

Gesture between Worlds

The Art of Haris Epaminonda

Jonathan Miles

I was dreaming of urinating. My prostate is swollen, so I often wake with a dream of needing to urinate, but it was different this time as it appeared that I was pissing blood, well not only pissing blood but spraying it everywhere. The whole bathroom had marks of blood; the red was glistening in entralling patterns on the white surfaces.

The evening before this I had been reading a book on Fra Angelico by Georges Didi-Huberman in a passage that addressed the fresco painting in the converted San Marco Museum. I was struck by the way that he had introduced the notion of a disconcerting presence of blotches of paint that did not appear to correspond to any sense of a subject and thus stand out as being strangely non-figurative for the period. He says that it “was in the first place a spattering, a throwing of pigment onto the wall, a pure act of subjectum, “subject” in this sense of what is thrown down, directly in front of the senses, but thrown in such a way that it goes right past you, slips beneath your nose and lodges in obscure places below, conceals itself because its very obviousness disconcerts you.”⁽¹⁾

What is striking about looking at those frescoes is the relationship of the radiance of the actual painting in conjunction with the creamy whiteness of the actual cells. At times I felt that I was not really taking anything in, but rather was subject to radiance itself. In the dream I had of urinating blood I was not really able to see because I was not really sure what I was looking at, and the moment I realised, I closed my eyes returning to darkness in order to understand. It was at this point that I awoke.

Anyway I am subjected to the sensation of needing to urinate. It invades my sleep, breaks into the slow comfort it might yield and thus torments the nerves that should instead be soothed. When I was young grown-ups would warn me about “pissing your life away,” but this is like a process of being drained away. In this context, the association of blood and urine is not surprising, but the passage into the art of Fra Angelico is uncanny.

I had wanted to write a lecture on the nature of gesture and at the heart of this desire was the painting by Fra Angelico called “The Mocking of Christ with the Virgin and Saint Dominic” which is in the ninth cell of the Convent of San Marco. The painting depicts fragmentary details of Christ's tormentors. Christ himself is blindfolded, so he appears to be untouched by these gestures of spitting, slapping and beating. The visual isolation of each of these gestures is both extreme and exact at the same time, accumulating in the aura of Christ as a memory trace to be overcome within the process of redemption. The contrast between the animation of the gestures and the static grace of the seated Christ is an extraordinary pictorial innovation in the context of these paintings, which are themselves, sealed within a private space of reception. ⁽²⁾

In the *Poetics*, Aristotle redefines the notion of mimesis, which he identifies with the capacity of art to portray the universal meaning of human existence. Art is an imitation of action, it constitutes a *mythos*, which is able to isolate universal truths from contingent particulars of everyday life and in so doing, it lends existence a heightened sense of unity. Aristotle views the image as being a reflection of the internal activity of the mind mediating the relationship between sensation and reason. In this regard the image is a bridge between outer and inner, assuming a role both as a window on the world and a mirror in the mind. Aristotle believed that the images of our dreams are ultimately derived from our sensible experience. He stated that “dream is a species of imagination, it is therefore a particular mode of experience” and in turn imagination is related to the movement of desire. I am in search of a schema that might link imagination, dream, memory, knowledge, gesture and representation. In this process of searching I feel caught up in a multiplicity of interruptions, seizures of sense, visitations, and ecstatic encounter. An image of urinated blood, the mocking of Christ, scattering of text, these are all in circulation in a process of touching the limits of representation. ⁽³⁾

I remember another dream that I had related to blood. There was this huge cactus with spikes in all directions. At the base of the cactus there were a number of monkeys that then started to climb up the cactus. I felt an intense anxiety about the possibility of the spikes lacerating the eyes of the monkeys. I looked away, as if vision itself was already seeped in pain. I heard several shrieks and in turning back I saw a young monkey covering a bleeding eye.

Sometimes images spike your eyes.

I wonder where this trail will lead me, and then to what end. I was meaning to write about your work, but at this moment it feels as if it might be elsewhere, as if not in view. Then briefly, you appear, showing me photographs of Mexican children prepared for burial, angelic, almost as if raised beyond the condition of life because in a sense they could no longer be touched by the approaching event of death. We just lingered over the surfaces of these images, I do not really remember speaking, which struck me as a form of intimacy. I assumed that you might be Latin and as Latin, Catholic also. I think that this constitutes my first memory of you. My next memory was in a seminar when I had asked everyone to bring a fragment of writing. You read a story about a group of men and women in a desert. One of the women drank a liquid made from the sap of a cactus. After a short period the group formed a human chain and each urinated in sequence into the mouth of the other so that a trace of the cactus sap was able to pass through the entire group. Once this process was completed, they then left this world for another world. There was something matter of fact about the way this story was read, as if this is the kind of event that would happen as part of the course of things. In some ways it was like a reading of a children's story but the aura of innocence contained within the delivery had already passed through orgy. I stayed with the assumption about a Latin and Catholic identity but also added the concept of magical realism. This naming process served to anchor my perception.

