

**WORD-THINGS:
HAPTIC SEMIOLOGY IN CONTEMPORARY WRITING AND THOUGHT**

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A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

GRADUATE PROGRAMME IN ENGLISH
YORK UNIVERSITY
TORONTO, ONTARIO

MAY 2016

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Abstract

In the service of reconceptualizing twentieth-century philosophies of language (after recent developments in continental philosophy), this dissertation introduces a theoretical tool: the “word-thing.” The word-thing constitutes a reconfiguration of the sign through a dual operation: on the one hand, a word-thing conceives of the thinghood of words and, on the other hand, a word-thing encapsulates the linguistic entification of the Kantian thing-in-itself. Ever since Kant, the question of the relationality between word and object has been framed by post-German Idealism in which apparent phenomena stand in stark contrast to their noumenal basis (or the thing-in-itself), and twentieth-century philosophies of language have been largely a struggle to think words and language within Kantian categories.

By contrast, *Word-Things* posits an inherent embodiment of the word and an innate linguistic and haptic quality to things. Drawing on work in speculative realism, object-oriented ontology, and non-philosophy, *Word-Things* advances a new theoretical approach to language called *haptic semiology*. *Word-Things* theorizes the relation of word and object as a form of touch, distinct from anthropocentric hapticity, in which the signifier presses against the referent, reformulating the substance of the sign itself. The dissertation considers the following issues: 1) an ontology of language, 2) the reconfigured relation of word and thing as being based on touch, and 3) an understanding of “touch” that is situated through a non-corporeal definition of *flesh* (combining the phenomenology of Maurice Merleau-Ponty with the work of Jean-Luc Nancy).

Rather than offering one, delimiting definition of a word-thing, I offer a taxonomy of possible (re)definitions of the word/object relation. Each chapter may be thought of as a “case study” examining a different hypothesis of the word/object dyad. Chapter One inverts the relationship of signifier and referent by postulating the sign as being “referent-based” rather than

“signifier-based.” The second chapter considers the possibility of “flattening” the word/object relation within a “flat ontology” in order to read the avant-garde poetics of Francis Ponge, conceptual writing, L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E poetry, Mark Laliberte, Natalie Czech, and Jaz Parkinson. Chapter Three expands on the flat ontological thesis while situating the world/object relation as an actor-network and also as a fractal; this argument is advanced through readings of the fiction of William S. Burroughs, Tony Burgess, Franz Kafka, and Alain Robbe-Grillet. In the fourth chapter, the word/object relation is considered both as a “fuzzy monism” and also as a fleshy fold; put differently, the slash that separates word and object is considered as a fleshy, combinant space. The chapter uncovers permutations of this “fleshy fold” in James Joyce’s love letters and the provocative fiction of Urs Allemann. Chapter Five further extends this “flesh” hypothesis to include the embodiment that occurs during theatrical performance (as seen in the plays of Caryl Churchill), within Hélène Cixous’s theorization of *écriture féminine*, and in the idiosyncratic poetics of Hannah Weiner. The final, concluding chapter asks a non-intuitive question: if words can be conceived as material objects, then how precisely can this materiality be understood? My response locates a word-thing’s materiality within the “Theory of Objects” offered by Alexius Meinong alongside Martin Heidegger’s work on the thing, which theorizes “essence” on the basis of a structural void that “holds” objects. Heidegger’s own thinking is strongly informed by East Asian philosophy, so, by linking Meinong with Heidegger, I then conclude by looking at the Shinto theory of *kotodama* (or the “spirit of the word”).

Therefore, the “presence” or “essence” of a word-thing depicts a paradox: the ontological “ground” of a word-thing is *nothingness*. However, this nothingness or void is a *productive* nothingness that permits the emergence of both linguistic meaning and non-meaning.

Acknowledgements

First and foremost, I would like to thank my supervisor, Marcus Boon, for his intellectual rigour, immense knowledge base, and tireless push toward innovation. This would have been a much poorer dissertation without him. I would also like to thank my committee members: Tom Loebel for helping me maintain a certain level of sanity amidst the chaos of graduate student life thanks to his devastating sense of humour (while keeping me philosophically honest—he is likely the love-child of Jacques Derrida and George Carlin); and also Stephen Cain whose depth and breadth of knowledge of avant-garde poetry has sailed this dissertation into new, uncharted experimental waters. I would also like to thank Shannon Bell, Ian Balfour, and Timothy Morton for rouding out the dissertation committee.

