On Blinking.

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This book began with a photo.
More specifically, a picture of Saas-Fee, Switzerland.

Friends were tagged in the image as if they were there, sitting in its grasses, walking up its paths. Just like they once had, when they had first met at EGS – in the glen of fairies, and of writers too.

We dedicate *On Blinking* to those who danced up the mountain with us …

                    … and to Lim Lee Ching & Nicole Ong.

Our friends.

julia hölzl ·
augen, blicke, stätten

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A blindness dwells in each beginning, for in the beginning there is darkness, no(t) origin: "Between origin and beginning […] there are dark relations […]; between the two there is an interval, and even an uncertainty."

Maurice Blanchot, *The Infinite Conversation,* trans. Susan Hanson (Minneapolis & London: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), 369.

A blindness dwells in each origin, for there is no original origin; the origin is to be originated, always; such is its beginning. Every beginning, then, is to originate such origination, and there is no end to it: every beginning is a(s) beginning.

To begin with, to begin without origin means nothing but this: that there could be such th/is. To begin is to originate what is yet to be said, yet to be written, yet to be seen (as something that could be said, written, seen). To begin, here, is to anticipate the always already pre-cipitated, is to pre-suppose an *is,* is to presume such *is,* is to originate such is as *is,* a th/is that could be seen or witnessed, is to assume that there could be witnesses, eyewitnesses to such *is,* that the eye would be(ar) witness to such (im)possibility of *the(re) is*.

Thence this will be, first and foremost, on seeing, ocular moments, momentary glances, glances of the eye, *Augen-Blicke* – as if there *was,* as if there was an *is* to witness.

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Perhaps to see is to witness, is to witness (the) instantaneous, momentary sites, always already *en passant,* always no longer.

To see is to witness, is to see the no longer, as it is precisely with, in this (its) passing that time [is], with,in these (its) moments that time passes. Witnessing the no longer, witnessing these untimely sites we *are*: it is only with,in these momentary glances that existence situates itself, that a *there* is opened.* There, no(t) here, never – what *is* cannot be seen. To see is to pre-vent* the event from eventuating, to see is to fore-see is to fore-tell, is to pre-dict that which is (to be) seen.

See Martin Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit* (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer Verlag, 2006), 347.

Praevenire, "come before, anticipate, hinder"; from *prae,* "before" and *venire,* "to come."

Thence the primacy of sight. Since time immemorial it is the eyes that are given preference, at least since Parmenides:

Parmenides, *Poem,* trans. John Burnet.

Come now, I will tell thee – and do thou hearken to my saying and carry it away – the only two ways of search that can be thought of. The first, namely, that It is, and that it is impossible for anything not to be, is the way of conviction, for truth is its companion. The other, namely, that It is not, and that something must needs not be, – that, I tell thee, is a wholly untrustworthy path. For you cannot know what is not – that is impossible – nor utter it; For it is the same thing that can be thought and that can be.

Heidegger considers Aristotle's famous beginning of the *Metaphysics* – namely, the care for seeing as being essential to human's being* – to be a consequence of Parmenides' τὸ γὰρ αὐτὸ νοεῖν ἐστίν τε καὶ εἶναι: For it is the same thing that can be thought and that can be, or, as Heidegger puts it, being is that which is apprehended, being is that which shows itself in such contemplative apprehending or perception. Only through such seeing is being dis-covered; original and genuine truth lies in intuition, with this thesis remaining the foundation of Western philosophy. And this primacy of sight is equiprimordial* with the primacy of the present within traditional ontology*; being, seen as, seen with,in such presence, is thought possible only as such being-present, a(s) being-in-this-present. Hence

We prefer the sense of sight to all other senses: "Im Sein des Menschen liegt wesenhaft die Sorge des Sehens." (Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit,* 171). See Aristoteles, *Metaphysik: Schriften zur Ersten Philosophie,* trans. & ed. Franz F. Schwarz (Stuttgart: Reclam, 2007), 17 [980a]. For an English version see, for example, *The Metaphysics,* trans. Hugh Lawson-Tancred (London: Penguin Classics, 1999).

"Equiprimordial" is the common English translation for Heidegger's *Gleichursprünglichkeit.*

An ontology, once more, invented by Parmenides, who made being a pure being without becoming. – Though admittedly also for Heraclitus, creator of creation, of being as becoming, "what eyes witness, ears believe on hearsay" Heraclitus, "Fragment 15," *Fragments,* trans. Brooks Hatton, (New York: Viking Penguin, 2001), 11.

the act of seeing is nothing but an asser-
tion of the present, a presenciation of the
present as *is,* an assurance that the pre-
sent *is* a(s) present, that the present could
be re-presented, could be seen.

What can be seen is attributed such pres-
ence: what is seen is seen as presence. To
be in sight is to be in presence. A re-pre-
sented presence of an *esse*-nce, then, for
every act of seeing implies this *Wesen* to
be (present), to be seen.

Jean-Luc Nancy, "Elliptical
Sense," trans. Jonathan Der-
byshire, in Jean-Luc Nancy, *A
Finite Thinking*, ed. Simon Sparks
(Stanford: Stanford University
Press, 2003), 107.
The eye: an intruder, a trespasser, always
already, distorting what [is]. It is the gaze
which gazes after, a dividing, "a *discern-
ing* […]. That is to say, a fine, penetrating
insight, a perspicacious gaze." The gaze
pushes itself to this fore, requires such
fore, requires an essence, a *for(e) sure*.

And it is the – this – gaze that is to be abandoned, as to "dis-cern, strictly, means to see between [to glimpse, entre*voir*], it is barely to see, or to guess, in an ellipsis of the eye. *Theōrein* has been reduced here to an extenuation, to a vestige in the half-light – to a twilight vision, not one of daytime."

The eye, seen as tracer, as tracing traces, is (to be) seen as witness, a witness of this half(way), and it is not only a witness, but is witnessing the witness itself. The eye: witnessing the no longer, witnessing presents that are not (present). The no longer, the has-been. What is this no longer, what is this presence, this unre-presentable presence that is never present, that never re-presents itself? And "[w]hat is a birth, or a death, a singular coming to presence?

How many times does this take place in a life? […] The event of sense, insofar as it is lacking, is neither the continuity of a substance nor the discrete rarity of an exception. It is being, the thinking of which is the ontological ethics of this 'neither… nor,' held in strict abeyance, unsublated, above the abyss."

a, "without" and *byssos,* "bottom."

Above the abyss, towards the abysmal *a-byssos** a ground-less in-sight, but a finite sight, a seeing the outside, from outside, and yet within, for such with,in is to remain abyssal.

Nancy, "A Finite Thinking," 11.

Betweens, a trans yet no transmission. For what is seen cannot be transmitted, as it happens only once. Only once: "There's not an 'ounce' of sense that could be either received or transmitted: the finitude

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of thinking is indissociable from the singularity of 'understanding' what is, each time, a singular existence." This finite insight, always already an – its – outside, sees what cannot be seen (sight as such is impossible: how, after all, to see?), for what is seen *becomes such seen,* and is no longer.

Seeing is to see the appearing disappear, is to see appearance as *such*: as dis/appearance.

And this seeing, this finite seeing or seeing (of) the finite bears witness to "the absence of sense as the only token of the presence of the existent. This presence is not essence, but – *epekeina tēs ousias* – birth to presence: birth and death to the infinite presentation of the fact that there

is no ultimate sense, only a finite sense, finite senses, a multiplication of singular bursts of sense resting on no unity or substance. And the fact, too, that there is no established sense, no establishment, institution or foundation of sense, only a coming, and comings-to-be of sense."

It is only beyond (its) absence that presence [is]. Witnessing the no longer, no longer witnessing, the witness is "not *present* either, of course, presently present, to what he recalls, he is not present to it in the mode of perception, to the extent that he bears witness, at the moment when he bears witness; he is no longer present, even if he says he is present." What is witnessed, is not, is only once, is a once that is always already a never, and beyond, which is why "there is no witness

Jacques Derrida, "Poetics and Politics of Witnessing," trans. Outi Pasanen, in Jaques Derrida, *Sovereignties in Question: The Poetics of Paul Celan,* ed. Thomas Dutoit & Outi Pasanen (New York: Fordham University Press, 2005), 76.

Ibid., 83.

for the witness." What is [present] presents itself only once* – only one time: the *only* time. Always a first time, already. If seeing is witnessing, seeing is bearing witness to the impossibility (to the beyond of absence, of presence, that is) of such witness/ing. Every act of seeing is always already a de-scription, is to in-scribe an ascription, de-fining the seen.

"Only one time: circumcision takes place only once." Jacques Derrida, "Shibboleth: For Paul Celan," based on a translation by Joshua Wilner, revised by Thomas Dutoit, in Derrida, *Sovereignties in Question,* 1.

There is no witnessing: all there is, [is] witnessing.

It is the presence of absence that renders witnessing possible, a presence that does not re-represent itself. There is no before for being: "Being absolutely does not pre-exist; nothing *preexists*; only what exists exists." Only what exists *is,* and the essence of existence consists in the withdraw-

Jean-Luc Nancy, "Being Singular Plural," in Jean-Luc Nancy, *Being Singular Plural,* ed. Werner Hamacher & David E. Wellbery, trans. Robert D. Richardson & Anne E. O'Bryne (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000), 29.

al of (its) existence.* The presence of the between lies in its absence, and it is only through an absense of sense that (their) presence is witnessed – a presence which

"is not essence, but […] birth to presence: birth and death to the infinite presentation of the fact that there is no ultimate sense, only a finite sense, finite senses, a multiplication of singular bursts of sense resting on no unity or substance. And the fact, too, that there is no established sense, no establishment, institution or foundation of sense, only a coming, and comings-to-be of sense." Once be-come, (its)

As Nancy, "Elliptical Sense,"
95, states for the essence:
"[T]he essence of essence
consists in the withdrawal
of its own existence."

sense is to be with-drawn; only by such with-drawal sense is made.*

It is the lack of significance that allows for the between. De-void of meaning, it is to be sensed. In order to be sensed, it has to

be let (gone). Thus, for the between to be seen as such between, a certain *Gelassenheit* is needed; bearing the *either,* bearing the *or,* towards the nor: neither here nor there.

What is seen was (not), what is seen is still becoming, is becoming an absented presence, becoming an other. What is seen is no(t) there, is no longer. Because it was, the past is not (present); because it is (becoming present), the present is not (past).

What is seen changes, changes us, just as we, changing, change the seen, the scene.*

Changing without ceasing, instantaneous, momentary sites present themselves differently, always different; presence is always anOther. De-signated differences:

* Or, as Henri Bergson puts it in "The Endurance of Life," trans. Arthur Mitchell, in Henri Bergson, *Key Writings,* ed. Keith Ansell Pearson & John Mullarkey (London & New York: Continuum, 2005), 173: "The circumstances may still be the same, but they will act no longer on the same person, since they find him at a new moment of his history. Our personality, which is being built up each instant with its accumulated experience, changes without ceasing. By changing, it prevents any state, although superficially identical with another, from ever repeating it in its very depth."

To see these momentary sites is to see them as and with,in signs, for what is seen is always already a sign, referring to another sign, "and only to another sign, *ad infinitum*. That is why, at the limit, one can forgo the notion of the sign, for what is retained is not principally the sign's relation to a state of things it designates, or to an entity it signifies, but only the formal relation of sign to sign insofar as it defines a so-called signifying chain […] All signs are signs of signs. The question is not yet what a given sign signifies but to which other signs it refers, or which signs add themselves to it to form a network without beginning or end." In sight: sighting in betweens, signing its signification, de-signating significance.

Gilles Deleuze & Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Brian Massumi (London & New York: Continuum, 2004), 124.

How to lose faith? How to loosen faith? How to see without sealing that which is seen?

One would imagine. One would imagine the seen to be, yet all there is [is], and it is an us that creates (its) presence. Evidently, there are no in-sights. Every act of seeing is to remain (an) Outside, is to remain an-Other, external way of seeing the always – already – estranged.

In a blink: im-mediate eyes, glances, momentary sites. Each time unique, appearances are always already dis/appearances, there [is] no thing but ophthalmic instants, transient and ever-eluding *Augen-Blicke*; and every such instant, Zarathustra* reminds us, entails all things yet to become. An *Augen-Blick,* this momentary

See Friedrich Nietzsche, *Also sprach Zarathustra: Ein Buch für Alle und Keinen* (Stuttgart: Reclam, 2000), 163.

blinking of an eye, is always already an inter-ference. Sub-sequently, seeing [is] always-already an intrusion and, there-fore, annihilation of the former: visions are divisions, visions violate the veil: See-ing [is] seeming is seeking is sealing; we see(k) to ascribe and we see(k) to de-fine. Observation is determination is violation of a singular(ity) yet to become; to see is to be-hold. Thus *eidein,* the act of seeing, has to be extricated from *eidos* (that which is seen), from an/its esse-nce (that which can be seen); *theōrein* (the act of) contem-plation, is to be dissociated from *theōrein* (to look at, to look at that which can be observed). –

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TRANSPOSITION. The gaze is to be discarded; the stare is to give way to momentary looks. It is the glance that renders seeing possible. A glance is a genesis is a generation of [glances] yet to be/come. Yet to come:

Interim times, embedded in Heideggerian *Augenblicks-Stätten,* these momentary sites of the between. (In-)between: temporary blindness, the only mode of seeing, the only mode of being seen. Between: blinking/s. Blinking gazes, against the pre-dominance of the present. It is only presence, but a present that is not present, never. What is cannot be seen: what is cannot be witnessed. For what is is not, always. It is through blinking, and only through blinking that one can see; perhaps.

Paroxystic restraints. Almost an almost, making the sight an event, making the seen eventuate.

III

World is world, and world the image an earth.

Adam Staley Groves, *Imaginality: Conversant and Eschaton* (New York: Atropos Press, 2009), 20.

In this beginning there is a re-turn, a return to the first time which is no(t) before – for the origin, the origin of (the) world, occurs at each moment of the world,⋆ and it occurs with,in a world which is not but which is a world that worlds.⋆ To be, come, then, is to become a world. "Becoming everybody/everything (*tout le monde*) is to world (*faire monde*), to make a world (*faire un monde*)."

Nancy, "Being Singular Plural," 83.

"Welt *ist* nie, sondern *weltet*." Martin Heidegger, *Vom Wesen des Grundes* (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 1995), 44.

Deleuze & Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 308.

Faire (un) monde: faire (une) vision (d'un monde).

In, between these ex-positions some be-tweens, between these over-exposures some per-spectives,* claiming the pass-ing (through),* passing through these worlds, imagined worlds. It is always a passing through, a(s) passing the passage.

The image, a world. The world, an image; made such image, imagining its imagina-tion.

And it is the photograph that is meant to transmit such worlds, "the scene itself, the literal reality," that is; or at least its perfect *analogon*. Yet, the scene itself – a sign, a-signing its reality once more, always once more – evades its re-production: all that

Perspicere, "inspect, look through"; from *per,* "through" and *specere,* "look at."

"Denn jede *Per*-spektive nimmt schon das *Durch*gängige für ihre Blickbahn in Anspruch." (Martin Heidegger, *Beiträge zur Philosophie* [*Vom Ereignis*], Gesamtausgabe 65, ed. Friedrich-Wilhelm von Her-rmann [Frankfurt am Main: Vit-torio Klostermann, 1989], 447.)

Roland Barthes, "The Photo-graphic Message," in *Image Music Text,* trans. Stephen Heath (New York: Hill and Wang, 1978), 17.

[is] [was] (no image). What we see (as image) has not been, what we see (as image) has been made (an image). And there is no world outside the image; a photograph is an image of concepts, as Flusser elucidates.*

Vilém Flusser, *Towards a Philosophy of Photography,* trans. Anthony Mathews (London: Reaktion Books, 2000), 36.

The photograph is thought to bear witness of and to the witness. A double binding, a referent without reference. The image witnesses what cannot be witnessed. Witness of the no longer, the image tries to see: trying to see an outside that is with,in, trying to see the event whilst eventuating it, event-ually eventuating itself, for it is the image that event-uates (the event). A photograph names the no longer (names it a no longer), the photograph remains and re-names the no longer (re-names it a/s no longer). It turns a blind eye to

blinking, blinks the fact that nothing is given at once; everything is given at once, given only once. Only once, in the blink of an eye, a blink of an eye.

What is, here, then, in this blink of an eye, is curiosity, which, following Heidegger, is not limited to seeing.* Rather, it expresses a tendency to an encounter, to a being-encountered, a letting-be of such an encounter. Curiosity takes care to see not in order to understand what it sees, but only in order to see,* and it might thus able to let the seen be: let the seen dis/appear. No(t) *Neu-Gier,* no voracity for the new, but for an Other. To look at the Other in her Otherness is to re-spect* an Other/ness already given, the only presence there is, above the abyss. Sur-mounting the sense of sight, opening a passage

Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit,* 170.

Ibid., 172.

Respicere, "look back at, regard, consider"; from *re,* "back" and *specere*.

towards the sensing of senses, the sense of
sensing – an opening towards touching,
for "[s]ense is touching. The 'transcen-
dental' of sense (or what is 'ontological' in
it) is touch: obscure, impure, untouchable
touch." A touching the singular, a singular
touch, *touched for the very first time** –
"To touch oneself, to be touched right at
oneself, outside oneself, without anything
being appropriated. That is writing, love,
and sense."

That is curiosity, again, a new, always a
new; to see not to understand but to see,
as seeing is only possible when eluding its
appropriation, its sense. To see between,
to see between these traces, between these
traces that are, that are by tracing traces.
For seeing is tracing, and "*to discern* is to
see and to trace; it is to see or to trace at

Nancy, "Elliptical Sense," 110.

Like a Virgin, like Madonna's Virgin.
Nancy, "Elliptical Sense," 109.

Ibid.

the point where the rings around the eyes touch – between the eyes. Discerning is where touching and vision touch. It is the limit of vision – and the limit of touch. To discern is to see what differs in touching. To see the center differing (from itself): the ellipsis."

To see is, perhaps, to discern what differs.

IV

We, then, here, in the end, in this end, in
this origin of the end, "'have discerned':   Nancy, "Elliptical Sense," 107.
we have divided off with a *cerne,* which
in French is the contour and particularly
the ring of fatigue around tired eyes; thus
we have divided off from two *cernes,* trac-
ing the contour and the division, the di-
vision as contour […]. We have retraced
the limit of writing, writing as limit. We
haven written writing: it can't be *seen,* or
barely; it writes itself; it traces itself and
effaces itself under the very eyes of anyone
who would try to look."

Paul Celan, "The Meridian" (Georg Büchner prize speech, 1960), trans. Jerry Glenn, in Jacques Derrida, *Sovereignties in Question*, 181.

We, here, in this end, have reached no end, have not come to an end. For there is no here for the now. Here we, still, try to look, try to look at the written, try, then, after all, to look at the poem, taking "its position at the edge of itself; in order to be able to exist, it without interruption calls and fetches itself from its now-no-longer back into its as-always […] The poem wants to reach the Other, it needs this Other, it needs a *vis-à-vis*. It searches out and addresses it. Each thing, each person is a form of the Other for the poem, as it makes for this Other." To make for anOther: to see the *no more to be named*. To make for an ending, within which we dis-cern, within which we bear witness to the impossibility of naming, of witnessing – of seeing, after all.

Stunden, maifarben, kühl.
Das nicht mehr zu Nennende, heiß,
hörbar im Mund.

Niemandes Stimme, wieder.

Schmerzende Augapfeltiefe
das Lid
steht nicht mehr im Wege, die Wimper
zählt nicht, was eintritt

Die Träne, halb,
die schärfere Linse, beweglich,

holt dir die Bilder.

Paul Celan, "Ein Auge, offen/ An eye, open," in *Selected Poems,* trans. Michael Hamburger (London: Penguin Books, 1996), 136ff.

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Hours, May-coloured, cool.
The no more to be named, hot,
audible in the mouth.

No one's voice, again.

Aching depth of the eyeball:
the lid
does not stand in its way, the lash
does not count what goes in.

The tear, half,
the sharper lens, movable,

brings the image home to you.

It is always a(t) first glance that there *is*.

jeremy fernando ·
at the risk of love or,
on reading & touching in 3 ½ blinks

What happens when one reads?

That is the question that we will be attempting to address. And once the dossier of reading is opened, the question of *what is it that one is reading?,* that is, *what is the object of reading,* is never far behind. Since there is an object, one must also take into account the question of the objective of reading – of not only whether there is an aim, but also whether this aim is reached, whether it can be reached, which opens the notion of calculability, accountability, accounting. And one should not be mistaken: one will always be held accountable.

Who ever said that reading was safe.

As Paul de Man has taught us, "not that the act of reading is innocent, far from it. It is the starting point of all evil"[1] – "evil" in the precise sense of the question, questioning, heresy. For, we should not forget that reading begins by opening the question: one can even posit that all questions bear echoes of the primordial question, "did God really ask you not to eat from any of the trees in the garden?"[2] This is not the time nor place to open the dossier on performative truths, lies, and the divine – what is crucial to us is that this is a question that is never answered, a question that remains a question. Hence, even as we open questions in relation to reading, we should

1 Paul de Man, *Allegories of Reading: Figural Language in Rousseau, Rilke, Nietzsche, and Proust* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979), 194.
2 *Genesis* 3:1. All references to the Bible are taken from the *Jerusalem Bible*.

bear in mind that the status of a question is always itself called into question, questionable.

Perhaps we should slow down a little, and begin once again at the beginning. And reopen the question we started with: the question of the relationality between oneself and a text. This is a question not only of hermeneutics, but also one of phenomenology; for, the question of *what a text means* can only come about at, if not after, the moment one is engaging a text. Thus, reading is the relationality between the subject and the object, but one that never allows the two to be separated, or defined. When one reads, the subject calls the object into being but, at the same time, the subject is only a subject as such because of its relation to that very object. Hence, this is a relationality in which both the subject and object can be known in relation with each other, but whose status as such is always already in question. After all, the reader and the text (s)he is reading is brought into the relationality, and also separated, by reading. An act that cannot itself be without the very relation it brings about. Hence, it is both the name of the relationality and also the condition of the relation it names. As such, it names nothing other than the fact that relationality is the non-essence of the relation between two things. At best: a space between.

