Thinking Otherwise

By

Jane L. Gregory

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Committee in charge:

Professor Lyn Hejinian, Chair
Professor Charles Altieri
Professor Eric Falci
Professor Robert Kaufman

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Abstract

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My dissertation, *Thinking Otherwise*, is a triptychal essay that pursues the consequences of a common feature of two very different artists, Agnes Martin and Alice Notley, who each renounce the products of reason—concepts, ideas, knowledge—for the sake of thinking. Both choose the theory of evolution to exemplify their refusal to believe in ideas. Evolution is forsworn because of its fitness as an emblem of reason—a paragon of reason's fruits that stands as explanation *and* cause of the way things are the way they are. Upon release from the class or hold of mental objects whose function the theory of evolution exemplifies, each artist performs a visionary perceptive mode without which her art would be impossible, and which she avers is transmissible to the audience.

Chapter one reads against the ubiquitous trend in Martin scholarship that divides the visual from the verbal, dissociating Martin's "visions"—the way her paintings occurred to her entire, "the size of a postage stamp"—from her "voices," auditory hallucinations symptomatic of Martin's schizophrenia. Critics insist on this division between Martin's visions and her voices to preserve the integrity of the paintings, leaving them uncompromised by Martin's mental illness. I argue that consigning the voices to Martin's pathology undermines her thinking *about* thinking, an activity that isn't the same as the wordless activity her visions provide. To take seriously the mental activity Martin wants her work to initiate, I turn to two psychoanalysts working at the time Martin was diagnosed: Marion Milner—for her work on the boundary between creativity and madness in both her clinical studies and her auto-criticism—and W.R. Bion, for his understanding of hallucinosis and his theory of thinking as an apparatus that develops in response to thoughts.

Chapter two maps the trajectory by which Alice Notley's "poetics of disobedience" authorizes not only her remaking of poetic genres, but also the launching of scientistic claims which culminate in her insistence that poetry determines speciation and is a tool with which we can measure the laws and nature of the universe. I show how Notley's work exceeds the limits of feminist epistemology, and I consider her work in connection with the decolonial work of Édouard Glissant and Sylvia Wynter. The imbrication of Notley's formal imagination and a counterpoetics (Glissant's term) leads to a counterhumanism (Wynter's term), which rivals secular humanism—deposing Darwin's the *Descent of Man* with Notley's *The Descent of Alette*.

The final chapter reads Martin's paintings and Notley's poems to discover a synthetic argument

for measure's capacity to recondition both the materials and process of thinking. Inhabiting the nexus of creative and academic writing, this chapter is a lyric essay that is both a narrative of my own responses to the objects of study and an exploratory confession of my methodology and my own filiative poetics.

For Opal

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Introduction

At first [they] spoke only poetry (only much later did it occur to anyone to reason).
—Rousseau

My avant garde then & now was composed of a shaky imagined grid holding a multiple of approaches.
—Eileen Myles

This project was initiated by my desire to think through the consequences of a common feature of two very different artists, Agnes Martin and Alice Notley, who both profess strong investments in mind and thinking, but who also both refuse to believe in the products of reason—public reason, other people's reasoned ideas, their own ideas. In this dissertation, I argue that these refusals, which might be taken to be mere provocations or to evince an anti-intellectualism, instead challenge and expand the limits of discursive thinking by way of the medium-specific interventions each artist makes, displaying by way of those interventions other kinds of thinking and other modes of assessing.

While it will be seen later that reason is an appropriate term for Notley's investments and antagonisms, it must be said immediately that reason is not an appropriate term for Martin, for whom no known term sufficed. Writing on Martin has tended to substitute experience for what goes on in the mind once reason as faculty is demoted: Hermann Kern sees Martin's work as "an expression of mind experience"; Jacquelynn Baas notes that once Martin's writings begin to appear and attend her paintings, the paintings "[acquire] for the informed viewer a new dimension: hsin, heart-mind in Chinese" (Kern 6, Baas 224). Apt as these formulations are, experience, as this project will show, is not exactly what Martin wanted her work to beget.

It must also be said that these two artists probably seem an unlikely pair. One, Notley, might be described as a maximalist, having produced over forty volumes of poetry to date, many of which are larger and longer than just about any book of contemporary poetry;[1] the other, Martin, has been described as a minimalist. Agnes Martin rejected being classified as a Minimalist and instead considered herself to be the last living Abstract Expressionist. Martin's relationship to influence and affinity is structured in contradiction, as are many of the positions she may be said to occupy: she both explicitly claimed affinity with the Abstract Expressionists and refused to acknowledge that she had ever been particularly influenced by other art, save classicism.[2] Furthermore, one prioritizes the linguistic constitution of experience, the other wordlessness. In autobiographical terms, one moved away from the desert, the other to it.

However, both Martin and Notley refuse certain concepts for the sake of what produced them: each artist disavows herself of ideas in order to let the mind work. And the mind, far from being what works on and works up what we usually think of as its own transmissible products,

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[1] Notley's prolificy is discussed in Part Two, but see especially *Alma, or The Dead Women; Songs and Stories of the Gouls; Disobedience* for examples of the sheer volume of Notley's output.

[2] On Martin's rejection of the application of the minimalist label to her work, see Glimcher 17 and Cotter, n. pag. On her refusal of influence, see Martin's *Writings* 37.

be they individual or collective—ideas, information, knowledge—instead only works in their absence. Both Martin and Notley belong to the contemporary and simultaneously defy it, have strong and self-professed roots in a high American Modernism that they also heroically betray. What emerges from the conjunction of these two artists' refusals and from the interplay between their respective works is an unironic picture of what it is to be a visionary artist in the secular contemporary. "Commentators apply the word *visionary* with little sign of embarrassment," chastens Suzanne Hudson ("Agnes Martin: On a Clear Day" 121). Indeed, this should be embarrassing; but Martin is ever repeating the story of how she found her signature style, and how she painted every subsequent painting, in a manner best summarized by Virginia Woolf's Lily Briscoe: "I have had my vision," and then she has painted it (Woolf 209). And Notley is *always* having her vision, is never outside of what she sees there: "there is a crystal city and we are in it" (Notley, Town Hall Audio). On offer in this picture—however embarrassing the visions upon which it depends—is a profoundly demanding mental activity that amounts to thinking otherwise—to thinking, otherwise; to thinking everything otherwise—and some proofs of that possibility.

Both Martin and Notley choose the theory of evolution to exemplify their refusal to believe in ideas and neither artist substitutes another theory of life's origins or variety in its place. Notley's refusal of evolution and her rewriting of the world's origins is ubiquitous in her work and is discussed at length in Part Two. *In the Pines* (2007) is a concentrated example, as is "My Bodyguard," a poem from 1980: "I don't believe in evolution. / I don't either as a matter of fact. However I believe / that snakes evolve into peas. Because they're green and round" (Notley, *Waltzing Matilda* 49). And Martin explains her renunciation of evolution in a 1997 interview conducted in Taos:

> I don't believe in what the intellectuals put out. The intellectuals, they discover one fact and then another fact and then another fact…they say from all these facts we can deduce so and so…no good. That's just a bad guess. Nothing can come but inaccuracies…I had a hard time giving up some of them, but I managed it. Evolution. [Really?] Mmmhhmmm. All of them. I gave up all the theories, even the atomic theory. And I don't really, I don't have any ideas myself and I don't believe anybody else's. So that leaves me a clear mind…I have an empty mind, so when something comes into it you can see it. That must be enough. (Brackets are the interviewer's comments.)

Her final sentence here, "That must be enough," is meant to end the interview, but it also points to the degree to which her refusal of these theories is also the condition of possibility for her paintings.[3]

Each artist's denial of evolution is un-ideological insofar as neither is a creationist, a cosmologist, or religious at all; in fact both profess to be atheists.[4] The need to disbelieve in

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[3] Several years later Martin again describes the particular difficulty of giving up the idea of evolution, along with atomic theory, in Mary Lance's documentary, *Agnes Martin: With My Back to the World.* To her lifetime friend and gallerist, Arne Glimcher, on her way to deliver a lecture at Yale in 1976—nearly thirty years before the interviews referred to above—Martin gives a different example: "It was very hard for me to give up intellectual theories—probably the hardest was giving up Einstein's Theory of Relativity" (Martin quoted in Glimcher 80).

[4] See Notley, "Town Hall"; Martin, letter to Princenthal (Princenthal 474).

evolution is expressed as a need to disbelieve in all ideas of its class in order to emancipate what may be made and apprehended by the mind. Notley refuses evolution primarily as a story, while Martin refuses it as an idea and as a series of facts. Both artists, though, refuse it as explanation or cause for what we are or are given to perceive. Upon release from the concept of evolution—and, to generalize, from the class or hold of mental objects whose function it exemplifies—each artist achieves and engages a visionary perceptive mode without which her art would be impossible. This visionary mode should be understood as distinct from the epiphanic, exceptional state that sponsors hieratic art: neither Notley nor Martin would have you believe they make spiritual art or art with special access to spirit. For each artist, this vision is the simple condition that going on requires, the minimum health of the mental system, what it takes to survive, what survives what it takes.

Evolution, though, is itself a story of survival, the reason the things there are are the way they are. It is explanation and cause in both its technical sense— as a theory that explains the diversity of life, how the leopard got its spots— and also in its figurative sense, which in fact predates its technical sense, as in: the evolution of Western attitudes or ideas about beauty, or the evolution of modern thought. Before "evolution" was shorthand for Darwin's theory of the origins and diversity of life, it was used in another technical sense to denote the change in an embryo; then it was applied more generally to the cosmos; then to changes in species (OED).[5]

At some point in what follows, the suspicion will probably arise that Notley and Martin were being heuristic—for Notley can't seriously consider the theory of evolution to sit plainly among the many "mass produced trains of thought," and Martin can't *seriously* deny that the atom exists![6] This suspicion confirms itself: there is nothing remarkable about the fact that these two artists disavow themselves of concepts like evolution: art is irrational, its world isn't the real one. The suspicion that Martin and Notley do nothing more—in refusing ideas like evolution—than reinscribe the division between art and not-art along the lines of the real might be intensified by the fact that the two were just and often are called "visionary" and visionary art is perhaps a conflation of or confusion between art and religion, two adversaries of the rational order. Better, though, to accuse this dissertation of enlisting this painter and this poet to rediscover that art is irrational—or, worse, that it is opposed to or exclusive of serious thinking—for while Martin and Notley self-describe as having visions, I do not. What they are contending for, though, is primacy of position in the tradition of serious thinking, to be able to use its heaviest terms without the axiomatic assumptions that attend them, rediscovering no less than Truth by way of *Reason* (Notley) and Beauty by way of *Ratio* (Martin).

Martin's preference for classicism and Notley's for ancient poems like Homer's and *Innanana* are both evidence of just this retention of the concepts (or the shape of those concepts) that are the progenitors of their entire traditions, *as if* those concepts were still free from the history that would unfold after them under our fathers and their fathers' fathers. "*Reason"* as used above is meant to invoke Notley's book, *Reason and Other Women,* and to make plain the

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[5] As we will see in Part Two, that an application to species predates its more totalizing theoretical form is in some ways good credit for Notley, who wants to abandon evolution for the sake of a truer understanding of species. Also discussed in chapter two are the ways in which this evolution of the term 'evolution' is itself evidence for the fitness of Sylvia Wynter's expansion of Fanon's schema of ontogeny, phylogeny, and sociogeny.

[6] For Notley, see *Scarlet Cabinet,* v; for Martin, see Mary Lance.

fact that Notley doesn't disdain reason after any anti-intellectual fashion: she wants to have reason, just not *that* reason—she wants you to know that Reason is a babe, guys. Martin's understanding of Beauty is complex and will be discussed at length in Part One, but suffice it to say that beauty is an apprehension of a truth that sometimes goes by the name of perfection and can never exist in the world or any of its objects, only in the mind. While response to and recognition of beauty require a mind that is not reasoning, there can be no doubt that Martin's work (and the beauty we confer upon it when we respond to it) required a mind that could *ratio* full well—in the sense of calculation and reckoning.[7]

The hardest conclusions to forestall in the space of this dissertation will be that Martin and Notley, though differently, are both 1. calling things well known by other names—like calling what was called thinking "mind experience" and 2. refusing those parts and products of the mind that constitute and organize public, social life in favor of those parts of the mind that are used for the production of their works of art for their own sake. Were that second conclusion to be drawn, then might issue the defense that they both also, though, powerfully assert that the response in the viewer or reader has some consequential value, that the power and value of the response, both its form and effect, stitch us back to the social/material world. Sure, maybe. But Martin does turn her back on the world—as the title she gives her 1997 series of paintings, *With My Back to the World*, expresses—and it may be that her poetics doesn't really return us to the world or reflect it in any way. It is inarguable that Martin had no interest in politics. Friends described her as conservative—Harmony Hammond puts it simply as: "Her simplistic and conservative, if not right-wing, views about feminism, abortion, 'the women,' 'the poor,' or 'the Indians' were quite shocking and disturbing to me" (Hammond 37). However, Martin did not abjure the political without also wanting to expose its insufficiency; Jill Johnston notes her own discomfort at Martin's anti-politics but also paints a more complex picture than Hammond:

> …i was fearful of exposing what could only be a profound political disagreement between us. i read a hilton kramer review she had there of her retrospective in philadelphia and couldn't help saying the reason she doesn't have the reputation hilton kramer says she should have is because she's a woman. but agnes knows exactly what or who she is or isn't she shot back i'm not a woman and i don't care about reputations. i said well i wouldn't come to see you if you weren't a woman. she concluded the argument saying i'm not a woman, i'm a doorknob, leading a quiet existence. [sic] (Johnston 300).

Martin's poetics aims to motivate feeling and has no use for action, does not want to compel it. What it does do, though, is encourage us to disbelieve fundamental facts about that world, like that it is organized by power.

Notley and Martin both formulate this particular refusal nearly identically. For Notley we must refuse "the powers we've created to obey" and then use our own powers (poetry) to recreate the world (Notley, *Reason and Other Women* 52). And for Martin,

> [We] must consider the idea of *Power* because without freedom we cannot make our full

[7] As illustration of ratio in this literal sense, see Figure 1 of the Appendix, an image of the calculations that were required for Martin to convert the image as she saw it in her mind, an image the size of a postage stamp, into a 6x6 painting.

> response. With the idea of power in our minds we are subject to that power. If you believe in it, then it exists for you and you are naturally subject to it. But in reality there is no power anywhere. (*Writings* 97)

Dispensing with the idea of power is necessary to attain freedom, and freedom is the necessary condition for response. This concern of Martin's is consistent throughout her career. For an exhibition in 1967 she wrote: "My formats are square, but the grids never are absolutely square; they are rectangles, a little bit off the square, making a sort of contradiction, a dissonance, though I didn't set out to do it that way. When I cover the square surface with rectangles, it lightens the weight of the square, destroys its power" (*Writings* 29). This response—this dissertation—is structured in three parts: the first considers Agnes Martin, the second Alice Notley, and the third performs what is freely enabled by what it follows.

"Consideration" is the right term for this dissertation's mode in that it is a careful study, and also in that the object of consideration is not necessarily a claim but instead can be *regard* or *attention* itself. So, I ask patience for what will sometimes be an argument-poor expedition, a wandering in the field Martin and then Notley produce and describe. To consider—from the Latin *considerare*—is kin to sidereal astronomy, a study with stars as its object, a discipline that requires the observer lie down with their back on the ground—an image offered as illustration of what Martin might have meant when she named her series *With My Back to the World*— maybe in a field, observing the motions of what moves them. Concepts are treated in service of this ideal.

Part I, "Agnes Martin: *Not to know but to go on,*" traces the articulation of Martin's poetics in the context of her career as a painter. While I show that Martin didn't exactly write all of her writings (many were transcribed from conversations with her or assembled from her notebooks by other people), I also argue against those critics who claim that Martin "stopped painting in order to write" (Stiles 85). I detail the inextricability of the written from the painted and read against the ubiquitous trend in Martin scholarship that divides the visual from the verbal, dissociating Martin's "visions"—the way her paintings occurred to her entire, images seen in an instant and "the size of a postage stamp," which she then transformed into her standard 6x6 via precise calculations—from her "voices," auditory hallucinations symptomatic of schizophrenia, a diagnosis she had already received in the 1950s when she hit upon her signature style, but which was only revealed publicly after her death. Critics insist on this division to preserve the integrity of the paintings, leaving them uncompromised by Martin's mental illness. I argue that consigning the voices to Martin's pathology undermines her thinking *about* thinking, an activity that isn't the same as the wordless activity her visions provide. To take seriously the mental activity that Martin wants her work to initiate, I turn to two psychoanalysts working at the time Martin was diagnosed: Marion Milner—for her work on the boundary between creativity and madness in both her clinical studies and her auto-criticism—and W.R. Bion for his understanding of hallucinosis and his theory of thinking as an apparatus that develops in response to thoughts.

Part II, "Alice Notley: *I am losing my because,*" maps the trajectory by which Alice Notley's "poetics of disobedience authorizes not only her remaking of poetic genres, but also the launching of scientistic claims that culminate in her insistence that poetry determines speciation and is a tool with which we can measure the laws and nature of the universe. The chapter begins by examining Notley's mythological narration of her poetic inheritance, which myth culminates in a feminist poetics that claims to exceed the limits of epistemology, licenses the remaking of

the epic genre, and launches a signature measure. Through the conjunction of these three things, Notley's work makes audible a voice that tells a new story about the origins of human life, a voice that tries to undo the bad determinisms and false sense of inevitability produced by the history and mythology of Western Civilization. In tracing this quest to "find a story for beginnings," I consider Notley's work in connection with the decolonial work of Édouard Glissant and Sylvia Wynter. The imbrication of Notley's formal imagination and a counterpoetics (Glissant's term) leads to a counterhumanism (Wynter's term), which rivals secular humanism—deposing Darwin's *The Descent of Man* with Notley's *The Descent of Alette*. Drawing on Glissant's notion of counterpoetics, Wynter develops a "counterhumanism…made to the measure of the world." In Wynter's counterhumanism, she renames the species "*homo narrans*": the species that narrates itself into existence. In so doing, it consistently over-represents Man (Western, white, landed) as synonymous with human, as if the interests of Man were the same as "the interests of the human species itself." Wynter relentlessly reveals this over-representation as a call to differently "enact ourselves" as a species. Thus, I argue that Notley's project can be read as an attempt to answer Wynter's call, and that its answer carries with it a theory of reader reception that claims to transform the species and to take measure of that transformation.

Part III, "A Measure of Thought" reads Martin's paintings and Notley's poems to discover a synthetic argument for measure's capacity to recondition both the materials and process of thinking. Inhabiting the nexus of creative and academic writing, this chapter is a hybrid or lyric essay that is both a narrative of my own responses to the objects of study and an exploratory confession of my own filiative poetics. This chapter takes measure of my own methodology, what I call "thinking between" and explore in an interlude on rhyme. As a poet's dissertation and a work of poetics, I argue that poetics is a rhyme between confession and performance; thus, the final chapter includes auto-criticism of the poems I was writing alongside the dissertation and that share the scholarship's impulses and discoveries. Rhyme and measure are elements of poetry's music—what Martin called poetry's attempt to "get beyond words, with words." I note that both Martin and Notley arrived at their signature measures after periods of intense grief (for Notley measure is prosodic structure, while for Martin it is the careful calculations her paintings required); so I take up Nathaniel Mackey's claim that music is "wounded kinship's last resort" and makes visible the fact that something "is left out of reality," has been lost. If music is "wounded kinship's last resort," rhyme and measure, then, can be its scars. Rhyme opens the space for thinking between. And measure is measure in Mallarmé's sense: *mesure* is meter, measure, and order; it is also the technology Mallarmé tried to use to leverage both poetry and thought against death, to make what is lost survive. Parts I and II of *Thinking Otherwise* pursue the intersections of biography and artistic practice, while Part III is focused on considerations of form, which consideration entails the products of biography (feelings, thoughts) and the products of artistic practice (paintings, poems).

Part I
AGNES MARTIN: *Not to know but to go on*

No way in, go in, measure.
—Samuel Beckett

I cannot, even if I wanted to, answer these questions. Nor, as far as I know, can the Grid.
—W.R. Bion

Soon after Agnes Martin began to produce the works she is known for and was satisfied with, writing began to accompany these works in exhibitions, catalogues, and art magazines. It is difficult to get a sense of whether and how Martin herself conceived of writing or its relationship to painting. Martin may have been ambivalent about writing; or as her biographer Nancy Princenthal claims, quite the opposite: "in a sense she wrote all her work" (9). Princenthal stresses that writing—both in its material form as handwriting and in its relation to thinking—is essential to Martin's work, and she gives the chapter in which this conjunction is explored the wonderful title "Lines of Thought." But Martin didn't always write her published writings. The earliest pieces were often compelled or accomplished by others, as documentations and recollections of private conversations, transcribed or recalled by artists, acquaintances, and advocates. What we now understand as Martin's writings were never stably identifiable as such and their circulation and publication is perhaps best understood as a kind of licensed piracy, as rumors that have been half-heartedly endorsed by their subject. Her writings circulated conventionally as texts after they circulated socially as conversations with her, or professionally as lectures delivered by her to young artists. By the time they became texts, they circulated in a scene from which Martin was far removed, in forms others gave or found for them.

Given the lineation of Martin's writings as they were initially published, they incontestably appear as poetry and so it follows that Martin was and continues to be rightly received as a "[painter]-thinker-poet-writer" (Hudson, *Night Sea* 29).[8] This is true of several of the earliest of Martin's writings, which endure throughout her career as her major writings and seeds thereof. "Reflections," published first in *Artforum* in 1973, was transcribed in December 1972 by Lizzie Borden following an interview with Martin; this piece contains the germs of "On the Perfection Underlying Life," a lecture given at the Institute of Contemporary Art in Philadelphia in 1973, the notes for which were published in facsimile in Hermann Kern's 1973 catalogue. In the 1973 ICA catalogue itself, though, we find "The Untroubled Mind," probably Martin's most famous piece of writing. The text for this piece was transcribed by Ann Wilson "after conversations with the artist she had in the summer of 1972," but concludes, bizarrely, not with the last line of "The Untroubled Mind"—"The wiggle of a worm is as important as the assassination of a president"—but rather with "[a section] taken directly from Agnes Martin's notes for a lecture given at Cornell University, January 1972" (*Writings* 44, ICA 24). Also in 1973 Jill Johnston would publish "Surrender & Solitude" in the *Village Voice*; this piece records

[8] On Martin's ambivalence about writing see also essays by Tiffany Bell and Jonathan Katz.

Johnston's own pilgrimage to see Martin, is candid about Johnston's struggles with "insanity" and the affinity she felt with Martin in that struggle, as well as repeating verbatim statements of Martin's that were transcribed by Borden and Wilson to become "Reflections," "The Untroubled Mind," and "On the Perfection Underlying Life" ("Surrender & Solitude" 32-33).

To summarize: In 1972 Martin had three conversations with young artists who admired her and who had made a kind of pilgrimage to see her. These conversations became at least two poems and at least two lectures, were immediately published in two magazines and two exhibition catalogues, though in a thoroughly confused manner, which makes it impossible to understand Martin's writings as having any discrete, stable form. The most "authentic" or unquestionably hers of her early writings are the facsimiles that appeared in the Kunstraum catalogue, the forum from which Martin was most thoroughly and entirely physically removed. Martin's own notes, the facsimiles show, were in sentences, but the transcriptions made by Borden and Wilson have no line-terminal punctuation. While this is a small matter, I note that her early interlocutors represented what she said as lineated poetry for how Wilson and Borden model—and Martin lets stand—the formal flexibility of her work, work most interested in facilitating productive response in others, which facilitation often depends on or refers to a sociality that is at odds with Martin's famous solitude. All that said, I must also acknowledge that if we heed Martin's warnings about intention and decision—that as soon as you have to make a decision, the work is ruined—then it doesn't matter that she did not choose to lineate the writings as they appeared. It is quite lovely, though, to observe the way her writing looks, as lines; as it is also lovely to remember (and look forward to) Alice Notley's preferred visual medium: to collage fans, which have lines before she gets to them.[9]

Just as Martin's earliest writings were accomplished through and by others at their inception, so her writings continue to be written after her death. [10] Martin went to great lengths to refuse or resist entirely identifying as the author of her writings, just as she resisted any notion that she was responsible for her paintings and as she also resisted owning anything at all.[11] Rather than taking credit or responsibility for her paintings, Martin understood herself as a "locus" that enabled their possibility (Posnock 367). Suzanne Hudson elaborates this abdication to understand Martin as a "medium" for the paintings, "both an agent acting as an intermediary and the very substance through which action is conveyed" ("Agnes Martin: On a Clear Day"

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[9] See Figure 2 of the Appendix of Images.

[10] Borden and Wilson wrote Martins' first major writings. Before these appeared, though, Ann Wilson published "Linear Webs: Agnes Martin" in 1966; this piece relates several extended statements by Martin, a kind of hearsay or unofficial transcription, though Martin doesn't co-author the piece (Wilson 46-49). Shortly following this "An Answer to an Inquiry" appeared in *Art in America* in the summer of 1967; the entirety of that piece reads is quoted on page vii of the introduction above (*Writings* 29). I note these two pieces to show that however much critics like to point out that Martin is full of contradictions, she is also incredibly consistent: these two pieces—one an official answer and the other Wilson's recollection of Martin's answers to her own questions—show the constancy of the fact that Martin's verbal statements are always occasioned by other people. Arne Glimcher continues to effectively write her writings after her death, in her own hand. See the facsimiles included in his monograph *Agnes Martin: Paintings, Writings, Remembrances*.

[11] For Martin's tendency to minimize her hand in writing, or in intending to write, see also Princenthal 190-91.

121). The force of this resistance, though, is nearly countered by the previously published and unpublished writings appearing posthumously, in her own hand, and on papers whose colors and textures are striking in their resemblance to the paintings themselves. The publication of her writings in facsimile—a single piece in 1973, seven in 2013— was both preceded and interrupted by lineated and typeset prose; and one can imagine the late interviews, like those conducted by Mary Lance in 2003, being transcribed and published as poems no differently than the earliest pieces. While the details of the publication history of these writings might be less lambent than the striking resemblance between the facsimiles of her writings and the paintings,[12] the publication history does much to ensure that we use the confusion of the oral and written forms of Martin's verbal work to refuse any progression or evolution from one form to the other.[13]

The same refusal of progress must attend consideration of the chronology of her mature work: Martin herself carefully and consistently refuses any narrative progression of her work. The fact that the earliest writings are quoted in her latest interviews—just like the fact that the last painting she made before she died resembles very much the last painting she made before her hiatus, before leaving New York in 1967—is good proof that the work doesn't evolve but involves, becomes elaborated.[14] Indeed, the resemblance between "Trumpet" (1967) and "Untitled" (2004) is noted and illustrated by Glimcher (56, 202).[15] But not everyone agrees that "Trumpet" was the last painting Martin made before she left New York and stopped painting. By several other accounts, the last painting was "Tundra," a painting described by several of Martin's critics but that is not reproduced or mentioned in any of her catalogues; perhaps, though, the forthcoming catalogue raisonné, edited by Tiffany Bell, will account for "Tundra."[16]

When Martin's first major writings appeared in 1973, they were surrounded by her absence. On the one hand there is her six- or seven-year absence from painting, and on the other is her refusal to take full authorship of the writings. For some, Martin's writings explain the years she spent not-painting: "[Martin] stopped painting in order to write" (Stiles 85).[17] Although evidence for this impression is absent, the impression conveniently, if a bit too teleologically, structures the chronology of Martin's work's appearance such that the writing appears before Martin officially resumes painting, and easily provokes one of two assumptions: either writing's necessity also necessitated painting cease, or the accomplishment of writing allowed for the resumption of painting. If her hiatus from painting is understood as a lack, her writings serve to justify and explain that hiatus, to fill that lack. However unlikely it is that

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[12] Rhea Anastas, in "Individual and Unreal," has a concise history of the publication of many of Martin's writings (Cooke, 147-8n10).

[13] See Figures 3 and 4 in the Appendix.

[14] Looking forward to the section on Martin's diagnosis: the fact that there is no linearity of development, no narrative, means there can be no talking cure either.

[15] See Figures 5 and 6 of the Appendix.

[16] On "Tundra," see Crimp and Hudson.

[17] As was discussed above, Borden, Wilson, and Johnston wrote Martins' writings during her "hiatus"; these writings effectively ended it and lent the sense that Martin stopped painting in order to write.

Martin stopped painting in order to write, that conjecture sits beside the preponderance of other reasons given—written and recorded, by Martin and by others—for this interruption in painting. I will return to Martin's period of "Silence," as Princenthal names it, later in this chapter, but it is worthwhile quickly to list the myriad reasons given for her exit from New York in order to illustrate how thoroughly Martin wants to baffle *cause* as a general concept. Martin left New York, initiating her "fallow period," for several reasons (Hudson, *Night Sea* 21). First, her dear friend Ad Reinhardt had died (Kern 6). Secondly, she was being evicted from her loft in Coenties Slip at 28 South Street because of its imminent demolition; or, she was not being evicted, but knew she needed to leave when a "massive building went up" and ruined her view of the East River (Bloem 34). Thirdly, 1966 had been a very good year for her: she had made some money off of her paintings, had been awarded an NEA grant that allowed her to buy a truck, and she wanted to travel a bit (Miranda, n. pag). Fourthly, she was satisfied with her work, could relax—"I established my market and I felt free to leave," she said (Eisler 82).[18] It had something to do with time and independence—"I must give independence a trial"—as she put it to Lenore Tawney (Fritsch in "Tate" 240). Lastly, she left New York for emotional reasons: she was full of "remorse," which may or may not have had to do with a falling out with Tawney, her breakup with Chryssa, or with the fact that people couldn't "see the paintings" (Johnston, "Surrender & Solitute" 33 and Miranda); she thought an artist could only last for ten years in New York; she was "staying unsettled and trying not to talk for three years," as she wrote to Sam Wagstaff;[19] and she was in a state of great turmoil, which related to her work, her personal life, or her mental illness.[20] This is all to say: her move was no dramatic renunciation. She had been planning it for some time.

Of the many reasons given for her exit from New York and enumerated above, only two were written by Martin (the letters to Tawney and Wagstaff), and only one speaks to the question of her output. This is the letter to Sam Wagstaff, who owned a few of Martin's works. The letter is brief. Martin begins, "I think my paintings will be around quite a while as I perceive now that they were all conceived in purest melancholy"; she then discusses how she particularly likes the paintings and drawings Wagstaff owns, tells him she hopes he will lend them to any upcoming exhibitions; she then says, before signing off and as though to assure him she is ok, "I am staying unsettled and trying not to talk for three years. I want to do it very much" (Martin letter to Wagstaff). The acknowledgement of melancholy is unusual: Martin very rarely admits of the darker emotions, but more exceptional here is that the melancholy is valuable. Despite this minor confession, too much shouldn't be made of its authority. The letter is undated and mentions nothing about whether or not she is painting or intends to paint, which makes it hazardous to assume that her designs on this three-year silence are synonymous with a six- or seven-year cessation of painting.[21] Nowhere else in the writings that have been collected since

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[18] Perhaps the only direct quote from Martin about this hiatus, she makes this remark a full twenty years after she has resumed painting.

[19] Agnes Martin letter to Samuel J. Wagstaff, 19--. Samuel Wagstaff papers, 1932-1985. Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

[20] See Glimcher and Crimp.

[21] While the consensus is that from 1967-74 Martin "ceased painting entirely"—as the LACMA curator of Martin's 2016 retrospective put it—and then broke her silence with *On a Clear Day,* a series of thirty

the earliest writings does she discuss the conditions that determined this period of not-painting—in interviews she gives a host of reasons that do not sit easily together— but everywhere she writes about what is required in order to paint, and what she wants the work to do.

Martin's writings, then, are understood both as other to and as framing reflection of her visual work. And to whatever degree Martin wrote all her visual work, as Princenthal claims, her writings were written by others too. Or, more accurately, the decision for her writings to be written was ultimately out of Martin's hands, just where she wants decisions (*Writings* 115). Though her critics express varying degrees of irritable reaching after the real reasons she left New York and took a break from painting—and it's worth remembering that this was a brief interval within a very long career—Martin herself is completely unperturbed by it once she returns to painting, as evidenced by the sweet explanation she gives to Mary Lance in her 2003 film: it took her four years once she settled in New Mexico to build her studio, but once she had a vision of an adobe brick she knew she had to build the studio, and once she built it she resumed painting. This is consistent with the sense that Martin is serenely absent as agent of her paintings, just as she is of her writings and her major decisions. This sense was developed early by both Jill Johnston and Ann Wilson into the claim that Martin was a medium for what she said, meant, and painted.[22]

According to Johnston, a young artist at the time of her visits with Martin, Martin's paintings "paint themselves" (292). Ann Wilson would later explain that the same was true of her verbal communications: "[Martin] did not pursue communication, what she had to say flowed out seamlessly, as if she had written and rewritten the meaning she ascribed to her life, work, and philosophy until it was as distilled as the light of that place in time" (Johnston 292, Wilson 21). Also, Kern writes that her "works want to be seen as messages, which are transmitted by the artist serving only as a relatively unimportant medium," which is further reinforced by Martin's own insistence on a literal (etymological) understanding of inspiration (8). Throughout her biography, Princenthal emphasizes the affinity between Martin's visual work and the written and pushes back against the autogenetic picture Wilson and Johnston—and indeed Martin—paint:

> Inspiration, certain aspects of Surrealism, and spiritual practices of both the East and the West all played important parts in shaping Martin's work. But perhaps no source was more important to her than the pressure of language, whether oral, written, or internal. To the extent that her painting can be called automatist, it can also be identified with unspoken and not fully articulated writing. The lines of thought along which her mind ran can be said to find literal expression in the penciled lines that course throughout her

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screenprints, this might be legend rather than fact. Rather, as Lizzie Borden wrote in 1973, before the release of *On a Clear Day: "*She has made many attempts to subvert the grid, recently destroying almost a year's work before completing a series of 9" x 9" paintings of grids and of horizontal lines, in gray silkscreen ink and in pencil, to be printed and published by Parasol Press in 1974. Martin's reason for using the printing process is to make the works more detached and impersonal, to erase all traces of the hand" (Borden 44).

[22] Wilson who visited Martin in 1972 and co-authored her first major writings, as discussed above; Johnston who published her own account of visiting Martin in 1973 that foretells Martin's writings for her.

work. (Princenthal 110-111)[23]

Princenthal here means to rival the automatist claim with the writerly claim. Martin adds another order of reflection, though, as the autogenetic develops an awareness of its own responsiveness. Martin herself did not share the sense of the automatic because the process was so effortful. She would wait and wait and wait for an inspiration, then she would have it—the inspiration came in the form of a picture of what she was supposed to paint that was the size of a postage stamp in her mind—and then she would do laborious calculations to transform the tiny version into the 6x6 version (though in her eighties she switched to 5x5 canvases because the 6x6 canvases were too difficult for her to pick up and turn around); then she would paint the same painting over and over again until it was good enough (Feldman 235, Glimcher 105).[24]

Princenthal highlights not only writing's material form—the "mineral glint," as she puts it elsewhere, of Martin's lines penciled on canvas (88)—but also its conceptual formation, writing's function as a container for thought that shares thought's medium. "Lines of thought" is a lovely metaphor for and description of the conjunction between Martin's visual and verbal work (92). However, it isn't clear that Martin values the written as much as Princenthal does and it is a safe guess that Martin did not value the discursive forms of writing and thinking as much as any critical biographer must. In other words, it is impossible to determine what Martin thought about thinking in writing, or about writing in general, perhaps because of Martin's intense privileging of the artist's vocation. What Martin thought about art was decisively clear, as at the end of an interview:

AM: You can ask me for my definition of art if you want.

JS: OK, I will. What is it, please?

AM: Art is the concrete representation of our most subtle feelings. That's the end.[25]

So, about writing we both do and do not know what she thought, for, in the words of John Dewey, whom many a critic like to point out Martin probably had read: "the artist does [her] thinking in the very qualitative media [she] works in, and the terms lie so close to the

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[23] Though it might be tempting to suspect that Princenthal is just being figurative in her description here, she consistently conflates thinking with the "states of mind" that Martin sees her paintings as expressing: "As riven with contradictions as the artist herself, [her work] was born as thought, transcribed by hand, and addressed with fervent intimacy to everyone" (Princenthal 257).

[24] On Martin's early denial of the automatic, see her statement from Betty Parsons' gallery show in 1958 (Kunstraum 78). This was the first "statement" of Martin's to appear. Although within it she denies the automatic, she more vehemently denies authoring the statement itself: "I did not write this statement and it is not true. I do not paint or not paint what it says"; and elsewhere, she continues, "This statement is the most quoted of my 'statements' and I did not write it and I hate every word. It was written by a fellow called Ray Izzbiki who pretended to write what I said but wrote instead his own thoughts" (quoted in Princenthal 186).

[25] This definition is repeated in her writings; in the interview it is as though she is reading it to us. See Simon (1996).

object…they merge directly into it."[26] In fact, deep immersion in Martin's work makes clear that Martin shows us nothing if not how much of thought is non-linguistic, even as she uses language to show us this. The artist thinks *with* her paintings. Sometimes language is thinking's medium; sometimes writing's medium is language. Sometimes pencil and paper, paint.

Because Martin has no minor writings, her first major writings might be thought of as those that resemble her subsequent writings in the same way as Martin's first major paintings—her first grid paintings and her first paintings with stripes—resemble all of the subsequent paintings she made and allowed to survive between 1959 and her death. Martin arrived at her signature style in 1959, a year or two after having moved to New York from Taos once Betty Parsons bought enough of her work that she could do so. Though a statement of Martin's appeared in 1958 for a group show at Parsons' gallery, Martin would later claim that statement to be a forgery;[27] so the first real appearance of her writing was in the catalogue for the 1973 exhibition at the Institute for Contemporary Art in Philadelphia, organized by Suzanne Hudson. Included in that catalogue are:

I cite this part of the catalogue's table of contents because Martin's statements are congenitally attended by stories and parables. The stories and parable are retellings of retold stories, stories Martin told when she showed her work to friends. In the ICA catalogue, as everywhere, Martin is placed as an intermediary between—a medium of—the work and the written response to it. Martin's writings, no matter who had a hand in writing them, make possible the same kind of intimate, direct presence that Martin orchestrated so carefully when she showed her work personally.[28]

Martin's way of showing her work personally is characterized by both an intimate address to the viewer and an encouraging preservation of the viewer's own autonomy; both of these characteristics are fundamentally relational—and Martin often says her work is a way of seeking friendship—and always attended by an ambitious and generous attempt to reconfigure perception. Martin's "giving up" on ideas participates in the reconfiguration of what it is to know, perceive, see, be addressed by, and think. In Glimcher's account of a visit he made to her studio in 1974—to see the first paintings she showed after her hiatus—he gives us an account that illustrates this well. Before she shows Arne and his partner Fred the work, they are in her kitchen, having coffee, when she tells them what beauty is:

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[26] Quoted in Baas, 231.

[27] See note 30 above.

[28] The *Willie Stories* and the *Parable of Equal Hearts* are joined by Jill Johnston's retelling of the "quiet concentrated ceremonious ritual" that was Martin's way of showing her own work (Johnston 292). Arne Glimcher also describes the "special way" Martin had of showing her own work (Glimcher 68-72).

> 'Beauty is something we know rather than see. There is a difference between seeing and perceiving and I'm interested in perception.' She continues, 'Betty Parsons and I were at her place on Long Island and we saw five round white pebbles, each slightly different in size and shape. I said to Betty, "Just by looking at them, we can tell which is the hottest all the way down to the coolest." We judged them and then felt them and we were right. We didn't really need to touch them at all. You see, most people's judgment and whole lives are based upon comparison from stored knowledge. Perception is something else. My brother was here last week and I tried to tell him about contemporary art. I put out four toothpicks on the table and I said, "With this spacing in between, they mean one thing"; I changed the space, "and with this spacing in between, they mean something else". Perception is knowing and seeing is recognizing.' (Glimcher 69)[29]

Martin's preference for knowing by perceiving rather than receiving stored knowledge, for perception over mere sight (or hearing, as we'll see later), is starkly in contrast with the 1958 statement she claimed was a forgery, in which the author describes the need for philosophers to "define the new beauty."[30] Martin will consistently disavow herself of the philosophers, those storers and purveyors of knowledge, because they present interference to percipience, beauty, happiness. The conversation goes on, they have lunch—"chops, steaks, fried garden squash, fresh tomatoes and cottage cheese,"—an extravagant meal for Martin, who ate only a few foods at a time—tomatoes, cheese and walnuts; bananas, coffee, and orange juice mixed with gelatin—while she was painting (Glimcher 69, 92). After lunch she is ready to show them the new paintings "in a special way." He doesn't describe the ways she shows them, other than to say that when they entered the studio the paintings were facing the wall.[31] She leaves them so they can go over the paintings "at [their] own speed" (Glimcher 69). Fred and Arne spend the next hour looking at the paintings, rearranging them and envisioning how they will show them, when "Agnes laughs and yells from the house. 'You've had your reaction already, if you keep looking at them they'll make you blind. . .' 'They make me happy,' Fred says, to which Agnes replies, 'That's exactly what they're supposed to do'" (Glimcher 69).[32]

Although Martin often presides over viewers' encounters with her work, both in person and in text, she just as often insists that she should and can have no influence over our response to her work:

> The cause of the response is not traceable in the work. An artist cannot and does not

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[29] Cf.: "Perceiving is the same as receiving and it is the same as responding" (Facsimile inserted in Glimcher between 144-45).

[30] For the statement see Kunstraum 78, for her disavowal of it see Princenthal 186.

[31] This is a recurrent trope in Martin's writings and interviews: a painting shouldn't be looked at immediately once it is finished or it can interfere with the going on of painting.

[32] In this story are two things to which we will return later: the toothpicks for their demonstration of the fact that measure determines meaning, and happiness—both its quality and its cause.

> prepare for a certain response.
> He does not consider the response but simply follows his inspiration.
> Works of art are not purposely conceived. The response depends upon the condition of the observer. (*Writings* 18)

She models this independence in her refusal of any influence other than her own, a refusal made for the sake of responsiveness. Consistent with her thetic insistence that the artist is necessarily the first responder to her own work, and either because of the routine dissolution of detail or by purpose, Martin becomes the full author of her texts by 1992, when Dieter Schwarz collects her *Writings*. While it may have been entirely out of Martin's hands which publication details are retained throughout the years of publication and republication of her writings, her gradual independence from her co-authors coincides with an increasingly adamant refusal to admit influence of any kind. Not only did Martin dodge questions of influence, she went so far as to claim that anything "that sticks in the mind" is a bad influence: "If Picasso crosses your mind while you're painting, it's all over" (Princenthal 236, Glimcher 71). For this reason, and because they went in one ear and out the other, Martin claimed in the last quarter of her life only to read detective stories, specifically Agatha Christie, rather than non-fiction, philosophy, or any other discipline that might give her ideas (Princenthal 14, 236).

Rather than ideas, Martin's writings persistently emphasize a "developing awareness" in the mind that is inseparable from the work itself. In "On the Perfection Underlying Life" she explains:

> Work is self-expression. We must not think of self-expression as something we may do or something we may not do. Self-expression is inevitable. In your work, in the way that you do your work and in the results of your work your self is expressed. Behind and before self-expression is a developing awareness in the mind that effects the work. This developing awareness I will also call "the work." It is a most important part of the work. There is the work in our minds, the work in our hands and the work as a result. (*Writings* 67)

The developing awareness is the work and there are at least three manifestations of it: in our minds, in our hands, and "as a result."[33] The "result," the elsewhere to or hybrid of the work in the mind and hands, is what is written or painted, yes, but it is also not entirely coincident with or dependent on them. The minds and hands belong to artists—for Martin is here addressing young artists—but the result can be anyone's; it is the "totally uncaused" response of the viewer, with which the artist can have nothing to do and do nothing about. In Martin's address to students, the speech itself is the work she was asked to do, and she understands her charge as the work of developing awareness most of all: "I will now speak directly to the art students present as an illustration of *the work*, with particular references to art work" (67, emphasis hers). Martin is adamant that her work is not illustrative of anything—as she is equally adamant that her work is expressive of the self and its inner-states and is not representational at all—but that doesn't mean that she can't verbally illustrate the awareness her work aims to develop, and develop it through her illustration.

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[33] Elsewhere in her writings and interviews, the response is the work itself, and the identification of a self in the work.

For a long time, Martin practiced meditation as a way to empty the mind and prime it for the developing awareness, as she explains in the 1997 interview with Smith and Kuwayama. However, once she has "learned to stop thinking," which required "giving up" on ideas in general, she no longer needed to meditate. Disavowing herself of ideas, she achieves a mind that "nothing goes through." Perhaps a mind nothing goes through is, as per Wallace Stevens in "The Snow Man," a mind of winter, capable of beholding "nothing that is not there and the nothing that is" (Stevens 10). But for Martin, the mind is emptied so that something, rather than nothing, can be apprehended by it: "I have an empty mind, so when something comes into it, you can see it." In the same interview, she elaborates on this:

> I used to meditate. Until I learned to stop thinking. Now I've stopped thinking. Don't think of anything. Before you train yourself to stop thinking, there's just all kinds of stuff going through your mind. Not anymore. Nothing goes through my mind. I don't believe in what the intellectuals put out. The intellectuals, they discover one fact and then another fact and then another fact…they say from all these facts we can deduce so and so…no good. That's just a bad guess. Nothing can come but inaccuracies…I had a hard time giving up some of them, but I managed it. Evolution. [Really?] Mmmhhmmm. All of them. I gave up all the theories, even the atomic theory. And I don't really, I don't have any ideas myself and I don't believe anybody else's. So that leaves me a clear mind…I have an empty mind, so when something comes into it you can see it. (Smith and Kuwayama, "Interview with Agnes Martin")[34]

Martin's claim to have stopped thinking is a refusal to do thinking with pride or ownership—she never owned property for the same reason she won't have or invest in ideas: she will use and hold ideas, thoughts will go through her mind, but to do thinking is to have those thoughts, and she would rather an understanding of mind that develops, but doesn't need to *have,* what it responds to.

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Martin generalizes her poetics often and adopts a far more oracular, didactic tone than one would expect from someone whose work is so often described as graceful and slight almost to the point of invisibility,[35] and also from someone whose particular personhood is almost never referenced in studies about her work, save for the grossest features of her legend.[36] In her tone and her assumption of collectivity we might hear the influence of Stein, to whom Martin alluded often; as an example of this assumption of collectivity, Martin claims, "We must not think of self-expression as something we may do or something we may not do. Self-expression is

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[34] Brackets are the interviewer's comments, my transcription.

[35] See Anne Wagner and Rosalin Krauss.

[36] This is less true of work produced in the last decade than those that preceded it. This is attributable to the fact that once Martin died more was revealed about her personal life, as is discussed below.

inevitable. In your work, in the way that you do your work and in the results of your work your self is expressed" (*Writings* 67).

Jonathan Katz makes much of this influence in his excellent essay on Martin, "Agnes Martin and the Sexuality of Abstraction," in which he elaborates evidence of Stein's influence by teasing out Martin's engagements with two of Stein's most thinly veiled references to her relationship with Alice B. Toklas. The two Steinian allusions that Katz unveils are: first, the discovery made by Brendan Prendeville that Martin quotes Stein in a statement accompanying Martin's work at a second show at Betty Parson's gallery in 1959 and secondly, Martin's painting titled "Milk River" in combination with some of her remarks about cows in "The Untroubled Mind": "Cows don't give milk if they don't have grass and water"; "Living is grazing"; "Memory is chewing cud" (Martin quoted in Katz 188).[37] The references to cows, Katz argues, invoke Stein's private language in which a cow was an orgasm. While I don't want to quibble with Katz' essay, a less productive tension emerges when we consider the fact that Martin vehemently denied ever having authored the statement for Parson's 1958 show, and when we consider her being put off by cows—"cows have social problems," she remarked to Glimcher (Glimcher 100). For once we admit these contradictions, we are left not with a tension that is the result of some hovering "between [a] system of coordinates and a veil," but with a person who cannot integrate her queerness into her social world, so winds up "a doorknob"—as Martin was fond of calling herself when people asked her what it was like to be a woman artist—rather than a woman, let alone a lesbian.[38] And, despite his initial claim to counter the traditional rendering irrelevant of "the socio-historical arena" in work on Martin, Katz nevertheless ends his essay with this sentence: "Martin's disciplined achievement of formal equilibrium thus becomes an incarnation, through perception, of the forgetting of history that is true freedom. It is a pure presentness, and it is grace" (Katz 194). Why a forgetting of history rather than of its ordering concepts?

Still, Katz offers a corrective to the dominant trend in criticism about Martin, the trend that issues from the "modernist machinery" that can't attend to anything other than "form and its affect" and so excludes consideration of "the 'human' element" in Martin's work (172-3). Instead, Katz argues that Martin's work, her "spiritual and pictorial pursuit…[is] a form of queer self-realization, wrought (paradoxically) through anti-identitarian, Zen-informed idiom" (172-3). Katz, too, quotes the passage above ("Work is self expression," in *Writings* 67) and he is right to shine light on the ways in which Martin's work might register her sexuality as a feature of the self that is inevitably expressed—register it not as subject or content but as "part of that whole other structure, beyond subject matter, that undergirds and informs art's meaning making" (175-6). For Katz, we apprehend this structure if we consider Martin's "erotics as a practice" (172). And we should understand practice here as something that includes both her creative practice and her eccentric framing of it—her poetics and how she delivers it; her paintings and how she paints them.

Apprehension of the undergirding structure upon which meaning is gridded amounts to a paradoxical deliverance, as Katz notes with interest that the more emphatic is Martin's insistence that the self is expressed in the work, the less the biographical details of the artist's life matter to

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[37] Katz also acknowledges Jacquelynn Baas's uncovering of the importance of the cow in Suzuki's Manual of Zen Buddhism.

[38] The phrase "between a rectangular system of coordinates and a veil" is Lawrence Alloway's, quoted in Katz 184. The "doorknob" comment is relayed by Jill Johnston (*Admission Accomplished* 300).

its reception. In Katz's hands, the paradox is formulated: on the one hand is Martin's turn away from the sensuous world, which he explains in no uncertain terms—"Sexuality is the motive for her turn away from sensory knowledge in favor of the transcendental"; on the other hand, Martin's work is praised "for [its] slow accumulation of a lush physicality. . . is nothing if not an index of her hand, the sensitive response to imperfections in the canvas's weave, the famed 'tremolo' that is the guarantor of the artist's presence" (184). Katz is careful to provide a picture more nuanced than the simple assertion that Martin's self-fashioning and public presentation were mystificatory or enigmatic in order to camouflage or closet her. He reads her queerness as "part of her signifying practice" that contributes to the powerful tension that we apprehend in her work, whether or not it is discursively produced (181). Katz credits Lawrence Alloway with the best description of this tension:

> 'As she draws it, the grid is half-way between a rectangular system of coordinates and a veil,' and 'Martin's seamless surface signifies, for all its linear precision, an image dissolving,' and 'in Martin's paintings, there is a secret tension between perception and recognition.' (Quoted in Katz 184)

The "secret tension" that Alloway beautifully illustrates is, Katz shows, charged with queer erotics; they are what her lines tremble with. But, Martin might counter, the personal isn't presenced by a style or a touch; rather, the revelation of the personal, the expression of the self, these are delivered by *response*—response not to a feature of the work but to a reflection and recollection of an image of perfection that the work brings to mind. In contrast to "the Chinese painters," Martin quips, "all my lines are measured and ruled and impersonal," not guarantors of her presence, erotically disclosed (Martin quoted in Princenthal 210). That some feature of the self, or the whole self, when disclosed might be structured in contradiction certainly does not discredit the disclosure. The avowed inevitability of self-expression in the work, coupled with Martin's constant framing of her own work—and the irrelevancy to the work of her particular personhood, a personhood that is, like all others, not unique[39]—in artists statements that accompanied her exhibitions—has provided fertile ground for a host of critics joining Katz to unearth feminist and post-structuralist readings of subjectivity in her work and in the relationship of the viewer to the work.[40] Much of this scholarship argues against the tendency to read Martin's stance—famously articulated by Martin as "I paint with my back to the world"—as rendering irrelevant any engagement with "the socio-historical arena."[41]

The queer self-realization that Katz sees in Martin's poetics is the result of the immediate conversion of the inevitable self-expression that occurs in an artwork (when that work is really working) into a joyful self-encounter that confirms the perfection underlying life and the livability of life. The question of self-expression, then, both depends on and engenders self-encounter as a response. "On the Perfection Underlying Life," Martin's 1973 lecture to students at the Institute of Contemporary Art begins: "The process of life is hidden from us. The meaning of suffering is held from us. And we are blind to life. We are blinded by pride" (*Writings* 67).