For some reason I organised a series of lectures on the theme of "Foreign." I think that I had read this poetic fragment of Holderlin:

"We are sign, without meaning
Without pain, and we have almost
Lost our language in foreignness"

I thought it might be possible to enter into that remote zone in which everything was not only strange, but also unsettled by loss of essential belonging. The question on my mind related to the notion

that this world has already passed over its threshold of representation, or if such a passage is not possible we have an apprehension of an edge that oscillates between a piercing, almost crystalline darkness giving rise to visions of an elsewhere and a leaden, dulling rhythm of time that we name as reality. The reason why the theme of metamorphosis has become such a compelling figure of thought, or aesthetic reflex relates to this sense of a threshold. The point, at which the world can be looked on as strange, is the point at which modulation of this threshold is becoming manifest.

We can understand ways in which art itself is a foreign country that has always been subjected to processes of mental colonisation in order to tame and control its resource. Perhaps art no longer understands its task, or its relationship to freedom, or even reason to resistance. I read the following words of Giorgio Agamben in a book called "A Man Without Content". "Inalienable and yet perpetually foreign to itself, art still wants and seeks its law, but because its link with the real world has grown weak, everywhere and on every occasion it wants the real precisely as Nothingness: art is the annihilating entity that traverses all its contents without ever being able to attain positive work, because it cannot identify with any content. And since art has become the pure potentiality of negation, nihilism reigns in its essence." (4)

If there is a turn toward notions related to metamorphosis, then it relates in some way to a desire to escape the circularity of art and nihilism, without recourse to a rhetoric of re-enchantment. As a mode of expression, this tendency is a refusal to play out a dulling endgame. If art is to be aligned with the common world, then perhaps it will also share the fate of this world, and thus caught within a struggle of finding and losing itself without end or seeming purpose.

I visit a friend who makes his living as a commercial photographer. He likes all the latest electronic gadgets. When I enter the house I notice that his 36-inch TV is on his living space, but no one is watch-

ing. I think that it is switched on when the children come home from school and then just stays on in case someone wants to watch, like a chair waiting to be sat on at all times. Signifying a presence as you enter and perhaps an absence when you leave, it is perhaps something that does not attend and is not really attended to in turn. The original producers of the TV declared it as the entry of a miniature theatre into the home but now it is more like a fact, which is both important and trivial at the same time. We might say that it merely symbolizes the fact that the world continues to happen. The light emitted by a TV screen is cool, even smooth, like a caress without bodily sign, so it is able to comfort itself into domestic space without unwarranted disturbance.

In the film “Dancer in the Dark” by Lars Von Trier, Selma finally acknowledges that she cannot see. The film is about a society that cannot see her as an immigrant and in turn her inability to see leads as a consequence to her own death. In looking at the film it is as if our own eyes are leant a sense of impotence, and perhaps as Selma realizes her approaching death, we close our eyes because we cannot absorb the logic of seeing no more. She has died so that another (her son) might see and somehow we become implicated in this sacrificial exchange. ⁽⁵⁾

I start to think of issues of vision in relation to Narcissus falling in love with his image because he cannot see that it is his self-same reflection that he views. Then the image of Oedipus casting out his own eyes, because of what he has been unable to see. Lacan's statement “in the matter of vision everything is a trap” resonates here as it mobilizes a force that is contained within of our (mythic) origin. ⁽⁶⁾

So as I start to write about your work, I am thrown across a field of encounters, blind spots, interruptions, constellations and intensities. I think that I need your work close at hand, rather than adrift in the space of memory. I also would like proximity to conversations we have had that barely seem to move away from their starting point, but as I start to think these things I also understand that writing is a lonely

activity, always underwritten by insecurity and doubt. I still have no substantial schema to guide me, so I am not really sure about what will come next. In this respect it is a theatre of the imagination, like your drawings, which just follow the impulse of the line and then gradually emerge as form and in turn as world. I think that each of the drawings is in fact both a body and a world simultaneously, or more accurately a becoming-world and a becoming-body. They are both conditions, because they reside in a state of uncertainty, and as such they resist being named. As drawing, they appear to evolve out of an automatic arena and as such have an affinity with biomorphic surrealism. Yet rather than reaching back into some lost reserve contained within surrealist practice, they point instead towards a post-human world, in which the syntax of life has become hopelessly dissembled, scattered, and reorganised, thus enabling the morphological features of biological organisation to become scrambled into new configurations. The organisation of a coherent pattern of space and time is rendered inoperative within the newly emerging process of becoming in such a way that habit, repetition, recognition, mimesis are no longer features of organisation. This is not to claim that this represents a form of primeval soup, or chaos, but rather an immanent order without the assumption of a hierarchy of form.

I am thinking about the way that we say “world” and observe what kind of gesture is contained within such an enunciation. We might feel that gesture itself is an attribute of the body, for instance pointing a finger or raising an eyebrow, but equally we can also think that there is a gesture within the heart of language itself. Gestures appear in general to linger on the edge of representation and at times might be even the flavour within representation. Gesture in this respect exists on the threshold of visibility pointing us to the reserve of the symbolic realm. We are lead between lines, enunciations, or figures in order to find those points of excess that cannot quite be spoken, a lingering in the not quite articulated, or the slippages in determination that might reroute the mapping process within the space of presentation. Yet another thought following from this, is that they are the leakage within in the sense of the elsewhere. All of this starts to point me in a direc-