Other academic mentors who have assisted in the evolution of this dissertation include: Jay Goulding, Art Redding, and Marie-Christine Leps. Professor Goulding’s advice on the final section regarding *kotodama* theory was indispensable. Professor Redding helpfully drew my attention to Vološinov’s work. As well, Professor Balfour helpfully coined the term “sensuous contiguity” in Chapter Four. Special thanks are also extended to my mentor at the University of Toronto, Garry Leonard.

This dissertation has also benefited from in-depth discussions with fellow grad students: I owe many drinks to Fenn Stewart, Matthew Godfrey, Rich Welch, Dani Spinosa, Dave Milman, Eric Schmaltz, and my poetry friends, Mat Laporte, John Bell, Liz Howard, Ralph Kolewe, Lynn McClory, David Peter Clarke, and Michael Boughn. I would also like to extend special thanks to: Michael Bergmann and Andrew Urie (my brothers from other mothers).

Writing a dissertation presents myriad challenges personal, social, emotional, physical, and psychological. The only way to get through the ordeal—I have found—is with the love and support of someone who you trust fully. Thankfully, Amanda Paxton has been a source of strength, escape, and fun in the midst of this challenging academic process: her endless intellectual insights and ability to debate the finer points of literary criticism into the wee hours of the morning—when the birds start singing—have unquestionably strengthened much of this dissertation.

Finally, thanks are also extended to the Braune family—Gisela, Birgit, Rudi, and Margot—for caring in spite of not understanding what I’m doing. This dissertation was written at a variety of bars and cafés around Toronto—I find I cannot write in quiet spaces—so I have to acknowledge that without these fine establishments I would have never completed this project: The Stone Cottage, The Village Roaster (now Turtle Pizza), Michel’s Café, various Starbucks and Tim Horton’s locations, the Korner Pub, the Absinthe, and the Grey Tiger.

As well, my dissertation was generously supported by a Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC) grant and an Ontario Graduate Scholarship (OGS) grant. I thank them as well.

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Introduction: When Words and Things Become Word-Things

This dissertation will attempt to theorize what a “word-thing” is—as opposed to more conventional notions of the sign and signifier—and consider examples in experimental writing that arguably present a being of language.¹ Initially, the notion of a being of language registers a phenomenological-semiotic split between the being of the word *as word* and the being of the word as *emissary of the referent*. Arguably, this notion of the “being of language” is what Heidegger searches for in his seminar on Herder from 1939: Heidegger proposes “[t]he word of being” or “des Seyns” (*Essence* 4) to suggest an “essencing of being” captured in language (27). Such a “pure being of language” is also arguably the goal of Paul Ricoeur’s study on metaphor: more specifically, Ricoeur approaches a “phenomenology” of the sign (*Rule* 306, 331, 349).

However, even though *Word-Things* is infused throughout by the work of Heidegger, choosing to build on his theories specifically in the Conclusion, this dissertation is disinterested in a phenomenology of the sign and prefers the speculative development of an *ontology of the sign*—the difference being that the former maintains a subject-centered focus, a differential model of phenomenal perception; the latter engages a new interrogation of the being of the word-in-itself or of *language qua language*. There is indeed a return to the subject, one that would prompt (in another book-length work) a revised formulation of anthropocentric ontology, but that later work is not the focus of this dissertation. Rethinking the object-being of words *in* language alters phenomenology, indeed, the process of thinking, and my own site of exploration is the process of *reading*. As I seek to demonstrate, the being of word-things amplifies the sensory practice of perception, and my focus will be on the hapticity of language—reading as an

¹ By “experimental writing,” I mean select avant-garde traditions that can be found in fiction, poetry, and theatrical writing.

equivalent experience to touching (after the work of Jean-Luc Nancy that I consider in Chapter Four).

To interrogate the being of the word-in-itself or language qua language depends upon, and yet is distinct from Badiou's notion of "being qua being" (*Being* 4-20). Badiou's context concerns a set theoretical perspective in which being is mathematically sutured to what he calls "the void"—and the void is itself a notion that registers the construction of being as a multiplicity of multiplicities. However, each concept ("being" and "language") designates different epistemological systems. As I hope to show, following Badiou, language (like being) requires an underlying structural void to permit the emergence of meaning (and non-meaning).

