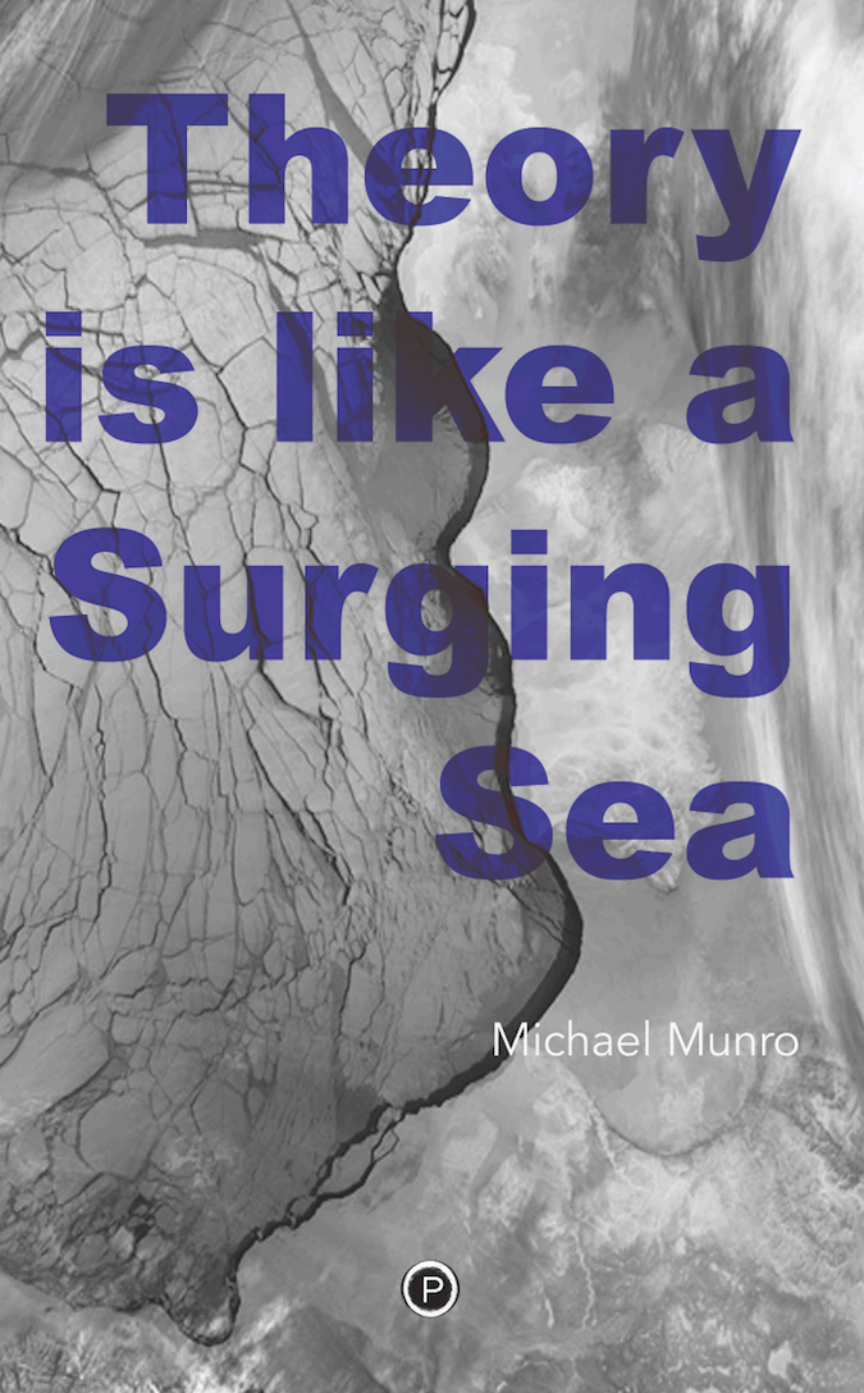
Theory is like a Surging Sea
Michael Munro

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dead letter office

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This book is dedicated to Eileen Joy who changed my life.

Table of Contents

Acknowledgments

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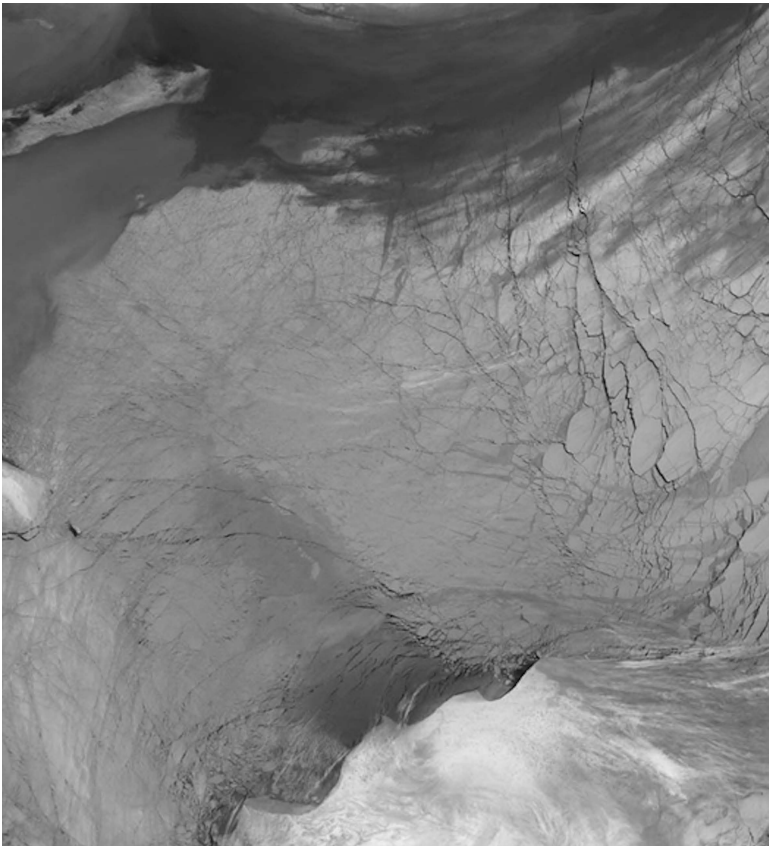
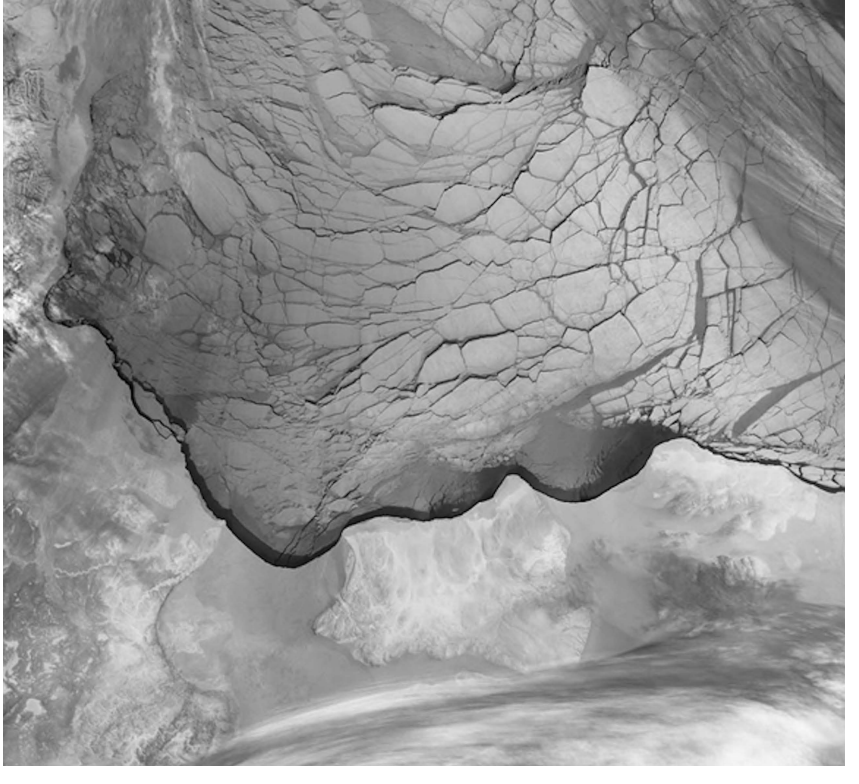




§ "The difficulty felt by those philosophers who have shown themselves to be puzzled by the subject of negation has not been that they failed to understand the use of negative signs," A.J. Ayer has written. "They have been at a loss, not to understand what negative statements are, but only to account for their existence."[1]

[1] A.J. Ayer, "Negation," *Journal of Philosophy* 49 (1952): 803 [797–815].

Theory is like a Surging Sea

Michael Munro

§I.

Dichtung und Wahrheit

> Strictly speaking, does not thought—or the act of thinking—always have the capacity for operating like a foreign language?[2]
>
> ~Rey Chow

Philosophie dürfte man eigentlich nur dichten. Witt-

[2] Rey Chow, *Not Like A Native Speaker: On Languaging as a Postcolonial Experience* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014), 42.

genstein's imperative translates, "very roughly," "Philosophy ought really to be written only as poetry."[3] Yet how is one to approach that directive? How is one to *read* it—as poetry, or philosophy? If poetry, following Robert Frost, is, precisely, "what gets lost in translation," how is one to place what's proposed here? And where does that leave philosophy?

"Poetry may well be 'what gets lost in translation'," Craig Dworkin has conceded, "though the phrase should be understood not in the sense of elegiac ruination or privation, but of absorption and reverie—in the way one might be lost in thought."[4]

Only in poetry lost in thought, as in another language, may philosophy be found.