tion of an in-between of visibility and invisibility, that exists within the interfacing of the self and the world. Normally this might be ascribed to the work of language itself. (The process of making art contains gesture, but this is difficult to discern). Perhaps we might advance the idea that gesture is the discharge of being itself, or even its essential animation. Looking up at the sky can be immediately acknowledged as a gesture that has run throughout the entire course of time, and as such, is a universal gesture, even though its connotations might vary. We are reminded that philosophy, or at least the impulse to philosophise, begins as an account of the wonder that is experienced looking at the starry heavens. Such a spectacle induced a feeling that we are looked upon beings. By extension the whole of space and our orientation within it, are articulated through the way we assemble gestures within its matrix. In so doing we are dispersing with our powers or vulnerabilities, throwing ourselves into continual interchange in order to affirm our being that otherwise might be overwhelmed by the abyss. Gesture in this regard secures for us ontic reversibility. When Merleau-Ponty said that through “other eyes we are for ourselves fully visible” he touched upon the nature of this collaborative project of reversible subjectivity and this by implication leads toward a state into which our landscapes interweave. We are given over both to perception and to gesture. Philosophy attends or even circulates around the gesture of that which cannot yet be thought. In an essay “Notes on Gesture”, Giorgio Agamben says that what “characterizes gesture is that in it nothing is being produced or acted, but rather something is being endured and supported. The gesture, in other words, opens the sphere of ethos as the more proper sphere of that which is human.” For Agamben, gesture breaks with “the false alternative between ends and means” and is instead the exhibition of the “process of a making a means visible as such.” Gesture serves to communicate that communication is possible, without it passing into language proper and in turn as either an end or a means. (7)

There is a story about Alexander the Great, who on finding himself in the distant lands of India, sought out an audience with a holy or wise man. Perhaps his tutor, Aristotle had spoken to him of the notion of

Sophia and how there were beings in India that possessed such a faculty. Eventually such a man was discovered and brought to his camp. Alexander was thus able to ask what constituted wisdom in beings. He looked intently at Alexander, holding the entire audience in expectancy. Finally he replied that wisdom in beings was to be found in those who evaded visual contact with men. Alexander was left speechless. "Is that all?" he exclaimed. "That is all," he replied, and then left the camp to return to the remoteness of his cave abode. I repeat this story constantly as it contains within it a kernel of perception capable of opening our world to a change of view.

This story of course raises the question about a transition that had occurred from viewing the world as wonder, to a new form of viewing in which seeing was related to inspection and in turn to an attitude of appropriation. What is it to see something and in seeing it, name it, and then in naming it to embrace the sense that this is a sign that opens that which is other to the process of appropriation? What occurs in the transition from being looked upon beings, to aggressively surveying and inspecting the world within a representational frame? Structurally a position of an imagined third person from which all things are seen is secured within this frame of representation, which insures that a spectatorial position can underpin a contemplative remove from the world.

As I write I am occasionally catching a glimpse of a postcard reproduction of a still image from the video work "Nemesis 52". It is such a strange form, because it neither appears as an object, nor a being properly speaking. Rather it seems to hover between a form of virtuality and actuality. The video projection mesmerises because of this unsettling of distinct boundaries. In some passages it seems to be a mode of eroticism liberated from the human sexual dance, secured instead within the movement of folds and shadow. Then the tone might shift into something that is so other, that we might repulse the inward pull of the work and instead shift into more abject corners of perception. Next we might feel we are looking at some lost masterpiece of surrealist art in a search for its indexical origin within the spacing afforded by history. This con-

stant shift to secure a place within identification, gaining recognition of what is being viewed, is of course the very fabric of the work. Somehow we can never properly settle into a point a view, or position, even after a sense that the devices have disclosed themselves. It is a quite Deleuzian work, but without the figure of Deleuze ⁽⁸⁾ being present. The work seduces and betrays, it undoes, but it also caresses, pulses and discharges, but also importantly resists easy naming, electing instead for enigmatic interiority. Something is being brought into presence, perhaps a third body introducing a form of unveiling in which a world is opened as a rhythm of becoming. Finally there is a sense that it is its own unique auto creation that draws its reserve both from the ancient world and the anticipation of the post human beyond.

Ovid was called “a poet between two worlds.” This idea should resonate with us within the present as we depart from the shores of the modern world, with all its definite markings. Ovid showed how metamorphosis occurs because of confusion between the world of objects and identities begins to tilt the world away from its regulative anchoring within habitual repetition. Metamorphoses animate, in completely novel ways, new relationships between materiality and identity and in so doing open out new vectors of expression. It is the faculty of reason that loses its essential grip within this shift around or within the fault lines of representation. Instead it is imagination that is given over to comprehend that which reason cannot decipher within its means. Thus the structure or the schema of the sublime can be perceived as undergoing a reversal or an undoing within this. Metamorphosis both attempts to figure that which is unstable but also holds instability as the gesture through which its expressive form is realised.