For the purposes of this dissertation, the "pure being" of words will be "discovered" or "located" in the data of poetic or experimental language. This approach will permit the generation of a variety of "case studies" or theoretical models that will help clarify the ontological import of the "word-thing." I do not intend to offer one that delimits the definition of a word-thing, because the very concept functions at an "outside" of language. The difficulties of conceptualizing such an "outside" activates a correlational problematic (further discussed in Chapter Two, but understood here as meaning *anthropocentric*) in which any "outside" of human thought remains apparently contained within a twentieth-century philosophical double bind: the *outside* as "outside" is discursively constructed and constrained by language. This dissertation prefers to think of the outside as something that *exists* and as something that exists in the same way that a *word exists*.

A word-thing is initially defined in this dissertation as a doubly-constituted vector that moves between the thinghood of words and the wordhood of things. Ever since Kant, the question of the relationality between word and object has been framed through a post-German

Idealist framework in which apparent phenomena stand against their noumenal basis (or the thing-in-itself) and twentieth-century philosophies of language have largely been a struggle to think words and language within Kantian categories (as I demonstrate in Chapter One).

By contrast, *Word-Things* posits an inherent embodiment to the word and an innate linguistic and haptic quality of the thing-in-itself. Drawing on work in speculative realism, object-oriented ontology, and non-philosophy, *Word-Things* advances a new theoretical approach to language called *haptic semiology*. Haptic semiology is not defined in strict relation to these other approaches, but prefers to use some of the tools they provide to better consider a being of language.

Speculative realism begins during a 2007 workshop held at Goldsmiths College at the University of London, while object-oriented ontology officially emerges (as a branch of speculative realism) in 2009 (although the 2002 publication of Graham Harman's *Tool-Being* could also be considered an early text of object-oriented ontology). The founders of speculative realism are Quentin Meillassoux, Graham Harman, Ray Brassier, and Iain Hamilton Grant.²

² *Collapse III* collected, under the title "Speculative Realism," the papers presented and the dialogues that developed from this conference. Building on the interest in speculative realism, two journals have begun with speculative realism as their focus: *Speculations: A Journal of Speculative Realism* and *O-Zone: A Journal of Object-Oriented Studies* are both published online by Punctum Books. Peter Gratton's *Speculative Realism* (2014) is a good primer to speculative realist philosophy and Peter Wolfendale's *Object-Oriented Philosophy* (2014) is a summary of Harman's philosophy. Paul Ennis's *Continental Realism* (2011) deals with the speculative turn in philosophy as does John Mullarkey's *Post-Continental Philosophy* (2006) (although Mullarkey's text deals more with the philosophical origins of the speculative turn). Another fantastic primer on the problematics of speculative realism and object-oriented ontology is Steven Shavero's *The Universe of Things* (2014). Apart from these texts, Graham Harman began a series on speculative realism at Edinburgh University Press. This series has published a variety of books that each expand on the speculative realist and object-oriented mandate. The series has currently released: Levi Bryant's *Onto-Cartography* (2014), Tristan Garcia's *Form and Object* (2014), Adrian Johnston's *Adventures in Transcendental Materialism* (2014), Tom Sparrow's *The End of Phenomenology* (2014), Markus Gabriel's *Fields of Sense* (2015), Manuel DeLanda's

They each develop unique and diffuse approaches to the same problematic, which is to think a different direction from Kantian philosophy that acts “as a deliberate counterpoint to the now tiresome ‘Linguistic Turn’” (*Speculative Turn* 1).

While the editors of *The Speculative Turn* (2011) (Levi Bryant, Nick Srnicek, and Graham Harman) do not directly define the linguistic turn, the term itself originally appears in the writings of Gustav Bergmann, and is popularized in an anthology edited by Richard Rorty (1967).³ In its first variation, the linguistic turn was primarily composed of analytic philosophers beginning with the mathematician Frege and including Carnap, Wittgenstein, Russell, Austin, and others. However, to this initial tradition I would include the structuralists and poststructuralists as “language-oriented” or as engaging in what Peter Gratton calls “linguistic correlationism” (21-22), which is a key correlationist tradition found in twentieth-century philosophy.

However, a “definition” of the linguistic turn that automatically includes structuralism and poststructuralism could be misconstrued as an unhelpful straw man in that the thinkers I would include under the heading of the “linguistic turn” in continental philosophy—Jacques Derrida, Julia Kristeva, Michel Foucault, Ferdinand de Saussure, Jacques Lacan, Hélène Cixous, Roland Barthes, and Jean-François Lyotard (among others)—are each philosophers with large and complex oeuvres that make easy schematization exceedingly difficult. However, I *do* claim

Assemblage Theory (2016), and Harman’s own *Quentin Meillassoux* (2015). As well, Harman and Bruno Latour edit a series on “New Metaphysics” at Open Humanities Press that has released the titles *The Democracy of Objects* (2011) by Bryant, *The Being of Analogy* (2016) by Noah Roderick, *Realist Magic* (2013) by Timothy Morton, *Plastic Bodies* (2014) by Tom Sparrow, *Ontological Catastrophe* (2014) by Joseph Carew, *New Materialism* (2012) by Rick Dolphijn and Iris van der Tuin, and the forthcoming (2016) *Being Up For Grabs* by Hilan Bensusan.