Here, if we pay attention, it is not too difficult to pick up echoes of Lucretius' conception of communication, where the communion occurs in the skin – the *simulacra* – between the two parties in a relationality.[3] And if communication happens whilst it is happening, the implication is that each occurrence

3 Lucretius, *The Nature of Things*, trans. A.E. Smallings (London: Penguin Classics, 2007), 106–47.

is singular. In this manner, it is akin to the emergent property of a chemical reaction: even though one can guess to a great extent what will materialize each time two elements come into contact with each other, there is still never a guarantee. Strictly speaking, the emergent property is unknowable, remains veiled from us, until the moment it emerges. In terms of communication, the notion of mis-communication would be a misnomer: for, that would only be possible with an *a priori* knowledge of the outcome. Without such a preconceived notion, any – and every – outcome is possible. Thus, even the notion of an unintended outcome is itself questionable. So, even as previous outcomes provide a certain probability, there is always already the potentiality of an unknown – and perhaps always unknowable – element in every communion.

In terms of knowing, this opens the question of the relationality between memory and knowledge. Since knowledge is premised on correspondence, this suggests that it is an act of memory. And here, we should open our receptors to the tropes of habit and *habitus*: for, it is through repetition that we learn, that something becomes habitual, that it is known to us. At that point, that habit becomes a part of us, inhabits us. Perhaps even to the point where we can no longer separate it from us, it can no longer be apart from us. After all, we often say that one knows something when one no longer has to think of it – when one can do it instinctively. When one has forgotten that one even knows it. However, one must also consider the fact that one has no control over forgetting – it can happen to one at any time. To compound matters, there is no object to forgetting: the moment the object is known – the moment one

can name what one has forgotten – one is back in the realm of memory. At best, one might be able to state the name of what one has forgotten (*I have forgotten how to do trigonometry*) but it would be a name without referentiality, without correspondence – a floating signifier, a pure name; a catachrestic metaphor – it could be anything, everything, and nothing, at exactly the same time. As such, there is no way in which to know if forgetting happens – and thus, each act of memory might well have forgetting in it. In this sense, there is no actual way of distinguishing between *truly* knowing – where one is inhabited by the habit – and not knowing at all.

If this were not so, one would not be able to say: "I don't know."

Each time one utters, "I don't know," one calls referentiality into question. For, if there was a referent to the statement, then one cannot truly not know. Of course, one can then posit that "I don't know" is a performative statement: whilst this might be true, one can never be sure of its status as performative; that would presume once again that there was a constative version, variation, as well. And if that were true, one would then have to claim that "I don't know" was a lie. Whilst this again is a possibility, there is no necessity for this to be so. Which means that, ultimately, "I don't know" is (n)either a constative (n)or a performative statement: its status is and will always be unknowable. Its undeterminability is due to the fact that there is an unknowable relation between the subject – the "I" – and the claim, that is, whether the "I" knows or not. This might be why it is possible to have an inkling that one knows something – one knows a something, but this something is not specified,

is unspecifiable. Which might be why one is able to name the something one has forgotten. In other words, it is possible that one might know a something that remains objectless: in this case, the statement "I know" remains an unverifiable one; a faith-based statement.

However, just because (s)he is unaware of something does not mean that it has no effect on her: even though (s)he might be completely blind to it, this doesn't mean that it cannot affect her. One does not have to have any knowledge of an oncoming bus for it to hit one.

This suggests that at each utterance of "I don't know," the very unknowability of the object that the "I" is approaching might still remain completely unknowable, even as it has an effect on her. The implication is that even as the "I" is being shaped, the subject may still remain completely in the dark – blind. This paradoxical situation is captured beautifully in Werner Hamacher's deceptively simple formulation, "under-standing is in want of understanding."[4] This is not a "want" in terms of a lack – where there is a shortfall in understanding. This is not even just an understanding that brings with it the potential of un-understanding, where un-understanding is a part of all understanding. This is an "understanding" that is inseparable from a "want of understanding" itself: where what is usually – keeping in mind that usually is of the order of *habit* – considered antonyms are different and yet un-differentiable at the same time.

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[4] Werner Hamacher, *Premises: Essays on Philosophy and Literature from Kant to Celan,* trans. Peter Fenves (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999), 1.

So, even as we posit the importance of habits, each encounter with a habit is always already fraught with the impossibility of differentiating habit as repetition from the singularity of each habit. Each time a habit comes into being, it is also in time – not just that it is a singular moment, but more importantly that the habit itself is being authored at that very point in time. And here, we should pay attention to the notion of point, keeping in mind Roland Barthes' teaching that the *punctum* potentially ruptures the *studium*.

So, even as it is precisely repetition – and a certain universality – which allows us to begin to address the text, to approach reading, the point of each encounter is also its potential breaking.

So, even though there is a general code – grammar – in which language operates, the fact is that each occurrence of language is situational, singular. Not only is there always already a tension between universality and singularity, as Paul de Man continually reminds us – with reference to the relationality between grammar and figurative language –, the singularity is the undoing of all universality itself: at each instance of an utterance, all grammatical universality is gone.

And it is only this potential unknowability that maintains communicability in its fullest sense – relationality – between the reader and the text; that allows each reading to be a positing, a position taken by the reader in relation with the text, that maintains the question in every answer, as it were. That resurrects the spirit in hermeneutics; where it is not so much a game of decoding based on a pre-set, existing, *a priori* code, but recalls that the hermeneutician is one who approaches the

text without ever pretending that (s)he can fully grasp it, understand by bringing under her stance.

In order for this to be so, we have to think of reading as an attempt to respond to the call of the text. Keeping in mind that the call can only come about as a result of that very act of reading itself. These were the very notions that Saint Augustine was meditating on in *Confessions*, which begins with a series of questions: "how can one call for what one does not recognise? Without such recognition, one could be calling for something else. Or is calling for you the way to recognise you?"[5] I*s one called, or does one have to answer a call?* More pertinently, *is there even a call if it is not answered* – which is a question of, *is the status of a call dependent on a response?* Here, we should keep in mind that the call Augustine was attempting to respond to is of a divine nature; a call that can often be elusive, and even difficult. One might even go further and posit that responding to such a call can often be dangerous – if not for oneself, at least for another. The case of Abraham and Isaac would seem to suggest so. Even though Isaac's killing was interrupted – one can call it a divine intercession – the intervention does not change the fact that his father was ready to cleft him in twain. In other words, this was a call of death. Or, more precisely, the response to the call of "Abraham, Abraham" was death. To be fair, one should take note of the fact that Abraham did attempt to ignore Yahweh's call: He had to call out at least twice.

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5 Saint Augustine, *Confessions*, trans. Gary Wills (London: Penguin Books, 2006), 3.

There is also a possibility that the first call differs from the second. And by responding to the latter, the murderous call, Abraham might well have effaced the possibility of another request, command even, from Yahweh. Perhaps the actual test was which call he would pick up. Or, one could posit – keeping in mind that Yahweh is a jealous god – that the wish for a sacrifice was awoken precisely because He was ignored. Even though this can only remain in the realm of speculation, what remains crucial to us is the fact that the response is a part of the call itself.

In his meditation on calls, on callings, on being called, Werner Hamacher contends that there is a difference between listening and hearing. Not just that the former is active whilst the latter is potentially passive. But more importantly, in order to listen, one has to cease hearing: for, one can hear many things at the same time, but to listen – in the precise sense of attending to, responding with – one has to select one, whilst ignoring all other sounds, voices, things.[6]

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6 In Hamacher's own words – which is a response to Peter Connor, and more specifically the latter's call: "Why is the call thought of as something which, rather than taken, taken down, or taken in – be it from a specific agent, subject, principle, preferably a moral one – will be given? And if each call which issues is destined to make demands on the one who is called (but this is also questionable), is it already settled that I will hear, that I will hear this call and hear it as one destined for me? Is it not rather the case that the minimal condition to be able to hear something as something lies in my comprehending it neither as destined for me nor as somehow oriented toward someone else? Because I would not need to hear it in the first place if the source and destination of the call, of the call as call, were already certain and determined. Following the logic of calling up, of the call […] and along with that the logic of demand, of obligation, of law, no call can reach its addressee simply as itself, and each hearing is consummated in the realm of the possibility not so much of hearing as of being able to listen up by ceasing to hear. Hearing ceases. It listens to a noise, a sound, a call; and so hearing always ceases hearing, because it could not let itself be determined other than as hearing to hearing any further. Hearing ceases. Always. Listen…" (Werner Hamacher, "Interventions," trans. Adam Bresnick, *Qui Parle* 1.2 [Spring 1987]: 38). Here,

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And perhaps this is why "reading is the starting point of all evil" – to read is to choose. A choice that opens a connection not only to the text, or to another, but the other within the self: since each call only comes into being (if one can even say that relationality comes into being) through and with a response, the call itself is chosen; but in order to even be able to choose, one also has to assume that one is called by that call. After all, the call might never have been meant for one: who hasn't picked up the phone on a wrong number dial. Or, even worse: a prank call.

Thus, it is not just because Yahweh is beyond mortal comprehension that one "could be calling for something else," but that there is always already something else in any call; a something that is quite possibility remains unknowable to one.

<p style="text-align:center">⊙</p>

Reading – touching.

Keeping in mind that the one touching and the one being touched are only separated by the touch itself; a non-essence, as it were.

One also must never forget Jean-Luc Nancy's reminder that space is required to touch. So, even as touching brings one closer, in contact even, with another, one and the other are forever separated by the touch. In fact, it is only through

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we should not dismiss the fact that we are eavesdropping on Hamacher in a footnote, in a conversation that is a part of – and always also apart from – the main discourse, whatever that even means. In attempting to attend to a particular notion that he opens – in listening – do we not also cease hearing the other possibilities opened in his response to Connor; enact a particular caesura? Cut off Werner Hamacher?

maintaining the barrier, the boundary, the skin – allowing all echoes of Lucretius to resound here – that there is no wounding, breaking, violence. Turning back to Nancy: one touches when there is no penetration. For, the moment skin is ruptured, there is an invasion – and the very space required for the communion is seized, effaced, ceases to be.[7]

Perhaps then, reading always only involves the surface. Which calls into question all the tropes of reading that ask us to dig under, to read into the text, to go below the surface. If reading is touching, then perhaps all one can read, all one can do whilst reading – in reading – is attempt to negotiate this surface, this border; at the risk of – perhaps only by – writing this very skin called reading into being. For, if reading can only occur in and whilst reading – and even this we remain unsure of – this means that in order to even call it reading, we have to first name it – write it into being – as such. But just because something is illegitimate – called into being without any possible verifiability; if reading is written into being as it occurs there is nothing beyond reading to say with certainty that it occurs – does not mean it is any less significant. A lack – perhaps even absence – of signification has no bearing on its ability to affect, have an effect.

If touching is a non-essence, this boundary is also non-existent in its existence. But just because there is a gap, distance, does not mean that one remains safe. For, in touching, one's skin is both the border and also the point of crossing. And it is only in crossing that the border itself is called into question.

7 Jean-Luc Nancy explored the notions of touching, penetration, and wounding, in relation to love and sex during his seminar – *Art, Community, and Freedom* – at the European Graduate School, June 2007.

Ever try crossing into another country *sans papiers*? Without first consulting the authorities?

Without being authorised to do so?

To read – to touch – to run the risk of having authored. And quite possible without daddy's permission.[8]

◉

Reading is anguish, and this is because any text, however important, or amusing, or interesting it may be (and the more engaging it seems to be), is empty – at the bottom it doesn't exist; you have to cross an abyss, and if you do not jump, you do not comprehend.

– Maurice Blanchot

What you risk reveals what you value.

– Jeanette Winterson

So, why read? Why put oneself through anguish? Why do anything that opens oneself, renders one vulnerable? But as Winterson teaches us, there is value in the act of risking itself – it "reveals." And since one cannot know the revelation until after the risk is undertaken, this is a leap of faith that has to be taken in all its blindness. Much like an act of initiation – a

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8 The relationality opened here between authority, authorship, and reading, owes a great debt to Avital Ronell – in particular *Loser Sons: Politics and Authority* (Illinois: University of Illinois Press, 2012). In her text, Ronell reminds us that authority comes from *autor* (father), and whilst attempts to assert authority might be seen as taking the place, role, of father, usurping his place even, it ultimately relies on – and ensures the unexorcisability of – daddy (even if he is a ghost).

rite we must pass – perhaps also a pledge of allegiance to the object or idea we value. For which – whom even – we are taking the risk.[9]

An aneconomic risk. Which perhaps only ends up revealing that one is willing to take risks.

One should never forget that reading foregrounds fictionality. Not just in terms of content but also in the relationality between the writer and what is written. One should keep in mind that the genre shapes one's approach: and here, we hear echoes of Derrida's reminder that each genre comes with its particular rules, laws, habits which shape our attempts to engage with the text: "you are free, but there are rules."[10] And since the reader only comes into being in that relation between herself and the text – that is in the reading – this also suggests that (s)he is part of this fictionality.

So, perhaps what is most at risk is the reader herself.

Just as "any text […] is empty – at the bottom it doesn't exist," every reader doesn't exist except in what is called, named, reading. But even as we say that, Blanchot warns us again that one only has to name due to the very absence of what is being named: "I say a flower! But in the absence where I mention it, through the oblivion to which I relegate the image it gives me, in the depths of this heavy word, itself looming up like an unknown thing, I passionately summon the darkness of this

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9 The question of the risk in, and of, reading was opened to me in a conversation with Esther Ng Xinlin at the English Department of Nanyang Technological University, Singapore, October 2010. Ng has pursued the same question in an unpublished essay entitled "The Question of Reading: What was Lost?" where she posits that reading itself brings our notions of reality into question.

10 Jacques Derrida, *Right of Inspection,* trans. David Wills (New York: The Monacelli Press, 1998), n.p.

flower, I summon this perfume that passes through me though I do not breathe it, this dust that impregnates me though I do not see it, this color which is a trace and not light."[11] In naming, what is called, *summoned* is precisely the "darkness" – that which is non-phenomenal. In naming the relationality reading, what is being summoned is the non-phenomenality of reading.

For, if reading is the name for an openness to the possibility of an encounter, this encounter cannot be constituted before its encounter. Hence, each encounter must remain unknowable until the encounter. And if every encounter is singular, each encounter might well be other to every other encounter. Thus, an encounter always already potentially undoes all encounters: which suggests that even after the encounter, the very knowability of the encounter remains in question.

Each reading is quite possibly the undoing of every reading – of reading itself.

It is "an abyss, and if you do not jump, you do not comprehend." But even jumping offers no guarantee of comprehension. All one potentially does is cross the abyss – the text itself remains far beneath, below, beyond, one. At the point of jumping, all one can know is that one is jumping.

But then, the question remains: what is the value? Or, how does one valuate what one values? More pertinently, can one ever evaluate a risk, particularly one which is singular, where all the entities involved – the reader, the reading, and what is being read – all come into being only in the encounter.

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11 Maurice Blanchot, *The Work of Fire,* trans. Charlotte Mandell (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995), 327.

Thus, is the very revelation the fact that what is valued is risk itself?

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This then leaves us in a bit of a quandary: if reading only occurs at the point of reading, it is an event. And as such, one cannot know of it until it happens. Which means that strictly speaking we can say nothing about reading, and only attend to its effects. Which is the implication of the question we opened with: *what happens when one reads?* At this point though, taking into consideration that the reader only comes into being at the point of reading, the question begins to take on strange inflections. For, if the *one* that is reading is dependent on the reading, then it cannot be solely a question of effects: that would require a stable notion of a *one* prior to reading. Of course, the subject that encounters reading comes before the reading occurs: however, if we are considering the notion of reading as an event, the subject that emerges from the encounter might well be altered in ways beyond the cognition of the subject. As Alain Badiou teaches us, the evental moment is the point where there is the opening of a "new world within an old world": phenomenally, the world might remain the same, but is altered, just ever so slightly; perhaps in ways that continue to escape the one(s) affected. And since the one(s) potentially remain blind to these possible changes, one can never fully know if they have occurred. Moreover, if there is no necessary phenomenality to these changes, not only are the subjects involved blind to them, the changes themselves – the cause, as

it were, of the changes – potentially remain unknown. In this sense, there is a double blindness: both of the subject and the object in question. Thus, the very status of the event itself is always already questionable. Not only is the question of *what happens to one* potentially unknowable, not only is the one possibly veiled, the very status of reading itself might well remain beyond us.

Hence, the question behind, perhaps even preceding, the effects of reading, the question in relation to our first question, might well be *what is reading?* Here, we should keep in mind that fact that reading itself is a relationality, a non-essence: thus, the question might well be a moot one, or at least one that leads to nothing. Another way of putting it – risking evocations of naming, giving it another name – is that *what is reading* itself, as a question, is a remainder, the question that is left – the question that remains a question. An abysmal question.

At this point the Wittgensteinian imperative to keep silent when there is nothing that can be known comes to mind. However, that would be a strategy of complete dismissal; where thinking as relationality is ignored. An effacement of the question itself. In order to attend to relationality, respond in relation to the other in the relationality without obliterating the otherness of the other, one has to respond to the other – gesture towards an answer as it were – whilst maintaining the question in every answer, every response. In other words, respond with a certain ironic distance; respond *as if* one can even respond.

This *as if* is not merely a form of David Hume's limited skepticism, but a structural *as if,* a pre-condition of think-

ing itself: not a suspension of disbelief so that you can believe in something, but more radically that in order to even begin thinking about something, you must act *as if* this thinking is even possible. But rather, this *as if* channels Samuel Beckett – in full acknowledgment of our inability to go on, but nonetheless heeding the call – even if this call is our own, from our own self – to just go on.

One must have a notion of what one is approaching – reading in this case – but neither close-off other possibilities nor even have a stable notion of the very idea itself. Or, in Jean-François Lyotard's words: "one must effectively have an Idea; but … this Idea is not, for us today, an Idea of totality."[12] Here, one should keep in mind that Lyotard is speaking as a response, in response, in a relationality with Jean-Loup Thébaud: so, we have to read his response as one, as a movement that is affected by, and that has effects on, another. It is a singular response, and not an "Idea of totality." Which might be what is suggested by "for us today": the very notion itself is temporal: there is no guarantee that it would be the same tomorrow, or a moment later; it might not even be the same if it was another "us" that he was speaking with. So, even as one is attempting to think the notion of reading, one must always leave open the possibility of non-reading; that non-reading is a part of reading. For, echoing Lyotard again, "as soon as one makes a determinant use of the Idea, then it is necessarily the Terror."[13] Here, one must pay attention that the Lyotard and Thébaud

12 Jean-François Lyotard & Jean-Loup Thébaud, *Just Gaming,* trans. Wlad Godzich (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), 88.
13 *Ibid.,* 92.

have a specific notion of terror, in which "the blow is not struck on the adversary but it is hoped that the blow will be borne by the third party, the witness, public opinion. In such a case, everyone is caught 'without freedom.'"[14] And what else is "the third party, the witness, public opinion" than the skin in between, the space for negotiation. In terror, what occurs is the devastation of the gap required to touch, for relationality, for reading. But, this does not mean there is no violence involved. For, if reading is an opening, not only are the effects of those possibilities – and the manner in which they affect one – unknown till they occur. Moreover, if each reading is a response to, it always already involves a choice, a choosing, of one over another. And since one cannot fully know what one is selecting until it is selected, this is a selection without *Grund* – an act of violence; picking one over all others, quite possibility without any legitimacy. In this sense, each time one reads, one can never be sure if one has mis-read, over-read, or under-read.

To compound matters, one must bear in mind the fact that in order to attend to reading as relationality, we have to also leave aside – at least momentarily – other notions of reading. Which means that a certain effacement always already takes place. Here, one must not forget that the conception of reading as relationality is a particular notion of reading, accompanied by its rules – in other words a game. And even as we are seeking to respond to the possibility of reading as an event – a singular justice when facing the law governing reading; grammar – we have to take into account Lyotard's question: "can there be then a plurality of justices? Or is the idea of justice the

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14 *Ibid.,* 70.

idea of a plurality? [Keeping in mind that] that is not the same question. I truly believe that the question we now face is that of a plurality, the idea of a justice that would at the same time be that of a plurality, and it would be a plurality of language games." However, he continues, "Can there be justice without the domination of one game upon the others?"[15] Does reading as response necessarily efface other notions of reading?

This is where it might be helpful to take a little detour, turn to Jacques Derrida and his meditation on democracy; in particular, his reminder that the risk of democracy is the admission of non-democratic elements through democratic means. The most obvious instance of this would be the rise of the National Socialist Party in Germany in the 1930s. In this sense, democracy is an approach to politics rather than a totalising idea. As long as the process is adhered to, only after a particular party comes to power can it be judged to be democratic, or otherwise – but never before. Thus, if one attempts to remain faithful to the possibility of democracy, it can never be a prescription – it can never be an "Idea" but a process, a becoming, one that cannot *a priori* exclude any possibility, even its antonymic other.[16]

This is perhaps why in the afterword to *Just Gaming,* in response to Lyotard's warning that "one should be on one's guard, I think, against the totalitarian character of an idea of justice, even a pluralistic one,"[17] Sam Weber notes: "if this is the case, it follows that the function of the great prescriber is not so much

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15 Lyotard & Thébaud, *Just Gaming,* 95.
16 Jacques Derrida, *Rogues: Two Essay on Reason,* trans. Pascale-Anne Brault & Michael Naas (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005).
17 Lyotard & Thébaud, *Just Gaming,* 96.

to prescribe, but rather to *proscribe*."[18] For, Weber continues, "by prescribing that no game, especially not that of prescription, should dominate the others, one is doing exactly what is simultaneously claimed is being avoided: one is dominating the other games in order to protect them from domination."[19] In order to protect the notion of reading as a response, paradoxically what has to be ignored – the phone call that has to be shut down, disconnected – is the possibility that reading is not a response. However, even whilst that is being said, we must pay attention to Lyotard's comment from earlier in the text: "boundaries are not borders… On the contrary, it is a place of ceaseless negotiations and ruses. Which means there is no reference by with to judge… [For,] we are always immanent to stories in the making, even when we are the ones telling the story to the other."[20] Thébaud's response – "because there is no outside"[21] – is picked up by Weber, channeling Freud and his reminder that "we can never be in a position that is totally 'immanent' to the stories we tell because – here as elsewhere – the stories are not 'immanent' to themselves."[22] Thus, even as we have to temporarily ignore the possibility of reading as non-response, we cannot ever completely shut it out: for, we can only judge after the reading has occurred whether it is a response or not. But then, through the very same means, non-response might well have snuck in through the door.