Toward the final years of his life in the 1570's, Titian turned to Ovid for inspiration. They are dark, brooding paintings that foreground the nature of the sacrificial event. Titian had taken to using his fingers to smear paint onto the canvas because the pain in his arthritic hands made the use of brushes difficult. Titian appeared to evoke twilight spaces in which the light blurs the boundaries between things and in so

doing evokes a sense of the half-forgotten and the half-remembered. Paintings become a stage in which a contest of aesthetic form and expression might be played out, a realm of the Gods, or at least a realm in which the Gods, mortals, animals and substance co-mingle. In the “Flaying of Marsyas” we are witness to the moment in which the triumphant Apollo extracts his price of victory from the vanquished Marsyas. The body has been suspended upside down so that the flaying might proceed. The figure of King Midas, who also doubles as Titian himself, sits in what is almost contemplative remove from this process. He looks downward toward the earth. Apollo continues to play his celestial music, but is perhaps also doubled as the figure that begins the process of cutting. This gesture aligns beauty and cruelty. So Marsyas is to be separated from his skin, to become all over wound and thus raw pulsation, the source of a flow of blood, water and agony that will seep into the soil becoming in turn a source of fresh spring water. Rather than aligning himself with the ascent and aesthetic principle of Apollo (clarity, precision of form, boundary, mental ideation), Titian instead aligns himself with the Dionysian principle of energy, colour, vitality, and dissolution. What we are seeing in effect is Marsyas becoming a formless object, which is the basis of both the sublime and the abject. Apollo's appropriation of the body of Marsyas produces an economy of division on a whole number of levels. The separation of the skin from the body could be also read as a mark of the separation of appearance and essence. There is also a ritualised enactment of aesthetic difference in the form of beauty and sublimity. Finally there is an indication of the application of knowledge to the body, rendering on the one side a form of torture death, and on the other, medical understanding. Titian is probably considering the entire purpose of being an artist, thinking for instance about the knowledge that it might yield alongside the pain that this quest is connected to. Titian is not only painting different moments of violence, but also suggesting that painting explodes out of a condition of violence capable in turn of exploding the limits of the existing world by revealing the fault lines inscribed into the principle of the visible. This labour is the very source of the work that exceeds authorship, for such work is not constituted as a simple object, but rather acts to destabilise such categories through shifting the boundaries of the seen and the unseen. Titian's painting is both

tragic and redemptive, revealing a passage through the invisible that produces a relationship between flesh and painting. I think that it is really a womb painting, a nursery of the soul in which Venetian light is mixed with the vapours of the bowels, a symbolic pit or hole, close to the dark space of the belly that emits bile, dank air, and all the other substances of decomposition. Titian surrenders himself to all these orders of substance in order to disclose the possibility of how the subject endures, despite the passage through the sacrificial encounter. ⁽⁹⁾

Titian's originality sprang precisely from his restless pursuit of the origins of things. He asks questions about art's relationship to itself and the search to find an arena of difference from life, but also the place it might have within the various symbolic divisions that culture forms. His late work might appear to turn away from the promises of humanist reason and the ascendancy of rationalist knowledge that developed with it. Rather than the light of reason, Titian was in search of a source of light that could not be disclosed through a clear examination of the order of the sky, but was rather a light that was emitted from a dark reserve or an elsewhere. We might say that Titian had started to paint without a sense of audience or place, for that matter, a sense of the future. Instead these late paintings deal with fate itself, how to die, how to absorb the knowledge of your acts, the purpose of art in the process of disclosure, and what can be passed forward in relationship to that which necessarily reaches backwards.

It is strange that I am talking to you about the work of old men. Perhaps this is something more to do with me rather than with you, but at the same time I suspect not. I have no way of measuring such distances. For myself, your work is merely promise or possibility. If pressed I do not really know. This does not mean that I talk of Titian because I am struggling to write about you, but rather I wish to find out things related to the capacity you hold within your formative gestures of becoming. Anyway you never seemed to turn away from heavy matters contained within the realities of death, eroticism, sacrifice, extreme fragmentation of the self, the scattering of limbs and blood, or anything

else that might be imagined. Of course you disguise a relationship to such things with a touch, which might at times be described as whimsical, or light, and you move across surfaces and mediums with an almost foolish impatience. I know that these are the kinds of asides that someone forms in writing about the other, but I feel as though everything should touch the page with you. At this very moment someone is expecting a telephone call from me, but I cannot stop writing, so the call is suspended because you are most immediately with me. The space of writing, in such a context, should not reserve itself to discrete and distant observation but rather should demonstrate how it has been touched. I think that really this is not an essay about your work but rather the ways I have been touched since considering writing an essay about your work. Originally we had agreed that it would be a kind of collaborative dialogue and even though that has been put aside in a direct sense I still feel that what I write now is indeed a dialogue. It is strange how we might assume knowing the other. Empirically speaking we have barely passed a word to each other. Not that there is anything lacking but rather any sense of knowing comes from a region that is quite elsewhere. Sometimes it is possible to have this sense of knowing without any exchange of words. You just look and in looking exchange a sign of knowing. In such occasions you might say things such as “we will do a lot of things together” or even “I know you, somehow.” So this writing springs from this apprehension of knowing that is contained within not knowing very much at all on another level. You could be Latin and Catholic as much as Greek Cypriot, radically heterogeneous or singular, a mystic or a modernist, somehow all these names could congregate around you without disturbing the course of this text.

Jean Genet wrote one of the greatest post-war texts on an artist's work. It was called “The Studio of Alberto Giacometti” and was published by the Maeght Gallery in 1957. Giacometti felt that it was the most significant text related to his work. In keeping with the idea of the wound, Genet writes that beauty “has no other origin than the singular wound, different in every case, hidden or visible, which each man bears within himself, which he preserves, and into which he withdraws when he would quit the world for a temporary but authentic solitude.