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[39] See *Writings* 61 for further remarks by Martin about personhood.

[40] Cf. Mansoor, Anastas, Krauss, G. Pollock.

[41] Smith and Kuwayama; Katz 172.

We are not happy, but "frustrated and lost," so we want to defeat pride. But "it is not possible because we ourselves are pride, Pride the dragon and Pride the Deceiver," or so the saying goes (*Writings* 67). But though the battle be lost, "we can witness the defeat of pride because pride cannot hold. Pride is not real, so sooner or later it must go down" (*Writings* 67). Its going down—which is also its occasion—is opportuned by our work and its inevitable self-expression: to repeat,

> Our best opportunity to witness the defeat of pride is in our work, in all the time that we are working and in the work itself. Work is self-expression. . . Self-expression is inevitable. . . Behind and before self-expression is a developing awareness in the mind that effects the work. This developing awareness I will also call "the work." (*Writings* 67)

The developing awareness, synonymous—or at least reciprocally presuppositional—with the work, is an expurgation of everything that threatens to defeat the awareness and to make the work impossible. This expurgation is addressed to the self and is delivered as recognition, as a wanting that is knowing. Having, through the successful work, "enjoyed freedom from pride we know that that is what we want" (*Writings* 67). For Martin, with this knowing we recognize and eliminate expressions of pride through the same process by which we find ourselves inevitably expressed.

In this encounter the work—the developing awareness—is an alpha-function, and the self an element it converts from a beta-element into an alpha-element, if we are gridding in harmony with the psychoanalyst Wilfred Bion—and we are. Bion is invoked, and will be discussed at length later in this chapter, for the relevancy of his "Theory of Thinking," in which he argues "thinking has to be called into existence to cope with thoughts" (Bion, *Second Thoughts* 111). Thoughts exist prior to thinking, and thinking is the apparatus that develops to deal with thoughts. Thoughts themselves, he argues, develop from preconceptions, to conceptions, to concepts, which development is accomplished through the alpha-function that is the thought-thinking apparatus. Bion classifies the mental material that the apparatus works upon into alpha-elements and beta-elements (110-119). Beta-elements are raw sense-impressions and emotional data—what the infant experiences before she has her own alpha-function, and what her mother converts for her into conceptions via "an emotional experience of satisfaction" (111). The alpha-function that thinking is, once developed, succeeds when it transforms beta-elements into alpha-elements:

> Alpha-function operates on the sense impressions, whatever they are, and the emotions, whatever they are, of which the patient is aware. In so far as alpha-function is successful alpha-elements are produced and these elements are suited to storage and the requirements [of thoughts]. If alpha-function is disturbed, and therefore inoperative, the sense impressions of which the patient is aware and the emotions which he is experiencing remain unchanged. I shall call them beta-elements. In contrast with the alpha-elements the beta-elements are not felt to be phenomena, but things in themselves. (Bion, *Learning from Experience* 6)

What matters, for now, is that Bion understood thinking to be an apparatus, an alpha function, that develops in specific relation to the thoughts of the patient. He uses the terms beta- and

alpha-elements as trackable mental material in order to map and plot the process of their development and metabolization by the alpha-function. He plotted this development on what he called "The Grid," though he later (to a certain degree) abandoned his grid. The Grid—about which more later—provides a system on which Bion takes the measure of an element's path through the thinking-apparatus and makes that measure communicable. Self-sensation, for Bion—which finds its corollate in Martin's formulation of response as self-encounter enabled by the self's expression in the work— travels through an ideologically organizing organ or function, like the central nervous or the capillary system—involuntary systems, capable of sustaining malfunction (Bion, *Two Papers* 24).[42]

For Martin, the question of self-expression, and indeed the question of self-constitution, emerges in the local context of self-consciousness' threat to emotional health and artistic production. We are in the terrain of self-consciousness, ego, "pride the dragon,"—the dragon we are (Martin, *Writings* 67).[43] Martin assumes, she tells the students to whom she lectures, that feelings of inadequacy, failure, defeat, and insufficiency are "the natural state of mind of the artist"; and not only is this the *natural* state of mind of the artist, it is "the essential state of mind for creative work" (68). Martin told the curator of the exhibition at the Institute for Contemporary Art to tell everyone she was a hermit so that she wouldn't have to appear at the show's opening (Princenthal 11). But in her lecture to the students there, Martin is forthcoming about her experiences of solitude—"the solitary life is full of terrors"— and defeat (*Writings* 71). She says, "What does it mean to be defeated. It means that we cannot go on. We cannot make another move. Everything that we thought we could do we have done without result. We even give up all hope of getting the work" (*Writings* 69). Defeat slides into helplessness, hopelessness, and threatens to annihilate us:

> *Defeated,* having no place to go you will perhaps wait and be overtaken.
> As in the night. To penetrate the night is one thing. But to be penetrated by the night that is to be overtaken.
> …The feeling of calamity and loss covers everything. We imagine that we are completely cut off and tremble with fear and dread. (70)

There is no use in resisting this helplessness, this defeat. Rather, it is discipline that will enable the artist to go on in the absence of hope, desire, "resistance or notions":

> Going on without resistance or notions is called discipline.
> Going on where hope and desire have been left behind is called discipline.
> Going on in an impersonal way without personal considerations is called *a discipline.*
> Not thinking, planning, scheming is a discipline.
> Not caring or striving is a discipline.

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[42] This momentary excursion into Bion's ideas about thinking and is much abbreviated and condensed, it is here to be bookmarked, returned to later.

[43] We will shortly see that the revelation of Martin's diagnosis (paranoid schizophrenic) catalyzed a shift in scholarship about her: in the early decades of her fame, and indeed while she was alive, self-constitution and expression was taken to be an ideological issue; in the years since Martin's death, criticism has tended read these themes biographically, which also allows critics a solution for the problem of Martin's politics.

> *Defeated,* you will rise to your feet as is said of *Dry Bones.*
> These bones will rise again. (70)

The "dry bones" belong to Ezekiel, who obeys the voice of the Lord who commands him to use his own voice to raise the dead of the house of Israel; and he does, and they become an undefeated army.[44] We will keep the tab of Ezekiel's obedience open and return to it later.

Martin's description of how the artists' natural feelings of inadequacy slide into solitary terror and helplessness also recalls William Wordsworth's "Resolution and Independence." In this poem the speaker, who usually lives "in pleasant thought," is suddenly beset by fear and dejection— "blind thoughts"—which he takes as expression of the universal "solitude, pain of heart, distress, and poverty" that is the fate all poets share: "We poets in our youth begin in gladness; / But thereof come in the end despondency and madness" (Wordsworth 261-262). In the midst of his helplessness, an old leech gatherer appears—far more outwardly dejected, impoverished, and "decrepit" than the poet. The leech gatherer, like Ezekiel, has a voice "above the reach / Of ordinary men," as if inspired by God. The leech gatherer's voice is compared to that of "Religious men, who give to God and man their dues" (263). The special power of the leech gatherer's voice is infused with what the poet takes to be supernatural authority, is inspired. After Ezekiel uses his voice to restore to the bones their flesh and sinews, they still do not live. It is not until the Lord commands him to prophesy breath into the bones that they come to life (37: 6-10). Ezekiel then is medium for the literal inspiration that gives life from God to man. In the poem's culminating stanza, the poet addresses the leech gatherer:

> My former thoughts returned: the fear that kills;
> And hope that is unwilling to be fed;
> Cold, pain, and labour, and all fleshly ills;
> And mighty Poets in their misery dead.
> —Perplexed, and longing to be comforted,
> My question eagerly did I renew,
> "How is it that you live, and what is it you do?" (264)

Wordsworth's speaker is heartened by the leech gatherer, by his response and affect; the old man's persistence and discipline renew the poet's good spirits— his own resolution, his own independence. Likewise, in Martin's address to the art students, she insists that they cannot struggle against the helplessness and defeat they feel:

> But helplessness when fear and dread have run their course, as all passions do, is the most rewarding state of all. It is a time when our most tenacious prejudices are overcome. Our most tightly gripped resistances come under the knife and we are made more free. Our lack of independence in helplessness is our most detrimental weakness from the standpoint of art work. Stated positively, independence is the most essential character trait in an artist. (*Writings* 71)

Martin's "On the Perfection Underlying Life" mirrors Wordsworth's picture of the discipline required to achieve one's independence from all that threatens to make work impossible. And

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[44] Ezekiel 37:4, Revised Standard Version.

both agree that feeling defeated is the natural state of the artist; but for Martin, a confirmed reader of Wordsworth, the natural state is always the state to be overcome.[45] And it is the art work that is capable of overcoming nature, of producing the "unconditioned response" rather than the conditioned—natural or naturalized—response. Indeed, Martin makes this explicit: "Everything we know and everything everyone else knows is conditioned. The conditioning goes all the way back through evolution. The conditioned life, the natural life, and the conventional life are the same" (*Writings* 73). The self-encounter that unconditioned response enables is an encounter with a denatured and undefeated self: "Say to yourselves: I am going to work in order to see myself and free myself. . . When I see myself in the work I will know that that is the work I am supposed to do" (73). Although the self is inevitably expressed in the work, it doesn't exactly exist independent of the work but rather achieves its independence through the work.

The self, like all of Martin's terms that carry the weight of the concept, is impossible to solve for a stable value or position. As probably goes without saying, Martin's writings are difficult to paraphrase or excerpt because of the intricate relationship between her terms and because of their idiosyncratic definitions. It may be best, then, to understand each of Martin's terms as Bion's alpha-elements and as touchstones.[46] The writings are programmatic, notational, didactic, and yet their logic is impossible to reproduce or represent because it doesn't resemble familiar logic—it's circular, tangled and nearly tautological, riddled with contradictions and reversals that are decidedly nondialectical. It is nonlogic and depends on nonknowledge[47]; it is the expression of a developing awareness for the sake of which belief in ideas and theories—"everything we know and everything everyone else knows"—must be withheld (*Writings* 72). Martin's lecture, it follows, concludes with an illustration of the work, a picture of its development:

> For those who are visual minded I will say: there seems to be a fine ship at anchor. Fear is the anchor, convention is the chain, ghosts stalk the decks, the sails are filled with Pride and the ship does not move.
> But there are moments for all of us in which the anchor is weighed. Moments in which we learn what it feels like to move freely, not held back by pride and fear. Moments that can be recalled with all their fine flavor.
> The recall of these moments can be stimulated by freeing experiences including the viewing of works of art.
> Artists try to maintain an atmosphere of freedom in order to represent the perfection of these moments. And others searching for the meaning of art respond by recalling their own free moments. (74)

Although Martin has not officially resumed painting at this point, she has painted a clear picture of what it means and what it takes to renew and persist in the work.

So it is that "On the Perfection Underlying Life" is an embodied resumption of the work that ceased when Martin left New York in 1967. The prodigal artist returns and lectures to

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[45] For confirmation of Martin's reading of Wordsworth, see Martin's *Writings* 93-94 and Linda Hunter.

[46] See Bion, *Second Thoughts* 110-119.

[47] See the discussion of "nonknowledge" in Part II, pages 50-54 of this dissertation.

students she assumes know well the psychic struggle that contributed to her seven or eight year "silence." I return to the question of her hiatus here because within the lecture she describes the turmoil that critics—after her death—read as symptomatic of her mental illness, while she also clearly articulates and universalizes what kind of mental experience enables and is enabled by painting, as opposed to the fear, dread, and "relative thinking" (another term for "conditioned response") that are obstacles to it (70). In 1967 Martin left the progressive, predominately queer enclave of artists—including Ellsworth Kelly, John Cage, Robert Rauschenberg, among others—who lived in Coenties Slip in lower Manhattan. As Princenthal points out in her biography, Martin's decision to leave New York and stop painting was understood to be in kinship with Susan Sontag's "The Aesthetics of Silence" published that same year. In this essay Sontag describes how "disavowal of the work [becomes] a new source of its validity," and through this disavowal "the artist becomes purified—of himself and, eventually, of his art."[48] The parity here is obvious, certainly contributed to the legend of Martin's persona, and is reinforced by Jill Johnston, who recalled that "leaving new york ha[d] become as much a ritual exodus as going to new york is a ritual initiation" ("Surrender and Solitude" 293). Against this, Princenthal argues that "Martin's flight is not best seen as a statement of principled withdrawal for solitary meditation. She left New York in a state of considerable turmoil ('every day I suddenly felt I wanted to die'), with no clear sense of where she was heading and no evident intention of sustaining her career" (Princenthall 241).[49]

Arne Glimcher, Martin's close friend and gallerist from 1963 until her death, gives Martin's explanation of her hiatus as: "In 1967 Agnes Martin stopped painting. She told me that when she made her first grid painting she was astonished that people responded. 'Now I've finished my work.' She bought an Airstream trailer and went back to the protection of the New Mexico desert" (Glimcher 56).[50] The version of the story that Glimcher tells here aligns with Martin's comment to Benita Eisler in her 1993 *New Yorker* portrait of Martin about having "established [her] market" (Eisler 83). It is the version Glimcher was authorized to tell while Martin was alive. He's more candid in the introduction of his book, *Agnes Martin: Paintings, Writings, Remembrances* though:

> …Agnes had always suffered from schizophrenia and from time to time required hospitalization . . . Agnes's episodes of illness became more frequent and on a weekend in 1968 she was picked up by the police on Park Avenue, uncertain of her identity or where she was. She was committed to Bellevue. …
>
> As her work began to appear in art magazines and in the most important contemporary collections and was praised by critics, Agnes's mental stability deteriorated. It became difficult for her to keep the psychological separation between herself and the work that she required. The spectre of pride loomed, resulting in her

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[48] Sontag quoted in Princenthal, 162.

[49] Princenthal's account convincingly evidences that this turmoil was at once psychological, social, and professional (235-40).

[50] Martin produced her first grid painting well before 1967; by some accounts in 1957, by others in 1959. Martin herself often gave "The Tree" 1964 as her first grid painting, but this is not correct by most accounts.

> decision to abandon painting. This would actually be a long hiatus, but at the time her intentions were permanent.
>
> In 1967 she came to the gallery one day and told me of her decision to stop painting. She asked me to give away her art supplies to a young artist. She bought an Airstream trailer and headed for New Mexico, where she had previously lived and taught. Seven years would pass before I was to see her again. (8-9)

The incoherence of Glimcher's timeline—Agnes left New York in '67, but was picked up on Park Ave. in '68—is not unique; inconsistencies like that abound in chronologies of her life and work. Martin didn't immediately head to New Mexico: it wasn't until years into her sojourn (which wasn't so solo—her friend Lenora Tawney traveled with her for a while[51]) that she decided to go to New Mexico, though "decided" is the wrong word. Martin herself says:

> I left New York and travelled for about a year and a half, waiting for some inspiration. You see, if you live by perception, as all artists must, then you sometimes have to wait for a long time for your mind to tell you the next step to take. I never move without a sort of command from my mind. And so I left New York. I went on a camping trip. I stayed in forest camps up north which could camp three thousand people. But there was nobody there. I was there all alone. I enjoyed it. I had this problem, you see, and I had to have my mind to myself. When you're with other people, your mind isn't your own. Well… finally you see, I remembered New Mexico. (Quoted in Gruen 93)

This inconsistency, as I've called it, is not Glimcher's mistake; rather it is a facsimile of Martin's deliberate obfuscation in response to any attempt to understand her work through the lens of her life. Glimcher goes to pains to maintain that he is faithful to Agnes's wishes: she told him he could publish his notes from his many visits to her studio over the decades after she died (so we presume he was also licensed to reveal her diagnosis); there is a material tenderness in how the facsimiled writings are placed in relation to the paintings and his relatively sparse commentary; and he ends his massive monograph by reproducing and occupying Martin's pedagogical address.[52] In his introduction to the monograph, Glimcher writes:

> I hope I have honoured her wishes by presenting a volume that shares our relationship and extends the perception of her uncompromising dedication to her art. Agnes Martin's own writings are less about her work than what it means to be an artist. That is the value of her writings and they are presented here especially for the young artists to whom they were directed. (281)

Glimcher also reproduces in facsimile a letter she wrote to him in which she sends him her

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[51] See Princenthal 178.

[52] All of Martin's published writings are best understood as shoptalks, addressed to young artists. As is discussed at length above, young artists often compelled or transcribed her writings. Martin "inconsistently enforced" her prohibition against catalogues throughout her career, and catalogues were sometimes the occasion for the gathering together of her notes and writings. In addition to the *Willie Stories, Parable,* and the ritual, special way she had of showing her work, she was also known to expound her ideas at length at parties and in the car, going into a trance as she and others have described it.

biography and asks him to release it. The letter, as well as the biography it frames, makes very clear how Martin feels about attempts to stabilize the details of an artist's life:

> Dear Arnold,
>
> I have to go ahead and release my biography. I will be very much obliged if you will have someone type it and send one copy to the Guggenheim…and put one in the file for anyone that asked. I don't suppose I've remembered everything. Can't remember the dates of anything!!!
>
> I read yesterday a scholar who discovered that a chinese painter died in 1256 not 1257. I can't understand scholarship just don't get the point.
>
> I think work and travel count in paintings; adventure is very important I think but when they say who you know it is upsetting.
>
> This biographic material will not be all they want. No amount would be enough. I consider this to be all that is relevant.[53]

Thus concludes the personal note. Martin then commences the actual biography, with a headnote that reads: "Please publish all or none." The biography consists of three numbered lists: the 35 jobs she's held; the 9 places she's lived; and the 11 places she's visited, though number 11 is "All the states some of them many times." If a viewer wants to know more about Martin than what she painted or said about art, Martin thinks maybe the material facts of her life will do. Just like she explained her return to painting as a consequence of her vision of the adobe brick— the material with which she would construct the literal circumstances (the walls) to enable painting—where she's lived and how she's made her money ought to provide all the details her audience needs.

While Glimcher faithfully reproduces Martin's own stance on what of her life matters to her work, as we've seen he also expands upon her "innocent" account of her fallow period, revealing her diagnosis and explaining that as her work gained more notoriety and prestige, and as she was personally exposed to that response, "It became difficult for her to keep the psychological separation between herself and the work that she required" (Glimcher 9). Innocent is Glimcher's word; but it should be shadowed by the spelling Martin herself often preferred: "innosense."[54] Interestingly, this separation that is required for the person is also undone by the work's inevitable self-expression and -encounter, or at least those works that Martin deemed acceptable. Satisfactory works, for Martin, were those absent of mistakes, those that suggested but did not achieve perfect vision seen in the mind, and those that provoked in the viewer (the first viewer being Martin herself) an unconditioned response. Non-satisfactory works have "mistakes," that act as a "focus," distracting from the whole vision that the painting is an enlargement of (Glimcher 102-105).

Glimcher recognizes the "spectre of pride"—in Martin's words, Pride the Dragon—that threatens when this separation fails to hold and in naming it that he is repeating Martin's public address (Glimcher 8; Martin, *Writings* 66). Any obstacle worth speaking of is an obstacle to the work's possibility. Glimcher does not feel the need to balance or weigh in on the relationship of Martin's illness to her work; he is merely presenting to us the records, what Martin presented to

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[53] This letter to Glimcher, included in his monograph, is inserted between pages 242 and 243.

[54] See facsimiles in Kunstraum and Glimcher.

him that he is now authorized to share with us. And this makes sense, he represented her as her dealer while she was alive and as her executor after her death. As soon as she started painting again he would take trips to New Mexico every time she had work to show him. He was used to ferrying an Agnes Martin back across the desert from whence she was always coming.[55] And indeed, it was Glimcher who famously and faithfully executed Martin's last wish. She is on her deathbed, her eyes are closed, as he tells it: "Agnes beckoned me to come closer to the bed, 'There are three new paintings in the studio. The one on the wall is finished and the two on the floor need to be destroyed.' Would I go to the studio and destroy them for her. This was her last request" (Glimcher 203). Glimcher complied with Martin's request and destroyed her unfinished paintings. Curiously, although he destroys the paintings he reproduces her "last drawing,"—a tiny line drawing that looks sort of like a plant, sort of like a face—without comment about whether or not she wanted it shown (Glimcher 243).[56]

But Glimcher's characterization of this separation, vital for Martin to maintain, is a de-pathologized version of what Dr. Fineberg, Martin's psychiatrist from 1985-2000, describes as Martin's psychosis, using Martin's friendship with Glimcher as exemplary of its manifestation. Princenthal writes, relating her interview with Fineberg:

> [Martin] '[referred] to Arnold [Glimcher] as her trusted friend and confidant and as someone who couldn't be trusted, sometimes in the same consultations.' As Fineberg explains, such discontinuous social reality is characteristic of Martin's illness. 'Putting things in separate boxes is the ambivalence characteristic of psychotic ambivalence. A neurotic ambivalence is like uncertainty, I want this, but I want that . . . But psychotic ambivalence is things are in separate boxes. Agnes had that.' (Princenthal 163)

Things being "in separate boxes" is probably not a naïve analogy, and indeed implies that Martin's grids were a strategy for dealing with a problem of boundedness, containment, or separation, as others have argued they were a method of ordering the chaos of her mind.[57] Princenthal too will present Martin's diagnosis and its relationship to her work in a manner that depends upon separation, ultimately concluding that Martin's visions—the images she saw of what she was supposed to paint—were not symptoms, whereas the voices she heard were.[58]

Although Princenthal gives Fineberg's account of how atypical Martin's voices were,

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[55] Glimcher doesn't even have to ask for permission to reproduce many of her works, as he is executor of her estate. And, truthfully, his reproductions are the best, but not cheap. The list price on Glimcher's monograph is $165, while the Tate catalogue is $55.

[56] See Figures 7 and 8 of the Appendix.

[57] This is Roger Denson's argument, regrettably narrow, in "On Agnes Martin and Mapping the Pathways Out of Schizophrenia." Martin didn't like chaos, certainly, but that is because she was a classicist: "Classicists like order, Romantics like chaos" (Martin, *Writings* 37). Denson ignores the aesthetic terms in which Martin insists this issue be framed. Rosalind Krauss, too, will describe Martin's work as schizophrenic, though this is well before her diagnosis was revealed, so Krauss presumably had no knowledge of it (Kraus, "Grids" 60).

[58] Princenthal introduces this idea early, on page 3 of her introduction, and fills it out in Chapter 6, "Silence."

especially in their resemblance to inner thoughts, she nonetheless characterizes them as "aural hallucinations . . .[that] had absolutely no creative use for her and were completely distinct from what she called inspirations, or visions" (Princenthal 156). Princenthal thus minimizes accounts that de-pathologize Martin's voices. She includes Fineberg's description of the fact that Martin's voices were "not typical schizophrenic hallucinations"—were more like "inner thoughts" than they were "acute, schizophrenic-like psychotic hallucination[s]"—but she follows Fineberg's account of Martin's diagnosis (which Martin had received decades before she began treatment with Fineberg) with Mark Epstein's, a psychiatrist who had no relationship with Martin (159). While Dr. Epstein wonders whether in a different time Martin might have been diagnosed as bipolar or schizoaffective, diagnoses that are "less frightening," with depressions that are "more familiar"—Epstein and Princenthal both conclude that "on balance," Martin did indeed suffer from schizophrenia (162, 166-7).[59]

Although we may find contradictions in Martin's statements, that "she is consistent only in being contradictory" is, Princenthal writes, "perhaps a symptom but also an invaluable gift."[60] To maintain the generosity of Martin's gift—which should be taken to mean a gift to others, rather than a talent—Princenthal is careful not to make too much or too little of Martin's illness. Not only would it be "grossly irresponsible to approach Martin's paintings as 'schizophrenic," but neither should we "consider her work spontaneously cathartic or in any other way therapeutic" (Princenthal 172-3). There are, in fact, several accounts that do both of these things, the worst of which is certainly Roger Denson's "On Agnes Martin and Mapping the Pathways Out of Schizophrenia and Obsession" in which Denson reads the paintings as doing little more than representing her struggle with the illness and allowing her to manage it.

Princenthal's accounting for Martin's disease is obviously driven by an ethical imperative to consider the facts without sensationalizing them. She contextualizes Martin's diagnosis by historicizing the theorization and treatment of mental illness in the period during which Martin's severe episodes begin to be recorded. She details the brutality of mid-century mental healthcare and gives an account of the anti-psychiatry movement of the 1960s, focusing on the work of Thomas Szasz, R.D. Laing, and Michel Foucault in their efforts to reveal the ways in which mental illness was socially constructed. She also engages feminist psychotherapist Phyllis Chesler, who in her 1972 book *Women and Madness* goes so far as to "[put] schizophrenia in quotation marks" and argue that such diagnoses were often applied as a punishment for women who dedicated themselves to artistic pursuit or as "'penalties for being 'female,' as well as for desiring or daring not to be.'"[61] As tempting as it is to mobilize Chesler in order to secure for Martin the place of feminist hero that so many of her friends and critics wish they could, Princenthal knows this would be too willful. Instead, Princenthal uses the separation she

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[59] Likewise, Princenthal minimizes Glimcher's accounts of Martin's voices, which contradict Princenthal's own account. By Glimcher's account, it was the voices that led Martin to her first grid, and the voices that allowed her to maintain clarity of mind, free from inner-conflict (Glimcher 77, 88, 107). It should be noted, however, that in Glimcher's account of Martin's voices telling her not to take her medicine, there is evidence of something not-so-innocent as inner-thoughts.

[60] This contradictoriness, it seems, if we take it as a symptom, might be more typical of the neurotic ambivalence that Fineberg describes.

[61] Chesler quoted in Princenthal 171.

discovers between the visions (good) and the voices (bad) to avoid looking the gift horse in the mouth. In fact, for Princenthal, what Martin *says,* just like what she hears, is far less important than her other modes of communication. She is thereby able to minimize Martin's "social judgments," usually expressed in interviews or conversations with friends (235). These judgments are expressions of Martin's politics that are "crude" and "careless" and cannot be used to situate Martin as transcendent hero of the same desires that motivated the struggles of the movement that goes by the name of "'68"—the year Martin may or may not have absconded from the scene (Hudson, *Night Sea* 26).

In addition to Katz' work on Martin's "queer self-realization," many critics attempt to understand her refusal to identify as a woman, but rather as "a doorknob," as a radical gesture that refuses the constructs of gender identity as they are given or as a generalizable critique of power.[62] Mansoor's is the quintessential move: Martin is "too engaged in a feminist relation to practice, perhaps, to objectify and label it as such" (*DIA* 166). However, these attempts are baffled by Martin's denial of having ever encountered gender bias, as attempts to make Martin's art take a social position at all are baffled by her expressions of very "politically conservative" views. Conservative is Princenthal's term, which is euphemistic, given that when Martin does discuss social issues her comments are often racist or misogynist.[63] There have been a few attempts to read Martin's work in relation to the Native American cultures, particularly the Navajo and Hopi tribes—their artistic practices, and spiritual beliefs— that she lived near, but her own statements about "the Indians," like her remarks about "the Spanish" are difficult to accommodate.[64]

Thus, by separating the voices—aural hallucinations symptomatic of Martin's illness—from the visions that were her inspirations, Princenthal is able to maintain that Martin's work never waivers in its clarity of thought. We can trace the lines of Martin's thought but shouldn't make too much of its verbal articulation—neither its contradictions and unfortunate judgments, nor as it occurred to her as voices she thought she must obey. Princenthal's account of Martin's diagnosis is exemplary even in its failure to function as an account, in its refusal to treat the work as symptom *or* as cure. And this is her professional imperative, to open up the relationship between Martin's life and work but not so wide so that we lose sight of the fact that Martin's work was "manifestly deliberate and meant to express universal rather than personal experience"

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[62] Cf. Johnston, Chave, Pollock, Mansoor.

[63] Princenthal 264 n.36.

[64] For an example of Martin's remarks on "The Spanish" and "The Indians" see Martin quoted in Henry Martin, 285-286; for Martin on women and not having encountered gender bias, see Johnston. For connections between Martin's art and Native American art, see Bell and Alloway.

It is notable that Martin made her "doorknob" remark and denied having encountered gender bias to Johnston in 1972, but also disavows herself of the idea of "man and woman" in both her 1997 interview in Taos and in her 2001 interview with Jenny Attiyeh. Martin's self-echoing makes plain how careful and deliberate she was in what she chose to share with the public and it is also one of the reasons Princenthal's distinction between visions and voices doesn't wholly account for the ways in which Martin's poetics includes recognition of her diagnosis and shows her coping with it. Suzane Hudson's characterization of Martin's "self-fashioning," the construction of her public persona, is apt: "she produced a public Martin coeval with the art she deemed fit to leave the studio" (*Night Sea* 19).

(Princenthal 172).[65]

By having the voices bear the load of Martin's schizophrenia, Princenthal is able to make Martin's poetics align with her illness without invalidating her poetics—without the contradictions in Martin's thought pointing to a failed integration between the self and reality that characterizes schizophrenia.[66] As was mentioned above, the gesture that separates the visions from the voices is also capacious in how it weakens the authority and impact of Martin's "crude" statements about the world, the rare moments when she almost voices a politics. Her responsibility for these statements is diminished because: if the voices determined who she could and could not associate with and contributed much to her paranoia and its impact on her relationships, then the statements she made about groups—her distrust of or hostility towards feminists, "the Spanish," or "Indians"—are determined by and an extension of the same misperceptions that plagued her personal relationships.[67] This is too neat a cleaving, but it is motivated by the desire to preserve the integrity of Martin's poetics and to do so fairly. Martin's position of "looking out with [her] back to the world"—a position first expressed in "The Untroubled Mind" in 1972 and then reiterated many times, most lastingly in the title of her 1997 six-panel series *With My Back to the World*—is and should be in harmony with her subsequent title, the 1999 painting *I Love the Whole World* (*Writings* 37).

Princenthal is right that Martin never claimed her voices told her what to paint, but she did obey them and they did free her. They told her what to do in order to construct the circumstances that made painting possible.[68] Or, at least, that is part of what they did and is the part that Martin let adjoin her art and her statements about art. Martin universalizes her struggle, speaking to students as though suicidal ideation ("every day I suddenly felt I wanted to die") is no different from the feeling of defeat and helplessness that all artists endure, that voice in your head telling you you aren't good enough.[69] Martin's voices, the ones she obeyed, freed her from this other kind of voice and allowed her to recognize herself through the unconditioned response that her visions required and enabled. Without the voices, then, Martin wouldn't have been able to have her visions. To be clear, I do not doubt Martin suffered from aural hallucinations and I don't mean to minimize her struggle with them. Neither do I mean to undo the separation Princenthal enforces between the voices and the visions—as there *is* evidence that Martin's voices had negative impacts on her life and there is not evidence that the visions did—but, by exploring the ways in which the voices—which she spoke openly about, rather than concealing them as she did her diagnosis—enabled meaningful work, rather than minimizing their positive

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[65] This is Princenthal's version of Glimcher's facsimiles, given their different professions. Where he is content to let the stuff of Agnes's legend continue to spin and cultishly hover around the paintings, Princenthal's consideration is well researched, as objective as it can be.

[66] See Princenthal 166-67 for a concise history Martin's diagnosis and on the somewhat regrettable notion of "splitting" that inheres in our understanding of the disease.

[67] The voices' contribution to her difficult friendships is touched on by Princenthal and given a full account by Donald Woodman, whose memoir of his time with Martin sensationalizes her illness and bespeaks a very fraught relationship.

[68] See Lance.

[69] Martin quoted in Princenthal, 241.

contributions to Martin's work and restricting them to expressions of her illness, we are better able to apprehend an undiminished picture of what Martin meant to communicate and how she thought it possible to do so. Fuller and further pursuit of these voices will ultimately construct a fantasy of them that is analogous to the telepathy Martin speaks vaguely about.[70] To present this undiminished picture, it is necessary to lay out the precise configuration of the alpha-elements/terms/ideas of freedom, obedience, and response, and how these things are figured in relation to aurality in Martin's thought. I will then use key intersections with the work of several psychoanalysts active at the time Martin was diagnosed whose interests and modes of thought align with her own (W.R. Bion and Marion Milner) in order to provide a rubric to assess both Martin's universalizing of what might be interpreted as specifically symptomatic, and how such symptoms might be conditioned. Rightly, a red flag has probably just been raised that signals the dangers of a psychoanalytic reading of Martin's thought or art. There have been a few attempts already at this, and they do not defeat the dangers they face.[71] Save for a sentence or two, I won't use Milner or Bion to offer an account of Martin's schizophrenia; rather I'll take up their work because of Milner's investigations into the boundary between madness and creativity in both her clinical studies and her auto-criticism, and Bion's understanding of hallucinosis, his grid, and his theory of thinking.

Thus far we have seen that Pride the Dragon, the ego, is an obstacle to health and to painting. Elsewhere in Martin's writings responsibility joins pride as the primary impediments to and enemies of work. To claim the voices free her from these antagonists we must understand Martin's idiosyncratic version of freedom. Freedom is explicitly "not political freedom" nor "freedom from social mores," but rather it is "freedom from mastery and slavery" and "freedom from right and wrong" (*Writings* 38). (Here we should hear Martin's preference for the perfection available in the mind to the imperfect but material world; she means both material freedom and mental freedom [15].) Freedom is not freedom from or freedom in political and social life but freedom from the categories and concepts that underwrite political and social life, freedom from those ideas that license political and social life to claim authority over reality, freedom from the claim that political and social life are more real than the realities that are not identical to them that our minds perceive when we become free. One will immediately ask, if Martin gets rid of right and wrong, what do we get instead? And the answer is nothing. We don't get (or get to have) anything: "When you give up the idea of right and wrong / you don't get anything / What you do is get rid of everything / freedom from ideas and responsibility" (*Writings* 38). Freedom also, from power, both as a concept and as a container for authority.

Power prevents us from making our response, and to be free of its hold we have to perceive its unreality. Once we do so then we see that rather than the conventional configuration of obedience and authority in which we obey those figures invested with power and authority, everyone is "in a state of obedient authority at all times" (98). To convince us of this, to "prove [it] to you beyond doubt," Martin will encourage us to give up physical power, parental power, and state power. She begins:

> Speaking of physical power: water power is in reality that element following its natural course downhill even though it may flow through a dynamo. There is no entity that may be termed power just by itself.

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[70] We will return to this in Part III of this dissertation.

[71] See Denson, Krauss, G. Pollock.

> In the psychological field: still considering power we encounter one of our most troublesome concepts, the idea of authority and obedience. Using the parent-child situation as a base it is generally believed that those in authority are on top and those in obedience below. . .
>
> Our most heart-felt and anxious obedience is a mother's obedience to the infant, and her slavish obedience to her children as long as they are in her care. Also from the very first moment the infant and child must obey the mother. It is plain, is it not, that they are both in authority and both in obedience at the same time. The authority-obedience state of being is not a "sometimes" state but a continuous state of being. We are always in authority and always in obedience. (97-98)

We will extend our stay in the "psychological field" shortly, but first we have to finish giving up what stands in the way of response. Martin begins our lesson in giving up power using these two examples—water power and parental power—in order to free us from what we assume are natural configurations of power. Following this, we then move to the "concrete examples" of "a policeman" and "The President," whose exemplarity shows their talent for being in a state of obedient authority; after these figures we give up God, for "the most troublesome anti-freedom concept is our belief in a transcendent supreme authority" (98). All of this relinquishment is for the sake of freedom, a state of obedient-authority in which "everyone is on his own private line," not lead by anyone else, not leading anyone else (99). Free, we can make our response to the abstract example that an art work is, and our response will be totally uncaused, conditioned only by the obedient-authority of and to our own minds.

Power is an abstraction that has concrete consequences once we believe in it; freedom is an abstraction too, a state our minds can achieve and occupy. While it may be that concretization is a product of the believed-in abstract, and while we might disbelieve the authority of the policeman or the president, disbelief in their authority and the disobedience such disbelief may inspire have concrete consequences once we move back out to the world from which these examples are drawn.[72] That Martin insists we are deluded about reality when we believe it to be structured by power might warrant reality testing, might make us wonder about the privilege her statement betrays. But when we remember that she was a gender-nonconformist (or a closeted lesbian, depending on accounts) who abdicated from much of social life and renounced all the material wealth her art earned, which abdication and renunciation may have been part of the strategy she developed to manage her schizophrenia, we see that whatever reality she was deluded about probably isn't the one we share and by so thinking conscript her to. That she lived an hermetic life doesn't mean, though, that she thought an artist should aim to be "free from and unrelated to the concrete environment." Indeed, for Martin, the artist's "transcendent response" to this environment is "so blissful and seems so much more innocent that we wish to seek to maintain it at the expense of a concrete response. But it is not possible and it is not desirable… It is from our awareness of transcendent reality and our response to concrete reality that our minds command us on our way…to full response" (94-95). Martin's

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[72] We will see in Part II that disobedience is a key term for Notley. However, for Martin it is misperception, misrecognition, is "anti-life." To disobey is to return us to the false conditioning that says power lies elsewhere, outside our minds, and to disobey the authority of figures like the policeman is to invest in action and decision, whereas she insists it is only the developing awareness that will change the world. (See *Writings* pages 111-19, 135-41.)

denial of power, like her refusal of evolution, is a reaction against the conventional conditioning that invests persons and concepts with authority and demands obedience to that authority. That Martin is invested in reconditioning the viewer (and maker) of art doesn't mean that art itself is engaged in presenting a reconditioned reality or a reality apprehended by a reconditioned mind. Art does not present reality,[73] it only presents response: "Art is the concrete representation of our most subtle feelings."[74] So, if the policeman, the president, evolution, and the atom bomb are "concrete examples" of the inseparability of obedience and authority and the consequences of losing sight of their coincidence, Martin's art aims to concretize those abstract, subtle feelings whose expression preserves the self as the seat of authoritative obedience.

What are these subtle feelings? Why are they abstract? What feeling is not abstract? Well, Martin would answer, these subtle feelings are feelings that are "without cause": "I paint what is without cause," she says in an interview in Mary Lance's film. The cause that we are without, here, should be understood both as something that produces results and as synonymous with reason. Art represents those feelings that are uncaused *and* uncaused by reason, reason being that authoritative mental function or faculty whose products are ideas, concepts, and knowledge—products that all claim powerful authority for themselves. (This is also why Martin is anti-nature, nature as cause.) As a concrete representation of our most subtle feelings, art does not raise the subtlety above the threshold of differentiation, or when it does, it does so just barely. Martin either insists that the freedom of full response is synonymous with a "very small happiness," and an innocent joy—though she always spells it "innosense"—or she insists on a kind of levelness, with the emphasis on never going below a certain line.[75] Importantly, though, even if we recognize the valence of the subtle feelings art represents, the feelings cannot be described in language nor are they reproduced in the viewer like an objective correlative. Rather, the artwork causes the viewer to recall her own subtle feelings, to return to a moment in her own experience when she had the freedom of full response (*Writings* 74, 94-95).[76]

Martin's not wanting to go below a certain line, wanting an even plane, involves both the imperative to dissemble hierarchical orders and the staving off of deep depression. In a refractive narrative of her arrival at both the purposive freedom of her work and her signature style, calling on Isaiah rather than Ezekiel this time, she explains:

> I saw the plains driving out of New Mexico and I thought
> the plain had it
> just the plane
> If you draw a diagonal, that's loose at both ends

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[73] "We cannot reproduce reality or represent it concretely. It is ineffable. / In art work we represent our own happiness because of our awareness of the infinite sublimity of reality" (*Writings* 113).

[74] Martin in interview with Simon. See page 6 above.

[75] See the last ten minutes of Mary Lance's documentary for both the "very small happiness" and the importance of not going below a certain line, though other versions of each of these possibilities abound in Martin's work. Cf. "a very small gesture of exultation" (*Writings* 16).

[76] Recollection of this kind is figured often as childlike in Martin's writings, for example on pages 118-119.

I don't like circles – too expanding
When I draw horizontals
you see this big plane and you have certain feelings like
you're expanding over the plane
…
The future's a blank page
I pretended I was looking at the blank page
I used to look in my mind for the unwritten page
if my mind was empty enough I could see it
I didn't paint the plane
I just drew this horizontal line
Then I found out about all the other lines
But I realized what I liked was the horizontal line
Then I painted the two rectangles
correct composition
if they're just right
You can't get away from what you have to do
They arrive at an interior balance
…
I painted those rectangles
From Isaiah, about inspiration
"Surely the people is grass"
…
Then I drew those rectangles
All the people were just like those rectangles
they are just like grass
That's the way to freedom (*Writings* 37-39)

We will flag and bracket for now both the compositional issues—the diagonals, the plane, the problem with circles— and the "blank page," its quick conversion into the "unwritten page," as the image that captures the emptiness of mind required to apprehend and respond to inspiration. The verse she quotes is Isaiah 40.7, and is confirmation of the comfort a voice comes to announce, announcing also that "Every valley shall be lifted up, and every mountain and hill made low; the uneven ground shall become level, and the rough places a plain" (Isaiah 40:4 RSV). After this leveling, this smoothing out of the rough places, revelation will come, exile will end. Ezekiel's bones and Isaiah's grass are both images we can compose with Martin's palette, but they're also passages that depend on and promise a voice whose address they record, and if it is a lost voice it's a voice they recall. The subtle feelings on offer here are a restoration of a unity—"as it was in the beginning, there was no division / and no separation"—and level calm (*Writings* 40).

In another illustration of this state, and a recommendation for how to achieve it, Martin commands: "Try to remember before you were born." Martin describes the memory of her birth in an interview with Mary Lance, thirty years after "The Untroubled Mind":

> I can remember the minute I was born. And I think everybody's born in exactly the same condition. I thought I was quite a small figure with a little sword, and I was very happy.

> And I thought I was gonna cut my way through life with this little sword, victory after victory. And I was sure I was gonna do it…and I think everybody is born one hundred percent ego, and after that it is just adjustment. I adjusted as soon as they carried me into my mother, about twenty minutes later, and half of my victories fell to the ground. My mother had the victories. I'll tell you she was a terrific disciplinarian. (Lance, transcription mine)

Martin's respect for her mother as a disciplinarian is no doubt related to her nomination of discipline as what it is to go on in the face of its apparent impossibility: "Going on without…is called discipline" (*Writings* 70).[77] As we have seen, going on requires renunciation, giving up "thinking, planning, scheming"; "not to know but to go on"; giving up attachment to success, responsibility, etc (18). While Martin respects her mother as a disciplinarian, as she also respects her "sense of duty," she nevertheless describes going without any indication of maternal affection or love (Lance). In another interview, she describes how her mother hated her: "she didn't like children, and she hated me, god how she hated me. She couldn't bear to look at me or speak to me—she never spoke to me" (Martin, interview with Jenny Attiyeh). Martin's description of her mother's never speaking to her certainly tempts a psychoanalytic reading of the relation of this silence and deprivation to the voices Princenthal locates as the most extreme of Martin's symptomology. Indeed, Martin's mother's silence and her figuration of her infant self, brandishing a sword and "cut[ting] her way" through life beyond the birth scene—these things tempt a Freudian reading: an Oedipal reading of the sword, of the oceanic inter-uterine reality and its closer relation to post-partum existence than the "caesura of birth allows us to believe" (Freud quoted in Bion, *Two Papers* 37). They also tempt a Kleinian reading: because unlike Freud Klein thought the ego was present at birth, because Martin's schizophrenia could be read as an overdevelopment of the splitting and projective identification with the bad maternal object.[78] I won't offer either reading for a few reasons: I have neither the interest nor the qualifications to do so, and to do so would be to return the mental freedom Martin effortfully produced (in herself and in her viewers/readers) to the systemizing knowledge of other people's thoughts.

Marion Milner (who also wrote under the pseudonym Joanna Field) and W.R. Bion, though, are far less programmatic than either the patriarch or the matriarch of psychoanalysis, and they each offer productive and idiosyncratic ways we might think about the relationship between Martin's diagnosis and her art (and its attendant poetics). Both Milner and Bion were also painters. Perhaps best known for his work on group dynamics, Bion was a weekend painter, Samuel Beckett's analyst in the '30s, and a decorated veteran of WWI.[79] Marion Milner wrote

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[77] See pages 14-16 of this chapter.

[78] See page 32 below.

[79] We will once again defer our meeting with Bion, but will shortly return to him after Milner. As we will see, his work deeply engages literature and art; he theorizes thinking and develops a grid on which to plot what his theories develop in order to observe and understand; his work considers the aesthetics of psychoanalysis and performs the transformations it describes; his career is also marked by an increasing commitment to what he called "O," an ineffable but "absolute truth in and of any object… [which] can be recognized and felt, but it cannot be known" (Bion, *Attention and Interpretation* 30).

extensively about her own art practice and chronicled her use of drawing in her treatment of patients, as she also theorized about art's general relationship to psychoanalysis. A selection of her titles alone express well her affinity with Martin. Indeed, Milner wrote extensively about her own art practice in *On Not Being Able to Paint* (1950), chronicled her decades long treatment of a paranoid-schizophrenic patient (Susan) in *The Hands of a Living God* (1969), and wrote generally about the intersections between art, psychoanalysis, and mysticism in *The Suppressed Madness of Sane Men* (1987).

The myriad and particular affinities between Martin and Milner are uncanny in their precision and staggering in their number. There is an obvious pedagogical affinity: Martin, who studied education at both Western Washington University and Columbia's Teacher's College, disparaged the social education of children (what we've already encountered as her opposition to conditioned thought) and stressed instead the nurturing of their aesthetic sense and the development of their capacity for independent response; for her part, Milner was commissioned to study a network of girls' day schools and in her published findings—*The Human Problem in Schools* (1938)—she concluded that "doing well at school depends on outward and inward looking experience which teachers facilitate by recognizing their pupils' independence and free-will."[80] In that book she also published a number of reproductions of paintings and the students' responses to those paintings as evidence of her findings and the students' capacity for creativity and insight not provoked by orthodox education. Martin's distrust of the influence of other minds is again matched by Milner's early work in which she articulates the need for finding "a method for discovering one's true likes and dislikes, for finding and setting up a standard of values that is truly one's own and not a borrowed mass-produced ideal," which we should hear as in resonant relation with Martin's need for unconditioned thoughts; or, as Milner put it in a line borrowed from E.M. Forster, "How can I tell what I think till I see what I say?" (*A Life of One's Own* 201, 151).[81]

The unsteady boundaries between other minds and her own, the difficulty of discerning between vital thoughts and the mind's chatter, produce in Milner "the panic and dread of being overwhelmed by the boundless sea of what was not myself" (*A Life of One's Own* 165). As with Martin, who spoke of both the restoration of an undifferentiated and peaceful unity and of the destructive force of what it is to be "overtaken" by boundless and dark depths,[82] Milner describes a mode of attention and perception that can either provide a transcendent experience of intense connectedness or amount to "embracing, becoming one with, something infinitely suffering, . . . plunging into a sea of pain in which both [the object of one's attention and the self] could become drowned," as she put it in *On Not Being Able to Paint* (25). *On Not Being Able to Paint* began as an exploration of Milner's own life-long study of painting in the hopes that her own sense of her failure as a student of painting might shed light on the same questions of education that she had explored in *The Human Problem in Schools*. She had a good deal of training and plenty of technical knowledge of painting, but never felt she really knew what painters were up to. Instead all of her work struck her as imitative or mechanical, not free (*On Not Being Able to*

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[80] Milner quoted in Sayers "Second Introduction" to *On Not Being Able to Paint* xxxiv. For Martin's pedagogy, see: Princenthal 31-32 and 46-48, and Henry Martin 69-70.

[81] This book was published under the pseudonym Joanna Field.

[82] See page 14 of this chapter.

Paint xvii, 153). As she pursues greater freedom and originality in her own creative work—a process that required she sequester herself from reading any theory about art, only technical manuals—she recognizes her obstacle is again a problem of boundaries, "the problem of how the external world does come to be felt to be real, separate, and 'out there' for any of us" (*The Hands of the Living God* xlvi).[83] The problem of boundaries, she confesses, is experienced as terror and is ultimately "a fear of being mad," and it is this fear at the root of her creative inhibition (*On Not Being Able to Paint* 17). Ultimately she will discover that she is able to make "free drawings," in which unconscious ideas could be symbolically expressed, by cultivating a mental state that oscillates rhythmically between two kinds of attention: an "analytic narrow-focused kind of attention," thoroughly cultivated by her psychoanalytic training and by the demands of the real world; and a "wide embracing kind of concentration that gives of its own identity to the particular nature of the other" (*On Not Being Able to Paint* xxi, 84). She discovers that while the experience of too-little separation between the self and the world can be terrifying and overwhelming, it can also be an entirely positive experience on which creative production depends. When she successfully makes a really free drawing, she notices that her "sense of self had temporarily disappeared, there had been a kind of blanking out of ordinary consciousness," a benevolent emptiness that is "the central concept of the *Tao Te Ching.*"[84] Rather than a "recognition of depression," this disappearance of the boundaries that enclose the self is instead an opportunity for greater integration of the self and not-self: "a plunge into no-differentiation which results (if all goes well) in a re-emerging into a new division of the me-not-me, one in which there is more of the 'me' in the 'not-me,' and more of the 'not-me' in the 'me'," an observation which should return us to Martin's notion of the self inevitably expressed and transformed by the work in which that self is recognized (*On Not Being Able to Paint* 154-55). Milner recognizes this feeling as Freud's "oceanic feeling," which she defines for us as "the notion of limitless extension and oneness with the universe; recurrent partial oceanic fusion between inner and outer, me and not-me, ego and object" (*On Not Being Able to Paint* 154, *The Hands of a Living God* 469).

Milner began writing *On Not Being Able to Paint* on September 3rd 1939, the first day of the Second World War, and didn't finish it until the war was over, though it didn't see publication until 1950. When *On Not Being Able to Paint* was finally published, Milner was seven years deep in her sixteen year treatment of "Susan," a paranoid-schizophrenic patient who would become the subject of her next book, *The Hands of the Living God*, published in 1967.[85] When Milner begins to treat Susan—having been asked to do so by D.W. Winnicott after his

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[83] This quotation is taken from the preface to that book, in which Milner reflects on *On Not Being Able to Paint*.

[84] Both Milner and Martin came to this work and other texts on Zen Buddhism through the work of Suzuki.

[85] Here we might be reminded of the book-ends of Martin's hiatus from painting, 1968 and 1973: opposition to the Vietnam War was widespread by 1968, the Paris Peace Accords were signed in 1973; '68 stands as a kind of shorthand for revolutionary potential, '73 as the inception of the Long Crisis and its neutralizing of the potential that '68's shorthand inscribes. Also worth noting that Martin described her family thusly: "We Martins are military men" (Glimcher 106). Although her brother had died in WWII, her reactions to "the summer of love," to the cultural shifts and the opposition to Vietnam are barely available for speculating upon. (See Hudson, *Night Sea* 25).

wife Alice (an artist) had seen Susan in a hospital and, struck by her beauty, wanted to rescue her—Susan arrives and says three things: "that she had lost her soul; that the world was no longer outside her; and that all this had happened since she received E.C.T. [electroconvulsive therapy] in hospital, three weeks before coming to [Milner]" (*The Hands of a Living God* xxxvii).[86] Milner is immediately sympathetic to Susan because of her own struggles with the world "out there" in relation to the self, and this sympathy is compounded by the fact that Susan says she experienced her feelings of being insufficiently contained and separate from the world as mystical, as providing a rare form of experience and knowledge, and yet these feelings were what made her crazy—a description which resonates with Milner's own fear of madness in relation to creativity (*The Hands of a Living God* 44). However, Milner soon discovers a significant obstacle to treating Susan using the traditional resources of her psychoanalytic training: Susan grants no reality to the idea of unconscious thought. No matter how apt Milner's interpretations are when she talks to Susan about her unconscious mental activity, her "unconscious fantasies or even unconscious wishes," Susan responds incredulously, asking, "'but in what part of my mind do I think these things?'" (*Hands of a Living God* 39). And likewise when Milner offers "any interpretation that depended upon finding a hidden symbolic meaning" for something, Susan "would say crossly, 'A thing is what it is and can't be anything else'" (40).

Because of Susan's refusal of these fundaments of psychoanalysis, Milner would have to adjust her practice in two significant ways: she would have to let go of the modes and systems of "knowing-beforehand" provided by Freud, Klein, and Winnicott, even though they are sufficient for Milner's own understanding of Susan's schizophrenia, because they are of no use to the patient herself; and rather than giving Susan good verbalizations of what Milner thought she was feeling, she would instead encourage Susan to "keep to the point of finding the exact word for what she was feeling herself" and "try to show her how she seemed to be putting a rigid barrier between the describable and the indescribable" (*The Hands of a Living God* 45-6). Milner's sympathies with her patient are further compounded when Susan brings her a drawing—the first of thousands she would produce over the course of her treatment—just two weeks before Milner's *On Not Being Able to Paint* is published. Immediately Milner is able to track Susan's pathology around the issues of separation by analyzing her drawings. Milner is already alert to Susan's feeling uncontained by her body—"she doesn't know where her skin is"—and connects this to the fact that Susan's mother was psychotic and refused to acknowledge any separation between her daughter and herself, and this was made into a "tragedy" when post-ECT Susan no longer had any memory of being held as a child— this is Susan's fall "from the hands of a living god" (*The Hands of a Living God* 11, 185, 458). The drawings, though, allow Milner a concrete way of communicating with Susan about the relationship between figure and ground, object and surround, the drawn line as agent of division.