³ Bergmann first used the term in his review of Peter Strawson’s *Individuals* (1959). See: Bergmann (1960).

that correlationism in twentieth-century continental philosophy primarily deploys a language-oriented approach.

In the initial speculative realist coterie, Quentin Meillassoux's work focuses on "speculative materialism," Harman's approach is object-oriented, Brassier embraces an eliminative nihilism, and Grant develops a vitalism that builds on the work of Schelling.⁴ Each thinker resists easy categorization, which renders the "movement" as a whole rather diffuse, but this fracture of related and yet different interests mirrors the ontological presentation of objects—objects that somehow remain in-themselves while also manifesting as related to other objects within non-hierarchical relationships. The primary thinkers of object-oriented ontology (or object-oriented philosophy) are Harman, Levi Bryant, Timothy Morton, and Ian Bogost.⁵ I would also include Jane Bennett in this gathering of thinkers.⁶

In order to move beyond the much-derided linguistic turn, the dominant rhetorical approach in speculative realism and object-oriented ontology has been more or less to excise or ignore much twentieth-century structural and poststructural philosophy. On the one hand, I

⁴ See: Meillassoux's *After Finitude* (2006). Harman's oeuvre has rapidly grown in the last eight years, but arguably his two most important books are *Tool-Being* (2002) and *Guerilla Metaphysics* (2005). Harman's philosophical approach can be summarized as a unique combination of Heidegger's tool analysis with Bruno Latour's actor-network theory. Harman considers his indebtedness to Heidegger in both *Tool-Being* and *Guerilla Metaphysics*, while his development from Latour is situated in *Prince of Networks* (2009) and *Bruno Latour* (2014). As well, Harman's two books of collected essays on speculative realism are important sources for his work: the first is *Towards Speculative Realism* (2010) and the second is *Bells and Whistles* (2013). Also, see: Brassier's *Nihil Unbound* (2007), and Grant's *Philosophies of Nature After Schelling* (2006).

⁵ See: Bryant's *The Democracy of Objects* and *Onto-Cartography*. As well, Morton's work combines object-oriented ontology with ecological philosophy. His recent *Hyperobjects* (2013) is excellent in this regard and builds an object-oriented approach to much of his earlier ecological thinking found in *Ecology without Nature* (2009) and *The Ecological Thought* (2010). His *Realist Magic* (2013) delves deeply into the aesthetic implications of an object-oriented theory of causality. Also, see: Bogost's *Alien Phenomenology* (2012).

⁶ Such as her excellent book *Vibrant Matter* (2010).

understand why this approach is necessary: structuralism and poststructuralism are each extremely complicated philosophical movements—that contain countless sub-movements—so wading into those waters would require books in themselves to work through the precise moments where speculative realism and object-oriented ontology redirect philosophy from Kant; however, on the other hand, I feel that there are select moments in structuralism and poststructuralism that point to an agential and object-oriented notion of the word. For this reason, I will repeatedly attempt to link certain structural and poststructural tenets and figures with newer concepts that emerge from the so-called speculative turn.

Non-philosophy is only loosely related to speculative realism and object-oriented ontology: it derives from the writings of François Laruelle—a French thinker who has been working since the 1960s, but has only recently begun to be translated into English. The references to language—in the gathering of speculative realism, object-oriented ontology, and non-philosophy—are easy to summarize because the tendency has been (as mentioned earlier), to ignore what could be called “the language question” in favour of “the object question.” In many ways, this choice on the part of speculative philosophers is a willful, rhetorical decision because so much of twentieth-century philosophy deals with “the language question” at the expense of “the object question.”