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18 Samuel Weber, "Afterword – Literature: Just Making It," in Lyotard & Thébaud*, Just Gaming*, 104.
19 *Ibid.*, 105.
20 Lyotard & Thébaud, *Just Gaming,* 43.
21 *Ibid.*
22 Weber, "Afterword," 111.

And even as we are learning from Sam Weber and his response, we must never forget that we are reading Weber's reading of Lyotard and Thébaud. Whilst keeping in mind Weber's lesson that "interpretation, like narration, is not simply external to the dream, it is an active participant in the dream itself (whilst still distorting it)."[23] Lest one contends that this is only true of dreams, one should not forget that reading is reliant on memory, mimesis, language, narratives – all of which come before one, are from elsewhere, and also always re-written with and through one. In this sense, even as we are reading, not only can we not know if we are responding, we cannot even be certain if we are writing that very response that we think we are reading. In other words, even as we are attempting to respond, we can never quite be sure if we are reading.

Thus, reading cannot be constituted even as an approach – for that would entail a certain knowledge about what is to come. At best, reading is a possibility.

Much like love.

Particularly in the "I do." An utterance which brings with it a nod to madness: a promise – keeping in mind that promises have no referentiality, and thus, no possibility of verification – where the future and the present collapse into one. For, this is the only way in which "when two become one" is possible: it could never have been about people, but about time itself: a promise that is made about the future, which is always in the past (when said, it is already over), lived out in the present. The "I do" as the point in which time itself is reified. A coming together which is also an opening – of the relationality

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23 Weber, "Afterword," 112.

between the two: a relationality that opens the possibility of "two becoming one" without any possibility of knowing what this possibility is.

The "I do" as nothing other than an affirmation to possibility.

As Hélène Cixous might say: "I tell you yes. I begin us with a Yes. Yes begins us."[24] Without even – or perhaps ever – knowing what one is saying yes to.

Reading: the opening of the possibility where the reader and her text become one – not a coming together that brings one under another, but an opening of the possibility of a reading without the possibility of knowing what reading itself is. Where all one can do is close one's eyes – even as they remain attentive, open, searching – take the plunge, and read as *if* one can.[25] As if for the first time; for each time is both the same and also already new. Where all one can do is to just read.

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24 Hélène Cixous, *Stigmata: Escaping Texts,* trans. Eric Prenowitz (London: Routledge, 2005), 107.

25 Opened – closed – closed whilst open – only momentarily.
Blink.
An act that doesn't know itself to be an act. For, it is an act insofar as it is a subject who blinks; but it is often also a reflex. In fact, when confronted with a blink, one can rarely distinguish between a cognitive act and a reflex by the other. Perhaps this is best captured in the colloquial saying, *in the blink of an eye*: in the phrase, we hear the echoes of both the temporality of this act, and the mystery surrounding it, as if something was seen in that instant, but what is seen can never be verified, can never be legitimized, and is only witnessed by the one who sees it, but who cannot even be sure if one has seen it. At most, one can speak of it – perhaps even testify to it – as if (s)he has seen it; naming the event of seeing, bringing with it all the possibilities of the fact that there may have been nothing to see, that all there was to see was something that always already is to come. When bearing witness to what is seen in her moment of blinking, all (s)he can do is offer a reading of it. All (s)he can do is offer a reading, where reading is the pre-relational relationality between the reader and the text; where reading is the willingness to be exposed to nothing but the possibility of reading; where reading is nothing but faith in the possibility of reading itself.
Reading – blinking.

I love you: I work at understanding you to the point of not understanding you, and there, standing in a wind, I don't understand you. Not understanding in a way of holding myself in front and of letting come. Transverbal, transintellectual relationship, this loving the other in submission to the mystery. (It's accepting, not knowing, forefeeling, feeling with the heart.) I'm speaking in favour of non-recognition, not of mistaken cognition. I'm speaking of closeness, without any familiarity.

– Hélène Cixous

But only in a footnote. Perhaps only to be touched – whilst jumping over.
After all, one can only fall downwards.
Abyssal love.

jessica aliaga lavrijsen ·
suspended in a moving night:
photography, or the shiny relation self–world

Que haya sueños es raro, que haya espejos,
que el usual y gastado repertorio
de cada día incluya el ilusorio
orbe profundo que urden los reflejos.

– Jorge Luis Borges, "Los espejos"

I'll be your mirror
Reflect what you are, in case you don't know […]
Let me stand to show that you are blind.
– The Velvet Underground & Nico, "I'll Be Your Mirror"

Framed seeing – photography – shows an ambiguous nature, as it is window to the world, shop window for desire, and vanity mirror for the self. The human action in seeing, in the gaze, and in our desire for capturing an instant that is nevertheless already lost, unveils photography as a mutable surface where the complex relation of self–other develops. The surface, which separates and unites subject and object, allows a dynamic relation between realities and perceptions. It is precisely in the in-betweenness of the ontological and epistemological break-ing, in the suspension "in the moving night," that approximation and intimacy can take place.

Every time somebody has tried to photograph something through glass – through a train window, a shop window, or through the protective glass of a framed painting or a photograph – it becomes evident: glass is not invisibly transparent, and the resulting picture will not ignore the mutable reflections

that inhabit its surface. The resulting photograph will include both sides, both realities: the reality in front of the camera, as well as the one behind. The very nature of this transparent and reflective surface is double, as it allows the sight of the world, attaching subject and objects, and at the same time, it separates and duplicates, by isolating and mirroring the subject who is gazing. The surface works as a window to the outside and as a mirror to the inside, both revealing and exposing. Inevitably, as Borges beautifully put it, "glass is on the watch," always.[1]

Because of this, we cannot ignore the surface that is in-between, the translucent barrier/access of glass; that the photographic lens is made out of the same smooth and shiny material of windows and mirrors. As we shall see, the act of photography, like glass, involves both a distance or barrier and an access or relation, just as the individual feels both attached and detached to the image. Moreover, photography has been associated with the Double, as the photographic act can be understood as the coming of the self as an other.[2] Photography reveals itself under this light as a surface where the world, desire, self and other, display their web of playful interconnections.

The human gaze is associated in the photographic act to the desire of the self towards capturing, and possessing, the world in an instant already lost. When looking through a shop window, the subject watches the framed world to be desired, and then, in a blink, his or her own reflection staring in on it. Photography is then sight–blindness, as our relation to the

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1 "nos acecha el cristal." Translated from Jorge Luis Borges, "Los espejos," *Obra Poética 1923/1985* (Barcelona: Emecé Editores, 1989), 125.
2 Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida,* trans. Richard Howard (New York: Hill & Wang, 1981), 44.

world is discontinuous, or rather, one of presence–absence. Jean Baudrillard says that "[t]he world is an object that is both imminent and ungraspable,"[3] but this could also be said for the subject behind the camera. Baudrillard asks: "Is photography a mirror which briefly captures this imaginary line of the world? Or is it a man who, blinded by the enlarged reflection of his own consciousness, falsifies visual perspectives and blurs the accuracy of the world?"[4]

We could answer his questions by suggesting that photography is both. A photograph is a – distorted – mirror of an instantaneous reality that was not fully or directly experienced at that time, and that is infinitely recreated or re-experienced by the spectator – who was not there at that time, but who is now there, giving meaning and existence to the perceived resulting photograph, which is both fixed and mutable. The photographic act captures the world as a mirror, since it needs the external existing reality to become what it is. However, it also needs someone to give sense to its content, a spectator to whom the reality of the photographic act is absolutely absent – as he or she was not there –, and who has to recreate it in his or her presence, projecting him or herself into these new meanings that occur every time the picture is perceived.

On the glassy surface of the lens, the window and the mirror, the subject and the object meet each other, merge and blur, and then one cannot tell whether the subject is in front of the

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3 Jean Baudrillard, "Photographies," 1997:
http://www.egs.edu/faculty/baudrillard/baudrillard-photographies.html
4 *Ibid.*

glass or behind it, inside or outside. Louis MacNeice's[5] verse "Corner Seat" describes it thus:

> *Suspended in a moving night*
> *The face in the reflected train*
> *Looks at first sight as self-assured*
> *As your own face*[6] *– But look again:*
> *Windows between you and the world*
> *Keep out the cold, keep out the fright;*
> *Then why does your reflection seem*
> *So lonely in the moving night?*[7]

The poem expresses precisely this presence and absence imposed by the glass, the connection and the isolation of human consciousness from the world that surrounds it and from itself. The window protects the traveller – the individual – no doubt, but it also separates him or her from what he or she sees, and from him- or her-self.

    The glass is neither a window nor a mirror, but a reversed window and a reversed mirror at the same time. They are reversed or rather bidirectional: the glass is both a window that shows the subject an outer world to observe, but that can also

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5 The Irish poet and playwright Louis MacNeice (1907–1963) belonged to the generation of "Thirties poets" – together with W.H. Auden, Stephen Spender, C. Day Lewis and Christopher Isherwood –, also known as "the Auden group."

6 The traveler in the poem, who is always a stranger in the world, encounters the Other, the face – "an opening in the opening" on the surface of glass. See Emmanuel Lévinas, *Humanism of the Other,* trans. Nidra Poller (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2006), 31. As Lévinas comments, the apparition of the Other is a *phenomenon,* and, thus, image, captive manifestation of its mute plastic form, epiphany of the face's *visitation*.

7 Louis MacNeice, "Corner Seat," *Collected Poems: 1925–1948* (London: Faber and Faber, 1949), 240.

be reversed, leaving the subject outside, with the cold and the fright; and it is also a mirror that shows the reflection of another, of an object – the reflection – that becomes subject, observing us – as if we were the object – self-assured. It is not an either/or issue as perceptive mechanisms can be reversed through the action of consciousness, which seems to imply always a certain doubling in the self. The surface, the picture, can be both object – something to observe – and subject – as the self is projected onto it. On the surface of the glass, in this barrier-access between self and world, both movements – from subject to object and its reversal – co-exist. As MacNeice put it in another poem, entitled "Snow": "there is more than glass between the snow and the huge roses"; and it is precisely this "more" where the photographic act dwells.[8]

The glass that separates and reflects, that divides and duplicates, has always been an artistic *topos* that leads to the re-questioning of representation and reality, and their relation (if it were real). Diane Arbus (1923–1971) used her cameras as analytical and critical tools. Her beautiful documentary pictures of marginal individuals in the nineteen-sixties tend to emphasise the subject's monstrosity, the Other in (front of) the spectator. As thinker and photographer Joan Fontcuberta has noted, there is the double existence of a subject who observes, on the one hand, and an alterity – that of society – that is observed.[9] Cindy Sherman (b. 1954), another postmodern photographer, believes in the impossibility of escaping rep-

8 Louis MacNeice, "Snow," in Michael Roberts (ed.), *The Faber Book of Modern Verse* (London: Faber and Faber, 1982 [1936]), 281.
9 "la doble existencia, por un lado, de un sujeto que observa y, por el otro, de una alteridad – la sociedad – que es observada." Translated from Joan Fontcuberta, *El beso de Judas: Fotografía y verdad* (Barcelona: Gustavo Pili, 2004 [1997]), 45.

resentation and, thus, denies the aforementioned double existence – if there is nothing beyond codified languages, then, there will not be an external reality; an Other, distinct from the observing subject. In my opinion, both positions could be reconciled in the photographic act, as in the previous example of the traveller who looks through/at the train window. The act of gazing is always double. As Fontcuberta explains, "the language – photography – establishes the bridge between object and subject."[10] The metaphor of the bridge expresses this doubleness, since bridges connect, and indicate an essential separation too.

The (meta-)reflection on the gaze seems to be an essential preoccupation of photographers from the very beginnings of photography. What has been considered the first photograph, taken by Joseph Nicéphore Niépce in 1827, shows Niépce's window and the views he saw everyday from his study.[11] It is worth noting at this point that the first photographs were mirror-reversed images, and that the silver salts were put on glass plates. Mirrors and windows have thus always been at the very heart of the photographic act. Many photographers have used the double nature of the glass aesthetically and metaphysically, turning it into a symbol of the ontological ambiguity – anxi-

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10 "el lenguaje – la fotografía – establece el puente entre objeto y sujeto." Translated from Fontcuberta, *El beso de Judas,* 45.
11 The image is entitled *View from the Study Window*. In the window of his workroom at his Saint-Loup-de-Varennes country house, Le Gras, Niépce set up a *camera obscura*, placed within it a polished pewter plate coated with bitumen of Judea, and uncapped the lens. "After at least a day-long exposure of eight hours, the plate was removed and the latent image of the view from the window was rendered visible by washing it with a mixture of oil of lavender and white petroleum which dissolved away the parts of the bitumen which had not been hardened by light." Harry Ranson Center "The First Photograph" (University of Texas).

ety? – that follows Cartesian or dual thinking.[12] We feel the impulse of wanting to recognise the content or meaning of a representation either in the subject or in the object; we do not assign it to both, or to something un-definable between both, or to the sum of both realities.[13] Nevertheless, we sometimes realise that the content of the relation between subject and object, between self and other, can be located indifferently in the object or in the subject, awakening epistemological doubts, as representation reveals itself as ambiguously dual.

In front of the glass, we are subject–object, self–other, single–double. Solitary, isolated and distanced, like MacNiece's traveller, in two pieces, since we are company and presence to our selves. The image that contemplates itself is never alone, much like Jorge Luis Borges or Buster Keaton[14] when they were in the company of a mirror or a window. The reflected image stays in a state of both fusion – images over-impose on each other – and also separation – the inviolable glass separates both images. As Jean-Luc Nancy formulates it, "[t]hrough the mark that it is, it [the image] establishes simultaneously a withdrawal and a passage that, however, does not pass."[15] It seems

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12 From Joseph Sudek's classical atelier-window to more contemporary examples such as Sabine Hornig's transparent picture (exhibited in a shop-window installation in Malmö, 1995), Uta Barth's intimate in-between window (2000), Naoya Hatakeyama's *Slow Glass* series (2002), or Ryuji Miyamoto's sightseeing window ("Palast," 2004), photographers have focused their attention on the surface of glass.
13 Kelley Ross, "Ontological Undecidability," 1996. My emphasis.
14 Buster Keaton is the protagonist of *Film* (1964), written by Samuel Beckett and directed by Alan Schneider. Film takes as its basis Berkeley's theory *esse est percipi*. The protagonist feels haunted by perception, and he ends up covering windows and mirrors in order to be left alone in peace. Nevertheless, even after all outside perception has been suppressed, self-perception remains. After tearing apart all the pictures he still feels chased by himself.
15 Jean-Luc Nancy, *Being Singular Plural,* trans. Robert D. Richardson & Anne E. O'Byrne (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000), 3.

that the separation imposed by the glass, its distancing, is the cause of the feeling of loneliness in the subject separated from the object, from the other, in the conscious thinking of him- or her-self as a hermetic and isolated self. It is precisely this separation between subject and object that allows the existence of desire, causing movement towards the out-side and to the in-side. As we shall see, it is the in-between space in which approximation can take place.

The observer sees him- or her-self reflected onto that which he or she wants to observe, and consequently, it prevents him or her from escaping into the other. The gazing traveller no longer feels isolated. But then, it seems that the reflection, the reflected other, is the isolated one. As Jean Baudrillard has commented, it is not the other that catches the photographer's attention, but what is left of the other when the photographer is not there (*quand lui n'est pas là*). We are never there in the real presence of the object.[16] This absence-presence has more do to with time in a space, rather than with space alone. The concept of time is also essential.

The moment of the photographic act, which is an irreversible instant, immediately passed, should not be confused with the simultaneity of real time.[17] Reality as experienced and the photographic act have different "times." As MacNeice's traveller is on the train staring at and through the window, there is a change in perception as the subject changes his focus from the surface to that which is behind, at a distance. He or she cannot really look at both realities at the same time, as human

16 Jean Baudrillard, "La Photographie ou l'écriture de la lumière: Littéralite de l'image," in *L'Echange impossible* (Paris: Galilée, 1999), 179.
17 Jean Baudrillard, "Photographies."

sight can only focus on a given depth of field: the human eye focuses on an object at a given distance through "accommodation," that is, it does this through a mechanism that allows us to change our focus. When we want to focus on a close object, we involuntarily contract the ciliary muscles, which pull the ciliary body slightly forward and inward, reducing the tension on the suspensory ligaments attached to the lens capsule. When the tension is reduced, the elastic lens becomes thicker and we focus on objects further away.[18]

It could be philosophically argued that both the outer landscape and the inner reflection co-exist on the surface of the glass, as in a photograph. However, when dealing with human sight scientifically, it becomes, physically, an either/or issue. Our ciliary muscles are either relaxed and we see what is distant, or they are tense and we see what is close. Nevertheless, in photography, the eye of the camera can catch both ontological realities – here–there, inside–outside, in front of–behind – through the choice of a closed aperture – the lesser its aperture, the greater the depth of field – but it can only do so through an alternation sight–blindness alternation. A camera catches the world's light through a quick opening and closing of the shutter, a mechanical blink.[19] The interval between the opening and the closing of the shutter depends on the selected speed

18 Anon., "Ciliary muscle," *Wikipedia*: "When the ciliary muscle contracts, it pulls itself forward and moves the frontal region toward the axis of the eye. This releases the tension on the lens caused by the zonular, which causes the lens to become more spherical, and adapt to short range focus. The other way around, relaxation of the ciliary muscle causes the zonular fibers to become taut, flattening the lens, increasing the focal distance, increasing long range focus."

19 The eye is also said to observe better when interrupting observation. As Barthes explained in *Camera Lucida*: Ultimately – or at the limit – in order to see a photograph well, it is best to look away or close your eyes (57).

that will determine the exposure time of the image. In a sense, through this necessary blinking that produces the photograph, the world is both present and absent, reproduced and erased. As Baudrillard points out, the world is interrupted because of the subject's discontinuity – made patent in the reflex blinking of the human eye and of the camera shutter: "It falls to the very grain of the details of the object, the play of lines and light, to signify this interruption of the subject – and hence the interruption of the world."[20]

When we take a camera we realize the existence of reflections and backgrounds on the double-natured glass. However, we mostly ignore the process as we automatically focus on that which interests us. Accommodation is a reflex movement we forget about, like blinking. In a sense, if we want to see both realities we have to "blink" epistemologically, to shift our perception instantaneously, to see one and (then) the other, both existing simultaneously, but perceived through their separation in time, rather than in place.

I have said before that time is as important as space with regard to photography. Photography always includes a trace of the reference world inside itself – as it is produced by the impact of photons – both spatial and temporal, excluding part of the world it references. Through the photographic image, "the world asserts its discontinuity, its fragmentation, its artificial instantaneousness."[21] Pictures multiply, re-present, and at the same time erase the world and the self, as they represent a fro-

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20 Jean Baudrillard, "La Photographie ou l'écriture de la lumière," 183.
21 *Ibid.*

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zen image, which is inevitably not-there. They do not present a time and a reality still there.

At the beginning of the nineteenth century, photography required very long exposure times because the materials were not highly photosensitive. Pictures like the one taken by Niépce at Le Gras with the camera obscura required day-long exposures. At the time, movement could not be registered properly, unlike the manner in which cameras can capture it today; only static objects could be photographed. Two decades later, as chemistry and technology developed, Louis Jacques-Mande Daguerre reduced the exposure times to 20–30 minutes for his daguerreotype[22] of the Boulevard du Temple in Paris (1838). Passing pedestrians and carriages were absolutely absent from the daguerreotype, as the emulsion had no time to register them. The street appears completely deserted except for soneone who was having his boots brushed. This person stood still long enough to be registered on the emulsion. Two years later, William Henry Fox Talbot invented the calotype process,[23] which worked by developing the latent image of a briefer exposure. The photographer used this new process to make a small experimental portrait of his wife, Constance; it had an exposure time of only three minutes. Because of these progresses, in October 1840, the human figure had accommodated to the photographic medium. Technological devices continued developing and improving in the nineteenth and twentieth century, and cameras and emulsions adapted to human timing, reducing exposure to a second or less, reaching

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22 The image is exposed directly onto a mirror-polished surface of silver bearing a coating of silver halide particles deposited by iodine vapor.
23 The image is exposed directly on the paper, coated with silver iodide.

its highest synchronicity with human time-perception with Edwin Land's 1948 invention of the so-called "instant photography." Digital photography was introduced in the nineteen eighties.

Photography evolved towards the human conceptions of space and time,[24] and individuals started – fragmentarily – to register their lives, those moments and persons they wanted to preserve from the passing of time, from movement. These snapshots could be compared in a sense to a continuous "blinking," perceiving things just as consecutive independent fixed instants. Moreover, photography is associated with an objective delight common to most individuals. This anthropocentric inclination seems logical, as the human has always been a key interest in photography, as we feel an essential fascination for our equals, for human faces and expressions. As Jean-Luc Nancy states, "[t]he photo – […] an everyday, banal photo – simultaneously reveals singularity, banality, and our curiosity about one another."[25] It is precisely this human curiosity that is at the very core of the photographic act.

Recent biological and cognitive studies have explained that our identity and our relation towards others is not a matter of distinguishing self from other, and that our fascination with the image exceeds the self. It is not only related to self-consciousness but to social abilities such as behaviour and language acquisition. In the early nineteen nineties, neuroscientists discovered "mirror neurons" in monkeys, chimpanzees,

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24 With the exceptions of scientific photography, whose focus can be as immense as the universe and as minimal as a neutron.
25 Jean-Luc Nancy, *Being Singular Plural,* 8.

human beings – and in some birds.[26] Mirror neurons are located in the brain's premotor cortex, and they fire "when an animal performs an action," and also "when it sees another (especially a conspecific) perform the same action, or even when it sees less than the whole action but can see enough to infer the other's animal intention."[27] The neuron "mirrors" the behaviour of the other animal, as though the observer were itself acting. As Boyd further states, "when we (and apes) look at others, we find both them and ourselves."[28] It seems impossible, thus, not to look at our own reflection in a mirror or in a window, as we are designed to be curious and to look at faces. There is where our fascination with portraits resides. As Nancy comments, "[a] portrait touches, […] [w]hat touches is something that is borne to the surface from out of an intimacy."[29] The surface hides an intimacy, "[t]he image throws in my face an intimacy that reaches me in the midst of intimacy."[30] This intimacy created on the surface is what draws connections between self and other(s).