[3] Ludwig Wittgenstein, quoted in Marjorie Perloff, "'Literature' in the Expanded Field," in *Comparative Literature in the Age of Multiculturalism*, ed. Charles Bernheimer (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995), 184 [175–186]. Thomas Basbøll has noted that the Austrian's dictum "means, somewhat less elegantly than the German, that 'one ought really to *do* philosophy *as poetry*.' The German word 'dichten' is the verb form of 'Dichtung,' which means 'poetry.' To my knowledge there is no such thing as poeting in English": Thomas Basbøll, "Epiphany," *The Pangrammaticon*, June 18, 2005, http://pangrammaticon.blogspot.com/2005/06/epiphany.html. Basbøll concludes, "In any case, modifying Peter Winch's translation a bit, we can render this more naturally as, 'One ought really only to *compose* philosophy (as one composes poetry)'."

[4] Craig Dworkin, *No Medium* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2013), 124.

§ Giorgio Agamben contends that "in a philosophical investigation, not only can the *pars destruents* not be separated from the *pars construens*, but the latter coincides completely with the former."[5] If one can apply to Agamben here another of his methodological principles, the transformation of aporia into euporia, and if it is indeed true, as he writes, that the *pars destruents* and the *pars construens* "completely" coincide, what might it be, instead—in the interest of the least displacement—for the former to wholly coincide with the latter? And how might that transform philosophical investigation?

[5] Giorgio Agamben, quoted in Adam Kotsko, "What is to be Done? The Endgame of the *Homo Sacer* Series," *An und für sich* [weblog], March 23, 2014, https://itself.wordpress.com/2014/03/23/my-acla-paper-what-is-to-be-done-the-endgame-of-the-homo-sacer-series/.

§II.

'Without this nothing thinks': The Enigma of the Active Intellect

There is perhaps nothing more enigmatic in the history of philosophy than that which in the tradition is known as the active intellect (*nous poiêtikos, al-'aql al-fa"āl*). The few dense, cryptic sentences in which Aristotle gives it its inaugural formulation, which comprise the whole of the fifth chapter of book three of the *De Anima*, are on one scholar's estimation the "most intensely studied sentences in the history of philosophy."[6] The "obscurity and extreme brevity" of "this half-page chapter," notes another, "are notorious."[7] In light of that chapter's

[6] Herbert A. Davidson, *Alfarabi, Avicenna, and Averroes on Intellect: Their Cosmologies, Theories of the Active Intellect, and Theories of Human Intellect* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 3.

[7] Willy Theiler, quoted in Christopher Shields, "The Active Mind of *De Anima* iii 5," supplement to "Aristotle's Psychology," in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*

posterity, what is it that so many have so intently sought to think by way of it? The chapter in question (430a10-25) reads in full:[8]

> Since in all of nature something is the matter for each genus (and this is all those things in potentiality), while something else is their cause and is productive (*poiêtikon*), by producing them all as a craft does in relation to the matter it has fashioned, necessarily these same differentiations are present in the soul. And one sort of mind exists by coming to be all things and one sort of mind exists by producing all things, as a kind of positive state, like light. For in a certain way, light makes colors existing in potentiality colors in actuality.
>
> And this mind is separate and unaffected and unmixed, being in its essence actuality. For what produces is always superior to what is affected, as too the first principle is to the matter.
>
> Actual knowledge is the same as the thing known, though in an individual potential knowledge is prior in time, though it is not prior in time generally.

(Spring 2011 Edition), ed. Edward N. Zalta, http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2011/entries/aristotle-psychology/active-mind.html.

[8] For the translation, and subsequent quotations, see Shields, "The Active Mind."

> But it is not the case that sometimes it thinks and sometimes it does not. And having been separated, this alone is just as it is, and this alone is deathless and everlasting, though we do not remember, because this is unaffected, whereas passive mind is perishable. And without this, nothing thinks.

However redoubtable may be the exegesis that this passage has not ceased to require, the scholarly consensus as to its general characterization can be simply put. Christopher Shields has done so expertly:

> Aristotle introduces a division into mind (*nous*) which he maintains is present generally in nature, between the active and the passive (*DA* 430a10–14).
>
> The active mind is compared to a craft, while the passive mind is likened to matter (*DA* 430a12–13).
>
> The active mind is compared to light, which in a certain way makes colours that exist in potentiality exist in actuality (*DA* 430a16–17).
>
> Having been separated, the active mind alone is deathless and everlasting (*DA* 430a23–24).
>
> Passive mind, by contrast, is perishable (*DA* 430a24–25).
>
> Because the active mind is unaffected, we are not in a position to remember—something or

> other at some time or other. Unfortunately Aristotle does not specify what exactly we cannot remember or when (*DA* 430a23–24).
>
> Without this (*this* = either the passive mind or the active mind), nothing thinks—or one thinks nothing (*DA* 430a25).

"To the degree that there is agreement about these general claims," Shields comments, "there is commensurate disagreement about how each is to be understood and developed." The chapter's striking last line is here exemplary:

> The ambiguity of the last claim provides a useful illustration of the sorts of difficulties we encounter when we approach *De Anima* iii 5 for careful study: in the phrase ('without this nothing thinks,' or 'without this *x* thinks nothing'; *aneu toutou outhen noei*; 430a25), one cannot even be sure about the intended referent of the demonstrative '*this*' (*touto*) or about whether 'nothing' (*outhen*) is the subject or object of 'thinks' (*noei*). Thus, depending upon how it is construed, Aristotle's Greek can be understood in at least four different ways: (i) without the active mind, nothing thinks; (ii) without the active mind, the passive mind thinks nothing; (iii) without the passive mind, nothing thinks; and (iv) without the passive mind, the active mind thinks nothing.

> These possibilities are not idle: we find different commentators understanding Aristotle's text in these markedly different ways. Each interpretation seems justifiable in its own terms, and so none is indisputably to be preferred over its competitors, at least not on narrowly linguistic grounds. Interpretive questions thus begin without firm textual data. What holds for this single phrase iterates through the entire chapter.

"Consequently, although some progress is to be made by minute philological analysis of *De Anima* iii 5," Shields concludes, "the text as it stands leaves unanswered many of the questions with which we began."

As it stands there is yet one point on which the text admits no dispute: what is at issue in that text's every interpretation remains "the act of thinking within thought itself."[9] "To think does not mean merely to be affected by this or that thing, by this or that content of enacted thought," Giorgio Agamben has written, "but rather at once to be affected by one's own receptiveness and experience in each and every thing that is thought a pure power of thinking."[10] "The experience of thought that is here in

[9] Gilles Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, trans. Paul Patton (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 114.
[10] Giorgio Agamben, *Means Without End: Notes on Politics*, trans. Vincenzo Binetti and Cesare Casarino (Minne-

question," in other words, Agamben continues, "is always experience of a common power."[11] It is none other, and no less, than the commonality of that power that makes of the active intellect an enigma. Daniel Heller-Roazen has isolated the two components all enigmas share: "opacity and the hidden principle of their interpretation. That summary may appear willfully paradoxical," Heller-Roazen comments, "yet enigmas verify its truth": Were an enigma "immediately intelligible, it would be none at all," yet were an enigma "solely solvable by means of knowledge extrinsic to its construction, it, too, could hardly be called an 'enigma'."[12]

The sense in which the active intellect constitutes an enigma is now clear. "The enigma can be solved only when the one who hears it knows that it turns, allusively, yet systematically, back upon itself."[13] The intellect attains its activity only when it "turns," with the decisive lucidity of the one whom it traverses, "allusively, yet systematically, back upon itself": the intellect distinguishes itself in its immemorial craft by the activity the problem of its activity provokes, in the varied acts of intellect the experience of that activity's intimate obscurity does not

apolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), 9.
[11] Agamben, *Means Without End*, 9.
[12] Daniel Heller-Roazen, *Dark Tongues: The Art of Rogues and Riddlers* (New York: Zone Books, 2013), 77.
[13] Heller-Roazen, *Dark Tongues*, 76.

fail to inspire. There is for philosophy in its history a resplendence the difficult color of clarity.

Postscript: The Last Chapter in the History of the World

> Thinking is finding a good quotation.[14]
>
> ~Paul de Man

"In recent decades, much has been said of quotations and ciphers, but even so, there has been perhaps insufficient emphasis placed on that anaphoric necessity of discourse that makes use of a quotation as a key and as an initiation."[15] An "anaphoric necessity," indeed: What sense does "anaphora" have here, and how does quotation figure its "necessity"?

Where it serves "as a key," where, in its remit, it will have effected nothing less than "an initiation," quotation is language in its messianic reduction.[16]

[14] Paul de Man, quoted in Ian Balfour, "The Philosophy of Philology and the Crisis of Reading: Schlegel, Benjamin, de Man," in *Philology and Its Histories*, ed. Sean Gurd (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2010), 210n40 [192–212].

[15] Lisa Block de Behar, *Borges*: *The Passion of an Endless Quotation*, trans. William Egginton (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2003), 150.

[16] On the model of the phenomenological reduction, see Peter Fenves, *The Messianic Reduction*: *Walter Benjamin and the Shape of Time* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2010). Jean-François Lyotard, quoted in Gerhard Richter, *Afterness*: *Figures of Following in Modern Thought and Aesthetics* (New York: Columbia University Press,

"A recapitulation, a kind of summation,"[17] "quotation marks are a summons against language, citing it before the tribunal of thought"[18]: "I read only (even here, I confess)"—even here, I confess—"where I do not understand, in the very opening of my non-comprehension."[19]

2011), 14 and 210: "After philosophy comes philosophy. But it is altered by the after."

