2003.
- Hugo, Victor. *William Shakespeare*. Translated by Melville B. Anderson. Honolulu: University Press of the Pacific, 2001.
- Hutchinson, Andrew. “Making the Water Move: Techno-Historic Limits in the Game Aesthetics of *Myst* and *Doom*.” *Game Studies* 8, no. 1 (September 2008). <http://gamestudies.org/0801/articles/hutch>.
- Huxley, Aldous. “The Gioconda Smile.” In *Mortal Coils*, 9–66. New York: George H. Doran Company, 1922.
- Isacoff, Stuart. *A Natural History of the Piano: The Instrument, the Music, the Musicians — From Mozart to Modern Jazz and Everything in Between*. New York: Vintage Books, 2012.
- Jameson, Fredric. *Archaeologies of the Future: The Desire Called Utopia and Other Science Fictions*. New York: Verso, 2005.
- . *Postmodernism, or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*. Durham: Duke University Press, 1991.
- Jean, James. *The Mysterious Universe*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1931.
- Johnston, Devin. “Tommy Jarrell.” In *Mosses and Lichens*, 55. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2019.
- Keats, John. “Ode to a Nightingale.” In *Complete Poems and Selected Letters of John Keats*, 236–37. New York: Modern Library, 2001.
- Kerouac, Jack. “Essentials of Spontaneous Prose.” *The Portable Jack Kerouac*, edited by Ann Charters, 484–85. London: Penguin Books, 1996.
- Kierkegaard, Søren. *Either/Or, Volume 1*. Translated by David F. Swenson. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1949.
- Kim, Jaegwon. “Mental Causation.” In *The Oxford Handbook of Philosophy of Mind*, edited by Brian P. McLaughlin, Ansgar Beckermann, and Sven Walter, 29–52. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009.
- Kim, Suji Kwock. “Monologue for an Onion.” In *Notes from the Divided Country*, 51–54. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2003.
- Koenderink, Jan J. “Perceptual Organization in Visual Art.” In *The Oxford Handbook of Perceptual Organization*, edited by Johan Wagemans, 886–918. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015.
- Koolhaas, Rem. “Junkspace.” *October* 100 (Spring 2002): 175–90. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/i231842>.
- Krauss, Rosalind. “Sculpture in the Expanded Field.” In *The Anti-Aesthetic: Essays on Postmodern Culture*, edited by Hal Foster, 31–42. Seattle: Bay Press, 1987.
- La Bruyère. *Characters*. Translated by Jean Stewart. London: Penguin Books, 1970.
- Lamb, Charles. “The Sanity of True Genius.” In *The Works of Charles Lamb*, 22–23. London: Edward Moxon, 1842.
- Laplace, Pierre-Simon. *A Philosophical Essay on Probabilities*. Translated by F.W. Truscott and F.L. Emory. London: Chapman & Hall, 1902.
- Larkin, Philip. “Aubade.” In *Collected Poems*, edited by Anthony Thwaite, 208–9. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1989.

- Le Guin, Ursula K. "Vaster than Empires and More Slow." In *The Wind's Twelve Quarters*, 166–99. New York: Bantam Books, 1976.
- Leibniz, Gottfried Wilhelm. *The Monadology and Other Philosophical Writings*. Translated by Robert Latta. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1898.
- Leikin, Anatole. *The Performing Style of Alexander Scriabin*. London: Routledge, 2016.
- Lerner, Ben. *Leaving the Atocha Station*. Minneapolis: Coffee House Press, 2011.
- . *The Hatred of Poetry*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2016.
- lisztcompetition. "Franz Liszt Sonata B minor, S178 explained by Leslie Howard." *YouTube*, October 6, 2016. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nAel-mzSmts>.
- Lleshanaku, Luljeta. "A Perfect Day." In *Negative Space*, 129–30. Translated by Ani Gjika. New York: New Directions, 2018.
- Locke, John. *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*. Philadelphia: Kay & Troutman, 1846.
- Logan, William. "Elizabeth Bishop at the 'New Yorker'." In *Guilty Knowledge, Guilty Pleasure: The Dirty Art of Poetry*, 243–49. New York: Columbia University Press, 2014.