In Susan's early drawings Milner sees nothing but rudimentary symbolism— everywhere genitals, everywhere feces. But, as the years go by, she sees Susan's drawings evolve. For Milner this confirms that Susan was discovering her creative powers and using them to achieve the kind of growth that the traditional language of psychoanalysis failed to provide for her. So, as Milner begins to notice Susan is using a lot of diagonal lines, she concludes:

> The symbol of the diagonal [was] emerging in the context of her struggles to get a firmer hold on the concept of duality and hence on the related problem of the

[86] Martin, too, underwent much ECT (Princenthal 152, 165).

> boundary…whether in the idea of her skin dividing herself from the world…; or in the idea of an interface within herself, between what is conscious and what is unconscious. (*The Hands of a Living God* 374)

Following the diagonals and extending the progress Milner reads out of them, Susan brings Milner a "remarkable drawing," this time using circles instead of diagonals. Milner names the drawing "The sleeping head and the egg" and describes it thusly:

> It begins as a large beautifully drawn egg; and emerging from one side is a haloed face, deeply asleep, and shaded across with stripes like a zebra. She says this face represents a retreat from the world. There is also a shaded-in flat shape, on which the chin of the sleeping head is resting; she says this flat thing is the world. (385)

Furthermore, as Milner writes, the drawing presents for Susan "new kind of womb," one which she:

> must create within herself, a task she knew about when she drew it, although she also knew that she was still in some sense asleep and so could not yet achieve it. . . [T]his drawing seemed to be about her struggles to reach that higher level of psychic containment from which her new self can grow. (385)[87]

Like the diagonals that figure a division between the unconscious and the conscious mind that Susan had previously failed to recognize, these encircling containers hold their subjects as answer to Susan's loss of the feeling of ever being held as an infant. Milner is heartened by this progress: "I see her as once more getting nearer the idea of a whole person existing in a body and rooted in its own ground, having a clear boundary, yet also having a way in and a way out, and creativeness going on" (389). The progress that Milner sees in Susan, as represented by the development of first the diagonal and then the encircling forms, confirm for her the insufficiency of the Kleinian understanding of schizophrenia—its explanations "meant nothing to Susan" (400). Klein's view was that the paranoid-schizoid position is a natural part of the development of the "ego, super-ego, and object relations" in early infancy (Klein 2). The position results from the process whereby the conflicts between an infant's life and death instincts (and here she is extending Freud), as well as the infant's experience of frustration and satisfaction, are projected outward via "projective identification" into separate parts of the mother, resulting in the "good (gratifying)" breast and the "bad (frustrating)" breast, and also internalized (via introjection) as good and bad parts of the self (1-25). When the bad objects are introjected by the infant, they are experienced as persecutory. For Klein, the origins of "paranoid disturbances," as characterize both Susan's and Martin's relations to other people, are to be found in the "persecutory anxiety" experienced by the infant in its paranoid-schizoid position (32). Milner, paraphrasing Klein, describes the pathological state as resulting from "the excessive intruding of the split-off parts of the self into the other person, in order to avoid the pains of separation" (*The Hands of a Living God* 295n1).

Where these explanations failed, Milner saw "creative process" as better suited to develop Susan's growth; as she would ultimately conclude that there is no difference between the "poetic genius" and the unconscious, the latter being that to which Susan could grant no reality,

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[87] See Figure 9 in the Appendix.

causing Kleinian interpretations to account for nothing.[88] Milner never claims that Susan "got better," but she does think they "got somewhere. . . better"[89]—better not least because while Susan may have only hinted at its possibility in her drawings, Milner's treatment of her confirmed her own experience of the creative process's capacity to restore the "undifferentiated state of the ego" before it was split, pathologically or not, before there was any difference between the self and "out there" (*The Hands of a Living God* 449, 442).[90]

In Susan's diagonal lines and their giving way to circles, Milner sees attempts at "psychic containment," a way of being held in the absence of any recollection of being held or recognized as separate by her mother (410). Martin's voices, then, might be understood as an address that undoes her mother's silence and refusal to look at or recognize her—offering commands that make her painting possible, converting her mother's cruelty into something closer to care, discipline into *a discipline* designed for going on without and without knowing how. This possibility of Martin's voices being somehow compensatory accords, as we will see, with Bion's understanding of hallucination as a possible "solution" to a problem, and in fact the same problem that is at the heart of the "origin of mathematics" (*Transformations* 83; *Second Thoughts* 113). Hallucinations do this by making something invisible "seen," and thereby evacuating it (*Cogitations* 49).[91] Still, there is no tidy alignment of the diagonal line and the circle as they relate to Susan's schizophrenia, her feeling insufficiently separate from the world, with Martin's own illness and its relation to these forms. Martin does, though, express the same difficulty about the self's containment—and we saw how both Princenthal and Glimcher's accounts of Martin's illness depend on notions of separation—and narrates a progression from the diagonal, to the circle, and beyond:

> If you draw a diagonal, that's loose at both ends
> I don't like circles – too expanding
> When I draw horizontals
> you see this big plane and you have certain feelings like
> you're expanding over the plane (*Writings* 37)

That a circle is "too expanding" perhaps means that if you stand outside of it, it threatens to engulf you, to transgress the boundaries between what it is supposed to contain and what is supposed to be outside of it. But the horizontal is a place on which the self can stand, extend, and expand "over the plane" without any impact on the plane it runs parallel to or hovers above. The horizontal proliferates rather than engulfs: once she drew that line she "found out about all

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[88] "The unconscious mind . . . is, in fact, what Blake calls each man's poetic genius" (Milner, *The Suppressed Madness of Sane Men* 214).

[89] Adam Phillips, Introduction to *The Hands of a Living God* xxxiii.

[90] Milner doesn't disagree with Klein, as is evidenced by the restoration of the split that is itself a Kleinian split, but rather finds the theories insufficient in developing a practice to which Susan responds.

[91] For more on hallucinations as something necessarily shared in order to be productive in the senses described, see Bion, *Attention and Interpretation* 35-37. On Bion's use of Shelley to describe the state hallucinosis can achieve, see *Transformations* 133. On the hallucinosis of reading Bion, see Jacobus, *Poetics of Psychoanalysis* 253.

the other lines," though the expansion here doesn't surround or possess what it discovers; for in the "correct composition," the one that achieves an "interior balance," "everyone is on their own private line" (38, 99).

Everyone on their own private line means that nothing follows anything else, everyone gets their own separate box from which they can freely extend. Martin wants her work to trigger a recollection of a moment of perfection, but this isn't a return—it is not a memory of an experience, nor does it follow from an experience. Perfection held in the mind follows neither from someone else's experience nor from one's own. Following is a problem because it recognizes the authority of something (or someone) else that leads, and this problem is again figured as a circle:

> If you follow others you are in reality at a standstill, because their experience is in the past. That is circling. Even following your own past experience, is circling. Know your own response to your own work and to the work of others.
> To *recall* in one's own mind past concrete experience is not circling. . .Experiences recalled are generally more satisfying and enlightening than the original experience. It is in fact the only way to know one's whole response.
> To illustrate *recall,* I will quote Wordsworth's "I wandered lonely as a cloud," in which the speaker famously recollects an earlier moment in time (and in the poem) of having seen a field of daffodils:
> "For oft, when on my couch I lie
> In vacant or in pensive mood,
> They flash upon that inward eye
> Which is the bliss of solitude;
> And then my heart with pleasure fills,
> And dances with the daffodils." (94-95, emphasis hers)

In this stanza that Martin quotes, Wordsworth presents a scene he has failed to fully appreciate while in it. Although "a poet could not be but gay" in the presence of these daffodils, this poet nevertheless failed to experience the pleasure available when he recalls them: "I gazed—and gazed—but little thought / What wealth the show to me had brought" (Wordsworth 303). Wordsworth's retrospective description of the scene is suffused with the desire to infinitely extend the perfection he achieves as he "recalls in [his] own mind [the] past concrete experience" of coming "all at once" upon:

> A host, of golden daffodils;
> Beside the lake, beneath the trees,
> Fluttering and dancing in the breeze.
>
> Continuous as the stars that shine
> And twinkle on the milky way,
> They stretched in a never-ending line
> Along the margin of a bay:
> Ten thousand saw I at a glance,
> Tossing their heads in sprightly dance. (Wordsworth 303)

He both gives us the end of the line (beside the lake) and tells us the line never ends: they are infinite, and yet he knows there are ten thousand, a number he can somehow apprehend with just a glance. It is the recollection itself that allows him to wander "lonely as a cloud," to see beyond the limits of human sight and to number the daffodils without counting them which amounts to recounting them perfectly.

Martin "illustrate[s] *recall*" by way of someone else's recollection, which process she expects will infinitely extend via the work that addresses—calls—the viewer in such a way as to stimulate a recall—a recollection of their own concrete experience—to which they are fully responsive for the first time. Wordsworth's is no circling, here—he doesn't return to the world where the daffodils were. Rather he extends the moment of perfection they could never occupy save in his mind into an infinite line, a line that extends beyond the horizon, beyond any vantage he could actually occupy. This is the lyric wager, the perfect abstraction mirrored in Martin's line.

In must be said, however, that Martin consistently expresses a rejection of Romanticism and a preference for Classicism: "the classic is cool…detached and impersonal"; it "depends on inspiration" and represents "more perfection than is possible in the world"—perfect circles, perfectly straight lines—and thus "Classicists are people who look out with their back to the world," people who don't like chaos, whereas "if you like it you're a romanticist" (*Writings* 38). In a marvelous instance of Martin's ability to un-irritably exemplify a paradoxical position, whereas she makes Wordsworth exemplary of a kind of recollection that is not a return, not a circling, here is her indictment of the romantic, as opposed to the classical, sensibility and purposive aesthetic: "If a person goes walking in the mountains that is not detached / and impersonal, he's just looking back" (37-38). It is also worth noting that the subject of her 1976 film *Gabriel* is a boy taking a walk over a mountain; this film, like her description of her earliest grid paintings, was meant to capture "innosense."[92]

Yet Wordsworth's lyric wager of being able to count the uncountable, the "prosodic thinking" that extends itself to a world at a different tempo—a different world—is analog to Martin's horizontals, the absolutely abstract planes that resemble the paper she writes her poems on.[93] Martin reflects—recalls and projects—Wordsworth's work in her own. The "pensive mood" Wordsworth's speaker projects is the mood Martin hopes her own work will recall, a mood she describes as lyrical in its autogenetic transcendence:

> SC: Do you feel that your writing and your visual art are on the same plane at all? What is the relationship of your writing to your visual art?
>
> AM: Well, the visual art goes beyond words, so there's no relationship.
>
> SC: Way beyond. Well, there are people who feel that, poetry especially, is a very high form of art.
>
> AM: Yeah. They try to go beyond words in poetry, with words.
>
> SC: Well, I don't know how that's possible. That stymies me.

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[92] On *Gabriel,* see Douglas Crimp.

[93] See Figures 10 and 11 in the Appendix.

AM: By the use of metaphor and meter and rhyme. They try to move us into a lyrical mood that goes beyond words.

SC: Does it ever succeed for you?

AM: Poetry? Oh, yes, I like it. (Martin, Smithsonian "Oral History" 23-24)

***

An easy transition from here to Wilfred Bion would be to inscribe Susan and Martin in this same circle: "The circle, useful to some personalities as a visual image of 'inside and outside', is to other personalities, notably the psychotic, evidence that no such dividing membrane exists"; this could then suggest that had Susan arrived at the horizontal, as Martin did, she might have been as remarkably functional as Martin was (Bion, *Transformations* 82). This is neither an interesting suggestion nor a sound speculation. Rather interesting, though, are the nexus of connections between Bion and Martin. For if Milner's account of her patient's and her own art practice positions art—and specifically the evolution of geometric forms—as therapeutic insofar as it made it possible for each to understand what was also being expressed symptomologically (Milner was able to understand that her own creative inhibition was a product of her fear of madness; drawing was the interface by which Susan's unconscious thoughts and symbol formations could be presented to her, whereas she refused to grant the existence of either in verbal communications), then Bion can help us see Martin's engagement with thinking—more specifically her rejection of theories and ideas, be they hers or another mind's—not as a strategy of freeing herself from disabling thoughts and hallucinations that are symptomatic of her schizophrenia, but rather as a transformation of thinking that she intends to communicate, almost telepathically, to the observer.[94]

Bion makes the remark about the psychotic's aversion to circles in *Transformations*, a difficult book that marks a transition between what is often described as his early and his late work.[95] *Transformations* begins:

> Suppose a painter sees a path through a field sown with poppies and paints it: at one end of the chain of events is the field of poppies, at the other a canvas with pigment disposed on its surface. We can recognize that the latter represents the former…despite the transformation that the artist has effected in what he saw to make it take the form of a picture, *something* has remained unaltered and on this *something* recognition depends. The elements that go to make up the unaltered aspect of the transformation I shall call invariants…
>
> In many pictures the effectiveness of the representation would depend on perspective. A peculiar feature of this domain is that a completely circular pond, for example, might be represented by an ellipse, or a path with borders running parallel to

[94] We will return to this in Part III.

[95] See Ogden 286.

> each other might be represented by two lines that meet. Indeed the representation of pond or path would be less adequate if it were a circle or parallel lines. Accordingly we assume that in ellipse and intersecting lines, circular pond and parallel borders, is some quality that is invariant under artistic creation.
>
> Suppose now that we view a stretch of railway line that is straight as far as the eye can see. The two lines of the track will be seen to converge. We know that if we were to test the convergence by walking up the line this convergence would not be confirmed; but, if we were to walk far enough and to look back the way we had come, the convergence would appear to lie behind us and to be confirmed by our sense of sight; the two parallel lines meet in a point. Where then is this point?...
>
> In Euclidean geometry definitions of terms such as "point," "straight line" and "circle" are so closely related to marks on paper and similar realizations that these definitions, which are really suggestive descriptions, serve well enough. But points and straight lines as defined in Euclidean geometry are not things-in-themselves. The mathematician has found that the extensions which his subject demands are not served by these definitions…The mathematician can investigate invariants common to circular object and ellipse, that represents it, by algebraic projective geometry. In his investigations statements about length, angles, or congruence cannot find a place in the theorems of projective geometry, though they are part of Euclidean geometry…Just as there are geometrical properties invariant under projection, and others that are not, so there are properties that are invariant under psycho-analysis and others that are not. The task is to find what are the invariants under psychoanalysis and what the nature of their relationship to one another. (1-2, emphasis his)

Bion is an analogical thinker: the paragraphs just quoted are the opening of his book, and already the analyst, the implied target these suppositions—any initiate of Bion's work will immediately recognize Bion's search for the invariants of psychoanalysis, and for ways of representing and transforming them so that they are communicative—is compared to a painter and a geometer. As Mary Jacobus rightly observes, Bion is aware of "his own susceptibility to what Freud calls 'the seduction of analogy'" (Jacobus 250). As she explains, Bion's "risky aesthetic wager" by which he sustains the comparison of the analyst to the painter (not to mention of the analyst to Milton's blind-sighted-poet-prophet) is matched and countered by his engagement with mathematics: "he sets himself to achieve precise mathematical formulations that can achieve propositional status for psychoanalytic theory"; and, more precisely, he is "in search for a system of representation that is not pre-saturated with meaning" (249). Bion uses mathematical symbols and terms because they are meaningless and therefore more freely able to determine the value of something. He uses "meaningless terms [in order] to provide psycho-analytic investigation with a counterpart of the mathematician's variable, an unknown that can be invested with a value when its use has helped to determine what that value is" (Bion, *Learning from Experience* 3). Thus mathematical symbols and terms, as opposed to meaningful words, allow Bion to talk about mental functions and factors "without being restricted, as [he] would be if he used…more meaningful term[s]" (*Learning from Experience* 2-3).

On the one hand, Bion wants an empty system, and his grid is thus a space in which becoming-meaningful can be tracked. On the other hand, he wants to use devices of communication that can be received by any system, no matter the medium it runs on; information that can be registered by any sense, including some that might not exist. He tells us:

> the total situation I have tried to describe pictorially I would like to be able to describe odoriferously—as a dog might smell it, and, if he were sufficiently gifted, might delineate it odoriferously. And similarly with all other sensuous media available. Since I wish to find a system of representation that would serve for all these systems, and some of whose existence I am unaware, I seek a system of representation that is unsaturated ($\psi(\xi)$) and will permit of saturation. (*Transformations* 117)

Bion's recourse to the variable is not unrelated to his contention that any psychoanalytic session should be assessed using the rubric of Keats's formulation of negative capability; the analyst, Bion will conclude by the later part of his career, should take no notes, attempt to retain no memories of a patient's previous session, should be content to let variables remain unsolved without any irritable reaching after fact or reason.[96]

To return to psychosis and the circle: it is not only that Bion wants to "mathematize"[97] psychoanalysis, but also that he understands the origins of mathematics psychoanalytically; specifically, he thinks mathematics developed as a way of coping with and avoiding psychosis. We will remember from the opening paragraphs of *Transformations* that points, lines, and circles are not "things-in-themselves," neither do they express an invariant "*something*" that can be recognized from its realization (real poppies in a field) to a representation (the painting of the poppies that *Transformations* opens by describing) (1-2). Rather, Bion argues: "It is supposed that Euclidean geometry was derived from experience of space. My suggestion is that its *intra-psychic* origin is experience of 'the space' where a feeling, emotion, or other mental experience 'was'" (*Transformations* 121). After a brief Kleinian-Oedipal interlude in which the point (.) is a breast and a line (——) is a penis, he explains that "points were originally the space that had been occupied by a feeling, but had become a 'no-feeling' or the space where a feeling used to be" (119-121). So, points represent the "place where" whereas lines denote trajectory, tendency, or use; and both points and lines can represent pre-conceptions.[98]

Remembering Bion's "Theory of Thinking," in which he argues that the thinking apparatus "is called into existence to cope with thoughts," we can understand the psychotic who is intolerant of circles as having developed a disturbance that prevents pre-conceptions from becoming conceptions or thoughts. Pre-conceptions "may be regarded as the analogue in psychoanalysis of Kant's concept of 'empty thoughts'" (*Second Thoughts* 111). When these pre-conceptions are "brought into contact with a realization that approximates to it, the mental outcome is a conception" (111). Bion draws a distinction between conceptions and thoughts: conceptions result from satisfying contact between pre-conception and approximate realization, whereas thoughts result from frustrating contact. This distinction is a product of Bion's Kleinian persuasion; Bion understands the schizophrenic (and the psychotic) personality as resulting from an intolerance of frustration, which intolerance causes the "hypertrophic development of the apparatus of projective identification"; the consequence of this is that what should be recognized

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[96] *Attention and Interpretation* 125; *Two papers* 7.

[97] *Transformations* 170.

[98] On points and lines as pre-conceptions: "A pre-conception, represented by • is a stage of development (a seed, so to speak, is a tree at [a] particular stage of its development: so is a tree). A preconception represented by a line (———) is a use" (*Transformations* 119).

as thoughts and coped with by thinking are instead experienced as a preponderance of bad objects that the psyche must expel (112). "Mathematical elements, or mathematical objects as Aristotle calls them," Bion argues, are strategies and products of how a sane mind deals with frustration—by modifying and representing it (113). Thus it is that "mathematics…belongs to that class of mental functioning which…is essential to sanity itself," and there we have the explanation for the psychotic's intolerance of circles (*Cogitations* 86-88). And there also we have the origins of Bion's Grid. It takes Bion himself volumes to explain and reckon with his Grid, so I will only represent it with two images: first, from *Transformations*, a passage and diagram in which he performs the modifications and interpretations of frustrations that mathematics can develop; the second, the grid itself.[99]

It is no easy task to summarize the purposes or mechanisms of Bion's Grid. It is both an instrument used for observation and the representation of an instrument; it is a method of containing both the material a patient produces during analysis and the experiences of the analyst. In the simplest terms, its x-axis denotes a range of possible statements, its y-axis a range of uses; though Bion often prefers the terms factors and functions to statements and uses (*Two Papers* 3-4). And, as he admits in the essay "The Grid": "an early casualty in trying to use the Grid is the Grid itself" (*Two Papers* 6). The fantasy of the Grid is that it can "contain," can trap and make communicable, "elements which lie outside the spectrum of 'thought'" and which express "O." O "stands for the absolute truth in and of any object," it cannot be "known about" but can be become, and nothing is true that does not come from it (*Two Papers* 23; *Attention and Interpretation* 26-35). For O there are only analogies, among them the "act of faith" and the "work of art": "the artist's O is apprehensible when it has been transformed into a work of art" (*Attention and Interpretation* 35). We never see Bion fill out the Grid, though he everywhere dares us to try to Grid the material he tries to communicate to us. For an illustration and exemplification of this: in "The Grid" Bion moves from his patient who had a stammer to Bion's own recollection of the non-semantic quality of voice, exemplified for him by his recollection of hearing Hitler's speeches at Nüremberg, how this left him with nothing but the beta-elements to receive, which were plenty (*Two Papers* 21-23).

In his last work, *A Memoir of the Future*, an autobiographical compendium of three novels, he does not include the grid itself but instead invites us to share in its hallucinosis. He is trying to make communicable "modes of thinking to which no known realization has so far been found to approximate," he explains in the preface (ix). We know, though he doesn't say, he had previously offered us the underwritten grid. Underwritten in the sense of being supported (by O) and in the sense of not being written enough. And *A Memoir of the Future* ends, six-hundred pages later, by telling us what cannot fill the spaces the grid always leaves empty:

> All my life I have been imprisoned, frustrated, dogged by common-sense, reason, memories, desires and—greatest bug-bear of all—understanding and being understood. This is an attempt to express my rebellion, to say 'Good-bye' to all that. It is my wish, I now realize doomed to failure, to write a book unspoiled by any tincture of common-sense, reason, etc. (see above). So although I would write, 'Abandon Hope all ye who expect to find any facts—scientific, aesthetic, or religious—in this book', I cannot claim to have succeeded. All these will, I fear, be seen to have left their traces, vestiges, ghosts hidden within these words; even sanity, like 'cheerfulness', will creep in. However

[99] See Figures 12 and 13 in the Appendix.

> successful my attempt, there would always be the risk that the book 'became' acceptable, respectable, honoured and unread. 'Why write then?' you may ask. To prevent someone who KNOWS from filling the empty space— (578)[100]

[100] In Part III we will return to the tendency of viewers (critics and vandals alike) to want to fill the "empty space" of Martin's paintings; and we will also return to the underwritten—to the horizons between something not being written-enough, and something underwriting it.

But because of the methodological imperative that arises when considering Martin's work—an imperative well summarized by Bion's attempt to prevent "someone who knows from filling the empty space," be that the space of a grid hung on the wall, sitting on the analyst's lap, or the space inside a mind primed for response—for now the empty space with which this chapter ends will stay empty. Bion wants his *Memoir of the Future* to be a monument to it. And so Martin "has for her monument: empty space" (Michelet 2).

Part II
ALICE NOTLEY: *I am losing my because*

Her overall project can be identified as that of a counterhumanism… 'made to the measure of the world.'
—Katherine McKittrick and Sylvia Wynter

I don't take naps / .../ What's that, facts?
—Drake

We have seen that for Martin disbelief in ideas and "stored knowledge" is required in order to reconfigure authority and obedience so as to become free to respond (Glimcher 69). This reconfiguration liberates the mind from the mastery of other people's ideas; it becomes the only authority that should be obeyed. The artwork—as that which concretely represents our subtle, uncaused feelings and has the potential to return the viewer to her mind's own authority, to solicit uncaused response—is paradoxically both the effect and cause of this reconfiguration. For Alice Notley disbelief in "received ideas" is part of her "poetics of disobedience," the only thing to which she has professed loyalty or demonstrated obedience.[101] Disobedience, for Notley, is the only actioned condition under which clear sight, clear thinking, and extraordinary vision are possible.[102] To understand what Notley is doing with *thinking*—which is after all where the conjunction with Martin originated—to understand what she is doing with (and to) that history of thinking that sometimes goes by the name of Reason, we have to first understand what thinking has to do with saying, what saying has to do with voice, what voice has to do with self, and how one might take measure of any of these things. Or, to go in the other direction, what self has to do with what there is to say, what saying has to do with what is true (including true thoughts, essential truths, the real world) and worth knowing, or known and for good reason. What follows might suffer from the fallacy of imitative form; its argument will spiral recursively rather than proceed linearly, but it will not get carried away with the permissions it is given to disobey.

Notley describes her disobedience often and variously, but perhaps most famously in "Poetics of Disobedience." This brief essay was written in 1998, in the wake of completing *Disobedience* (published in 2001) and while she is in the middle of writing *Reason and Other Women*, itself not published until 2010. Here, she defines what disobedience is and why it is called for:

[It] seems as if one must disobey everyone else in order to see at all…Staying alert go all

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[101] "Thinking and Poetry," *Coming After* 158; "The Poetics of Disobedience," n. pag.

[102] The turn to Notley mustn't effect the conflation of Martin's reconfiguration of authority with disobedient acts or positions: Martin was, by many accounts, conservative or quietist. She associates disobedience and rebellion with being "anti-life." See note 72 above.

> the ways one is coerced into denying experience, sense and reason is a huge task….But more and more…I discovered I couldn't go along, with the government or governments, with radicals and certainly not with conservatives or centrists, with radical poetics and certainly not with other poetics, with other women's feminisms, with any fucking thing at all; belonging to any of it was not only an infringement on my liberty but a veil over clear thinking. ("The Poetics of Disobedience")

For Notley, there is little separation between thinking and writing and disobedience is what allows one to both think and write with honesty. One must constantly ask oneself: "What am I buying right now? ...What am I buying, in terms of thoughts and ideas, from others? What are the parts of my reasoning I'm not sure of, but tell myself I am?"[103] Disobedient honesty is the precondition for both novelty (a new poem, a new idea) and truth (an idea worth buying) (*Coming After* 158, 160).[104] In Notley, as in Martin, theories and ideas, even those that are widely accepted (like evolution and the big bang) are denied because they are a threat to the process and potential of thinking, of reasoning, and of poetry. Honest thinking and writing depend on perpetual opposition to received ideas, themselves defined as those ideas "that come to you from others, the outside; or your own old ideas, what you think you think and don't question anymore" (158). An idea, we will see, can also be a belief, and those too should be interrogated and sourced. Ideas and beliefs live in the mind, they come to it and from it, and they direct what we do, make, and are. Only by understanding what ruins us (ideas) and how (which ones, where from), can we do, make or be anything with integrity. She details one of her attempts to do just this and maintain honest relation to her own mind, to the received ideas that occupy it:

> There are houses in the mind with front doors that never get opened, that have on them the signs of one's supposedly basic beliefs: "soul is you in others," "unified self," "white men are evil," "the truth is daily life," "reality is language," "no god," "god," "my business is to help others in obvious and direct ways…" One rarely unlocks the doors and enters, dusts off the shelves, forgets what the neighbors think long enough to find out what it's like to live there. I have a preconception in the book I'm writing [*Mysteries of Small Houses*], that there is a unified self and that the pronoun 'I' is a word which should be given back to people, who need it, but deepened. However I'm living in the house of that preconception as openly as I can, pointing at the furniture, occasionally breaking the knickknacks and spilling espresso or Contrex on the rugs. (164)

The spotlight is here trained on the received idea of a "unified self" and the pronoun *I* that attends such an idea. Notley admits that she has bought this notion, and it is a notion—the question of a unified self that is on offer in a number of markets: it is an aesthetic question, and an aesthetic question that happens to coincide with an assumption of a politics, at least when it

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[103] Alice Notley, "Thinking and Poetry," *Coming After,*163. On the question of thinking and writing, see her remarks about the conjunction of "how one makes and how one thinks" (160ff).

[104] The concern with truth predominates in Notley's poetics. To pursue the truth one must avoid jargon, "jargon being words coined by specialists in other fields, which represented privileged knowledge…" (158).

comes to the scene of American poetry to which Notley, often blithely, refers; it is a psychological question; it is a cultural question.

Notley freely admits that she believes in a unified self and wants to find her "real voice" and "real self," and she understands disobedience, perpetual opposition, to be integral to their discovery (130). She performs this opposition, even while offering a receipt for several received ideas, in her 1980 lecture, *Doctor Williams' Heiresses*.[105] As its title indicates, the lecture reckons with influence and the familiar trope of poetic inheritance—the transmission of both tradition and innovation across generations—but it also troubles, deranges, and queers the dominant genealogy of American Modernism and its aftermath. That Notley's title positions her among Williams' inheritors is unremarkable, as evident as his influence is in her work.[106] That she counts herself among his *heiresses* deserves some remarks: with this word we should hear the ghosted echo of the *poetesses*, that moniker that connotes lovely, diminutive competence and lives always in the shadow of the Great White Male Poets. The genealogy that Notley constructs in the opening of her lecture recalls and plays on mythological genealogies, thereby claiming for itself many of myth's conventions and permissions:

> Poe was the first one, he mated with a goddess. His children were Emily Dickinson & Walt Whitman—out of wedlock with a goddess. Then Dickinson & Whitman mated—since they were half divine they could do anything they wanted to—& they had 2 sons, William Carlos Williams & Ezra Pound, & a third son T.S. Eliot who went to a faraway country & never came back. From out of the West came Gertrude Stein, the daughter of the guy who wrote the 800-page novel & the girl who thought maybe rightly that she was Shakespeare. Gertrude Stein & William Carlos Williams got married: their 2 legitimate children, Frank O'Hara & Philip Whalen, often dressed & acted like their uncle Ezra Pound. However, earlier, before his marriage to Gertrude Stein, Williams had a child by the goddess Brooding. His affair with Brooding was long & passionate, & his child by her was oversized, Charles Olson. Before Charles Olson's birth the goddess had also been having an affair with Williams' brother Ezra Pound. No one was ever absolutely sure who the father of Olson was. Now O'Hara & Whalen were males that were male-female, as were many of the children of Williams by various goddesses & of Gertrude Stein & some gods. Olson was too big to be as male-female as he would have liked; his female was always curling up inside his shoulder or wrist to take a nice dark nap. Anyway it was striking how there were no females in this generation; & the first children of the male-females & of Olson & their other brothers were all males, and there were

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[105] Delivered on February 12th, the lecture was published in July of that same year by Tuumba Press.

[106] Notley often claims that Williams' poem "Asphodel" changed her life (town hall audio). Within *Dr. Williams' Heiresses* she recounts typing up that entire poem: "…I typed up all of your poem 'Asphodel, That Greeny Flower,' & Honey that took a long time." Typing other people's poems was a practice of Notley's that she learned from her first husband, the poet Ted Berrigan, as she explains in an interview: "I typed up other people's poems a lot anyway—it was something Ted had suggested, but I took it further than he had (he had sort of invented the typing of poems as a way of studying them). I typed up a lot of longer poems….all of Jimmy Schuyler's 'Hymn to Life,' a good portion of Williams' 'Of Asphodel That Greeny Flower,' and O'Hara's 'Ode on Michael Goldberg's Birthday (And Other Births).' Also Milton's 'Lycidas.' This is probably how I learned to write long poems" (Alice Notley interviewed by Stephanie Anderson).

> very many of them because of their fathers' incredible promiscuity. But the male-females also produced a second wave of children of which there were many females. These females could not understand how they came to be born—they saw no one among their parents & brothers who resembled them physically, for the goddesses their fathers mated with were evaporative non-parental types. As a matter of fact these females couldn't even believe that their fathers *were* their fathers. They came to indulge in a kind of ancestor worship—that is they each fell in love with a not too distant ancestor. One of them, Bernadette Mayer, fell in love with Gertrude Stein. And the one named Alice Notley fell in love with her grandfather, William Carlos Williams. (*Dr. Williams' Heiresses*)

American Modernism is both born and disseminated not only by mortal men and women, but by mortals mating with gods and goddesses; their descendants are sometimes androgynous "male-female" poets; there is incest, disinheritance, "ancestor worship"; and the heiresses named Bernadette and named Alice are members of what Notley has elsewhere called "that group without a name," "that sudden generation of strong women poets."[107]

Notley's lecture proceeds, often in the form of a dialogue between Bernadette and Alice or in letters to Williams from one of his granddaughters, through the details of Williams' estate, the most important of which are his expansion of what counts as poetic material and the introduction of the variable foot. After Williams, his heiresses felt they could admit everything: tampax, kids, etc.: "It's because of Williams that you can include everything that's things—& maybe everything that's words…if you are only up to noticing everything that your life does include. Which is hard. Too many people have always already been telling you for years what your life includes" (*Heiresses*). The expansion of poetic material is not guaranteed by Williams alone; one also and still has to see beyond what others tell you constitutes your life. The variable foot is also hard, and Notley admits that they haven't entirely "caught up with what Williams meant by [it]," but she knows at least that it provides the possibility that a tone of voice that "people aren't used to," the tone of a woman's voice, might find a form that can take it on:

> Variable foot is maybe about the dominance of tone of voice over other considerations—I do my poems this way 'cause I talk from here—haven't you ever talked to anyone? I'm not an oracle or a musical instrument or a tradition or a stethoscope or a bellows or even a typewriter: I am a tone of voice, warming, shifting, pausing, changing, including, assuring, exulting, including, including, turning & including. I break my lines where I do, as I'm being as various as my voice should be in our intimacy. (*Heiresses*)

These two heirlooms open up a space for what we recognize as a feminist poetics, but this recognition also demonstrates the limitations of converting a disobedience into an allegiance. If one utters or hears the phrase "feminist poetics" in the context of contemporary American poetry, surely these heiresses are at the vanguard of such a notion. And yet, were we to characterize such a poetics by Notley's description above, we would assume these poets subscribe to a feminist poetics the dominant features of which must be its inclusivity and its intimacy, but these features also appear in the most misogynist characterizations of "women's

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[107] Quoted in Rachel Blau DuPlessis, 261n17. Bernadette is Bernadette Mayer, whose own poems take up an opposition to reason and pursue the "kind of time that has flown away from causes" (Mayer 93).

literature." On the one hand, *Dr. Williams' Heiresses* is a birth story of a feminist poetics; on the other hand, to extrapolate such a poetics—or such a feminism—from it is to deliver it stillborn. While that analogy is both gross and over-simple, the point is that we should expect nothing less than that Notley's version of a feminist poetics will baffle some, if not all, of the versions of feminist poetics written by innovative writers with whom Notley shares her inheritance; indeed, it will baffle or be inadequate to even the version we expect her to hold.

Notley doubles down on her nonconformance by refusing the second half of the term "feminist poetics" and by differing substantially with her own versions of it as her work progresses.[108] As her lecture draws to a close we see Notley contending both with a period of depression and with the difficulty so common in facing our Modernist fathers and grandfathers:

> I typed up all of your poem "Asphodel, That Greeny Flower," & Honey that took a long time. In that bad time there was always you. To love as a poet & to love & hate as a man. Immobile & pregnant & isolate & unhappy, I didn't need to read about your attractions to women other than your wife. Your reasoning seemed specious & was enraging…I'm looking for a passage from "Asphodel" about a "field of women like flowers & what should you do but love them?" Everything that's catching my eye, though, in this poem, is something that's beautiful & makes me cry. […] I asked about love & Philip said Yes, love, & your great poem is about how it itself is being that & being handed as that as a flower to your wife & how it 'gelds the bomb'—no fear of evil death war destruction or pregnancy childbirth—because this poem exists. I suspected then & know now that that's true. And because you had written so, I was able to write & love & live, I don't even ever hate you temporarily anymore. [109]

It is not only the pedagogical value of typing Williams' poem or the poems it allowed Notley herself to write, but also the consolation of the poem itself—a consolation mediated and made possible by the input of her friend, Philip Whalen—that win, for Williams, her forgiveness. Forgiveness may have been necessary for Notley to write the poems his work enabled, or it may have come after they were already possible, as a form of thanks or as a permission won by her poems themselves. Whatever the cause or need to forgive—even if one's feminism makes one want to wish such a need away—the effort or compulsion to forgive as a man, rather than to hate as a man but love as a poet, reveals an investment in the personal that Notley's work retains even as it becomes epic and mythic in scale and ambition.[110] The domestic, the personal, the

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[108] On Notley's resistance to poetics itself see Nelson 133, 147. Notley also articulated this resistance—or disdain—in a recent prose piece: "…I write into the void of the minds of everyone and everything, alive and dead, I am listening to it and recording it, I am writing *of* it over and over and at length. I am not engaged in anything otherwise named in the poetics-saturated conversation of my peers; they are each other's peers but not mine, I say" ("How We Cause the Universe to Exist").

[109] *Heiresses,* n. pag. This is the lecture's final paragraph, followed only by the closing—"Yours, / Alice"—and the signature and date.

[110] I will return to the question of the personal later, but it is worth stating here that this feature of her poetry is most often attached to her affiliation and affinity with the New York School in both its first and second generations. Notley's own persistent and wholesale dismissal of movements, combined with Maggie Nelson's wonderful and exhaustive account of Notley's relation to the NY School, allows this

autobiographical—all of these will be folded into her epics, rather than abandoned for them.

As Notley's disobedience becomes more total and is hurled at greater pitch, both in her poems and in interviews and prose, she exchanges the intimacy we see in her address to Williams for a complete refusal to socialize with the minds of men. As it becomes more extreme, or more sharply articulated, Notley's disobedient feminism will require that she give up everything generated by men, which is so very much of *everything*. What is true can only be won in their absence, "all thinking from outside seems tainted by the male," so she will have to "try to know everything from [herself]"; as image for such a mode of knowing she puts forward "meditating alone in one's closet," as she put it in an email to Maggie Nelson.[111] The stark contrast between the image of Notley typing Williams' poem as a kind of apprenticeship, to her solitary meditation in a presumably dark closet shouldn't tempt us to read her work as progressively evolving, even if evolving towards increased radicality or devolving towards a primordial cave/closet.[112] Less the difference of twenty some years between *Heiresses* and Notley's note to Nelson, and more the difference between a poet and an anonymous but decidedly male thinker, should explain the totality of her renunciation. This renunciation is also a rivalrous bid to replace Western Man with Poet Herself.

To know everything "from herself" is to overwrite what had been transmitted as knowledge and as material—logos as it means to matter. Because all thinking seems "tainted by the male," Notley will counter this taint with a feminine "stain." Stain as counter, by way of rhyme, is then literalized as menstrual blood and is likened to the first material, "the stain that / / invents the world" and begins the universe.[113] This originary moment is the source of poetry, which issues from and to a space and time before there was a divide between male and female. When we access this space we understand Notley's "girl theory," her "central belief that cross-gender identification is a central aspect of being a poet."[114] This dynamic runs in the other direction as well: Notley's flexible performance of gender identification leads us to this [re]originary moment, offers it as opportunity to preempt the differentiation of male from female and the oppositions that result from this differentiation—this is our way out of the "battle of the

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chapter to "[say] yes / to no" and ignore their importance altogether (Stevens 138, Nelson 131-168, Notley *Coming After* 25).

[111] Notley in an email to Maggie Nelson, quoted in Nelson, 163.

[112] As with Martin, chronology cannot imply a progressive development because the work insists upon an atemporality that coexists with the eternal; and the eternal takes as its predicate nothing less than Truth, as it is eternal truth each artist strives for and lays claim to. If this explanation is "too high fallutin,'" as Notley coyly admits some of her own explanations might be seen to be, we might understand the atemporality that the pursuit of absolute truth requires as a flexible temporal landscape, as Gertrude Stein aimed to achieve; a timescape that can keep pace with each audience member's particular affective tempo. Adam Frank writes beautifully about this aspect of Stein in conjunction with Bion's "Theory of Thinking," and with a fascinating emphasis on reverie that attends what he sees as Stein's poetics of trying to engender "experience of new knowledge" (Frank 98-109).

[113] "Beginning with a Stain," *Grave of Light* 174.

[114] Nelson 139. Nelson also points to a line from "World's Bliss," a poem Notley published the same year as *Dr. Williams' Heiresses*. The line goes: "—oh each poet's a / beautiful human girl who must die" (*Waltzing Matilda* 133).

sexes," a battle Notley certainly traded on in *Heiresses*, but leaves behind and is no longer interested in once she has rendered it and countered its ground with her own (Notley interview with Foster 71).

In Notley's insistence that poems come from the androgynous, hyphenated space of the male-female, rather than from one or the other after they have been differentiated—she doesn't abandon myth in the way that Rachel Blau DuPlessis urges us to do in the name of feminist poetics. For DuPlessis, myth is complicit in Modernism's (bad) politics:

> Destabilizing language, form, narrative has historically been the task of both modernist and postmodern innovation. But there is a central problem with these two twentieth-century movements of linguistic and formal critique. The problem is Gender Politics. Modernism has a radical poetics and exemplary cultural ambition of diagnosis and reconstruction. But it is imbued with a nostalgia for center and order, for elitist or exclusive solutions, for transforming historical time into myth. (Duplessis 152)

Rather than disinherit myth because of its historical imbrication with the patriarchy, Notley mythologizes even Modernism's bad politics, but she does so in a narrative that does not replace "historical time" with myth, but rather embeds myth in it. Neither does Notley write a history of Modernism that expands its canon by digging up and giving light to those excluded, marginalized poetesses that other feminist poetics claim.[115] Instead, Notley disobeys the dominant paradigms and begins "before the beginning" of the story,[116] before the patriarchy had laid all the ground, before males forgot that they, no matter their size, had females inside them who sometimes curled up and were given to take "dark naps." Out of the dreams that come during her own dark naps, Notley "[goes] back to myth for women's sake," myth which is just "a more formally organized thought-out dream," and in so doing returns "epic…to its own origins" (*Coming After* 103). The dream world, for Notley, is an arena in which agency is not correlated to gender; women can and do act there, participate in and author heroic stories that, once written, function as myths always do to represent and determine cultural values and belonging.[117]

These dark naps, that dark closet, resonate with one of the epigraphs to Jacqueline Rose's recent study, *Women in Dark Times*: "Darkness is a better form of freedom." The source of the epigraph is the painter Thérèse Oulton, whose work, Rose writes, "suggests that in order to understand what is wrong with the world, we must descend into the core of the earth" (Rose 243). What impresses and moves Rose in Oulton's work is her attempt, in Oulton's words, "to find a way of approaching the subject of paint less brutally" (quoted in Rose 247). In darkness, in descent, in the attempt to do less harm than the masters that have preceded and excluded them, Oulton and Notley share a poetics; and maybe when a poetics most resembles an ethics Notley's

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[115] See, for example, Kathleen Fraser's "The Tradition of Marginality."

[116]Notley's pivotal poem *Beginning with a Stain* from 1987 is the first of her works to explicitly engage the phrase "before the beginning," and this phrase will repeat, exactly or approximately, from that poem forward. This is discussed later in this chapter, but for specific recent examples see *Negativity's Kiss* 48, 56; *Certain Magical Acts* 8, 56; "How We Cause the Universe to Exist."

[117] See 49, 49n123, and 66 below.

disobedience can flicker out of presence for an instant. What Oulton wants to do is give voice to the medium she works in, which for her is paint.[118] For Notley the medium is words, is poetry, and perhaps most emphatically is voice. Notley wants to descend to that beginning where voice was simple, undifferentiated. In that beginning, as voice is, so is everything else. Only in one's real voice can one tell a true story, in Notley's cosmo-ontology of poetry (which ontology is inseparable from her understanding of what life is more generally). Language and voice are the media of poetry, as they are of story; and how stories are told determine how their subjects behave in the worlds they create. It is with voice—what she will call her "real voice," which tries to coincide with the "first voice"[119]—that a new origin story can be intuited and then told, can rival and replace the old one, can undo its bad determinations and render it "less brutally," thereby reducing the brutality it begets. As example, take Notley's rejection of the "scientific myth" of the Big Bang: "if we say the universe began in violence we will be violent" (Notley, "Town Hall").[120]

We might expect that Notley's dismissal of the Big Bang as "scientific myth" reflects a dismissal of or disdain for science in general— a dismissal that dissolves the difference between theory and myth by virtue of the diminutive claim to truth each term has, so that saying something is "only a theory" is no different from saying it's "just a myth." And we might expect this disdain to be a reaction against the masculinist history of science that not only excluded women from its practice but also served to justify their more general oppression and abuse—scientific misogyny as cousin to scientific racism. Against these expectations, though, we will find that Notley makes a number of scientistic claims about her work, claims which resemble science more than any other descriptive system in their assumption of an objective and measurable capture of non-contingent truth.[121] Notley's dismissal of the Big Bang as "scientific myth" returns the Big Bang to the realm of myth so that its aftermath can be rewritten. But before it can be rewritten it will have to be dreamed—dreamed, formalized into better myth, written as and determining of a better (ongoing) history. This structure by which the real and

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[118] Oulton: "Landscape is treated as inanimate….It is to the detriment of everything that is treated as 'out there,' including women. [Landscape] is dying because of that treatment as though it had no life but were mute, victim. I'm trying to develop a method that allows that which is mute—the paint—to have a voice" (*Flash Art* 127). Or, more recently: "that 'overlooked' that I want to paint, the material that gets overlooked as the eye looks for the subject. Not only in the detail" (Oulton interview with Nicholas James).

[119] Notley, *Coming After* 166.

[120] As I've tried to make Notley keep company with Oulton in the fuller freedom darkness provides, I'll also add Muriel Rukeyser to the order. Rukeyser writes, in *The Life of Poetry*, "When the poem arrives with the impact of crucial experience, when it becomes one of the turnings which we living may at any moment approach and enter, then we become more of our age and more primitive. Not primitive as the aesthetes have used the term, but complicated, fresh, *full of dark meaning*, insisting on discovery, as the experience of a woman giving birth to a child is primitive" (Rukeyser 172, italics mine).

[121] Notley's investment in truth is, to say the least, unfashionable. As Maggie Nelson writes, "Notley has repeatedly said that her poetic experiments do not pursue beauty, novelty, or aesthetic greatness; rather, they search for truth. 'Truth' hasn't enjoyed much popularity as a concept in any field, poetic or otherwise, for quite some time now, and Notley's unembarrassed use of it differentiates her—sometimes vociferously—from a whole host of fellow poets and thinkers" (Nelson 148).

actual world must pass first through dream and then through myth before becoming the reality—the material—science lays claim to and describes is Notley's redressment of that original mistake by which "the split between conscious and unconscious began with the almost universal banishment of women from public and political life" (*Coming After* 177). The dream-realm is uncreated space, undifferentiated and unclaimed. So it is that women might be revealed to be "dream masters"; so it is that the "First Woman" might be sought and found to speak, found to tell the story of the dream she is the source of, and tell it as myth whose referent is the same as science's universe (177).[122]

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Disobedience, as we have seen, and beginning before the beginning—as we will continue to see—are essential parts of what, throughout Notley's career, becomes a strengthening assertion that poetry might make or reveal another world. (The phrase 'make or reveal another world' is imprecise. As will become clear in what follows, Notley's claim is that poetry might [can] be involved in the revelation of a world whose making it [Poetry] is inseparable from.) Disbelieving in everything, preempting the world's origin—or pre-emptying it— these permit the making of a new universe "out of the old stuff newly unidentifiable" (Notley, "How We Cause the Universe to Exist"). The old stuff is not only epic and myth, but also the self before it couldn't stand itself and had to be undone: "there is another world, and there are moments when one, anyone, is there. . . .you have been touched by the 'gods' and are in a true life-and-death or life-and-love moment, and the world as materialism vanishes. Epic has a connection to myth, and myth a connection to dream. Epic can be the poem of who you really are, of what in you has been forced down into dream" (Notley, *Interim* 98).[123] Vanishing "the world as materialism," and discovering a true self ("who you really are") are not the goals we expect contemporary poetry to set for itself, especially if we want to understand disobedience as something other than an anachronistic obedience.

And we do, but there comes a point in writing about Notley in a way that neither disobeys academic form nor one's better judgment at which one has to figure out how to let herself off the hook, how to guarantee the visibility of Notley's more extreme claims—be those claims anachronistic, metaphysical, solipsistic, irrational, etc., depending on your taste or distaste—while also recognizing those claims as integral to the work, and while supporting the work's value and continuance. In Maggie Nelson's wonderful chapter on Notley, and just after the moment where Notley endorses "meditating alone in one's closet" as the best approach to the truth, Nelson mildly disclaims, "whatever one thinks of her current position, the aesthetic question remains, what kind of poetry has Notley produced in its sway?" (Nelson 163). The implicit answer to Nelson's question is that Notley has produced poetry that is certainly worth

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[122] We will return, more than once, to the "First Woman"—to her incarnation as Alette, heroine of *The Descent of Alette*, Notley's most well-known work—whose name came to Notley in a dream; "I dreamed the name," Notley writes (Notley, *Disembodied Poetics* 105).

[123] In "Epic and Women Poets" Notley gives a fuller account of the relationship between dream, myth, and epic; as she also explains the role of measure and voice in the discovery and invention of the feminist epic.

thinking about, and it makes good sense to position the aesthetic question—and the poetry that answers it—as valuable despite "what one thinks" of Notley's "current position" and the ideas that are synonymous with that position, but it also undervalues the epistemological force of Notley's poetry and the kind of mental activity she claims her poetry enables. For my moment of reckoning with the dangers Notley's claims deliver us unto I want to make a bid for understanding Notley's claims as claims to non-knowledge, as nonknowledge themselves, as unknowing with positive content. Understanding them thusly allows them to remain transmissible without becoming transactional. As soon as a claim is a claim to knowledge it conscripts agreement or disagreement and marshals itself as fulfillment of a lack; a claim to nonknowledge might allow us to take these ideas seriously without having to buy them or not buy them. In this way nonknowledge is theoretical and remains that way: it is used by being tested and aims not to prove itself, but something on its other side.

What I intend by nonknowledge comes closest to Barbara Johnson's account of it, though there are of course many other accounts. In Johnson's work, nonknowledge, underwritten by Mallarmé, becomes essential to her understanding of writerliness and its relation to action (a relation the oft-used phrase "poetry and politics" also intends to capture).[124] Nonknowledge is crucial to how Johnson inflects this relation with feminism and to the larger project of unseating the masters of knowledge and the relation to knowledge their installment ensures. Nonknowledge and the process of unknowing that produces it allow one "to become conscious of the fact that what one thinks is knowledge is really an array of received ideas, prejudices, and opinions" (*A World of Difference* 84). So it is that nonknowledge becomes an emblem of the "feminization of authority," the label for a practice that "retain[s] the plurality of forces and desires within a structure that would displace the One-ness of individual mastery" (85). In Johnson's work this practice, this kind of and relation to knowledge, is carefully traced and modestly presented as a pedagogical aim that her own writing ceaselessly performs. Johnson's performativity is an answer to Mallarmé's own and that which he inspired in Derrida[125], and nonknowledge finds its figure in Mallarmé's dark lace; for, Mallarmé writes,

> *[O]n n'écrit pas, lumineusement, sur champ obscure, l'alphabet des astres, seul, ainsi s'indique, ébauché ou interrompu ; l'homme poursuit noir sur blanc.*
>
> *Ce pli de sombre dentelle, qui retient l'infini, tissé par mille, chacun selon le fil ou prolongement ignoré son secret, assemble des entrelacs distants où dort un luxe à*

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[124] Johnson, "Is Writerliness Conservative," *A World of Difference* 26-31.

[125] See "The Double Session" in Derrida's *Dissemination.*

For this chapter's justification for the absence of any examination of how nonknowledge and analogous concepts have figured in the thought of thinkers as tremendously important as Kant (not to mention more recent thinkers like Bataille and Agamben). In a recent essay on Mallarmé Alex Ross has summarized Mallarmé's importance to this tradition of thinking in French theory very well: "Perhaps [Mallarme's] most prolonged resonance was in French philosophy and theory. From Sartre and Lacan to Blanchot and Derrida and on to Badiou, Julia Kristeva, and Jacques Rancière, French thinkers have defined themselves through interpretations of Mallarmé. If you can crack these poems, it seems, you can crack the riddles of existence." Although not all of these theorists and philosophers take up nonknowledge, its quality and structure in Mallarmé's work is no doubt what allows them to produce so much knowledge on the grounds of his poems.

inventorier.