[17] Giorgio Agamben, *The Time That Remains*: *A Commentary on the Letter to the Romans*, trans. Patricia Dailey (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005), 75. Walter Benjamin, "Karl Kraus," in *Reflections*: *Essays, Aphorisms, Autobiographical Writings*, ed. Peter Demetz, trans. Edmund Jephcott (New York: Schocken Books, Inc., 1978), 269 [239–273]: "In quotation the two realms—of origin and destruction—justify themselves before language. And conversely, only where they interpenetrate—in quotation—is language consummated."

[18] Giorgio Agamben, "The Idea of Thought," in *Idea of Prose*, trans. Michael Sullivan and Sam Whitsitt (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995), 104 [103–104].

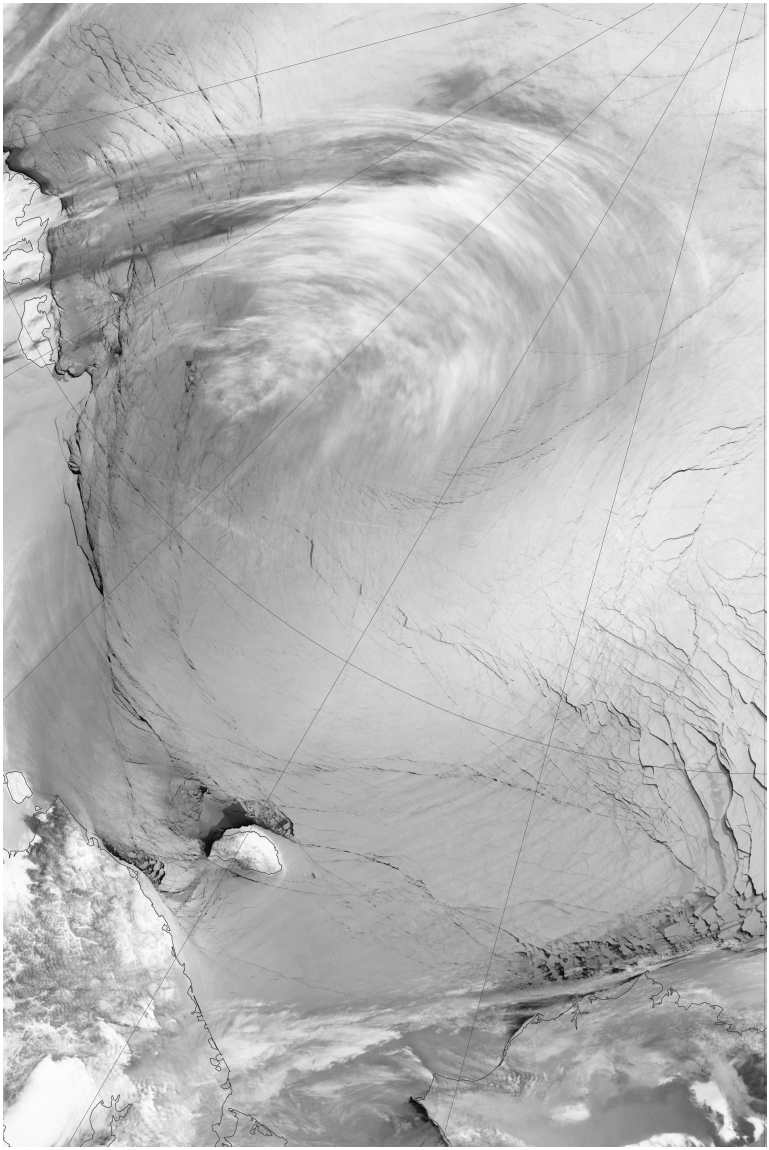
[19] Geoffrey Bennington, *Not Half No End*: *Militantly Melancholic Essays in Memory of Jacques Derrida* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2011), 126.

§ "The attempt to clarify the nature of negation," Ray Brassier has written, "involves enquiring about the being of non-being."[20]

> For it seems only something that *is* in some sense can be negated: otherwise, what content can negation or denial have? But that which is not cannot refer to something, since *something* is a sign of one thing and hence always refers to a being (something that is), just as *somethings* (plural) refers to several things. But then whoever says or utters 'that which is not' cannot be referring to anything, whether one or many. Consequently, it seems we cannot analyze what we mean when we say that which is not, since it cannot refer to anything that is either one or multiple. Thus the expression seems to be devoid of sense. But then are we not denying something again and thus invoking the very thing which we just said cannot be invoked?[21]

"One of the disciples is driven to despair when he learns that every question only leads to more questions. When he asks: then why should we begin? the Rabbi turns the joke back on him: 'You see,' said Reb Mendel, 'at the end of an argument, there is always a decisive question unsettled'."[22]

[20] Ray Brassier, "That Which is Not: Philosophy as Entanglement of Truth and Negativity," *Stasis* 1 (2013): 177 [174-186].
[21] Brassier, "That Which is Not," 178.
[22] Rosmarie Waldrop, *Lavish Absence: Recalling and Rereading Edmond Jabès* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 2003), 5.



§III.

Nearer to You than the Sea

for Zahid R. Chaudhary and Eileen A. Joy

"Nearer to you than the sea"—it's with these words that L.O. Aranye Fradenburg ends the final sentence of a paragraph mid-stream in the argument of her final chapter in *Staying Alive: A Survival Manual for the Liberal Arts*, "Life's Reach: Territory, Display, Ekphrasis."[23] In itself and in context the paragraph is unremarkable—which is to say, exemplary: from biology to neuroscience, from psychoanalysis to developmental psychology, to ethology, art, and ecology, the range of scholarship cited and discussed in a single paragraph is par for the course, as is the

[23] L.O. Arayne Fradenburg, "Life's Reach: Territory, Display, Ekphrasis," in *Staying Alive: A Survival Manual for the Liberal Arts*, ed. Eileen A. Joy (Brooklyn: punctum books, 2013), 239 [223–262].

artfulness with which it is arranged. Nor is the sentence itself remarkable. A typical final sentence of a body paragraph, it offers a paraphrase of the foregoing and an example. What one might call a throwaway sentence. Almost. I'd like to attempt to situate that sentence—"I am, in part, *where* I am—at a certain angle to the sun, nearer to you than the sea"—and to demonstrate its reach today, here, where the sea could not be nearer.

In a 1917 letter to Scholem, Walter Benjamin writes,

> Knowledge becomes transmittable only for the person who has understood his [*sic* throughout] knowledge as something that has been transmitted. He becomes free in an unprecedented way. The metaphysical origin of a Talmudic witticism comes to mind here. Theory is like a surging sea, but the only thing that matters to the wave (understood as a metaphor for the person) is to surrender itself to its motion in such a way that it crests and breaks. This enormous freedom of the breaking wave is education in its actual sense: instruction—tradition becoming visible and *free*, tradition emerging precipitously like a wave from living abundance.[24]

[24] Walter Benjamin, quoted in Zahid R. Chaudhary, *Afterimage of Empire: Photography in Nineteenth-Century India* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2012),

A series of questions, like a wave, here suddenly breaks: That knowledge *is* not transmittable but becomes so ("Knowledge becomes transmittable" are the passage's opening words, and although perhaps a salutary assertion, it is no less astonishing for that)—what precipitates that becoming, and under what conditions does it (might it) obtain? When and after what fashion can one be said to have understood one's knowledge "as something that has been transmitted"? Can *that* be an object of knowledge? Or is it only *then*, in transmission, that it's first given to be "understood"? What frees knowledge for transmission, and in what manner ("unprecedented," Benjamin writes) does one who has so understood it become "free"? If it has been transmitted—and is so understood—is it truly without precedent? How freely does the "unprecedented" come to take precedence, here? And from where? Is it "metaphysical" that "a Talmudic witticism" comes to mind

193–194. I could have saved face after a fashion—one to be interrogated in the following text—and quoted this passage from the volume of the correspondence in which it appears. But I let the citation stand, not simply for the sake of honesty, nor to mark a humdrum scholarly debt. It marks an additional—and happy—debt: I had the great privilege and pleasure to study with Professor Chaudhary at his first teaching post, the University of Washington, Seattle. I dedicate this to him fondly and in thanks, and to Eileen Joy, without whom—and this is the very least indication, the most proximal (the nearest!)—this would not have been written.

here, or is only its "origin" metaphysical? Can *that* be known, and transmitted—and so known as transmitted—as it is here, where it comes to mind, in a letter? And what precedent does (might) that set?

Must it have come over one like the surging of the sea? Or is that "only" a metaphor?

That theory "is like a surging sea" makes the (attempted) pivot away from it all the more conspicuous, if less understandable: What is one to make of the syntax of that sentence, of the sudden ebb that stems the flow? "Theory is like a surging sea, *but*"—but, yet, however—Benjamin goes on to write of "the only thing that matters to the wave"? How is one to theorize that transition? How is one to understand the manner in which that transmission breaks?

(And what hinges on that parenthetical insertion, "understood as a metaphor for the person"? What comes to pass here, very much in passing?)

And what is one to make of the swirling breakwater of figurative language here? How does the *mention* of metaphor, one staging the wave as the person, the person as wave, named and "understood as a metaphor," complicate the *use* of simile ("Theory is like a surging sea") employed but a few words earlier in the same sentence? And what is the relationship between these two figures? Synecdoche? How is *that*, in turn, to be understood?

Is this where "theory" comes into the picture? Is this what it is "to surrender itself"—oneself, one's self, one self or other, "like a wave"—"to its motion"? What's to be made of that motion so as to crest and break ("to surrender itself to its motion in such a way that it crests and breaks")?

Is that something like freedom ("This enormous freedom of the breaking wave …")?