Occasionally though, intriguing considerations of language do emerge from these movements: Harman has offered an initial consideration of an “object-oriented literary criticism” in his essay “The Well-Wrought Broken Hammer” (2012), but, despite the merits of this essay, I argue that there are many other avenues beyond new criticism and new formalism that are available for an object-oriented approach to literary study (some of these “other avenues” will be considered in this dissertation). In the same issue of *New Literary History*, Timothy Morton

offers a persuasive object-oriented analysis of poetry that primarily focuses on Shelley, but also addresses Keats, Hopkins, and Joyce.⁷ Levi Bryant's essay "Politics and Speculative Realism" (2013) in *Speculations IV*, offers a breakdown of the speculative realist critique of the linguistic turn as a response to critical theory: "the critical theorist attempts to show that what we took to be a property of the referent is instead—in Saussurean language—an *effect* of the signifier (sign-vehicle) and the signified (interpretant) sorting or carving up the world in particular ways" (17). Generally speaking though, in speculative realism and object-oriented ontology, the rhetorical decision is to bracket the "linguistic turn" (which in this case includes structuralism and poststructuralism) in favour of exploring different and new philosophical terrain.

François Laruelle, in his formulation of non-philosophy, theorizes a model of real/representation that departs from more traditional correlationist positions:

Therefore it is less a matter of critiquing or deconstructing a representation which we would, despite everything, still admit to being constitutive of the One or of the real and which would then be real in its own way; rather it is a question of more profoundly breaking the ultimate bond of reciprocity this deconstruction continues to presuppose between the real and its representation; of liberating the one from the other, liberating the real just as much as representation; of removing them from this aporetic situation in which the Greeks, under the name of 'philosophy,' have abandoned and devoted them to being opposed to one another. (Laruelle, *Philosophy* 8)

Laruelle scholars John Mullarkey and Anthony Paul Smith insist that

⁷ See: Morton's "An Object-Oriented Defense of Poetry" (2012).

what Laruelle offers us is a new vision of philosophy as a whole that is neither the right nor wrong *representation* of reality, but is a material *part* of the Real, though one that always tries to refract the Real through itself, in a ‘*mixte*’, ‘amphiboly’ or ‘dyad’. Each philosophy is a mediation of the Real, though of a very strange kind to be sure. The work of non-philosophy is an experiment with what results in our knowledge from seeing philosophy in this way. (1)

But what is “the real” for non-philosophy? “The Real is indifferent to, or resists, each attempt at representing it,” Smith and Mullarkey argue, “because every thought (philosophical or non-philosophical) is already a part of it (and how can a part be, that is, re-present, the whole?). There is something more but not mysterious in the Real—namely its resistance to being represented (as a whole)” (4).⁸

In terms of non-philosophy’s engagement with language, Laruelle has proposed two intriguing linguistic projects that attempt to inject realism into structural and poststructural philosophy. In Laruelle’s essay—translated in 2013 by Taylor Adkins on his weblog *Speculative Heresy*—“Toward an Active Linguistics” (originally published as “Pour une linguistique active (la notion de phonèse)” (1978), Laruelle argues that “[s]tructuralism describes the conditions of *possible* linguistic [*sic*] experience rather than its conditions of *real* experience” (n.p.).

Laruelle’s “active linguistics,” as opposed to traditional linguistics, seeks to theorize the “reality of language” (n.p.), through the concept of *phonesis*—a concept that develops “language potentials” (n.p.). Laruelle attempts to reposition the linguistic phoneme through active linguistic phonesis, which he understands as the “phoneme *qua* productive flux or speaking-power” (n.p.).

⁸ In what may be a happy coincidence for speculative realist philosophers, Bruno Latour’s definition of the real is also “what resists” (*Pasteurization* 174).

By introducing the productive flux of speaking-power into his notion of active linguistics, Laruelle considers language as an organism or as a “phonetico-phonematic entity” that leads him to propose “*the fractional organ of language [langue]*, which is an object of a complexity superior to that of the phoneme alone and is produced by associative contiguity of ‘contraries’” (n.p.). The “reality of language” manifests, for Laruelle’s active linguistics, as an “*index sui*” or as a “speaking speaking” (n.p.) such that language becomes constituted through its own self-organizing or self-generative internal principles (this dynamic will reappear throughout this dissertation in different ways).

Laruelle’s 1976 book *Machines textuelles* remains untranslated—apart from the introduction, which Taylor Adkins translated as *Speculative Heresy* in 2013—but the book is primarily a non-philosophical response to Derridean deconstruction. Laruelle understands this book as a combination (or collision) of Deleuze and Derrida, or an attempt to “make the Delida/Derreuze series resonate” (n.p.). *Machines textuelles* attempts to render Derridean deconstruction through a series of Deleuzian machines so that Derridean *différance* transitions into a non-philosophical “indifférance to signs” (n.p.). Laruelle posits the concept of the “*textuale*,” which he designates as “the text’s a-signifying machines, or general textuality in its ‘transcendental’ functionality” (n.p.).