- . "Elizabeth Bishop's Sullen Art." In *Our Savage Art: Poetry and the Civil Tongue*, 122–25. New York: Columbia University Press, 2009.
- . "Hart Crane Overboard." In *Our Savage Art: Poetry and the Civil Tongue*, 166–71. New York: Columbia University Press, 2009.
- . "Milton in the Modern: The Invention of Personality." In *The Undiscovered Country: Poetry in the Age of Tin*, 202–18. New York: Columbia University Press, 2005.
- . "Sonnet." In *Rift of Light*, 53. London: Penguin Books, 2017.
- . "The State with the Prettiest Name." In *Our Savage Art: Poetry and the Civil Tongue*, 91–110. New York: Columbia University Press, 2009.
- . "Verse Chronicle: Falls the Shadow." In *The Undiscovered Country: Poetry in the Age of Tin*, 234–48. New York: Columbia University Press, 2005.
- Long, Marguerite. *At the Piano with Claude Debussy*. Translated by Olive Senior-Ellis. London: J.M. Dent & Sons, 1972.
- Longenbach, James. "Why It Must Be Abstract." *The Georgia Review* 45, no. 1 (Spring 1991): 75–92. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/41400137>.
- Longfellow, Henry Wadsworth. *Kavanagh: A Tale*. Edited by Jean Downey. New Haven: College & University Press, 1965.
- Loos, Adolf. "Ornament and Crime." In *Ornament and Crime: Thoughts on Design and Materials*, translated by Shaun Whiteside, 185–202. London: Penguin Books, 2019.
- Lowell, Robert. "Fall 1961." In *Life Studies and For the Union Dead*, 15–16. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2007.
- Lytard, Jean-François. *Lessons on the Analytic of the Sublime*. Translated by Elizabeth Rottenberg. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994.
- MacNeice, Louis. "Snow." In *Collected Poems*, edited by Peter McDonald, 30. London: Faber & Faber, 1979.
- Mahon, Derek. *Selected Poems*. London: Penguin Books, 1993.
- Man, Paul de. "Criticism and Crisis." In *Blindness and Insight: Essays in the Rhetoric of Contemporary Criticism*, 3–19. London: Routledge, 1983.
- Mariani, Robert. "Million Dollar Extreme's Adult Swim Show Becomes Collateral Damage of Trump's Victory." *The Federalist*, December 12, 2016.

- eralist.com/2016/12/12/million-dollar-extremes-adult-swim-show-becomes-collateral-damage-trumps-victory/.
- Matthiessen, Peter. *The Snow Leopard*. London: Penguin Books, 2016.
- Mayur. "Krzysztof Kieslowski's Cinema Lesson (Master Class in film direction)." *YouTube*, August 2, 2013. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9-k6sIN-zK4>.
- McCarthy, Cormac. *Blood Meridian*. New York: Vintage International, 1992.
- McEwan, Olivia. "The Digital Decline of David Hockney." *Hyperallergic*, April 4, 2017. <https://hyperallergic.com/369975/the-digital-decline-of-david-hockney/>.
- McGregor, Rafe. "The Problem of Thick Representation." *Contemporary Aesthetics* 16 (2018). <https://contempaesthetics.org/newvolume/pages/article.php?articleID=839>.
- McGurl, Mark. *The Program Era: Postwar Fiction and the Rise of Creative Writing*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009.
- McIntyre, Niamh. "Instagram Art Is a Joke, and It's on You." *Vice*, January 27, 2015. <https://www.vice.com/en/article/bn5q7q/is-instagram-a-legitimate-artistic-medium>.
- McLuhan, Marshall, and Quintin Fiore. *The Medium Is the Message: An Inventory of Effects*. Corte Madera: Gingko Press, 2001.
- Melville, Herman. "Hawthorne and His Mosses." In *The Apple-Tree Table and Other Sketches*, 53–86. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1922.
- Mencken, H.L. "Music as a Trade." In *A Mencken Chrestomathy*, 547. New York: Vintage, 1982.
- . "Opera." In *A Mencken Chrestomathy*, 545–46. New York: Vintage, 1982.