Or is it something like education ("… is education in its actual sense")? What would it be to be one for whom there is no longer—knowledge having *become* transmittable—a difference between freedom and education, and for whom *that* is "the only thing that matters"?

Would that "in its actual sense" be "instruction"? Is this where becoming transmittable transpires, instructively, knowledge becoming transmittable where tradition becomes "visible"? To what "visibility," consequent to what education, might tradition become as if luminous? For how "precipitously" from "living abundance" would tradition have to emerge like a wave for it, in its instruction, *to free*? (As if into the air, into the light, at a certain angle to the sun …)

An emergence "like a wave"? Or, perhaps, like a person—"the wave (understood as […] the person)"—a certain person?

It is living abundance Fradenburg brings "nearer to you," today, remarkably, "than the sea."

§ "Being is also non-being," Gilles Deleuze wrote in *Difference and Repetition*, "*but non-being is not the being of the negative*; rather, it is the being of the problematic, the being of problem and question."[25] Deleuze returned to those words in a lesser piece, republishing them four years later with an exemplary series of discreet emendations. "Non-being is not the being of the negative, but rather the positive being of the 'problematic,' the objective being of a problem and of a question."[26] The *positive* being of the problematic, the *objective* being of problems and questions—what is the sense of those additions, and according to what necessity does the recourse to elaboration impose itself there? How, in other words, is one to understand the "'problematic,'" the "being" of the problematic, in its "positivity"?

[25] Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, 64; emphasis author's.

[26] Gilles Deleuze, "How Do We Recognize Structuralism?" in *Desert Islands: And Other Texts, 1953-1974*, ed. David Lapoujade, trans. Melissa McMahon, Charles J. Stivale, Michael Taormina, et. al. (New York: Semiotext(e), 2004), 189–190 [170–192].

§ IV.

VERTIGO, *BEATITUDO*: SPINOZA AND PHILOSOPHY

> One could say that every philosopher has two philosophies: his [*sic*] own and that of Spinoza.[27]
>
> ~Henri Bergson

> Spinozism or no philosophy at all.[28]
>
> ~G.W.F. Hegel

1.

"We have not yet begun to understand Spinoza," Gilles Deleuze once claimed, "and I myself no more

[27] Henri Bergson, quoted in Michael Hardt, *Gilles Deleuze: An Apprenticeship in Philosophy* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), 130n3.
[28] G.W.F. Hegel, quoted in Pierre Macherey, "Hegel Reads Spinoza," *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 29 (2011): 223 [223–236].

than others,"[29] noting elsewhere that "the greatest philosophers are hardly more than apostles who distance themselves from or draw near to this mystery."[30]

Here one question eclipses all others, or serves to focus them: What would it be to have an adequate idea of Spinoza?

2.

Philosophy is the very vertigo of immanence. That formula complements one of Deleuze's: "Immanence is the very vertigo of philosophy."[31] Immanence is not philosophy, nor philosophy immanence. But there is in the passage from one to the other a modification of sense that is not without significance. It is perhaps for that reason that the two formulas are best read together. At the point of vertigo.

But why vertigo? What about philosophy, much less immanence, may be said to be vertiginous? Daniel Heller-Roazen has isolated the two components all

[29] Gilles Deleuze and Claire Parnet, *Dialogues II*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Barbara Habberjam (New York: Continuum, 2006), 12.
[30] Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *What is Philosophy?* trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Graham Burchell (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 60.
[31] Gilles Deleuze, *Expressionism in Philosophy: Spinoza*, trans. Martin Joughin (New York: Zone Books, 1992), 180.

enigmas share: "opacity and the hidden principle of their interpretation. That summary may appear willfully paradoxical," Heller-Roazen comments, "yet enigmas verify its truth": Were an enigma "immediately intelligible, it would be none at all," yet were an enigma "solely solvable by means of knowledge extrinsic to its construction, it, too, could hardly be called an 'enigma'."[32]

Immanence is the very vertigo of philosophy because immanence is the very paradigm of the enigma.

Deleuze's formula is found in a work Deleuze titled *Spinoza and the Problem of Expression*: "By taking the 'problem of expression' as his central concern, Deleuze announces the ingenuity of his approach. Nowhere in the myriad definitions that the *Ethics* comprises is 'expression' defined. Yet the verb form of the concept appears on the very first page in the definition of 'God': 'By God I mean an absolutely infinite being; that is, a substance consisting of infinite attributes, each of which *expresses* eternal and infinite essence'."[33]

More remarkable yet, "as soon as it is introduced into Deleuze's argument, the concept 'expression' is

[32] Heller-Roazen, *Dark Tongues*, 77.

[33] Knox Peden, *Spinoza Contra Phenomenology: French Rationalism from Cavaillès to Deleuze* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2014), 210; emphasis author's.

> immediately bifurcated into two senses. The virtue of this concept for Deleuze is that it provides a single name for two heterogeneous processes, *explication* and *implication*. Deleuze argues that in Spinozism the modes, as affections of substance, effectively explicate substance. But it is equally true that each modal modification implicates substance in turn. The usual connotations of these two words are fully in force in Deleuze's reading; substance is effectively elaborated through, that is, explicated *by*, the modes. But the modes implicate substance, in that they impinge on its putative autonomy, never leaving it unchanged. […] Deleuze's point is that in Spinoza substance is in an incessant state of unfolding (*explication*) via the modes, and folding back in on itself (*implication*) as a result of these modal affections.[34]

To explicate is to implicate, for every implication follows from an explication, and every explication turns on how what it explicates is implicated in it.

Philosophy stands to immanence as explication stands to implication.

Philosophy: the vertigo of immanence *in its expression*.

[34] Peden, *Spinoza Contra Phenomenology*, 211; emphasis author's.

3.

"Philosophy is something that moves, that passes, and that takes place," Pierre Macherey has written, "in a place where the connection between thoughts gestates, which, in the works themselves, escapes the specific historical conditions of their authors' undertakings, and the understanding of this process diminishes the interest we might extend to their systematic intentions, because this process grasps them dynamically in the anonymous movement of a sort of collective project."[35]

"Spinoza" is the name given that anonymity by those who undergo its movement *sub specie aeternitatis*.

[35] Pierre Macherey, *Hegel or Spinoza*, trans. Susan M. Ruddick (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011), 3–4.

Postscript: The Unreadable

> Whether or not clarity is enough, it is certainly not enough to throw around the term 'clarity,' since that term obviously means very different things to different people, and stands in urgent need of clarification.[36]
>
> ~Hans-Johann Glock

> What is there more mysterious than clarity?[37]
>
> ~Paul Valéry

"If reading is not to be simply synonymous with deciphering, commentary or even interpretation," Geoffrey Bennington has written, "then it must inevitably encounter the question of the unreadable"[38]: "If I can simply read what I read, then what I am doing is not in fact reading but something else (processing, decoding, unscrambling): reading as such occurs only as and in the experience of the unreadable."[39] Not "processing, decoding, unscrambling," neither is it "deciphering, commentary or even interpretation"—reading is an activity irreducible to any

[36] Hans-Johann Glock, "'Clarity' is not enough!" in *Wittgenstein and the Future of Philosophy*: *Proceedings of the 24th International Wittgenstein Symposium*, eds. R. Haller and K. Puhl (Vienna: Holder-Pichler-Tempsky, 2002), 83 [81–98].

[37] Paul Valéry, quoted in Eleanor Cook, *Enigmas and Riddles in Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 225.

[38] Geoffrey Bennington, "Editorial," *Oxford Literary Review* 33 (July 2011): v [v–vi].

[39] Bennington, "Editorial," v.

other that may, at first glance, be thought to be synonymous with it. Whatever else it is, reading is not something one "simply" does. Nor, it appears, is it something one can do "simply." If "reading as such occurs only as and in the experience of the unreadable," and if the unreadable can be identified with the illegible, reading for all that remains no less difficult to place. "The very act of recognizing moments of illegibility," Craig Dworkin has written, "cancels their status as such; reading the illegible nullifies its own account in the precise moment of its construction and obliterates the very object it would claim to have identified, creating a new space of erasure which cannot itself be read. In that moment of singularity the unreadable disappears within its own legibility, and that legibility simultaneously effaces the text it would seem to read."[40] No longer "simply synonymous with deciphering, commentary or even interpretation," yet incapable of articulation without their resources, situated "only as and in the experience of the unreadable," yet given over to that experience only insofar as the unreadable itself will have escaped one, where—in what sense—may reading "as such" be said to "occur"?

Writing of novelty in metaphysics, A.W. Moore claims it is not simply that a "radically" new way of making sense of things will, of necessity, have been unforeseeable. "The introduction of a radically new way of making sense of things is unforeseeable in the more profound sense that, until that way of making sense of things has been introduced, there is

[40] Craig Dworkin, *Reading the Illegible* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2003), 155.

no way even of making sense of its introduction."[41] As Jean-François Lyotard has observed, "We read" —only; necessarily; radically; at all—"because we do not know how to read."[42]

[41] A.W. Moore, *The Evolution of Modern Metaphysics: Making Sense of Things* (Cambridge, Eng.: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 418.

[42] Jean-François Lyotard, quoted in Bennington, "Editorial," v.