Mirror neurons are thought to be important for a person's understanding of the actions of other people – developing empathy and mindreading – and for learning new socio-cognitive skills by imitation. They also contribute to the creation of a "theory of mind," which refers to our ability to infer another person's mental state from experiences and behaviour. Human beings can hold multiple models of reality in their minds, since

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26 Brian Boyd, *On the Origin of Stories: Evolution, Cognition and Fiction* (London: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2009), 124.
27 *Ibid.*
28 *Ibid.*
29 Jean-Luc Nancy, *Being Singular Plural,* 4.
30 *Ibid.*

we are "capable of meta-representation – of understanding the process of representation – and involving beliefs as well as desires, goals, and intentions."[31] As Boyd explains, "'[b]eing affected by others is a design feature of human beings.' Through mirror neurons and other systems we are wired for emotional contagion."[32] Intimacy is thus shared and communicated through the desiring gaze, which reveals itself as an essential human mechanism to cope with the world and to learn about the self and about others. There is an essential intimacy in the gaze and in the captured image. As Nancy recognises:

> If it is possible for the same line, the same distinction, to separate and to communicate or connect (communicating also separation itself…), that is because the traits and lines of the image (its outline, its form) are themselves (something from) its intimate force: for this intimate force is not "represented" by the image, but the image is it, the image activates it, draws it and withdraws it, extracts it by withholding it, and it is with this force that the image touches us.[33]

Returning to MacNeice's poem, it seems as if the traveller and his or her image do not belong to the same time. Maybe because we tend to think that they cannot co-exist simultaneously on the same ontological level – the reality must be either in front or behind the glass – that we tend to experience it as

31 Brian Boyd, *On the Origin of Stories,* 145.
32 *Ibid.,* 163.
33 Jean-Luc Nancy, *Being Singular Plural,* 5.

something temporal, past. Baudrillard defines objective illusion as the physical impossibility of the co-being of objects in real time; everything exists as a recorded/printed version, in the absolute disorder of temporal scales, separated and isolated.[34] The act of representation, of duplication, seems to prevent the simultaneous co-existence of the represented and the representation, even on the surface of the glass. As Borges wrote:

> *Todo acontece y nada se recuerda*
> *en esos gabinetes cristalinos*
> *donde, como fantásticos rabinos,*
> *leemos los libros de derecha a izquierda.*[35]

Nevertheless, cinema – photography inserted in time – has shown that different realities, different images, can co-exist, since the human eye "remembers" an image when it has already disappeared and "sees" its trace, which merges with the next one. Persistence of vision,[36] as this effect is called, is exclusive of the eye/brain, as if designed to allow humans to ignore the discontinuity of sight, and that of the world and the self. Actually, it is in their disappearance that images move and breathe, and in their traces that the world and the self appear; ambiguously, discontinuously. Only the instant of the photographic act that stays at the surface and ignores the ontological boundary of glass, or the human eye that "sees" even while

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34 *Ibid.*

35 Jorge Luis Borges, "Los espejos," 25.

36 Persistence of vision is the phenomenon of the eye by which an afterimage is thought to persist for approximately 1/25th of a second on the retina, to compensate for the blackout that would be experienced otherwise through blinking.

blinking, allow the existence and connection of realities, as the different images, the previous and the latter, the here and the there, fuse.

It is the temporary disconnection, the act blinking that allows a change, a movement. Our intense interest in seeing the other(s) is combined with our evolved capacity to understand one another through a "theory of mind." Images – in sight and in photography – have to combine themselves through the change of point of view, of perspective, or of depth of field, in order to have some relational and contextual meaning.

There is also a spatial disconnection, an interruption of the meaning, that occurs in the *punctum*, that allows the break of a fixed system and an escape of the self towards the other(s). Roland Barthes' *punctum* – which describes the effect of a small detail that "shoots" out from an image, and "pierces" the subject because the detail signifies something outside the parameters of language,[37] being thus a hole, a cut, an *aporia* – relates to the subject while reaffirming the photograph's always delusive and ungraspable nature, as the *punctum* escapes our total comprehension.

It is through the empathic force, present in the temporal and spatial disconnection that allows movement, that we are removed from the world and removed from ourselves, that allows the engagement in a never-ending dialogue or transfer self-other. The separation between subject and object – be it spatial, as glass, or temporal, as blinking – of the photographic act, results not in Death, as Roland Barthes has posited,[38] but

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37 Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida,* 65.
38 *Ibid.,* 47.

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in the creation of the space for desire and relation, allowing the existence of a centripetal movement that brings different realities closer in the alternation of perceptions. As Lévinas states, the Desire for Others is fundamental movement, pure transport, sense.[39]

As a conclusion, we could state that the ambiguous or double nature of framed seeing and of the surfaces, that both present the world and reflect the viewer, allow an intermittent engagement self-other(s). It is in the flickering perception – in the "blink" – where self and other(s) relate to each other, and where the world exists and keeps moving.

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[39] Emmanuel Lévinas, *Humanism of the Other,* 30.

brian willems ·
emerging sight, emerging blindness

Be shellèd, eyes, with double dark
And find the uncreated light
    – Gerard Manley Hopkins, "The Habit of Perfection"

When it has untied its old kinships, the eye is able to open
at the unchanging, ever present level of things; and of all the
*senses and all sources of knowledge (*tous les saviors*), it is*
intelligent enough to be the most unintelligent by repeating
so skillfully its distant ignorance.
    – Michel Foucault, *The Birth of the Clinic*

He was the one surviving Zug: he himself was the monster
he had been sent to kill.
    – Damon Knight, *Beyond the Barrier*

This essay covers two main topics: the role of the "double vi-
sion" of the sight/nonsight of blinking in selected fiction of
Neil Gaiman and China Miéville, and an examination of the
role of blindness and sight surrounding "Molyneux's question."
In Gaiman's work "double vision" functions as a synchronic
representation of diachronic events. This representation is
important because it makes fleeting change visible. However,
China Miéville's novel *Perdido Street Station* provides an im-
plicit critique of this "double-vision" by re-locating moments
of movement within the experience Gaiman describes. The
importance of the role of blinking in a discussion of vision
and the blind brings forth a question of the ability to see dark-
ness itself. While a number of historical and contemporary

thinkers are engaged with in this trajectory, it is the burgeoning field of speculative realism (Latour; Meillassoux; Harman) that provides a lodestone. It is here that the *immanence* of the thought of Badiou (but also Deleuze, strongly brought forth in DeLanda) is centralized, meaning the manner in which the new arises from what already is, rather than from any sort of transcendental perspective. This can be seen, for example, in Quentin Meillassoux's positing of the question of *ancestrality:* if all knowledge is based on the observer (relativism), then how can we know that the earth is 4.5 billion years old, when there were no observes on the earth to observe it for much of that time? The answer comes about through a new understanding of the object which exists before givenness which is developed through the language of mathematics and science, although this perspective will also be seen in the scientific attunement of Nietzsche and others. Thus, it can be argued that the relational or relativistic position of much cultural theory and continental philosophy should be augmented if not replaced by a theory of the object in which it will be seen that a development of a representation of the lack of relation between a subject and object (Harman's dormant objects) can be the locus of where a more fundamental understanding of such a relation is to be found.

<p style="text-align:center">⊙</p>

STUPIDITY, ANIMALITY, MULTIPLICITY, INABILITY. A number of works by contemporary fantasy author Neil Gaiman represent diachronic events synchronically. In his novel *Anansi*

Boys, Gaiman calls these events moments of "double vision."[1] These moments consist of the co-presencing of the changed and the unchanged within a single being at one moment in time. While change is everywhere around us, in germination, growth and decay, the term "double-vision" indicates the potential of seeing more than one side of a transformation simultaneously, thereby presenting a moment of stasis within change. One of the important consequences of Gaiman's double-vision is that the movement of change then becomes easier to see.

While Gaiman is perhaps best known for writing the *Sandman* series of comics, here I will be looking at three prose works: two novels, *American Gods* and *Anansi Boys,* and the short story "How to Talk to Girls at Parties."

Gaiman's novel *American Gods* tells the story of a pantheon of deities who were carried to America by their believers' thoughts and deeds, and who are now dying out because of a lack of believers and their sacrifices. These "old gods" decide to go to war with the new gods of technology, consumer culture and media, whose worshipers abound. In this sense, as Gaiman has stated in a *Rain Taxi* interview, the novel is political in that it is about immigration and "the way that America tends to eat other cultures."[2] At the center of the novel lies Shadow, to whom the world of the gods is initially invisible. He eventually learns that he is the son of Mr Wednesday, who

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1 Neil Gaiman, *Anansi Boys* (New York: Harpertorch, 2005), 151.
2 Rudi Dornemann & Kelly Everding, "Dreaming American Gods: an Interview with Neil Gaiman," *Rain Taxi* (Summer 2001):
http://www.raintaxi.com/online/2001summer/gaiman.shtml.

is actually the god Odin, among many other incarnations. Mr Wednesday enlists Shadow into the fight between the old gods and the new.

The first experience of double-vision that Shadow undergoes happens at the roadside attraction of The House on the Rock, and it is located in an experience of the animal. Mr Wednesday has attempted to gather as many of the old gods as possible in an attempt to rally the troops. Amid the exhibition rooms Shadow meets a number of Mr Wednesday's acquaintances, although none of them seem to have any god-like qualities. The transformation of these men into gods takes place on an indoor carousel. As the carousel spins, Shadow begins to see things differently: "The images that reached his mind [A] made no sense: [B] it was like seeing the world through the [C] multifaceted jeweled eyes of a dragonfly, but [C] each facet saw something completely different, and he was [D] unable to combine the things he was seeing, or thought he was seeing, [A] into a whole that made any sense."[3] This quote presents four elements of double-vision, which are then given a surplus of co-presencing as the scene progresses below: [A] a lack of making sense; [B] animal vision; [C] multiplicity; and [D] not-doing.

The experience described here is framed at beginning and end by a lack of sense [A]. The images that reach Shadow's mind "made no sense" at first, and in the end he is "unable" to make the images into a whole which "made any sense." Such a "removal" from sense has traditionally been taken up from a number of perspectives: the voice of the animal, madness and the kernel of trauma resistant to symbolic reification. Such a

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3 Neil Gaiman, *American Gods: The Author's Preferred Text* (London: Headline, 2004), 144.

refusal finds another theoretical counterpart in Ronell's *Stupidity* which traces the unthought of puerility throughout a number of literary and philosophical sources. Stemming from the doubled primal scene of Deleuze's call for stupidity as the adequate determination of thought in *Difference and Repetition* and Samuel Beckett's claim to his distinction from Joyce in his well-known *New York Times* interview from 1966 with Israel Schenker where he states that "Joyce tended toward omniscience and omnipotence as an artist, but I'm working with impotence, ignorance,"[4] Ronell's investigation of stupidity takes the form of a double-figure which both uncovers its traumatic resonances which open up structures of knowledge to change and difference and its oppressive dismissiveness: "Whether in the precincts of the literary or the psychological, stupidity offers a whirligig of imponderables: as irreducible obstinacy, tenacity, compactedness, the infissurable, it is at once dense and empty, cracked, the interminable 'duh' of contemporary usage. A total loser, stupidity is also that which rules, reproducing itself in clichés, in innocence and the abundance of world. It is at once unassailable and the object of terrific violence."[5] Thus, stupidity is a figure of the double, in that it is "at once" both ubiquitous and disruptive. The "ability" of stupidity to be simultaneously multiple is because of its *removal* from sense, following the coordinates of potentiality laid out above. In fact, for Ronell, not-doing is in a sense ethical: "It becomes ethically necessary to find a way rigorously to affirm nonworking, to

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4 Quoted in Avital Ronell, *Stupidity* (Urbana & Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2002), 32–3.
5 *Ibid.,* 38.

subsidize rest, laziness, loosing around without succumbing to common criminalizations or devaluations of the logic of other activities."[6] Thus, there is a need to foreground the practicality of the "removal" from doing of theory.

One manner in which to represent "not doing" for humanity is through a connection with the animal. The second element [B] of the quote from *American Gods* indicates that the visual experience Shadow is undergoing is like the "multifaceted jeweled eyes of a dragonfly." While the tens of thousands of lenslets of a dragonfly eye actually allow it to see in a radius of 360° rather than in any sort of fractured sense,[7] which is perhaps indicated by Gaiman's use of "like […] but" in this quote, what is important about the metaphorical use of insect vision is what it indicates regarding the possibilities of seeing. As I have argued elsewhere, a powerful example of this metaphor can be found in the artwork of Diane Thater, whose *Knots + Surfaces* (2001), for example, provides a representation of the discovery made by mathematician Barbara Shipman that when a schemata of a six-dimensional object is turned into a two-dimensional one, the curves produced are similar to the pattern that bees produce when dancing. Thus, Thater created an installation in which the multiple vision of the "quantum bee" is represented through multiple projections on multiple planes of a gallery-articulated space.[8] What Gaiman and Thater are

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6 Ronell, *Stupidity,* 56.
7 Brian Handwerk, "Animals Eyes Provide High-Tech Optical Inspiration," *National Geographic News* (2005):
http://news.nationalgeographic.com/news/2005/12/1205_051205_animal_eyes_2.html.
8 Brian Willems, "Diana Thater: Pet Fixations." *artUS* 27 (2009), 94. However, fracturedness is not to be coupled with totality. See Brian Massumi's history of "total vision" in *Parables for the Virtual: Movement, Affect, Sensation* (Durham & London: Duke University

trying to do is represent the world of one creature to another. In a sense this acts as a reading of Jakob von Uexküll's *Umwelt*, otherwise known as a function-circle. As Von Uexküll describes in his *Theoretical Biology,* the function circle of the animal consists of responses to stimuli, which then affect the outer world, which then influence the stimuli. Such a periodic circle is the function-circle of the animal: "For each individual animal, however, its function-circles constitute a world by themselves, within which it leads its existence in complete isolation."[9] For the animal, the world is always something that is crossed out: inaccessible *as a whole*; the human is able to access the world as a whole through language, which is the underpinning unthought of Heidegger, as Derrida has shown in *Of Spirit.*[10] However, Gaiman's use of animal vision indicates an opening up rather than a closing off which, as Agamben argues in his reading of Von Uexküll in *The Open,* also happens on the level of the animal itself, as can be seen in how the threads of a spider web "are exactly proportioned to the visual capacity of the eye of the fly, who cannot see them and therefore flies

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Press, 2002), 144–52.

9 Jakob von Uexküll, *Theoretical Biology* (New York: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co., 1926), 126. One of the most important contributions of Von Uexküll is disregarding a superiority of the human's function circle when compared to the animals: both are seen through their "limitations."

10 However, as Simon Critchley argues, Heidegger's description of crossed-out being is "an attempt to render Being invisible that simply makes it more visible," *Very Little – Almost Nothing: Death, Philosophy, Literature* (London: Routledge, 1997), 17. Therefore, the unthought of Heidegger was stated thus: his investment in developing the gap between the poverty of the non-human being and the human-being's being-in-the-world only makes poverty more visible, and thus, in a reflexive manner, enacts an allegory of the human condition. Or, as Floyd Merrell claims: "Within each organism, along the functional cycle or information-conveying loop, external signals enter and become internal signals, having been processed in the transition according to our particular capacities," *Sensing Corporeally: Toward a Posthuman Understanding* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2003), 266.

toward death unawares. The two perceptual worlds of the fly and the spider are absolutely uncommunicating, and yet so perfectly in tune that we might say that the original score of the fly, which we can also call its original image or archetype, acts on that of the spider in such a way that the web the spider weaves can be described as 'fly-like.'"[11] Thus the mutual development between fly and spider is both an example of the "with" but also of distance, as they are "uncommunicating," an aspect which forms a key point in the discussion of speculative realism below, because it indicates a presence of something beyond the givenness of perception.

The third and fourth elements of the quote from *American Gods,* multiplicity [c] and not-doing [d], are often paired in critical work on potentiality. However, an important distinction needs to be made. Shadow is not in a position of "potentiality" here. It is not that he could make sense of what he is seeing but is *choosing not to*. Rather, he is "unable" to do so. This inability removes him from the economy of potentiality because there is no "writing table" of ability which can come forth when that ability is not exercised. In this sense Shadow is dumb, or stupid, in that he simply *cannot*. However, this stupidity is also connected to the multiple. This inability needs to be taken seriously. It is connected not only to Ronell's work but also the "uncommunicating" aspect that Agamben notes in the relationship between the spider and the fly. In other words, what is being developed is a relationship along the lines of what Graham Harman calls the "dormant object," meaning

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11 Giorgio Agamben, *The Open: Man and Animal,* trans. Kevin Attell (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004), 42.

an object that exists outside the human domain, even outside any relationship to the human domain, although nonetheless it is something to which we have access:

> Yet there may be other objects that do have real parts that make them real things, but still have no relation to anything further; precisely for this reason, they will currently have no psyche. We might call them "dormant objects," a notion excluded in advance by every relationist philosophy. The dormant is the sleeping, and though perfect sleep may be impossible for dreamers like us, nightly sleep is our closest approach to the freedom from relation in which we are most ourselves. Perhaps God is not the most alert of all beings, but rather the most oblivious.[12]

Harman is not describing the "not-doing" of potentiality; he is describing objects without relation, rather than those which could have but choose not to have relation. However, such "stupid" objects are also connected to multiplicity, freedom, even the omnipotence of God. Thus, Harman delineates much of the work of this essay: developing the coordinates of the relationship between the relationless and change.

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THE DIACHRONIC IN THE SYNCHRONIC. The scene under discussion from *American Gods* takes place in front of a carousel. The circular nowhere of the carousel mirrors the man-

....
12 Graham Harman, *Circus Philosophicus* (Hants: O-Books, 2010), 71.

ner in which Mr Wednesday's human friends turn into gods – through a metamorphosis-within-stasis. The description of Shadow's actual experience of double-vision takes place as he observes Mr Nancy (who is the father of the two "Anansi boys" in Gaiman's follow-up novel of the same name).

> [Shadow] was looking at Mr Nancy, an old black man with a pencil moustache, in his check sports jacket and his lemon-yellow gloves, riding a carousel lion as it rose and lowered, high in the air; and, *at the same time, in the same place,* he saw a jeweled spider as high as a horse, its eyes an emerald nebula, strutting, staring down at him; and simultaneously he was looking at an extraordinarily tall man with teak-colored skin and three sets of arms, wearing a flowing ostrich-feather headdress, his face painted with red stripes, riding an irritated golden lion, two of his six hands holding on tightly to the beast's mane; and he was *also seeing* a young black boy, dressed in rags, his left foot all swollen and crawling with black flies; *and last of all, and behind all these things,* Shadow was looking at a tiny brown spider, hiding under a withered ochre leaf.[13]

What Shadow seems to be experiencing are multiple stages of a historical timeline all "at the same time" and "in the same place." Shadow is experiencing all of the morphings of Mr Nancy simultaneously, the instantiations of what he once was and what he now is, which includes spiders, a boy, and various gods. Although Mr Nancy has taken on many forms during his

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13 Gaiman, *American Gods,* 144. My emphasis.

life, his past forms are not left behind. However, he is not some kind of shape-changer either. He is not sometimes a spider and sometimes a small boy. And yet, he is all of these things at once. Shadow's experience of this diachronic within the synchronic begins to indicate a double-vision of metamorphoses.

So, on the one hand, an argument could be made to add a new chronotope to those Mikhail Bakhtin laid out in his famous essay "Forms of Time and Chronotope in the Novel." Perhaps the "chronotope of the carousel" in which multiple events which are diachronically distant become simultaneously represented in story-time, although needing to be represented one-after-the-other on the page. However, a more fruitful approach may be an understanding of why Bakhtin sees new forms of the representation of time in the novel as important. Toward the end of his essay Bakhtin asks: "What is the significance of all these chronotopes? What is most obvious is their meaning for *narrative*. They are the organizing centers for the fundamental narrative events of the novel. The chronotope is the place where the knots of narrative are tied and untied. It can be said without qualification that to them belongs the meaning that shapes narrative."[14] Thus, scenes of double-vision, because they posit an unusual representation of time in narrative, can be seen as a locus for deriving meaning from the novel. But the reason that chronotopes carry meaning is a structure similar to that of boredom: in the chronotope, "Time becomes, in effect, palpable and visible."[15] Thus, as ar-

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14 Mikhail Bakhtin, "Forms of Time and Chronotope in the Novel," in *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays,* trans. Caryl Emerson & Michael Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981), 250.
15 Mikhail Bakhtin, "Forms of Time and Chronotope in the Novel," 250.

gued above, the foregrounding of time can be connected to the foregrounding of being, which of course is unbearable, thus we always choose the pain of life over the trauma of boredom, as Schopenhauer has argued.[16]

At the same time, there is something more complex going on in this quote from *American Gods,* and that has to do with an element of difference within this inmixing; for although Shadow is seeing these multiple forms of Mr Nancy at the same time and place, he also is not. At the beginning of the quote it is stated that he is seeing everything "at the same time, in the same place"; however, at the end of the quote there are markers of both time and space: "and last of all, and behind all these things" there was the figure of a tiny brown spider, thus indicating its status as the primary or original manifestation of Mr Nancy. This is not a contradiction, but rather a manner in which *to map* space within the novel, and thus bring out the significance of the figure of the carousel. For if there is "merely" the multiple without any kind of difference contained, then what is being described is a correlationist or relational structure which then becomes trapped in its own self-reflexivity, as discussed below. But what the carousel does is to represent both the diachronic (in the *at the same time*)

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16 Siegfried Kracauer, in his essay "Boredom," asks what would happen if one would remain within boredom and not be distracted by everyday living: "Then boredom becomes the only proper occupation, since it provides a kind of guarantee that one is, so to speak, still in control of one's own existence. If one were never bored, one would presumably not really be present at all and would thus be merely one more object of boredom […]. One would light up on the rooftops or spool by as a filmstrip. But if indeed one is present, one would have no choice but to be bored by the ubiquitous racket that does not allow one to exist, and, at the same time, to find oneself boring for existing in it," *The Mass Ornament: Weimar Essays,* trans. Thomas Levin (Cambridge & London: Harvard University Press, 1995), 334.

and the synchronic (in the *last of all and behind all things*). As-suming a clockwise rotation, the structure of the carousel can be represented thus:

at the same time, in the same place

behind all things

the last of all
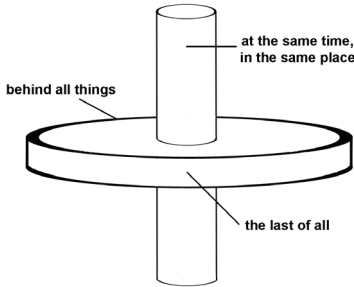
Although *American Gods* does not provide a map of the move-ment of the carousel per se, the inscription of space within time in the apparently contradictory statements regarding time in this passage adds another element to representation, but what is it? Of course space plays a great role in Bakhtin's essay, from public squares to landscapes,[17] but, as Franceo Moretti argues in *Graphs, Maps, Trees,* there are no maps: "Take Bakhtin's essay on the chronotope: it is the greatest single study ever written on space and narrative, and it doesn't have a single map."[18] The figure of a carousel provides a structure on which we can map the relation of the diachronic and the synchronic of double-vision (and indeed, in Moretti's chapter on maps he is more interested in narratives on which one can map, such as

17 Bakhtin, "Forms of Time," 248–9. The first great reading of space within literature is Gaston Bachelard's *The Poetics of Space,* in which, for example, he argues that much mod-ern dwelling has lost its connection with both vertical and cosmological space. (Boston: Beacon Press, 1994), 27.
18 Franco Moretti, *Graphs, Maps, Trees: Abstract Models for Literary History* (London & New York: Verso, 2007), 35.