- Merleau-Ponty, Maurice. "Eye and Mind." Translated by Carleton Dallery. In *The Primacy of Perception: And Other Essays on Phenomenological Psychology, the Philosophy of Art, History and Politics*, edited by James M. Edie, 159–90. Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1964.
- Merrill, James. "b o d y." In *Poems*, edited by Langdon Hammer, 245. New York: Everyman's Library, 2017.
- Mill, John Stuart. "What Is Poetry?" In *The Broadview Anthology of Victorian Poetry and Poetic Theory*, edited by Thomas J. Collins and Vivienne J. Rundel, 562–70. Ontario: Broadview Press, 2000.
- Millay, Edna St. Vincent. "Renaissance." In *Renaissance and Other Poems*, 1–8. Mineola: Dover Publications, 2011.
- Milton, John. *Paradise Lost*. Edited by Susan L. Rattiner. Mineola: Dover, 2005.
- Miner, Margaret. *Resonant Gaps: Between Baudelaire & Wagner*. Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1965.
- Mlinko, Ange. *Distant Mandate*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2017.
- . *Shoulder Season*. Minneapolis: Coffee House Press, 2010.
- Monroe, Harriet. "A Discussion with Hart Crane." *Poetry* 29, no. 1 (October 1926): 34–41. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/120575726>.
- Monsaingeon, Bruno, dir. *Richter: The Enigma*. Warner Music Vision, 1999.
- Montaigne, Michel de. "Of Friendship." In *The Complete Essays of Montaigne*, edited by William Hazlitt and translated by Charles Cotton, 78–84. London: John Templeman, 1842.
- . "That We Taste Nothing Pure." In *The Complete Essays of Montaigne*, edited by William Hazlitt and translated by Charles Cotton, 313–14. London: John Templeman, 1842.

- Moore, Marianne. "A Grave." In *Observations*, edited by Linda Leavell, 58–59. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2016.
- . "Poetry." In *Observations*, edited by Linda Leavell, 28. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2016.
- Morris, Wesley. "Should Art Be a Battleground for Social Justice?" *The New York Times*, October 3, 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2018/10/03/magazine/morality-social-justice-art-entertainment.html>.
- Muir, Kenneth. *Shakespeare's Tragic Sequence*. London: Routledge, 2005.
- Murray, Les. "The Buladelah-Taree Holiday Song Cycle." In *Learning Human: Selected Poems*, 25–34. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2001.
- Nabokov, Vladimir. Interview by Herbert Gold. In *Strong Opinions*, 93–107. New York: Vintage International, 1990.
- . "Symbols and Signs." In *Collected Stories*, 598–603. London: Penguin Books, 1997.
- Nagao, Takashi. "Yves Tanguy and Multiplication of the Arcs." *Trying to See the Invisible, It's Just Misunderstanding*, May 30, 2013. <http://kaitentou.blogspot.com/2013/05/yves-tanguy-and-multiplication-of-arcs.html>.
- Nagel, Thomas. "What Is It Like to Be a Bat?" *The Philosophical Review* 83, no. 4 (October 1974), 435–50. DOI: 10.2307/2183914.
- Naremore, James. *Acting in the Cinema*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990.
- Nietzsche, Friedrich. *Human, All Too Human*. Translated by Marion Faber and Stephen Lehmann. Lincoln: Bison Books, 1996.
- . *The Joyous Science*. Edited and translated by R. Kevin Hill. London: Penguin Books, 2019.
- . *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. Translated by Graham Parker. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005.
- O'Hara, Frank. "Song." In *The Collected Poems of Frank O'Hara*, edited by Donald Allen, 361. New York: Borzoi Books, 1971.
- Ólafsson, Víkingur. "Opening," by Philip Glass. In *Philip Glass: Piano Works*. Deutsche Grammophon, 2017.
- Onfray, Michel. "Messages from a Master: Hans Holbein." *Tate*, September 1, 2006. <https://www.tate.org.uk/tate-etc/issue-8-autumn-2006/messages-master>. Published in conjunction with *Holbein in England* (September 28, 2006–January 7, 2007), Tate, London, England.