> [O]ne does not write, luminously, on a dark field; the alphabet of stars alone does that, sketched or interrupted; man pursues black upon white.
>
> This fold of dark lace, which retains the infinite, woven by thousands, each according to the thread or extension unknowing a secret, assembles distant spacings in which riches yet to be inventoried sleep.[126]

These paragraphs come from a short piece called "Restricted Action," in which Mallarmé is responding to a Comrade who has "confided his need to act" (*Divigations* 215). To act, Mallarmé surmises, amounts to "violent fisticuffs with the idea," which any reader of Mallarmé will know is not a good thing, as the idea is, ideally, all there is.[127] To further demean the object (action) of his comrade's inquiry, Mallarmé goes on to assume that by action his comrade means "to produce on many a movement that gives you the impression that *you* originated it, and therefore exist: something no one is sure of." This definition of action leads easily to an image of text and its circulation—an impression, a movement, a self in complicated situation in relation to these impressions and movements. It follows, without surprise, that only "literary action" can satisfy the full force of his young comrade's need: "your act is always applied to paper; for meditating without a trace is evanescent, nor is the exalting of an instinct in some vehement, lost gesture what you were seeking" (216-217). In her essay "Is Writerliness Conservative?" Johnson picks up Mallarmé's "unknowing a secret" and returns it as nonknowledge:

> Mallarmé is here suggesting that action cannot be defined otherwise than as the capacity to leave a trace—a written trace, a trace not of clarity but of darkness. It is with his obscurity, his nonknowledge, that man writes, and the poet's duty is to stand as guardian of an ignorance that does not know itself, an ignorance that would otherwise be lost. (Johnson, *A World of Difference* 30)[128]

In this obscurity and darkness we should take a dark nap, recognize the better form of freedom that Oulton finds in darkness, and the corresponding reduction in brutality—no fisticuffs. To unknow a secret is to take unknowing as a mode capable of acknowledging what cannot be disclosed as knowledge but is nevertheless true, or at least has the feel and function of truth.

To elaborate this function, I'll turn briefly to Lyn Hejinian, member of that "sudden generation" that Notley notes.[129] Hejinian develops a poetics of unknowing from which follows a kind of ethics of alterity:

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[126] Johnson's translation. *A World of Difference,* 29. She has translated the entire prose piece, "Restricted Action" in *Divigations*.

[127] See "Music and Letters" in *Divigations* 189, and also "Igitur" and the 1897 preface to "Un Coup De Des" in Mallarmé's *Selected Poetry and Prose* 91-101, 105-106."

[128] There are interesting parallels between this sense of obscurity and Glissant's work on obscurity, discussed on pages 65-66 below.

[129] See note 108 above.

> Poetry comes to know that things are. But this is not knowledge in the strictest sense; it is, rather, acknowledgement—and that constitutes a sort of unknowing. To know *that* things are is not to know *what* they are, and to know *that* without *what* is to know otherness (i.e., the unknown and perhaps unknowable). Poetry undertakes acknowledgement as a preservation of otherness—a notion that can be offered in a political, as well as an epistemological, context. (Hejinian, *The Language of Inquiry* 2)

Hejinian's redrafting of knowledge requires the admission that what I intend by nonknowledge might also be—or might just be—conceived of as knowledge, but different, which difference would consist in a greater identity between thinking and knowing rather than conceiving of knowledge as a product of thinking. It is very much this rethinking of knowing as a concept, experience, and a practice that Hejinian's essay "The Quest for Knowledge in the Western Poem" accomplishes.[130] Hejinian understands knowledge to be "not an entity but a function—it would best be called 'knowing'—and the purpose of that function is to contextualize—to contextualize in the profoundest sense, so that knowledge is not only knowing *of* (which is experience *in potentia*) and knowing *that* (which generates propositions) but also knowing *how*" (223, emphasis hers). In addition to its purpose—profound contextualization—Hejinian emphasizes knowing's tendency to reside in the interstices:

> Knowledge is based on the experience of the disjuncture between what's seen and what's thought—on the alterations cast by reflection, on thought's own alterity. In fact, if it weren't *other,* at least momentarily, we wouldn't experience it at all, because we wouldn't notice our noting it. (227)

Knowledge's alterity, its being between, is attended by its transitivity: "knowledge is of something" (226). As a function that can take a direct object, knowing—in Hejinian's sense—transforms what is known by revealing its uncertainty and, following Henry James, the tendency of the object of the knowledge to be identical to that knowledge's expression. Hejinian's quest, her performance of the "profound contextualization" of the function that knowing is, performs just the sort of transformation of knowledge that Elizabeth Grosz calls for in "Feminism and the Crisis of Reason," where one of the many aspects of this crisis is that "knowledge is outside of history, capable of being assessed and reevaluated independently of the time and space of its production. Knowledges do not carry the indexes of their origins" (Grosz 191). In Hejinian's essay "Reason," that titular term is also revealed—and thus transformed—to be participant in and integral to the recognition of the context one is in as real.

Returning to Mallarmé's modes of unknowing: in her gloss Johnson is emphatic in her use of the historically universal subject—"that man writes"—but she immediately turns on it, turns to the conjunction of a writerly understanding of "unknowing a secret"—writerliness now defined as "attention to the trace of otherness in language"— and the feminist project that discovers the "lies, secrets, silences, and deflections" of those "voices or messages not granted full legitimacy" in the history over which that universal subject (Man) presided (*A World of Difference* 30-31).

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[130] Also interesting to note that before it appeared in *The Language of Inquiry,* Hejinian's "Quest for Knowledge" appeared in *Disembodied Poetics,* the same volume as Notley's "Women and The Epic."

And so nonknowledge is delivered securely to the realm of the feminine, for not only has knowledge been denied to women in the history of education that excluded them from its transmission, but so also have they been unknown because of this exclusion—therefore the trope of their unknowability, the inability to make any sense of them.[131] The space of the unknown is a feminine space, and in this realm, where nonknowledge is, so too is poetry.[132] While Johnson's work tirelessly presents the repression of femininity, I'd like to expand the kinds of otherness permitted to remain in this realm to include forms of sexual difference that are not necessarily feminine, and indeed other forms of difference that are not containable by the notion of sexual difference.[133] For this same reason I want to claim that there is more to nonknowledge than its

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[131] Johnson's "Teaching Ignorance" develops nonknowledge as ignorance to formulate a feminist pedagogy; she begins with a reading of Molière's *L'Ecole des femmes* (*School for Wives*) in which Agnes acquires an education beyond that on offer by her two rival teachers and the culture at large (17th century England) in which women's education is limited to what a woman needs to know in order to perform her tasks as a wife, mother, and daughter. "[At] the intersection of contradictory lessons" Agnes "[discovers an] intelligence" beyond the forms of dependency to which her teachers mean to confine her. In fact, the feminist pedagogy Johnson founds is rival to that of the OG Western pedagogues; her chapter concludes with a reading of the *Phaedrus* in which, she coyly writes, "Plato's belief in Socrates' pedagogical mastery is an attempt to repress the inherent 'feminism' of Socrates' ignorance" (*A World of Difference* 82, 85).

[132]Johnson finds another instance of the repression of femininity—a femininity that again adheres to the figure of Socrates— in Plato's expulsion of poetry (and all mimetic art) from the republic. The poetry at fault for this expulsion is Socrates' poetry: it is poetry that represents and stimulates "overflowing emotions" and so "unrepresses the real" that had been repressed with difficulty for the sake of philosophy. "The poetry that is expelled from the city, then, is equated with femininity," and this expulsion guarantees the primacy of philosophy (and patriarchy): "a certain censorship of sexual difference—one that confined women to the duties of reproduction—permitted the birth of philosophy" (Johnson, "Correctional Facilities" 158, 159).

[133] This allows the accommodation of Agnes Martin, who did not identify as a woman or as any specific other to that presumed or performed identity. So, this realm is the realm of nonknowledge and the realm in which the white-supremacist-hetero-patriarchy, as it is called in common parlance, does not hold sway. Johnson herself problematizes the binarity of sexual difference and asks after an alternative to it that does not return to a universalism that fails to recognize difference (Johnson, *Reader,* 176).

While Martin's refusal to identify as a woman is taken to be a consequence of her standing "with her back to the world," more useful is thinking of this refusal as part of what her poetics and paintings enable (see pages 12-22 of Part I above). Marion Milner, in *The Supressed Madness of Sane Men,* is an interesting analogue. Milner is struggling to understand patients who experience "the paradox of being able to feel oneself in non-existence while continuing to exist," but experience this as devastating: "For them non-existence was apparently thought of as forever, a total annihilation rather than a phase in the creative process of 'lifting an image out of the stream of perception.'" In describing the non-pathological experience of being able to "lift an image this way,"—which is quite obviously the category Martin would belong to—Milner is quoting Lao Tze, a text she arrived at via Suzuki, as did Martin. Shortly following the description of this creative process that "goes back to non-existence," an elaboration of the enabling conditions of that process, we find: "He who being a man remains a woman will become a universal channel" (quoted in Milner 262). Notley never mentions an interest in Lao Tze, nor would she necessarily admit of any non-poetic influence, but both the tunneling back before existence and the hermaphroditic figure that becomes a "universal channel"—an undifferentiated medium—certainly harmonize with her poetics.

being either a positively recast lack of knowledge—as Johnson discovers a "positive ignorance"—or a feminine other to a masculine knowledge (*A World of Difference* 85).

Nonknowledge is not a plea to expand what counts as knowledge so that "women's knowledge" can be included (though interesting work has been done in the service of just this), and so that "knowing by experience" and "knowing how" are as valuable as "knowing that."[134] As neither a lack of nor other to knowledge, nonknowledge is the material with which one thinks. It is for this reason that there is no contradiction between an idea and nonknowledge. In the realm of nonknowledge ideas can circulate without having to be true or possessed, but freely within a different economy productive of a different sociality—their circulation structured by a different set of forces than those that order man's world. As a radical negation of the known, nonknowledge does not seek admittance to an accommodationist epistemology. Philosophers, epistemologists, theorists, etc. are masterful thinkers and masters of knowledge—they possess and generate knowledge. For these masters, thinking both requires knowledge and produces more knowledge, and it is knowledge that leads to the truth: knowledge is possessed and claimed, which activity guarantees truth as property too.[135] But when nonknowledge is used for thinking, it is what thoughts are made of, rather than what man is thinking of. By incorporating its object rather than possessing it, thinking with nonknowledge lets thinking itself be true and insists that truth's confirmation cannot be the known. Nonknowledge can express truth without claiming it, without even claiming to know the truth it expresses. If nonknowledge is to Poetry what knowledge is to Philosophy, then Poetry's truth will be seen to be theoretical too, but in a scientific sense—science whose truth can be measured, but cannot be entirely known or confirmed by belief.[136]

So, nonknowledge is required to take seriously Notley's claim that poetry, by its very saying, causes the universe to exist or by fiat reveals another world that we are really in, but this

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[134] Vrinda Dalmiya and Linda Alcoff's essay "Are 'Old Wive's Tales' Justified?" in *Feminist Epistemologies* makes the case for both of these forms of knowledge by contrasting the knowledge of midwives and obstetricians.

[135] This is not true of all truths, like the truth of God. But we are here in a secular universe with a God myth, the truth of which God accords with nonknowledge. In other words, to avoid having to defer to the knowers to represent the situation of truth in the context of secularity I will say instead that in writing this chapter there was often occasion to use the word "faith," but I consistently mistyped it as "failth." Or, in other words, it is by way of nonknowledge that [G]Notley busts up the m[a]nopoly on gnosis.

[136] If the claim to science seems unreasonable it is so because it is Notley's claim. Whether or not we dismiss it because of its unreason, we should at least grant that one of the permissions afforded to science but not so easily to the kinds of philosophy/theory a dissertation on thinking (and reason, soon) would be expected to include is the possibility of a lay understanding. This lay understanding is what Notley wants for her poetry: "it isn't true unless anyone can understand it" (*Close to Me*, preface). Or, in the face of this unreason should one accuse Notley or this essay of substituting for knowledge a fantasy of its other, I would take Rose's example in insisting that taking fantasy seriously is a way of "paying tribute to what a mind is capable of" (Rose, "This is Not a Biography" 14).

Looking forward to the section on Sylvia Wynter below, this claim to science is also a retrieval of science from the "order of non-adaptive cognition" established as "natural sciences" (Wynter, "On How We Mistook the Map for the Territory" 141).

shouldn't be confused with the idea that poetry can *change* the world, especially in a political sense.[137] Notley is a visionary poet, as she herself claims, and disobedience is the path not only to vision but also to sight, to seeing the real rather than the agreed-upon real[138]: "I felt myself pushing against ideas of reality as solely what's visible and in what shapes and colors it's said to be visible.…, against the pervasive idea that one must not protest what everyone else has named the actual" (Notley, "The Poetics of Disobedience"). For Agnes Martin the emphasis was on a return to a state of "innosense," very often associated with childhood, from which one could make a full response, unconditioned by ideas about or understandings of the world. For Notley, disobedience enables a regression not to the infancy of the individual but to the world's own infancy. She takes us before the beginning of the world because from there issue not only clear thinking and honest writing but "states of grace" from which we can apprehend that as the world was before its beginning, so it is now and, thanks to this, the world is other than it is. In the beginning there was a "crystal city" and we are still in it.[139]

The infant world is alternative to the present world, the "late and ugly" world defined by the voices that issue from the agents of its ruination (*Coming After* 168). Notley explains the need for both the world and poetry to re-originate: "What a poem is, how it is good—what it looks and sounds like overall, the kinds of subjects it's concerned with—all of this since when? since shortly after known history began, has, worldwide, been addressed by men"; these men have "invented 'our' system"—and here she means not only our poetic system but also our entire episteme—and have only allowed "some input" from "like-minded" women who do not challenge their remaining "self-perpetuatingly powerful in the tiny glassed-in bubble that contains all the master controls" (*Coming After* 167, 170). The problem with known history, the reason it is inadequate to the task of answering questions about what poetry is, is not least a problem with the voice in which it's told, the contexts and sexed bodies in and by which the knowledge a voice has to say is produced.[140] To counter this problem Notley poses experiment after experiment designed to test what the world can be if its story is told by a different voice, from a different viewpoint.[141]

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[137] See pages 51, 166 of *Coming After* for examples of this stance.

[138] I mean this phrase to recall Martin: "[We] have created a world of ideas that does not actually exist. / The political world is a structure conceived and agreed to by us but it is not a reality. / You have been conditioned to believe that this political world is in fact real" (*Writings* 137).

[139] Notley, "Town Hall." The Crystal City figures in *Reason and Other Women*, discussed below, and more fully in *Benediction.*

[140] Relevant to this point is Grosz's careful articulation of knowledge's relation to "sexually specific (male) bodies." Grosz's aim is to draw out the implications that "*sexed corporeality* may have on relations between knowers and objects known and on the forms, methods, and criteria of assessment governing knowledges today" (188).

[141]In explaining her collection of essays, Notley describes her attempt to "be clear, and not consciously innovative in language," while at the same time "[wanting] to invent a viewpoint *in each instance* according to what was required, that is, to see what was there without a predetermined terminology or logic getting in the way" (*Coming After* v). And elsewhere: the poet's business is "to test, *continuously*, assumptions rather than assume them" (159).

The concern with voice is evident in *Dr. Williams' Heiresses*, as are intimations of the relationship between voice and measure that will proliferate and expand and come to characterize Notley's best known works. In *Heiresses*, Notley expresses little more than an intuition that the variable foot had something to do with transmitting a permission to speak her poems in a true voice; soon thereafter she will articulate and perform a sense of measure that combines voice with a signature patterning[142] that guarantees its true expression (and the truth of its expression), and her poetics will acquire a metaphysics that has no father, not even the good doctor:

> But the real question is, is that a real question? What might be another kind of poetry? Whole other poetry springing from nowhere, as at the beginning of the world, in the hands of women? Or perhaps even more desirably, as at the beginning of the world, invented equally by women and men together. Not as now, already made out of men. Do you follow me? . . . What would it be like to make a female poetry? Is that possible? A desirable way to conceive an undertaking? . . . Can there ever be any value in sexual polarization of activity? Is there feminine and masculine? . . .
>
> The question then perhaps becomes, What is it like at the beginning of the world? I mean hopefully now—but the world is late and ugly. But we pretend anyway that we are the first ones, we open our mouths for the first time (there never was such a time), we speak with the first voice ever (there never was such a voice—what do we say? Why must we have a poetry? And who are we? We see now that we are the world and the world is poetry, that words are our poetry, while other pieces of the world have other poetries—birds have their songs but also plants have their forms and patternings and the sky has its own look and process: poetry is the surface and texture and play of being, including the light that springs up in things from their depths. Then what is a poem? The poems are everywhere, we walk among them—an infinitude of them occupying the same boundariless space—what are they? Our knowings of what is: born to know we are each being, born to be aware in the heart of being, we gently define shapes of being, in words, which are free of dimensions, free of cause and effect. . .
>
> Where is the poem? Where can it be? The poem we can't find is a whole new earth . . . Women and Poetry, wasn't that my subject? Finally we are allowed to write but the world is dying—the poems are dying—the literal ones I mean, at least seemingly. In this ridiculous inescapable and tawdry material world we women are allowed now what? To make more of it, more of that, more stuff. But not to remake it. Not to change it from the ground up and walk out onto the earth as if it were its first morning. . . .Everything must change and very very soon. Women and poetry, is a joke—Where is the world? Where is the first world? We must find it as soon as possible. (*Coming After* 166-169)

We should understand her search for and performance of the "first voice" as both mythological and literal; or, if we cannot go so far as to take this voice literally, given that "there never was such a voice," we at least have to grant that it occurs in literalized form to the poet. The mythological first voice preempts the story of the world that has already been voiced, communicated, assumed, and authorized as history. This is the voice of the "first woman"

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[142] This signature patterning characterizes her best-known work, *The Descent of Alette,* though it appears elsewhere first. It will be discussed at length later.

sought after and found in *The Descent of Alette,* a name (Alette) that came to Notley in a dream (*Disembodied Poetics* 104). Not only because of its literariness, but also because of its origins in dreams, as a name Alette demands to be read. The first syllable, *Al-,* is not only the beginning of Alice and of aleph, but also the root that denotes otherness (as in *alterity* and *allegory*); and the second syllable, *-ette* denotes either diminutiveness, femininity, or imitation (*kitchenette*, *suffragette, leatherette*, respectively). Alette as other Adam, whom Alice ordered to be made and made audible.[143]

To make the mythological first voice audible, Notley will tunnel back before the beginning of the world's story—before any voice had yet claimed or told its story—in order to speak with a voice that might be indistinguishable from the set of forces that structure the world, a voice that is or is rival to the divine/mythological voice that spoke the world and what would become its history into existence, or so the story goes.

To take the first voice literally we have to confuse it with our own voice and we have to understand that the personal individual sometimes owes her speech to other voices; we have to understand the speaker in all her vulnerability before and commitment to the voices that speak to and through her, often from beyond death.[144] Whether or not the mythological first voice that Notley pursues is the voice that never was, this voice nevertheless becomes heard from as the dead speak from and as it. So it is in *Close to Me and Closer… (The Language of Heaven)* when the poet's father's voice speaks to the poet and in the poems. Parent of the poet's own voice, and so perhaps the first voice she ever heard, this is a first voice that returns to be heard, literally, as she explains in the preface:

> I remember feeling very happy writing it, waking up mornings with my dead father's voice in my head. In order to write his speeches properly I had to have faith that that was his literal voice I heard. I let the voice dictate to me exactly what to write with very little interference from "my" rationalizing self. I had begun the work in the thought that metaphysics and religion would never be rightly discussed unless in an ordinary way by an ordinary mind: "it isn't true unless anyone can understand it." I hadn't heard my father speak in fifteen, sixteen years, but one never forgets a parent's voice, and he just took over. I have no way of knowing any more how true to his real speech I've been . . . It was surprising and inspiring to catch his meanings in my poem as he stumbled toward the true definition of measure: "what is measured." I'm loath to say he didn't <u>really</u> dictate his part of the poem; and I feel the daughter's parts of the dialogue are nowhere near as good as the father's. He bested me. He should have, he had the knowledge of the dead. (*Close to Me* preface)

The first voice that never was is countered by the lost voice that is itself again; in its literality this

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[143] Cf. "Alice Ordered Me To Be Made," *Grave of Light* 33.

[144] There is a kind of harmony between beginning before the beginning and the first voice on the one hand and the ability to hear the voice of someone who has died on the other. And there is an additional harmony: before the beginning of the world was an original unity much like Martin's sense of the Classic, or Yeats' understanding of Byzantium. (See Notley *Coming After* 85 for epic and unity, 146 for voice and unity. For Yeats on Byzantium as expressive of this unity, see his 1930 letter to T. Sturge Moore in *Collected Letters* 5390 and his notes in *Explorations* 290).

voice addresses the speaker intimately in her daily life. The poet "had to have faith" that the voice was literally his and this faith was conferred by her recognition of it as the voice she remembered: "one never forgets a parent's voice." In this paragraph Notley both insists the voice was literal and the poems an attempt to be "true to his real speech," and also confesses, "he didn't <u>really</u> dictate his part of the poem." This confession happens quickly and is attached, via a semicolon, to an evaluation of the parts of the poem that belong to the two voices, the father's and the daughter's. It is not difficult to accept the confession that the dead father wasn't really talking to the poet, and we might even feel some relief; neither is it difficult to understand that the daughter does not equal the poet. But, that the dead speak her poems to her is a claim Notley makes again and again, a claim that somehow withstands the confession of its own untruth. Whether or not we give any credence to the claim that the dead return in order to beget Notley's poems, they require that we suspend our belief or disbelief and read as if they (the dead) do. Reading *Close to Me* we see that the father returns with clear purpose in order to teach the daughter how to think as the dead do (7). He explains that there was "an Initiation, into . . . how they think here," and this initiation is ambiguously compared to, possibly identical with, his initiation into the Masons. He goes on:

> I'm <u>telling</u> <u>you</u> these things, so you can live. And not . . . air, not live in air. Because here isn't really, either — But it isn't air — I can't <u>explain</u> it good. In the Initiation, all they did, someone with a white arm, sleeve, put a cup — maybe a <u>sea</u>shell — against my ear. Because what thinking is, is <u>hearing</u>. Hearing yourself think. Even if it right away becomes something . . . you <u>do</u> then. If you can listen, you can think, in the <u>true</u> way. Then the thought comes from nowhere. Where's nowhere? Is that where <u>I</u> am? Maybe. Anyway that's how to think, alive or dead. Even when . . . god thinks, the thought comes from nowhere, which seems to be <u>inside</u> <u>god</u>. To make a thing — you hear the thought, to do . . . whatever, <u>next</u>, as you make it. That's how the universe . . . got made, & that's how I'm telling you, these things. Well actually — we're <u>both</u> listening. The truth <u>comes</u>. Reality . . . comes. You don't, tinker with it till it <u>is</u>, what you want. (9)

The underlining and ellipses here are how measure is made; they modulate the spaces between phrases and are mimetic of a search for something just beyond reach, or something that you expect but that may not come—trying to remember a dream, eavesdropping on voices that flicker in and out of earshot. In the lines "The truth <u>comes</u>. Reality . . . comes. You don't, tinker with it till it <u>is</u>, what you want," the underlining cuts against the parallelism between truth and reality as subjects: both truth and reality come, but they don't both <u>come</u>; reality appears regularly (it just comes), but truth's arrival has been "tinkered with." The commas, too, participate in this measure, but they also function more regularly to impact the semantic content of a sentence and to modulate the naturalness of the syntax—they either make it seem like natural speech or denature it:

> I asked someone, could there, have not been, anything . . . a universe, or earth, or god . . . They said, that's words that's still, the old thinking, like you did on earth. The idea of, nothing, that's like, that there are <u>opposites</u>. There aren't opposites, something/ nothing . . . Everyone laughed. <u>Nothing</u> isn't . . . it's mostly, an <u>idea</u>. God <u>fills</u> everything. "Everything" . . . though, doesn't <u>mean</u> anything either, as a word. When you become . . . a dot, listening to, the one thought, <u>that's</u> "everything". (9, underlining

and elipses are Notley's)

For the most part, the commas here represent the simultaneity of thinking and speaking, thinking through speech: "The idea of, nothing, that's like, that there are opposites." But, when the commas come in slightly awkward places—as in the lines "They said, that's words that's still, the old thinking, like you did on earth" where we expect a comma separating "that's words" and "that's still"—they reveal the strenuous necessity of listening, they are the technology by which speech is recorded in units that we can make heard into thoughts: "To make a thing — you hear the thought, to do . . . whatever, next, as you make it." In this line Notley uses all of the modulating marks of her measure. As a kind of diacritics these marks emphasize the auricularity of the language on the page, make us aware of our own listening, and—in being said-thoughts about thinking—reveal thinking to be a kind of hearsay. Recombining Notley's disobedience (her refusal to buy other people's thoughts and ideas) and the claims made in this book about the identity between thinking and listening, we are left with a situation in which thinking is itself a communicative act, and when a mind is initiated—which is analogous to Agnes Martin's notion of the unconditioned mind—there is a kind of telepathy between minds, easier to achieve in the dream world but available in waking life too, by way of the poem and its carriage of voice.[145]

The aim of the father's speech is to help his listener think like the dead, which also provides a more general help, a comfort in "horrible times" (preface). The listener should "become a dot": "When you become . . . a dot, listening to, the one thought, that's "everything" (9). The "dot" makes a visual pun with the way the father's sections are notated. The daughter—who is not only the dreaming poet but the listener/reader too—is given a physical location to imagine herself in and this location, this dot, both traverses all of the father's thoughts and structures his speech, which speech is an articulation of the heard-thinking to which they are "both listening." For its part, the daughter's own speech is "characterized by mid-line capital letters which signal, quickly (other punctuation's too slowing), the beginning of a new foot or subline,"[146] which looks like this:

> Why do we make
> ourselves aliens
> We must invent ourselves
> mustn't we To be here to make
> a sea of difference
> For humans are
> nothing Unlike apes
> & birds & fishes
> Who understand themselves […]
> But we are aliens

[145] Notley's claims about telepathy will be discussed below, but are easily seen in the father's next speech in *Close to Me,* where he "transfer[s] a shape" by way of his speech and describes this shape as both the body of the listener—it is a "body shape" and "It's got a head," and "It's all of you. It's anyone. Without anything. It might be dead you . . . or sort of, you not born yet. Or you like . . . someone who doesn't know you, thinks about you"— and "the idea of there being shapes." By his speech, he initiates the speaker and gives her the technology she needs for the "transfer" to be successful (11).

[146] Preface.

fretting to belong here
Inventing words & frets
Inventing folksongs In-
venting rich & poor And
the song of that
Sing back Sing
Back into
Origin tongue
Poetry The
tongue to
touch the
beginning
It's all we have
Poetry
It is the Human difference
Though we've forgotten
But we are poets
We must not forget That we are poets
Ever again (10)

The signatures of the daughter's voice—the capital letters that come either at the beginning of a line or mid-line—require that we, while reading/listening, activate the measure latent in her speech. We make this measure audible by performing for ourselves the tension that inheres between following the flow and rush of the unpunctuated lines, and abrupting into the separate units within this flow, phrases that are meant to be distinct from one another, these distinctions signaled by the capitalization. We can see from the lines quoted above that this book is concerned with arriving before the beginning, "Sing[ing] / Back into / Origin tongue" in order to "invent ourselves" in a way that will make the speaker not alien to but "heroine Of [her] story" (12). To re-version her story it has to occur to her in a measure she can use; and transferred with this measure is the ability to do thinking in the way the father wants her to—to think like the dead do. The book presents their exchange first as a dialogue, with clear difference between the ways their speech is scored on the page, but the two voices very quickly merge, imitate, and echo one another to such an extent that by the book's end both the formal notations for the two voices and the voices themselves have become indistinguishable:

I don't know which one of us is speaking
[…]
How can I live on earth?
By living in heaven
The dead will help
the dead are there with you

Meanwhile you have now told my 'story'
[…]
I know but you must wake up . . .
And live as the words

> of heaven,
> Not in the story of
> the living dead on earth
> I am all poet, not speaking
> You are all poet, speaking . . .
> You can be
> heaven on earth . . . (66)

While one could attempt to parse the voices and claim that the lines with ellipses are still the father's, following that logic would mean that the daughter's voice was silenced, that she is left only to say "I am… not speaking"; as it would also mean that the story that has been told is still the father's story, still his-story. So, the end of the book would have a dis-identity between poet and daughter if it also has an identity between father and daughter, preserving the paradox of the preface by which Notley records his "literal voice" while also confessing that "he didn't <u>really</u> dictate his part of the poem." The dis-identity at issue here is confirmation and enacting of what Notley understands to be a difference between an adaptable voice used in daily life and a truer voice that the process of writing a poem discovers. The melodramatic redemption that comes at the end of this book—the hubristic claim to transcend earthly existence not by dying and living in heaven, but by being "all poet" and "liv[ing] as the words / of heaven," thereby restoring earth—is accomplished via poetic voice, by the speakers' refusal to lapse back into "person voice."[147] Poetic voice is the "voice of the poem," not the person, and it comes from somewhere outside of the poet; or, if it is an "internal voice," its origin is not the same as one's regular voice: "the voice of the poem doesn't seem to come from the brain, i.e., the part of the person that willfully imposes preintentioned meanings or constructions" (*Coming After* 155). Notley's insistence on the distinction between Poet and person, and the voices that issue from each, renders these as two different classes of beings. But, as soon as the poetic voice is achieved and used, it undoes the difference between the consecrated voice of the poet-seer and the demotic voice of the ordinary person. The poetic voice, Notley writes, is "unitive": it reveals, restores, and authenticates the person whom it uses like a medium.[148]

The voice is capable of producing a recognition that is achieved as intimacy and experienced as authenticity and confirms that there is a "centered" and "unified self"[149]:

> Frank O'Hara was the first poet I ever read who 'sounded like me.' Obviously he doesn't sound at all like me or most of the many people who've reacted similarly to his work: he was a gay man from Massachusetts born in 1926, I'm a straight woman from the Southwest born in 1945. But poetry is intimacy, it's an instantaneous transferal of mind, and this poet…got right into my…the part of my head that has a silent tongue, and his waggled like mine. (*Coming After* 5)

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[147] *Closer to Me* 66. On "person voice" see "Voice" in *Coming After,* 147-157.

[148] *Coming After* 146, 147, 152-57.

[149] "There is in Western poetry no decentered self," a fact that Notley admits might be regrettable; elsewhere, though, she affirms that "there is a unified self and that the pronoun 'I' is a word which should be given back to people, who need it, but deepened" (*Coming After* 148, 164).

This intimacy is described as a literal possession, an occupation of her own head that also replaces it (interesting that Alette would later be headless, but would nevertheless manifest speech, despite having neither mouth nor tongue). The recognition of what she sounds like in the voice of another produces a further recognition of an exceptional self whose presence cannot be taken for granted. She tries to explain the point of such an identification: "I seem to believe anyone has a secret self, a rather delicately pondering inner person. Much of poetry exists to communicate with this entity. Its thoughts have the shape of speaking." Whether or not she is writing as an 'I,' as a "unified voice" or not, the voices speak in shapes that promote the assumption of just such a "secret self," she resumes: "It's thoughts have the shape of speaking, but it doesn't have to explain as much to itself as one does to another person: it doesn't, e.g., think in prose-fiction sentences at all. It sees while it thinks, self-observes often, constructs scenarios of triumph out of utter vulnerability, etc., etc., that it melts in and out of. And it suddenly rather selflessly 'understands'" (*Coming After* 6).

The poetic voice, though unitive, does not universalize. It is bound up with and must be filtered through the attributes and personality of the person (147, 163). The understanding that poetic voice enables and promotes is a gathering of variety under the unity to which it belongs, but this gathering doesn't dissolve the particulars within this variety. In a formulation that disobeys both Eliot and Olson less than we would expect, Notley speaks of a "transference," elsewhere described as telepathic,[150] of both an energy—as in Olson's "kinetics of the thing"—and a set of vivid percepts that have some part in disclosing "The Truth."[151] This disclosure requires that the poet "forgets herself" in a similar fashion to Eliot's requisite and momentary "extinction of personality" that the "objective correlative"—itself a transfer—requires.[152] *Close to Me & Closer . . . (The Language of Heaven)* begins as a dialogue, an exchange, in which the father comes to tell the daughter the story of becoming herself, which telling also initiates her into a mode of perception (thinking as the dead do and "touch[ing] the beginning") which will ensure that she never again forgets "That we are poets" and therefore access, embody, and perform this Truth by "tak[ing] the measure of" what this truth refers to (nothing less than "all there is").[153] The success of their exchange depends upon the measure each uses: their measures

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[150] "[A] voice carries poetry. I can almost imagine a poetry of telepathy: a transference of thought in which the density and simultaneity of thought are also transferred, obviating linearity and therefore voice. But time implies a voice, and though there might exist a sort of "page" meant to be taken in all at once and not linearly, the page would most probably have been constructed linearly, letter by letter, and that linear construction is the author's voice. An author's voice is existence and presentation in time…" (*Coming After* 149).

[151] Olson 51; Notley, *Coming After* vi.

[152] Notley, *Coming After* 153; Eliot 47, 92. And, should we be pressed for examples of the "art emotions" that Eliot's own formulation requires, we might take Notley's above description of emotions such as vulnerability and triumph that "melt" and are then recast as an understanding (Eliot 51).

[153] *Close to Me* 65.

My sense of performing and embodying truth as what it means to remember one's identity as Poet owes much to Marcel Detienne's book *The Masters of Truth in Archaic Greece.* Detienne's book describes the "transition from myth to reason" and the changing situation and definition of truth within this history (the history of ancient Greece and its extension into Western Civ. as we know it). Notley's

begin in distinction, but by the end of the book they hybridize and harmonize, speaking in a single measure that is product of the unitive force of poetry's issue. "Rhythm is bound up with living,"[154] Notley writes, and measure is how voice authenticates the truth it has to tell; so, by reverse-engineering measure's diversity—by recording in poetry a story of not only how we got from nothing to something, but also how we got so many different somethings—Notley offers us a view of the two primary voices of this book becoming, through the work of the book, undifferentiated, as undifferentiated as they were in the beginning when there was—they were—only the first voice.

Although we know that "there never was such a voice," we pretend anyway that we speak with it in order to discover the "first world" that might redeem the "late and ugly" world we are in (*Coming After* 170). The "first world" is a bad and gnostic pun, and what it names is paramount in Notley's poetics. As was the case in *Close to Me & Closer… (The Language of Heaven),* for Notley the resources required to vanish the "late and ugly" world, to find its redeemed other, and to undo the banishment of women from the public sphere of action and the split between the conscious and unconscious mind that resulted from this exclusion, often have their provenance in dreams: from dreams we discover myths which can then be written as

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project restores the unity between "diviner, bard, and king of justice" and the truth they have access to and declare, by which action it undoes the separation of discursive and "magicoreligious" aka "philosophicoreligious" aka "symbolicoreligious" truth that Detienne's book is an account of (Detienne 15-52). Detienne self-describes as an "archaeologist of truth" and his digs reveal that by "reciting the myth of emergence" the poet "collaborates directly in setting the world in order" (44). We might see Notley as advocating or accomplishing an atavistic return to an idealized Greece and restoring the identity between "diviner, bard, and king of justice," which ideal also resembles the unity Yeats saw in Byzantium; but it is important to insist on the feminist difference of her return: were she to collaborate and participate in ordering the world, were the world to unfold from her origin myths, what follows from the creation stories would still be cosmogonies and theogonies, but wouldn't have their human subjects idealized or universalized as the warriors of the Greek epics. The usefulness of Detienne is, in part, to show that Notley's isn't a patently anti-intellectual project, but rather opposes itself to the ways in which intellectual history and violent material history are entangled.

Simon Jarvis argues that although there is "no path 'back' through this history" which would restore the poet to the position of Detienne's "master of truth" and restore the truth-function of verse. Jarvis's summary of the history we cannot reverse is worth quoting: "Our own sense that prose is the natural medium for philosophy does not really testify to anything natural, but rather to something historical: to the defeat of a performative conception of truth, in which truth is the opposite of oblivion and is something done by the poet to somebody else, and its replacement with another set of conceptions, in which truth is the opposite of error and is established through dialogic argument, and has nothing in particular to do with poetry" (86). Jarvis argues that while there is no way back that will restore to poetry its purchase on truth, poetry retains its identity as "the very event of truth itself" through prosody, through meter, through those functions of language that are paralinguistic and extrasemantic. Meter is how poetry seems to say more than it says: "When the poet's mastery over truth is broken, what happens to his or her relationship to meters and rhythms in which that truth was, not clothed, but embodied? Do those worlds of sound really become mere ornaments, a series of miniature mimeses of whatever the semantic content happens to be at any given point? Or do they rather retain, through the long mutations and mutilations of history and tradition, a recollection of their supposedly immortal home – an impossible wish to be, not the garments or casket for true thinking, but the very event of truth itself?" (96).

[154] *The Scarlet Cabinet* vi.

epics.[155]

Before we follow her quest to "find a story for beginnings" I want to note that in her intense privileging of the origin story and the desire to return to its cradle, there is a resemblance between—on the one hand—Notley's description of the structure of the dream, myth, cultural belonging and agency, and—on the other—Édouard Glissant's description of "atavistic cultures" that are often synonymous with colonialist cultures, founded on and defined by a kind of right to return. The colonist's right to the land he occupies is presumed and vouchsafed by his primogeniture: the myth of his birth and birthright perfectly coincides with the creation myth itself. Atavistic cultures, Glissant writes, "draw legitimacy from a Genesis, a creation of the world, which they had intuited and transformed into a myth, the focus of their collective existence."[156] Opposed to atavistic cultures are "composite peoples… [who] have minimized the idea of Genesis" because, Glissant explains, "the fact is that the 'end' of the myth of Genesis means the beginning of [the] use of genealogy" (*Carribean Discourse* 141). Genealogy is the means by which atavistic cultures justify their exclusive claim to their territory: the genesis of genealogy generates also the logic by which a people belongs to the land, and it to them; its myth is therefore also responsible for the othering of others. Indeed, Glissant argues, "in the Western world" and its discourse, its systems of thought, "the hidden cause (the consequence) of both Myth and Epic is filiation" (*Poetics of Relation* 47). Filiation is the reason—the logic and cause—subtending Western self-understanding and it is the structure by which it bequeaths its conceptual and material legacy. Filiation guarantees both a "fixed linearity of time [which] moves always toward a projection, a project," and the sublimation of "the notion of individual dignity" into "the oppressive reality of private property" (*Carribean Discourse* 138). From this concept of time we get History ("the History of Western Civilization") as told by its only legitimate heir, the landed white Man whose dignity is conferred by his possession of property and which further confers his ability to act and impact history, to be the hero of that story.[157]

Man legitimates himself and his claim to the territory he occupies by way of the Genesis myth and this legitimacy is genetically communicable—he reproduces it by procreating and transfers it as property. To genesis and genealogy Glissant will add two other cognates: generalization and genre. Generalization describes the process by which Man universalizes himself as ideal subject so that Man (Western, landed, white) becomes the single figure in which all of being human is described and contained; anything outside of this description is Other, and any being in the position of the other has only two choices: "Either the other is assimilated, or else it is annihilated. That is the whole principle of generalization and its entire process" (*Poetics of Relation* 49).[158] By this logic one is either recognized as citizen or barbarian, and this recognition—recognition that depends on the other being transparent, knowable, understandable—draws the color line and determines racial relation. The project of the West—"The West is not the West. It is a project, not a place"—is a projective generalization of Western

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[155] See note 117 above.

[156] Glissant, "Identity and Diversity," quoted in *Calaban's Reason* 23.

[157] "History [with a capital *H*] is a highly functional fantasy of the West, originating at precisely the time when it alone 'made' the history of the world" (*Carribean Discourse* 138).

[158] See Glissant, *Poetics of Relation* 11-22; 47-63. Sylvia Wynter's work, discussed below, is concerned with just this process of generalization and its extension as genre.

Man's transparent universality (*Carribean Discourse* 2).

While Man requires that the other be transparent or be absolutely excluded, the "violence linked with filiation" that such exclusion entails is often rendered obscure by the genres in which he represents it (*Poetics of Relation* 52). Myth and Epic disguise the individual's violent response to the otherness of the other by embedding all heroic action within a structure with the ultimate goal of the community's successful realization of its "natural" right to domination; tragedy is engendered by a felt threat to the chain of filiation, and "tragic action" operates by way of an artful oscillation of "opacity and disclosure"—the truth of the threat is "unveiled"—because "the violence linked to filiation (the absolute exclusion of the other) cannot be faced head on nor all at once" (47-58). The novel and the poem, too, represent and reproduce the western project's making of History by conforming to its notions of temporality (a linear, teleological time) and the importance of the individual and his actions within it. The novel does this by harmonizing with this sense of time and by capturing the market on explorations of time in general[159]; the lyric by presenting revelation as a sudden, instantaneous flash—in keeping with the transparency that anything must possess in order to be apprehensible— and by its reliance on individual experience and speech, the self that speaks itself rather than being discovered and knowable through its relation to others (*Poetics of Relation* 25-35, 54-58). In his own work—poetry, prose fiction, and theory— Glissant accomplishes a revolt against the boundaries of these genres as he also performs a wandering, "errant," trajectory of thought and argument; its movement draws "open circles" that proliferate and "disindividuate Relation," circumscribing dialectic within the aesthetic, dethroning the hero who acts with a conception of action that is grounded in community. Where we used to find the warrior hero of western epics, we find instead "the man who walks…[toward] no goal or end," delivers not messages but gestures and rhythms; we recognize and honor him not in his transparency but in his obscurity, recognize his poetics as "a pure refusal that changes nothing in the world" but reconceives it, without this conception leading to another "legend of descent" (183-209).

Aware of the dangers of drawing an analogy between Notley's poetics of disobedience undergirded by white feminism and Glissant's decolonial subject founding new forms of expression and identity, aware also that there is no way to disappear the fact that in her rivalry of western patriarchy Notley reproduces some of its violent natures and tendencies, *and* produces a "legend of descent," I nevertheless find that the uneasy resemblance between Notley's obsessive re-beginnings and Glissant's atavistic cultures converts into a productive resonance.[160] A resonance—an echo—between the counterpoetics that Glissant's work recognizes and calls for and Notley's performance of a counterpoetics that values obscurity (that finds what is true by taking dark naps in dark closets) and overwrites the transparent, late and ugly (New) World with the founding of another one whose imagining takes precedence over the world as materialism. It

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[159] *Caribbean Discourse* 106, 136. Glissant faults the European novel on this count, but sees "The Novel of the Americas" as functioning quite differently and in fact searching for the accretive, involuting duration that Western, Indo-European generic tradition no longer includes. (*Poetics of Relation* 14-17; *Caribbean Discourse* 102-108, 134-142. For "The Novel of the Americas" see *Caribbean Discourse* 144-150.)

[160] Notley's origin myths are atavistic, but they also intend to deliver an undifferentiated culture in which identity is not conferred via sameness or difference; undifferentiation is produced by the recognition of everything's admixture. Notley wants to deliver an undifferentiated culture that is kin to Glissant's sense of a culture that protects diversity.

is in this sense that she wants to discover the first world. Obscurity, Glissant explains—as opposed to the "false transparency" that the West imposed on "[the] world they used to run"—"protects diversity" (*Poetics of Relation* 62, 114). Notley's quest for origins is atavistic, but the culture she intends to deliver is not homogeneous for being undifferentiated: undifferentiation is produced by everything's admixture; her vision thus "protects diversity" as order, culminating in the recognition that "chaos is not chaotic" (Notley, "Town Hall").[161] Notley's speaker returns to the beginning, as to chaos, to leave behind the story that projects order's triumph over chaos, the story of evolution's higher orders of being; in its place the Poet, "maker of order," insists that she was "formed across and return[s] to" a chaos in order for it to be "lightly reformed from" an undifferentiated community.[162]

To insist on inclusive undifferentiation is (in Glissant's terms) to refuse the "myth of the One" and the filiative "legend of descent" that extends from it, in favor of the "myth of the All" (*Poetics of Relation* 47). The refusal of filiation—both as a construction of nation and as a heteronormative determiner of one's position, either familial or aesthetic— is everywhere evident in Notley's work, and this refusal characterizes much of Glissant's own.[163] To understand the stakes and scale of this refusal and the territory this refusal wants to reclaim, I'll turn to Sylvia Wynter, who argues that Glissant's work—the resonances and crossings of his themes, no matter the genre he is writing in, and the discourse that is constituted by the movements of these themes—comprises an "instituting act of [a] new mode of revolt" (Wynter, "Beyond the Word of Man" 639). Glissant's discourse is an *act* that participates in a "a new uprising" directed against nothing less than: "conventional reason," "the present discourse," the whole "tradition of discourse on whose basis" Western Europe accomplished not only its founding of the universal subject as a notion—Man—but also its global expansion, the territory it claimed and colonized. [164]

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[161] This also what Glissant terms "unity-diversity" (*Poetics of Relation* 94, 1). Cf. *Reason and Other Women,* the cave that is a return to "the grave of the grave of the chain of things," (138); cf. *Certain Magical Acts* "calm chaos" and "I'll be content … / when the skeleton of the main house collapses and stains us dark / with chaos" (8).

[162] *Certain Magical Acts* 8-10.

Notley speaks her poems as the first member of a new cultural species, a *Culture of One,* as she titles her 2011 collection, the first two poems of which show her "at the beginning again," writing "her own nature since writing began" (3). Notley's work aims, then, to refuse the distinction between an atavistic and composite culture, founding a new atavism that includes all; this, one assumes, is how she permits herself to disobey prohibition against appropriating and inhabiting a subject position that she does not occupy outside of the poem, or to claim, for example, that the speaker of her poems is eternal and, rather than containing multitudes, is their unification: "I'm not one. I'm immortal, like the universe," she says, "But I've always been / a poet, that's all, no sex or race, no age or / face" (*Certain Magical Acts* 5). The only distinction she permits is the differentiation of the living from the dead, a boundary that she nevertheless worries and transgresses, though grief confirms its actuality.

[163] It is worth noting, though, that one of the primary tensions in Notley's work is between a claim to speak as/for/to "all of us," while also insisting on her self's singularity and agency, sometimes with a nearly messianic tone, as in the title *Culture of One.*

[164] On the character of this revolt and the object of its antagonism, she writes that Glissant's works are "performative acts of countermeaning directed against the semantic character or behavior regulating

What Wynter describes in Glissant's work also applies to her own, and indeed she will aim her discourse against nothing less than the entire episteme in which we find ourselves, and by which we find ourselves (and what it is to be human) described. Wynter's work is ineluctably complex, so it is difficult to quote from or summarize. Among the several reasons for her work's relative obscurity might be the preponderance of what seems to be jargon, but which Wynter intends as just such an "instituting act" as she sees in Glissant's work, and which act intends nothing less than to constitute a new regime of knowledge, a new order of human being. Take, for example, her 2015 essay, "The Ceremony Found: Towards the Autopoetic Turn/Overturn, its Autonomy of Human Agency and Extraterritoriality of (Self-)Cognition1." This essay revisits her 1984 piece, "The Ceremony Must Be Found: After Humanism," which sought "to come to terms with the issue of race in its late modern purely biocentric expression as Du Bois' 'Color Line,'" and proposed that such a reckoning would require a heretical "rupture or transformation analogous to that effected by Lay-humanist intellectuals at the end of the Western-European Middle Ages"—i.e. the revolution by which humanity was no longer guaranteed or defined by its "divinely sanctioned identity"[165] (was no longer *homo religiousus*) and became *homo politicus* instead, " a figure now self-governed by its/his reason, articulated as reasons of state."[166] In the 19th century *homo politicus* would be replaced by *homo oeconomicus*[167] and each of these genres of human being had a revolution in the "natural sciences" to guarantee it: *homo politicus* by Copernican astronomy, and *homo oeconomicus* by Darwin's biocosmogony.[168] That natural science came to assume an authority hitherto held only by the church and its clergy, in terms of each body of knowledge's ability to explain the origins of our species and its defining characteristics, leads easily to the misconception that the religious explanation is relegated to the

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program, instituted by our present order of discourse and therefore by its related order of rationality or mode of 'conventional' or cultural 'reason.'" (Wynter, "Beyond the Word of Man: Glissant and the New Discourse of the Antilles" 638-9). In addition to Wynter's essay on Glissant just cited, Encarnación Gutiérrez Rodríguez' "Archipelago Europe: On Creolizing Conviviality" contains a pellucid summary of how Wynter (and Glissant himself) extend the specific character of "Antilleanity," and the process of creolization contained within it, such that it becomes a mode (and act and site) of resistance that is a global struggle, rather than a necessarily local one (Rodríguez 80-99; see especially 80-85).

[165] "The Ceremony Must Be Found" 25.

[166] Wynter and McKittrick, "Unparalleled Catastrophe for Our Species" 15.

[167] In Wynter's words: "the reinvention of the landed gentry's Civic-humanist conception of *Man*(1)-as-*homo-politicus* with the Liberal-humanist conception and now capital-owning cum purely secular *genre* of being human of *Man*(2)-as-*homo-oeconomicus*" ("Ceremony Found" 233).

[168] This is an argument that Wynter makes in a number of places, but is perhaps most easily apprehensible in the interview between Wynter and McKittrick, especially pages 9-35. It is also available, though, in Wynter's 1997 essay "Columbus, the Ocean Blue, and Fables That Stir the Mind: To Reinvent the Study of Letters," her 2003 essay "Unsettling the Coloniality of Being/Power/Truth/Freedom Towards the Human, After Man, Its Overrepresentation—An Argument," and in "The Ceremony Found."

Homo oeconomicus is Wynter's preferred term for our species, rather than *homo sapiens* (or *homo sapien sapiens*), and which is our "present ethnoclass (i.e., Western bourgeois) conception of the human, Man, which overrepresents itself as if it were the human itself" ("Unsettling the Coloniality of Being" 261).

realm of myth, and the true explanation is science. Rather, Wynter emphasizes that the Darwinian account of our species is "'part science, part myth'" ("Unparalleled Catastrophe" 36). And in fact it is the hybridity of human being—part *bios* and part *mythoi*—that compels Wynter's taxonomic preference: *homo narrans*.

Wynter's unceasing insistence on the hybridity of human being owes much to Frantz Fanon's "redefinition of being human as that of skins (phylogeny/ontogeny) *and* masks (sociogeny)."[169] Amplifying Fanon's insight, Wynter calls for a "New Science," described by Aimé Césaire as a time when "the study of the word will condition the study of nature": poetic knowledge will no longer be subjugated to scientific knowledge, itself "summary…poor, and half-starved" [170]; the *bios* will no longer be assumed to be more determinant than the *mythoi* in defining what it is to be human. The force of the emphasis on the Word, on the human as languaging being, as *homo narrans,* is that it brings into relief "the singularity of the co-evolution of the human brain…[with] the emergent faculties of language, storytelling" (Wynter, "Unparalleled Catastrophe" 25). As *homo narrans*, the human species auto-institutes itself as a species by narrating and describing what and how it came to be, which means that we must add a "Third Event" to the two events generally credited with our emergence as a species:

> [In] addition to the First Event of the origin of the physical universe and the Second Event of the origin of purely biological forms of life…, there existed, as I propose, a *Third Event.* This *Third Event* is one that the paleontologist Juan Luis Arsuaga describes in his book *The Neanderthal's Necklace: In Search of the First Thinkers* (2002), as the one by which "[t]he first modern humans in Africa, although surrounded by other [hominid] populations as robust as the Neanderthals of Europe, took *a different evolutionary route, an alternative strategy to solve ecological problems.*" This alternative strategy had as its condition the evolutionary formation of "a brain specialized in the manipulation of symbols," together with "articulated language at the service of a unique capacity to […] *tell stories and create fictitious worlds."*("Ceremony Found" 217, emphasis and brackets hers)

By insisting on this Third Event, Wynter denaturalizes the biocentricism that posits that we are

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[169] Wynter, "Unprecedented Catastrophe," 23. The Fanon she refers to here is from Fanon's famous introduction to *Black Skin, White Masks,* in which he writes:

> Reacting against the constitutionalizing trend at the end of the nineteenth century, Freud demanded that the individual factor be taken into account in psychoanalysis. He replaced the phylogenetic theory by an ontogenetic approach. We shall see that the alienation of the black man is not an individual question. Alongside phylogeny and ontogeny, there is also sociogeny. In a way,…let us say that here it is a question of sociodiagnostics.
>
> What is the prognosis?
>
> Society, unlike biochemical processes, ,does not escape human influence. Man is what brings society into being" (Fanon xv).

For an in depth and illuminating discussion of this nexus, see David Marriott's "Inventions of Existence: Sylvia Wynter, Frantz Fanon, Sociogeny, and 'the Damned.'"