Mary Mitford's *Our Village,* rather than narratives that actually provide maps).[19] The reason that mapping is important here is simple: just as the simultaneity of double-vision makes time palpable, the mapping of space foregrounds force: "As in an experiment, the force 'from without' of large national processes alters the initial narrative structure beyond recognition, and reveals the direct, almost tangible relationship between social conflict and literary form. Reveals form as a diagram of forces: or perhaps, even, as *nothing but force.*"[20]

In one sense the novel resists describing what this force might be. There are other examples of this kind of multiple-seeing in *American Gods*[21]: however, the mechanics of this vision are never laid out specifically. Such a refusal to stipulate the rational behind an experience is the prerogative of literature in general, but perhaps especially in the genre of the fantastic in which, as Tzvetan Todorov has argued in his classic study, the strange events that happen in a world in fact remain unexplained.[22] In the scene with Mr Nancy, the narrator merely states that "Shadow saw all these things, and he knew they were the same thing."[23] However, in another moment of double-vision in the novel, a possible clue is provided. It is implied that these moments are connected to a shift of vision – or a blinking. For example, in one scene Mr Wednesday lays

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19 This attention to location recalls Ian Watt's dictum that realism includes a hightened specificity of place in *The Rise of the Novel: Studies in Defoe, Richardson and Fielding* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971), 32.

20 Moretti, *Graphs, Maps, Trees,* 64.

21 Gaiman, *American Gods,* esp. 151; 262.

22 Tzvetan Todorov, *The Fantastic: A Structural Approach to a Literary Genre,* trans. Richard Howard (Ithaca & New York: Cornell University Press, 1975), 25.

23 Gaiman, *American Gods,* 144.

his hand on Shadow's shoulder. This causes Shadow to experi-
ence "a *dizzying* moment of double vision"[24] in which he sees
Mr Wednesday simultaneously as the man he currently is as
well as "hundreds and hundred of winters" and as a gray man.[25]
While the term "dizzy" is not medically precise, it is often con-
nected to a distortion of vision, which then leads to a lack of
balance. Such a distortion of vision, however imprecise, pro-
vides a gateway into understand the force at work in the re-
lationship between sight and nonsight, or what here comes
under the aegis of double-vision.

Light-headedness, dizziness and blurred vision all indicate
a removal from the world, especially from the world of sight,
while still remaining in that world, although with a skewed
perspective. This is "the world through blunted sight" which
Patrick Trevor-Roper traced as essential to art in his book of
the same name. In his opening chapter, entitled "The Unfo-
cused Image," Trevor-Roper, an ophthalmologist by trade,
makes the argument that skewed or otherwise distorted vision
(myopia, astigmatism, etc.) has been at the root of much of the
new visions provided by literature and the fine arts over the de-
cades.[26] In a famous analysis of the work of Modigliani, Trevor-
Roper argues that it could be the artist's astigmatism which
accounts for the manner in which the figures in his paintings
tend to lean to the left: "Thus, it could just be argued that the
oblique astigmatic, whose retinal images are sloping, but who
straightens his percepts, since his touch and intellect tell him

....
24 *Ibid.,* 262. My emphasis.
25 *Ibid.*
26 Patrick Trevor-Roper, *The World through Blunted Sight: An Inquiry into the Influence of
Defective Vision on Art and Character* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1970), 17–66.

that the objects are in fact upright, may over-compensate when he paints them on his canvas, and the result of this could be that the picture we see is sloping in the opposite direction."[27] It is not passing out or fainting, which would be to leave the world completely (even if just for a moment); rather it is having one's vision disrupted, although still in use. Martin Jay, who traverses thought from the Greeks to the poststructuralists in order to trace alternatives to the superiority of vision in his *Downcast Eyes,* concludes that what is necessary is not a turning away from vision but an emphatic Nietzschian "yes" to the multiplication of vision based upon a dialectic model:

> Indeed, it is precisely the proliferation of models of visuality that the antiocularcentric discourse, for all its fury against the ones it distrusts, tacitly encourages. Ocular-eccentricity rather than blindness, it might be argued, is the antidote to privileging any one visual order or scopic regime. What might be called "the dialectics of seeing" precludes the reification of scopic regimes. Rather than calling for the exorbitation or enucleation of "the eye," it is better to encourage the multiplication of a thousand eyes, which, like Nietzsche's thousand suns, suggests the openness of human possibilities.[28]

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27 Patrick Trevor-Roper, *The World through Blunted Sight,* 61. On such visual gaps cf. Rudolf Arnheim's classic study *Visual Thinking* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969), 89–90.
28 Martin Jay, *Downcast Eyes: The Denigration of Vision in Twentieth-Century French Thought* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 591.

What the structure of the carousel does is to combine the thought of Trevor-Roper and Jay: there is both the multiplicity of vision enacted in the "at the same place, in the same time" of the "middle bar" of the diagram above. This aspect of double-vision is seen in the manner in which Shadow sees the multiples of Mr Nancy, for example, all at once. But at the same time there is a disturbance to his vision, represented by two ends of the disc in the diagram, represented by "the last of all" and "behind all things." Here, we have both a temporal and spatial disruption to multiplicity, a disruption which the work of Trevor-Roper connects to a "weakness" of vision, and which Gaiman connects to dizziness or blurred vision. Thus, the force that the "map" of the carousel indicates is that of a "dizzifying-multiplication," or what will be called below "pure presence."

A final example of double-vision from *American Gods* makes the connection between blurred and multiple vision explicit. In this scene Shadow himself dies, although he is shortly to return to life. As Shadow is being ferried across the river Styx a smoking oil lamp hanging at the front of the boat causes a blurriness of vision. It is then that Shadow is able to see the psychopomp boatman (who he knew as Mr Ibis in real life, when he was alive) in his multiple incarnations: "The smoke stung Shadow's eyes. He wiped the tears away with his hand, and, through the smoke, he thought he saw a tall man, in a suit, with gold-rimmed spectacles. The smoke cleared and the boatman was once more a half-human creature with the head of a river-bird."[29] Although Mr Ibis does not appear as both creatures at once in a strict sense, he does lecture Shadow on the

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[29] Gaiman, *American Gods,* 522.

prevalence of simultaneity: "You people talk about the living and the dead as if they were two mutually exclusive categories. As if you cannot have a river that is also a road, or a song that is also a color."[30] Gaiman's sequel-of-sorts to *American Gods,* the novel *Anansi Boys,* develops the concept of double-vision by differentiating it from metamorphosis, or change, per se. This difference is in one manner indicated in how, with metamorphosis, another element takes the place of dizziness, which is storytelling, or the word. The main result of this differentiation is that metamorphosis is connected to magic, while double-vision is connected to experience.

◉

THE WORD OF GOD. Derrida's well-known critique of nonrelation in Heidegger's thought attempts to reinstate the primacy of language within the "question" of Heidegger.[31] Gaiman's sequel to *American Gods, Anansi Boys* follows a similar path: first it sets up the "poetic word" at the heart of change and double-vision; then it displaces language with *style,* which can also be called a *way* of seeing, which was called *blurriness* in the preceding section.

Anansi Boys tells the story of two sons of Mr Nancy (the character in American Gods): Fat Charlie, who lacks self-confidence in all he does, and Spider, who can influence almost any person or object in the world on command. Eventually it is found that both sons used to be one person, although they

30 Gaiman, *American Gods,* 523.
31 Jacques Derrida, *Of Spirit: Heidegger and the Question,* trans. Geoffrey Bennington & Rachel Bowlby (Chicago & London: University of Chicago Press, 1991).

were split at a young age. Thus, multiple entities being "at the same time, in the same place" is central to the novel, although this is also disrupted; a structure seen in the diagram of the carousel above. The disruption, at first, takes the form of "the word."

The function that the word, or *storytelling,* has in the novel is that it is the means by which Spider exerts his magical influence on the world. For example, when he meets Fat Charlie's fiancée Rosie, he convinces her that he is actually Fat Charlie by simply telling her so, although there is really no physical resemblance.[32] He also gets Fat Charlie to leave the apartment while he brings Rosie over by just telling him to go, which overrides any will Fat Charlie has to stop Spider's seduction.[33] These are just a few among many examples. However, the importance of the poetic word in enacting moments of metamorphosis is developed when Spider is captured by an enemy, tied spread-eagled, face down, to four stakes in the ground. In addition, in order to curb his magic his tongue has been cut out. To try and save himself he attempts to create a spider out of mud. Eventually he is able to get one of his hands free enough to form the spider, but the problem is making the word which would breathe life into his creation: he has no tongue: "The word, that would be the hardest part. Making a spider, or something quite like it, from blood and spit and clay, that was easy. Gods, even minor mischief gods like Spider, know how to do that. But the final part of Making was going to prove the hardest. You need a word to give something life. You need

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32 Gaiman, *Anansi Boys,* 102.
33 *Ibid.,* 125.

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32 Gaiman, *Anansi Boys,* 102.
33 *Ibid.,* 125.

to name it."[34] What Spider shows here is not that "words" are generative but rather "the word," in the sense of language itself. According to Agamben, the "word of God" functions in just this manner: it is a form of revelation which is not language but which denotes that there is language as such:

> If the theological tradition has therefore always understood revelation as something that human reason cannot know on its own, this can only mean the following: the content of revelation is not a truth that can be expressed in the form of linguistic propositions about a being (even about a supreme being) but is, instead, a truth that concerns language itself, the very fact that language (and therefore knowledge) exists. The meaning of revelation is that humans can reveal beings through language but cannot reveal language itself. In other words: humans see the world through language but do not see language. This invisibility of the revealer in what is revealed is the word of God; it is revelation.[35]

In the quote from *Anansi Boys* above, it is "making" which is impossible for Spider because he has no tongue, and thus no language. For Agamben this "making" is seen in the possibility of knowledge which is born from entry into the symbolic, thus it is also key in forming an understanding of beings without the word.[36]

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34 Gaiman, *Anansi Boys,* 312.

35 Giorgio Agamben, *Man Without Content,* trans. Georgia Albert (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999), 40.

36 Thus, in *Agamben and Theology* Colby Dickinson argues that "Agamben too seeks to develop a way out of the constitutive split within our linguistically established identities. Articulating this resolution through recourse to the inexpressible expression that is God's

However, culture does not originate from culture. Thus, the revelatory nature of "the word" as a representation of the manner in which humanity comes into the world as knowledge-bearing creatures has recently been given a non-religious trajectory by attempts at connection evolutionary theory and the development of literature. As Brian Boyd says in *On the Origin of Stories,* "I suggest that we can view art as a kind of cognitive *play,* the set of activities designed to engage human attention through their appeal to our preference for inferentially rich and therefore patterned information."[37] This "natural" propensity for story formation plays a large role in Douglas Coupland's *Generation A,* which provides a model of the effects of the digital on storytelling and opens with "How can we be alive and not wonder about the stories used to knit together this place we call the world? Without stories, our universe is merely rocks and clouds and lava and blackness. It's a village scraped raw by warm waters leaving not a trace of what existed before."[38] In another science fiction example from the same year, Cory Doctorow's *Makers,* a "ride" has been created in which a number of inventions can not only be viewed but also contributed to and commented on. During the ride one has the chance to use a joystick to either "–1" or "+1" elements of the exhibition and robots, in real time, make adjust-

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voice beyond all attempts by language (or scripture) to say it would seems to overlap in this sense with Deleuze's reading of Spinoza. [...] As much as Agamben has of late been interested in erasing all boundaries between the glorious body and the earthy one, there remains in this investigation of immanence an expression of our being beyond all linguistic forms and representations." (London & New York: Continuum, 2011), 170.

37 Brian Boyd, *On the Origin of Stories: Evolution, Cognition, and Fiction* (Cambridge & London: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2009), 85.

38 Douglas Coupland, *Generation A* (London: William Heinemann, 2009), 1. Although Coupland does equate storytelling with praying (*ibid.,* 2).

ments to the ride to reflect these scores (and there are multiple rides throughout the United States, all linked to the original in Florida). The reason that this example is being brought in here is that eventually the feedback provided by the many riders "naturally" turns the ride into a story instead of a collection of random inventions. One of the main characters says that it is "Not so weird. People see stories like they see faces in clouds. Once we gave them the ability to subtract the stuff that felt wrong and reinforce the stuff that felt right, it was only natural that they'd anthropomorphize the world into a story."[39] The "playing" that Boyd centralizes comes forth in the example from Doctorow in the manner in which people can provide feedback. What both of these examples indicate is a "noncultural" explanation of culture.

In *Anansi Boys,* Charlie's story revolves around trying to claim the power of the poetic word that his brother Spider has for himself. Eventually he is able to do so, although his power does not rest in his brother's medium of the word but rather in a more "natural" domain: in song. This can be seen the first time the meek Charlie makes a stand for himself, deterring a man with a gun by singing "Under the Boardwalk" in a restaurant.[40] Thereafter, it is song that Charlie uses to tap into the same powers that Spider has through the word. The reason that song is an important counterpoint to the word is that as a figure of territorialization/deterritorialization it opens what is described below as a *speculative* manner in which to experience the non-human world within the human world. The way

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39 Cory Doctorow, *Makers* (New York: TOR, 2009), 176.

40 Gaiman, *Anansi Boys,* 320–1.

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in which song relates to the territory has been mapped out by Deleuze and Guattari in their work on the refrain in *A Thousand Plateaus*. Here, they argue that song is that which can put up a border between ourselves and the outer world: "A child hums to summon the strength for the schoolwork she has to hand in. A housewife sings to herself, or listens to the radio, as she marshals the antichaos forces of her work. Radios and television sets are like sound walls around every household and mark territories (the neighbor complains when it gets too loud)."[41] As Boyd argues, the marking of territory is one of the main functions that song has for birds,[42] or, as Deleuze and Guattari put it, "The role of the refrain has often been emphasized: it is territorial, a territorial assemblage. Bird songs: the bird sings to mark its territory."[43] The reason that song can striate space is because of rhythm, which both divides and joins; rhythm "ties together critical moments."[44] However, just as song can territorialize, and thus eventually become an expression of knowledge,[45] the use of song within the symbolic deterritorializes because rhythm is reinserted into expression. Thus, the role of the "voice" in bearing the traumatic kernel of the real in the film theory of Michel Chion.[46] Gaiman indicates the importance of song in the opening of *Anansi Boys,*

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41 Gilles Deleuze & Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia,* trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis & London: University of Minnesota Press, 2005), 311.
42 Boyd, *On the Origin of Stories,* 76–7.
43 Deleuze & Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus,* 312.
44 *Ibid.*
45 *Ibid.,* 315.
46 Michel Chion, *The Voice in Cinema,* trans. Claudia Gorbman (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999).

in which he states that it is song which can create something new in the world:

> It begins, as most things begin, with a song.
>
> In the beginning, after all, were the words, and they came with a tune. That was how the world was made, how the void was divided, how the lands and the stars and the dreams and the little gods and the animals, how all of them came into the world.
>
> They were sung.
>
> The great beasts were sung into existence, after the Singer had done with the planets and the hills and the trees and the oceans and the lesser beasts. The cliffs that bound existence were sung, and the hunting grounds, and the dark.
>
> Songs remain. They last. The right song can turn an emperor into a laughing stock, can bring down dynasties. A song can last long after the events and the people in it are dust and dreams and gone. That's the power of songs.[47]

In this opening passage of the novel Gaiman indicates both the territorializing and deterritorializing natures of song. Song territorializes because it divides: it is how "the void was divided" and it sings "the cliffs that bound existence" into presence. However, song also deterritorializes, it disrupts the structures that it creates: it brings down rulers and dynasties. In the novel this dual-nature of the song is represented in moments of double-vision, although the previously determined categories of "dizziness" and "double-vision" never actually appear together.

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47 Gaiman, *Anansi Boys,* 1–2.

In one first example, the "dizziness" seen in *American Gods* can be found in *Anansi Boys* when a ritual is enacted to transport Fat Charlie into the backstage world of the gods:

> In Fat Charlie's mind all *the sounds began to blend into one strange sound*: the humming and the hissing and the buzzing and the drums. He was starting to feel *light-headed. Everything was funny.* Everything was unlikely. In the noises of the women he could hear the sound of wildlife in the forest, hear the crackling of enormous fires. His fingers felt stretched and rubbery, his feet were an immensely long way away.
>
> It seemed then that he was somewhere above them, somewhere above everything, and that beneath him there were five people around a table. Then one of the women at the table gestured and dropped something into the bowl in the middle of the table, *and it flared up so brightly that Fat Charlie was momentarily blinded. He shut his eyes, which, he found, did no good at all. Even with his eyes closed, everything was much too bright for comfort.*
>
> *He rubbed his eyes against the daylight.* He looked around.[48]

In this example, an initial aural confusion sets Fat Charlie off balance, which is one of the main effects of dizziness. This confusion is then intensified by actual visual impairment, which, however, does not bring about a moment of double-vision but rather one of unveiling, for the world of gods is seen to exist

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48 *Ibid.,* 163. My emphasis.

as "backstage," always accessible but at no point existing in the same time and place as found in moments of double-vision.

However, in another example, which is taken from earlier in the novel, an experience double-vision seems to have taken place, but it is tied to storytelling rather than dizziness:

> What's that? You want to know if Anansi looked like a spider? Sure he did, except when he looked like a man.
> No, he never changed his shape. It's just a matter of how you tell the story. That's all.[49]

In this scene, the narrator addresses the narratee's skepticism regarding Spider's powers. The wording "he never changed his shape" is the only explicit indication of double-vision in the novel. However, here it is tied not just to a story, but the manner in which the story is told. This indicates that the word in Gaiman is not just connected to a belief in language but to the way in which something is said; in other words, there is a disruption possible within language itself, just as the song of creation remains in creation and can be the engine of deterritorialization. In the final work of Gaiman's to be looked at, his short story "How to Talk to Girls," both language and dizziness are "combined" in a coordinate they share: the *manner* in which moments of double-vision are experienced. This manner takes the form of the blink.

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49 Gaiman, *Anansi Boys,* 45.

FROM PRIOR TO CO-PRESENT. While the word and song indicate different mechanisms for change in Gaiman's work, the result of both is the same: an understanding of the change they engender can stem from Heidegger's notion of *poetic dwelling*. Taking the line "…poetically man dwells…" from Hölderlin for the title of an essay, Heidegger argues that a poetic relationship to the world exists a priori to the everyday manner in which we dwell in it.[50] Poetic dwelling is a kind of constructing, or thinking, the world described as being-in-the-world.[51] In this essay Heidegger also connects this constructing with a measuring of the world, which is based on the kind of dying which is reserved for Dasein:

> In poetry there takes place what all measuring is in the ground of its being. Hence it is necessary to pay heed to the basic act of measuring. That consists in man's first of all taking the measure which then is applied in every measuring act. In poetry the taking of measure occurs. To write poetry is measure-taking, understood in the strict sense of the word, by which man first receives the measure for the breadth of his being. Man exists as a mortal. He is called mortal because he can die. To be able to die means: to be capable of death as death. Only man dies – and indeed continually, so long as he stays on this earth, so long as he dwells. His dwelling, however, rests in the poetic.[52]

50 Martin Heidegger, "…Poetically Man Dwells…", in *Poetry, Language, Thought,* trans. Albert Hofstadter (New York: HarperCollins, 2001), 213.
51 *Ibid.,* 215–16.
52 *Ibid.,* 219.

Thus, a poetic relationship to the world can be said to be two-fold: it involves a certain distance from one's world and it involves the ability to change or form that world.[53] The second aspect is dependent on the first in that when a being is enraptured in its environment – like a tick which only responds to light and movement[54] – it does not have the distance to observe that environment, to engage in research within it, and thus to name and to change it. For, if poetry (and thus capital-L Literature) is what is removed from everyday language in order to fundamentalize the ambiguities within it,[55] then philosophy can also be seen as not that which constructs the truth (being enraptured in the world) but that which shows the way in which truth is constructed. Both aspects involve a distance from the world, a not-participating in it fully, as Derrida indicates in his "law of genre."[56]

Poetic dwelling is central to a short story of Gaiman's, entitled "How to Talk to Girls." This story features a number of girls from another universe who are apparently the last remnants of a destroyed planet. The reason that this story is being looked at here is that the girls "are" girls but *at the same time*

53 Regarding the role of distance in the origin of poetic dwelling, Véronique Fóti argues that "Heidegger himself, stressing that the source, in its de-rivation, exceeds itself and is thus not self-sufficient, characterizes the origin as both excess and lack; yet he seeks immediately to embed the source in its hidden 'ground,' which, whatever its darkness, stands firm. To show forth (*zeigen*) the origin, he insists, is to establish it firmly and festively (*festigen, festecken*) in its essential ground, which is the holy. Such a showing, which renders festive and firm, is what he understands by a poetic founding, which also founds itself by abiding in a nearness to the origin that keeps open the dimension of distance," *Heidegger and the Poets: Poiēsis / Sophia / Technē* (New Jersey: Humanities Press, 1995), 58.
54 Giorgio Agamben, *The Open: Man and Animal,* trans. Kevin Attell (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004), 46–7.
55 Cf. William Empson, *Seven Types of Ambiguity* (New York: New Directions, 1966).
56 Jacques Derrida, "The Law of Genre," trans. Avital Ronell, *Critical Inquiry* 7.1 (Autumn 1980): 55–81.

they are also poems. However, they do not change from one to the other, as in *Anansi Boys,* but are simultaneously both, as in *American Gods*. Nevertheless, a part of the make-up of their multitude is the word, in the shape of a poem. Thus, they form a kind of synthesis of the two novels.