However, Laruelle’s non-philosophical theorization of linguistics is different from that proposed by haptic semiology: Laruelle’s active linguistics remains structurally grounded in what could be called a correlational circle, in which the subject remains the originator of the semiotic signal. Haptic semiology, on the other hand, attempts to consider the word-in-itself or the sign-in-itself as the originator of the semiotic signal. The various texts and traditions of non-

philosophy, speculative realism, and object-oriented ontology will act as helpful accouterments to better articulate the project of haptic semiology.

A word-thing capaciously redefines the sign in order to incorporate a variety of possible sign-entities that emerge from both the rematerialization of the signifier and the linguistic entification of the thing. This initial understanding leads to a variety of other definitional shadings: in certain circumstances, the word-thing considers the collapse of the entrenched boundary between word and object (that results in a “flat ontology”); elsewhere, this conceptual “collapse” is configured as a network or as a *word-fractal*. In each definition, this collapse is considered in explicitly haptic terms where both signifier and object touch in an interpenetrative mesh—a mesh of undecidable complexity. Finally, the word-thing is conceived most broadly—in the Conclusion—as a simultaneously morphogenetic and logogenetic field from which both words and things independently emerge and cohere as their own distinct ontological entities. While each of these “definitions” may appear unique and different, they each share the goal of a combinant redefinition of word and thing—or, put more clearly, this dissertation seeks the overturning of word/thing *as* word-thing.

In the Conclusion, I theorize two further shadings of the word-thing: the word-thing can be, depending on context, either correlational or speculatively non-correlational. The non-correlational element of the word-thing is contained in the very term “word-thing” (in relation to my analysis of *koto* in the Conclusion), and the correlational iteration of the word-thing I call a “thing-word.” Even though I repeatedly use the term “word-thing” throughout the dissertation, I want to make it clear that a “word-thing” is a speculative entification of a word that extends from a word’s initial materialization (or objectalization) as a thing-word. Methodologically speaking, the words considered as the “data” of this dissertation—as the data that necessitates a

theorization of word-things—emerge from the oeuvres of experimental writers and poets. I claim that the words these writers and poets use are typically thing-words; however, these thing-words permit the speculative development of a haptic semiological theory of word-things.

However, why should philosophers take the “data of language” seriously? What do literature and poetry provide philosophy? Another way of asking this question is to ask how is this dissertation useful for scholars of literary criticism? On the one hand, much twentieth-century continental philosophy uses literature as its data: Derrida, Lacan, Barthes, Kristeva, and Foucault were each trained in philosophy, but their works frequently cite literary figures and poets.⁹ I highlight the origins of this tradition as recently developing from the later work of Heidegger who focuses on poetry—particularly the poetry of Friedrich Hölderlin.¹⁰ Gradually, in the later Heidegger, the relation between being and language becomes closely intertwined and undecidable.¹¹ Another possible source of this tradition—as Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy argue in *The Literary Absolute* (1978)—can be found in the German Romantics and Idealists.¹²

⁹ While this select handful of philosophers use literary and poetic examples a lot, they also consider a variety of other media and cultural forms. I do not mean to suggest that they *only* consider poetry and literature. Derrida’s interest in literature can be found throughout his oeuvre, but a good collection of this tendency in his work can be found in *Acts of Literature* (1992). Lacan uses the Poe short story “The Purloined Letter” at length in *Écrits* (pp. 6-48) and also bases his theory of the *sinthôme* on the fiction of James Joyce in his seminar from 1974-1975 (called *R.S.I.*). Barthes’s work regularly features a variety of literary figures: see his *The Pleasure of the Text* (1973) and *Writing Degree Zero* (1953). Kristeva’s dissertation deals with avant-garde writing: see *Revolution in Poetic Language* (1974). Finally, Foucault’s book on the avant-garde writer Raymond Roussel is called *Death and the Labyrinth* (1963). This footnote is by no means a comprehensive list of the poetic and literary references in these thinkers works, nor is it a comprehensive consideration of the extensive interconnections between structuralist and poststructuralist tendencies to consider poetry and literature as “data” for philosophical inquiry.

¹⁰ See: Heidegger’s *Elucidations of Hölderlin’s Poetry* (1981).

¹¹ See: Heidegger’s *Poetry, Language, Thought* (1971).

¹² See: the final three chapters of *The Literary Absolute*.