[170] Césaire, "Poetry and Knowledge" xlii.

who and what we are because of "genetics and extrahuman laws of naturalism."[171] The problem with the biocentric viewpoint, itself a consequence of the ubiquity of the "Darwinian descriptive statement," is that it reduces our conscious experience and our social perceptions to consequences of a natural, and thus inevitable, scientific process, just as it also naturalizes the organization of culture and society and presents its projections as if they were discoveries, as it does with race. (Wynter, "Unsettling the Coloniality of Being" 318).

In Wynter's schema, Man—as type specimen of the human species—has gone through two iterations, Man1 and Man2, both of which over-represent a Western, white, cishet European male as the norm of the species, such that all who do not resemble Him are relegated to sub- or non-human status, occupying what Fanon called the "zone of nonbeing" (Fanon xii).[172] What we should now understand as "the Western bourgeois biocentric descriptive statement" describes a *genre*[173] of being human—a "genre'd coherence" that is human being—that is enabled and extended through imperial expansion and colonial and sexual violence to "over-represent its ethnic and class-specific descriptive statement of the human *as if* it were that of the human itself" (Wynter, "How We Mistook the Map for the Territory" 117). In other words: what is merely a genre/mode of human being is mistaken for a generality (the generic category of Human being), and any deviation from the normative mode is vilified. Thus it is that within this

> fictively constructed and performatively enacted genre of being hybridly [bios and mythoi] human…that the peoples of African and Afro-mixed descent have been lawlikely fictively constructed as the 'Negro' / 'Colored' / 'Black' / 'N[*****]'embodiment of

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[171] Katherine McKittrick, "Axis, Bold as Love" in *On Being Human as Praxis*, 145. McKittrick's chapter greatly aided my understanding of how Wynter uses science, and what she means by it.

[172] If one finds that Wynter's ideas (and her prose) are difficult to parse, McKittrick's summary might be useful: "The human, in Wynter's writings, is representatively linked to the figure of Man1 (invented by the Renaissance's *studia humanitatis* as *homo politicus* and therefore differentiated but not wholly separate from the *homo religiousus* conception of human) that was tethered to the theological order of knowledge of pre-Renaissance Latin-Christian medieval Europe; this figure opened up a slot for Man2, a figure based on the Western bourgeoisie's model of being human that has been articulated as, since the latter half of the nineteenth century, liberal monohumanism's *homo oeconomicus.* These figures, both Man1 and Man2, are also inflected by powerful knowledge systems and origin stories that explain who/what we are. These systems and stories produced the lived and racialized categories of the rational and the irrational, the selected and the dysselected, the haves and the have-nots as asymmetrical naturalized racial-sexual human groupings that are specific to time, place, and personhood yet signal the processes through which the empirical and experiential lives of *all* humans are increasingly subordinated to a figure that thrives on accumulation…We presently live in a moment where the human is understood as a purely biological mechanism that is subordinated to a teleological economic script that governs our global well-being/ill-being—a script, therefore, whose macro-origin story calcifies the *hero figure* of *homo oeconomicus* who practices, indeed normalizes, accumulation in the name of (economic) freedom. Capital is thus projected as the indispensable, empirical, and metaphysical source of all human life, thus semantically activating the neurochemistry of our brain's opiate reward/punishment system to act accordingly!" (McKittrick, 9.)

[173] For Wynter on the conjunction of gender and genre (and which conjunction extends the gene/general node we discussed in relation to Glissant) see "The Autopoetic Turn" 9n23 and "The Ceremony Found" 196.

> ultimate *Human Otherness to Man2*, as a founding underside that is then performatively enacted and systemically produced by them/us collectively as subjects/initiates of our now planetarily extended, Western and westernized world-system. ("Ceremony Found" 196)

Just as the theological order guaranteed Man's place in His world supernaturally, the biological order (the "Darwinian descriptive statement") installs Western Man (*homo oeconomicus*) as the "naturally" selected-for hero of the biological and economic order, the fittest survivor who survives by accumulating resources that are projected as both scarce and "natural"—He is a hero who survives *on* capital.[174]

The force of Wynter's work issues from, on the one hand, the strength of her argument: that the human "[is] an alterable species-subject"[175] that can be (can behave) differently in accord with a different way of self-defining. On the other hand, the force of her work issues from her modeling of the difference she argues we must instate: her rigorous methodology amounts to practicing human being differently, and it does so by explicitly engaging the relationship between her discipline as a literary scholar and the human community—and its variety of other knowledge-producing fields and practices, within which it is situated. Wynter's work aims to be total; it can be dizzying in that aim because of the scale of its ambition: it wants to include and replace what we understand to be intellectual history and what we understand to be human history with its own narration and supplementation of those histories. Wynter begins with the Big Bang—the "first event" that made the human species possible—and her work always reaches not only to the contemporary moment in which it is written, but beyond it as well. If we follow her thinking and her way of thinking, we see that the entire "system of knowledge as we have it *now*, goes" ("Unparalleled Catastrophe" 16). This is her ambition, to urge that entire system to go, and to reconceive of ourselves as the agents of the new system's making:

> We must now collectively undertake a rewriting of knowledge as we know it. This is a rewriting in which, inter alia, I want the West to recognize the dimensions of what it has

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[174] Wynter explains that economics has replaced theology as "master discipline," so it is that for *homo oeconomicus,* "The master discipline of economics functions now, therefore, according to the same behavior-regulatory imperatives, and/or laws, that the master discipline of theology had functioned, in the past, for the overall societal order of Christendom. The transumptive correlation between the two master disciplines (theology and economics) thus points to N.J. Giradot's identification of all religions (together with their secular substitutes) as functioning according to a behavior-regulatory formulaic schema of a 'significant ill,' on the one hand, and its 'cure' or 'plan of salvation,' on the other. Our present episteme's economic system and its formulaic schema delineate, therefore, mankind's enslavement to natural scarcity—which has replaced what had been its/our enslavement to original sin. The new and present plan of salvation is, therefore, that of the unceasing mastery of natural scarcity by means of ever-increasing economic growth" (Wynter, "Unprecedented Catastrophe" 26).

A succinct summary of this node of Wynter's thinking can be found in Max Hantel's "What Is It Like to Be a Human," in which he writes: "Today we are mired in Man2, a biocentric order hinging on the Color Line to quarantine the space of otherness in the global South, positing a natural causality for neoliberal economics in which the subject becomes the subject-entrepreneur investing in not only market forces but also their own genetic stock" (Hantel 63).

[175] This phrase is Rinaldo Walcott's summarizing of Wynter's project, from his essay "Genres of Human" in McKittrick's *On Being Human as Praxis*, 186.

> brought into the world—this with respect to, inter alia, our now purely naturalized modes or genres of humanness. You see? Because the West *did* change the world, *totally*. And I want to suggest that it is *that* change that has now made our own proposed far-reaching changes *now* as imperative as they are inevitable. As Einstein said, once physical scientists had split the atom, if we continue with our old way of thinking—the prenuclear way of thinking—we drift as a species toward an unparalleled catastrophe. (18)

We should hear her call literally: she wants us to "rewrite knowledge as we know it," and this rewriting of knowledge invokes both the qualitative and temporal functions of *as* in relation to our knowing. The rewriting is the qualitative "manner in which" we know and the "way that" knowledge is produced; and we do this rewriting "simultaneously with," or "during the time that," we know the knowledge we are [re]writing (*OED*). So this rewriting is knowing anew, knowing otherwise, and is perfectly coincident with new knowledge, the contents of which compose a "new science" and a "new studia" (Wynter, "The Autopoetic Turn" 21, 28).[176] And this knowing, this (re)writing, remakes the collective of knowers (the species) as well.

Consistent with her emphasis on the linguistic character of knowledge, when Wynter calls for no less than a willful mutation of the human species—a new species of human being—we should understand that this must be achieved through language, and by recognizing the importance of language in constituting our species: the "science of the Word" must precede all other science, even if its precedence follows from or is lent authority by conventional science.[177] As was described above, Wynter accepts the two major events credited with determining our emergence as humans: the first event (the Big Bang) originates the physical universe and the second event is the origin of life. But, she adds that a "biomutational third event" is as important as the first two in determining our species' origin.[178] In Wynter's words, this event is our emergence as a "languaging" species, a species of "storytellers [who] storytellingly invent themselves as being purely biological," and it is her work's ambition to undo the mistake by which we understand ourselves as merely biological. ("Unparalleled Catastrophe" 11). Wynter enlists science relentlessly to corroborate her account of this third event, as she does with Juan Luis Arsuaga, the paleontologist who describes "[the] evolutionary formation of 'a brain specialized in the manipulation of symbols…[with] a unique capacity to […] *tell stories and create fictitious worlds'"* ("Ceremony Found" 217).[179] Wynter enlists the sciences and includes them in her narration of human and intellectual history—joining Arsuaga the paleontologist are J.F. Danielli the theoretical biologist, David Bohm the physicist, Gerard Edelman the cognitive

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[176] Wynter names this new discourse of knowledge both a "new studia," referring to the *studia humanitas*, and a "new science," referring to the fact that science is the descriptive system we expect to produce the coherence of our species.

[177] Wynter and McKittrick, "Unparalleled Catastrophe" 26, 31. Again, this is adapted from Césaire,'s "Poetry and Knowledge" in which he writes that "the study of the word [conditions] the study of nature" (xlix).

[178] An origin she locates as: "some 200,000 years ago in the Southwest region of Africa" ("Unparalleled Catastrophe" 35.)

[179] Emphasis and brackets hers.

scientist, etc.[180]—but, lest we forget, the truths of science are insufficient. Science's truths are "half-starved" if not preceded by "poetic knowledge," in Césaire's terms,[181] so Wynter weaves them together with other modes of knowing in order to both describe *and* enact the "rhetorical-neurobiological feedback loop" that is both the subjective experience of being human and its objective externalization.[182] The "rhetorical-neurobiological feedback loop" *is* the Third Event *and* what makes it apprehensible.

By articulating the nature of the Third Event and avowing its importance, Wynter is then able to claim that a "Second Emergence" is both possible and necessary, which emergence would constitute a new episteme—an era characterized by a new genre of human being and a new system of knowledge that it produces and by which it knows itself:

> [The] proposed overall mutation that I now define at the level of our *Homo Narrans* species itself, is nothing less than that of our *Second Emergence*, this time from our continued subordination—as the price paid for the Event of our First Emergence—to our own humanly invented, autopoetically instituted cosmogonies or origin narratives and their mandated/prescribed sociogenic replicator codes of symbolic life/death. I further propose that this *Second Emergence* mutation can only be effected from within the terms of the Ceremony Found's *new* post- and meta-Western humanist Origin Account and answer to the question of who-we-are. This proposed *new answer* necessarily moves beyond the limits of our present secular Western world-system's now globally hegemonic, homogenized/monohumanized answer and its *biologically absolute*, cosmogonically chartered and empirically enacted, (neo)Liberal-humanist, Western-bourgeois "paradigm of justice." And it is this specific ethno-class paradigm of justice against which the "redemptive-prophetic" Rastafarian intellectuals of Jamaica had projected their "gaze from below" religio-politico millenarian counter-cosmogony. Thus as Bob Marley iterated in his song "So Jah Seh," the Black God Jah, as a new fount of justice, assures Rastafarians that "not one of my seeds shall sit in the sidewalk and beg bread […] no they won't." ("Ceremony Found" 222-23, italics hers)

Wynter intends her work to participate in the inauguration of the collective remaking, the "Second Emergence," of the human species. The "Second Emergence mutation" is constituted by a recognition—which she writes into recognizability (reifies) as: "self-cognition(1)"[183]—of

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[180] Arsuaga: "Ceremony Found" 217 and "Unparalleled Catastrophe" 77n38; Danielli: "Ceremony Found" 211; Bohm: "Ceremony Found" 212; Edelman: "Ceremony Found" 221 and "The Autopoetic Turn" 44.

For illuminating accounts of how science functions in Wynter's work, see Chapter 4 by Mignolo and Chapter 6 by McKittrick in *On Being Human as Praxis.*

[181] Césaire xlii.

[182] This phrase is Max Hantel's (67). Also useful is his discussion of how Wynter seeks to find a method "up to the task of not only describing embodied consciousness in the world but also changing it," and how her turns to science follow Fanon's "struggle for 'the real leap…introducing invention into existence'" (64).

[183] This is part of the full title of the essay referred to as "Ceremony Found."

ourselves as the hybridly human *homo narrans*, which recognition allows for a "new answer" to the question of who we are as a species. This answer, for the first time, accommodates a truly ecumenical understanding of human being.[184]

The Second Emergence is the rupture with which we began our discussion of Wynter's work. Her discourse is the "instituting act" of both a "new science of human discourse" *and* "a new mode of revolt"—a revolt that she likens to the "redemptive-prophetic" countercosmogony of the Rastafarians of her native Jamaica. The utopic Bob Marley line that Wynter invokes—"not one of my seeds shall sit in the sidewalk and beg bread"—is what it would look like if we were "to replace the ends of the *referent-we* of liberal monohumanist Man2 [*homo oeconomicus*] with the ecumenically human ends of the *referent-we in the horizon of humanity*" ("Unparalleled Catastrophe" 24, italics hers). If we were, in other words, to rewrite our story and its subject—which we are.

While there is uncanny similarity between Wynter's and Notley's projects along the lines of speciation and language's role in its accomplishment, there is immeasurable difference in the articulation of this alignment and the materials and methods each author employs. If Notley's rivalry of the giants of Western thought is primarily expressed by declining to engage or acknowledge them, Wynter's is expressed by subsuming them. In Wynter's work the new human follows from the old; revolt can (and must) participate in and determine evolution. In Notley's work, though, a new species can only emerge from a space in which what precedes it is radically negated. Although Wynter's method, typified by her citational practices, couldn't be farther from the spirit of Notley's disobedience, we can nevertheless understand Notley's work in Wynter's terms. We can see Notley's *The Descent of Alette* as countermeasure to the auto-institution of the "half-mythic-half-scientific Origin Narrative as formulated in Darwin's *The Descent of Man*,"[185] by the action of which institution all human subjects descended towards *Man*—by which we mean Man2, *homo oeconomicus,* or even Man1 who preceded him, whose theodicy implied his exclusive superiority—the white, western, bourgeois subject who triumphed over the "significant ill" (what used to be original sin) that was the scarcity of resources and the selection or dyselection of traits ("Unsettling the Coloniality of Being" 265). And this triumph guaranteed *Man*'s right to win out over others, and indeed over Nature, in the face of that ill. This long digression through Glissant and Wynter is meant to unfold some of what is at stake in origin stories, both the dangers and the possibilities they inscribe. What follows will trace Alette's origins and some of Notley's other beginnings, and it will also ask after the consequences and permissions that arise if we take Notley's "half-mythic-half-scientific" origin stories as seriously as we do those she means to unseat.

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To return to, and begin at, the beginning. Notley locates her first attempt to "find a story for beginnings," part of that same attempt that searches out the first world, in her 1987 poem *Beginning with a Stain,* written after the death of her stepdaughter, Kate Berrigan: "in her honor I

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[184] On Wynter's use of the notion of the ecumenical, see "Ceremony Found" note 18.

[185] Wynter, "On How We Mistook the Map for the Territory" 144.

made my first attempt at something epic in scale, since being devastated by her death, I felt close to large dangerous powers" (*Coming After* 172). Although she wouldn't write what she considers her first proper epic for a few more years—*The Descent of Alette*, written in 1990, published in 1992—in the final sections of *Beginning with a Stain* she has a "prosodic breakthrough" (173).[186] She will develop and perfect this prosody the following year in the poem "White Phosphorus," written following another intimate death, that of her brother from the aftereffects of his service in Vietnam. The discovery of this measure— this way of doing measure—and a feminist conception of action will make *Alette* and the several epics that follow it possible. Notley describes the development of this prosody from its origins in the final sections of *Beginning with a Stain*—its "long lines divided into phrases set off by quotation marks" that represent a chorus of voices, to the unification of these voices in "White Phosphorous." As the voices unify, "the measure begins to regularize" (*Coming After* 173-174). And it is both the unified voice and the regular measure that make the epics possible.

If it is voice and measure that make the epics possible, it is grief (both personal and collective) that make them necessary. Notley explains that she arrived at her signature measure and what has elsewhere been called her "feminist epic" when, in *Beginning with a Stain,* Notley "felt close to large and dangerous powers…[and] kept trying…to find a story for beginnings. The beginning of the universe, the beginning of living again after someone loved has died. But I didn't really have a story to tell, or a cast of characters, so I couldn't make an epic" (172). But when her brother died from a drug overdose directly related to the PTSD he suffered as a consequence of his service in Vietnam, Notley writes, "Suddenly I, and more than that myself, my sister-in-law and my mother, were being used, mangled, by the forces which produce epic, and we had no say in the matter, never had, and worse had no story ourselves. We hadn't acted. We hadn't gone to war…We got to suffer, but without a trajectory" (172). As was discussed earlier, Notley's solution to the lack of story, of action, was to use the realm of dreams to discover myth, which can then be crafted into epic; but because what she discovers are not the familiar stories, she needs a new form, because "a new content, a new consciousness, implies the need for a new sound" (*Disembodied Poetics* 106).[187]

To give a sense of the development of this permissive measure, which Notley claims isn't fully realized until *The Descent of Alette*, take first a stanza from her 1987 poem, *Beginning with a Stain:*

> "Speaking firstly forever"
> "speaking firstly forever, who might we be?"
> "We are mattress," "nearly invisible membranous tissue"
> "not any longer disordered" "wings" "what
> the first feeling was…" "we must will its movement" "Praise

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[186] *Alette* and *Beginning with a Stain* were published together in *Scarlet Cabinet,* but published undated and in reverse chronological order, so it isn't until the selected *Grave of Light* that the evolution of the prosody is legible without Notley's own explanation in the essay ("The 'Feminist' Epic") just cited. It is also important that it isn't just the measure alone that potentiates the epics. It is also figuring out "a way for a woman to act, to commit actions, enact a story, that suited the genre of epic," especially given that Notley doesn't "even believe in acting, at least not very much" (173-4).

[187] See also Notley's introduction to *Scarlet Cabinet,* pages v-vi.

> is for precision, nothing else, as in 'the hero did precisely
> what she was supposed to'" "These are the yellow lines characterized
> by having the honor to be uttered" "They are yellow but only a
> color" ("I love you") ("Shut up")[188]

This stanza begins the penultimate section of *Beginning with a Stain* as it appears in *The Scarlet Cabinet: A Compendium of Books* by both Notley and Douglas Oliver, but, when she excerpts it in the selected poems, *Grave of Light,* it is the beginning of the final section. In that much shorter version (the original poem was 30 pages, the version that appears in the selected poems is 10 pages) the only quotation marks previous to the ones above are in the (now) penultimate section:

> They say something ruinous & tragic happened soon after
> or close to the earliest expanse of us, I mean that time that
> stretches even backwards from the first time in it the "creation"
> And I think there must have been these several stains, light, blood, & paint […]
> All creation is a staining, a change in purity
> […][189]

Of the many consequences of the re-versioning of this poem the most important demonstrates that loss is creative— reduction can be lossless. Both before and after this moment the poem announces itself over and over again as an attempt to preempt—to create the universe before—history, "before the beginning." We move from a "they say" to a They that speaks as many voices. We are offered a surfeit of terms and positions for this priorness from which to "[speak] firstly forever": we are "pre-apparatus"— and "in the dream of the first dark, I"—and "what is it?" but "…later, but first"— for and before "heaven stretches backwards from your first time in it, & forwards from / your grief, & you *can* bring it back down by calling to it, for a time, & then, finally / it was already here. But that first loss, was like no other" (*Scarlet Cabinet* 364).

This is the moment we break into the way towards the breakthrough that Notley describes (and which is her answer to / rivalry of the variable foot). At the exact moment when we've discovered that there is something that has nothing before it, a beginning we cannot get before. This first loss—unlike the "first people," "first world," "first woman,"etc.—is uncreatable, unlike any other *loss* and any other *first*. It is a loss that is the answering negation of the epic simile—it gives itself as rival to the association between "the 'Homeric simile and the beginning of philosophy'" (Arendt 108). It is the epic simile's negation but begets the first "feminine" epics. So, unlike any other—no, "like no other"— beginning, it makes everything after it. Whatever this beginning creates does not evolve and/or is not evolution: it is a lot of poetry

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[188] *The Scarlet Cabinet,* 376; *Grave of Light,* 181.

[189] *The Scarlet Cabinet,* 364, *Grave of Light,* 179.

(more books than there have been years[190]); it is all Poetry ("Poetry is the species").[191] *Beginning with a Stain* placed us squarely "'in the beginning / before there was a verse'" so that everything that follows is Poetry (*Scarlet Cabinet* 376).

In *Beginning with a Stain*, Notley may not yet have a story that can explain the culture in which she finds herself, but she certainly has a sense of how to begin, how things begun. The poem opens in fairly narrative, sentimental stanzas that describe the narrator contemplating "A stain of old blood on a bedspread (white)" that she had slept on with her lover. She isn't sure, though, if this stain is from her own blood or her stepdaughter Kate's, who also lay in that bed with her own lover before she died. Although she may not know whose stain it was originally, "This is the stain / that invents the world"—indeed it is how "the Universe did perhaps" begin. The poem continues with an invocation to the dead: "Surround my heart bed / with my others at night / speak with me of the stain, that is our love, that / invents the world, that is / our purest one. Help me to stain, I say, my words with all us" (351). So, *Beginning with a Stain*—seed of an epic it doesn't itself become—begins with this plea that her words might carry with them the force of a literally creative original stain, a mark that also marks them as rivalrous bid not only for a new epic, but a new genesis. [192] She needs the muses—her dead; and she needs them to charge her poem with a force that telescopes backwards from John 1:1 (the beginning in which there was the word) to Genesis 1:1 (the beginning in which heaven and earth, light and dark, human man and woman, were created and divided). For her words to be stained "with all us" is for them to be the site from which the First Person, and then the Human Species, springs. We can hear this creation in the pun by which "all us" sounds a lot like Alice, so the First Person is the speaker, and then she is "all us," all *of* us, as well. This isn't so unlike Adam whose name, Robert Alter reminds us, also simply meant "human."[193]

Notley's claim to be or speak for "all us"—like her search for the "first world" discussed above—might make us uncomfortable, and she is consistent in her disobedience of the prohibition against appropriation and over-identification. In *Beginning with a Stain,* the speaker

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[190] An accomplishment that certainly fulfills the first of the following ambitions, especially in terms of bookshelves; she explains that her "lifelong project, as it seems today, August 3, 2001, has been twofold: to be a woman poet taking up as much literary space as any male poet, but most especially through poetry to discover The Truth. What else is there to do?" (*Coming After* vi).

[191] Preface to *Close to Me.* See also Notley's interview in *BOMB.*

[192] The notion of the original stain also invites a Platonic reading, and a Neoplatonist gnostic account of the degraded world, too, as Notley asks "Where are the gods?" and acknowledges that "something ruinous & tragic happened," after which "heaven receded" and "the gods became the first people" (*Scarlet Cabinet* 364). Kurt Cline explores Notley's use of Gnosticism in *The Descent of Alette* in his essay "Journey to the Land of No Return: Alice Notley's *The Descent of Alette* and the Sumerian 'Descent of Inanna.'"

[193] Alter, *The Five Books of Moses* 18. Alter also points to the literalness of Adam being of the earth, and to the phonetic connection between Adam and '*adom*, the color red. (Alter on Adam and earth, xxxv; on redness, 778). Notley's First Person knows this, too: the "starting-point that is I, any I" knows that "A word is a reddening stain" (Notley, "Beginning with a Stain" in *Scarlet Cabinet* 352-354*).*

identifies herself as a slave and also engages with Cheyenne stories.[194] In Notley's other work, she will claim to have no race,[195] will identify as an immigrant (rather than an expat),[196] and will also explain explicitly why she doesn't buy the story about cultural appropriation.[197] I understand this transgressive refusal to participate in that same imperative that Wynter identifies: the need to find a way of understanding and presenting the human ecumenically, in Wynter's terms, or "species inter-identification," as Notley calls it ("Evident Being"). And indeed, this same impetus—to speak words stained with "all us" that create us anew—will carry forward from *Beginning with a Stain* over the next three decades of Notley's career.

Though she begins to be conscious of the need for this beginning and for a feminine epic in *Beginning with a Stain,* "White Phosphorous" (about the death of her brother), written in 1988 (just one year after *Beginning with a Stain*) is a significant step towards the measure that marks *Alette.* "White Phosphorus" tells a fragmented and recursive story of her brother's heroin overdose, years after he had returned from Vietnam, and of the ways in which he never really could return, given that the realities of that war were organized by the same forces that direct daily life ("'*Everyone's* just like a soldier' 'everyone fights, everyone works' / 'For the army of money we guess'" [*Grave of Light* 193]). His death is a direct consequence of his service and the structures that demanded it: "'& our government / of men' 'organizes' 'this addiction'" (192). The "government / of men" speaks to the persistent exclusion of women from public and political life (an exclusion, you'll remember, to which Notley also attributes the "split between the conscious and unconscious mind").[198]

Before "White Phosphorus" appeared in *Scarlet Cabinet*, it was published in Homer's *Art,* a small chapbook that contained two short poems ("Poem" and "Mother Mask"), the short prose piece "Homer's *Art*," and "White Phosphorous." In the prose piece, Notley explains that "Homer's *Art* is to tell a public story," and these stories are "generated by a war & are male-centered—stories for men about a male world….Thus, how could a woman write an epic? How could she now if she were to decide the times called for one?"[199] She then turns to just such a need, though she presents it as hypothetical, whereas the poems that surround this brief essay

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[194] "I will never not make a sound, not have made a sound / I will ride this voice as I change, as always am / galley slaves of the slow black ship"; "Wanting to tell a story…this / with reference to the Cheyenne—you / may *not* identify with them" (*Scarlet Cabinet* 353, 355).

[195] *Certain Magical Acts* 3.

[196] See Notley's "When You Arrived" in *The Kenyon Review* and her interview with *Kenyon Review* David Baker.

[197] "Can you presume to say Cherokee? no says Hahvahd Universitay. No says Stanford Universitay. No says Brown Universitay….matters of definition for Stanford Universitay. is it fate to be a woman?" (*Alma* 28, 31).

[198] See page 65 of this chapter.

[199] *Homer's Art* 6; *Scarlet Cabinet* 401; *Grave of Light* 187. I cite all three of its publications here because I think it is noteable that Notley choses to retain the progression of these poems, rendering the effortful arrival at her signature style transparent.

make it clear that this is her own experience, her own loss[200]:

> Meanwhile we ourselves have experienced a rather strange faraway but shattering war. Say someone you know dies many years after the Vietnam War, as a consequence of it. To tell that story, which is both personal & very public, you might distance it from yourself, somehow, & find a sound for it—as the greeks did—that makes your telling of it listenable to & true….But a woman who is affected by or even badly damaged by events in Vietnam will never know what it was like to be there, had no role in the shaping of policy with regard to that war or any war, has no real access to the story or even *a* story: what she experienced contained very few events. (Homer's *Art* 6)

Given this situation, given the limitations set on women's capacity to act and on those actions' capacity to compose or connect to the kinds of events that constitute a story like those epics are created to tell, it is no wonder that women are "likely to write something lyrical (/elegiac) or polemical, rather than epic or near-epic" (6). The challenge, then, is to write an epic in which "there might be recovered some sense of what mind was like before Homer, before the world went haywire & women were denied participation in the design & making of it. Perhaps someone might discover that original mind inside herself right now, in these times. Anyone might" (7). So it is that in "White Phosphorus" Notley takes on this challenge, and writes a poem that is very much about the exclusion of women from public and political life, at the same time as it takes on subjects both very personal and very public. In this uncompromising elegy we see Notley laying claim to the Homeric mantle of authority by literalizing that mantle and cloaking in it the figure her brother becomes. Here are two stanzas from the middle of the poem:

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[200] The first poem in Homer's *Art* is narrated by a speaker writing from a "whorehouse cave" in which she works, and the poem's concluding lines are:

> …Yet I would like to speak out
> I would like to say, that when your cities &
> your politics do crumble, the whorehouse cave will
> remain, that is obvious; & your concerns are
> pressing, & transient; but your powers, rein-
> forcingly assented to by your women, are still most
> dreadful. I miss you. I do. And we miss him; we miss my
> brother, the man who just died from the Vietnam War. (5)

And the poem that follows "Homer's *Art*" and precedes "White Phosphorus" is "Mother Mask," which concludes with a plea to its titular figure:

> …close open your eyes & close open
> your mouth & be dumb speak to us
> be still sing to us, tell us an old old new one
> an old new story truth lie of our own life deaths
> our peace wars, tell us our own old story we don't
> know it any more, haven't had a
> Mother, a Mask Mother, a wood real
> mother for forever (9)

> "Flowery mantle." "Homeric sacrifice?" "noise of darkness" "fear of
> darkness" "now mantle of innocence" "King of his death now" "Home"
> "I've come home" "He said, 'I've come home'" They were sacrificed for
> nothing, for distant" "instants of thought" "All for your thinking"
> "He said, 'I've come home; I've finally come home' then he died" "flowers"
> "Magnolias & lilies" "innocent now" "I've come home. Who's there?
> at home? all the dead?" "To come home from the war" "years after" "To die" "To
>
> wear mantle light honey" "mantle dead white" "in sunlight, in late"
> "Homeric?" "he said it was hideous" "all of it" "hideous" "every
> instant in Nam" "theatre of worsts" "now mantle of
> white" "phosphorus & lilies?" "trees now lean down" "over our faces"
> "Tell details of battle?" "As" "in an epic?" "As" "in lies?"
> "We don't want that now" "We want only our mother of
> dirt" "our mantle of white" "want each other of soul…" (*Grave of Light* 194-195)

Here we see the mantle as tentative symbol of epic authority, entangled with "Homeric sacrifice" and the conventions of epics in which battles are recounted by those who return from them. (The connection to the Homeric trope of coming home after the war is emphasized by the capitalized "Home" at the end of the second line quoted above, bringing "Homeric sacrifice" very nearly "Home" to Homer.) The question marks in these stanzas fall at significant locations, expressing uncertainty about whether the demands of this story, and what would make its telling possible, will be sufficiently satisfied by taking up the (figurative) Homeric mantle. Ultimately, the poem moves towards more certainty about the insufficiency of trying to write a properly Homeric epic, which would mean repeating the mistake that Notley described in another poem in Homer's *Art* by which the rule of men is "rein- / forcingly assented to by [women]" (5).[201] Even writing a kind of counter-epic from within the Homeric tradition isn't good enough—writing as Helen, say, or Persephone or Hecate— because these perspectives were invented by men, so to inhabit them is only to reproduce the unreality of the feminine as conceived of by men.[202] The phrase

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[201] White Phosphorus" narrates another version of this same problem, and in this excerpt the "They" should be understood to be the men who write and star in the "male centered stories for men about a male-centered world":

> … "They" "who are
> the subject" "of all history" "& of poems" "as if"
>
> "we have ever, in all ways" "yielded to them" "by speaking of" "always
> speaking of" "Kings" "presidents" "the Great Men" "their mistresses"
> "Generals" "Communist Kings" "Leaders" "Warriors" "West Point of Greeks"
> "West Point of Greeks against" "West Point of Trojans" "Isn't it more
> beautiful, under the Earth?" "Or to be sunlight, not history?"
> "Now I can love, & only" "now" "Remove us from history but
> not from your air"…(from "White Phosphorus," Homer's *Art* 19-20, *Grave of Light* 195)

[202] Notley makes this explicit in "Homer's Art" and in her 2007 interview with CA Conrad.

"'mantle dead white'" conjoins the narrative situation of this poem (her dead brother, covered in white flowers, later wearing a white feather mantle) with the problem and project Notley articulates in "Homer's *Art*," "Women and Poetry," "The 'Feminine' Epic," and elsewhere: that the figurative "mantle" of poetic authority is male, dead, and white—we might even imagine that phrase rendered as "'man~~tle~~ dead white.'"[203] Given that dead white men—and the world they "storytellingly," to borrow one of Wynter's terms, instate— have Homer at their helm, it is no

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[203] Another reason Notley must reject the Homeric version of epic, while retaining the role measure plays in its dissemination, is because it glorifies war, rather than capturing its gross hideousness and stupidity. In her insistence on the stupidity of war and the interchangeability of war because of that stupidity (articulated again in "Homer's *Art*": "The greatest point of comparison between the two wars, Trojan & Vietnam, lies in their stupidity—which is where tragedy begins & where a story must be told") Notley has something in common with Adorno, who writes of the events and subjects of epic poems as "interchangeable," and also of the contradiction that Epic's relation to myth installs within itself: "The storyteller has always been the one who resisted interchangeability, but historically and even today what he has to report has been the interchangeable." And furthermore, this contradiction (which is also the process by which the subjects of epic poems are objectified) wins for the epic no small measure of "stupidity," which subject acquires an attribute: "narrative stupidity," i.e. "epic naiveté." (*Notes to Literature* 25). Adorno's title, "On Epic Naiveté" is a fragment of the first excursus of his and Horkheimer's *Dialectic of Englightenment*, in which they go to great lengths to locate the beginnings of the enlightened, bourgeois, rational subject in Homer's epics. For them, as for Notley, these descriptors are, in a word, bad. So we might see Notley's insistence on the stupidity of war as running the "allegory of history" that Adorno sees in Homer's epics— by which the hero is presented as a unique, individuated subject when he really just allegorically represents the interchangeable violence that it is his culture's founding myths and legacies—backwards, un- or de-justifying the history they glorify. And, Silvia Wynter might be pleased to find Adorno and Horkheimer corroborating her account of Man; they write: "The lone voyager armed with cunning [Odysseus] is already *homo oeconomicus*, whom all reasonable people will someday resemble" (*Dialectic of Enlightenment* 48). (Also very interesting in relation to these intersections is Adorno and Horkheimer's "In the Genesis of Stupidity," which ends: "Like the genera within the series of fauna, the intellectual gradations within the human species, indeed, the blind spots within the same individual, mark the points where hope has come to a halt and in their ossification bear witness to what holds all living things in thrall" [Ibid., 214].)

Admittedly, much of the above paragraph is not only an insufficient account of the complexities of Adorno's account of the entanglements of myth and epic, or subject and object, but also, and more damningly, the claim I make in the following paragraph, about the mantle acquiring more materiality as it becomes less Homeric, is precisely the mistake by which the storyteller thinks her subjects have a concreteness that belongs to objects, rather than to concepts. Though I haven't space here to pursue this, a fuller account of these connections could be made by reading Adorno on Göethe's *Iphigenie* in relation to Notley's "Iphigenia" from *Benediction* (she also appears in *Alma*). "Iphigenia" begins: "who dares me out turn the // profits (poems) from burning but am the victim. I counsel you to listen for irrational connection (undergrowth): I myself can't listen to a one unless it cries unsense in my ear, for I've a capacity to transmigrate and be a shapeless thing, the hole of images itself I *am* Iphigenia, forced to consecrate the humans sacrified to Artemis on Tauris, though there are no deities except as torn from the hole by kings nervous of their power blood buying it without the least sacred presence I am sacred, un-Iphigenia... If in all image I could enter the image of the image, the hole in the very one that controls the godlike entities we discern with our senses as outlines we name and worship, consecrating them to our interactions. Our ones. Our reasons. And so if I could become Iphigenia, I could unbecome her, and destroy this need for her—but being her now, babe of the contagion…" (*Grave of Light* 309).

wonder Notley lays down that mantle, though she doesn't leave it behind.

The mantle as symbol becomes less Homeric, but it also becomes more material as it connects via the poem's imagery to the funeral scene (her brother's body, "'…covered in white, / fresh flowers" "at home" earlier in the poem) and to the "White Phosphorous" of the poem's title, an explosive chemical agent used in Vietnam which burns very quickly and produces large quantities of smoke. There is a striking visual rhyme between the three images: the white phosphorus bomb exploding on the Viet Cong; the funerary flowers, white lilies and magnolias; and a mantle made of white feathers that she sees her brother wear at the end of the poem.[204] Here is the final section of "White Phosphorus":

> "Mask now" "is complies" "complies" "with the forms (too much of everything,
> everywhere") "All of this is" "the mask" "my mother's mask" "& mine"
> "wronglike forms, too many of" "Complying, to live here" "always, more
> complying" "Too many things" "machines" "too many" "too many clothes"
> "cheap roses" "kleenexes" "membranous" "bags, of plastic" "Too many
> ideas" "vocabularies no color" "too many paintings" "too many songs"
> "too many Tarot decks" "& poems" "& books" "Too many" "things to eat"
> "too many" "machines" "magic machines" "too much magic" "much too much of it"
> "Stupor" "distress" "& abandoning of others" "too much news" "news"
> "everything" "made the same" "too many names" "too much knowledge"
>
> ("knowledge, so endless" "is nothing") "A war" "more news, more
> to know about, to know" "Excuse for anger" "indignation" "you can still
> keep your money" "know the terms of news" "terms" "& Not be nature"
> "don't be nature" "mute" "not knowing the" "terms" "Know what news knows"
> "What words know" "Do words know?" "No they don't, only flesh knows only
> soul knows" "in the words" "A mask is rigid" "on warm flesh on
> dreaming mind" "on fleshly mind" "rigid" "But my brother now is
> nature, pure nature" "however that be" "Or I have dreamed so" "Owl,
> not an albatross" "He's an owl," "not an albatross" "I have twice"
> "dreamed that Al" "is an owl" "intricate with" "feathers" "texture of
>
> thousands of feathers" ("I've seen" "an owl" "only in" "a museum") "Owl,
> I didn't know him, I searched" "the owl's face for its" "identity"
> ("Al died later" "that day") "grey owl great grey owl" "wisdom, & war"
> "Master of nights (Al's terrible" "nightmares") "he rose up, finally
> as an owl" "is he owl?" "Where is owl now" "I've never seen one" "I
> later" "dreamed after" "I'd realized" "Owl was Al" "that he was a" "snowy owl"
> "white, with black spots" "A man said," "he's not an albatross"
> "Owl, not an albatross" "Al" "whom I have seen" "also seen in a
> small" "waking vision" "standing in his living room" "wearing

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[204] For the image of a white phosphorous bomb exploding on the Viet Cong: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/White_phosphorus_munitions#/media/File:A-1E_drops_white_phosphorus_bomb_1966.jpg. Yet another layer of this mantle is its connection to the "white mantle" of the knight's templar, a significant symbol in *Close to Me and Closer*.

a white mantle, flower mantle a" "mantle" "of fresh, white flowers"

"petals, like feathers" "white petals" "white feathers" "a cloak
of nature of" "purity" "of purification" "wilder, milder, he is
nature" "he is better mind" "My brother" "is owl" "Athena-like" "wise"
"I know things only" "this way" "My brother" "is Owl."

Although Notley began to use double quotation marks in *Beginning with a Stain*, we can see them here being used to create a more regular rhythm, as we can also see a unified voice being divided into rhythmically organized phrases, rather than a confluence of voices braided together by these marks. The last stanza of "White Phosphorus" is the only four-line stanza in the poem; the entirety of *The Descent of Alette,* written just after "White Phosphorus" is in quatrains (except for the last stanzas of some poems, which are sometimes less than four lines). Joining Alice/"all us" from *Beginning with a Stain,* we now have Al/Owl; and both the owl and the Al- will conspire to make "Alette" in *The Descent of Alette.*

Though *The Descent of Alette* is Notley's first epic, after it she will imply that it isn't epic enough (*Coming After* 170). Her desire to write an epic was motivated, on the one hand, by her "sense of the twentieth-century 'Big Poem'" (171). As she tells it in *Dr. Williams' Heiresses,* her forefathers wrote these Big Poems: Olson's *Maximus Poems*, Willams' *Paterson,* Pound's *Cantos*. And of course, on this same hand, is the relation of these Big Poems to the big, epic poems that came before them in the Western tradition, and ultimately Notley wants to write more like Homer or Dante or Milton than like Pound or Olson: "[I] started to be intrigued by the possibility of telling a *continuous* story, not in the manner of Olson, Pound, Williams, but more in the manner of Dante or Homer. Because it seemed so difficult; and I already knew how to negotiate pieces. So many people in this century seem to" (*Coming After* 171-172).

And then, on the other hand, *Alette* was motivated by that process we have thoroughly rehearsed: the development of a measure and a notion of action that make a feminist epic possible. We have to tarry on this hand even a little longer. The measure in *The Descent of Alette* is much like that of "White Phosphorus," but its locutions are of more regular length and are more exactly like poetic "feet or phrases," with each line consisting of three or four feet (173). To get a sense of this measure, here is the first page of *The Descent of Alette:*

"**O**ne day, I awoke" "& found myself on" "a subway, endlessly"
"I didn't know" "how I'd arrived there or" "who I was" "exactly"
"But I knew the train" "knew riding it" "knew the look of"
"those about me" "I gradually became aware—" "though it seemed

as that happened" "that I'd always" "known it too– –" "that there was"
"a tyrant" "a man in charge of" "the fact" "that we were"
"below the ground" "endlessly riding" "our trains, never surfacing"
"A man who" "would make you pay" "so much" "to leave the subway"

"that you don't" "ever ask" "how much it is" "It is, in effect,"
"all of you, & more" "Most of which you already" "pay to
live below" "But he would literally" "take your soul" "Which is
what you are" "below the ground" "Your soul" "your soul rides"

> "this subway" "I saw" "on the subway a" "world of souls" (*The Descent of Alette* 3)

Notley emphasizes four things about the measure of *Alette* in her Author's Note that precedes the text quoted above: 1) The double quotation marks are there to "measure the poem" and "enclose…poetic feet"; 2) They should slow the reader down so that she has to "silently articulate…the phrases at the pace, and with the stresses" that Notley intends; 3) They "distance the narrative from…the author: I am not Alette"; and finally, 4) They "remind the reader that each phrase is a thing said by a voice: this is not a thought, or a record of thought-process, this is a story, told."

A considerable amount of other stuff has been said about these double quotation marks and the measure of *Alette*: critics have been bewildered, annoyed, inspired. Page Dubois has a useful summary of some of the more negative or dismissive responses while Dubois herself emphasizes the ways in which the form of the poem, the double quotation marks enclosing phrases "begin to signify a command, an imperative" that the reader hears as "'breathe,' 'take a breath,' 'inhale,'" that thus returns poetry to the body, and so to the oral tradition (Dubois 94-95). Christopher Roman likewise emphasizes the body, particularly the ways in which the form of the poem "disturbs measure and disturbs breath in order to kill the normalization of the body imposed by the Tyrant" (Roman 213). For her part, Maggie Nelson connects *Alette's* "new measure" to the "holy story" it is Notley's ambition to tell, and Nelson also points out that this ambition has political ramifications, which ramifications make politics too narrow a name for what it is that Notley is ambit-ing towards (Nelson 155).

Notley notes in "The 'Feminine' Epic" that "the measure [of *The Descent of Alette*] has been called, in effect, feminine, or at any rate a break with the male conventions of line and lay out," though Notley herself doesn't think that's exactly the case (*Coming After* 174). For, not only does Notley's sense of the line owe much to several men, but she rejects the idea that a measure could have a sex.[205] The story, though, is another story. She goes on:

> The story part is different, its technique, for me, is sexed. Well I *don't* act. I don't even believe in acting, at least not very much. Why did I want to write about a woman of action if women don't act and if I don't really approve of deeds? I do live and some sort of action in time is entailed in living itself. And I wanted, and still want, flatly, to write an epic—to take back some of what the novel has stolen from poetry and, further, to avenge my sex for having "greatness" stolen from it. This may be ambitious, and even self-aggrandizing, but also it may be necessary. But actually I like stories, though not so much in novels; I like them in poetry, where they're more compressed and elegant, where the movement of the story is reinforced by the movement of the lines. I wanted to tell myself one of those. I discovered meanwhile the Sumerian epic *The Descent of Inanna*. In combination with my observations on dreams and on myth, this poem pointed me in the right "story" direction.
>
> … Inanna doesn't "act," she does nothing but show up in the Underworld, die, get revived, and choose a replacement. Compare that with the *Iliad*. I found I could use such

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[205] "[W]hile writing *Alette*, and now too, I thought of this measure as My Measure, that 'My' not being sexed in my mind, even though the poem is finally predominantly feminist. How could a measure possibly have a sex?" (*Coming After* 174).

> a poem, though not very closely, as a model. My poem isn't really like Inanna except insofar as Alette descends into an underworld, and insofar as the action of my poem is mythological. (174-176)

What does it mean for the action of a poem that doesn't value action to be mythological? It might mean that the action's unreality is emphasized—Alette doesn't *really* act; her actions are just myths. Before continuing this line of thought, it is worth summarizing *The Descent of Alette;* to do so I will abridge Notley's own summary of the story and its relation to the measure and to feminism. In her summary of her poem's story, we see that Notley's sense of mythological action is allegorical:

> May I tell the story of my poem? The protagonist at the beginning has no name, no identity or memory. Finds herself in a vast subway system ruled by a well-educated, well-bred, multi-talented male Tyrant who lives aboveground. The protagonist wanders from subway car to subway car, station to station, observing the misery and minute particulars of the Tyrant's control. There are animals and also metamorphoses in this system, and she begins to be aware of a connection to a snake and to an owl. She also begins to know she is on a quest to find "our mother," the First Woman, whoever that might be. Finally she gets on a different kind of train which dissolves and leaves her floating to a lower level of existence, a set of caverns representing the psyche. As she proceeds…she is presented with explanatory tableaux or dreams, which show piecemeal the structure of the self below its surface. She also picks up on the trail of the First Woman, who may be a snake… [and] participates in a sort of lottery, draws a card, the Ace of Panthers/Roses, which signifies that it is she who must kill the Tyrant. Then she descends a staircase to a further level of being, a natural but entirely dark setting, a potential paradise which contains no light from the sky. There she finds the First Woman, not really a snake though that has been her symbol—but headless: her head is always nearby. The First Woman tells her story, and the protagonist assists in the replacement of the First Woman's head; then the First Woman begins to place stars in the sky, simply by speaking. The protagonist leaves her and meets up with the owl, who performs on her a brutal ritual "death," in order to give her "grace" and the owl attributes of flight, a beak, and talons: weapons. Now ready for the Tyrant she ascends to his mansion, a huge literal Museum of Natural History. They tour the museum with its displays and dioramas. The Tyrant informs her he can't be killed because he literally is the world and not at all a person. They reenter the subway world together, take a train to the River Street stop, outside of which flows a dark river. The protagonist sees a black tattered cloth floating on its blood-black waters, and having swallowed the cloth she regains her memory and her name: she is Alette and is in mourning for her brother who died in one of the Tyrant's manipulative wars. There is a pursuit, a sort of combat, and she does kill the Tyrant, discovers the one way to do so, which involves use of her owl powers. Then the doors of the subway unlock, people emerge, and the world begins again in open air. (176-177)

Notley's epic is decidedly and consciously anti-Enlightenment: it is a descent towards a paradise which "contains no light from the sky." The First Woman—taken by some to be something like an "Earth Mother," and therefore seen as "a bad (un-avant-garde) thing"—escaped the world and the "degradations" it imposed on her not by transcending it, but by descending below it. And,

Notley emphasizes, "her most marked quality is that she's a storyteller: though she has no operative mouth, being headless, she can speak from the throat, and she has the ability to make you *be in* her stories. Really then she's like the source of dreams" (177). As such, the First Woman as storyteller doesn't simply use language—she has no mouth, no head, but has nevertheless learned to speak. Yet not only does the First Woman speak from her throat, she sees from it too; and language as she wields it is repurposed to constitute rather than communicate:

> … "But I see things" "within myself—"
> "pictures, & stories—" "that you might not see" "ordinarily" "I have the
>
> power," "as I speak" "to enable you" "to see them too," "to forget that"
> "I'm speaking them" "They take on" "their own life then," "before us,
> around us" "I cease to speak" "as they exist" (*Alette* 92)

The protagonist understands that the First Woman remembers a time before the human species existed; she asks about this time, asks about '"that primal entity"/ "or how we" "emerged from it"' (91). The answer the First Woman gives is not so different from the undifferentiated "welter and waste," the earth "without form and void" in *Genesis*, before god divides day from night, land from sea, etc.[206] The First Woman explains it as a time and place

> … "where everything that was to be"
> "seemed to exist at once" "Objects" "& events" "in a swirling" "present
> moment" "were like bright-colored" "liquid circles," "small light-
>
> streaked galaxies" "Each wheeled" "forever" "& it seemed as if"
> "I could know each" "in perfect present pleasure—" "Did I?" "I don't
> remember" "For history" "began:" "I was never" "outside of time again:"
> "There was sky now" "& the sea" (93)

Following this, the First Woman makes several other attempts to present prehistory with more precision, to explain what arose and what was lost when history began. In another biblical parallel, the matter of creation and the materiality of language are related. Notley everywhere emphasizes the materiality of the First Woman's voice: it has color, texture, and temperature.[207] It is not a stretch to say that there are parallels between how this voice is rendered and what itself claims to be able to render, on the one hand, and the poem's own measure, its metering towards matter. The headless woman explains her voice's power:

> " 'As I
> say a word,' she said—" " 'As - I - say - a - word,'" "she said again"
> "but in a" "staccato way," " 'a - new - star - appears'" "And at"
> "each word she said" "a point" "of light appeared" […]

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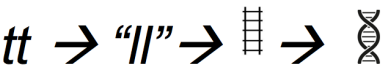
[206] "Welter and waste" is Robert Alter's translation of Genesis 1: 1-2, whereas the *RSV* has it as "without form and void" (Alter 17).

[207] '"Watch my voice now:'" / "Colored lights," "bright pure colors—"…/"rose up from" "her throat"' (93)

> “ ‘These stars,’ she said,” “ ‘ do not
> disappear…” “They are permanent…” “My voice is making them” “Truly
> making them” “As many stars” “as this sky needs” “are as many”
>
> “as I say tonight” “Life is changing” “I have much to do” “And you too” (99).

The speech that comes to the protagonist comes in a “staccato way,” much as the lines of the epic come to us. In the lines just quoted there are no periods, though there are ellipses in the First Woman’s dialogue (I’ve bracketed the ellipses that indicate when a phrase or line has been elided). It is hard not to see these ellipses as illustrative of the stars that appear as she speaks them into the sky: each phrase that precedes the ellipses is a three-word phrase, and we will remember how the dots that compose the ellipses are thematized in *Close to Me*. Just as the voice is material, so too is the name, the letter, the punctuation mark. The First Woman’s voice transforms the protagonist’s surroundings and her understanding.

The protagonist, Alette—though she doesn’t know her own name yet—can witness the First Woman’s communication (can receive it, perceive it) because she has journeyed to a different dimension/level of existence: she has been on a train, has been transported by way of its track to a beginning-space. There’s a way in which “Alette” is not Alice but “All us” as the poem’s chief ambition is to transport us, via its tracks, “and the rhythmic” “passage over them” “is what” “we ride.”[208] As Alette merges with the first woman, we merge with Alette, *homo allus* achieved via the mechanics of the thing—a movement that is easiest to illustrate pictorially:

tt → *“ll”* →  →

The above symbols notate *The Descent of Alette’s* claim on speciation: with Alette as the first of a kind, as our origin, we are a different species. The symbols track the transformation from Alette to *homo allus* to the train tracks (the poem’s measure, its mechanics) to their being lifted and twisted into the double helix.

After the First Woman sends her on her way, the protagonist endures a series of transformations. It is difficult to summarize these transformations because in their details are the contours of Alette’s evolution. Her body is transformed to include owl parts, initiated by a visitation by an owl who is also her dead father. The owl notes a prior transformation and his visit has a clear purpose:

> “‘Your neck” “is healing,’” “the owl said” “‘My neck?’”
> “I touched” “my neck” “& felt a clean thing” “scabbed line”
> “all around it” “like a thread—” “‘You have her” “in you now,’
> he said” “He turned his whole head” “to the side” “for some moments”
>
> “Then looked back at me” “‘We have” “work to do” “Plans to make’”
> “‘What have we” “to do together?’” “‘We must prepare for”
> “your confrontation” “with the tyrant’” (102)

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[208] This is not a quotation, but a borrowing of Notley’s measure.