The girls have been shot through space not just to inform others of their now-lost world, but in fact to recreate it. A human, Enn, goes to what he thinks is a normal party when he meets the metrically named Triolet, who says "If you want. I am a poem, or I am a pattern, or a race of people whose world was swallowed by the sea."[57] Although in this passage "or" seems to indicate a state of metamorphosis, or of different consecutive perspectives, rather than a diachronic experience in a synchronic image, when Triolet tells Enn about her background, it is seen that she is actually all of these things, and all of these things at once:

"We knew that it would soon be over, and so we put it all into a poem, to tell the universe who we were, and why we were here, and what we said and did and thought and dreamed and yearned for. We wrapped our dreams in words and patterned the words so that they would live forever, unforgettable. Then we sent the poem as a pattern of flux, to wait in the heart of a star, beaming out its message in pulses and bursts and fuzzes across the electromagnetic spectrum, until the time when, on worlds a thousand sun systems distant, the pattern would be decoded and read, and it would become a poem once again."[58]

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57 Neil Gaiman, "How to Talk to Girls at Parties," in *Fragile Things: Short Fictions and Wonders* (New York: Harper, 2007), 250.
58 *Ibid*.

Triolet is that poem, beamed out of a star, but at the same time she is a girl whispering this poem to Enn. However, the whispered poem is not in a language that Enn understands; the only way that Enn can comprehend the poem is to be open to the experience of Triolet herself, who is the poem she is telling. This opening brings about change, *de facto:* "'You cannot hear a poem without it changing you,' she told me. 'They heard it, and it colonized them. It inherited them and it inhabited them, its rhythms becoming part of the way that they thought; its images permanently transmuting their metaphors; its verses, its outlook, its aspirations becoming their lives.'"[59] Here the "openness" that Enn must have does not indicate a stillness, or "not-doing" as is often associated with potentiality. Rather, the subject is moved. The subject is inhabited, rhythms of thought have changed, metaphors have transmuted, aspirations have been re-scheduled. The shifting of the subject is a representation of the imbalance of dizziness.

Christopher Fynsk, in his chapters on Heidegger in *Language and Relation,* performs a similar move when focusing on the noise rather than the stillness of language in Heidegger's work on poetic dwelling. First Fynsk shows the role of not-doing in Heidegger's thought: "For Heidegger, the compact threshold of poetic language […] is a tombstone, the house is a sepulchre ([…] but is already suggested strongly by the images of 'stilling' in 'Language' – however much Heidegger insists that such stillness is not the absence but the highest form of movement in measure). The accomplished mourning of poetic

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59 Neil Gaiman, "How to Talk to Girls at Parties," 250.

remembrance would be an assumption of mortality."[60] However, Fynsk then proposes another approach, that of movement, or "noise," in place of stillness and being-towards-death: "In Heidegger, the way to language seems to lead inevitably to death in the sense of stillness […]. But if we attend more to the noise in language than does Heidegger, very different paths will open."[61] Fynsk proffers a reading of "noise" by challenging Heidegger's assertion that poetic dwelling precedes the inauthentic dwelling of the everyday.[62] Instead Fynsk argues that the emergence of humanity takes place with language rather than prior to it:

> it may not be quite adequate to say, as I did above, that the relation of *Ereignis* [appropriation] and humankind (which opens the way and is the way language comes to speech) occurs in and through language. For we must also say that language occurs – comes to itself – in and by this relation. The appropriation of humankind to its essence is not properly *prior* to language (in the sense of a condition), because all appropriation, including that of humankind, occurs in a showing that belongs to the essence of language. Moreover, the appropriation of humankind is to be thought as nothing other than an assigning of humankind to language: the appropriating of humankind to what is said in the saying and as capable of answering to language in a countering saying. But if the appropriation of humankind is not *prior*

60 Christopher Fynsk, *Language and Relation: …that there is language* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996), 37.
61 *Ibid.,* 38.
62 Heidegger, "…Poetically Man Dwells…," 211–12.

to language, it must nevertheless be understood as in some sense *co-originary* with it."[63]

The manner in which the coming forth of humankind is not prior to language is seen in Gaiman's story in the manner in which being and becoming (essence and appearance, or the a priori poetic and the language of a poem) become "one": Triolet warns Enn that "Within a generation their children [the children of those who have 'experienced' the poem] would be born already knowing the poem, and, sooner rather than later, as these things go, there were no more children born. There was no need for them, not any longer. There was only a poem, which took flesh and walked and spread itself across the vastness of the known."[64] Thus, the poetic words which is a multiple of double-vision instigates change, and this change is a movement from the a priori of poetic dwelling to an image of "only a poem," but a poem which dwells in the world through its flesh which would walk and spread itself. However, in order to develop what the role of noise, or "motion," in change, more textual evidence than Gaiman can provide will be needed. Thus, a novel from China Miéville will be read in order to foreground the role of agitation within double-vision as a manner of leading to a discussion of the challenge speculative materialism provides to the "co-presencing" found in Gaiman's work.

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63 Fynsk, *Language and Relation,* 97.
64 Gaiman, "How to Talk to Girls," 250–1.

SUBTRACTION AND EXTERIORITY. There are three characters in China Miéville's second novel, *Perdido Street Station,* which foreground the manner in which "noise" affects co-presencing. The form this foregrounding takes is that the first character acts as an experience of double-vision while the other two act as critiques of that experience. In short, what *Perdido Street Station* initially posits is that an experience of double-vision experience is essentially static. For, while there is a multitude represented simultaneously, this multitude, in such an experience, is stationary. Miéville's novel then posits two possible ways to "rectify" this stillness: first through the addition of movement within double-vision, and second though a lack of codifying constraints.

Briefly, the first character in the novel under discussion is Lin, who is a "khepri" woman, which means that she has a human body and a scarab-like head. She is a sculptor who sees with an "insectile vision" which divides the world into a multitude of fragments which are each comprehended in their uniqueness; thus, Lin takes on a similar position in the novel as the multitudinous vision seen in *American Gods,* which was also "insectile." The second character is Mr Motley, a "remade" human whose name indicates the variety of amalgamated body parts that make up his person. He hires Lin to sculpt his likeness. However, Lin becomes disoriented because Mr Motley's body parts are not just various but they are also constantly changing. He berates her for not being fluid enough to see him in his multiplicity, claiming that she still has a "base" image of what he was like before. According to Mr Motley, Lin's problem is that, through her sculpture, she is trying "to freeze

in time a body in flux."[65] Thus, he begins to point to an expansion of the synchronic representation of the diachronic, as it was seen in Gaiman's work. This "way forward" is the incorporation of movement into an experience of double-vision, or a combinatory experience of the vision and nonvision of the blink. While Lin is ultimately unable to take Mr Motley's advice, for he murders her, a manner in which movement is to be experience is offered by the third character under discussion, a Weaver, which is a kind of interworld spider. The key feature of the Weavers is that they are removed from comprehension. They are continuous, incomprehensible, rolling, and at the same time flat; they do not dream (which becomes a source of strength when they fight creatures who feed on dreams), they have no hidden messages, no animal cortex to contradict a symbolic existence. They have no ego, and they are unfathomable to the others in the novel. What these three characters offer are three representations of the way in which a subject *changes* when open to an experience of the multitude: Lin represents seeing the many rather than the whole; Mr Motley stresses observing change; and finally the Weavers question the role of comprehension itself. What these characters have in common is a representation of the effects that double-vision need to have in the subject in order to come about.

Perdido Street Station is a novel in the genre of the "new weird," meaning, put simply here, that elements of fantasy are included in the story but they have a "scientific" reason to be there: for example, there may be dragons, but it is because they were engineered in a laboratory (although Jeff Vander-

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65 China Miéville, *Perdido Street Station* (London: Pan Books, 2000), 134.

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Meer, in his introduction to *The New Weird*, singles out a political agenda and a fondness for the grotesque as the defining, non-structural elements of the sub-genre[66]). The main plot of Miéville's dense novel is centered on trying to rein in a group of "slake-moths" which have gotten loose. The moths are dangerous because they feed on inhabitants' dreams until their prey is rendered inert.

Lin, the first character taken up in this discussion, eventually plays a key role in this fight. However, the first thing that is noticeable about Lin is that when she is presented at the beginning of the novel she is highly sexualized. She is nude, cooking at the stove, while her "fully" human lover Isaac remains in bed, the bedcovers seemingly too small to cover his girth.[67] What is interesting about the description of Lin is that before the narrator divulges that she is a khepri, a term which then defines her categorically, she is presented "in pieces"; Lin is characterized as hairless, with red skin, and is extremely muscular. In fact, her muscles were "each distinct. She was like an anatomical atlas."[68] The reason why seeing her first through details rather than as a "whole" is important is because this fragmentation mirrors the way in which Lin experiences the world, an experience that is reflected in her physical differences from Isaac.

Lin's manner of experiencing the world can be seen the first time she is on her own in the novel. After having had sex

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66 Jeff VanderMeer, "The New Weird: 'It's Alive?,'" in *The New Weird,* ed. Ann VanderMeer and Jeff VanderMeer (San Francisco: Tachyon, 2008). Cf. William Burling, "Periodizing the Postmodern: China Miéville's *Perdido Street Station* and the Dynamics of Radical Fantasy," *Extrapolation* 50.2 (Summer 2009): 326–45.
67 Miéville, *Perdido Street Station,* 11–12.
68 *Ibid.,* 12.

with Isaac, a relationship which is still taboo enough in the city that they cannot be seen out together in public, Lin goes to the khepri quarter to pick up some art supplies. It is on this outing that Lin's seeing things in their fragmentary nature rather than wholeness comes forth:

> Lin's bulging mirrored eyes saw the city in *a compound visual cacophony. A million tiny sections of the whole, each minuscule hexagon segment ablaze* with sharp colour and even sharper lines, super-sensitive to *differentials* of light, weak on details unless she focused hard enough to hurt slightly. Within each segment, the dead scales of decaying walls were invisible to her, *architecture reduced to elemental slabs of colour.* But a precise story was told. *Each visual fragment, each part, each shape, each shade of colour, differed from its surroundings in infinitesimal ways that told her about the state of the whole structure.*[69]

The way in which Lin experiences the whole is through the part. This line of thought has its most well-known theoretical component in the work of Deleuze on the assemblage, which he has formulated through the equation $(n-1)$. As a reminder, the assemblage is a gathering of parts which is not necessarily taken as a whole. In a simple example, instead of "a room" there are "chairs, a desk, a floor, gravity, light, plumbing, temperature, air" and so on (although the possibility of each of these elements being made up of other forces is taken up below under a discussion of the irreducible). In the equation $(n-1)$,

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69 Miéville, *Perdido Street Station,* 20. My emphasis.

the whole of the room is "taken down" one level and it is the elements of the room which remain. As Deleuze and Guattari argue, the assemblage "is not the One that becomes Two or even directly three, four, five, etc. It is not a multiple derived from the One, or to which One is added ($n+1$). It is composed not of units but of dimensions, or rather *directions in motion*. It has neither beginning nor end, but always a middle (*milieu*) from which it grows and which it *overspills*. It constitutes linear multiplicities with n dimensions having neither subject nor object, which can be laid out on one plane of consistency, and *from which the One is always subtracted* ($n-1$)."[70] Here, Deleuze and Guattari combine a number of elements under discussion: there is a subtraction from a whole and what this subtraction makes visible is "middles," directions, movement from one-to-the-other rather than the points in between. These multiplicities are what Lin experiences in "Each visual fragment, each part, each shape, each shade of colour," although there is no motion attached to these directions as such (each element resides in her experience, rather than passing through). It is movement that the next figure will put into play.

However, first the notion of the assemblage needs to be clarified. It was said that in the assemblage it is the multiplicities which are important rather than the "whole" concept they make up. One import aspect of these multiplicities is that they are in a relation of exteriority, in that one element (a color) can be taken out of one assemblage and put into another, where it carries a different function. As Manuel DeLanda explains in *A New Philosophy of Society:* "Today, the main theoretical

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70 Deleuze & Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus,* 21. My emphasis.

alternative to organic totalities is what the philosopher Gilles Deleuze calls *assemblages,* whole characterized by *relations of exteriority.* These relationships imply, first of all, that a component part of an assemblage may be detached from it and plugged into a different assemblage in which its interactions are different. In other words, the exteriority of relations implies a certain autonomy for the terms they relate."[71] The reason that these multiplicities are "subtracted" from the One is that a relation of exteriority implies that the elements do not relate to each other in terms of what they are, but rather in terms of what they (can) do:

> Relations of exteriority also imply that the properties of the component parts can never explain the relations which constitute a whole [...] In fact, the reason why the properties of a whole cannot be reduced to those of its parts is that they are the result of not an aggregation of the components' own properties but of the actual exercise of their capacities. These capacities do depend on a component's properties but cannot be reduced to them since they involve reference to the properties of other interacting entities. Relations of exteriority guarantee that assemblages may be taken apart while at the same time allowing that the interactions between parts may result in a true synthesis.[72]

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71 Manuel DeLanda, *A New Philosophy of Society: Assemblage Theory and Social Complexity* (London & New York: Continuum, 2006), 10–11.
72 *Ibid.,* 11.

Another word that could be used instead of assemblage is *network*. For DeLanda, an assemblage/network relates to the new in that it can feature certain emerging properties. For example, in an interpersonal network, the following emergent properties can be described: *density,* or "a measure of the intensity of connectivity among indirect links"; *stability,* in that there is no tension created between nodes with different attitudes (my friends' friends are not my enemies) and that proximity to other causes similar attitudes to be created; and *solidarity,* although it does not matter what form it takes: "some members may be motivated by the feelings of togetherness which getting involved in the arrears of the community produces in them, others by altruism, and yet others by strict calculations."[73] However, it is not the specific characteristics that emerge from a network which is the focus here, but rather in an assemblage there is emergence from parts in a relation of exteriority.

In other words, what is important about the assemblage for this discussion is simply the way in which it is the relation of parts is foregrounded; as Deleuze and Guattari put it: "There are only multiplicities of multiplicities forming a single *assemblage,* operating in the same assemblage: packs in masses and masses in packs."[74] What is important at this point is that assemblages are gatherings of parts in that they can be disassembled and reassembled; or as DeLanda words it elsewhere, assemblages are both irreducible and decomposable.[75] These features will be taken up below under the discussion of

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73 *Ibid.,* 56–7.
74 Deleuze & Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus,* 34.
75 Manuel DeLanda, *Philosophy and Simulation: The Emergence of Synthetic Reason* (London & New York: Continuum, 2011), 185.

Mr Motley and movement along with the manner in which Graham Harman expands Bruno Latour's version of network theory. In addition, such plurality is reflected in the world in which *Perdido Street Station* is set; for, as Nicolas Birns argues, in this world "racial diversity is not plurality leading to a harmonious, diverse multiculturalism, but incommensurability."[76] This is due to the fact that, as Jean-Jacques Lecercle has noted (in a discussion of language), there is no "subject" in relation to the assemblage: "An assemblage never refers to a subject… there is no subject who is the sender of the utterance, no subject whose utterance is reported. The source of the utterance is a collective, whether social, national or political."[77] In the context of Gaiman's *American Gods,* the assemblage was seen when it was not just, for example, the "whole" of Mr Nancy which was seen, but rather, when double-vision was experienced the assemblage of all the beings and things which Mr Nancy had ever been became visible. However, the "absence" of a subject that both Lecercle and DeLanda indicate was also seen in "How to Talk to Girls at Parties," in which the poem was to eventually nullify the speaker.

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PURE PRESENCE. The structure of double-vision, in this "nullification" of the speaker, needs to be brought forth. For Lin, her assemblage-vision is further developed in a passage which

76 Nicholas Birns, "From Cacotopias to Railroads: Rebellion and the Shaping of the Normal in the Bas-Lang Universe." *Extrapolation* 50.2 (Summer 2009): 203.
77 Jean-Jacques Lecercle, *Deleuze and Language* (Hampshire & New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), 188.

relates her attempts at getting Isaac to share her way of experiencing the world:

> Lin had tried to describe how she saw the city to Isaac.
>
> *I see clearly as you, clearer. For you it is undifferentiated. In one corner a slum collapsing, in another a new train with pistons shining, in another a gaudy painted lady below a drab and ancient airship…You must process as one picture. What chaos! Tells you nothing, contradicts itself, changes its story. For me each tiny part has integrity, each fractionally different from the next, until all variation is accounted for, incrementally, rationally.*
>
> Isaac had been fascinated for a week and a half. He had, typically, taken pages of notes and sought books on insectile vision, subjected Lin to tedious experiments in depth-perception and distance-vision […]
>
> His interest had quickly waned. The human mind was incapable of processing what the khepri saw.[78]

The assemblage can be seen in the manner in which Lin sees Isaac's vision of the whole as chaotic, since it presumably "skips over" the multiple relationships between the parts. In one sense Lin's mode of seeing is another way of describing double-vision: instead of seeing one element, that element's constituent parts all become visible all at the same time. But why is it that the exterior relationship of elements in an assemblage creates a "new" or more truthful way of seeing? One manner this is examined is through Heidegger's thought on

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78 Miéville, *Perdido Street Station,* 20–1.

the tool, discussed below. Alain Badiou, in his essay "Philosophy and Art," takes such an approach. He identifies four main strains of Heidegger's thought – the question, the earth, a re-evaluation of the history of philosophy, and poetic-being – and then states that it is only the last which retains any resonance for contemporary thought.[79] Then Badiou lays out three main strains of Heidegger's thought on the poem: 1) he established that a poem is not about knowledge but rather *alētheia,* or the uncovering of truth; 2) he showed how poetry is not necessarily a separate entity from philosophy but can be philosophy; and 3) this leads Heidegger into the "trap" illuminated by Derrida's critique of nonrelation – this "truth" or philosophy must reside somewhere, and Heidegger could not "escape" locating it in the word itself.[80]

The next step Badiou takes is the reason he is being looked at here. The question he asks is: what has contemporary poetry done to "escape" the "trap" of language that Heidegger sets up for himself? Badiou finds two possible paths: Mallarmé and Celan. In Mallarmé, Badiou finds "the separation, the isolation, the coldness of that which is only present insofar as it no longer has any presentable relationship to reality,"[81] meaning that such a poem is "pure presence" in that it does not refer to anything else, there is no unveilable truth which underlies its language; it, like the matheme, is simply not anything other than what it is.[82] In Celan, Badiou identifies another op-

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79 Alain Badiou, *Infinite Thought: Truth and the Return of Philosophy,* trans. Oliver Feltham & Justin Clemens (London & New York: Continuum, 2004), 91–2.

80 *Ibid.,* 96–7.

81 *Ibid.,* 98–9.