Such art, then, is a far cry from what is called miserabilism. Giacometti's art seems to me determined to discover this secret wound in each being and even in each thing, in order to illuminate them." The writing oscillates from wishing to find the secret centre of his work to observations about his appearance or the way he occupies the space of his studio. Another passage is as follows. "He smiles. And all the wrinkled skin of his face starts to laugh. In a peculiar way. The eyes laugh, of course, but the forehead too (his entire person has the gray color of his studio). Out of sympathy, perhaps, he has assumed the color of dust. His teeth - wide apart and gray too - the wind passes through them."⁽¹⁰⁾ Somehow Genet puts aside all formality or even critical pomp and instead sets about writing about anything and everything as it might occur. Nothing appears to be either censored or formalised. There is a rhythm between Genet and Giacometti, between artefacts and their spatial dwelling, between art and the everyday, but above all else a force of interruption that indicates a sacred realm that words can only indicate. Genet allows, in effect, the ordinary to find a place next to, that which is extraordinary. On another level, Genet is simply paying attention to what it is possible to write and he draws upon an intimacy in order to do so. This intimacy is set against the feeling of place that exercises a power or even force within the writing. I have not been with you in your studio so it would not really be possible to write as Genet does of Giacometti, so I elect to evoke instead a theatre of your imagination, the memory space of your becoming, the curious world of Haris composed as distant mind rather than a material space. Out of all of this would come a stream of moments, encounters, looks, film fragments, reveries and exchanges. I would not be too concerned about the problem of having to demarcate such things as real or imagined episodes. Already there are distinct colours and textures in this, a portrait emerging alongside. I start to recall you showing a fragment of a Tarkovsky film "Andrei Rublev" when a man goes up in a hot air balloon and we are given his eyes as he scans the earth and the multitude below. In some respects, everything with you is thrown in a continual case of elsewhere. Genet has a certainty connected to the relationship of place (the studio) and the portrait of the man, and that is a certainty I neither want nor can have. Not having visible contact instead leads me to other places secured by invention and memory.

It appears that I have followed, or even that, Genet has pursued me for a long time now. This influence was really mediated by Sartre's book on Genet ⁽¹¹⁾ which I traced through the library system whilst at school. I remember it had a dark brown cover that seemed to indicate a long, but unexposed shelf life, and this gave me the feeling that it was a book that contained secrets. Like a book of secret knowledge it was beyond me, and yet I persisted in turning the pages because I had understood Genet's connection to the ceremonial. Occasionally words would burn into me, like a process of etching especially those related to the implications of naming. It only took a few words of comprehension to turn my world into the shape that it has now assumed. Strangely the novels of Genet did not have the same effect and sometimes I found the prose tiresome and yet he never lets go of me. Somehow he turned stones over for me, and although I might wish that they remained, as before, I no longer have choice about the implication of this event within vision.

As human beings there appears to be a limit about what we can see and in turn show. Most of the existing cosmos is just dark matter, quite beyond the amplification of our technological devices. Likewise our space of memory appears pathetically compressed. The time of Aristotle is not really so distant, and after all, there are those in Afghanistan who still refer to the presence of Alexander as if still proximate to their own lives. I think of your work as not being readily taken by the space of the modern, but rather through the act of imagination, departing to places now erased by our mapping process. Its concern with the fragment brings it into relationship to Romanticism, and through Romanticism, to Surrealism, but then I also detect traces of archaic worlds as well, because of the proximity to things that have been lost or left in a state of ruin. Everything is elsewhere to that that shines, or as front or empty confidence, instead we enter worlds that are estranged, contagious, touched by loss or melancholia, adrift like flotsam and looking all ways at once to find new possibilities. I think that you might be rebelling against the fascination with the power of the image within contemporary culture and with it a curious emptying out of the subject, which might be its counterpoint. This emptying out of

the subject creates a hallucination of the self, a self ruined in order to be found again, finally a self that lives close to the source of its own alienation, in order that it can reside within equivalence. This sense of equivalence might be in turn our way of declaring ourselves to be in the spectacle of the world, whereas my sense with you is that you seek the elsewhere or radical difference as the point of orientation.

I am close to my end with this, and by virtue of proximity of ending, close to you also. At times you complain about the combination of sun and boredom. We share little, other than not really having an audience, but then why should anyone pay attention to this condition. I write in a way that can only assume your presence for this reason. I must confess that I never really feel bored. Writing for you, with you, against you, has taken me away from the pain in my chest. So simple really. This is how we go on. There is little that I would hold from you in terms of possible words. I come across a fragment of text written by Hegel in his manuscripts of *Janeer Realphilosophie*. "The human being is this night, this empty nothing, that contains everything in its simplicity - an unending wealth of many representations, images, of which none belongs to him - or which are not present." ⁽¹²⁾ Somehow I am attempting to make a picture out of all these fragments in order to indicate some greater whole and yet I think that knowledge might be found in the in-between of the spaces, or in the elsewhere of the reiterative process. Perhaps I am connecting knowing with the texture of thought and sense. Your work assembles itself as books, moving image, drawing, photography, assemblage and objects in ways that indicate passages from one level to another, always in search of the next register, overflowing and then stilling like water wishing to indicate depth. Sometimes the elements feel like traces of memory, at other moments, vestiges or fragments that have lost their place in a chain of encounter. One moment you appear as a teller of strange children's stories, and then equally this might switch to dark gothic tales. There appears little by way of boundary definition but rather a restless pursuit of that which appears to fall outside. Anyway the subject is simply what it does, but the ground of the subject is also paradoxically an abyss, which opens out a gap or space of impossibility within the heart of representation⁽¹³⁾.