§ "By 'problematic,'" Deleuze clarifies, "we mean the ensemble of the problem and its conditions."[43] "For Kant," as for Deleuze,[44] "problems are

> (1) transcendent to experience (they are not themselves derived from empirical or a posteriori experience) while having only an immanent employment, such that they are (2) organizational principles, which (3) do not disappear with their solutions, rendering them (4) fictions in that they make no claim to knowledge (in their correct or immanent usage) yet are nonetheless employed to arrive at knowledge, which thus (5) have a true (immanent) and false (transcendent) usage, and (6) such that they do not resemble their solutions.[45]

"After I established these things, I thought I was entering port; but when I started to meditate […] I felt as if I were thrown again into the open sea."[46]

[43] Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, 177.
[44] Levi Bryant, *Difference and Givenness: Deleuze's Transcendental Empiricism and the Ontology of Immanence* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2008), 165: "It is clear that all six of these properties are precisely what Deleuze seeks in the concept of a problem."
[45] Bryant, *Difference and Givenness*, 165.
[46] Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, "A New System of Nature," in *Philosophical Essays*, eds. and trans. Roger Ariew and Daniel Garber (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., 1989), 142 [138–145].

§V.

The Idea of Prose

"Any inquiry into prose inevitably meets the perplexing example of an illustrious predecessor,

> M. Jourdain, the famous bourgeois *gentilhomme* from Molière's play of the same name. Moved to write an amorous epistle to an unattainable lady, the bourgeois hires a master of philosophy to instruct him in this arcane skill. The master first asks him whether the letter is to be written in verse. Bourgeois that he is, Jourdain rejects that out of hand. 'You want only prose?' asks the master. 'No, I want neither prose nor verse,' answers the bourgeois, who merely wants a seductive note to be casually dropped at the feet of the lady. But the master is less concerned with the pragmatics or effects of the note than with taxonomic distinctions. 'It must be one or the other,' he insists. Expression admits of no other possible

forms. Asked why, the master provides the following rule: 'Tout ce qui n'est point prose est vers; et tout ce qui n'est point vers est prose' (Everything that is not prose is verse, and everything that is not verse is prose). M. Jourdain then wonders what it is that he is speaking. 'Prose' is the reply. 'And when I say: "Nicole, bring me my slippers, and give me my nightcap," is that prose?' At the master's affirmative answer, Jourdain marvels at a competence he did not know he had: 'For over forty years I have been speaking prose without suspecting it in the least.' He returns, however, to his primary concern, the composition of the note. He suggests its content, a simple cliché, and asks the master to change it around, to couch it in a more gallant manner. The master essays various permutations on the original suggestion but winds up admitting that Jourdain's initial version was the best, which leads Jourdain to say: 'And yet I did not study, and I've done this on the first try' (Act 2, scene 4).

Even by the master's lights (dim as they are), M. Jourdain intuitively arrives at correct expression for his purposes. So what has he learned by learning that he was speaking in prose? No insight was gained here, only a label to be applied to an activity that had not called attention to itself and showed no need of doing so. Yet once

the label is available, it becomes a weapon in the arsenal of knowledge that M. Jourdain can now wield to affirm his superiority over those from whom he seeks to differentiate himself. Thus, when his wife reprimands him for his foolishness, he retorts by beginning to quiz her (Act 3, scene 3): 'Do you know what you are talking at this moment?' Madame Jourdain clearly has no idea what her husband is talking about. To his now more refined linguistic sensibility, she appears to be obtusely concerned with matters of content, of evaluation, of pragmatics. 'What is that called?' M. Jourdain insists. 'That is called whatever one wants to call it,' she replies. Clearly, she fails to understand the value of a label, subscribing to a theory that sees naming as arbitrary. She knows there is no knowledge to be gained here, just some verbal posturing. 'C'est de la prose, ignorante' (It is prose, stupid), says the gentleman in triumph, who then goes on to restate for her the opposition proffered by the master that divides the expression of the world into two universes. But whereas the master had offered two mutually exclusive possibilities, M. Jourdain, whose intuitive powers have been ratified by the correctness of his own version of the love letters, now unwittingly deconstructs this opposition by showing that verse and prose are not in a relation of opposition and territorial

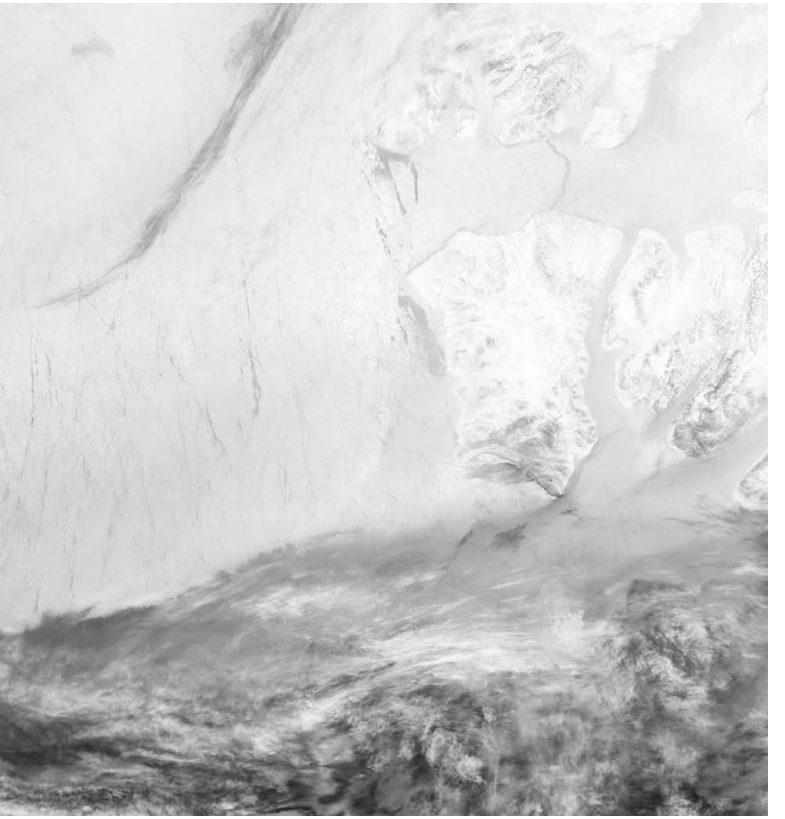
> dominion. He delivers the rule to his wife as follows: 'Tout ce qui est prose n'est point vers; et tout ce qui n'est point vers n'est point prose' (Everything that is prose is not verse; and everything that is not verse is not prose).[47]

"We may laugh at the bourgeois's inability to parrot his master's lesson," concludes this compelling account of an "illustrious," inescapable precursor, "but we may well wonder whether, just as he has been speaking prose unwittingly, he may unwittingly state a truth about it."[48] Indeed, what might that truth be, and how might that statement, in its peculiar inconsistency, be said to be of a piece with it?

If verse can be identified with poetry, prose cannot be so easily identified with philosophy. "Poetry possesses its object without knowing it while philosophy knows its object without possessing it,"[49] Giorgio Agamben writes, so that "every authentic poetic project is directed toward knowledge, just as every authentic act of philosophy is always directed toward joy."[50]

[47] Wlad Godzich and Jeffrey Kittay, *The Emergence of Prose*: *An Essay in Prosaics* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), ix–x.
[48] Godzich and Kittay, *The Emergence of Prose*, x.
[49] Giorgio Agamben, *Stanzas*: *Word and Phantasm in Western Culture*, trans. Ronald L. Martinez (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), xvii.
[50] Agamben, *Stanzas*, xvii.

Perhaps prose could be said to consist in what's ventured by the proposition: *everything that is philosophy is not poetry, and everything that is not poetry is not philosophy.*



Appendixes

§ "We have now not only traveled throughout the land of pure understanding and carefully inspected its every part, but have also surveyed it throughout, determining for each thing in this land its proper place. This land, however, is an island, and is enclosed by nature itself within unchangeable bounds. It is the land of truth (a charming name), and is surrounded by a vast and stormy ocean, where illusion properly resides and many fog banks and much fast-melting ice feign newfound lands. This sea incessantly deludes the seafarer with empty hopes as he roves through his discoveries, and thus entangles him in adventures that he can never relinquish, nor ever bring to an end."[51]

[51] Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. Werner S. Pluhar (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., 1996), A 236/B 295.

Appendix I

§ *Before all else there is beauty*

Review of S. Oglesby, *Theses on Aesthetics as First Philosophy*. Seattle: Fabulate Books, 2014. 96 pp.

The teleology of the Universe is directed to the production of Beauty.[52] That's the text's opening line, its first thesis. It's also a quotation—a quotation and provocation from the late work of Alfred North Whitehead, one that sets the stage for everything to follow. And yet, Oglesby is measured. She immediately acknowledges that Steven Shaviro—another guiding light of the study—"doubtless speaks for many" when he calls Whitehead's claim "outrageously hyperbolic."[53] That does not stop her, however, from going on, still in the very first section, to cite and answer Michael Austin's question, from the

[52] Alfred North Whitehead, *Adventures of Ideas* (New York: The Free Press, 1967), 264.
[53] Steven Shaviro, *Without Criteria: Kant, Whitehead, Deleuze, and Aesthetics* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2009), 69.

inaugural issue of *Speculations*, "Why does anything happen at all?"[54] "In a word," our author avers, "*kalogenesis*": from the Greek *kalós* (beauty) and *genesis* (creation).[55]

Let's back up a moment. Some context might help (especially considering the fact that Oglesby doesn't bother). The work's title comes from one of the stars of Speculative Realism, and the founding figure of its most prominent subfield, Object-Oriented Ontology, Graham Harman. That aesthetics is first philosophy may be the most striking of Harman's many startling claims, and it gets at the heart of what he's up to.[56] Since Harman's well known and

[54] Michael Austin, "To Exist is to Change: A Friendly Disagreement With Graham Harman On Why Things Happen," *Speculations* I (July 2010): 66–83.