Beyond the interrelated quality of much twentieth-century philosophy and literary study, the roots of speculative realism can be traced to the fiction of H.P. Lovecraft: the 2007 “Speculative Realism” workshop held at Goldsmiths College took place the day after the “Weird Realism: Lovecraft and Theory” conference (also held at Goldsmiths). Harman explicitly links speculative realism to Lovecraft’s fiction—initially in *Collapse III* where he credits Lovecraftian objects as presenting “a kind of realism without common sense” (367)—and later devoting an entire book to linking the importance of Lovecraft for speculative realism and object-oriented ontology.¹³ In some ways, the “data of literature”—or the “data” of Lovecraftian fiction—necessitates the philosophical emergence of speculative realism.

However, in the instance of this dissertation, the data of experimental literature and poetry usefully point to “limit-experiences” of language: experiences of language where the being of the subject and the being of language cross-pollinate so that the borders of each become indeterminate. My use of the term “limit-experience” builds on the work of Georges Bataille, Maurice Blanchot, and Foucault: the intellectual lineage of the notion of “limit-experience” is captured in Roberto Nigro’s article from 2005. Nigro writes that: “If the limit-experience of Bataille, i.e. the game between limit and transgression, wrenches the subject from itself, in the literary experience of Blanchot it is a matter of the disappearance of the subject: the being of language emerges in the disappearance of the subject, in the exclusion of the subject” (656). Nigro considers limit-experiences as anti-dialectical, such as when he claims that “[t]o speak a language stripped of dialectics means to draw thought back toward the limit of the impossibility of language, toward the limit at which the essence of language is called into question” (656). Indeed, at this limit of language—this limit that interrogates the very essence of language

¹³ See: Harman’s *Weird Realism* (2012).

itself—the positive description of language is called into question; in other words, at the limit-experience of language—understood in this dissertation as experimental forms of writing that push against normative definitions of legibility, grammar, and syntax—word-things develop and these word-things require a speculatively new semiotic theory to apprehend them.

There is a long history of limit-experiences of language that would include the written word as object in Cubism, Surrealism, and the visual art avant-gardes; the sounded word in Dadaism; the movement of sound poetry; and the global development of Concrete and visual poetry.¹⁴ The texts that I use as “data” in this dissertation may have an “eclectic appearance”—i.e., I am not offering a rigorous historical overview of movements such as Concretism, Surrealism, Cubism, or other avant-garde movements—but the creative texts I select notably manifest as specific instances of an *embodied language*; in other words, while there are countless

¹⁴ In Cubism, the technique of *papier-collé* (or “pasted paper”) typically deploys a mixed collage of image and word. The technique was popularized by Georges Braque, but he was inspired by Picasso’s collage techniques. The approach inspired subsequent experiments by Kurt Schwitters and Henri Matisse (among many others). See: Christine Poggi’s *In Defiance of Painting* (1992) and Chapter Five from Stephen Scobie’s *Earthquakes and Explorations* (1997) for more on Braque’s *papiers-collés*. Matthew Gale’s introduction to *Dada & Surrealism* (1997) contains countless examples of this trend in Surrealist and Dadaist art. His section on the paintings of René Magritte is useful in this regard: see pp. 261-264. Nathalia Brodskaja’s overview of Surrealist art *Surrealism* (2009) is another good overview of traditions of Surrealist art. See: David Hopkins’s introduction to *Dada and Surrealism* (2004), pp. 64-69. Inez Hedges’s *Languages of Revolt* (1983) is an excellent resource of the history of Dadaist perspectives on the alchemical nature of the word. See Chapters One and Three of this work. Dafydd Jones also considers the unique relationship between Dadaism and language throughout *Dada 1916 in Theory* (2014). One of the best sources on sound poetry is the catalogue *Sound Poetry* (n.d.): it is the record of the 11th International Sound Poetry Festival held in Toronto in 1978, edited by Steve McCaffery and bpNichol. Dick Higgins’s “A Taxonomy of Sound Poetry” (1980) is an excellent resource along with the Marjorie Perloff and Craig Dworkin edited collection *The Sound of Poetry / The Poetry of Sound* (2009). As well, my own essay “Arche-speech and Sound Poetry” (2014) deals with the political implications of sound poetry throughout its history. The Emmett Williams edited anthology (1967) captures the lineage of concrete poetry that spans from the 1950s to the late 1960s. Dick Higgins’s *Pattern Poetry* (1987) traces “pattern poetry” (which is an early source of concrete) throughout history, beginning in Ancient Greece. The best international overview is likely the Mary Ellen Solt edited anthology *Concrete Poetry: A World View* (1968).

moments throughout the visual and textual avant-gardes that appear to use text in a “collage” like manner, or in a non-semantic way, the creative texts I consider deploy words in the service of a unique (re)conceptualization of language that heretically resists traditional—i.e., semiotic or linguistic—definitions of the sign. Therefore, the creative texts I look at—the cut-ups of William Burroughs, the language-zombies of Tony Burgess, the poetry of Hannah Weiner, the love letters of James Joyce, the various other fiction and poetry examples in Chapters Two and Three—each experiment with text as object, but also implicitly propose a corresponding “theory of the sign” in which signs manifest as emissions *from the object*.