- Owens, Craig. "The Discourse of Others: Feminists and Postmodernism." In *The Anti-Aesthetic: Essays on Postmodern Culture*, edited by Hal Foster, 57–82. Seattle: Bay Press, 1987.
- Paulin, Tom. "Oran." In *The Road to Inver: Translations, Versions, Imitations*, 1. London: Faber and Faber, 2004.
- Payzant, Geoffrey. *Glenn Gould: Music and Mind*. Toronto: Prospero Books, 2008.
- Peacock, Thomas Love. "The Four Ages of Poetry." In *The Works of Thomas Love Peacock*, Vol. 3, edited by Henry Cole, 324–48. London: Richard Bentley & Sons, 1875.
- Phillips, Adam. *On Flirtation*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1994.
- Pinsky, Robert. "The Robots." In *At the Foundling Hospital*, 45. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2016.
- Poe, Edgar Allan. "Sonnet—Silence." In *The Portable Edgar Allan Poe*, edited by J. Gerald Kennedy, 419. London: Penguin Books, 2006.

- Pooler, Richard. *Boundaries of Modern Art*. Bury St. Edmunds: Arena Books, 2013.
- Powers, Richard. *The Overstory*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2018
- Prikryl, Jana. "To Tell of Bodies Changed." In *The After Party*, 40–42. New York: Tim Duggan Books, 2016.
- Quincey, Thomas De. "The English Mail-Coach." In *Selected Writings of Thomas De Quincey*, edited by Philip van Doren Stern, 913–81. New York: Modern Library, 1949.
- . "On the Knocking at the Gate in *Macbeth*." In *Selected Writings of Thomas De Quincey*, edited by Philip van Doren Stern, 1090–95. New York: Modern Library, 1949.
- Ransom, John Crowe. "The Tense of Poetry." In *The World's Body*, 233–60. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1968.
- Rauschenbach, Boris V. "Perceptual Perspective and Cézanne's Landscapes." *Leonardo* 15, no. 1 (Winter 1982): 28–33. DOI: 10.2307/1574339.
- Reed, M.G. "Hans (Jean) Arp's Non-Random Chance Collages." *Data Deluge*, December 21, 2010. <http://www.datadeluge.com/2010/12/hans-jean-arps-non-random-chance.html>.
- Resnais, Alain, dir. *Hiroshima, Mon Amour*. Paris: Pathé Films, 1959.
- Reynolds, Blake. "A Pixel Artist Renounces Pixel Art." *Polygon*, May 13, 2015. <https://www.polygon.com/2015/5/13/8595963/a-pixel-artist-renounces-pixel-art>.
- Richards, I.A. *Principles of Literary Criticism*. New York: Routledge Classics, 2001.
- Riley, Denise. "Your Name Which Isn't Yours." In *Impersonal Passion: Language as Affect*, 115–28. Durham: Duke University Press, 2005.
- Rilke, Rainer Maria. *Selected Poems of Rainer Maria Rilke*. Translated by Robert Bly. New York: Harper & Row, 1981.
- . *The Selected Poetry of Rainer Maria Rilke*. Edited and translated by Stephen Mitchell. New York: Vintage International, 1989.
- Robinson, Nathan J. "The Intellectual We Deserve." *Current Affairs*, March 14, 2018. <https://www.currentaffairs.org/2018/03/the-intellectual-we-deserve>.
- Rochefoucauld, François de la. *Moral Reflections, Sentences, and Maxims*. Cambridge: William Gowans, 1851.
- Rodewald, Stew, and Heidi Rodewald. *Passing Strange*. New York: Dramatists Play Service, 2010.
- rockpaperscissors82. "Slavoj Žižek – Calvinism is Christianity at its Purest." *YouTube*, December 26, 2015. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ohNbDnlQp78>.
- Ross, Alex. "Chacona, Lamento, Walking Blues." In *Listen to This*, 22–54. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2010.
- . "Infernal Machines." In *Listen to This*, 55–70. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2010.
- . "Ligeti." *The Rest Is Noise*, June 12, 2016. <https://www.therestisnoise.com/2006/06/ligeti.html>.
- . "Listen to This." In *Listen to This*, 3–21. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2010.