[55] The coinage is Frederick Ferré's, quoted in Brian Henning, "Re-Centering Process Thought: Recovering Beauty in A.N. Whitehead's Late Work," in *Beyond Metaphysics? Explorations in Alfred North Whitehead's Late Thought*, eds. Roland Faber, Brian G. Henning, and Clinton Combs (New York: Rodopi, 2010), 211n2 [201–214]; http://connect.gonzaga.edu/asset/file/263/2010HenningRecentering_Process_Thought _Beyond_Metaphysics.pdf.

[56] The claim is made in many places. See, inter alia, Graham Harman, "Vicarious Causation," *Collapse* II (March 2007): 221 [187–221]. See also Graham Harman, "Aesthetics as First Philosophy: Levinas and the Non-Human," *Naked Punch* 9 (Summer/Fall 2007): 28-30 [21–30]. For Harman, "aesthetics is first philosophy" means here, in so many words, causality. But one could ask, after Robert Jackson's example, *Why?* Why is causality, in Timothy

widely summarized, I'll be brief. Examples work best. And one of Harman's favorites is fire and cotton.[57] Fire burns cotton. Full stop. That's the only way fire encounters cotton. Cotton's softness, its color, and scent—its price, and where it's harvested: all this (and more) is lost on fire. Fire burns cotton but it does not exhaust it. It never gets to its depths. And, more to the point, it can't. Nothing gets to anything else's depths, ever. Each object always exceeds what it is to other objects, and to the extent that an object encounters another object, it does so by "alluding" to it—that is, by a kind of *translation*:

Morton's words, "wholly an *aesthetic* phenomenon"? Perhaps one should keep in mind here Borges's definition of "the aesthetic phenomenon" as "this imminence of a revelation which does not occur." In other words, perhaps "causality" describes what *does* occur in the imminence of revelations that do not. See Robert Jackson, "The Anxiousness of Objects and Artworks: Michael Fried, Object Oriented Ontology, and Aesthetic Absorption," *Speculations* II (May 2011): 154, 167 [135–168]; Timothy Morton, "Introduction: Objects in Mirror are Closer than They Appear," *Realist Magic: Objects, Ontology, Causality* (Ann Arbor: Open Humanities Press/MPublishing, 2013), 19 [15–39], emphasis author's; Jorge Luis Borges, *Labyrinths: Selected Stories and Other Writings*, eds. Donald A. Yates and James E. Irby, trans. James E. Irby (New York: New Directions, 1964), 188.

[57] The example is used in many places. See, inter alia, Graham Harman, "A Larger Sense of Beauty," DIALOGICA FANTASTICA, http://dialogicafantastica.wordpress.com/2011/02/01/a-larger-sense-of-beauty/.

fire reduces cotton to its flammability. Flame translates cotton into its tongue.

And that's also how to begin to get a handle on Harman's fascinating claim: Aesthetics is first philosophy. First philosophy is (more commonly known as) metaphysics. Metaphysics, according to Wilfrid Sellars' famous definition, is how things, in the broadest possible sense of the term, hang together, in the broadest possible sense of the term. How things hang together—the ways in which objects translate one another, in other words—can be said to characterize *aesthetics*, in the broadest possible sense of *that* term. So aesthetics is first philosophy.

That's what Oglesby doesn't tell you. What she also doesn't tell you—not explicitly—is how beauty fits into the picture.

In her account of beauty, Oglesby follows Shaviro in closely following Kant. The terms here are largely those of the "Analytic of the Beautiful."[58] Disinterestedness? Check. Non-cognitive? Indeed: "Beauty," in Shaviro's paraphrase, "cannot be subsumed under any concept. An aesthetic judgment is therefore singular and ungrounded."[59] Here Oglesby

[58] Immanuel Kant, "Analytic of the Beautiful," *Critique of Judgment*, trans. Werner S. Pluhar (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1987), 43–97.

[59] Steven Shaviro, "Accelerationist Aesthetics: Necessary Inefficiency in Times of Real Subsumption," *e-flux journal* 46 (June 2013): http://worker01.e-flux.com/pdf/article_8969650.pdf.

cites Alexander Nehamas by way of clarification. "Kant was right that the judgment of taste is not governed by concepts. That was not because the concept of the beautiful or the nature of the judgment is peculiar, but because, I want to suggest to you,

> the judgment of taste is simply not a conclusion we draw from interacting with, describing, or interpreting works of art.
>
> I want to turn our common picture around. The judgment of beauty is not the result of a mysterious inference on the basis of features of a work of art which we already know. It is a guess, a suspicion, a dim awareness that there is more in the work that it would be valuable to learn. […] But a guess is just that: unlike a conclusion, it obeys no principles; it is not governed by concepts. It goes beyond all the evidence, which cannot therefore justify it, and points to the future.[60]

It's in attempting to extend the scope of that insight that the argument's at its most tenuous. It "goes beyond all the evidence": Beauty for Oglesby is the paradigm of aesthetics as first philosophy insofar as

[60] Alexander Nehamas, "An Essay on Beauty and Judgment," *The Three Penny Review* 80 (Winter 2000), http://www.threepennyreview.com/samples/nehamas_w00.html.

the status of aesthetic judgment as it applies to art, specifically, is generalized to stand for the (apparently, problematically) "singular and ungrounded" way in which things or objects or whatever—actual entities, to adapt Whitehead's parlance—*hang together*.

That's Oglesby's gamble, anyway. The bulk of the work attempts to read the Whitehead-inflected treatment of Kant in the crucial first chapter of Shaviro's *Without Criteria*—a draft of which can be found online[61]—with Ruth Lorand's *Aesthetic Order*, where beauty is theorized as a type of "lawless order."[62]

So there you have it: a vision of a kind of order—on the order of the universe—without criteria and without law. As to its success or failure, I refer the interested reader to the text itself. The details don't much matter here. As Whitehead says, that's not where the action is.[63] What I'd like to do instead, in

[61] Steven Shaviro, "Without Criteria," http://www.shaviro.com/Othertexts/WithoutCriteria.pdf.

[62] Ruth Lorand, *Aesthetic Order: A Philosophy of Order, Beauty and Art* (New York: Routledge, 2000), 1.

[63] What he actually says is, "It has been remarked that a system of philosophy is never refuted; it is only abandoned. The reason is that logical contradictions, except as temporary slips of the mind—plentiful, though temporary—are the most gratuitous of errors; and usually they are trivial. Thus, after criticism, systems do not exhibit mere illogicalities": Alfred North Whitehead, *Process and*

the space I have left, is briefly touch on a line of inquiry that concerns the project's strong Kantian inheritance, and whose modification may affect its plausibility.

Specifically, I'd like to raise the issue of disinterestedness—as Nietzsche did, and with his very words: Kant, "instead of envisaging the aesthetic problem

> from the point of view of the artist (the creator), considered art and the beautiful purely from that of the 'spectator,' and unconsciously introduced the 'spectator' into the concept 'beautiful.' It would not have been so bad if this 'spectator' had at least been sufficiently familiar to the philosophers of beauty—namely, as a great *personal* fact and experience, as an abundance of vivid authentic experiences, desires, surprises, and delights in the realm of the beautiful! But I fear the reverse has always been the case; and so they have offered us, from the beginning, definitions in which, as in Kant's famous definition of the beautiful, a lack of any refined first-hand experience reposes in the shape of a fat worm of error. 'That is beautiful,' said Kant, 'which gives us pleasure *without interest*.' Without interest! Compare with this definition one framed by a genuine

Reality, eds. David Ray Griffin and Donald W. Sherburne (New York: The Free Press, 1978), 6. Close enough.

> 'spectator' and artist—Stendhal, who once called the beautiful *une promesse de bonheur*. At any rate he *rejected* and repudiated the one point about the aesthetic condition which Kant had stressed: *le désintéressement*. Who is right, Kant or Stendhal?[64]

Yet more than the fate of aesthetics hangs in the balance. Because as Gilles Deleuze has pointedly noted,[65] since Kant, aesthetics has named a "wrenching" division: As Daniel W. Smith has aptly (and concisely) put it, "Aesthetics since Kant

> has been haunted by a seemingly intractable dualism. On the one hand, aesthetics designates the theory of sensibility as the form of possible experience; on the other hand, it designates the theory of art as a reflection on real experience. The first is the objective element of sensation, which is conditioned by the *a priori* forms of space and time (the 'Transcendental Aesthetic' of the *Critique of Pure Reason*); the second is the subjec-

[64] Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals and Ecce Homo*, ed. Walter Kaufmann, trans. Walter Kaufmann and R.J. Hollingdale (New York: Random House, 1967), 103–104.

[65] See Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, 68, and Gilles Deleuze, *The Logic of Sense*, ed. Constantin V. Boundas, trans. Mark Lester with Charles Stivale (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990), 260.

> tive element of sensation, which is expressed in the feeling of pleasure and pain (the 'Critique of Aesthetic Judgment' in the *Critique of Judgment*). Deleuze argues that these two aspects of the theory of sensation (aesthetics) can be reunited only at the price of a radical recasting of the transcendental project as formulated by Kant, pushing it in the direction of what Schelling once called a 'superior empiricism'; it is only when the conditions of experience in general become the genetic conditions of *real* experience that they can be reunited with the structures of works of art.[66]

Oglesby is close to Deleuze here, and so is her wager: aesthetics in the—*truly*—broadest possible sense of the term.

Aesthetics as first philosophy is a beautiful thing.

[66] Daniel W. Smith, "Deleuze's Theory of Sensation: Overcoming the Kantian Duality," in *Essays on Deleuze* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2012), 89 [89–105]. But see also Steven Shaviro, "The 'Wrenching Duality' of Aesthetics: Kant, Deleuze, and the Theory of the Sensible," http://www.shaviro. com/Othertexts/SPEP.pdf.