The owl sees that the protagonist has the First Woman in her, her scar marks her former headlessness which mirror's the First Woman's own. The owl imparts to her some owl parts (talons, beak, eyes, wisdom) and directs her to a black lake at the center of the Underworld. In her journey to the black lake she also internalizes it: it transforms her senses and allows her to recognize its other, a concentration of light (which is itself coincident with darkness), a unity she contains and, upon this recognition she becomes pure being. Embedded within this transformation is yet another, for she also becomes her own dead body (by dying '"into" "the lake"') and is then made to live again (110). These transformations do not happen in sequence but in a kind of spiral; her owl transformation continues beyond her movement back from death. As she begins to "reinhabit" her own skeleton, she gains new knowledge:

…"My bones" "were full"

"of knowledge," "the history" "of the planet" "As I put them on"
"I saw shapes" "in the darkness" "before my eyes—" "dreamy figures
& scenes" "I saw amoebas" "swell & divide" "Saw apes die" "& be mourned"
"I saw a king" "in blood-soaked velvet" "standing" "in a puddle" (112)

In what her bones know is the evolution of human life, from the "swell & divide" of amoebas to the great Apes to the rule of Man (read in Wynter's sense of Man2) embodied by the Tyrant. Her knowledge is embodied knowledge, for immediately after she reoccupies her skeleton by laying on top of it, the Tyrant appears:

…"floating
stretched-out" "above me," "face down, "face near mine—"
"dressed in his dark suit & tie" "As if" "to enter me too,"

"mingle with" "my flesh & organs" "Dwell within me until I died"
"I caught his large blue smiling eye" "His right eye swelled"
"& enlarged" "Enlarged, disattached" "& came closer" "It was
full of type," "of letters," "slightly raised &" "in a spiral" (113)

The spiral of letters in the Tyrant's eye (also, in his *I*) encodes the stakes of Alette's journey and her battle. It is hard not to see the spiral of letters in the Tyrant's eye as an image of DNA, and its message if uncontested would mean her membership in his species. At stake is not only the protagonist's own heredity, but the constitution of the world in which she and humankind must live. The Tyrant's hold is total, for not only does the spiral in his eye suck everything into it[209] but later the Tyrant explains that he is identical to reality itself: '"I have become" "reality, itself" "I am reality, / itself"' (123).[210] Rather than allow the message and law of the letters in the

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[209] This is illustrated by the lines that directly follow those quoted above: '"All the excess light" "that hovered" "about the outside" "of my / body—" "that had not been" "enclosed by it—" "was sucked up into" / "those letters," "till the letters" "glowed white"' (113).

[210] That the Tyrant *is* reality is figured physically: his heart is the subway, his veins its tracks; he is also immaterial reality--"all inspiration" comes from him, even transcendence is his jurisdiction (132-34).

Tyrant's eye to remain uncontested, the protagonist—with her owl parts—will defeat the Tyrant and ensure her species' differentiation.

Not only is what she knows transformed, but also the way she thinks, and this is essential to her ability to defeat the Tyrant. The owl-father explains:

> "Your
>
> weapons" "are moral" "They were given you" "by an animal"
> "Manufactured" "by nature," "were made by nature" "not by"
> "the human mind" "Not a rational" "device," "not a vicious" "device"
> "You are now part owl'" (115)

To think like an owl is arguably a destiny contained in Alette's very name, and she learns that name after she and the Tyrant get off at River Street and she picks up a fragment of black, tattered cloth with her beak. The Tyrant wants to see and hold the "black tatter," so the protagonist swallows it to keep it from him. Upon swallowing the cloth, she narrates, addressing the Tyrant:

> "There was
>
> within me" "at once" "a bleak dawning," "a sky turning" "from ob-
> sidian" "to sickly" "bluish light" "'Why was my memory," "my memory,"
> "floating in your" "heartsblood?' I cried" "'I must have" "let go of it"
> "It was too painful" "I loosed it from me" "& gave it back to you"
>
> "back to your body," "from where its pain came" "My name is" "Alette"
> "My brother" "died in battle'" (136)

Here we see the trajectory from *Beginning with a Stain* to "White Phosphorus" to *Alette* made explicit*,* the entanglement of personal grief and public crisis. Alette remembers her name at the moment she retrieves her own feeling from the forms mandated and structured by the Tyrant's rule; upon being able to express her grief to him she is also able to articulate her name.

Of Notley's many books, *Alette* has received the most critical attention, and, as I've already mentioned, although Notley says the name came to her in a dream[211], critics have made much of the significance of "Alette." Here is Page Dubois on the name:

> Consider the very name Alette: a *lette* lacks just one letter, with which it would be the "descent of a letter," a letter like "r," a letter as an epistle, an unfashionably utopian epistle about tyrannicide that takes place on a subway ride deeper and deeper into the city's body. As Mark Irwin points out, the name Alette is also a play on the Greek word *aletheia*, "out of forgetfulness," often translated as truth. (Dubois 90)

And, in a parallel to the way the first woman populates the sky with stars that correspond to the words she speaks, the Tyrant too has thoughts that are "'half-material" "& make a screen in" "the sky'" (129).

[211] *Disembodied Poetics* 104.

Christopher Roman argues that "Alette is a play on the word 'owlet,'" and Notley corroborates this: "I didn't know I was still writing…about my brother's death until midway through the last book [—book 4 of *The Descent of Alette*]. That's exactly the point where Alette remembers her name. My brother's name was Al, mine is Alice: "Alette" is more like "girl-owl" (Roman 219, *Coming After* 178).[212] Earlier in this chapter I read the sound Alice out of "all us" in *Beginning with a Stain;* here we see Notley herself reading the pun out of her dream of the owl, reading her brother's name by [dis]articulating her own. Names express difference with letters, and Page Dubois' "descent of a letter" is a beautiful image for *Alette*, and should join the spiral of letters in the Tyrant's eye as encapsulations of the ambitions of Notley's epic and her countermeasure.

Immediately following the stanzas of the poem quoted above in which Alette relearns her name, the Tyrant aestheticizes Alette's grief—he finds it beautiful and it brings him to tears, but she responds by becoming an owl again, abandoning human language as the medium in and by which grief can be rendered as song, or as poetry, and instead she flies up and circles around him, letting loose '"a slow stream" "of owl sound"' (139). Alette hunts the Tyrant, searches out his vulnerable spot, which turns out to be a bush. She uproots the bush with her talon and then turns back into a woman, there to witness the Tyrant's death. His death is befitting of an epic, as he speaks beyond the moment of his death: '"'I think…" "you have killed me…" "I am…" "really / dying'" […] " 'How could you be" "this cruel?"' (144). There are several stanzas in the Tyrant's death scene that return us to Notley's essay "The 'Feminine' Epic" in which she sketches for us what she sees as the challenge and task of her epic: to find a way for a woman to act and to "enact a story" in a way that would "avenge [her] sex for having 'greatness' stolen from it" and would also redress "the split between conscious and unconscious [that] began with the almost universal banishment of women from public and political life" (*Coming After* 172-177). We will recall also the importance of dreams as the realm in which this kind of action is possible and in which that split is bridged. So it is that in the Tyrant's death scene Alette feels herself to be '"encircled by" "time-/lessness" "As if in" "another realm" "I had not acted," "had never/ acted"' (*Alette* 144). And in response to his question about how she could be so cruel as to kill him, she says: '"'I'm killing no one" "You are not real" "You said so" "yourself,' I / said" "'Forms in dreams…" "forms in dreams…'" "I searched within" / "for right words" "'I will

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[212] She goes on: "In another poem I call it "owl-appendage," as "-ette" appends. In a world of war like the one we live in, woman is appendage certainly, even if she joins the army. After I discovered that my brother was behind the poem, I went back and built him more into it. Though I was writing it because of him, all along, I'd forgotten because the poem isn't personal, it's public. Though feminist it includes everyone. It's dedicated to my father, another Al, because he's the owl in book three" (*Coming After* 178). Julia Bloch writes compellingly on the catharsis Alette achieves as she learns her name (Bloch 2). See also Notley in conversation with Conrad on the name: "The owl symbol arose in connection with *Alette* as a pun. Actually it first appears in "White Phosphorus," in the last section. The word's a pun on my brother Al's name, and then on my name too. At the end of "White Phosphorus" I have a vision of my brother as an owl after his death -- but he himself had the pun inside him: he had a collection of kitschy owl wall plaques and things. Then after he died my mother took it up too and collected a lot of ceramic and glass owls. As my father's name was also Al (and others in the family) the pun, and totem, really spreads… A totem is a point of identification with another species -- it can also be a plant -- with its talents and powers. There's usually a myth involved. Owls tend to represent death and/or wisdom -- the owl is Athena's bird…"

change the" "forms in dreams"[…]/ "from dreams," "from dreams we" "can change," "will change" "In / dreams," "in dreams, now" "you will die" "You will die'" (144). These phrases begin to double in order to represent the fulfilment of what they prophesy. What changes in the dreamworld will change the upperworld too; this dreamworld in which Alette can act, can kill the Tyrant, has real and material consequences for determining what is outside of it. Thus, after he dies we have an image that inverts the spiral of letters collecting all light in the Tyrant's eye. Alette emerges from the subway to see '"a brown darkness"' that swirls then steadies to become '"my owl self" / "confronting me" "but spectrally—" "unreal & real."' And on the other side of this confrontation, '"He no longer lies" "between us & I" / The light is new now," "isn't it?" "The light has been made new"' (147). I see this spiral as counter to the helix in the Tyrant's eye because it allows Alette to be both herself and entirely other at once; it is her release from the version of inheritance that the Tyrant—archetypal "Dead White Male"[213]—bequeaths her. By becoming hybridly human (not exactly in Wynter's sense, but not exactly not), Alette subverts the Tyrant's legacy in a way that recalls Notley's own thwarting of inheritance in *Dr. Williams Heiresses.*

Changing the "forms in dreams" initiates a new dawn, a claim anchored by Notley's changing of forms in her 150 page poem (the epic made anew, its new dawn enabled and enacted). And this is where the poem ends, with a collective, an "us," that had been unable to form or join together, had been suppressed by the Tyrant's rule. Released from the dominance of the Tyrant, by way of Alette's countermeasure (and her counter to the double-helix), a new collective—not a new humanity because they are creatures in excess of or not limited to humanness—emerges, in the final two stanzas of the poem,

> "all the
>
> lost creatures" "began to" "emerge" "Come up from" "below the subway"
> "From the caves &" "from the dark woods" "I had visited" "they emerged"
> "I watched through" "tears of clarity" "many" "forms of being"
> "I had never" "seen before" "come to join us" "or come to join us
>
> once more" "Whatever," "whoever," "could be," "was possible," "or
> had been" "forgotten" "for long ages" "now joined us," "now
> joined us once more" "Came to light" "that morning" (148)

At the end of Alette's journey, the epic slides open to invite a new epoch. The Tyrant is dead, as is "all commerce" and everything about "how we've lived." This is the impossible wager of *The Descent of Alette*, that the poem's action authorizes the constitution of a new collective and a new world in which it can conduct itself. A number of Notley's subsequent collections lay bare the pain and impediments to being so remade.

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[213] *Coming After* 177-8.

In her 2007 collection, *In the Pines,* Notley reiterates several commitments we've already seen, among them: the willed inauguration of a new species ("I am losing my because. / I said I was / the new species: no one"), and the refusal to think using the materials and methods of patriarchy ("She isn't thinking any more, you say. I say, now she's free to think") (*In the Pines* 4, 9). Transmission and inheritance are familiar themes in Notley's work; *In the Pines* engages them too, but this time the emphasis is on folk transmission and the transmission of code, both linguistic and genetic. By way of folk transmission, the blues, hymns, and other standards join the legacy of Williams and the epic as the traditions with which Notley is reckoning, and she also explores both illness and genetic predisposition as non-aesthetic folk transmissions. As for code, this trope signals a reckoning with genes and language as two different systems of expression that determine what it is to be human, and through which the human is expressed.

In the Pines is structured in three sections and progresses gradually from a hybrid form of poetry and fragmented verse to discrete and wholly lineated poems.[214] Transmission is an important trope in the book not least because Notley is writing it while undergoing Interferon treatment for Hepatitis C, a treatment notorious for difficult mental and physical side effects. *In the Pines* opens with this disclosure, and it follows that during her treatment she finds herself in a state she renders literally as a mental breaking point—"the mind breaks" (17). Recalling Notley's endorsement of "meditating alone in one's closet" cited earlier in this chapter, one of the recurring images in *In the Pines* is that of a closet on fire, which is an apt capture of the tone of the book. High on Interferon, sick both from the treatment and the disease, Notley expresses real doubt about the capacities of her mind and her poetic project: "If my mind should break, would it just be broken that's all," she writes, and worries that "[my death] will not be right…For I won't have vindicated women. I won't have seen the fall of male power. I won't have helped heal the earth" (32, 40).[215] That she "won't have seen the fall of male power" means that the Tyrant killed in *The Descent of Alette* doesn't stay dead, the structures and real menace he imposes and represents return in *In the Pines,* and she must be willing to kill him again.[216]

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[214] The first section, "In the Pines" is in 14 numbered sections in which prose predominates but is interrupted by lineated verse; the second section, "The Black Trailor," begins in a similar form as the first but contains discrete prose poems within it that have their own titles; the third section, "Hemostatic," is composed of discrete, lineated poems that also have their own titles but contains no prose.

[215] The opening page of "In the Pines" renders this doubt plainly in a dialogue between the speaker and the reader:

> …I got hepatitis C form shooting speed thirty-three years ago. But that isn't a story. Why are you continuing to read?
> If you detest everything about your society, you say, why are you writing?
> It is time to change writing completely.
> You are not doing that.
> Wait and see.
> You have no stamina. You're a sick weakling. (3)

[216] The most explicit return to *The Descent of Alette* occurs in "The Immigrants," a poem in the second part of *In the Pines,* in which the speaker confronts the presence of "he who chooses our illusion," a figure that rhymes with the Tyrant in his occupancy of the seat of male power, and is also described as "The drunken man [at] the wheel, everywhere." Just after she admits to an interloccuter that she wants to and is willing to kill this man, she has "a sudden memory of a time spent underground." She wrestles

Despite the fact that what was accomplished in *Alette* didn't completely remake the world, despite the doubt and disorientation the speaker of *In the Pines* faces, Notley nevertheless tunnels into and through this mental breaking point, and conducts a painful and ruthless investigation into her own most ambitious claims and then redoubles those claims: that through poetic making she can/has defect[ed] from the species and initiate[d] a new one; that she can to transgress the boundaries of other minds and recondition them.

This book opens by denying both evolution and story: it refuses narrative because of the master narrative and wants to burn "the whole 19th century self" down along with the closet in which it might meditate.[217] This desire is in tension with the fact that, as she'll write later in the book, "The code's not just genes but songs" (52) and she is transmitting both just as both are being transmitted through her: "I see that I will pass something on to the folk. If it's sad could I have helped that? It was passed on to me" (33). Passed on to her are not only the songs that she samples but also the genes she shares with her family and which might contain a predisposition to mental illness.[218] The emphasis on folk songs in this book plays on both the general sense of folk as *a* people, and the narrower sense of *one's* people:[219] as we've seen in other books, Notley wants a collective that is inclusive, a people that is all people; but this book is also particularly concerned with Notley's biological family and its extensions, as can be seen in poems like "In the Garden," but also in the dedication to the book, which is "to my sons and their friends" (and it's worth noting that both of Notley's sons are poets).

The possibility of a "genetic defect" (13) that might disorder the mind is copresent with the virus with which she is infected and the mentally deranging treatment she's undergoing to keep that virus from reproducing. Notley effortfully transforms what this defect might be by owning it, by taking what could either signal her genetic predisposition or her viral infection and making it instead the emblem of her differentiation. Her defect is a mutation that makes a new species: "Aren't I defective? The wind is disturbing my heart. I am the new / species, born of the needle. Or. Whatever I might say. Everyone in the new species is defective" (16). The defect is converted from something that threatens life to the condition of life's possibility.[220] To be "born

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with her own will towards violence and "the power of destruction," the violence that subtends all possibilities for acting within the world organized by "male power" (*In the Pines* 92-93). Recalling Notley's negativity about action discussed earlier in this chapter, this poem ends with one of the most beautiful lines in the book: "Make nothing of this; to be this negative is an action with no known flower yet, but I prize it, I said" (93).

[217] See *In the Pines* 3-5.

[218] As for the songs she samples, on the first few pages alone there are references to "Jack of Diamonds" by Blind Lemon Jefferson and "Pancho and Lefty" by Townes Van Zandt, and quite possibly others that I'm not picking up. Because *In the Pines* presents narrative details so obliquely, the piece about inherited mental illness is not containable within a single quotation; see pages 9-13 as one instance of this possibility's presentation that involves a fractured story of a sister, a brother, a mental hospital, and direct addresses to two parental figures. The word "neuron" also signals this possibility throughout the book and records the poet's attempt to observe the soundness of her mind.

[219] *OED.*

[220] See also: "If living is a defect, still it was too dark to see it. Because we had to have eyes, unless we were singers, blinded by machetes from the African future, to which we were connected. At that time I sang, Jack of die. / There is a diamond in my wound and I can't see it. In my defect. In my defect" (18).

of the needle" has several meanings here. Notley is from Needles, California, and references to Needles the place abound in this book[221]; and the needle figures in this book as a homeopathic technology: she contracted her defect-as-illness, her viral hepatitis C infection, through a needle, and the Interferon treatment she is undergoing to combat that disease is also administered through injections. We should also hear a pun on 'defect' as both noun and verb: her infection is a defect, it messes with the code, but she's also defecting from the species. Notley's defection from the species is accomplished via language, via "Whatever I might say," as she puts it here, and which echoes the lines quoted earlier: "I said I was / the new species: no one" (4). That she is "losing [her] because" describes a process by which what she is writing triumphs over what has written her; she isn't just the expression of her genes and she wants what she says or sings to have constitutional impact both on herself and others. Given that "[t]he genome is an awkward song. Imposing your will on a possible future, bent over backwards toward you, only you" (30) she will marshal her defect so as to become a species-defector, such that (and because) "desertion itself is the only possible song" (79).[222]

Song is the privileged communicative/linguistic unit in *In the Pines* and is imbued with the same force and ambition as the concept of story as when Notley was thinking about the epic. Given that "the code's not just genes but song" and the singer is made of (and expressing, and transmitting) both, when Notley declares on the first page of *In the Pines* that her purpose is to "change writing completely" she means what is written in and by both the genetic code and the linguistic code (52, 3). It's important that what I mean by 'the linguistic code' not be taken to mean only its semantic content. Notley is concerned with sound both as measure and signature, with what sound transmits that cannot be read, with reading figured as a process that translates language into meaning.[223] Song, genes, and neurons are all transmitting information through the poet but there is often "no decipherment" (123). Although she is expressing the information these things carry, that information cannot necessarily be reduced to or "translated" into language. Whereas in the case of neurons and genes, the lack of decipherability is often attended by a sense of frustration and paranoia,[224] song's transmission of non-translatable, non-

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[221] As an example of these references, see the athel tree's appearance in *In the Pines* and Notley's remarks about those trees in her interview with Lindsay Turner.

[222] Notley's skill at punning is everywhere evident in *In the Pines*, and she sees the pun as one of the linguistic functions that establish reality. As she puts it in "How We Cause the Universe to Exist," "in the beginning was the Pun, that placed us, compressed us in the same place or room or line."

[223] Relevant passages on reading, translation, and the audible but non-semantic content of song, see pages 5-6, 36-37, 123 of *In the Pines.*

[224] For this sense of frustration see, for example: "Momma told me I was happy; she would cry if I wasn't. This is the way this sadness works. Of course it doesn't show up in your man speculations, though you will tell me which of my neurons are lit when I'm listening to the blues…Do you think you can find the neurons for the fact that I hate you" and "keep your hands off my neurons" (6-7; 36). The evidence that song transmits feeling, on the other hand, doesn't require any "man speculations," brain scans, or experiments; rather in *In the Pines* what song communicates is often signaled by tears, physical evidence that something has been changed and created. Indeed, just following the line "The code's not just genes but songs" we get this rejoinder: "The code's not just genes but tears…This is a folk procedure too: whose tears are calling now?" (52).

paraphrasable content is the most redemptive possibility *In the Pines* puts forth—and it is through song that the "new species" asserts itself.[225]

To become the new species the poet has to "cease to become" in the old ways, determined by the old causes and stories, thus the sloughing off of evolution, the "19th century self," etc. (3-5).[226] The figure Notley chooses for this unbecoming that generates the "new species" is "no one" (4). The figure of "no one" is the agential occupation of this "folk procedure," a way of tapping into the lost or anonymous sources from whom folk transmissions originate, for "No one can sing the blues like no one" (52, 10). These transmissions are also carried through one's most intimate relations: "I'm the folk, no one; Daddy, that's who I am. / Momma, it hurts me too. All of you" (51). As much as "no one" is the sender of these transmissions, the singer of these songs, it is also a figure of reception and reciprocity, an agent of collectivization as much as of dis- and re-individuation.[227] Everyone can be "no one" in the new species, and to Notley the poet's oldest and holiest task is to make it so.[228]

As I've said, *In the Pines* is characterized by moments of deep doubt that run contrary to

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[225] My understanding of this possibility owes much to Robert Kaufman's work on lyric's " 'go-for-broke-game' ['*Va-banque-Spiel*'], for the lyric must limit itself to working coherently in and with the medium—language—that human beings use to articulate presumably objective concepts, even while the lyric explores in semblance-character the most subjective, non-conceptual and ephemeral phenomena. This theoretical or philosophical difficulty, concerning how simultaneously to think objectively and subjectively, also arises practically as lyric's great problem of form-construction: how—with language alone as medium—to build a solid, convincing artistic structure out of something as evanescent as subjective song and how, into the bargain, to delineate or objectivate the impressive fluid contents of capitalist modernity? How, spontaneously yet rigorously, and with the utmost concision, to make thought sing and to make song think?" (Kaufman 99-100).

[226] In addition to the bold assertion that there is "no evolution" on page 3, pages 74-77 engage evolution as a theory and as a story; both of those forms are found to be, unsurprisingly, severely lacking in their truth content and brutal in their material effects.

[227] Notley's "no one" echoes Emily Dickinson's poem 260, which begins with the lines "I'm Nobody! Who are you? / Are you - Nobody - too?" (Dickinson 279). This echo sounds loudly in Notley's reiteration of her lines a few pages later: "I am no one, the new species, just like you" (9). "No one" also connects to Jack Spicer's famous lines from the opening to "Thing Language," which states "No one listens to poetry," and then repeats this formulation a few lines later, "No / One listens to poetry," an echo that is also a rebuttal, given that within this poem and in Spicer's poetics of dictation, one must occupy the position of "no one" and be the first listener in order for poems to be written at all. The reader, too, must occupy the position of "no one," as the reader is listening to or reading Spicer's poem. This "no one"—both Notley's and Spicer's, and Dickinson's "Nobody" too, probably—also recalls Ulysses' cunning occupation of the position of no one when he told the Cyclops his name was "no one" [Οὖτις], in order to avoid Polyphemus' identification and judgment. (Spicer 326; Homer 9:409, page 223). Much could be said about these allusions, and in a more developed version of this project I would also like to discuss this in relation to Adorno and Horkheimer's *The Dialectic of Enlightenment.*

[228] "Someone, at this point, must take in hand the task of being everyone, & no one, as the first poets did," she writes in the introduction to *The Scarlet Cabinet* (vi). For the substitutiblity of "everyone" and "no one" in *In the Pines,* see pages 16, 19, 22, among others.

Notley's characteristic hubris. In the beginning the poet is unsure of her powers and can only muster the deepest and least refined forms; she rebroadcasts minimal fragments of the "oldest songs" and shards of memory and image that cohere into neither story nor poem (52).[229] As the book progresses, though, we encounter less doubt, less resistance. In the first part of the book, the poet is worried she's a weakling incapable of changing anything and she rejects all of narrative because of its inevitable usurpation into the master narrative; by the second part, though, she begins to reclaim the forms of both poem and story: "There is another story, inside a drop of spit. I see it"; "I was born to be your poet […] / And I know one thing. No one. Is the poet. I am/ […] I didn't give you genes, I gave you poems. / It's all the same being, wrapped up" (98, 58-9). In addition to these rhetorical declarations of her powers, Notley begins to erect structures and places in which these powers are operational, one such is the "Black Trailor," an analog to the underground in *The Descent of Alette* that she recalls from within it. Just as she rhetorically collapses the difference between genes and poems in the lines just quoted, she does so imagistically as well:

> After my injection, like any folk shaman of the path.
>
> In the beginning when young I tried and failed; and as I suffered more and more, improved. Now in my defect I'm best of all. In my earlier injections, I was the twin of this now. I took on the stories I am casting away like old medicines.
>
> The songs are inside with small red cells. The stories, once coiled into snakes, I cut to pieces. They're trembling words which connect vibrationally. (52)

Stories coiled as snakes recalls both the serpent in the garden, metonym of the fall, and also that other coiled code, DNA. She's cut these to pieces and is repurposing them, fashioning them into her own art. While words that "connect vibrationally" is simply a description of sound, she wants these words to have more material impact than mere sound. To make this case, she asserts that there are "many kinds of physics," including the kind "where words move objects constantly" (65) (which is probably the same physics that authorized Alette to populate the sky with stars via what she said),[230] and there is also the "physics of symbols" (77). The assertion of these various "physics" is involved in the claim Notley makes both in this book and elsewhere that under the right conditions *poesis* makes more than just poems, but makes reality, too.[231] Notley articulates this belief in an interview thusly: "The poet serves poetry, not society, which is a group fantasy. Poetry does make for change, but it does it by being rather singular. It is involved in the creation of reality out of tiny sounds and meanings, sort of like particle physics but on the creation level. I know this sounds highfalutin, but I believe it."[232] Notley slightly

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[229] This is acknowledged early on: "It's almost a story or a poem but it's really a song because it's ripping me apart" (7).

[230] See pages 85-86 above.

[231] An example of this occurs in "The Black Trailor," surrounded by the assertion of these various physics, in which the question is posed, "If world ends, can words speak again? You are lost language, I say. Where was it in this corpse planet, code, code for you?" (72).

[232] Notley, "Dreaming This World Into Existence: An Interview With Alice Notley."

expands upon what she means by "sort of like particle physics" in another essay from the same year: "(I sometimes say only communication keeps the universe in place—what electromagnetism and gravity *are*?). This is the definition of memory, and my poems remember everything, exist to create small and vast slightly blurred segmental entities—that probably could be scientifically measured, to hold it, the universe, together."[233]

The scientistic claims that Notley makes do indeed sound highfalutin, to say the least, but *In the Pines*, like so many of Notley's other projects, does create a space (or an entity) in which their truth is made communicable. As with *Alette, In the Pines* constructs an elaborate system in which it is possible to transcend given limits and make the species anew. Within the universe of *In the Pines*—and despite Notley's own consistent dismissal of linearity and progressive evolution[234]—enough coherence is established so that we move from the swirling disorder of the first section to the establishment of single poems in the final section, "Hemostatic," the title of which also suggests that some recovery and healing has been accomplished and is underway. Many of these poems are beautiful, and many fiercely express the will towards the type of change Notley insists poetry can initiate.[235] The problem is, though, that eventually one must leave the universe the book has created. This is why the Tyrant doesn't stay dead. It's a problem Notley herself experiences: after writing *The Descent of Alette* Notley wished she could stay in that meter forever, but she knew it wouldn't work that way. Each book requires that she enter a state of mind from which she can create the space in which her rules of truth apply, a space that the reader can then also enter.[236] Notley intends the transference of states of mind to be accomplished through sound and measure and to be solidified by the imagined spaces in which these are the organizing forces and we can see their impact. No matter how fully we can be initiated into these spaces, once we step outside those structures we find that what's true within them cannot be verified outside of them.

The problem of there being an outside to the book, and it remaining relatively unchanged once the book is finished, both for the reader and the writer, is why, Notley writes, "Before [my death], I want to send thoughts, as unstruggling patterns, not lines of words. Maybe to the weather, forced into its own new violence" (*In the Pines* 66). The weather is the (possible) target here both because, since the early 1990s, Notley's work has explicitly engaged global warming,[237] which she here calls the weather's "new violence" that "[w]e've created," but also because the weather is a system of transmission so broadly cast as to become a general, and shared, condition. Wanting to "send thoughts, as unstruggling patterns" speaks to Notley's intention and desire for the materials of her expression to operate like genetic (as opposed to merely linguistic) material; it also hints at a telepathic claim that Notley makes elsewhere, most

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[233] "How We Cause the Universe to Exist."

[234] "[T]he only problem with evolution being its linearity—a rather enormous problem" (ibid.).

[235] For just one example, see the end of "Song": "…Lady // tell what happened where there was / no one. In this song. No one in // charge / appeared, and / time lay down" (*In the Pines* 120).

[236] Reading at Kelly Writers House 2006 (Q & A).

[237] See Notley's remarks on *Desamere* in the *Boston Review* interview.

fully in *Reason and Other Women.*

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Reason and Other Women, I thought, would be the book with which I would conclude this chapter. It would lead, in part through its telepathic promise, to an outside in which whatever claims I had made or tested could still be operational. When I initially began my research into Agnes Martin and Alice Notley, which I expected would lead to a single chapter in a five-part dissertation, I wrote a brief paper about their work for a conference in Paris in 2014. The topic of the conference was "Modern American Poetry through the Lens of French Theory." The paper I presented for that conference ended with a bit about *Reason and Other Women*, though at the time I hadn't read the whole book. I still haven't read the whole book. The conclusion of that paper narrates the difficulties of trying to write about these artists "through the lens" of theory, difficulties that I have tried to address in this dissertation by adopting a citational practice that avoids, for the most part, returning Notley or Martin to the canon of thought responsible for the overrepresentation of Man2.[238] In addition to these difficulties, the Paris paper narrates the deferral of *Reason and Other Women.* Here is the conclusion of that paper:

> Again in this book she will get back *before* the beginning to see what can be apprehended and built on the grounds that disobedience has dismantled. It is not only "clear thinking" that disobedience enables, but also, as she calls it in the preface to *Reason and Other Women*, "states of grace." *Reason and Other Women,* she describes, "had a complicated genesis, in Byzantine art, to a lesser extent in Christine de Pizan's *La Cité des Dames*, and in dreams, intentions, structural maps, and schemes of color symbolism and numbers, all of which shifted about in my mind as I composed on the computer, often forgetting what I was supposed to be doing—the plan—as I wrote myself into a different state of consciousness." The book then sets out to "do" thinking, to "track the mind" in its coming to these states of consciousness. Part of the necessity for the study of mind that *Reason and Other Women* makes is the insufficiency of the other systems that claim to know mind; Notley writes that she "didn't want to leave the definition of mind to philosophers, neurobiologists, or psychologists with their 'models' precluding states of grace. (I am officially an atheist, but much of my mental experience seems ignored or belittled by the sciences of the mind and the brain)" (*Reason* preface).
>
> *Reason and Other Women* set out to trace the mind in the act of thinking, but thinking telepathically and thinking its way into altered states of consciousness that the authorities of

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[238] I return here to Sylvia Wynter's figure. (See pages 69-72 above.)

The citational practice this dissertation has (for the most part) tried to follow emerged because of what was immanently demanded by careful study of and immersion in Notley's and Martin's work, however, that I felt authorized to proceed with that practice owes much to Sara Ahmed's *Living a Feminist Life*, in which she explains her own citational practice: "In this book, I adopt a strict citation policy: I do not cite any white men. By *white men* I am referring to an institution…Instead I cite those who have contributed to the intellectual genealogy of feminism and antiracism…work that lays out other paths, paths we can call desire lines, created by not following the official paths laid out by disciplines" (15). On white men as institution, see pages 152-53.

mind can neither explain nor (usually) accept. Because those authorities—philosophers, neurobiologists, psychologists—rely on reason to define mind, it might strike one as paradoxical that this book takes reason as its chief icon.[239] One might expect that when a book of poetry claims to rival authorities of mind it would put forward sense, or affect, or intuition, quasi-reason or semblance-reason or reflective-reason or deranged-reason or really a whole host of things besides age old reason. In this book Reason is also a figure that sometimes appears to the poet. In the preface, Notley explains that Reason first appeared to her in a dream as her dead stepdaughter Kate, who was dressed in blue to symbolize that she was reason and came to the poet to teach her of her own and the world's telepathy. Kate was reason not just because she was dressed in blue but because "reason is the working through of 'messages,' or is perhaps the voyage of the messenger." Notley goes on to elaborate the book's title in a way that does not dissolve its enigmatical relation to reason's role in conventional understandings of mind:

> In Christine de Pizan's book, the messengers are the women Reason, Justice, and Uprightness, who appear to Christine in her extremity of distress that women have been demeaned throughout the written history of the mind. Christine lived in another time and culture from the Byzantine. She was a 14th century French woman who earned her living by writing. Her messengers are clear icons in my mind, and my book is named for them, not for a religion. (Preface)

By claiming reason as her poetry's icon and by putting reason alongside telepathy and grace as those mental processes her poetry will record, Notley is denying the written history of the relationship between science, art, and philosophy (and she's taking religion out of the contest entirely). She is denying these distinctions in the name of reason at the same time as she refuses to let the world be limited or described by what reason has produced and verified. In addition to telepathy, grace, the recreation of reason, communication with the dead, and the presentation of the "second world," the preface to *Reason and Other Women* makes one other significant claim.

An auxiliary function of the book's tracing of the mind as it changes states is that the book will provide that same variety of experience to the reader. As in much of Notley's work, the "different state" is also a different space, and in *Reason* it's a Byzantine church: "the reader enters the poem as if entering a Byzantine basilica, proceeding further and further inward." However, as the book accumulates encounters and events—"sacred," "mythic," and "personal"—the work becomes denser and more difficult, as she herself acknowledges. Part of the difficulty is the density—after the first few pages there is very little space on each page, but the long lines and sentences are also difficult because the book records the process of its writing-thinking as though it were a transcript of thought; soon after the world is created, typos or accidents or errors or false-starts or words-in-formation appear. Regular capitalization falls away, as do many apostrophes and other punctuation marks. In essence, the newborn reason by which thoughts arrive and become monumentalized makes it difficult to communicate. But, she writes, "if you read this book slowly, no more than ten or twelve pages at a time, read those pages word by word, your consciousness can shift. You can enter a plane above society's killing demands and live in

[239] For someone familiar with Notley's work, though, it will be less surprising because so much of her work is like catching someone in the middle of reasoning, though effortfully reasoning without obedience to any preestablished chains or practices of reason.

'mind' at least temporarily." Yes, the claim that we might transcend society and live in mind alone is indistinguishable from simple escapism, pure fantasy, and to suggest that poetry can take us there might be delusional. But, Notley insists—and this she shares with Martin—the grounds on which we make those judgments are themselves foundationally deluded. The world has always been made by delusion and with *Reason* Notley will be one of its makers.

So it is that *Reason and Other Women* begins in a world unmade by the poem's creation and records the effort to originate the story of the world out of the mind anew, in such a way that the world might end up utterly otherwise than the way it is. It is difficult to represent how thorough this un- and re-creation means to be and how great the obstacles are to its accomplishment. The book attempts nothing less than a transvaluation of everything existing that will be so entire that some of what existed before the transvaluation will no longer exist. What the book wants to build is an enduring, inhabitable monument that preserves the reality of what is won by those other states of consciousness Notley describes in her preface. Here is how she records this labor in "Small Room of Unmade Mosaic," the fourth poem in the book:

> roomful of bone fragments pieces of the original
> story which can never be put back together, man had said, pieces sift between fingers
> small knuckles broken of the story. I can't find it out, never, warned
> don't try
> Should I collect the pieces the tiny what are they
> Almost-forms
>
> was there really an origin, all I know is I'm always at the mercy of others untrustworthy stupid brutal, running in gangs
> is this degeneration
> what do I know of beginnings
> …
> Try to picture the first. be at the first. what if there was no first and what if we've made up time
> all comes through darkness creature
> there with dark hair and she is I.
> no shes bones fragments
> you know nothing and will always,
> life will never give enough to us, we are too stupid and selfish except in a simple
> single moment, now in this moment I do nothing to you and
> I'm not stupid or selfish, now in this moment if it could somehow be held held the
> purpose of poetry of icons of contemplation, is to hold the one thats like this
>
> and if there is in the cosmos a conflict between pure moment and time,
> time in which, we do things, essentially to each other tinkering and fragmenting the wholesome creature, that pile of bones:
> still *now* we're not tinkering, and there was no creation, there was only
> ever this crystal lined with the faintest spectrum of violet blue yellow

Don't sing the world into time again let it be still in this place … (*Reason* 18)

This passage records the effort to reason a way into less brutal and stupid structures—both theoretical structures, as in its reckoning with time, and mythological structures, as in the "creature / there with dark hair," composed of the fragments of bone that are imagistically analogous to the broken pieces of the story with which the poem begins.

The difficulty of sloughing off, abandoning and unmaking the old symbols, the old reasons, all those "bought things"[240] is the greatest obstacle to *Reason's* ability to remain within the reality the mind accesses in its "states of grace" and make that reality communicable. The reality the consciousness discovers and wants to communicate is figured in the book first as the "second world" which is "entangled like coils of always in this very one" (24) and in which telepathic communication abounds, and then more enduringly as the "crystal city." The crystal city is reason's city; it is real but invisible until we understand the unreality of false reason—reason mastered by the owners of the "bought things" that one must "unbuy" (43). Reason, both as figure and as faculty, is the icon of the kind of mind this book aims to make endure, and here she appears:

> the stars on her head the stars of her crown are
> the crystal city invisible,
> wrapping the basilica in telepathy
> …
> the stars are the real stars and their light blazes down catches my face as the bodys
> in the soul heart of breaking me has broken me has, reason, reason broke me by
> showing me our false world
> broke my ability to participate fully in the activities of my time to wear its dresses
> but dressing in black and white i was wearing owned dresses the blue dress is
> not owned, the one she wears
> …
> i am wearing her i am her she is the back of my mind there
> …
> there is a city for reason
> a hawk circled the crystal tower with the animal eye of what's reasonable
> her dress is an acid blue that eats wrong thinking
>
> her dress is the blue of knowing as a hawk or a baby or the wisdom of your pain
> of what you've learned from, upon reflection
>
> what are the laws of the city
> reason, the only free thing that there is (47).

Notley is not the first to encounter the difficulty of trying to use reason to transcend

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[240] "These are bought things ignore them as such ive known all along i was using bought / names but / i will unbuy them by leaving the space in the wall blank where some jesus was /…/ a thought i have thoughts made into a monument / …is this the crystal city / which one of me is alive now, just going on momma / faculty of it and we can't yet imagine so that is my messy job here the art of this mess / to find the faculty of living in the city without time line" (42-43).

reason.[241] This is the role of Bergson's intuition.[242] For the intellect cannot alone tolerate the new, the newly created or known: "Explaining it always consists in resolving it, it the unforeseeable and new, into elements old or known, arranged in a different order. The intellect can no more admit complete novelty than real becoming; that is to say, here again it lets an essential aspect of life escape, as if it were not intended to think such an object" (*Creative Evolution* 181).

In the version of this paper that I drafted before I committed myself to *Reason and Other Women*—a book I have not finished because I am diligently obeying its command not to read more than 10-12 pages at a time, which conveniently releases me from having to tell you if the book succeeds or fails in transforming my consciousness—I did several things that I have not, in this paper, done. In that paper that I am not presenting, I arrived at theory much earlier, in particular a few examples of theory that, because of reason's inability to transcend itself, try to enact some aspect of thought in addition to presenting its discursive products.

In that paper I expose the stunning resemblances between Barthes' *The Neutral* and Notley and Martin. The resemblances range from the very general (the neutral as the desire to baffle paradigms and Notley and Martin as committed paradigm bafflers) to the uncannily specific, so specific they induced paranoia: the Neutral's baffling of the yes/no paradigm and Martin's construction of the mind that says "yes" and "no" as anti-life, and Notley's irreducible "no" that "implies yes"[243]; the role of fire in mediating the real and unreal selves in *In the Pines* and Barthes' incredible figure in which "time [is] the field of the flammable: fire is a particular mode of time: the time of the crises" (103), etc. However, I abandoned Barthes and moved on to Bataille because both Martin and Notley describe quasi-mystical experiences but deny god, so I hoped Bataille's conception of experience in *Inner Experience* would ground that kind of experience in a philosophical account of its communicability. Bataille's *inner experience* is "what one usually calls *mystical experience*," but it is without god, "free of ties, even of an origin." Inner experience has no goal, origin, or destination, other than itself (Bataille 9). Like Notley's disobedience and Martin's refusal of external authority, Bataille's mental experience requires rejection of presuppositions because "Dogmatic presuppositions have given experience undue limits: someone who already knows cannot go beyond a known horizon" (9).[244] Bataille's quasi-mystical experience communicates

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[241] In discussing *Reason and Other Women* before it was published she cites the influence of Stein, explaining the book as trying to "[catch] a flow of reasoning" she was "somewhat influenced by Gertrude Stein's ideas about what a mind is like and how one might depict it, that it is repetitive to the point of a statsis which becomes musical, beautiful, and profound….The obvious problem is that you can only catch a mind with a mind, so you never get where you're trying to be, again you wind up making art. Why shouldn't you?" (Notley interview with Sophie Erskine).

[242] In *Creative Evolution* Bergson writes of the inability of reason to transcend itself, to "leave its own environment." If you want to leave reason's environment, and the environment created by reason, and the reasons given for the environment, then, he advises, "You must take things by storm: you must thrust intelligence outside itself by an act of will" (*Creative Evolution* 212).

[243] Barthes 18, 42; Martin, *Writings* 137; Notley, *In the Pines* 4, 17.

[244] "I call experience a journey to the end of the possible of man. Not everyone can take this journey, but if one does, this supposes the negation of authorities, of existing values, that limit the possible. From the fact

nonknowledge, an interesting addition to Martin's emphasis on response and Notley's refusing to listen in order to listen. But Bataille's contribution to this paper, too, had to be sacrificed. Then, out of fear of irrationalism, I turned to Bergson, with whom there really is a preponderance of similarities, from intuition to uncreation to freedom to crystals and crusts. I will walk you through my abandonment of Bergson in a moment, but first want to confess something general about the difficulty that arose when theory and the poetics I've been elaborating were made to confront each other.

My hope for this paper had been that in thinking through the consequences of Martin and Notley's non-belief in "bought" ideas, in Notley's case, or ideas of any kind, in Martin's, was to see what disbelief and disavowal might potentiate for thinking itself, rather than to conclude that these artists' refusal of theory's products was an anti-intellectualism, an irrationalism, an aestheticism, or even a feminism (or any other ism). Instead of all this, Notley and Martin would be seen to employ radical negation to affirm the necessity of that kind of theory that tries to unsettle its own foundations.[245] This was and is an accomplishable task, but it was also one that felt, under the influence of Martin and Notley, like a bad obedience, a dishonesty, and a betrayal. I abandoned each theoretical lens as soon as it became too clear[246], for the moment that Martin's or Notley's thinking-poetics began to seem in agreement with Barthes, or Bataille, or Bergson, whose lens was the clearest, I then had to reinscribe the differences between art and philosophy; for each was suddenly and once again, as in the old stories, contending for a position and function in relation to knowledge, truth, and communicability.

The most radical feature of what Martin and Notley share is an insistence that there is a freedom the mind can achieve that provides a stance toward reality and a way of thinking that is entirely otherwise than the conditioned, conventional ways; and, essentially, this freedom is transmissible. The transmissibility of this freedom and the stance toward reality that it buys or conditions makes a bid to be epistemic. In order to claim more freedom than is reasonable, these artists must begin before the beginning and unseat the frameworks that precede and surround them, they must recreate the whole world: "The creation of a world is a free act, and the life within the material world participates in this liberty," writes Bergson (*Creative Evolution* 270). The kind of freedom that he perceives here, and that Notley and Martin invite us to participate in, is made sensible, according to Bergson, by the intuition.[247]

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that it is the negation of other values, of other authorities, experience having positive existence itself becomes value *and authority* positively" (14).

[245] Their negation would be so profound that they would escape the dialectic altogether.

[246] This isn't the right metaphor, really. The lenses were both too clear and crystalizing, but not refractive (crystalline) enough. The problem with crystallization of the non-refractive kind is well put by Bergson: "It has been pointed out that we generally perceive our own self by refraction through space, that our conscious states crystalize into words, and that our living and concrete self thus gets covered with an outer crust of clean-cut psychic states, which are separated from one another and consequently fixed…[For] the convenience of language and the promotion of social relations, we have everything to gain by not breaking through this crust and by assuming it to give an exact outline to the form and shadow which it covers" (Bergson, *Time and Free Will* 169).

[247] "If the consciousness that slumbers in [instinct] should awake, if it were wound up into knowledge instead of being wound off into action, if we could ask and it could reply, it would give up to us the most intimate

As Elizabeth Grosz describes in her excellent essay "Bergson, Deleuze and the Becoming of Unbecoming," the intuition enables that: "the object touches the subject, mind partakes of and as matter, the subject is immersed in and as an object and matter is made conceptual, rendered virtual: but only at those moments when intuition, as difficult as it is to muster, erupts" (8). It is easy to map Bergson's intuition onto what Notley and Martin have in common. In fact, *Reason and Other Women* is so Bergsonian that I would assert that Bergson must have been, at least telepathically, involved in its composition.

However, as soon as I point out how like these ideas are, I'm returning them to the story they erupted from, rather than the one they tried to rupture in some realer, more disruptive sense. And then, when I reinscribe Notley and Martin in a moment in the history of philosophy which they so effortfully tried to escape, even Bergson's most sympathetic moment, it is intuition that claims to "[acknowledge] the real's capacity to be otherwise, its ability to become more and other," as Grosz writes, rather than Martin's response or Notley's reason (9). And, Grosz explains, it is only philosophy that can "communicate unambiguously" "the immersion into the continuity of being" that intuition provides, whereas art's intuition can only "[harness or express] this continuity." And again, it is only within philosophy that "undecidability" is restored to the real and made communicable (Grosz 9).

The consequences of Notley and Martin's disbelief, for me, are deeply ambiguous. I can hear already various learnednesses clamoring to point out the ways in which they are simply repeating a folly (or a special permission) of the artist,[248] the ways that they are proposing indistinction rather than better distinctions, the ways they are drawing lines around themselves rather than away from what there is.[249] Notley insists, not only in *Reason and Other Women* but in subsequent books and in public spaces, that "we are in the crystal city right now."[250] Maybe we are, but since I haven't finished the book I can only say that the real of the crystal city is no more communicable than the real without it, unless that real be stripped of its undecidability or unless only science and philosophy—their reason and

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secrets of life"; "There are things that the intelligence alone is able to seek, but which, by itself, it will never find. These things instinct alone could find; but it will never seek them" (*Creative Evolution* 182, 167).

[248] Notley signals awareness of this risk, as this little joke about Plato's tripartite theory of the soul shows. The speaker is talking about her own ambiguous desires toward "the owner," a figure for all that must be disobeyed, to put it really reductively:

> …he'd created my
> feeling out of reason had vi diverted the crystalline and made it appetitive rather
>
> ismember dismember remember rejoin, rejoin the pieces of the world into before his creation of it the creation is his story the creation was the death of her. the snake, the crystal serpent is the wisdo not quite that the primal transparency the real city in the second world the city she guards (*Reason* 52)

[249] I also anticipate that they might seem to be renaming imagination, and in fact a very interesting addition to this paper would be a reading of Notley's lecture, "Doctor Williams' Heiresses," in order to understand what imaginative and formal possibililties Williams and other Modernists opened up for her.

[250] Notley "Town Hall"; "from *Benediction"* in *Grave of Light*, 296-308.

> reasons—be the only deciders. I can only communicate unambiguously that we are *not* in the crystal city, even if it *is* ambiguous whether we are really in it. For me, the stakes of this ambiguity and unease are rather high: the decision this confrontation provokes is one in which we must either return freedom to an economy in which it must be earned, guaranteed, and can be granted; or let it remain where Martin and Notley have and *take* it, where freedom is totally unreasonable, totally uncaused, and where reason is totally free—"the only free thing that there is" (*Reason* 47).[251]

Within the context of this chapter in which I have painstakingly traced Notley's relentless pursuit of the space "before the beginning," a space in which she both insists and discovers "there are no arguments,"[252] a space in and from which we might learn to think otherwise, it is no wonder that the end of the chapter might be a problem, just as stepping outside of any Notley book is a problem for what she claims is accomplished within them. And returning to my own beginnings in this project by quoting just now several pages of my earliest engagements with the subjects of this dissertation is perhaps a display of the imitative fallacy par excellence. But there is no way, while trying to think about thinking otherwise, for my argument to be developed enough to conclude (or even proceed other than interminably) within the discursive framework and method to which I have hitherto held. So, to finally read *Reason and Other Women* as Notley prescribes, and just as the chapter on Martin concluded by refusing to fill the empty space with knowledge, this chapter will conclude by deferring to the next beginning.

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[251] See page 26 above for Martin's commitment to the uncaused.

[252] For Notley on "before the beginning," see note 116 above. "There are no arguments" is from *In the Pines* (38; see also 77).

Part III
Measure of Thought

The search for the thought is thinking.
—Lyn Hejinian, *The Language of Inquiry*

For I am not a literary scholar nor an historian, not a psychologist, a professor of comparative religions nor an occultist. I am a student of, I am searching out, a poetics.
—Robert Duncan, *The H.D. Book*

[W]e penetrate the mystery only to the degree that we recognize it in the everyday world, by virtue of a dialectical optic that perceives the everyday as impenetrable, the impenetrable as everyday. The most passionate investigation of telepathic phenomena, for example, will not teach us half as much about reading (which is an eminently telepathic process) as the profane illumination of reading will teach us about telepathic phenomena.
—Walter Benjamin, "Surrealism"

Note on method:

This chapter is formally and methodologically unorthodox for reasons I hope are already clear. It is emboldened not only by the two seemingly-paradoxical pillars of Notley's poetics—inheritance and disobedience which, once twinned, construct a feminist poetics with a hallucinatory reason as its chief icon—but also by Martin's unwavering commitment to the freedom of full response. Thus, it is structured in numbered fragments that were written using the following constraints: the writing would be structured by reading *Reason and Other Women* in the manner Notley instructed, only a few pages at a time; the only other materials available to me were the notes and archive I had constructed in the process of writing this dissertation.

I.

Returning to *Reason* after all this time. A return that required a departure from both the aptitudes and the impasses of the critical form in which its reading was to be accomplished, and was for so long deferred (as "reading" Martin's paintings was, too). *An endless return after no return, return after no / return.*[253] If this departure be thought of as a permission, maybe it was granted by Notley's seeming always to begin again from before the beginning, by Martin's urging us to imagine the time before we were born, by the truth of Cioran's aggressive lament: "Every work turns against its author: the poem will crush the poet, the system the philosopher, the event the man of action."[254] This is what Spicer knows, too—"What I mean is words / Turn mysteriously against those who use them / Hello says the apple / Both of us were object"—and perhaps part of the task is to suspend the work in the moment of its turning, resist its settling into becoming a quintessentially allegorical object (like an apple), so that some spirit stays thrown rather than used.[255]

In this first re-reading of *Reason* I find whatever resistances the book posed to being read are dramatized: "can I know without forcing others to / let me know?"; "a closed system cannot know"; "What does this message look like?" (17, 25, 16). This last question hangs at the top of a page, under which blank space unfolds as if we should fill it with answers or a picture of an answer.

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[253] In the expanded archive I've assembled throughout the course of this research it seems necessary to admit that my own poems are part of it, as is the work of those figures of thought that the citational practice of the preceding chapters excluded. (*Yeah No* 80).

[254] Notley, "Evident Being" 102; Martin *Writings* 41; Cioran, *The Temptation to Exist* 33.

[255] Back of this sentence is that sentence from Adorno's *Aesthetic Theory* that I can never escape: "Art is redemptive in the act by which the spirit in it throws itself away" (118).

II.

But the empty space shouldn't be filled, nor should this daybook become a record of attempts to fill the blank page. An emptiness in which messages appear but do not say or mean what they carry, an emptiness as medium: "but the medium in which i am alive is not fabricated" (*Reason* 25). This medium and the emptiness primed for messages' apparition returns us to Bion's empty grid, Martin's "empty form goes all the way to heaven" (*Writings*, 43) and her empty mind that she compares to a blank page once freedom, the object of painting,[256] is achieved:

> The future's a blank page
> I pretended I was looking at the blank page
> I used to look in my mind for the unwritten page
> if my mind was empty enough I could see it
> I didn't paint the plane
> I just drew this horizontal line
> Then I found out about all the other lines (*Writings* 38).

But the blank page as figure and as figured by the paintings is filled in by vandals and viewers alike, invited by the lines Martin drew, viewers who sometimes think it looks like paper or is punctuated by ghosts.[257] The trouble in writing about Martin's paintings is that critics so often bring with them what they already know or want—again why Bion's attempt to prevent this is so useful—and this is the trouble acknowledged by T.J. Clark, too, whose diaristic *The Sight of Death*—in which he records the aftermath in real time of his daily encounter with two Poussin paintings—has been a model throughout the process of thinking about my own encounters with Martin's paintings, Notley's *Reason*: "This morning I arrived with an idea of what I should try to write about—the first time this has happened, and not a good sign. I want this book to be about what occurs in front of paintings more or less involuntarily, not what I think ought to occur" (133). Martin's sense of the "uncaused response" is analog to the involuntary occurrence that Clark is after, though for Martin that response cannot be followed back to the paintings nor read out of them. Clark's book is an attempt to keep alive the "pleasure and astonishment" that can result from giving oneself over, "again and again," to an encounter with a work (or works) of art. To keep these things alive is to attempt "to keep the opposite of the present alive. By which I

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[256] But not freedom *from* (see page 24 of Part I above).