82 *Ibid.,* 99.

eration: in order to be confronted with a poem of "pure pres-
ence" one must be open to that-which-is-outside-one's-self.
This openness is poetic, because this confrontation with the
outside involves naming it, and this naming is a poem.[83] As
an example Badiou provides a few lines from one of the short
poems in Celan's book *Lichtzwang,* although perhaps a more
far-reaching example, at least in relation to Celan's work as a
whole, can be seen in the difference between the poems "Death
Fugue" and "The Straitening." Both are attempts at inscribing
the *Shoah* in language within a dialogue of Adorno's dictum
that "All post-Auschwitz culture, including its urgent critique,
is garbage."[84]

The first poem of Celan's, "Death Fugue," is an example
of Heideggerian poetic-being in that through the form of a
fugue the poem uncovers a certain relation to the truth of the
Shoah. However, the poem's musical structure was perhaps a
sign that this relation to the truth was too "easy" in relation
to its subject matter. Thus, "The Straitening" provides an ex-
ample of what Badiou sees as exemplary in Celan's work: here
one is confronted with the "pure presence" of the inadequacy
of language to express. Badiou, like Adorno,[85] sees a similar
function for the language in some of Samuel Beckett's work.
At the end of *On Beckett* Badiou argues: "At the other extreme,
we find what I will call Beckett's sarcastic prose. Built almost
entirely on rhythm, it gratingly utters […] that words are an

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83 *Ibid.,* 99–100.
84 Theodor Adorno, *Negative Dialectics,* trans. E.B. Ashton (London: Routledge, 1990), 367.
85 Adorno says that "Beckett has given us the only fitting reaction to the situation of the
concentration camps – a situation he never calls by name, as if it were subject to an image
ban," *Negative Dialectics,* 380.

inadequate vehicle, that ill saying is always already too much of a well saying, and that the counter-path of thought can only be rediscovered by throttling words, subjecting them to a syntactical ordeal that forces them to ill ring."[86] Taking a cue from Beckett's late work *Ill Seen, Ill Said,* Badiou again defines the poetic as how the "pure presence" of language without unveiling acts as a name for an event which exists "outside calculable interests."[87]

The key for understanding this leap in Badiou's work is the connection between the "pure presence" of poetry and the matheme. For Badiou, mathematics holds a privileged place in the relationship between emergence and immanence. Although no pretence is being made here at fleshing out the rich complexities of the role of mathematics in Badiou's thought, meditation seventeen, "The Matheme of the Event," from Badiou's *Being and Event* brings forth both the doubled structure and the consequences of the matheme. Here, the example Badiou uses is the French Revolution. The basic argument is that the event of the revolution included the revolution as one of the terms of its own becoming.[88] The matheme Badiou develops for this argument is as follows: S is a situation (the French Revolution); X is the "evental site" that is presented in S (for example, "the peasants"); then it can be said that X belongs

86 Alain Badiou, *On Beckett,* eds. Alberto Toscano & Nina Power (Manchester: Clinamen Press, 2003), 116.
87 Badiou, *Infinite Thought,* 100. This can be seen, for example, in the difference between the text and the performance of Beckett's play *Not I* (1972) in which the text includes a multitude of ellipses which, with patience, can be filled in by the reader, while the speed of the speech in the performance precludes any such cognition.
88 Alain Badiou, *Being and Event,* trans. Oliver Feltham (London & New York: Continuum, 2005), 180.

to, or is presented in *S,* written thus – $X \subseteq S$; and the event of
X (in which the peasants become present in the revolution)
is written e_x. This formulation allows Badiou then to express
that an event is made up of all the multiples of its site, along
with the site itself:

$$e_x = (x \subseteq X, e_x)^{89}$$

Thus, the matheme indicates "*the mode in which the Revolution
is a central term of the Revolution itself*; that is, the manner in
which the conscience of the times – and the retroactive inter-
vention of our own – filters the entire site through the one of
its evental qualification."[90] The example Badiou provides of this
is the declaration of Saint-Just that "the revolution is frozen."
In this sense what Saint-Just adds to the revolution "that *one-
mark* that is the Revolution itself, as this signifier of the event
which, being "qualifiable" (the Revolution is 'frozen'), proves
that it is itself a *term* of the event that it is."[91] Thus, just as the
poetry of Mallarmé and Celan indicates the "pure presence" of
a non-veiled truth, the matheme of the event is immanent, in
that it is "the one of the infinite multiple that it is."[92]

As an additional example provided here for clarification,
Quentin Meillassoux's explanation of the transfinite in
Cantor's set theory is useful. As Meillassoux explains, the basic
principle is that if you have a set of a given number of elements
A and you compare the number of elements with the number

89 *Ibid.,* 179.
90 *Ibid.,* 180.
91 *Ibid.*
92 *Ibid.*

of all of their possible combinations в (just one, one and two, one and three, all, none, and so on), в will always a higher number than а, *even if а is infinite*[93]; thus the transfinite. The reason that the transfinite is such a powerful concept is that "*the (quantifiable) totality of the thinkable is unthinkable*"[94] and thus the assemblage becomes a more accurate representation of the relationship between elements. For Badiou, one of the consequences of the uncertainty of the totality of the thinkable is that it is a doubled consequence which allows for truth, and thus it begins to develop the structure of double-vision: "The undecidability of the event's belonging to the situation can be interpreted as a double function. On the one hand, the event would invoke the void, on the other hand, it would interpose itself between the void and itself. It would be both a name of the void, and the ultra-one of the presentative structure. And it is this ultra-one-naming-the-void which would deploy, in the interior-exterior of a historical situation, in a torsion of its order, the being of non-being, namely, *existing*."[95] Although there are a number of elements in this statement that are key to Badiou's thinking, there is not enough space here to develop it. For this chapter, it suffices to say that the structure that is being described here is that of deterritorialization/territorialization, or the synchronic presencing in the diachronic: in other words, it is an immanent structure that posits an alternative to the poetic-being of Heidegger (although this is done by going through Heidegger). This alternative is the "pure presence" of

93 Quentin Meillassoux, *After Finitude: An Essay on the Necessity of Contingency,* trans. Ray Brassier (London & New York: Continuum, 2009), 104.
94 *Ibid.*
95 Badiou, *Being and Event,* 182–3.

the poetry of Mallarmé and Celan, or that of the structure of the carousel described above. However, even this mode comes under question in Miéville's novel. When Lin is contracted by the "remade" Mr Motley, her way of seeing is criticized as being too static (thus, he also contradicts Tim Miller's claim of Mr Motley as a figure of "hybridity"[96]; in other words, the element that Mr Motley introduces to the assemblage is *movement*. The reason that movement is important is that it is a signal of the generative, and as such, it has the potential to be an intensive property; in other words, movement can generate something new.

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DORMANT OBJECTS. A call for the inclusion of movement in such thinking comes about in Miéville's novel when Lin is contracted by Mr Motley to make a sculpture of him. As suggested by his name, Mr Motley is a mixture of body parts. Therefore, he could be configured as another representative of an assemblage: in short, more parts than whole. However, Lin has a difficult time even looking at him because all the different parts that go to make up his body are *in flux:* "The first couple of times she had come here, she had been sure that he changed overnight, that the shards of physiognomy that made up his whole reorganized when no one was looking. She became frightened of her commission."[97] The contrast between

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96 Tim Miller, "The Motley & The Motley: Conflicting and Conflicted Models of Generic Hybridity in Bas-Lang," *Foundation* 108 (Spring 2010): 39–59.
97 Miéville, *Perdido Street Station,* 133.

her fragmented vision of the world and Mr Motley's diachronic being come forth is the reason that she is frightened: it is not because Mr Motley is somehow scary, but rather that the prospect of trying to capture the fluidity that is Mr Motley's body in the static nature of her sculpture seems wrong: "She wondered hysterically if it was like a task in a moral children's tale, if she was to be punished for some nebulous sin by striving *to freeze in time a body in flux,* for ever too afraid to say anything, starting each day from the beginning over again."[98] This scene offers an implicit critique of the synchronic experience of diachronic events that was found in double-vision.

Lin attempts to cope with the fluctuating body in making her sculpture,[99] but Mr Motley is not satisfied. He critiques her for seeing each of his parts as fragments, rather than seeing all of his changing parts as himself all at once as an instantiation of "pure presence," as Lin still tries to make sense of his configuration by attempting to trace reason and origin in each of his elements. Mr Motley says: "It's so… predictable. You're still not looking the right way. At all. It's a wonder you can create such art. You still see *this* – 'he gesticulated vaguely at his own body with a monkey's paw' – as pathology. You're still interested in what *was* and how it went *wrong. This is not error or absence or mutancy: this is image and essence.*"[100] Thus, Mr Motley indicates that it is "pure presence" that Lin must perceive, rather than any kind of poetic-being, which always exists with its counter-part, the everyday.

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98 Miéville, *Perdido Street Station,* 133–4. My emphasis.
99 *Ibid.,* 134.
100 *Ibid.,* 140.

With the concept of pure presence on the table, a revision of Heidegger's concept of the "everyday" becomes possible. One important aspect of poetic-being is that everyday objects are never present in their totality. Speaking of a number of common things found in a bedroom or office, Heidegger says that "These 'things' never show themselves initially by themselves, in order then to fill out a room as a sum of real things."[101] One manner in which such things do become present as such is when their everyday usefulness comes under question, a line of argument which usually follows the motif of the "broken tool." In this sense it is in the "unhandiness" of a broken hammer, for instance, that the hammer as such becomes present.[102] However, as Harman has indicated in his reevaluation of this concept in *Tool-Being,* "the visibility of Heidegger's 'broken tool' has nothing to do with equipment not being in top working order. […] [A]s ought to be expected, Heidegger teaches us not about smashed-up blades and chisels, but only about beings in general."[103] The reason that the broken tool acts as a key point for taking a step beyond Heidegger is that it encapsulates a major aspect of his thought, and that is that authentic being (tool-as-tool) and inauthentic being (tool in use and forgotten) are always tied together through the "mere" [*bloß*] in that the hammer is not "merely" a hammer, there is also a more fundamental comportment which has been forgotten through use and which can become experienced through its "brokenness"

101 Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time,* trans. Joan Stambaugh (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996), 64.
102 *Ibid.,* 68.
103 Graham Harman, *Tool-Being: Heidegger and the Metaphysics of Objects* (Peru: Open Court, 2002), 45.

(or, as otherwise developed in Heidegger, through anxiety, or boredom). Harman's program is to retain the dual structure of the "mere" but to foreground it into an object of pure presence, rather than poetic-being: "The idea of an object-oriented philosophy is the idea of an ontology that would retain the structure of Heidegger's fundamental dualism, but would develop it to the point where concrete entities again become a central philosophical problem."[104] Thus, when Mr Motley stresses to Lin that, regarding his body, "*This is not error or absence or mutancy: this is image and essence*" he is also asking her to stop looking "behind" the brokenness of the tool for a veiled truth, but rather to stick to the presence of the object on the surface: it is here that his truth is to be found.

The thrust of Harman's development of an object-oriented ontology can be seen in his split from the actor-network-theory developed by Bruno Latour, who is an important figure for this discussion because of the way in which movement is central to his theory. For example, one of the five major concerns of his theory is with the "nature of actions," meaning how "in each course of action a great variety of agents seem to barge in and displace the original goals."[105] What is important for Latour here is not that the actor in his theory has some kind of agency that other objects do not have, but rather that they are "the moving target of a vast array of entities swarming toward it."[106] Thus, in counter distinction to agency Latour suggests the term *figuration,* stressing that it is not the presence or absence

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104 Graham Harman, *Tool-Being,* 49.
105 Bruno Latour, *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network-Theory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 22.
106 *Ibid.,* 46.

of agency which determines a subject but rather the flow of multiple strands of continually changing influence from other actors in a network which causes a subject to act.[107] While at first this might seem like another version of the assemblage as described above, and indeed Latour does call out to Deleuze as a like-minded thinker,[108] it is precisely at this point of necessity of the network of influences as being constitutive of the subject that Harman takes umbrage with Latour.

In his essay "The Sleeping Zebra" Harman describes a visit to Latour's apartment in Paris. Latour has to leave and Harman is left in the apartment alone, where he dreams of Badiou's take on set theory.[109] All this acts as a prelude for Harman's presentation of his concept of a dormant object. In short, Harman sets himself apart from Heidegger's tool-beings in that objects do not have a poetic and everyday aspect to them which we can uncover and forget, but rather we interact with objects on the sensual realm. However, this is not the crux of the argument, for Harman goes a step further by arguing that non-human objects relate to each other in the same manner[110]: "All things, both human and nonhuman, must encounter other things in the form of sensual caricatures."[111] This is not an attempt, as such, to invest objects with a psyche (although this too is a part of Harman's program) but rather to show how the interaction of one object with another through thought, memory, fantasy or dreaming is only quantitatively and not qualitatively differ-

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107 *Ibid.,* 53.
108 *Ibid.,* 129.
109 Harman, *Circus Philosophicus,* 67–8.
110 *Ibid.,* 68–9.
111 *Ibid.,* 69.

ent from when "dust collides with dirt," since both take place on the sensual realm.[112] Thus, it is on the sensual that relation occurs, and it is on this level that the figure of the assemblage emerges: "All that exists is composed of pieces, and obviously these must relate in order for the thing itself to exist; everything must first be aggregate in order to become substance."[113] Thus, Mr Motley's insistence on Lin seeing his body not in terms of what it was or how it is divergent, but rather in terms of flux and change, of the relation of his body as a whole, which remained his body, not only despite but because of the fluctuations. Harman provides a similar example: "For instance, the components of my body change constantly without my always becoming different as a result. It is true that a point may be reached where this change in pieces is sufficient to destroy me. Yet that point must actually be reached; it is not attained automatically with every slight shift in the infrastructure of human and inhuman things."[114] Thus, it is through *movement* that it can be seen that there are times when an outside influence might have no effect on an assemblage (a feather brushes up against an oil tanker). Harman extrapolates that "if an object can exist apart from any specific situation, it can also exist apart from any situation at all"[115]; and thus the concept of the sleeping object is born, meaning an object which, like a person in deep sleep, has no relation to the world outside itself, and yet it still exists.[116] The dormant object thus forms another manner

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112 Harman, *Circus Philosophicus,* 69–70.
113 *Ibid.,* 70.
114 *Ibid.*
115 *Ibid.*
116 *Ibid.,* 71.

in which to approach pure presence, for as "sleep entails that the thing still exists, but simply without relation to anything else"[117] so does pure presence exist without relation to anything "underneath" but rather in the manner in which it is twisted from its underlying sense.

In the case of Mr Motley, the object without relation takes the form of a "ruptured moment" in which there is an experience of pure presence without recourse to sense. This last concept of Mr Motley's will lead this reading of *Perdido Street Station* into its final phase, a discussion of an experience of *non*-knowledge, the framework for which is provided by the spider-like Weavers of Miéville's novel. What is interesting about the Weavers is that they are creatures which are represented as being *removed* from understanding. This removal is key because it is what Mr Motley seems to think Lin is missing in her extensive way of seeing the world: "'Maybe I'm too hard on you,' Mr Motley said reflectively. 'I mean… this piece before us makes it clear that you *have* a sense of the ruptured moment, even if your question suggests the opposite… So maybe,' he continued slowly, 'you yourself *contain* that moment. Part of you understands without recourse to words, even if your higher mind asks questions in a format which renders an answer impossible.'"[118] What Mr Motley is representing here is, in the words of Deleuze and Guattari quoted above, the assemblage's "challenging the hegemony of the signifier." Such a challenge becomes apparent in the figure of the Weavers, who do not relate to the world in a human fashion, seen primarily

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117 *Ibid.,* 73.
118 Miéville, *Perdido Street Station,* 141.

in their lack of dreaming. Instead they posit another relation to the world, that of pure presence.

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NONSENSE. The Weavers, who are the only beings in the novel who are able to defeat the slake-moths and thus save the city, are represented as beings which exist outside normal conduits of understanding:

> The Weaver thought in a *continuous, incomprehensible, rolling stream of awareness.* There were *no layers* to the Weaver's mind, there was *no ego* to control the lower functions, *no animal cortex* to keep the mind grounded. For the Weaver, there were *no dreams at night, no hidden messages* from the secret corners of the mind, no mental clearout of accrued garbage bespeaking an orderly consciousness. For the Weaver, *dreams and consciousness were one. The Weaver dreamed of being conscious and its consciousness was its dream, in an endless unfathomable stew of image and desire and cognition and emotion.*[119]

Here the Weavers, on the one hand, represent Badiou's matheme discussed above, in which the concept of revolution figured as a set of revolution itself. In this example from *Perdido Street Station,* dreams and consciousness are terms which follow a similar economy, not in the sense however that the Weaver dreamed of being conscious or that its consciousness

119 Miéville, *Perdido Street Station,* 769. My emphasis.

was a dream, but rather how *both* are a part of and more than the set of the unfathomable stew of cognition. For the Weaver consciousness and dream exist in each other and yet are also a surplus of each other. This is an example of the pure presence that Badiou saw in Mallarmé, Celan and Beckett.

There is another aspect to the description of the Weavers here that has a parallel in Harman's thought, and that is the manner in which the Weavers are removed from sense and understanding. This was what Mr Motley said Lin needed to do in order to see him, to have an experience of his body separate from the words and images she would fit it into. This aspect of Miéville actually has a direct correlate in Harman's work, in that Harman's essay "Offshore Drilling Rig" uses as its setting an experience Harman and Miéville shared together of being stuck on the offshore drilling rig of the title for a number of hours. Although the validity of the story must remain in suspension (the helicopter pilots that dropped the two off on the rig crashed and died just as they were out of view, and a flag that Harman waves at the end has an uncanny resemblance to the one with a picture of a sleeping zebra in the essay of that title), it is interesting to note that the point of the essay is actually how objects never interact with each other directly, but this interaction always takes place through the sensual. In a bow to the setting in which they find themselves, Harman creates a fantastical picture of a multitude of oil rigs able to siphon objects from the past or future into the present, except they are not able to siphon the actual objects, but just their images.[120] He then grants all objects this power, and imagines that some

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120 Harman, *Circus Philosophicus,* 45–8.

of this siphoning of images affects the object being siphoned, and some does not.[121] The point of this rather obscure image is that some contact between objects can affect and change some objects, while other types of contact has little or no effect. This then opens the space for some objects to be not affected by forces, and thus the dormant object becomes possible. While there is nothing inherently valuable about the appearance of Harman and Miéville together in this essay, it does indicate that there is a connection between Miéville's work and pure presence, and this connection has been shown to lie in the manner in which the Weaver is nothing else but what it is: there is no depth of poetic-being within it. And this is the location of its power in the novel; for it is the only figure who is able to defeat the deadly slake-moths who have run rampant. In this sense the Weaver challenges the hegemony of the signifier by being "flat"; there is no separation between subject and experience. The Weaver is in itself incomprehensible to humanity; this is because the Weaver is all "image and essence," as Mr Motley states. However, it needs to be kept in mind that this image and essence of pure presence is still an image which is seen. Thus, the next section takes up an investigation into the role of sight in moments of double-vision.

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MOLYNEUX'S QUESTION.   One of the main tenants of Harman's thought is that in order to develop a concept of pure presence

the relation between objects must remain in the sensual. However, a problematic aspect of this thought is that all aspects of the sensual are not the same, and it is usually vision which is seen as the privileged sense. This section aims to provide a brief historical account of attempts at challenging the hegemonic role that vision plays in an understanding of the senses with the aim of developing double-vision as an alternative sensual experience to the dominance of sight. The first step, in this section, is to pose the question, which takes the form of a dialectic in that blindness and sight are seen to be located asymmetrically in each other. Then, in the next section, it is argued that vision can actually disrupt knowing, and it is only when the unveiling truth of poetic-being is countered with an understanding of sensory relations that the truth of seeing comes forth. In one sense, this latter position is impossible for much of the argument surrounding this historical account because many of the figures cannot imagine an experience of vision which is separate from language. However, it will be seen that within the textual descriptions of experiments in vision from the 18th century there is a space opened for a rupture with language, however slight. This "space" is then taken up in the next section through the thought of a number of contemporary figures.

This discussion of double-vision centers around what is called "Molyneux's Question." The background to this question begins with English surgeon and anatomy professor William Cheselden, who, in 1728, invented iridotomy, a surgical method for curing certain forms of blindness by making an incision in the iris. Cheselden's method was an advance in

ophthalmic technique because, as Harry Mark observes, the previous barber-surgeons "entered the eye blindly without accurate knowledge of its anatomy or the actual mechanism of the surgery."[122] In contradistinction, Cheselden performed the procedure "with true awareness of the ill it was supposed to cure, and the reason for its effect."[123] Although Cheselden only offered a short description of his technique,[124] its effects were immediately apparent: a cure that had itself once caused a "formidable mortality"[125] became relatively safe and routine for the next 150 years.[126] The reason Cheselden is being used as the opening figure in a discussion of the role of vision is, in fact, twofold: first, Cheselden is located at the beginnings of a standardized relation to the body that resulted in increasing the number of lives saved because of a clearer perception of the way anatomy functions[127]; second, the new technique of iridotomy addressed one of the pressing questions of consciousness of both Cheselden's time and ours by allowing a boy who had been born blind to be cured, thereby advancing

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[122] Harry Mark, "The Strange Report of Cheselden's Iridotomy," *Archives of Ophthalmology* 121 (Feb 2003): 266. For a brief but insightful overview of 18th century ophthalmic techniques see Fiona Roman, "Notes from Ophthalmic Practice in the Eighteenth Century," British Journal of Ophthalmology 78.5 (1994): 338.

[123] *Ibid.*

[124] A description of an illustration of the technique reads: "c is a Sort of needle with an Edge on one Side which being pass'd thro' the Tunica Sclerotis, is then brought forward thro' the iris a little farther than e. This done, I turn the Edge of the need and cut thro' the Iris as I draw it out," quoted in *ibid*.

[125] Leo Zimmerman and Ilza Veith, *Great Ideas in the History of Surgery* (San Fransisco: Norman Publishing, 1993), 297.

[126] *Ibid.,* 299.

[127] This perception can also be seen through the enduring popularity of Cheselden's *The Anatomy of the Human Body,* first published in 1713. On Cheselden's role as a "public anatomist" see Anita Guerrini, "Anatomists and Entrepreneurs in Early Eighteenth-Century London," *Journal of the History of Medicine and Allied Sciences* 59.2 (2004).

an investigation into whether such a person would be able to recognize objects by sight that she or he had previously only had access to through other senses: "The blind man's arrival is a mythical as well as epistemological event, for if he brings with him no understanding of the visible, then philosophy has a new myth, that of its own totally experiential origin."[128] However, by paying close attention to the rhetorical strategies of Cheselden's own written accounts of the boy's cure, it will be seen that the doctor not only increased the ability of "seeing" both by and of the body but he also opened new way of being able to see "not-seeing" itself, putting his interest in line with much contemporary thought on questions of blinking and vision, as can be seen in W. G. Sebald, Hélène Cixous and Jacques Derrida, discussed below. This is not to say that Cheselden participates in a denigration of vision, although this too has a long and valuable history. Instead what is being argued here is that an emerging perception of darkness is concomitant with an emerging power of sight. This doubled perception is brought forth in a foregrounding of the temporal duration of the moment; that of both insight and obscurity, thus forming a figure of a "pure perception" of double-vision.

Cheselden reports on his celebrated case of the reparation of sight to the boy born blind in a section of his *Anatomy of the Human Body* entitled "An account of observations made by a young gentleman who was born blind, or lost his sight so early, that he had no remembrance of ever having seen,

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128 William Paulson, *Enlightenment, Romanticism, and the Blind in France* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987), 11.

and was couch'd between thirteen and fourteen years of age."[129] Cheselden's account has secured a place in history because it was the earliest evidence available which addressed what was at first considered to be merely a thought-problem raised by the Irish lawyer William Molyneux, who posed his question to John Locke thus: will someone who is blind from birth be able to distinguish objects immediately upon gaining sight? Or put another way, "does the mind know before sense experience and if not, does each sense contribute a separate knowledge, which then has somehow to be coordinated into a unified sense of the world?"[130] While there is not the space to rehearse or examine the "enormous thicket"[131] of thought that surrounds Molyneux's question, which starts with Locke and Diderot and continues in Berkeley, Condillac, Voltaire and beyond,[132] a brief analysis of Cheselden's original report will show how blindness and sight form a coupled figure. However, in order to frame the context of the importance of Cheselden's work, Molyneux's original problem should be quoted:

> Suppose a Man born blind, and now adult, and taught by his touch to distinguish between a Cube, and a Sphere of the same metal, and nighly of the same bigness, so as to tell, when he felt one and t'other, which is the Cube, which

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129 William Cheselden, *The Anatomy of the Human Body,* 5th ed. (London: William Bowyer, 1740), 300. Orthography has been modernized when necessary when quoting from this text.
130 Jay, *Downcast Eyes,* 98.
131 Jacques Derrida, *On Touching – Jean-Luc Nancy,* trans. Christine Irizarry (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005), 340n4.
132 Jonathan Crary, *Techniques of the Observer: On Vision and Modernity in the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1992), 59.

the Sphere. Suppose then the Cube and the Sphere placed
on a table, and the Blind Man to be made to see. Quære,
Whether by his sight, before he touch'd them, he could now
distinguish, and tell, which is the Globe, which the Cube.[133]

As stated above, Molyneux's question was treated as mere the-
ory until Cheselden's invention provided the first case study,
which was taken up, for example, by Voltaire (following Locke
and Berkeley), who claimed that the study provided an answer
of "no," and by Thomas Reid, who claimed it at least evidenced
a qualified "yes."[134] However, what is of interest here is not so
much the details of the debate but rather the way in which it
was taken up as a case study, as "hard evidence" at the begin-
ning of the Enlightenment. Perhaps one of the most prominent
uses of Cheselden's experiment is Immanuel Kant's citation
in his preface to the 1788 *Critique of Practical Reason,* where
the philosopher makes a passing reference to Cheselden, say-
ing that "One might ask, like Cheselden's blind man, 'Which

133 Quoted in John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding,* ed. Peter Nidditch
(Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975), 146. Molyneux had posed the question in a slightly
different manner six years earlier, but received no response. Locke took up the issue in his
second edition of the *Essay.* On the Molyneux question see Michael Morgan, *Molyneux's
Question: Touch and the Philosophy of Perception* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press,
1977) and Marjolein Degenaar, *Molyneux's Problem: Three Centures of Discussion on the
Perception of Forms* (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1996).
134 In the *Eléments de la philosophie de Newton* Voltaire states that "[Cheselden's] experi-
ment confirmed everything that Locke and Barclay had foreseen so well. For a long time
the boy distinguished not size, situation, or even figure. An object measuring an inch, and
put in front of his eye, and which hid a house from him, appeared to him as large as that
house. All that he initially saw seemed to him to be on his eyes, touching as the tactile objects
touch the skin," (Osterwald: Société Typographique de Neuchâtel, 1772), 178–9 (My transla-
tion). Cheselden attended Newton during the latter's final illness. On Reid's complex reac-
tion to the question, which includes a brief overview of the thought surrounding this issue,
see James van Cleve, "Reid's Answer to Molyneux's Question," *The Monist* 90.2 (2007).

deceives me, sight or touch?' (Empiricism is based on touch, but rationalism on a necessity which can be seen)."[135] What is important for Kant is not actually the answer to the blind man's question but rather the way in which Cheselden's experiment illustrates the new approximation of science to the universality of a law. However, a closer examination of Cheselden's report of the experiment will show that tagging along with this new-found vision is an increased ability to make the ambiguity of darkness visible.