So we both have to cling to the idea that this has been our space of encounter, or at worst, a painful scattering across the field we call our passage⁽¹⁴⁾. All that follows is the labour of footnotes. And then another day. Before leaving you I wish to tell you a story about the time I visited a Tibetan healer. He needed a translator to talk to me but what I remember more than anything else was the way he looked at me, almost as if I could sink into his eyes. He gave me some medicine that appeared like balls of dirt and after ingesting several of these balls I fell into a deep sleep. As I slept he appeared to travel inside of me, passing through all my veins and arteries, round and around until all the passages had been purified. When I awoke I had little sense of this being a dream at all. He had been inside of me through the night. When I saw him again he exchanged no words but instead stuck golden needles in my skull. I felt that I could visualise the constellation they composed, as if ordered by a geometry drawn from my moment of birth and descending condition of health. After the treatment he smiled, placed his hands together, slightly bowed, and that was that. The point is that this episode makes me ask what is mind, and following this what is the image? I find it hard to be able to find a line between inside and outside, but the image of this doctor-monk travelling through my body stays with me, or marks me, if you like. Likewise with this text I am not really sure about what is you and what is me, we simply entered a space which made such writing a possibility, in turn we are open about this possibility, it occurs, and together we turn. I know that I keep leaving you with yet another passage but it has become difficult to depart from this space of writing. The next time I start to write to you I would begin with the words of Helene Cixious. "The world-wide non-justice that we all know politically has spread all the way to our imagination. It goes so far that we are not just with the earth, with the stars, with ground, with blood, with skin. In advance, and without our even being informed, everything is already ordered - classed according to a scale which gives primacy to one element over another. And power to one thing, or to one being over another. All the time. And in an unfounded manner."⁽¹⁵⁾

Jonathan Miles, London 2006

Footnotes

(1) Georges Didi-Huberman (1995) *Fra Angelico* Chicago (P.2) The art of Fra Angelico (1400-1455) discussed, explores issues relating to the problems of representing the unrepresentable showing how the painter depicts emptiness, visual modes of transformation and forms of displacement that at times challenge verisimilitude. The writing focuses on the elements the author finds disconcerting, particularly what he terms as dissemblance in relationship to the figure. Didi-Huberman describes his book as “a drifting net, a network that itself branches out into several answers instead of one answer” in order to address the enigma and mystery of these paintings. “I have designated the specifically pictorial category of this disturbance by the (Proustian) term “patch” of painting. This is a way of naming those zones, those moments in the painting where the visible vacillates and spills into the visual. It is a way of naming the “cursed part” of paintings, the indexical, nondescriptive, and dissemblant part. In fact, paintings of reserve - and this is once more their gift for disconcerting - part of themselves for negating or clouding what they affirm in the mimetic order. Something in their aspect collapses at that point and dissemblance, a sort of disturbance, comes to reign there as the omnipotence of strangeness. There is nothing metaphysical about this strangeness in itself: it is only the power, the very symptom of painting - the materiality of paint, that is color - color that no longer “colors” objects but rather irrupts and ravages the decorum of the aspect.” (P.9) When I was reading this sections related to the splattering of paint, I started to think out Norman Bryson's essay “Vision in the Extended Field” (*Vision and Visuality* ed. Hal Foster Bay Press 1998) in which he discusses Far Eastern painting (in this case thrown ink). This of course has quite different connotations, but is striking anyway.

(2) For an exploration of the frescoes in the cells of the Dominican monastery of San Marco in Florence see John T. Spike (1997) *Fra Angelico* Abbeville Press. This book refutes the notion that the frescoes in the cells were chosen randomly, but rather suggests that they

constructed a spiritual exercise organised into three ascending levels of enlightenment. These frescoes are the most extensive cycle within the quattrocento and number more than fifty. One of the fascinating features about the paintings in these cells is the relationship to the library which is situated to the side of these structures. The availability of text, in particular Greek or Pagan text had expanded considerably at this time and was to have a profound impact on the course of the development of Florentine Art.

(3) "Representation is what determines itself by its own limits."

Jean-Luc Nancy (1993) *The Birth to Presence* Stanford (P.1)

This essay discusses the "epoch of representation" in the West, evoking the idea that "the limit of the West is ceaselessly in sight" opening the world in the process "to the closure that it is." In discussing thought, he states that thought "is poor. It is poverty we must think. Thought is this: merely to be born to presence, and not to represent its presentation, or its absention. Thought is poor, insofar as birth is thought. The poverty of thought is imposed, in the face of philosophy and against it (even in the bosom of philosophy itself), by "literature," or "poetry," or "art" in general. On condition that these are not already replete with philosophy, which occurs much more often than it might seem, for this is a matter neither of "genre" nor of "style." It goes much further. It is, quite simply, a question of knowing, in a voice, in a tone, in a writing, whether a thought is being born, or dying: opening sense, ex-posing it, or sealing it off (and wishing to impose it). At issue is this: either discourse names, or a writing is traced by its verb." (P.4). Nancy's writing style is far from transparent and requires a multiple reading process, but in staying with this, it yields to absorption. "The textual strategy Nancy deploys to consider the multiple forms of sense is worthy of attention. It is analogous to a multi-stranded knot (perhaps similar to those knots beloved of Lacan) whose ends are enclosed by the strands in such a way that to pull on any strand is merely to tighten the knot itself. Alexander's sword, whether as force or as reason, might cut this Gordian knot, which would sever the hidden ends, yet that severance would remove the possibility of learning the knot's valuable meaning." B.C. Hutchens (2005) *Jean-Luc Nancy and the Future of Philosophy* Acumen (P.9)