[257] I believe I have read all of the criticism published and available in English about Agnes Martin's work. There are often times when critics confront the role/aspect of emptiness in the work, sometimes by proliferating figures of what is almost there. To my mind, the most beautiful example of this is Ann Wilson's early essay, "Linear Webs," in which she writes, describing Martin's painting "Leaves" and certainly chanelling Martin and the conversations Wilson had with her: "*Leaves* is a painting with a stone-like patina wash, painted with horizontal groupings of four lines bisected by vertical pencil lines. Grey lines on a grey wash make an uneven patina like rain, like water falling down a wall. The horizontal pencil lines are ghosts, illusions of sight. Ghost punctuation, a sufficiency, a minimum of means, dry bones, taking away from the painting whatever time, soap, hard use might take away, leaving a skeleton that cannot be diminished by time; a painting that might survive in a desert" (47). Wilson's use of "dry bones" here, a reference to Ezekiel that features in Martin's writings, transcribed by Wilson (see page 15 of Part I above).

mean the full range of human possibilities that the present is dedicated to destroying—the kinds of recognitions and sympathies that make up the human, as far as I'm concerned."[258]

Clark's project reveals these recognitions and sympathies by way of his writing seeing. (Cf. Merleau-Ponty's "Cezanne's Doubt.") But again Notley insists on things being more natural than made. "[B]ut the medium in which i am alive is not fabricated" (*Reason* 25). She isn't satisfied with being *il miglior fabbro* but would best fabrication altogether.[259] The medium in which this voice is alive to us should be the medium in which we encounter it (the poem, in language, on the page).

That it isn't fabricated, though, is where this intractable business about telepathy comes in. There is supposed to be a medium of thought that isn't language, a medium through which thought in the form of "unstruggling patterns" is conducted that transgresses the boundaries of individual minds and isn't reducible to language (*In the Pines* 66). She repeats that it is there everywhere and wants to claim equity between this medium and not meaning but matter.

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[258] T.J. Clark, interviewed in *The Brooklyn Rail* (2006).

[259] "Poetry's involvement with music formalizes it, beautifies it, its aesthetics are more like nature's less like a human's" (Introduction to *The Scarlet Cabinet*, vi).

III.

Though Notley is content with language simply being an insufficient category for the communicative medium in which she works, Benjamin's early essay "On Language as Such" presents a theory of language that wants to redeem language from being solely contained by its "bourgeois conception," in which man communicates to other men using words that denote things, and reclaim for it its mystical materiality (Benjamin, *Selected Writings Vol. 1*. 65). In this essay Benjamin argues "that which in a mental entity is communicable *is* its language" (63). Language contains its own infinity not because it is made up of infinitely rearrangeable parts, but because it is constituted by what is communicated in it:

> [A]ll language communicates itself *in* [rather than *through*] itself; it is in the purest sense the "medium" of the communication. Mediation, which is the immediacy of all mental communication, is the fundamental problem of linguistic theory, and if one chooses to call this immediacy magic, then the primary problem of language is its magic. At the same time, the notion of the magic of language points to something else: its infiniteness. This is conditional on its immediacy. For precisely because nothing is communicated *through* language, what is communicated *in* language cannot be externally limited or measured, and therefore all language contains its own incommensurable, uniquely constituted infinity. Its linguistic being, not its verbal contents, defines its frontier. (64)

Benjamin's sentences are germane to Notley's work precisely because, as Benjamin reminds us by quoting Hamann, language is "'the mother of *reason* and revelation'" (67).[260] To be on the frontier of language *as such* is to transcend the limits of the language of man: "The infinity of all human language always remains limited and analytic in nature, in comparison to the absolutely unlimited and creative infinity of the divine word" (69). Though Benjamin insists on the infinite and incommensurable, Notley thinks this limit can be transcended by way of measure in ways that have an impact on the material world, a change that would be itself measurable.[261] Maybe this is why the medium is still Reason's.

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[260] See the discussion of Notley's use of language (and characters that use language) in ways that rival the OT God's use of language Part II on page 76 above.

[261] See "How We Cause the Universe to Exist" and "Dreaming this World into Existence."

IV.

"[I] go in in reaction" (*Reason* 28) and find little to come out with.

V.

Reason seems to put forth a medium in which nothing can be articulated or indexed, a medium that disarticulates, so that whatever approaches knowledge in it (or through it) is knowledge without an object or is unknowable as an object. The inarticulate voice sounding itself out towards the disarticulation of concepts—

VI.

The inarticulate voice sounding itself out towards the disarticulation of concepts—"to make something known but its in between / cant be said" (33); "there is no con or unconscious in here because that would be pieces but i must / reconstit how / do you sew them no i no, i must see them whole" (36)[262]—in relation to the violence Notley's work contains, its many murders and dismemberments.

That this violence pertains to the re-membering of Reason is part of the mythic function in the work, a violence that wants to stand in place of what the conceptual system enacts, to make image differently than the ways in which the ones we were given or have bought have been made. This violence is also connected to the shamanic role that Notley embraces.[263]

Susan Sontag, writing on Artaud, explains well the difficulty of knowing what to do with this kind of work. Artaud's, Sontag explains, is a "body of thought" rather than a "body of work," because "the character of Artaud's writings forbids their being treated simply as 'literature'" (lvii).[264] Given that Artaud's is "work that cancels itself, thought that outbids thought, recommendations that cannot be enacted," Sontag asks, "Where does that leave the reader? … To detach his thought as a portable intellectual commodity is just what that thought explicitly prohibits. It is an event, rather than an object" (ibid.). Here is obvious parity between Notley's refusal of "bought" ideas and Sontag's prohibition against treating Artaud's thought as something we might buy and use or assent to as something in which we might believe. "Forbidden assent or identification or appropriation or imitation, the reader can only fall back on the category of inspiration." She goes on:

> Artaud is someone who has made a spiritual trip for us—a shaman. It would be presumptuous to reduce the geography of Artaud's trip to what can be colonized. Its authority lies in the parts that yield nothing for the reader except intense discomfort of the imagination.
>
> Artaud's work becomes usable according to our needs, but the work vanishes behind our use of it. When we tire of using Artaud, we can return to his writings. "Inspiration in stages," he says. (lviii)

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[262] All quotations from *Reason* are typed as they appear in the book. Any changes in capitalization are indicated in brackets. So instances like "but i must / reconstit" are not typos but rather the stuttering and fuzzing of the original.

[263] See Notley and Kellan 17.

[264] Susan Sontag, "Introduction," *Antonin Artaud: Selected Writings.*

VII.

"Inspiration in stages" is perhaps what I had hoped for in this third part of *Thinking Otherwise*: that study or consideration would yield the kind of responsiveness work that cannot be *used* demands (work like Martin's, Notley's, Artaud's for Sontag), that the lyric essay would be a form in which the critical capacity of their work would be transmitted and furthered. But "study" is related not only to *studere,* "to push on," but also to *stupere*, "to knock hard" (Shipley 390). Hence the school of hard knocks, and the nothing yet that has so far come.[265]

Maybe the trouble that remains with encountering their work is that I've committed myself to testing its transformative capacity and the promises it makes publicly (or if not publicly, at least towards some audience) rather than simply experiencing it privately. There is no hiding the use I'm trying to make of it—

"tears for the future her job is to cry / for the future when, your job too, crying for the future" (39).

Notley's phrase "crying for the future" is epithet for her vocation, a job that everyone will share once she converts us all to members of her species. I prefer Stevens' "The poem is the cry of its occasion," which shifts the emphasis not just from poet to poem, but further out to what is outside of it. The word *occasion* comes from *cadere*: to fall. A falling together of circumstances, occasion, though it used to mean the setting of the sun, its going down (*OED*).

To ask after what this work on Notley and Martin has occasioned, then, is to admit that privately the draft is called "Agnes and Alice," not "Martin and Notley"; that maybe my own poems are better transmitters of what their work occasioned. The poems are not so different than this essay, though, in that I'm committed to seriality as a poet, to ongoingness, to virtualizing ends and origins. The serial poem returns always to some occasion that cannot pass; its origin never ends but neither do its parts exactly follow.

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[265] Thanks to Lyn Hejinian for pointing out the relevance of Stefano Harney's and Fred Moten's use of the term "study" in *The Undercommons*: "Study is what you do with other people. It's talking and walking around with other people, working, dancing, suffering, some irreducible convergence of all three, held under the name of speculative practice" (110). Study is "a mode of thinking with others separate from the thinking the institution requires of you" (11). See also 67, 109, 118.

VIII.

In 2014, the year I first started work on Notley and Martin, I was asked by the artist Eric Amling to travel to his art show opening and give a reading there. I mistakenly remembered the title of Amling's show as "Public Event," when in fact the title was "Private Event." So this poem,[266] for which that original occasion is only residual, means to be both a convocation and an opportunity to answer the call of some occasion, some public event:

ACTION IS CONTENT AND CONTENT WITHOUT ANY ACTION IS DESIRE

There is a flashing forth by which
I enter your heart and instruct you: get me

to the brouhaha, the cry of
the devil in the cloth of the clergy,

the hubbub, bubba, go, scum
up the wildredness

and then you will see some of the light lifht
in the grass the moss was in the clover of

what everything is but m[in]e, dug
under the little I cannot instrument

, man, I have imperceptible knowledge
a lot, guys, and work very little

all of the time so that your desire is strong
as it should be to call attention to the title's

own: to unhurt with, be smart about, and
redact, while healing what makes you make them, your faces.

I understand my wrong memory of this poem's original occasion—the swapping in of the public for the private—to be an acknowledgement of the fact that this poem wants to be a convocation, a sounding out of and towards an address capable of the directness and intimacy that inheres in Celan's sense of the poem as a handshake, O'Hara's sense of the poem as a phone call.[267] This is also a sounding out and an activation of the play within language: the brouhaha, the hubbub, bubba. To make these sounds is to admit that all poems aspire to the condition of the onomatopoeia, the rhyme between confession and performance. As poetics is a rhyme between occasion and occupation, their practical unification, an ideal description of a public event.

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[266] *Yeah No* 12.

[267] Celan 26, O'Hara 1072.

IX.

What I mean by confession is informed by Nathaniel Mackey's unfolding of the way confession, in Robert Duncan's work, is "not restricted…to the autobiographic" (*Discrepant Engagement* 99). Reading Duncan through the work of Guyanese writer Wilson Harris, Mackey explains: "[C]onfessionality is also mediumistic—in the compound conjunctive sense of channeling voices from the past and of engaging the medium qua medium, consciously and self-reflexively engaging issues pertaining to poetics and poetic tradition. The derivative nature of the work in itself constitutes a confession. Hence the aura of subjectivity surrounding the term *confessional* needs to be replaced by a sense of susceptibility, of being subject-to" (99).[268]

While Notley would surely balk at any idea of her work being derivative, I do not. My understanding of seriality is structured by work like Duncan's and Mackey's. *My Enemies,* a book written thoroughly under the influence of Duncan, begins with a poem that is a member of a series only in the loosest sense of the word, a series that is more like a trend, really. Poems that tag the word "#beyond" or "#faith," or both, or almost undo them. These poems struggle towards the kind of belief in poetry and its efficacies that Notley and Duncan endlessly evince, but which I cannot always muster.

BEYOND THEITY, ITY IDIOM / DEAR FAITH

This is the sound of the sun on a loop

What was the sun is the sound of a loop on

This is a range arrayed and able

Officer, I heard the sound of the sun
and it meant burn them down and was smart
arson and underneath arson dirt and under that my eyes.

This whole road was made of my eyes many many
eyes and was called for, called
vision that carriage of sight.

The wheels of which,
through motion, make music, then
you strike a note to decide for what
it was struck, say stricken.

Say I am as I am able, a donation. Bone
demented cement, cemented
lament. And all motions were repetitive
motions, a wind in the tree, the wind on a loop.

Science was the only joke we had
and we told it back and forth, sometimes
it went *life is where I do my actions,*
sometimes it wept and wept.

[268] Mackey goes on: "The 'species of unpredictable arousal' Harris remarks upon revises—radically calls into question—the notions of self subjectivity implies" (99). Mackey's work on Duncan reckons with "the legacy of post-colonial anxiety regarding tradition" and illuminates some of the same problematics that I treat in the discussion of Notley's work in relation to Glissant's, above in Chapter 2.

The officer in this poem is a figure for the kind of authority that sponsors or executes violence the poem knows it can neither remit nor redress, but the apostrophe to the officer is the figure by which the poem tests the delusion and magic of the lyric address. The word "theity" in this poem's title is a playful smashing together of "the" and "ity," but their conjunction also suggests some theological occasion, some deity to which the poem is a ditty (*My Enemies* 3). This thread in my work attempts to re-inhabit what Notley calls a "disallowed metaphysics," which I take to be a secular metaphysics (*Mysteries of Small Houses* 83). I gravitate towards poets with an interest in an approach to the ineffable, by which we customarily mean the unsayable, poets who think that poems might configure access to an invisible order, or that might reveal the relationship between material horror and the immaterial beyond. But I am interested not so much in the unsayable, the ineffable, but rather the effable—the F'able with a capital F—the effable but otherwise unthinkable, or only circumstantially thinkable, such that poems can inaugurate those circumstances. What are the thoughts we cannot form and how might form be involved in their [un]thinkability? How might poetry—through what it makes of the meaning it finds and discovers in language and the forms through which it makes that meaning range—circumscribe what is only circumstantially thinkable, only occasionally true? So the disallowed metaphysics is reactivated not to say the ineffable, but to F the limits of the thinkable, the sayable.

X.

The suspicion all along that this project considered in the context of my poems is a "Book I Will Not Write" too. The "Book I Will Not Write" poems are a series of prose-like poems that run through *My Enemies* and disregard that book's boundary to show up in *Yeah No* too. Many of these poems also aim for a mode of address that is as intimate as Celan's handshake, O'Hara's phone call, but they suspect that this intimacy might only endure in that temporality that poems but not persons can occupy—the society of poems going on over our heads, as Jack Spicer would say.[269]

The BIWNW poems describe books that virtually exist: I can't read them to you; they are stories of occasions that never happened; yet they claim often and variously to preserve records of what they insist never was. By doing so they foreground how the occasion of a poetics participates in a difficult temporality to which poetry is particularly well suited, but which also has extra-poetical life. If Hannah Arendt's sense of beginnings should have already been in the air, so too should her formulation of the "no longer" and the "not yet" that allows her to understand the present as discontinuous with what surrounds it; there is a gap between the no longer and the not yet that simultaneously presences them both without touching either. It is this gap, in her words, "that the book longs to bridge.[270] She means the book she is reviewing, but I also take her to mean the book in general, and my work troubles the difference between real books, unreal books, and poems. A book is discontinuous with what surrounds it, and it isn't. So too, poems. The discontinuous present is a dream, a willful assertion that the future can be recovered even if the present can neither accommodate nor guarantee its approach. The discontinuous present is also what licenses the series to perforate the boundary between *My Enemies* and *Yeah No*, a signal that something can be un-done even if it isn't finished, as these poems (and this dissertation) continue to try to begin something in the gap between the no longer and the not yet.

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[269] See Spicer's "Letters to James Alexander," especially page 209 of *My Vocabulary.*

[270] Arendt, in a 1946 review of Herman Broch's *The Death of Virgil,* described Broch's book as a "bridge" that "tries to span the abyss of empty space between the no longer and the not yet: For the decline of the old, and the birth of the new, is not necessarily an affair of continuity; between the generations, between those who for some reason or other still belong to the old and those who either feel the catastrophe in their bones or have already grown up with it, the chain is broken and an 'empty space,' a kind of historical no man's land, comes to the surface which can be described only in terms of 'no longer and not yet'" (Arendt, *Essays* 158-9).

BOOK I WILL NOT WRITE

This is a collection of two shorter works. The first book is the one after anxiety, as in on its other side. This book denies poems are themselves books I cannot write. The second book is the book before anxiety, both prior to and at its face. While back of the face, the door, back of the door, the room, the book, a face. This book was written out of a desire now more than ever to be what I cannot and to have the time to know what I need to. This book (The Book of Shame) is dedicated to my editor, please write back.

BOOK I WILL NOT WRITE

This book is a picture book, more precisely a book of pictures. Pictures of everything that has ever been used as an example by somebody making a pretty abstract point. A great number of the pictures are of tables and chairs in classrooms and other meeting places where one encounters benign, ridiculous, or stunning confusion about tableness and reference, but also where one is asked to sit down—for example, you can sit right here. There are pictures of food and of opposites: maybe this, maybe not. There are pictures of things that do not exist and have never happened: the book's own three dimensional index, the stone and its weapon, the live deer with crocheted antlers, lilac, etc. There are also pictures of pieces of space that range from a few millimeters to a full armspan, these pieces of space were used to illustrate size, as in it was *this* big. I want to ask if these are pictures of *this*. This is why I will not write. Because of this difficulty I face my own face, difficult. What is impossible is that I would have to put inside the book a picture of the book since it is an example too. This isn't to say it exemplifies anything at all or has a point worth clarifying. I simply want to ask if you will stand still so I can take a picture of you, for example, or you, and you.

(*My Enemies* 45, 16)

XI.

One way to get out of step with the present is to dis-resemble how it occurs to you. This is what puns discover, the kind of mirror rhyme is.[271] Robert Duncan defines rime as "measured motion, time, proportion…possible awareness [of occurrences] between total disresemblance of sounds and total resemblances. . . RIME = morphological intuition."[272] It was Duncan who lent me the sense of both polysemy and rime as agents of productive discontinuity—simultaneous resemblance and disassembly—that constellates towards an otherwise, a knowing otherwise. In *The Poet's Freedom: A Notebook on Making,* Susan Stewart writes that "rhyming is based in aural coincidences that themselves depend on noncoincidence in time and space" (151). Yes, though rhyme also upends that upon which it depends: while rhyme might initially depend on a noncoincidence, once the rhyme is made each word no longer perfectly coincides with its previous self either. Bloom eternally rhymes with doom, mortals with portals. This is why, for Duncan, rime is holy and puns occupy the highest of its orders, rather than their being the "lowest form of wit."[273]

Allen Grossman writes that rhyme (and other forms of repetition) as that which "summons to common membership at the level of the species" (362). While Grossman doesn't go there, we might route this sense of membership through Wynter and Notley, hope to find the species transformed by way of rhyme's upending non-coincidence that converts to common membership. This possibility is somehow contained in Dickinson's variant in "This world is not conclusion," in which what was first "sequel" then became "species":

> This World is not conclusion.
> A Species stands beyond -
> Invisible, as Music -
> But positive, as Sound -
> It beckons, and it baffles -
> Philosophy, don't know.
> …[274]

What Dickinson points to in her line "Philosophy, don't know" and also in the half-rhyme between "beyond" and "Sound" is what Notley is after in *Reason.*

There is a resemblance between the reactivation of a disallowed metaphysics and the deployment of a disallowed (or unfashionable) rhyme—if both have fallen out of favor it is reason's favor, reason is the fall—and this resemblance runs precisely along the lines of the undoing of the

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[271] On the relationship between pun and rhyme, see Hugh Kenner, "Pope's Reasonable Rhymes."

[272] From "Notes on the Structure of Rime" in *Robert Duncan: Collected Essays and Other Prose,* 290.

[273] Kenner 74.

[274] Dickinson Poem 373, page 397. Also notable that "the lines might be part of 'After great pain a formal feeling comes.'"

noncoincidence that reason tells the story of in its capture of space and time. Rime, after it is made, names a corruption, a discontinuousness with each of the single words it involves. Rime makes measure of the distance within coincidence. Rime is a device to place understanding between two terms whose non-coincidence it is a tribute to. What kind of occasion does the present have to be in order to disrupt its continuity with what surrounds it?

Notley declares her "disallowed metaphysics" in a poem in which she also writes "Grief isn't a word I'm not a person" (*Mysteries* 83). Rhyme, measure, elements of poetry's music—and reason doesn't get music. Music, Nathaniel Mackey writes, drawing on Steven Feld's *Sound and Sentiment,* "is wounded kinship's last resort"; it makes visible the fact that something "is left out of reality," has been lost.[275] If song comes from the cry of wounded kinship, rhyme can be its scar.

So some of my poems take rhyme as their occasion, as when "international" breaks down to become "in or at an all" in this poem:

WHAT CAME BEYOND FAITH / USUS ET FRUCTUS

International
in or at an all

in many languages this
rhymes with misfit.

Police, there is no imagination.

There are lice and the grid of the window,
the door in the door in the wall of the window.

What restlessness rests still on the sill:
cotton threaded with glass become dust
through which.

Oil on land, land on oil
in Canada, is Canada Canada Canada.

To vacate is too much of evacuation and patrol
returns verb form to to aware.

Is the more more courageous? This
is the misfit and isn't,
visionary,

no heir to aware. Vision is the dust of,
vision's dust is air.

Is the more more courageous?

To the police: there is no imagination.
To the polis: imagination is no place.

[275] Nathaniel Mackey, "Sound and Sentiment, Sound and Symbol" 29-30.

Or that other series in *My Enemies* in which each title names a rhyme: "Doom/Mood," "Concept/Receipt," "Nope/Open," etc.:

DOOM / MOOD

In the dumb mud of attention, dear Judge, mood was everything, up to a certain point, a bunch of what there was. And on the lawn the least of what was known of the bird was not the feather it left behind where everyone was using the word labor against the rubble rubble thunder rubble and aspired to the condition of the music of the condition that aspired to destroy you through music. But I have found a place in the sun, I said, inaccurate place inaccurate besides, sitting here is no way a place in the sun, a product of chance overheard as chants over our heads, above the little distance between ____ & ____. O, say I came to the valley I crossed, I crossed the valley I came to, let the world rent. Reckon what is absurd to the field, what wreck declined down that hill, what progress degraded graced the grass the light went gradually out of? Absurd to the field is this warning, (is this warning you, Judge, on the lawn), or invention of the miracle I am afflicted with, impossible to say field or call that field a meadow in the dark. I came upon a marsh in the dark it came out of, can a field go on with a marsh in its middle, rubble rubble thunder rubble, on the ledge that any ingress is I'm sure what business did this all the livelong day, boom.

XII.

When Reason as figure first appears, she "came suddenly into the church of my mind as i felt near a certain border / i didnt understand the nature of / / she didnt change this river of words images movement projection flowing / consciousness including unconsciousness / but cast a light on things. reason as primal / […] / reason appeared to me in a blue dress i have not seen her face nor her skin / only the light she casts and her high long dress" (44-5). The dress becomes an analog to concepts themselves, notions and ideas we have bought and must return and disobey:

> only reason is intelligent, only reason loves deeply, only reason can deal with notions
> of purity and impurity, cementing them into the shapes of the world
> can choke on our air but breathe and speak and breathe
> the stars on her head the stars of her crown are
> the crystal city invisible,
> wrapping the basilica in telepathy
> …
> reason broke me by
> showing me our false world
> broke my ability to participate fully in the activities of my time to wear its dresses
> but dressing in black and white i was wearing owned dresses the blue dress is
> not owned, the one she wears
> …
> her dress is an acid blue that eats wrong thinking
> …
> what are the laws of the city
> reason, the only free thing that there is (46-7)

Reason's dress refashions notions themselves so that they may be otherwise concretized "into the shapes of the world" (46). What Reason wears and how she is styled is the first (and most) apprehensible thing about her. Reason as an icon is fashion forward, that kind of icon first.

Though I don't remember what connections I initially perceived, in this section of *Reason and Other Women* I have notes pointing to Adorno on concepts and metaphysics—"Metaphysics always deals with concepts" (*Metaphysics* 4)— and citing also Keston Sutherland's ironic complaint: "So long as Marx's concepts can be specified, Marx's style need only be enjoyed" (Sutherland 6). Trying through Adorno to work out something about Reason's dress and her not-yet-witnessed capacity to change the conceptual system ("this river of words"), I wrote: "Adorno's own aesthetics, his own form, show this bifurcation of concept and style to be utterly optional. Not only is the concept a subject, it is also a genre of made things, their medium-specific retrospection, mediascopic; it is also his form: his thinking styles concepts. Maybe fashion especially understands that to style is to assemble, to make the thing that will be seen and worn, thought and communicated."

XIII.

Just after Reason in her blue dress appears, Notley's search for what's worth knowing begins to resemble an Agnes Martin painting:

> the second world enwrapping me
> the pencil gentle lines in the sky become words the bare design…
> the lines are swelling again what is worth knowing…
> oh white wisp of line in sky why and the trees next to space travel
> i am qualified to give you pain by telling the truth (49-50)

There's little I can do with this coincidence except to note that it is as striking as the similarity between Martin's description of her memory of birth ("I can remember the minute I was born. And I think everybody's born in exactly the same condition. I thought I was quite a small figure with a little sword, and I was very happy"[276]) and Notley's description of her birth scene in *In the Pines:* "I was first pierced by love when I was born. My face and body pierced by blues, by reds and blues, like a tribal possession. / Sapphires and rubies of rigid pains, love bade me contort myself" (21). The jewel tones of *In the Pines* are typical of the world we primarily inhabit, whereas it's the "second world" we seek in *Reason and Other Women*, where these colors are inapprehensible or haven't yet been achieved.[277]

This seems as good a place as any to note that Martin's dress often resembles her paintings. This is true of the famous photographs of Martin that were taken for *Vogue* in 1960[278], during which period Martin's paintings are faint grids and subtle grey washes:

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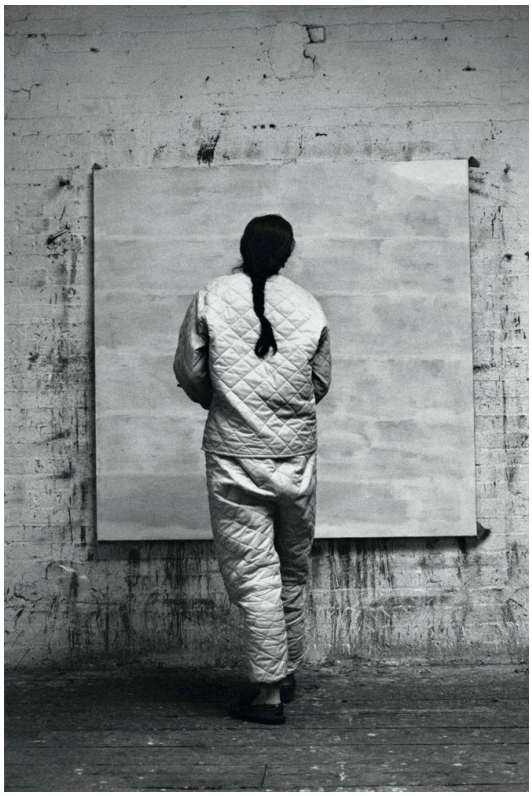
[276] From Mary Lance film, transcription mine, see page 27 of Part I above.

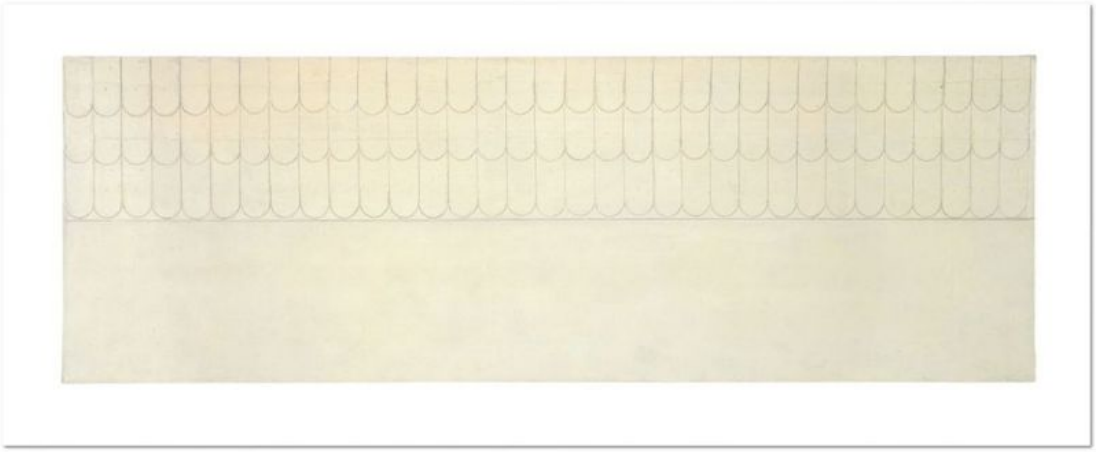
[277] Notley discusses this in the preface to *Reason and Other Women*, but it is also a trope throughout the book. See, for example, "Mosaic of Pharoah's Daughter" 62-64.

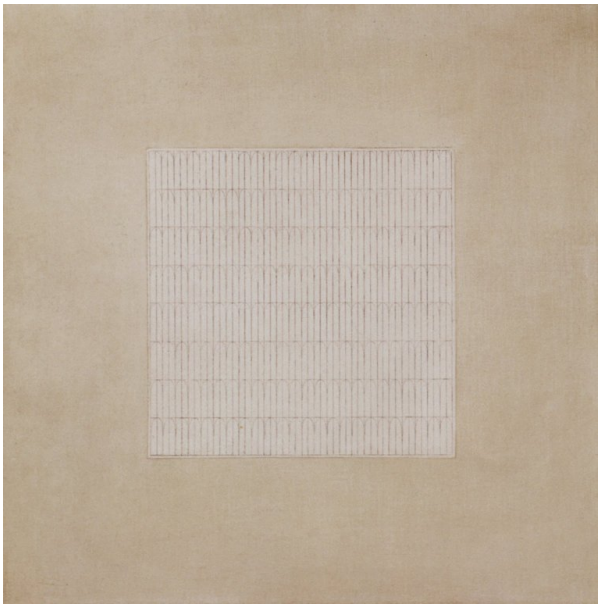
[278] Alexander Liberman, "Agnes Martin with Ladder and Level" and "Agnes Martin, 1960," Getty Research Institute. Image © J. Paul Getty Trust © 2016 Agnes Martin / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York.

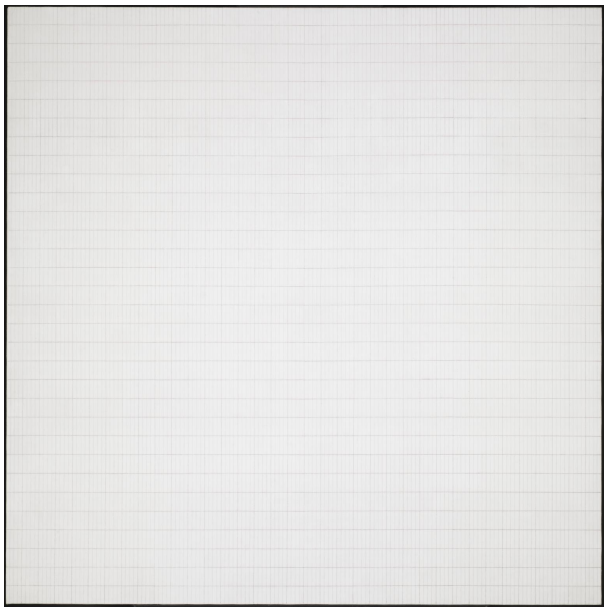


Of the above photograph, Anne Wagner writes that "the quilted outfit is clearly the painter's practical choice" (Wagner 229). But doesn't it also share something with *The Heavenly Race (Running)* (1959), *Song* (1962), or *Morning* (1965)[279]:

[279] *Agnes Martin* (Dia) 48, 82, 93.

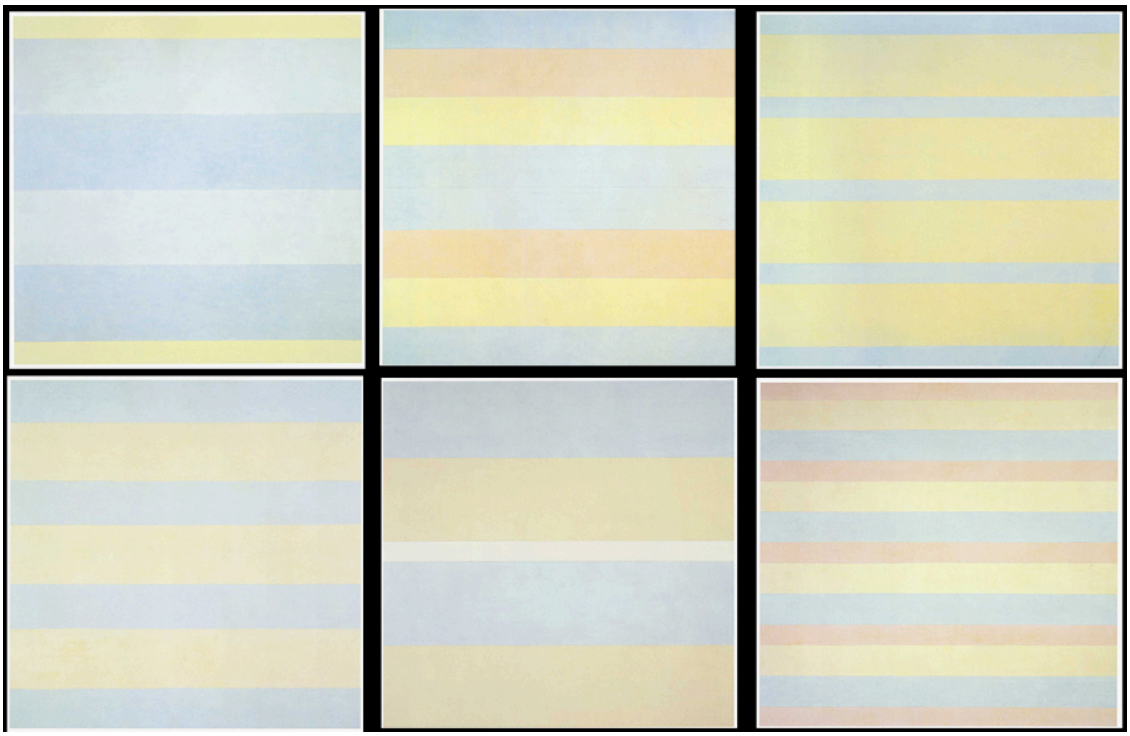






As Martin's series of paintings begin to take on more color and feature horizontal stripes more often than grids, her dress changes as well. This difference is observable beginning in the 1980s and is especially clear when looking at the paintings from the 1990s and early 2000s. Take the congruence between these close ups of Martin's 1997 series *With My Back to the World* and these stills of Martin from Mary Lance's documentary[280]:

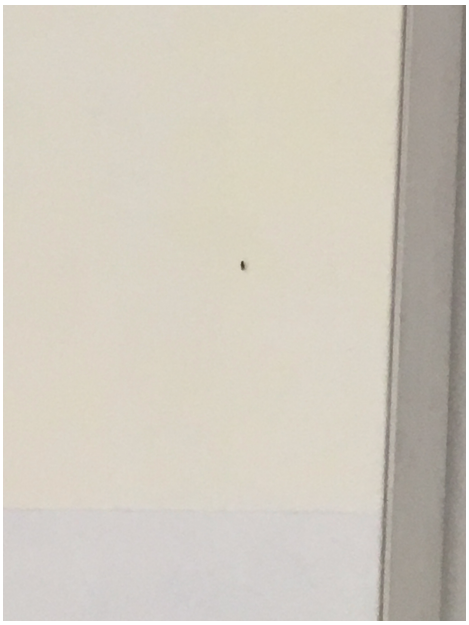
[280] Paintings: Agnes Martin, *With My Back to the World,* 1997. Synthetic polymer paint on canvas, six panels. The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Documentary: *Agnes Martin: With My Back to the World*, directed by Mary Lance, 2003.



The reproductions above oversaturate the colors of *With My Back to the World*; the colors of the paintings are much slighter in real life, closer to the hues of the shots of Martin from Lance's film. In 2016 I spent two days at the Martin retrospective at LACMA. Being in the galleries with Martin's paintings I found a calm harmony between the paintings and the museum-goers' striped shirts, the tile in the bathroom, the grates, the floor; I wrote, "the detail of all these, as with the paintings, becomes aleatory, fluid, as though something in the water has the vision, too." I was surely thinking of Woolf's line, spoken by Lily Briscoe, "I have had my vision," when I wrote in my notebook that I wouldn't keep track of which notes correspond to which painting, that "Less and less matters to them. Stop the concern about titles, when she stopped signing the work. Less

and less matters to them, only our condition to attend to them, that condition a susceptibility, and to language." I found it difficult to heed Martin's dismissal of chronology: "The order or chronology doesn't matter but I can't remember that, can't forget that she had to live through the painting of the paintings, as I want to travel through them. It doesn't matter which one I had which thought about. Or any of my thoughts. The most naïve response—that they long to be written on. Though even if they ask to be written on all writing fails where it thinks it is thoughts *about.* The paintings change so you can watch them instead of see them, like clouds, they want to be watched rather than seen because they want a response, for you to see your own vision. And what do I want my vision to be. I can tell she was funny because this one looks like piss on paper. And all the way back through, to *Homage to Life* I am either hallucinating script and other discourse or there is everything she didn't paint as a wash under what she did."

I returned to the series *With My Back to the World* again and again. It was there that I became sure that that series' title means to be in harmony with *I Love the Whole World*, not antithetical to it. That one way one turn's one's back to the world is to lie down on top of it, staring at the sky. This was somehow confirmed by the fact that there was a tiny fly on one of the paintings, ambling slowly on one faint green stripe. I found this impossibly funny and strange.



Its landing and staying where it did somehow confirmed that the problems of responding fully to art that insists on its own radical space are real, and dared me to consider the possibility that nothing I say *about* the paintings could be true or useful beyond the moment of standing before them. A truth also contained in the enigmatic anecdote from Glimcher's book on Martin, in which she is trying to explain contemporary art to her brother and manipulates some toothpicks, explaining that "[w]ith this spacing in between, they mean one thing…; and with this spacing in between, they mean something else."[281] Whatever she meant to demonstrate here I imagine the space between the toothpicks to be like the various intervals between her stripes, rectangles, or squares.

An ordering of fields, waiting for measure to be marked, fields in which one can mark their response, graph and measure like thoughts. Measure as blank analytic.

XIV.

A live fly on a painting is a kind of mistake, but also an invitation, a comfort, a joke. Remembering it calls to mind also Griselda Pollock's description of the effect of Martin's paintings, which she describes as a "tonal counterpoint" that results from the interaction between the verticals and the horizontals, and strikes her less as the effect of a grid, but instead it "forms a kind of screen; associatively I might be reminded of a window, with its Venetian blinds drawn, blocking my view, shielding a lighted interior, obscuring vision while introducing themselves as the masking screen that I see instead: lure/frustration, invitation/ blockage" (170). While *With My Back to the World* did not produce this screen effect for me, perhaps it did for the fly.[282] The

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[281] Glimcher 69.

[282] Pollock's essay is also a wonderful resource for looking at the instability of Martin's writings as writings, as was discussed on pages 1-3 of Part I of this dissertation. Pollock's presentation of Martin's "The Untroubled Mind" as "written as pencil and laid out like blank verse or concrete poetry," is an intentional confusion of the words, their contexts, and the grids on which they were spread. She describes the words as written in pencil, and yet she (in the footnotes) acknowledges that much of what she is quoting from was in fact a transcription between Martin and Wilson. This confusion is compounded by the fact that at the end of her essay Pollock presents "The Untroubled Mind" on a separate page as though it were a poem of 26 lines, when in fact it is 360 lines (in *Writings*). That Pollock's presentation of Martin's writings amounts to a confusion shouldn't be taken as a wholesale criticism of Pollock's method; in fact, the liberties she takes permit her to dialogue with Martin, a dialogue in which Martin's replies (as imagined by Pollock) do not always *answer*, such that the dialogue is a bunch of intersecting lines, at odd angles, with gaps between them. And, Pollock's own parapraxis reveals how difficult it is to

fly's presence as confirmation of the possibility that formal motifs, compositional acts, "artistic elements," as Charles Altieri writes, are "literal forces within the world" (*Painterly Abstraction* 34). Forces that are measurable, or that attempts at measure—the "pulsational scannings" that Martin's paintings induce in the viewer—bring awareness of.[283]

The fly (not a house fly but a fruit fly) as the tiniest imaginable body that somehow demonstrates the effectiveness of the work and its joy, taking measure of what thought, built from the body, built outside.

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accept Martin's apolitical stance: Pollock writes, "the artist declares herself opposed to classicists who '…are people who look out with their backs to the world'" when in fact Martin is identifying herself with the classicists (Pollock 160, *Writings* 37-38).

[283] Bracha Ettinger quoted in Pollock, 163.

XV.

Joining the alternation between a screen and a veil, and the "pulsational scannings," is Anne Wagner's writing on Martin's *Red Bird*: to look at *Red Bird* "is to be, and to remain, unsure about what the artist proposes we see. Is there anything there at all? If so, what?" (209). These formulations describe the attempts at apprehension Martin's paintings induce. The experience of listening to the sound of thought before you know what it says, trying to read something unwritten or underwritten.

Martin's paintings are renderings of measure itself, measure as the "empty form [that] goes all the way to heaven" (*Writings* 35). And measure as she renders it is figuration itself, for figuration is a representational act—to figure is "to portray," "to bring into shape," "to give something form"—and also a mental activity that is prior to representation and the fixing of forms (be those forms conceptual or aesthetic): "to reckon, calculate, understand, ascertain" (*OED)*. If measure is an apprehensive form, is prehensile, then there inheres the relation between measure and grace.

While Martin herself doesn't use the word grace, her work is so often described as being full of grace;[284] and grace, as a descriptive aesthetic quality, seems to involve both a slightness and a sense that something designed is being carried out—as ballet is the most conventionally graceful form of dance but also rigidly choreographed, its expression being the formal accomplishment of its design, like a Martin painting. When Martin writes "we feel a certain devotion," it is to the pursuit of this relation and is of utmost importance for any artist, in her view (*Writings* 100). While neither Martin's nor Notley's work is devotional in a religious sense, it is devotional nonetheless, and both confirm the pursuit of grace. *Reason* records and induces "states of grace," and grace is what the owl brings to Alette that allows her to defeat the Tyrant (*Reason* preface, *Coming After* 176). For Martin, what generally goes by the name of grace, in her lexicon, is "mystery" (*Writings* 91, 152-156).

The critic R.V. Young, writing on devotional poetry of the 17th century, notes that "the apprehension of grace" was among the primary orientations of the poets he studies (Donne, Herbert, Crashaw, Vaughan) and also sees them as expressing awareness of grace's incompatibility with the modern, secular world-view: "The very concept of grace is antithetical to what may be taken as the typical *Weltanschauung*, with its strains of Marxist materialism, Nietzschean nihilism, and Freudian *Schadenfreude.* Underlying the notion of grace is the conviction that behind what is visible, beyond what can be articulated, there is not nothing, but something—the unexpected gift, the unmerited favor…Devotional poetry, in its apprehension of grace, constitutes a paradigm of a view of literature…" (Young 1-6). Young is concerned here with a paradigmatic opposition to certain schools of literary criticism (namely deconstruction); for him, devotion enables a particular apprehension of grace which secular criticism lacks, and

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[284] See pages 10-11 of Part I, above, or the jacket copy for the Dia catalogue, which describes Martin's work as "gorgeously quiet in color and composition, [having] a distinctive grace that sets them apart from those of the Abstract Expressionists of her day and the Minimalist artists she inspired. Martin attributed her grid-based works to metaphysical motivations, lending a serene complexity to her ouvre" (https://www.diaart.org/shop/books/agnes-martin-permanent-collection-publications).

because the paradigm of secular criticism worships lack as the only ultimately apprehensible thing, where grace was, nothing is. But in Young's emphasizing not the language of belief but the language of ideas—it is the "concept of grace" and its "apprehension," rather than a revelation and experience of grace that is at issue—we can see the tendency of grace to walk the line between being a baffling or ineffable experience and being an apprehensible concept.

Just as devotion allows for a particular apprehension of grace, so does grace as a concept demand a particular form of apprehension. The form of apprehension that grace demands—be that grace divine or conceptual, something or really nothing—is exemplary of the special kind of conceptual activity that poems and paintings require and enable. The word 'apprehension' itself captures much of the richness of this activity, as amongst its meanings are a literal, physical grasping ("to lay hold upon, seize, with hands, teeth, etc."); an emotional grasping ("to feel emotionally, to be sensible of, feel the force of"); an intellectual grasping that involves both recognizing and understanding ("to perceive the existence of, recognizing, see" and "to catch the meaning or idea of; to understand"); and an aesthetic grasping ("to become or be conscious by the senses"). And to apprehend is to stop, "to seize or arrest," as one does a criminal. And finally, to apprehend is "to anticipate," to fear or sense something that isn't fully present, or hasn't happened yet.[285]

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[285] *OED*.

What I have called conceptual activity and linked to apprehension has been used historically and continues to be used to demonstrate both the philosophical and real-world value of poetry, and it goes by a variety of names. It is perhaps most enduringly and simply Keats' "negative capability," in which "man is capable of being in uncertainties, Mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact & reason" (Keats 492). It is also, I think, the force of Charles Altieri's unfolding of the power of Imagination such that it provokes a "responsiveness" that is also a style of perception, and it does so by virtue of "its capacity to put details and states together that do not necessarily cohere in ways that are bound by knowledge claims" (Altieri, *Reckoning* 60).

Another version of apprehension might follow Adorno's reading of Hegel in which Hegel's speculative thinking becomes a kind of lyrical thinking: "Abstractly flowing, Hegel's style, like Holderlin's abstractions, takes on a musical quality. . . No doubt Hegel's style goes against customary philosophical understanding, yet in his weaknesses he paves the way for a different kind of understanding; one must read Hegel by describing along with him the curves of his intellectual movement, by playing his ideas with the speculative ear as though they were musical notes. Philosophy as a whole is allied with art in wanting to rescue, in the medium of the concept, the mimesis that the concept represses, and here Hegel behaves like Alexander with the Gordian knot. He disempowers individual concepts, uses them as though they were the imageless images of what they mean" (Adorno, *Hegel* 123).

For Adorno, apprehension is the only way to know a work of art, as he writes in *Aesthetic Theory*: "art's spirit is a process and thus it is the work itself. To know an artwork means to apprehend this process. The spirit of artworks is not a concept, yet through spirit artworks become commensurable to the concept…Only in this act [the act of apprehension] . . .do art and philosophy converge" (88). Apprehension as a process—a kinetic, constructing act—concretizes the abstract into a concept. For Adorno it is this process of not-already-determined conceptualization that is unavailable in the reified world, and which it is the special ability of art to provide the semblance of.

Robert Kaufman, in numerous essays, draws out this aspect of Adorno's thinking, emphasizing its Kantian allegiances and its constructivism. Kaufman stresses the "quasi-social and quasi-conceptual" nature of art (especially lyric poetry) because "the aesthetic, rather than being determined by, provides the

XVI.

The temporality of apprehension and its transitive potentiations is, I think, what Susan Howe finds in the archives. It is what she means when she says, in *My Emily Dickinson,* "My precursor attracts me to my future" (97). And it is certainly what she means when, writing of an "exiled spirit" that shares much with Notley's "disallowed metaphysics" she explains that: "this visionary spirit, a deposit from a future yet to come, is gathered and guarded in the domain of research libraries and special collections" (*Spontaneous Particulars* 17). For Howe, archival research provokes a particular kind of thought, a special mode of thinking—"mystic documentary telepathy," she enigmatically names it—in which each object of her attention "is a pre-articulate empty theater where a thought may surprise itself at the instant of seeing. Where a thought may hear itself see" (18, 24). Howe's sense of telepathy is a capture of coincidence between minds, across time, that leaves evidence in objects (including but not limited to textual objects), and her synesthetic presentation of this mode—"a thought may hear itself see"—claims for thought a greater diversity and freedom of material: thoughts are sounded and seen, not just said and read. I invoke her sense of what the archive provides because what she presents as a certainty I experience as a hope, that as a critic I might facilitate a transfer of some little bit of the thinking that happens between the objects my project constellates. An attempt, however failed, to promote the essay as function, a kind of color gel for thinking as, with, between.

Spontaneous Particulars concludes with two fragments transcribed from Noah Webster's notes on the word 'Transport.'[286] Immediately preceding that, though, is this paragraph in which Howe expresses that she too acknowledges little difference between the poet's and the scholar's vocation:

> Poetry has no proof nor plan nor evidence by decree or in any other way. From somewhere in the twilight realm of sound a spirit of belief flares up at the point where meaning stops and the unreality of what seems most real floods over us. The inward ardor I feel while working in research libraries is intuitive. It's a sense of self-identification and trust, or the granting of grace in an ordinary room, in a secular time. (63)

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form for conceptual, purposeful thought or cognition." It is by its being the form of conceptualization, but not determined by preexisting concepts, that the aesthetic "provides a prerequisite of critical thought when…it offers formal means for allowing new (and not necessarily utopian) aspects of contemporary society to come into view" ("Red Kant" 711). Elsewhere, Kaufman puts this as "aesthetic thought-experience [that] maintains the form—but only the form—of conceptual thought;" and in another essay he terms it "apprehension-comprehension" (Kaufman, "Aura, Still" 76; "Poetry After" 167).

[286] 64-67, see endnote on 79.

XVII.

Howe says "Spontaneous sound particulars balance the scale of law with magic" (34). But in my reading of *Reason*, now, again, I find none of this magic—perhaps because I cannot hear it, cannot catch its rhythm. Howe knows her claims to telepathy are unreasonable, too: "Harmony continues to exist through fact and experience—though there is no reason why it should—nor is there any proof you can read back to the notion of one mind's inner relation with nature's vibratory hum. Lyric poets can't move heaven and earth in order to say things, language separates from music through yearning muted rhythmic pulse—through stepwise voice motion—" (46). "Stepwise voice motion" could be a paraphrase for the activity and ambitions of Notley's prosody in something like *Alette,*[287] wherein measure is the technology by which a voice becomes credible and is also what makes speech feign losslessness.

While voice and authenticity were central to *Alette* and to Notley's poetics in general, for voice *Reason and Other Women* substitutes "mind speech" (52). And it follows that the train tracks that were rendered rhythmically in *Alette* as a carriage for voice are replaced by the train as a metaphor for and figure of—a cliché, even, and *Reason* is aware of the clichés it trades in[288]—the flow and following of thought. In *Reason* what she calls her "next mission" is to "change trains" and become the conductor of thoughts, the material and medium of which the city is made (75, 91). A colored mosaic of "mind speech," *Reason* populates the sky with "counterstars" as manifest uncreation of "the powers we've created to obey" (55, 52).[289] *Reason* wants to replace the "theories [that] do not fit the case" with a better picturing that amounts to "the only proper science that is knowledge" (a formulation that echoes Cesaire).[290] Somehow, it promises, its tesserae will assemble into "a tale…told to the people who think consciousness is only an evolutionary accident,"[291] which telling will transform and be "held in the / liquid consciousness including consciousness's unconsciousness, the liquid crystalline / consciousness of the city" (62). Notley's insistence on the crystalline nature of consciousness, as on the "crystal city," surely has something to do with the fact that crystals have their own prosody, in a sense, a lattice structure of relations between atoms in which exerted forces are measurable and rhythmic.[292]

The reader of *Reason* should find herself in the Byzantine church nested in the crystal city, these structures erected or revealed by Notley's countermeasure that is, this time, less measure in the prosodic sense than it is a counter-medium through which images and messages travel. Though

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[287] See pages 81-82 of Part II above.

[288] On cliché see for example pages 54, 87.

[289] See pages 85-87 of Part II above to hear the echo between these "counterstars" and *Alette.*

[290] See pages __ above.

[291] This is the second view summarized by Penrose and Hameroff, discussed on page 142 below.