- . "The Velvet Revolution of Claude Debussy." *The New Yorker*, October 29, 2018. <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2018/10/29/the-velvet-revolution-of-claude-debussy>.
- Rudell, Jeffery. "Under the Influence." *The Moth Radio Hour*. Aired January 28, 2003, on NPR's *The Moth*. <https://themoth.org/stories/under-the-influence>.

- Ruskin, John. *The Seven Lamps of Architecture*. Mineola: Dover Publications, 1989.
- . “Of Truth of Space.” In *The Genius of John Ruskin: Selections from His Writings*, edited by John D. Rosenberg, 25–31. Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1998.
- . “Of Water, as Painted by Turner.” In *The Genius of John Ruskin: Selections from His Writings*, edited by John D. Rosenberg, 32–41. Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1998.
- . “The Work of Iron, in Nature, Art, and Policy.” In *The Two Paths*, 77–100. Frankfurt am Main: Outlook Verlag, 2018.
- Said, Edward. “Opponents, Audiences, Constituencies, and Community.” In *Reflections on Exile and Other Essays*, 118–47. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000.
- Sartre, Jean-Paul. *Nausea*. Translated by Lloyd Alexander. New York: New Directions, 1964.
- Saunders, George. “My Writing Education: A Time Line.” *The New Yorker*, October 22, 2015. <https://www.newyorker.com/books/page-turner/my-writing-education-a-timeline>.
- Schivelbusch, Wolfgang. *The Railway Journey: The Industrialization of Time and Space in the Nineteenth Century*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2014.
- Schoenberg, Arnold. “On Modern Music, Audience, and Critics.” Interview with Paul Wilhelm. In *A Schoenberg Reader: Documents of a Life*, edited by Joseph Auner, 57–59. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003.
- Schopenhauer, Arthur. *The World as Will and Representation*. 2 vols. Translated by E.J.F. Payne. Mineola: Dover Publications, 1966.
- Schumann, Robert. “New Paths.” In *Schumann on Music: A Selection from the Writings*, edited and translated by Henry Pleasants, 199–202. Mineola: Dover Publications, 1965.
- Sebald, W.G. *The Rings of Saturn*. Translated by Michael Hulse. New York: New Directions, 1999.
- Seidel, Frederick. *Selected Poems*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2020.
- Seneca. *Letters from a Stoic*. Translated by Richard Mott Gummere. Mineola: Dover Publications, 2016.
- Shakespeare, William. *Hamlet*, Edited by G.R. Hibbard. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008.
- . *Henry IV, Part I*. Edited by Barbara A. Mowat and Paul Werstine. New York: Washington Square Press, 1994.
- . *Macbeth*. Edited by Barbara A. Mowat and Paul Werstine. New York: Simon & Schuster, 2013.
- . *Romeo and Juliet*. Edited by Barbara A. Mowat and Paul Werstine. New York: Simon & Schuster, 2004.
- . *The Tempest*. Edited by Frank Kermode. New York: Random House, 1964.
- Sherriff, R.C. *Journey’s End*. London: Heinemann Educational Books, 1970.
- Simic, Charles. “Notes on Poetry and Philosophy.” In *The Life of Images: Selected Prose*, 19–28. New York: Ecco, 2015.
- Smith, Tracy K. “Sci-Fi.” In *Life on Mars*, 7. Minneapolis: Graywolf Press, 2011.
- Solie, Karen. *The Caiplie Caves*. Toronto: House of Anansi Press, 2019.
- . *The Road In Is Not the Same Road Out*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2015.

- Sontag, Susan. "Against Interpretation." In *Against Interpretation and Other Essays*, 3–14. New York: Picador, 2001.
- Stevens, Gregory. "Biting Back at the Machine: Charlie Chaplin's *Modern Times*." *Senses of Cinema* 60 (October 2011), <https://www.sensesofcinema.com/2011/feature-articles/biting-back-at-the-machine-charlie-chaplins-modern-times/>.
- Stevens, Wallace. *The Collected Poems of Wallace Stevens*. New York: Vintage Books, 2015.
- Stevenson, Anne. "Sous-entendu." In *Reversals*, 22. Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 1969.