§ "The interior of the exterior"—that's Michel Foucault's beautiful phrase for the place of the madman aboard the ship of fools, "a prisoner in the midst of what is the freest, the openest of routes."[67] The interior of the exterior, or the outside: farther away than any external world, closer—nearer—than any internal world, as Deleuze says.[68] "The inside as an operation of the outside,"[69] "an inside which is merely the fold of the outside, as if the ship were a folding of the sea."[70]

[67] Michel Foucault, quoted in Gilles Deleuze, *Foucault*, trans. Sean Hand (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988), 97.
[68] Deleuze, *Foucault*, 118.
[69] Deleuze, *Foucault*, 97.
[70] Deleuze, *Foucault*, 97.

Appendix II

§ *On Exactitude in Non-Library Science*

Review of Trevor Owen Jones, *The Non-Library*, Brooklyn, NY: punctum books, 2014. 104 pp.

> On closer inspection, we find here a new reason for every island to be and remain in theory deserted.[71]
>
> ~Gilles Deleuze

> It is as if the entire earth were trying to escape by way of the island.[72]
>
> ~Gilles Deleuze

Dear T.,

Already a few years ago now you composed a correspondence to mark the appearance of Judith Schalansky's *Atlas of Remote Islands: Fifty Islands I Have Never Set Foot on and Never Will*. I return to that

[71] Deleuze, *Desert Islands*, 10.
[72] Deleuze, *The Logic of Sense*, 312.

correspondence, on the publication of your first book, *The Non-Library*, because to do so seems to me somehow apposite. That may be the reason I find myself writing to you, to try to understand my sense of just why.

You note, in the last letter's closing line, that Schalansky's maps "are, I'm afraid, indeed the territory." I wonder if it isn't exactly on that point—or from it, as a point of departure—that the correspondence might, after a fashion, be continued.

Because the map—not to put too fine a point on it—*is not* the territory. That's impossible, isn't it, that the map should be the territory? Or maybe it's a clue: When—or more to the point: *where*—might the map in fact be the territory, and what might that suggest about our notion of the impossible?

Judith Balso's contribution to *Pedagogies of Disaster* is titled, "To Rely on the Inexistent Impossible."[73] *The inexistent impossible*: not the least merit of that phrase is that it renders imperative a clarification of what, precisely, "the impossible" could be said to designate. The impossible is, by definition, what is not possible. It is not possible that what is impossible could exist. And yet it is not at all clear, in the domain of the impossible, where existence

[73] Judith Balso, "To Rely on the Inexistent Impossible," in *Pedagogies of Disaster*, eds. W.J. Vincent van Gerven Oei, Adam Staley Groves, and Nico Jenkins (Brooklyn: punctum books, 2013), 495–507.

stands in relation to possibility. There is an existence of the impossible, in the notion of logical impossibility perhaps foremost. But is there not something to the intuition that the impossible, in the strict sense, is inconceivable? When you write of the Non-Library at "the height of the impossible," I wonder whether the impossible perhaps culminates, at its height, in that part of it that does not exist. Even then: What, in the impossible, would be the relation between existence and non-existence? How might one describe, or inscribe, the cartography of the impossible?

That it may not be possible to do so, not unproblematically, is what I understand Balso's phrase to imply. And that's also the sense of the negative in the Non-Library I rely on in reading *The Non-Library*. That the map of the inexistent impossible may wholly coincide with its territory is something the ramifications of which your book might be said to catalog.

Forgive me for going on at length, but I felt the need to mark that correspondence, however remote.

To you my thanks and my congratulations.

M.

§ *Coda: The Riddle of History Solved*

> Communism is the riddle of history solved, and it knows itself to be this solution.[74]
>
> ~Karl Marx

> The existence of an answer does, it is true, define the riddle, but not in the manner we might have thought.[75]
>
> ~Galit Hasan-Rokem and David Shulman

"Mankind always sets itself only such tasks as it can solve; since, looking at the matter more closely, it will always be found that the task itself arises only when the material conditions for its solution already

[74] Karl Marx, "Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844," in *The Marx-Engels Reader*, ed. Robert C. Tucker (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1978), 84 [66–126].

[75] Editors' "Afterword," in *Untying the Knot: On Riddles and Other Enigmatic Modes*, eds. Galit Hasan-Rokem and David Shulman (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 318 [316–320].

exist or are at least in the process of formation."[76] In 1842 in the *Rheinische Zeitung*, and therefore nearly two decades before the better known passage of the 1859 preface, Marx wrote: "The fate which a question of the time has in common with every question justified by its content, and therefore rational, is that the question and not the answer constitutes the main difficulty. True criticism, therefore, analyzes the questions and not the answers. Just as the solution of an algebraic equation is given once the problem has been put in its simplest and sharpest form, so every question is answered as soon as it has become a real question."[77] "The existence of a 'real' answer follows from the posing of any 'real' question," a scholarly commentary concurs. "But we can now see that the true nature of riddling lies just here," it continues, "in the precarious opacity of the solution."[78] If "communism is the riddle of history solved," what formulation of that "riddle" "knows itself to be this solution"? After what fashion, into what "precarious opacity," does the riddle of history resolve itself?

A clue may be found in the contrast between two

[76] Karl Marx, "Marx on the History of His Opinions," in *The Marx-Engels Reader*, 5 [3–6].
[77] Karl Marx, quoted in Alberto Toscano, "The Politics of Abstraction: Communism and Philosophy," in *The Idea of Communism*, eds. Costas Douzinas and Slavoj Žižek (London: Verso, 2010), 204 [195–204].
[78] Hasan-Rokem and Shulman, "Afterword," 318.

stories—between two instances of self-reference in those stories, specifically, and what the self-recognition in each instance implies for how the story plays out. "In the *Arabian Nights*," first, "we hear of Emir Hārūn al-Rashīd,

> who became very bored. Nothing could revive his spirits. His storyteller asked: 'Do you want to hear the story of al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī, the mother of all stories, the story that relieves all boredom forever?' 'Do you know the story?' asked the emir. The storyteller confessed that he did not, but promised to obtain it for the emir. The emir gave him one year and one day to accomplish the task, on pain of death. The storyteller dispatched his four disciples to the four corners of the world to find the story. They returned within a year, to be questioned by the emir. Each of the first three confessed to having failed to obtain the desired story, but told instead of other stories and adventures he had encountered. The fourth disciple announced that he had found the story.
>
> 'There was once an emir who became very bored,' began the disciple. 'His storyteller promised to obtain for him the story that relieves all boredom and dispatched four disciples for the task. Three returned empty handed.'
>
> 'You are telling me my own story,' cried the emir angrily. 'But wait, how did you know about

> the others? You were not present when they came back. So perhaps it is a story after all!' The emir became confused. He could not make sense of the situation.

"The storyteller suggested he be patient," so ends this account of the fable, "and hear the rest. The emir refused. He ordered dancers and musicians to be brought in, to divert his mind and make him forget the story."[79] In contrast, another fable, "narrated by A. K. Ramanujan, tells of a man

> who was prompted by his wife to go and listen in the evenings to the recounting of the *Rāmāyaṇa*. But each night he fell asleep as soon as the recitation began. When this happened for three consecutive nights, his wife scolded him thoroughly and commanded him to stay awake. On the fourth night, the man forced himself to listen. The storyteller described how the king of monkeys, Hanuman, sailed through the air over the ocean as a messenger from Rāma to the captive Sītā. As a sign that Rāma had sent him, Hanuman was carrying Rāma's ring; unfortunately, the ring suddenly fell into the ocean. The storyteller turned to the audience and asked: 'What will Hanuman do now? How can he retrieve the

[79] Ilan Amit, "Squaring the Circle," in *Untying the Knot*, 292 [284–293].

> ring? How can he be of help to Rāma without it?' The man was deeply moved by what he heard. He jumped up, ran to the ocean, plunged in,

"found the ring, and brought it back to Hanuman. He then returned to his seat," our tale concludes, "and"—dripping wet—"continued to listen."[80]

Explication de Texte

> *To believe in this world.*[81]
>
> ~Gilles Deleuze

Into what then does the riddle of history resolve itself? According to Dan Pagis, a riddle is transformed by its solution into a work of art. Specifically, a poem.[82]

Now at the end of the poem, the solution is transformed in turn.[83]

[80] Amit, "Squaring the Circle," 292–293.
[81] Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 2: The Time-Image*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Robert Galeta (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989), 172; emphasis author's.
[82] See Dan Pagis, "Toward a Theory of the Literary Riddle," in *Untying the Knot*, 81–108.
[83] "If poetry is defined precisely by the possibility of enjambment," Agamben writes, "with deceptive simplicity," Heller-Roazen comments, "it follows that the last verse of a poem is *not* a verse" (emphasis added): Giorgio Agamben, *The End of the Poem*: *Studies in Poetics*, ed. and trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen (Stanford: Stanford University

Perhaps the solution to the riddle of history can be read, immanently, out of the history of the riddle: "As long as the riddle is a riddle, it has no solution. As soon as a solution is given, it loses its essence as a riddle."[84] Yet the story told by the riddle—to take the full measure of its poetry—insinuates us directly into its midst, challenging us, impossibly, "to oscillate between no solution and no riddle, between riddle and solution,"[85] between poetry and philosophy, that is, vertiginously, between the poetry of the riddle of history solved and the philosophy the moment of whose realization was missed[86]—the *real* movement, in sum, which abolishes the present state of things "to be in touch with all the world," thereby, and "remain alive" to it.[87]

Press, 1999), 112. See also Daniel Heller-Roazen, "Speaking in Tongues," *Paragraph* 25 (July 2002): 104 [92–115].