(4) Giorgio Agamben (1999) *The Man Without Content* Stanford (P.57). Agamben was for a period a student of Heidegger and we can understand some of the methodological procedures in his approach to writing in the way he traces the development of our use of language. This is especially striking in the essay "Poiesis and Praxis." Agamben challenges the heart of the Modernist project with an analysis of the mutuality of nihilism and art and in doing so calls upon a re-articulation of the ancient notion of poiesis.

(5) For a philosophical commentary on sacrifice see Jean-Luc Nancy (2003) *A Finite Thinking* Stanford in an essay "The Unsacrificeable."

(6) In writing this passage, I had several essays and books in mind. Firstly, in an essay "The trace of trauma" by Michael Newman (ed. Carolyn Bailey Gill (1996) *Maurice Blanchot: The Demand of Writing* Routledge) he discusses the figure of Narcissus and vision. "Narcissus falls in love with his image because he is oblivious to the otherness in himself which cannot be seen. The blind spot of vision is associated here with that place where both death and the other touch the subject. A question, which might pose itself, is what comes first: does the non-relational confrontation with death-finitude make possible the relation with the other person, or is it through the other person that one encounters death? Whatever the case may be, Blanchot's extraordinary claim is that Narcissus is not narcissistic, at least in the sense in which the term is understood in common parlance: it is because he loves himself that Narcissus cannot love another. But rather, by not recognizing his image as his own, he cannot relate to the other, since he has no relation to himself. But this also implies the inverse: that Narcissus has no self-relation because it is only through the other that he would have recognised his image as his own." (P.153). Following from the discussion of Narcissus, I thought about Alenka Zupancic's discussion of Oedipus (Alenka Zupancic (2003) *The Shortest Shadow* MIT). "...Oedipus was "blind" before his act of plucking his eyes out; he blindly killed a stranger along a road, and was blind to the fact that he was sleeping with his mother (i.e. his life was "blind" precisely in the Nietzschean sense: first, he was life with blind eyes; then he became death with waking eyes). Moreover, we should think twice before

accepting that the horrible thing or truth that Oedipus finds in his search is simply parricide combined with incest. Is it not, rather, that the Thing that Oedipus finds in his search for knowledge is nothing other than Oedipus himself - that is, his own gaze? In other words, it is not the parricide and the incest that constitutes the Thing - it is Oedipus himself as the object that was, from the very outset, "eliminated from the picture," thrown out in the form of the bundle/package that his parents entrusted to a shepherd with the instructions that it must disappear. It is this elimination that, at the very outset, determines Oedipus' perspective, as well as the picture/image of the world in which he then "blindly" finds himself." Is not the deadly secret of this culture that we are "eliminated from the picture," already blinded by the incessant dazzle of this culture of images, which are themselves offered as proof of democracy within the blink in the eye? For Lacan's discussion of vision see his *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis* Penguin (1971).

(7) Giorgio Agamben (2000) *Means Without End: Notes on Politics* Minnesota (P.56,7). There is another essay by Giorgio Agamben (1999) *Potentialities* Stanford Chapter 5 Kommerell, or On Gesture. He says "if speech is originary gesture, then what is at issue in gesture is not so much a prelinguistic content as, so to speak, the other side of language, the muteness inherent in humankind's very capacity for language, its speechless dwelling in language. And the more human beings have language, the stronger the unsayable weighs them down." (P.78). In Ulrich Baer (2000) *Remnants of Song* Stanford, he states that "because philosophy's original gesture aims at freedom of thought and liberation from preconceived ideas, freedom may be said to be the very condition of philosophy, and the condition of all endeavours resulting from thought." (P.27). Also see David Michael Kleinberg-Levin (2005) *Gestures of Ethical Life* Stanford.

(8) Deleuze claims that art is not about representation or concepts but rather is affective. Affects can be defined as forms of sensible experiences articulated in their singularity, moving outside of the organising systems of representation in the process. This moving out of this frame or organising system implies a force of disruption of the everyday or