[292] The vibration of a crystal is constituted by its phonons, which are quasiparticles "associated with a compressional or acoustic wave involving vibrations of atoms in a crystal lattice" (*OED*).

it is tempting to expand the figure of the crystal, via its use in radios, so that it might conduct, modulate, and make audible or legible the messages *Reason* contains, this metaphor is limited in its application because *Reason* can't do the math that such a formulation would involve, and must settle instead for being a "symbolist beautiful head game" that miraculously "breathes in and out telepathy," as she puts it in "Ivory Diptych of Miracles," which begins:

> i didnt pick you. the winds. miracle occurs if you take out the structure between things, that you've inserted. when the wall of the words causeandeffect falls. the cold air is leaking through, forget, oh dark enclosure of pleasure within now spread out. it is a plain with small villages etched in crystal against the dark.
>
> the head said and it was a mans, "i am perfectly telepathic" a huge dark head hairless with ears. whos whose, wasnt it mine in some sense, where everything enters going on and barriers miraculously fall all the time. it is open but there are no messages thats a good day, i want to tell you. i can receive telepathic but i cant solve the letter equations the math that's symbolized by the alphabet it is too silly. sullied by high thought the values of the high class the values of games and the star the starring in
>
> civ to make it more complex and not for everyone a symbolist beautiful head game
> …
> down in the basement of the church high in the head, is, a golden headed child climbing down. the glittering smile painted on, looking for the miracle, the explanation so walks on dark dirt barefoot. dirt dirt dirt. there is the tiniest model city of crystal towers there and we are all enclosed in or are are what, sort of a city, all window all door all tower like wind held in place but yet fluid curve a hint of blue and violet in the crystalline seamless unbreakable structure. we were always what word
>
> should one use, intelligent rather than intelligible were as it is, the whole, knowing if you will a crystal a world which breathes in and out telepathy all knowing all (65)

By designating the "crystalline seamless unbreakable structure" she's building as "intelligent rather than intelligible," Notley solidifies that structure's sponsoring of a mediumistic version of telepathy that can't be rendered in language but is still transferred through it: while she can't "solve" the messages using math and doesn't transmit their content using words in the poem, either, what speaks in the poem is "perfectly telepathic" nonetheless. Thus structured *Reason*'s tessellated telepathy is a medium for intelligence that cannot read what it knows but nevertheless writes the laws of the known universe: "the piece of paper the tablets of nonMoses, only predict fire the fire of the giving of the / law which can hardly be spoken at all, only known, as by the dead and telepathized" (71).

The inversion by which the law is ineffable but the miraculous can be plainly stated is also why the allegory for which *Reason* is specially prepared never arrives, its elements never organize.[293] (The miraculous thing here—or the magical thing, to call back to Howe's sense of the balance of

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[293] See pages 148, 155 for examples of the lack of separation required" "nothings containable…there / is no way to keep it separate in a work is it this work no subject object church or city."

law and magic—is telepathy.) The head that proclaims its "[perfect telepathy]" is a figure and container for the "mind and thinking" that *Reason* set out to track, as Notley writes in the Preface: "I conceived of the head as a Byzantine church—and so the reader enters the poem as if entering a Byzantine basilica, proceding [*sic*] further and further inward. I thought of possible icons and mosaics on the walls of the church as what was fixed, culturally, in the mind, what you can't get rid of. But I also conceived of the personal icon or image, beautiful or traumatic, as that which, too, can't be shaken." The allegorical promise of *Reason and Other Women*, to oversimplify, was "the crystal city," real but abstract too, surrounding the concrete structures the mind was led to imagine on the way to the city's apprehension. But because allegory requires more separation (between the virtual and the real, or the abstract and the concrete) than the mind-in-the-act-of thinking maintains, the poem instead records the failure of allegory, a failure that is a consequence of the refusal of hierarchy and the full investment in poesis—

> …don't like this but like doing it
> …don't freeze it and look at it isn't art isn't art so much as snake…
> hierarchy not but then how distinguish or must i, not exactly yet to keep making and do (120)

—and is linked to a lack of regular rhythm. If I can't quite catch the rhythm, maybe I'm to take comfort—"reason, comfort me now. as the ground of telepathy as the ground of // the static of time as the superior love" (76)—in the fact that this failure is shared by the same agent that promises to transform and "shift" my consciousness and the plane I'm on (Preface).[294] In "Death of Mary," a few poems after "Ivory Dyptich," Notley records the effort to catch the rhythm and its elusiveness:

> swirling center became the altar changing stillness there must be a bright core a the ruby light place the true singular one. the city in the center always in a sort of motion is the real city always in motion or is it still, underneath the motion, and then what i've called the ruby, all thats where i've gone so far. yet. symmetry doubling the ring range people hawk the satanic possibility and this whole rhythm, which is arbitrary and wont change yet is not the rhythm of the mind is the rhythm at the moment of me working at the moment, going at the moment in such a mosaiced movement moses trying to receive some laws in order to go on. (77)

Notley acknowledges that whatever rhythm there is is simply "the rhythm at the moment / of me working at the moment" rather than, say, some kind of gem-like (ruby or crystalline) light pulsing with a measurable frequency.[295] But she will work this "moment" until it produces a

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[294] See 182-183 for one example of the book's putting forward the possibility of its own failure.

[295] For another example of the problem of measure in *Reason:* "what is its numbers scheme oh the same old, arbitrary one as before like those / sixes we can still have a six and, six and, finally let me into my bed i'm much bigger / than. some panels are unachieved as the snake slith as progressive as the art / byzantine oh like that word, don't you like byz…/the night is //f ar the day is maddening … i cant systemize my objects they refuse to be mine" (121).

sound that can lead her on: first ramifying moment by repeating it, from "rhythm at the moment" to "working at the moment" to "going at the moment," this "going at" a kind of pecking at the word until it opens up to the alliterative "mosaiced movement." To this "mosaiced movement" is attached an appositive that continues the alliteration: "moses trying to receive some laws in order to go on," a figure that arrives via the movement she's effortfully made out of the moment at which the rhythm wasn't quite, wasn't yet, found. Though neither "moses" nor "nonMoses," reading *Reason* I, too, am at work trying to receive something to go on. To make measure apprehensible, or to measure apprehension, or to use measure to mark the experience (call it thinking, seeing, beholding) of sensing something just beyond apprehension—

XVIII.

Reason as a figure becomes a motif ("reason appeared") that accumulates into a refrain: "reason appeared to me and said."[296] And maybe the figure of reason who, despite this accumulation, barely appears ("hasn't appeared here for awhile") and never really says what she says, is on offer as a partially unoccupied position that the reader might step into and fill out, piece together by trying to listen to herself think: "don't like this but like doing it…keep doing this keep doing this" (152, 120, 140).

[296] For example 44, 54, 81. Though trying to track and cite this accumulation more fully, I find it either isn't true or can't be verified without rereading the whole book, an impossibility.

XIX.

But Notley's insistence within *Reason* that "this is the world" knows I will fail to receive what *Reason* promises to give so long as I'm in the position of the critic (112). As Susan Sontag writes in *Against Interpretation,* "interpretation is the revenge of the intellect upon art. Even more. It is the revenge of the intellect upon the world. To interpret is to impoverish, to deplete the world—in order to set up a shadow world of 'meanings.' It is to turn the world into *this* world. ('This world'! As if there were any other.) The world, our world, is depleted, impoverished enough…Interpretation, based on the highly dubious theory that a work of art is composed of items of content, violates art. It makes art into an article for use, for arrangement into a mental scheme of categories" (Sontag, *Against Interpretation* 13-15). *Reason* defeats the will towards interpretation but not use, a desire to be used by it. In the case of *Reason,* a reader, professional or not, is lead to pursue power (as a quality one could possess, not a position one could occupy) rather than meaning.[297]

Like Sontag, Notley moves away from the emphasis on semantic content. She wants the poems not to "just be words,"[298] not to just have meanings but to be materials of which the world is composed. She wants them to be leaves, "tesserae of world and worldliness" (105). The point of "these pages," of saying anything at all, is not what anything means but that said things *are* things: "your meanings are not the point, then whats the point, its your / veritable information formation, what do you mean, its when what you say is a thing / like a pan, surrounded by its own, silver halo, and these pages, are things / are things full of thing" (126).

Form is a problem she almost dares not to speak of: "is it possible not to use the word form" (119). Ultimately, she knows we might crave the "classical form," but the poems in *Reason* are nonetheless opposed to this: "the / shape of this is probably trapezoidal really or simply fanlike ignoring the men who're // reading their i mean men who are beautiful elegant shapely cantos so / unlike this crystal walls where you live" (124). Fanlike like her collages, like the homeopathic images in *In the Pines*, we find justification for the difficulty of reading *Reason and Other Women* in "Jone Jonah." The problem is that "the second world," where the crystal city is, is polluted by the ordinary world, the "first world," so the telepathy is polluted too (96). So we are implored to join her in trying to clean it up:

> but if you've come this far with me you're satisfactorily bitten you are poison you'll not be the same again in mainstream torrent we must unpollute telepathy i think and this may be the only way byt by jamming all its frequency frequencis with these too many words misspelled and fuzzed out sentences for clogging all the airways do you get it now? (97)

The second world isn't isolated enough, so consciousness of it decoheres.

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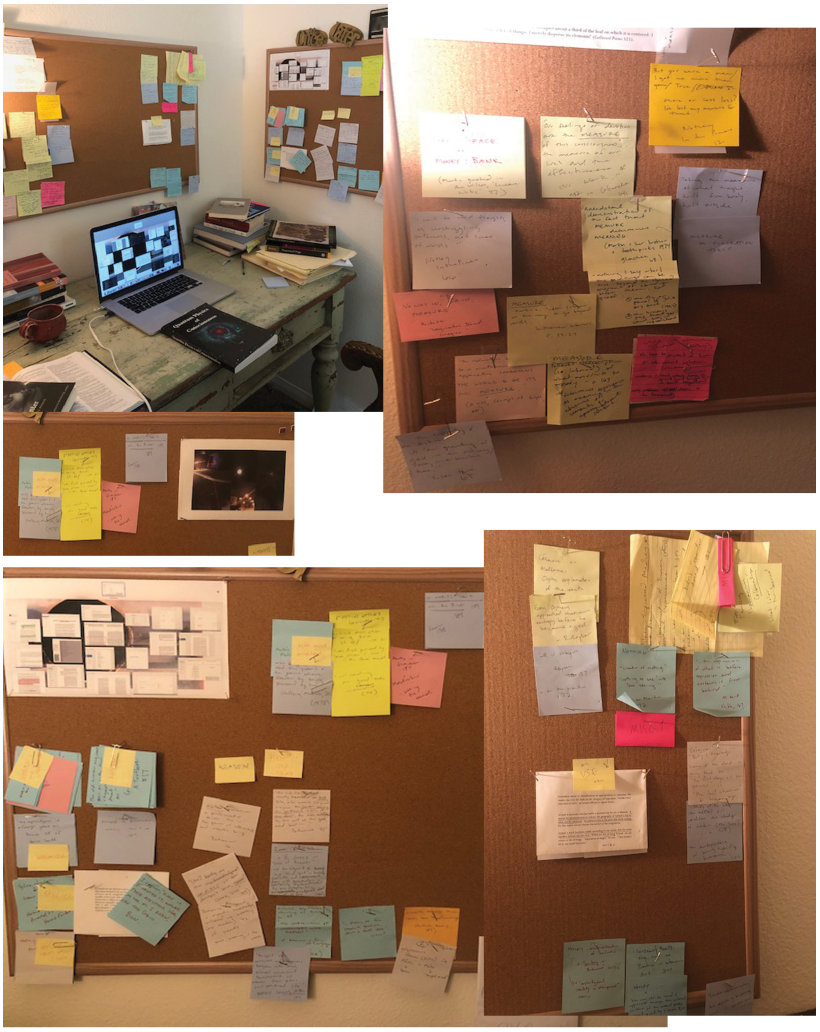
[297] See 120-121.

[298] See, for example: 102, 113, 119, 150, 173.

XX.

For my project, though, the trouble isn't just pollution and decoherence, but also use, the desire for it. Its most successful moments are those in which I achieve a thinking between objects, being struck by connections that feel like they are absolutely given, as if by grace, in Howe's sense. But thinking between is just another name for the formal activity of constellation, and sometimes it looks like this:



Trying to get power from *Reason,* coincident with trying to do right by it, to read it like you're supposed to, somehow neutralizes responsiveness. From Martin:

> If inspiration is only possible when we are not functioning, and it is—then it really is like a gift…
> Some artists make the mistake of thinking that with inspiration they have been granted power to lead the world out of darkness…This is entirely wrong…

> If you are a big functioning thing you cut yourself off from inspiration, which depends on non functioning…
> Super sensory abilities and intuition sometimes mixed up with superstition must also be mentioned. All supersensory abilities are mental telepathy, I think you will see that if you give it a little time,—a scientific fact, shared by all the animals in varying degrees and one that in most people no longer functions. Intuition on the other hand is inspiration.
>
> Superstition if you have it will make art work impossible for you. There have been societies many of them in which there was no art only fetishes: that is objects with power. The correct response to make to fetishes is fright not happiness or some peaceful feeling.[299]

Although by invitation, the lure of greater mental function, I've made a fetish of *Reason,* invested it with power I consent to receive from it.

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[299] Pages 13-18 of facsimile inserted between pages 16-17 of Glimcher.

XXI.

The smallest repetitions in *Reason* are moving, as in "Snake Time," when what seems like automatic writing becomes reflected upon: "the snake of / the year of all beginning movement of movement and length invested oh invest who / can use that. she is a snake is a world of time unsegment oh who can use what is use / who can. who is not to be thrown away but will rise above or defray the cost of / identity oh who can use that" (119).

If the change the mind undergoes is slighter: "…a new space a / further knowing. thats what its like in part a changing vantage thats always. and that / isnt always a quest for revelation its just what it is a minimal motion or change" (110).

So many as ifs. As if she's trying to induce a vision: "walk in the door door keep doing this keep doing th nothing special that is / of a species. breaking break me but cant poison i have broken myself on thing like / grief but they could never break me…i have used them over and over to be in this story in order / to get to get to the rock the grave the cave the church the wing the place that is marked / by the double or cross that is x is the door rood the oo the exhumed air itself breathy light / tinged faintly with blood red" (138). The *oo* falls out of "door" and its inversion in "rood," and it rhymes with Hilma af Klint's *oo o oo,* the "concept…as starting point" for her system of symbols and its role in her telepathic practice (Klimt 7), as it also recalls Bion's [O], that which designates the "truth in and of any object…an essential postulate of science [that] cannot be scientifically discovered" (*Attention and Interpretation* 10).

To find finally another explanation for Notley's prolificy—not only to match and exceed the amount of space her forefathers took up, but to literally overwrite everything, to cover it with her writing: she will redeem the world (by eradicating its evil) this way: "no evil uneradicable if bound up in real each person who person who practices," a practice she directs through her "mosaics" that contain "the treasure each one / a new new code independent called both sides of the frontier i took the sentence and // stretched it all out saint snake ground around the names of artists eradicated so could / lift off the attached and never cry again. supposed not, supposed, symmetry doubled / like a wing world into the first and second worlds but they blurred now…/if the words grow up / more vertically city arise and if they stretch" (119). As if embodied description could literally re-describe, could script material being.

XXII.

The "second world" in *Reason* designates that same world so often sought after in Notley's work.[300] To find it is a matter of consciousness, an order of it. Trying to honor Notley's hunch that poesis works "sort of like particle physics,"[301] at some point in my research I turned to *Quantum Physics of Consciousness.* The book is edited by Penrose and Hameroff, authors of the article "Consciousness in the Universe: Neuroscience, Quantum Space Time Geometry and Orch-OR Theory," a title that, were it not for the regular capitalization and the colon, could fit in *Reason and Other Women*, with its broken "beau-ty" and its "Anthropos, andromeda, multimedia wind and rain" (30). Penrose and Hameroff delineate three "possibilities regarding the order and place of consciousness in the universe [that] have been commonly expressed" (224). They are: 1) Consciousness is an epiphenomenon, a second order effect, "not an independent quality but arose as a natural evolutionary consequence of the biological adaptation of brains and nervous systems." This is the view that Notley's *Reason* is launched to combat.[302] 2) "Consciousness is a quality that has always been in the universe." All matter has consciousness; or, matter is illusory and "consciousness is all that exists." (On this last point, the authors cite Kant.) 3) The "Orch-OR" [orchestrated objective reduction] theory, with origins that its authors locate in Whitehead, states that "precursors of consciousness" have always existed, and "biology evolved a mechanism to convert conscious precursors to actual consciousness." A difficulty in this view is that while "precursors of consciousness, presumably with proto-experiential qualities…exist as the potential ingredients of actual consciousness, the physical basis of these proto-conscious elements [is] not necessarily [a] part of our current theories of the laws of the universe."[303] While I cannot evaluate or even claim to understand the mechanics of Orch-OR, some of what it presents is fiercely Notleyan, as with the final "connection" the explanation below posits:

> [C]onsciousness depends on biologically 'orchestrated' quantum computations in collections of microtubules within brain neurons, [and] these quantum computations correlate with and regulate neuronal activity, and that the continuous Schrödinger evolution of each quantum computation terminates in accordance with the specific Diósi-Penrose (DP) scheme of 'objective reduction' of the quantum state (OR). This orchestrated OR activity (Orch OR) is taken to result in a moment of conscious awareness and/or choice. This particular (DP) form of OR is taken to be a quantum-gravity process related to the fundamentals of spacetime geometry, so Orch OR suggests a connection between brain biomolecular processes and fine-scale structure of the universe. (Penrose and Hameroff 223)

Though I cannot myself asses this theory, the two elements most fundamental to it—its model of and challenges to conventional understandings of computational consciousness, and its theory of

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[300] The second world in *Reason* renames what she had called the first world in her collection of essays. See pages 56-76 in Part I.

[301] See page 95 above.

[302] *Reason* is "to be / told to the people who think consciousness is only an evolutionary accident" (62).
[303] Roger Penrose and Stuart Hameroff in *Quantum Physics of Consciousness* 224.

the mechanics of microtubal quantum processing—have been thoroughly and ongoingly contested. [304] However, what interested the authors about microtubules is that: "the intelligent function and periodic lattice structure of microtubules suggested they might function as some type of biomolecular computer" (226). This description calls to mind the "liquid crystalline" medium of consciousness that Notley puts forward in *Reason*, its mechanisms she renders as literally tubular: "if there were a tunnel between the two worlds only poetry would matter…but i dont // believe in tunnel except as piece of poem itself except as poem when everything to me / manifestly overlaps a machine made of tubes sending messages" (157).

There emerges a picture of poetic information, made meaningful.

A lattice with a pattern that carries the code for consciousness of code.

Microtubules, Sylvia Wynter probably knows, are autopoetically instituting entities—"self-assembling polymers"—in Hameroff's view, capable of processing information. These "[c]ellular automota are computational systems in which fundamental units, or 'cells' in a grid or lattice can each exist in specific states, e.g. 1 or 0, at a given time" (227).

Following a description of the fine structure of microtubules that very much resembles some descriptions of Agnes Martin's paintings[305], Penrose and Hameroff go on: "Each cell interacts with its neighbor cells at discrete, synchronized time steps, the state of each cell at any particular time step determined by its state and its neighbor cell states at the previous time step, and rules governing the interactions. In such ways, using simple neighbor interactions in simple lattice grids, cellular automata can perform complex computation and generate complex patterns" (227). Thus, at times, consciousness.[306]

There emerges a picture of poetic information, made meaningful.

A lattice with a pattern that carries the code for consciousness of code, encoded in a universe in which you know this to be true.

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[304] While I cannot myself asses this theory, the two elements most fundamental to the theory—its model of computational consciousness and the mechanisms of microtubal quantum processing—have been thoroughly criticized (Wikipedia, sorry).

[305] In fact, the facsimile of Martin's "The Thinking Reed," particularly the drawing on the back of the page, looks not at all unlike some of Hameroff and Penrose's diagrams of microtubules. See Glimcher between 40-41, Penrose and Hameroff 226-227. Martin's pun, "thinking reed" activates telepathy, what Benjamin means when he says reading is "eminently telepathic" (216).

[306] The mechanics of this "thus" are beyond me, but Penrose and Hameroff argue that consciousness ("conscious experience") emerges at a mathematically measurable level of complexity in which a certain percentage of microtubules within neurons are in superposition and avoid decoherence (230-240).

XXIII.

"Periodic lattice structure" of the crystal, the brain, poetic information, an acid trip. How banal is the search for this resembles that.[307] How small would the differences be for Notley to have received a similar diagnosis to Martin's? Because a person judged insane is so judged because "the basic anti-social act consists in not making sense," because "a mad person is a person whose voice society doesn't want to listen to," because "what is called insane denotes that which in the determination of a particular society must not be thought" and those are precisely the thoughts Notley wants us to hear, to hear even in our own voice.[308]

Yes, all of this that I am doing, I know, what I am doing, is trash. Caught this contagion: "my line / is so frayed that my voice rips and shreds…how can i hear or be anything but do dull in the where," rather than some opening into another state or order of mind (*Reason* 152). Should I tell you the origins of this trash, biographical? How one of the two authors of the Orch OR study is Dr. Stuart Hameroff, father of the first person I ever went on a date with. How in May of 2014 I went to a tower, a residency, and wrote the first good poem I'd written in three years, since the death of my brother and the birth of my daughter, heavily under the influence of Notley and completely alone for the first time in years. So maybe that's why I thought Notley would help me conduct my grief, the grieving I hadn't done because my brother's OD happened just two weeks after Opal's birth, so I thought I had to turn off the grief to avoid ruining her life. Then, after that poem, I thought I should do the undone grieving, so I took a part I was offered in Notley's play, *Anne's White Glove*, staged as part of "Alette in Oakland," an extra-institutional symposium devoted to Notley's work in October of 2014. Initially, I was to be one of four actors who would split the part of the lead character, Alison, a poet living in the Lower East Side of New York, whose husband has recently died. Notley was commissioned to write the play in 1984, the year after her first husband, the poet Ted Berrigan, died. The play is "basically about Ted Dying," Notley said in an interview, and the play "kind of ripped all of [her] insides out."[309]

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[307] Hameroff's description of the fine-structure of microtubules; Griselda Pollock's description of Martin's *The Dark River*; Notley's geometry of the liquid crystalline consciousness that somehow her poem will commute. Hammerof: "Thirteen linear tubulin chains…align side-to side to form hollow microtubule cylanders with two ypes of hexagonal lattices…winding patterns which intersect…at specific intervals matching the Fibonacci series found widely in nature and possessing a helical symmetry…suggestively sympathetic to large-scale quantum processes" (226). Pollock: "At a distance of apace in the ratio of 5:1 of the outer rim is a third square created by hand-drawn parallel lines marked, at five intervals, with a painted stroke that forms a trailing rectangle" (170). Notley: "these six faceted crystals with their three horizontal lattices," a structure she tries to enter, borrow, transmit: "im in a couple made out of crys / because everything happens twice and twice equals infinity not duplication that's why / e were others third axis and the three held in place by the one so there can be myriad / facets why of the same crys and the massive rosy quartz colored by a bit of the / bloodstream with its littles" (161). The crystal, abbreviated as cry; the "littles" the information carried in the blood that is "not just genes but song" (*In the Pines* 52). For how literally material she wants this effect to be, see pages 169-171 on the "piezoelectric effect" the poem's material tries to produce.

[308] Sontag, *Artaud* liv-lvi.

[309] Notley interviewed by Yasmine Shamma, 139.

The play was performed at La Mama, and much of it takes place in dreams in which Jim appears to Alison. As a rather negative review of the initial production summarized the play in *The New York Times*, "'Anne's White Glove' isn't a coherent drama so much as a fragmentary diaristic meditation in which a poet named Alison (Julia Brothers) exorcizes her morbid depression after the death of her husband, Jim (Thomas Carey), a 'philanderer philosopher.' Miss Notley's protagonist experiences disturbing visitations in dreams that leave her depressed and enraged. She goes on agitated car rides with her sister and is visited by black-shrouded figures who pick her up in their arms. In one inscrutable ritual, an old man methodically cleans a fish he has pulled from a bucket" (Holden).

The director of the 2014 production, Alana Siegel, had been corresponding with Notley as we were rehearsing, and Notley explained to her that the part of Alison shouldn't be split because the play was all about the reintegration of the self, character, and language. When Alana asked me to be the only Alison I very much wanted to say no, for a number of reasons: I was very busy with graduate school, I had a toddler, I was adjuncting on the side to pay the bills, I had a conference paper to write for an upcoming conference in Paris, I was supposed to be writing my dissertation prospectus (a prospectus I wrote for a dissertation I didn't, called "Nothing Survives: the End of the World and the Ends of Thinking it in Contemporary American Poetry") etc., but mostly I was terrified. Terrified of the feelings I might have, would have to at least have to pretend to feel, terrified too of disappointing the community and Notley, who would be there. I don't remember exactly why I took the part, some combination of the fact that it felt like a diva move to say no; Elaine told me to do it and I trust her; and I had a faint hope that the play would help my work, maybe even my parenting, and improve my relations with my intimate dead—maybe they'd start to come to me in dreams, etc. (The cast was required to keep a collective dream journal throughout the process of rehearsing the play—a very short process, as we only rehearsed for six weeks and never did a full run-through—that was printed and distributed when the play was performed. I think I made one entry that was at least partially made up.)

Several weeks after the play I started to read *Reason* for the first time. After the first sitting (reading only 10-12 pages at a time), I sat down on my bed and had an image of a hand in a bandage, a hand I knew was my friend Michelle Ty's hand. It was late at night and I didn't know how to explain what had happened, so I texted Michelle and told her I had had a dream that she hurt her hand. She had just injured it earlier that night, playing basketball. That is the only instance of non-archival telepathy I've experienced in these years of reading and not reading *Reason.* I've finished it now.

XXIV.

With apprehension I look forward to returning elsewhere to what happened squarely between then (Michelle's hand) and now, a brief period in 2016 marked by confusion about the agential media of thoughts—which thoughts go where and wherefrom do they come—that terminated in something like a sinister *you know telepathy is real it's just not what you think it is* or "there is an audience / that is dangerous / to imagine, mostly, / and clearly, ex / ists // Do you still think / they are listening / and remember / myself" (*Yeah No* 95). An elsewhere to fill this in, take measure of it and build it out, but for now simply to register that it also figures incompletely in *Yeah No*, which I've only just realized rhymes with 'ya know.[310]

As the "Book I Will Not Write" poems were central to *My Enemies,* "Profices" is the dominant series in *Yeah No.* The title is a corrupt rhyme—a homophone—of prophecies and has an inexistent etymology I'll discuss in a minute. I'd like to think this idiosyncratic spelling is kindred to Emily Dickinson's misspelling of 'beyond' as 'b e y o n e d.'[311] Here, Dickinson is—according to her editors—just following habit, following an 'o' and an 'n' with an 'e,' which gets 'beyond' closer to Beyoncé, bonus, but it also puts a one, a unification, right in the middle of the word, making immanence within transcendence, making it count and countable. The other presiding influence over this series is Gertrude Stein, who might have insisted that Dickinson's misspelling was "no mistake," was instead a "binding accident," a mistake that is a conversion into something just or true.[312] Stein's permutative syntax is important to these poems, and so are Dickinson's variants. Those variants are a kind of rhyme, a rhyme of position, certainly—the variants occupy the same place, and as we receive them they still vie for it and at the same time.

If the title of "Profices" comes corrupt it comes also to announce that it is corruption that allies it to real prophecies beyond the aural coincidence of their names. Biblical prophecy is made of fragments, a patchwork of the barely told, rubble washed up on the shore of each historical period; each period and its concerns a screen that telling had to pass through, leaving behind its redacted remains. The largest gauge of the screen is the hashtag. What if only what was tagged could survive? And when must it be read to survive?

At the root of real prophecy is *phemi* (I speak), and so we understand the temporality of prophecy to be a literal extension of its etymology—speaking before, speaking of a future before it occurs, predicting it. Our first definition of real prophecy cannot imagine the future as anything but following continuously from the present. These poems, though, distance themselves from prophecy as speech before events, and instead choose a false etymology that allies them to making, to fashioning, to fashioning towards—the root verb here is *facio* (to make or do). PROFICES *f*'s prophecy by spelling the ph as it sounds. With that we get to hear profit (as in dollars), and we hear suggestions of feces, of office, maybe orifice, maybe prof. short for professor.

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[310] For example: "Now that I Know Death by Residual Technology," "To Hypnotize Space and Time," "Essay in which I Told You," and many "Profices" (*Yeah No* 78-82, 91-97, 61-66, 27-28, 76-77, 36-37.

[311] See Franklin's introduction to *The Poems of Emily Dickinson* Vol. 1, 37.

[312] Stein, *Tender Buttons* on mistakes: 10, 43, 65; on "binding accident": 19.

The title's refusal of standard spelling is the first of many misspellings in the poems, which refusals also signal the project's larger refusal of reason—reason as cause, reason as rationalist order[ing] of things, reason as surest way to truth. In this way they want to be post-enlightenment, but really, really post. And the title of each poem is plural, a signal that resounds as the poems try to proliferate each occasion they instantiate, each line. Proliferation of the occasion each present is makes towards compossible futures, better than no future at all. This proliferation is won by numerous formal habits in the poems that together want to produce a semantic maximalism. The poems are riddled with unvoiced lines, with variants, with punctuation that it is not possible to pronounce but that nonetheless has impact, makes meaning as it also corrupts it. "Profices" uses brackets in two ways: on the left side of the page brackets denote optionality and are optionally voiced; on the right margin they are supposed to be silent (a habit begun in *My Enemies* and ramped up in *Yeah No)*. At its most ambitious, this formal habit—the brackets, especially on the right margin—says it can violate the law of noncontradiction, can take something out and put it there at the same time, or later, as it is and as it isn't.

But they also want to make visible the kind of thinking poetic thinking is, the kind of listening it does. This semantic proliferation (also a form of indecision) is how the poems try to register all the barely registrable possibilities, the maximum of the minimally registrable, rendering all of the almosts at once. The almost bids to replace the impossible as the opposite of the possible; not negation but accompaniment, as the not-quite presenced can't be negated, just like the reality that is can't be negated by any that isn't quite actual. Or, more simply, the almost is an easier path to the otherwise. So these poems offer a path to an otherwise (or many) that isn't reason's path, neither is reason its cause.

XXV.

Alice and Agnes and their dead brothers. Some struggle to function. "More or less loss? I've lost my measure for that" (*In the Pines* 12). A problem of not being bounded enough, of putting thoughts in the wrong places, mind's movements not measured enough, a bout of unreason, Princenthal might say.

"Grief isn't a word I'm not a / person" (*Mysteries of Small Houses* 83). Having discarded "Nothing Survives" in 2016, "Thinking Otherwise" took shape in the wake of trying to imagine as fact the idea that not all of my thoughts were true, to believe that I wasn't to believe them, while simultaneously witnessing Martin's eschewal of thinking in general and Notley's refusal to believe anything other than her own thoughts. Having finished *Reason* some time ago, I had thought I'd have arrived by now at a way of enfolding it into the entanglement of grief and song, Martin's sense of meter and rhyme "as the way to go beyond words," using words (Smithsonian Interview, 23).

The ocean seldom appears in Notley's work. Often in *Reason* a baby is under threat.[313] For Martin, "the ocean is deathless" and functions as analog to the work as grounds for response and awareness of beauty (*Writings* 17).[314] For Mallarmé, the ocean as a figure carries life out of its "original foam" and its waves dictate life's rhythms (a mother rocks her child, mimicking the ocean, and the poet draws his rhythms from that rocking[315]); but it is also a figure for the infinite void "in which all reality dissolves" ("Un Coup De Dés," *Azure* 89). *Reason*, Notley's most architectural book, builds a space in which what is the case does not sustain the boundaries between minds, nor between life and death. Mallarmé's *A Tomb for Anatole*, his son who died at age seven, also aimed to be a built thing, though all we have are his notes toward building it. In those notes we see him trying to leverage thought and poetry against death. That his son is in the tomb (as reason would be in *Reason)* is the supreme wish of the project he couldn't complete. The formula, though, that recurs throughout the notes is that in their love the survivors are given a beyond and travel to it, where he is. And it isn't only that in their thoughts he remains, but rather that he is agent enough to give them their thoughts.[316]

In his preface to "Un Coup De Dés" Mallarmé reluctantly assures us several times that he does not "transgress against [the received] order of things" too much, by which order he means the conventions of prosody and typography. In the French, that which he does not transgress against too much is *mesure*, which means both meter, measure, and order (*Collected Poems* 121). Mallarmé's measured transgressions against convention are made in the name of converting "sound patterns" into "prismatic subdivisions of the Idea" (121). His measure, which involves but is not limited to rhythm, will render "the farthest vibratory prolongation of everything, or of Life" (*Divigations* 112).

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[313] For examples see 86, 154, 176.

[314] Cf. Milner's oceanic feeling, even the "manic-oceanic" that she draws out of Ehrenzweig (*HLG* 417).

[315] *A Tomb for Anatole* 128.

[316] For example see *Anatole* 82, 119, 166

So this devotional study—"Our feelings of devotion are the measure of this consciousness. Life is consciousness of life itself. Our feelings of devotion are the measure of this consciousness. They are the measure of our lives and the measure of the effectiveness of our work" (Martin in Glimcher 141)—could not construct a measure of thought that was deathless as Martin's ocean, Notley's second world. Instead it must settle to be a work of "criticism whose sole medium is the life, the ongoing life, of the works themselves" it studied (Benjamin 373). Their work is thought's measure, gridded and sung, let to go on.

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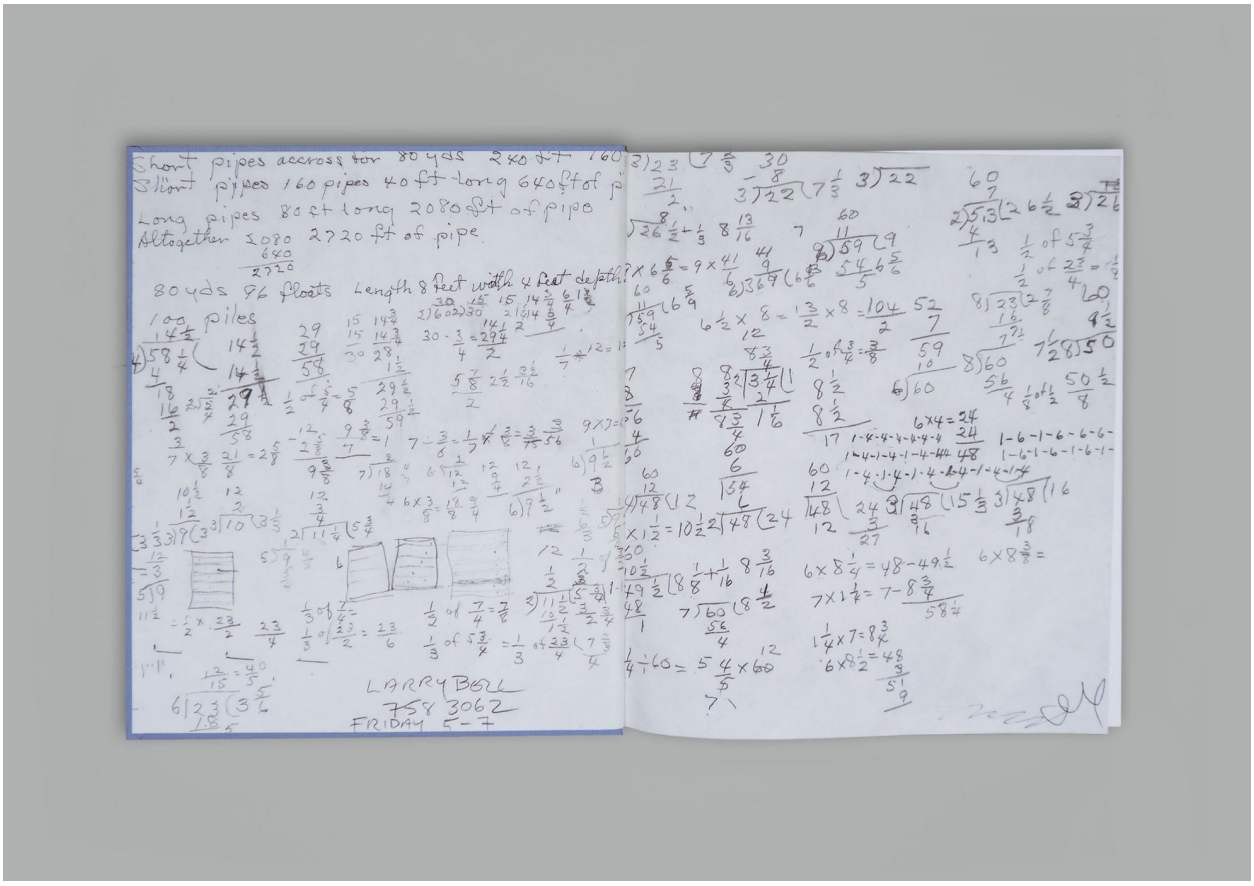
APPENDIX OF IMAGES

Figure 1

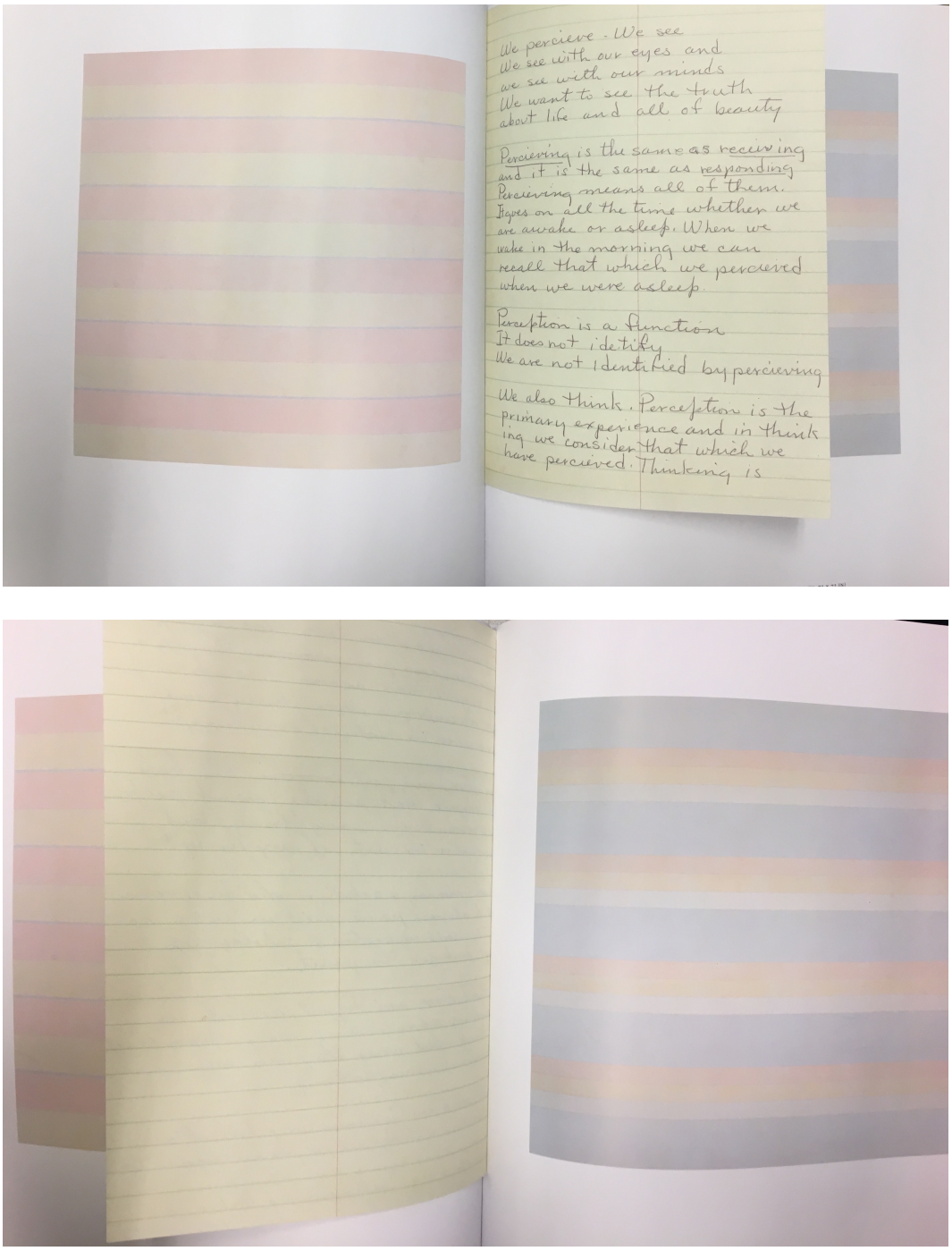


Inside covers of *Agnes Martin: Paintings, Writings, Remembrances* by Arne Glimcher.

Figure 2

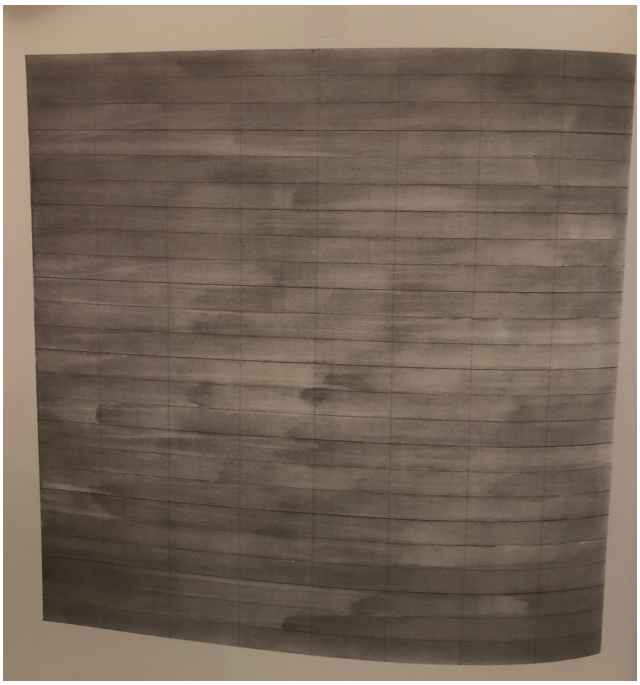
Alice Notley, collaged fan, image from *The Volta* (2014)

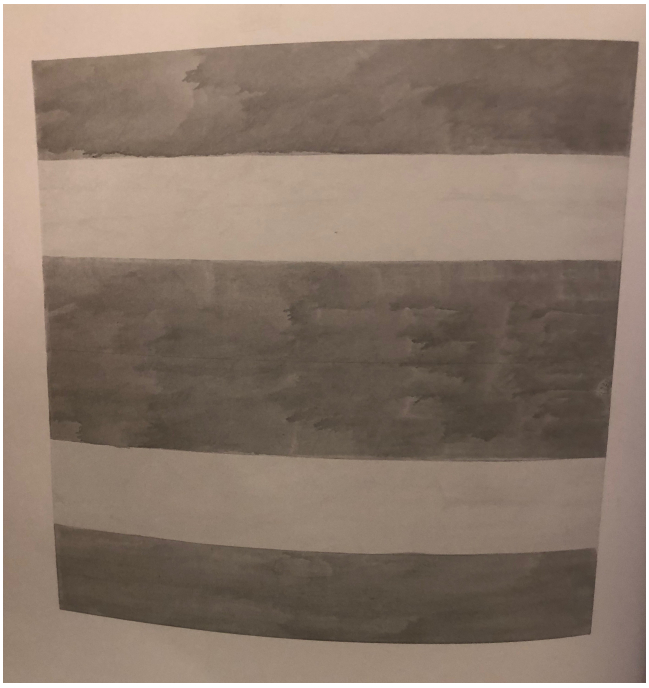
Figures 3 and 4



Facsimile of Martin's writing inserted between 144-145 in Glimcher.

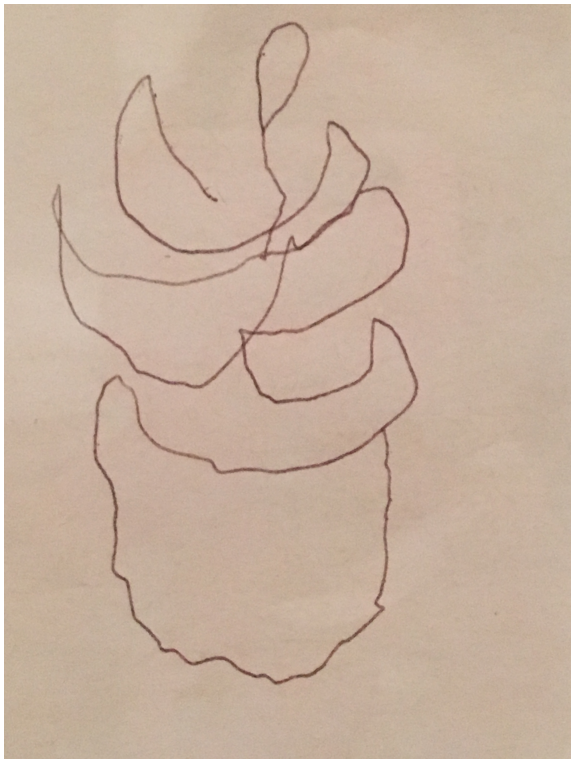
Figures 5 and 6





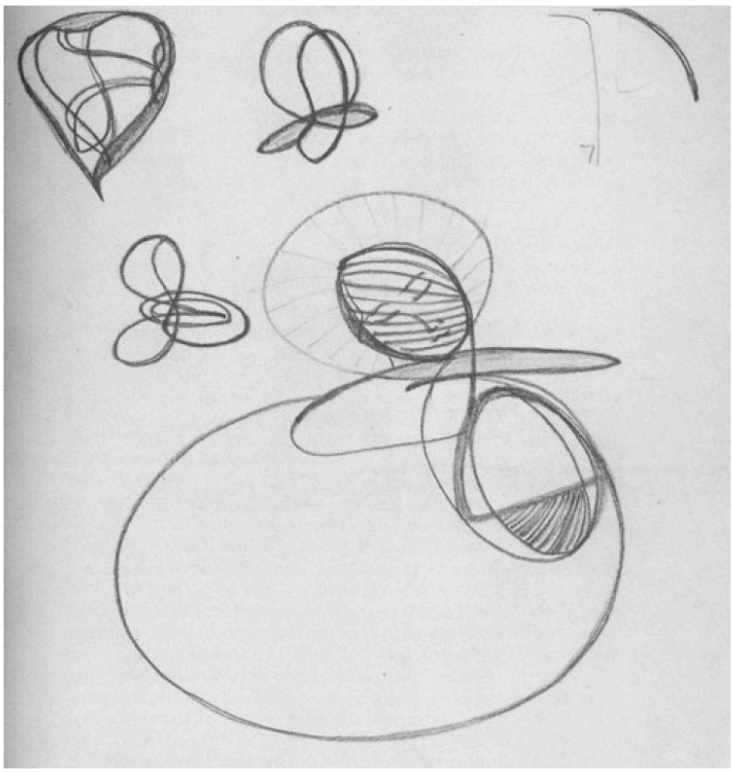
Agnes Martin *Trumpet* (1976), *Untitled* (2004). Images from Glimcher 52, 202.

Figures 7 and 8

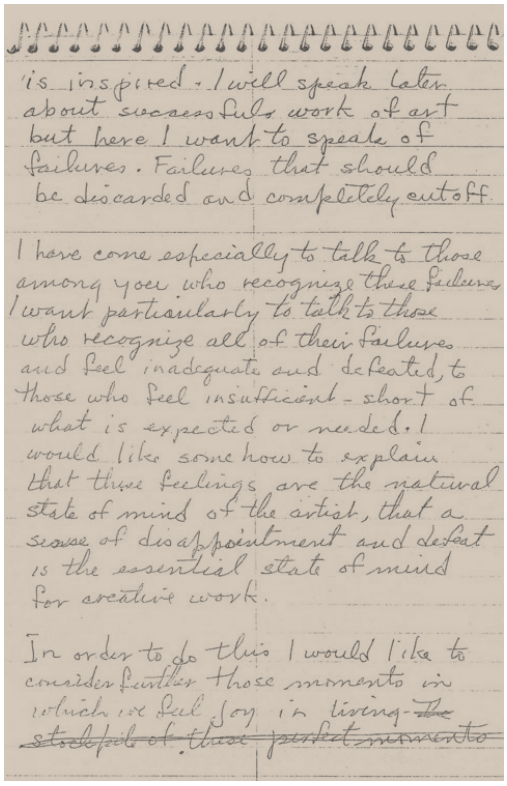


Agnes Martin's last drawing, photographed at LACMA 2016 exhibition.

Figure 9



Susan's Drawing, fig. 141 in Milner's *Hands of a Living God*.



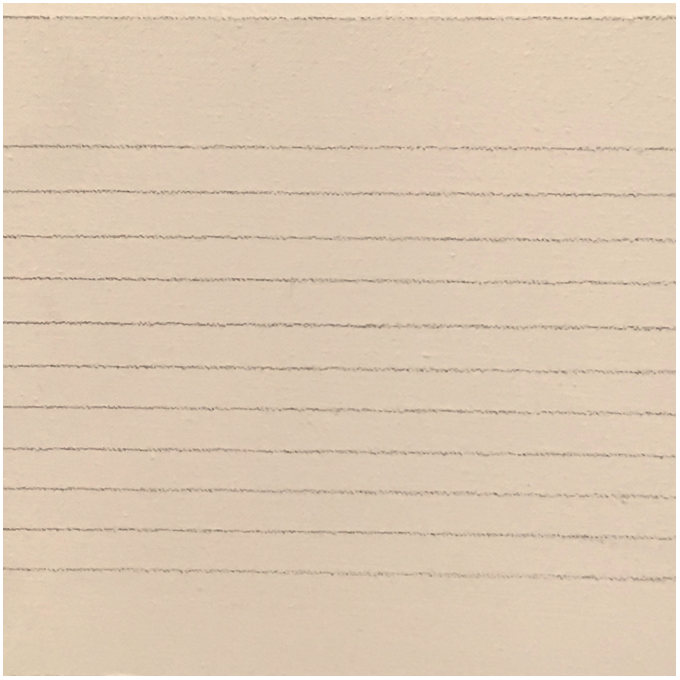
is inspired. I will speak later about successful work of art but here I want to speake of failures. Failures that should be discarded and completely cut off.

I have come especially to talk to those among you who recognize these failures I want particularly to talk to those who recognize all of their failures and feel inadequate and defeated, to those who feel insufficient - short of what is expected or needed. I would like somehow to explain that these feelings are the natural state of mind of the artist, that a sense of disappointment and defeat is the essential state of mind for creative work.

In order to do this I would like to consider further those moments in which we feel joy in living. ~~The steadfast of these perfect moments to~~

Figures 10 and 11

Facsimile of Martin's writings in the 1973 exhibition catalogue *Agnes Martin* (Munich: Kunstraum München, 1973).



Close up of one of the prints in the 1973 series *On a Clear Day,* photographed at LACMA

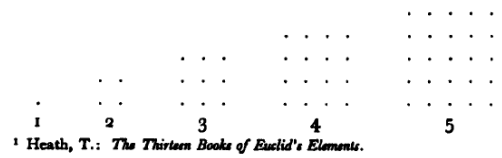
Figures 12 and 13

CHAPTER SEVEN

THE "point" and the "line" represent visual images which remain invariant under a wide range of conditions. The same is true of the visual images associated with the propositions of Euclid; hence the propositions themselves are communicated over long periods of time and between widely separated cultures and races. This may appear to be true of any visual representation, such as cave paintings, but although the column 3 component, record or notation, is strong, the artistic representation does not appear to be so rich in ideational content as the geometrical representation is. The geometer Bhāskara (b. A.D. 1114) drew four right-angled triangles inwards one on each side of the square of the hypotenuse and left it with the comment "See!"[1] There are two dissimilar observations that can be made. One is mathematical and can be stated: $C^2 = 4\frac{ab}{2} + (a-b)^2 = a^2 - b^2$; the other is mythical and can be stated: of the 3, 4, 5, triangle 3 is the first odd number and is perfect, 4 is the square on an even side 2, while 5 partly resembles the father and partly the mother, being the sum of 3 and 2, "and we must then liken the perpendicular to the male, the base to the female and the hypotenuse to the offspring of both".

The mathematical statement of the theme has been profitable and has led to development. The mythological statement, though widely spread, has not. Is it possible to release it from its fetters by reverting to point and line?

If we use the point alone to construct a square we can produce the following effects:



[1] Heath, T.: *The Thirteen Books of Euclid's Elements.*

Bion, page 93 of *Transformations.*

THE GRID

	Definitory Hypotheses 1	ψ 2	Notation 3	Attention 4	Inquiry 5	Action 6	... n.
A β-elements	A1	A2				A6	
B α-elements	B1	B2	B3	B4	B5	B6	... Bn
C Dream Thoughts Dreams, Myths	C1	C2	C3	C4	C5	C6	... Cn
D Pre-conception	D1	D2	D3	D4	D5	D6	... Dn
E Conception	E1	E2	E3	E4	E5	E6	... En
F Concept	F1	F2	F3	F4	F5	F6	... Fn
G Scientific Deductive System		G2					
H Algebraic Calculus							

Bion, page 2 of *Two Papers.*