This making-darkness-visible can be seen in the way Cheselden's report of the young boy's coming-to-sight is grounded in ambiguity. Cheselden begins his account by saying that those like the boy he cured were not exactly totally blind: "they are never so blind from that cause [cataracts] but that they can discern day from night, and for the most part in a strong light, distinguish black, white, and scarlet."[136] Cheselden does not in any way try to "hide" such an ambiguous beginning but rather foregrounds it in this first sentence of his case study. He then goes on to describe other ways blind people can see, making a comparison of how "they can discern in no other manner, than a sound eye can through a glass of broken jelly, where a great variety of surfaces so differently refract the light, that the several distinct pencils of rays cannot be collected by the eye

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135 Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason,* trans. Lewis White Beck (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill Educational Publishing, 1956), 14.

136 Cheselden, *The Anatomy of the Human Body,* 300. Later, the boy said that scarlet was his favorite of colors, and that the extreme of black caused him fear, a fear which is perhaps more complex than Cheselden allows since it erupted when "some months after [the operation], feeling by accident a negro woman, he was struck with great horror at the sight," *ibid.,* 301.

into their proper foci."[137] Cheselden's step forward for the Enlightenment is already grounded in murky waters. Blindness and sight are not diametrically opposed for Cheselden, who begins his description of blindness with a description of sight. In other words, this great leap forward in visibility in both a literal sense of vision for the boy and in a scientific method which penetrates nature and the cosmos contains within itself its own dismantling, its own blindness, which is not a contemporary idea or interpretation but rather something that was foregrounded at its origins.

However, Cheselden argues, despite the doubling of sight and blindness, these faint hints at vision were not enough to allow the boy to name objects that, post-op, now came into focus: "And thus it was with this young gentleman, who though he knew these colours asunder in a good light, yet when he saw them after he was couch'd, the faint ideas he had of them before, were not sufficient for him to know them by afterwards, and therefore he did not think them the same which he had before known by those names."[138] Even within this "no" to what became known as the Molyneux question, however, Cheselden reports a future which locates sight within blindness, and vice versa. This can be seen in the future appellation the boy assigns to a cat: "Having often forgot which was the cat, and which the dog, he was asham'd to ask; but catching the cat, which he knew by feeling, he was observed to look at her stedfastly, and then setting her down, said, So puss, I shall know you another

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137 *Ibid.*
138 *Ibid.,* 301.

time."[139] In this example the boy, filtered through Cheselden's reportage, both knows and does not know the cat; he is able to apply a term to the cat: "puss," although "puss" seems to be used as a placeholder until the more "correct" term "cat" can be found. "Puss" in this context makes a darkness visible by being a vocalized but "incorrect" stop-gap which allows the "darkness" of the inability to name the cat to come forth and be unveiled. "Puss" makes the inability of "cat" visible by putting off the "correct" naming to another time. In another example, blindness itself has its advantages, which do not disappear when sight is gained: "And even blindness, he observed, had this advantage, that he could go any where in the dark, much better than those who can see; and after he had seen, he did not soon lose this quality, nor desire a light to go about the house in the night."[140] Cheselden's boy concomitantly serves as a figure of great advances in the field of ophthalmic technique and in a sheltering of the powers of blindness from within the ramifications of that very event.

◉

VISION VS KNOWLEDGE. In one sense it seems like Cheselden's account functions in a different manner than an earlier and very well-known example of anatomical blindness, Rembrandt's *The Anatomy Lecture of Dr Nicolaes Tulp* of 1632. Rembrandt's painting, created a century before Cheselden's invention, depicts members of the Amsterdam Guild of Sur-

139 Cheselden, *The Anatomy of the Human Body,* 302.
140 *Ibid.,* 303.

geons around a body laid out on a dissecting table. However, the surgeons are looking over and past the body of criminal Aris Kindt in order to focus on an anatomy book propped up in a corner. The inability of the surgeons to see what is just below their eyes manifests itself in the cadaver's left hand not only being wildly out of proportion to the rest of the body but also by its being erroneously replaced with a right hand. In addition, the shadow cast by the attending surgeons lies directly over the cadaver's eyes, which are the only pair not focused on the text, instead turned up back into their eyelids. So while this image does illustrate the blindness of anatomy books, a blindness Cheselden's contribution helped to diminish, the image may also be read as a determinate negation of the dialectics of Cheselden's view, in that through a negative illustration of the effects of blindness, or of a blind following of erroneous anatomical texts, blindness itself is able to become more visible rather than any kind of sight being found "within" blindness. However, as Jonathan Crary argues in *Techniques of the Observer,* both versions of seeing blindness are still filtered through language, rather than the sensual (in the sense of Harman). As Crary argues: In all the speculation surrounding the 1728 case of the Cheselden boy, no one was ever to suggest that a blind person restored to sight would initially see a luminous and somehow self-sufficient revelation of colored patches. Instead, that inaugural moment of vision was a void that could not be spoken or represented, because it was empty of discourse and thus of meaning. Vision for the newly sighted person took shape when words, uses, and locations could be

assigned to objects."[141] This linguistic distance from the sensual finds its counterpart in the technique used by Cheselden to observe the elements of the body for his anatomy: the camera obscura.
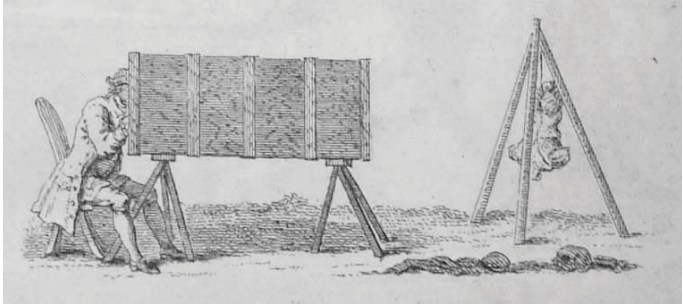

Image found on the title page of Cheselden's *The Anatomy of the Human Body.*

For Crary, the camera obscura, through all the different fluctuations in the contexts of its use, imposes a fixed subject in relation to what is being observed (as can be seen in the observers's literally sitting in a chair from Cheselden's illustration). Thus, the "*regularity* and uniformity"[142] which Crary sees as a part of the apparatus of the camera obscura represents its social function which is at a remove from the wildly sensual. In a similar manner Siegfried Zielinski argues that like early computers, the camera obscura was used and enjoyed but there was no access to its mode of funtioning.[143]

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141 Crary, *Techniques of the Observer,* 66.
142 *Ibid.,* 30.
143 Siegfried Zielinski, *Deep Time of the Media: Toward and Archaeology of Hearing and Seeing by Technical Means,* trans. Gloria Custance (Cambridge & London: MIT Press, 2006), 259.

However, others have seen more of a rupture within these 18th-century examples themselves. The use of Rembrandt's image as a visible placeholder for blindness can be found in a contemporary appropriation of the painting in W. G. Sebald's 1995 novel *The Rings of Saturn.* In this novel, which is full of images (as in all of Sebald's fiction), Rembrandt's work is reproduced twice: first in toto, and then only a detail of the cadaver appears. Sebald's narrator tells us that "the anatomy lessons given every year in the depth of winter by Dr Nicolaas Tulp were not only of the greatest interest to a student of medicine but constituted in addition a significant date in the agenda of a society that saw itself as emerging from the darkness into the light."[144] Actually, Sebald describes how when viewing Rembrandt's picture at the Mauritshuis in The Hague the spectator is put in the position of another one of the anatomists standing around the table on which the body of the criminal lies, although what changes in the observers' perspective is that the blindness of the surgeons becomes the focus of the picture. Thus, the painting acts in a different manner than the camera obscura in that the position of the subject is unstable: "and we believe that we saw what they saw then: in the foreground, the greenish, prone body of Aris Kindt, his neck broken and his chest risen terribly in rigor mortis. And yet it is debatable whether anyone ever really saw that body, since the art of anatomy, then in its infancy, was not least a way of making the reprobate body invisible."[145]

144 W. G. Sebald, *The Rings of Saturn,* trans. Michael Hulse (London: The Harvill Press, 1999), 12.
145 *Ibid.,* 13. As Jonathan Long argues, "Sebald's reading of the *Anatomy Lesson* shows that Rembrandt deploys the anatomical atlas against itself: by copying the lower left arm directly from the atlas, Rembrandt has painted it upside-down. The resulting 'crass misrepresentation' [...] becomes, in the narrator's view, a sign of the violence perpetrated on Aris

As such this scene is actually a foregrounding of an improved ability to make blindness visible: "Though the body is open to contemplation, it is, in a sense, excluded, and in the same way the much-admired verisimilitude of Rembrandt's picture proves on closer examination to be more apparent than real"[146] which is revealed in the flipped-over and out-of-proportion hand of Kindt. Thus, the painting not only shows an anamorphosis regarding the observer, but also replaces the hegemony of vision-as-knowledge with the sensory apparatus of the body as a whole. This interpretation of Rembrandt's painting then becomes a commentary on the role of images throughout Sebald's work, for they function not as empirical proof of the I-was-there but rather as elements foregrounding the darkness that is a part of vision itself. These images actually disrupt the connection between observation and truth by becoming uprooted from their role as evidence in order to show their literary function as truth-makers. While it is true that, as Mary Cosgrove argues, "Sebald reads this from an ethical perspective as Rembrandt's empathy with criminal, Aris Kindt: Rembrandt is defying the growing Cartesian rationality of the seventeenth century by asserting the body in this way"[147] the story is making another point simultaneously, for "the narrator is equally making a point about the relationship between seeing

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Kindt and a gesture of empathic identification on the part of the painter. This stress on the suffering of the individual victim reinscribes embodiment at the very moment of its disappearance into the body," *W. G. Sebald: Image, Archive, Modernity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008), 135.
146 Sebald, *Rings of Saturn,* 16.
147 Mary Cosgrove, "Sebald for Our Time: The Politics of Melancholy and the Critique of Capitalism in his Work," in *W. G. Sebald and the Writing of History,* eds. Anne Fuchs and Jonathan Long (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2007), 107.

and knowing"[148] much as Molyneux's question did, although Sebald's reading is closer to Cheselden, who foregrounds the disruption of both sides of the argument rather than the empirical certitude of the test.

But how can blindness be seen as such? Paul de Man has done much to map a territory of reading blindness. For example, De Man asks how the ability for a sheltering of aporia can come about to be understood: "One should ask how a blindness comes into being that allows for a statement in which truth and falsehood are completely subverted to be accepted as true without resistance."[149] Briefly, for De Man moments of blindness occur when insight slips through unnoticed by a writer. As he says in a discussion of Blanchot and Poulet, "their language could grope toward a certain degree of insight only because their method remained oblivious to the perception of that insight. The insight exists only for a reader in the privileged position of being able to observe the blindness as a phenomenon in its own right – the question of his own blindness being one which he is by definition incompetent to ask – and so being able to distinguish between statement and meaning."[150] De Man describes here not only the blindness of Cheselden's account of the boy, sometimes read as a "no" to Molyneux's question but which actually grounded the question in ambiguity, but also in the blindness of the surgeons of *The Anatomy Lesson* which can only be observed from the

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148 *Ibid.*
149 Paul de Man, *Allegories of Reading: Figural Language in Rousseau, Nietzsche, Rilke and Proust* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 1979), 62.
150 Paul de Man, *Blindness and Insight: Essays in the Rhetoric of Contemporary Criticism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1983), 106.

literal and metaphorical position of the spectator in front of the canvas. These moments of blindness, however, "are also the moments at which they [critics, in this case] achieve their greatest insight."[151]

De Man's logic of blindness can also be found in a more contemporary example of technical advances in removing myopia, especially when found in the form of cataracts, which foregrounds to an even more qualitative extent an increased visibility of blindness. This example can be found in Hélène Cixous' account of the removal of her myopia through laser surgery in *Veils,* written in conjunction with Jacques Derrida. In this work Cixous describes how it was only after the veil of myopia was removed that the blindness of the human condition came forth, much as it was with Cheselden and Rembrandt that there was a struggle with how only after the body started to be known that a thought of the phenomenological allusiveness of that body could develop. Cixous opens her story, presumably speaking of herself in the third person, thus: "Myopia was her fault, her lead, her imperceptible native veil. Strange: she could see that she could not see, but she could not see clearly."[152] Similar to Cheselden's boy, Cixous was blind but could see, or at least make somethings out: "Spectacles are feeble forks only just good enough to catch little bits of reality. As the myopic people know, myopia has its shaky seat in judgment. It opens the reign of an eternal uncertainty that no prosthesis can dissipate."[153] However, advances in laser

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151 De Man, *Blindness and Insight,* 109.
152 Hélène Cixous & Jacques Derrida, *Veils,* trans. Geoffrey Bennington (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001), 3.
153 *Ibid.,* 6.

eye surgery caused Cixous to have her myopia removed: "she had learned the incredible news: science had just vanquished the invincible. It was done in ten minutes. End of the infinite. A possibility still impossible three years earlier. In the list of invincibles promised to defeat, they had just reached myopia."[154] In coordinates similar to Cheselden's invention, a quick surgery offers the eradication of a hitherto unanswerable problem. However, the parallels do not end there, for it is only with the removal of the veil of myopia that Cixous is actually able to begin seeing myopia itself: "Such an experience could take place only once, that's what was disturbing her. Myopia would not grow again, the foreigner would never come back to her, her myopia, so strong – a force that she had always called weakness and infirmity. But now its force, its strange force, was revealed to her, *retrospectively* at the very moment it was taken away from her."[155] Derrida, in his accompanying essay, draws forth the manner in which the removal of the veil is in fact a making-the-veil-visible: "You poor thing, you poor thing: finishing with the veil will always have been the very movement of the veil: un-veiling, unveiling oneself, reaffirming the veil in unveiling. It finishes with itself in unveiling, does the veil, and always with a view to finishing off in self-unveiling. Finishing with the veil is finishing with self. Is that what you're hoping for from the verdict?"[156]

What the removal of the veil has shown is, retrospectively, the time of the veil. In fact, what is being drawn forth through-

out all of the examples in this essay is a foregrounding of the expanse of time between understanding and non-understanding, between light and darkness, between vision and blindness. In other words, of pure presence, which takes place in the duration of the blink. Or, as Derrida argues in *Speech and Phenomena:* "As soon as we admit this continuity of the now and the not-now, perception and nonperception, in the zone of primordiality common to primordial impression and primordial retention, we admit the other into the self-identity of the *Augenblick*; nonpresence and nonevidence are admitted into *the blink of the instant.* There is a duration to the blink, and it closes the eye."[157] Derrida is arguing for a knowledge or vision of how what is not ourselves is concomitant to a construction or what is ourselves. In this sense he describing the location of the Weavers in *Perdido Street Station*; in that they are both the combination of consciousness and forgetting, and their disruption in cognition. This doubled identity is made possible because of the exterior relationship of blindness (nonperception) and sight (perception) rather than the manner in which one lies underneath the understanding of another.

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157 Jacques Derrida, *Speech and Phenomena and Other Essays on Husserl's Theory of Signs,* trans. David Allison (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1973), 62.

jeremy fernando ·
afterword – or, in the blink of …

– and here reason, for one flicker of an eye, reached the Is.

<div align="right">– Augustine, *Confessions*</div>

I learned: the first lesson of my life: nobody can face the world with his eyes open all the time.

<div align="right">– Salman Rushdie, *Midnight's Children*</div>

When we began, we attempted to open the dossier of seeing. Not just in the epistemological sense of *what it means to see,* or the hermeneutical sense of *the meaning of what is seen* but, more pertinently, the question *what is seeing.*

And when we say *we,* one has to keep in mind the fact that this is a collaborative thinking; a thinking that was only possible as others – Julia Hölzl, Jessica Aliaga

Lavrijsen, Brian Willems – had responded to our call to think, to attend to this gesture that had called out to us even as it continually escaped, continues to elude us. In this sense, even as we were sending out the call, we were unsure of what we were calling out for, if there was even an object, let alone objective, to our call. Thus, this was a call that was not only open to possibilities, it was a call that was open to itself, did not pretend to understand what it was calling for – an *open call*.

Which means that even as we read the responses to our call, chose, compiled, and put together what we now call a book, our book, we have no way of knowing if we have managed to attend to the question we opened, the question that first called out to us.

⊙

A CONFESSION. Keeping in mind Augustine's warning that if one is truly seeking – calling out – one cannot first know what one is looking for; and thus, always runs the risk of not only not finding it, but of mistaking what one finds as what one was looking for.* We should not forget that Augustine's text was written to the divine, to one that knows even as (S)he remains unknowable to us. Much like how the reader – you – remains veiled from us even as we attempt to address you. Thus, even as we write, you read, the relationality between what is written and what is read is always already haunted by the possibility of blindness – perhaps even when the one who reads is the very one who has written.

Saint Augustine, *Confessions,* trans. Gary Wills (London: Penguin Classics, 2006), 3–6.

This is particularly crucial as seeing – presence – has long been privileged in Western thought. But one must also remember that if discovery is finding whilst not knowing exactly what one is looking for, searching implies a certain blindness in seeing: and the moment of unveiling might well be one that is shrouded in darkness. At the instant of the encounter, one might not even know that one has encountered something.

An encounter where one is never quite certain which sense has the first encounter – if the encounter even happens in the realm of the senses.

And more importantly, that even whilst it is a figure that points to seeing, it is one that is unsure of what it sees: the very un-

certainty of what is seen foregrounded in the speed in which the seeing takes place: so much so that oftentimes one has to have a second look to be sure; a reviewing that might not avail of itself to one. So, even as there is something that affects one in that blink of an eye, one might never be certain of the cause of the effect – it might well be something that is not of the order of sight.

Thus, opening the question of sight also opens the register of what it means to know. A question that the essays attempt to address by attending to various sites of knowledge – photography, literature, philosophy – not just to locate unknowabilities, but to respond to ways in which they affect us. Hence, even as this book attempts to think about seeing, to ques-

tion what knowledge is, even as it unveils the blindness in knowing, seeing, it always also foregrounds its own lack of sight, acknowledges the unknowability within its claims. Which suggests that even as the essays stake positions on – this book posits – even as it sets forth notions to be seen, it brings with it what cannot be seen.

And here, if we listen carefully, we can hear echoes of Cioran's warning: "the terrifying experience of death, when preserved in consciousness, becomes ruinous. If you talk about death, you save part of your self. But at the same time, something of your real self dies, because objectified meanings lose the actuality they have in consciousness." Perhaps then, all we can do is name the dash, to speak of the dash, whilst letting it be – whilst

E.M. Cioran, *On the Heights of Despair,* trans. Ilinca Zarifopol-Johnston, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 4.

letting it dash, break, the very notion of meaning itself.

Not as if Augustine himself did not realise this: "My reason, while recognizing its own mutability, concentrated on its own activity, abstracting its expression from old patterns, freeing itself from the blur of contradictory impressions, to trace the ripple of light by which it promptly acknowledged that the immutable is above the mutable (how otherwise was it preferred to the mutable?) –" It is only by freeing his mind from itself – from its own cognisance of its transience and thus the impossibility of approaching the eternal – suspending reason insofar as it is possible, that Augustine, by no longer being himself – dashing himself – opens himself to the possibility of the "Is." Where

the encounter with the divine is always in the "trace" – trail, remainder. And only in a moment – "for one flicker of an eye" – might it be glimpsed.

In a moment before reason.

Thus, an encounter that lies outside one, beyond one's capacity to know: one that affects us whilst being absent from our very senses. Which opens yet another question: *how can one see absence?* Perhaps only with one's eyes closing – not quite shut, but with eyelids dashing towards each other.

Not deliberately though: for that would still be of the order of reason, self-awareness. Thus, not a wink. But a gesture that is both of the person but also one that es-

capes the full control of one, that happens to one – a blink.

"Nobody can face the world with his eyes open all the time": not because there is too much to be seen and therefore one needs intermittent breaks, but because without a break in seeing, one can never open oneself to the possibility of seeing what cannot be seen – the remainder of sight, the outside of seeing, that is the immutable, the eternal.*

And if this remainder is of the eternal – unchanging, ever-present, but always also potentially absent, escaping us, then perhaps all we can ever do is imagine it, envisage it even as we cannot see it, name it.

Sometimes, just a little out of sight.

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