common sense links that cohere words and experience leading in turn to new powers of thinking. Art is a process of becoming because of its power to disrupt existing modes of fixed thought and representation, particularly those relating to time. I would though be uncomfortable with the idea of attempting to undertake a Deleuzian reading of the work because this process starts to suggest a form of reduction. I was much more tempted into the notion of developing an account of theories of imagination. The modern reclamation of imagination begins with Kant who claimed that imagination was the common root of the two main stems of human cognition in the form of intelligibility and sensibility. For Kant the imagination was indispensable and nothing could be known without the transformative power of imagination. Kant claimed that imagination was an “art concealed in the depths of the human soul.” Following from this, I think that we are in the process of witnessing a reconsideration of the imagination within contemporary art and thought albeit as a disavowal of the late modernist idea of the concept in art. There is also an important relationship to politics connected to this, in that the world is increasingly being understood in relationship to forces that will transform everything into a desert of equivalence, a flat world of control and erasure of difference, lending continuity to a landscape of the self-same. In this context, forms relating to metamorphosis or imaginary otherness could be understood as resistant to this model of reality. If I start to reiterate words like becoming, imagination, the rhizomatic, difference, poiesis and resistance they indicate a point of turning within the contemporary moment, but they are not really sufficient for the process of entering into the exactness of given works. In a way I am pointing towards the fact that I am putting theory aside within this text, because the demand of the work in question, indicates a place elsewhere to such a process. Given this, I am not attempting to place the work or make any claims for it, rather I think that I am just attempting to indicate one way of being with the work, whilst paying attention to the process of writing. In this I am only drawing upon the things that are immediately around me in the form of books, images, notes in the form of a collage. These footnotes are a form of restoration of the powers that I normally am inclined to perform with, but are not necessarily convinced by.

(9) “The Flaying of Marsyas” by Titian (late 1570's) has a rich history relating to its interpretation. Fundamentally, I view the painting as an allegory of art itself or mediation on the relationship of being and art. The painting itself is centred on the throbbing navel centre of Marsyas and it is if the painting radiates outwards from this point (on an imaginative level it would be interesting to write about this painting from the perspective of the navel centre as a combination of the vanishing point and the creative starting point). Titian is drawing us inwards towards a centre beyond vision, perhaps towards an ecstatic understanding of art, in which bodily sense gives way to spiritual renewal. See *Titian* (1990) Prestel (P.370) and for Titian's relationship to Ovid see Erwin Panofsky (1969) *Problems in Titian mostly iconographic* Phaidon.

“He must have felt an inner affinity to an author profound as well as witty, sensuous as well as aware of mankind's tragic subjection to destiny. And it was precisely this inner affinity which enabled Titian to interpret Ovid's texts both literally and freely, both with minute attention to detail and in the spirit of uninhibited inventiveness.” (P.140). Finally for a discussion upon the representation of flaying, see Claudia Benthien (2002) *Skin* Columbia.

(10) Jean Genet (1993) *The Selected Writings* Ecco (P.312)

(11) Jean-Paul Sartre (1963) *Saint Genet* Mentor
Sartre talks of the fatal instant in the life of Genet, a form of metamorphosis in which “a well-behaved child is suddenly transformed into a hoodlum.” Sartre is of course referring to the moment in which Genet is called a thief, and in the act of being named assumes the reality. It is in this sense both the moment of his death and of his transfiguration, which leads him to live outside of history. “He deigns to take notice of the circumstances of his life only insofar as they seem to repeat the original drama of the lost paradise. He is a man of repetition: the drab, slack time of his daily life - a profane life in which everything is permissible - is shot through with blazing hierophanies which restore to him his original passion, as Holy Week restores to us that of Christ. Just as Jesus does not cease to be metamorphosed into a foul insect: the

same archetypal event is reproduced in the same ceremonies of transfiguration.” (P.13). What is notable in this text is the way in which Sartre develops his account of the imaginary through the vehicle of the life and writing of Genet.

(12) G. W. F. Hegel (1967) *Jenear Realphilosophie* Verlag

(13) Here I am drawing upon Slavoj Žižek (1999) *The Ticklish Subject* Verso, when he says that “the subject is both at the same time, the ontological gap (the “night of the world,” the madness of radical self-withdrawal) as well as the gesture of subjectivation which, by means of a short circuit between the Universal and the Particular, heals the wound of the gap...the subject's very endeavour to fill the gap retroactively sustains and generates this gap.” (P.159). Žižek is interesting because of the way he has taken his readers back to the original, early modern sources of the contemporary discourses of the divided, or de-centred subject, in particular in German Romantic philosophy and Hegel. For an insight into the idea of the power of the negative and the subject see the preface of Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit* (1977) Oxford “But the life of Spirit is not the life that shrinks from death and keeps itself untouched by devastation, but rather the life that endures it and maintains itself in it. It wins its truth only when, in utter dismemberment, it finds itself. It is this power, not only as something positive, which closes its eyes to the negative, as when we say of something that it is nothing or is false, and then, having done with it, turn away and pass on to something else; on the contrary, Spirit is this power only by looking the negative in the face, and tarrying with it. This tarrying with the negative is the magical power that converts it into being.” (P.19)

(14) Judith Butler (1999) discusses this idea of the subject and movement in her book *Subjects of Desire* Columbia. “Importantly, the Hegelian subject is not a self-identical subject who travels smugly from one ontological place to another; it is its travels, and every place in which it finds itself.” (P.8). I use this passage because it also touches a sense that the artist is a form of restlessness and as such “is his travels.”

⁽¹⁵⁾ Quoted in (2004) Abigail Bray *Helene Cixious* Plagrave (P.165). I was thinking about Cixious while I was writing and I feel that there are some interesting points of correspondence not just about a feminine textual body and the poetic, but in her critique of the “time of the flat thought-screen, of newspaper-thinking, which does not leave time to think the littlest thing according to its living mode.” (P. 144)

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