[84] Galit Hasan-Rokem, "'Spinning Threads of Sand': Riddles as Images of Loss in the Midrash on Lamentations," in *Untying the Knot*, 120 [109–124].

[85] Hasan-Rokem, "'Spinning Threads of Sand,'" 120.

[86] Theodor Adorno, "Introduction," in *Negative Dialectics*, trans. E.B. Ashton (London: Continuum, 1973), 3 [3–57]: "Philosophy, which once seemed obsolete, lives on because the moment to realize it was missed." One should recall here, for its full sense, Wittgenstein's dictum, "Philosophy ought really to be written only as poetry."

[87] Hasan-Rokem, "'Spinning Threads of Sand,'" 120. Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), 280: "Becoming everybody/everything (*tout le monde*) is to world (*faire monde*), to make a world (*faire*

un monde)." To enter into a zone of proximity with all the world so that all the world in turn becomes something else: see Fradenburg, *Staying Alive*.

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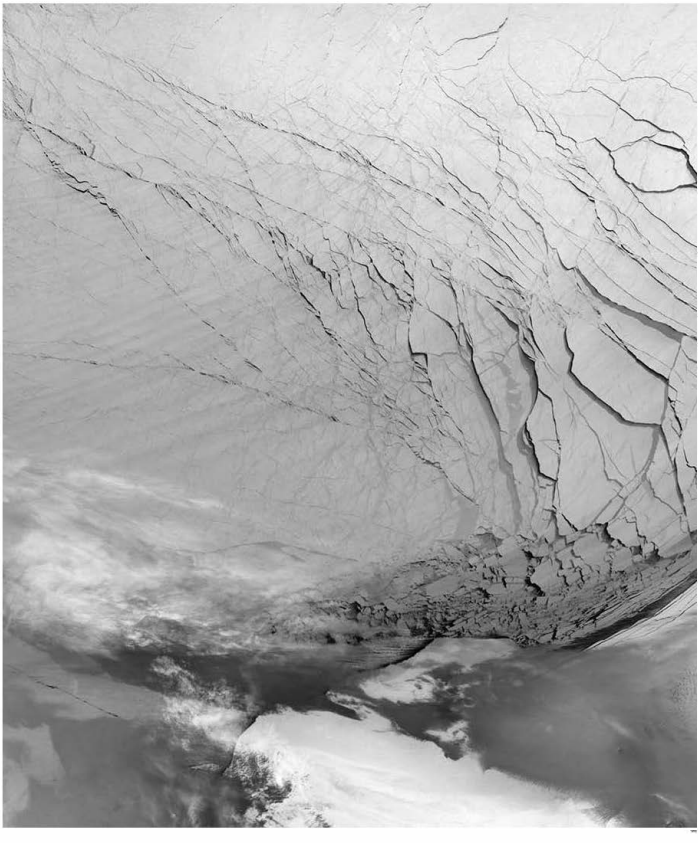

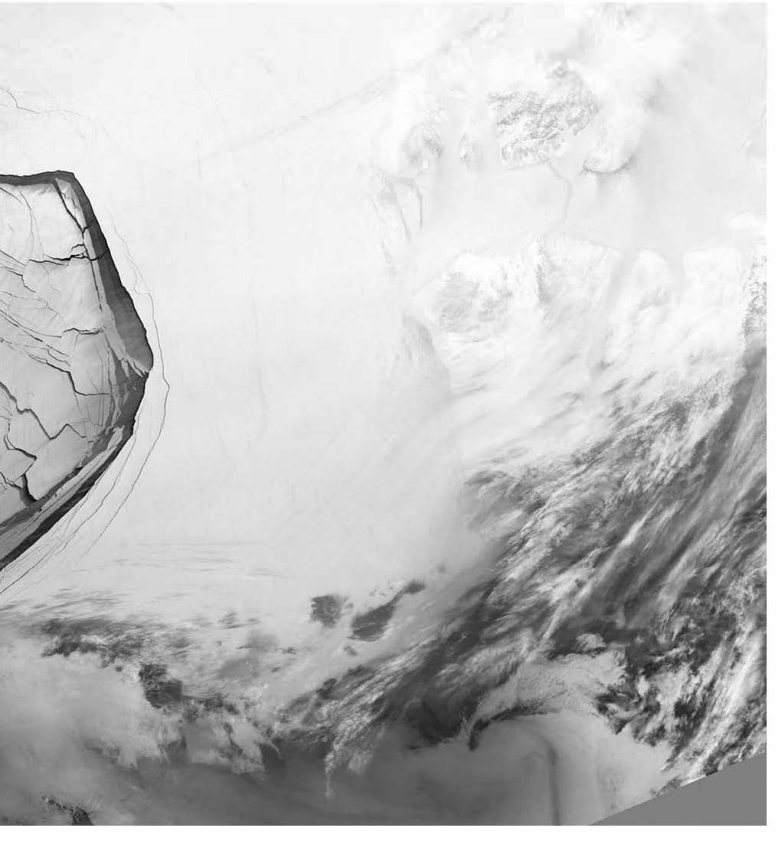

W. dreams, like Phaedrus, of an army of thinker-friends, thinker-lovers. He dreams of a thought-army, a thought-pack, which would storm the philosophical Houses of Parliament.He dreams of Tartars from the philosophical steppes, of thought-barbarians, thought-outsiders. What distances would shine in their eyes!

~Lars Iyer

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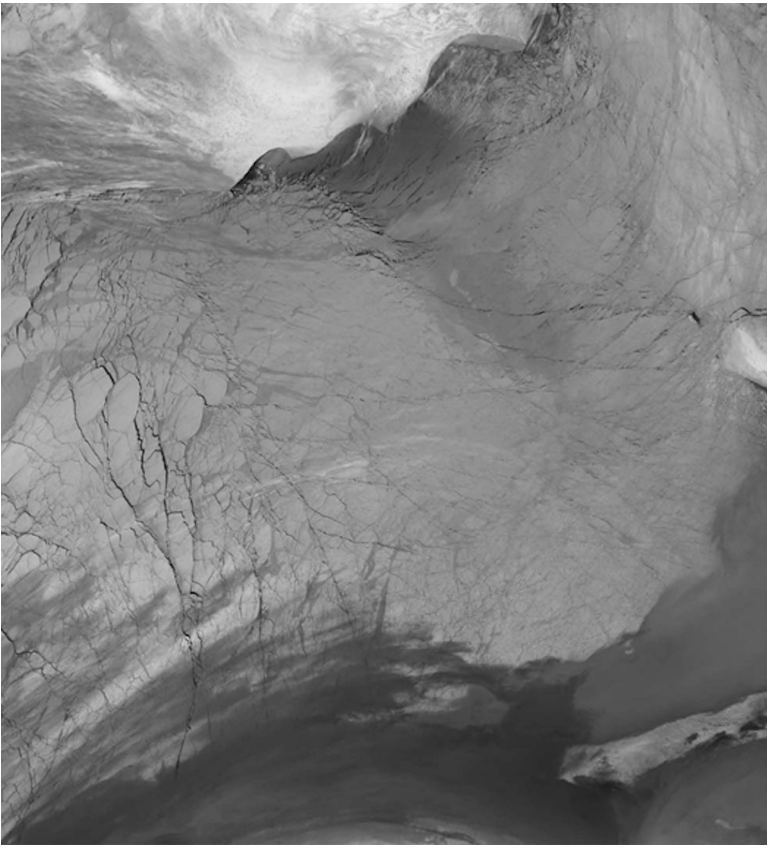
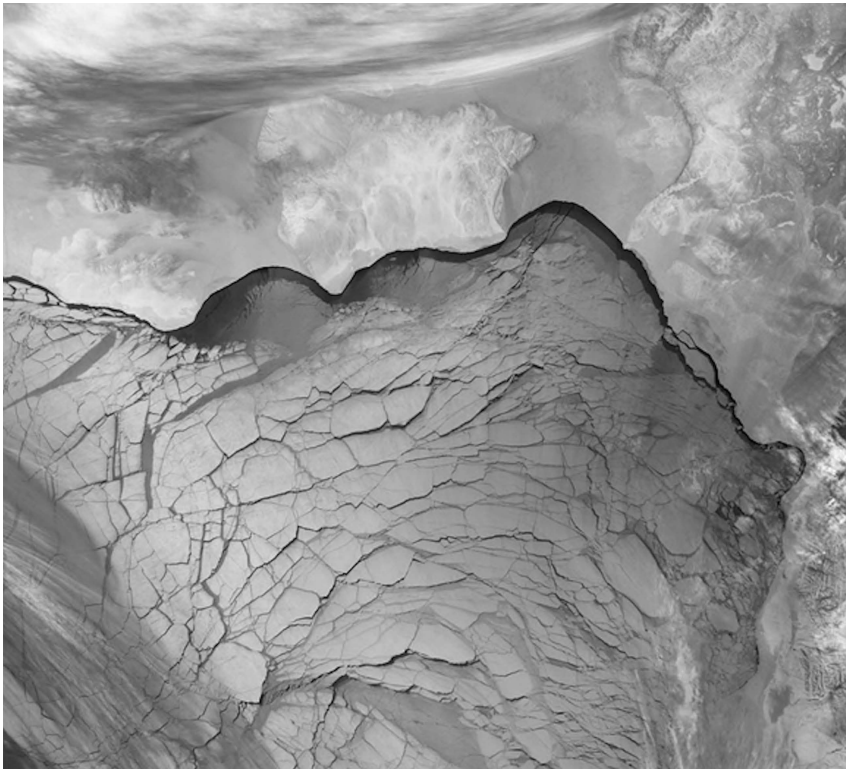
to love the questions themselves





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