- Stevenson, Robert Louis. "Crabbed Age and Youth." In *The Lantern-Bearers and Other Essays*, edited by Jeremy Treglown, 59–68. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1988.
- . "Letter to a Young Gentleman." In *The Lantern-Bearers and Other Essays*, edited by Jeremy Treglown, 244–50. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1988.
- . "The Education of an Engineer." In *The Lantern-Bearers and Other Essays*, edited by Jeremy Treglown, 251–58. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1988.
- . "The Lantern-Bearers." In *The Lantern-Bearers and Other Essays*, edited by Jeremy Treglown, 226–35. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1988.
- . "Truth of Intercourse." In *The Lantern-Bearers and Other Essays*, edited by Jeremy Treglown, 93–99. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1988.
- Stoppard, Tom. *Arcadia*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2008.
- . *The Real Thing*. London: Faber & Faber, 1984.
- Strindberg, August. *A Dream Play*. Translated by Caryl Churchill. London: Nick Hern Books, 2005.
- Sullivan, Hannah. "Repeat Until Time." In *Three Poems*, 15–43. London: Faber & Faber, 2018.
- Swinkin, Jeffrey. "Variation as Thematic Actualisation: The Case of Brahms's Op. 9." *Music Analysis* 31, no. 1 (2012): 37–89. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/23322092>.
- Sze, Arthur. "The Redshifting Web." In *The Redshifting Web: New and Selected Poems, 1970–1998*, 223–36. Port Townsend: Copper Canyon Press, 1998.
- Szybist, Mary. *Incarnadine*. Minneapolis: Graywolf Press, 2013.
- Szyborska, Wisława. *View with a Grain of Sand*. Translated by Stanisław Barańczak and Clare Cavanagh. London: Faber & Faber, 1996.
- Tennyson, Alfred Lord. "Ulysses." In *Tennyson*, 88–90. New York: Everyman's Library, 2004.
- The Howard Stern Show. "Chris Martin Performs Coldplay's 'Yellow' on the Stern Show (2011)." *YouTube*, July 4, 2020. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WxCa5xwdGGw>
- Todorov, Tzvetan. *The Fantastic: A Structural Approach to a Literary Genre*. Translated by Richard Howard. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1975.
- Trimmer, John D. "The Present Situation in Quantum Mechanics: A Translation of Schrödinger's 'Cat Paradox' Paper." *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* 124, no. 5 (October 1980): 323–38. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/986572>.
- Ulmer, Gregory. "The Object of Post-Criticism." In *The Anti-Aesthetic: Essays on Postmodern Culture*, edited by Hal Foster, 83–110. Seattle: Bay Press, 1987.
- Vallejo, César. "Our Bread." In *The Complete Poetry: A Bilingual Edition*, edited and translated by Clayton Eshleman, 111. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009.

- Van Gogh, Vincent. *The Letters of Vincent van Gogh*. Edited by Mark Roskill. New York: Atheneum, 1963.
- Vidal, Gore. "The Meaning of Timothy McVeigh." *Vanity Fair*, November 10, 2008. <https://www.vanityfair.com/news/2001/09/mcveigh200109>.
- Virilio, Paul. "Speed-Space," interview by Chris Dercon. In *Virilio Live: Selected Interviews*, edited by John Armitage, 69–81. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 2001.
- Wallace, David Foster. "Roger Federer as Religious Experience." *The New York Times*, August 20, 2006. <https://www.nytimes.com/2006/08/20/sports/playmagazine/20federer.html>.
- West, Nathanael. *The Day of the Locust*. New York: New Directions, 1969.
- White, E.B. "The Door." In *Poems and Sketches of E.B. White*, 37–40. New York: Harper & Row, 1981.
- Whitman, Walt. *Walt Whitman: Complete Poetry and Collected Prose*. Edited by Justin Kaplan. New York: Library of America, 1982.
- Wilbur, Richard. *New and Collected Poems*. San Diego: Harcourt, 1989.
- Wiman, Christian. *He Held Radical Light: The Art of Faith, the Faith of Art*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2018.
- Wittgenstein, Ludwig. *Culture and Value*. Translated by Peter Winch. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984.
- . *Notebooks, 1914–1916*. Edited by G.H. von Wright and G.E.M. Anscombe, and translated by G.E.M. Anscombe. New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1961.
- . *Philosophical Investigations*. Edited by P.M.S. Hacker and Joachim Schulte and translated by G.E.M. Anscombe, P.M.S. Hacker, and Joachim Schulte. Hoboken: John Wiley & Sons, 2009.
- . *The Blue and Brown Books: Preliminary Studies for the "Philosophical Investigations"*. New York: Harper & Row, 1965.
- . *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*. Translated by D.F. Pears and B.F. McGuinness. New York: Routledge Classics, 2001.
- Wolchover, Natalie. "Have We Been Interpreting Quantum Mechanics Wrong This Whole Time?" *Wired*, July 30, 2014. <https://www.wired.com/2014/06/the-new-quantum-reality/>.
- Wolf, Mark J.P. "Abstraction in the Video Game." In *The Video Game Theory Reader*, edited by Mark J.P. Wolf and Bernard Perron, 47–65. New York: Routledge, 2003.
- Wood, James. "Human, All Too Inhuman." *The New Criterion* 223, no. 4 (July 2020): 41–45. <https://newrepublic.com/article/61361/human-inhuman>.
- Wood, James N. *Impressionism and Post-Impressionism in The Art Institute of Chicago*. Easthampton: Hudson Hills, 2000.
- Wood, Michael. *Film: A Very Short Introduction*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012.
- Woolf, Virginia. *Between the Acts*. Edited by Frank Kermode. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008.
- . *The Diary of Virginia Woolf: 1925–1930*. Edited by Anne Olivier Bell. London: Hogarth Press, 1980.
- . *Mrs. Dalloway*. San Diego: Harcourt, 1981.
- . *The Waves*. Edited by David Bradshaw. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015.
- Wright, Franz. "Stay." In *F*, 15. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2013.

- Wright, James. "A Blessing." In *The Branch Will Not Break*, 57. Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 1963.
- Xrockpapersissors82. "Slavoj Žižek – Calvinism is Christianity at its Purest." *YouTube*, December 26, 2015. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ohNbDnlQp78>.
- Yeats, W.B. *Collected Poems of W.B. Yeats*. Edited by Richard J. Finneran. New York: Scribner, 1996.
- Yin, Steph. "Do You Know What Lightning Really Looks Like?" *The New York Times*, June 11, 2018. <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/06/11/science/lightning-paintings-photographs.html>.
- Young, Kevin. *Bunk: The Rise of Hoaxes, Humbug, Plagiarists, Phonies, Post-Facts, and Fake News*. Minneapolis: Graywolf Press, 2017.
- Yu, Fred. "Op. 10 No. 3, E major (Tristesse)." *Chopin: The Poet of the Piano*. <http://www.ourchopin.com/analysis/etude.html>.
- Žižek, Slavoj. *Disparities*. New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2016.
- . *Event: A Philosophical Journey through a Concept*. New York: Melville House Publishing, 2014.
- . *How to Read Lacan*. New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 2007.
- . *In Defense of Lost Causes*. New York: Verso, 2009.
- . *Less Than Nothing: Hegel and the Shadow of Dialectical Materialism*. New York: Verso, 2012.
- . *Living in the End Times*. New York: Verso, 2011.
- . *Looking Awry: An Introduction to Jacques Lacan through Popular Culture*. Cambridge: MIT Press, 1992.
- . *The Metastases of Enjoyment: Six Essays on Women and Causality*. New York: Verso, 2005.
- . *On Belief*. New York: Routledge, 2001.
- . *Organs without Bodies: Deleuze and Consequences*. New York: Routledge, 2012.
- . *Sex and the Failed Absolute*. New York: Bloomsbury, 2020.
- . *The Parallax View*. Cambridge: MIT Press, 2006.
- . *The Puppet and the Dwarf: The Perverse Core of Christianity*. Cambridge: MIT Press, 2003.
- . *The Sublime Object of Ideology*. New York: Verso, 1989.
- Žižek, Slavoj, and F.W.J. von Schelling. *The Abyss of Freedom/Ages of the World*. Translated by Judith Norman. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1997.