While I am committed to thinking how literature and poetry approach the problem of a “being of language,” I must acknowledge that an avant-garde or experimental writing methodology is not the only way of approaching this problem: even though this dissertation primarily deals with Anglophone literatures, it is not designed to present a *comprehensive* and *exhaustive* assembly of word-things. In some ways, word-things can be found everywhere at limit-experiences (and occasionally in more centrist experiences) of language.¹⁵ Because of the broadness of word-things, this dissertation seeks to shed light on a speculative semiotic (or post-semiotic) category that can be used to approach more radical and experimental instances of

¹⁵ One alternative approach would be a genre-specific analysis of instances of theories of incarnational language: for example, the genre of science fiction contains numerous moments of an alien language that invades earth or of a human language acquiring consciousness, etc. A tradition of science fiction novels that consider alien languages as vital and, in some way, agential can be traced initially to Samuel R. Delaney’s *Babel-17* (1966). In this work language is used as an object or weapon. This theme recurs in Neal Stephenson’s *Snow Crash* (1992), and agential language more generally can be found China Miéville’s *Embassytown* (2011), Ursula K. Le Guin’s *The Dispossessed* (1974), Suzette Haden Elgin’s *Native Tongue* (1984), and Ted Chiang’s short story “Story of Your Life” (1998). Each of these stories and novels approach the problem of word-things in distinct ways that warrant further consideration.

writing. The goal of this approach is to suggest that more work can be done towards a comprehensive consideration of these “excessive” and radical writings.

Along this same trajectory, there are some challenges with proposing what may appear to be a “universal” theory of word-things based on data from only one language—in this case English—and then through a particular group of writers working in that language. Even though this dissertation addresses different alphabetic traditions—that include both East Asian ideogrammic languages and languages that use the Latin alphabet—the haptic semiological theory proposed in *Word-Things* is applicable to any language that functions as a representational system and that contains experimental limit-experiences. However, this dissertation primarily deals with English in large part because English—as a language—is one of the more diffuse languages in the world. English historically develops from a myriad of sources that includes the Germanic tribes of Europe, the Anglo-Saxon settlements in what is now called England, the Celtic neighbours of the Anglo-Saxons, the overall influence of Latin, and the Norman French spoken after the Norman conquest (Leith 7-30). English develops as an extremely pliable and combinant language that is propelled by the influence of colonialism and imperialism into almost every country of the world (this distinguishes it from more geographically isolated languages such as Icelandic for example): its diffuse nature makes it one of the most dominant primary or secondary languages in the world (Leith 180-181). In other words, theories of language that use English as its primary data are then applicable to related languages such as German, French, Latin, Spanish, Italian, and Greek. The textual examples used in this dissertation are applicable to a broader theorization than that limited to English and the combinant nature of English typically mirrors the permutational nature of the avant-garde texts selected.

One of the originators of concrete poetry, Eugen Gomringer, went so far as to argue that concrete poetry—in its resistance to traditional notions of syntax, punctuation, grammar, and semantics—leads to a “universal poetry” (“Concrete” 68) that has the ability to combine all other poeties together (all poeties written in different languages). When language is poetically or experimentally pushed to its own intrinsic “limit-experience,” then the effects or results of this experimentation are applicable to a wide range of other languages because avant-garde experimentation pushes against the underlying and normalizing structure of language—namely, that language is a mimetic system. To that end, the predominantly English examples used in this dissertation are designed to suggest applicability to other languages and to manifest as notes towards a more general theory of language.

Issues of translation also emerge here: these translation issues point not only to the difficulties of translating linguistic limit-experiences, but also to the very terminology used to describe objects and things. The dominant theoretical terms used to describe objects and things spread across a variety of languages—each of which designate different definitional complexities: in English, the words “object,” “objective,” “referent,” “reference,” and “thing” each describe an object in some way, but do so with unique conceptual differences; in German, the terms “*Gegenstand*,” “*Bedeutung*,” “*Sache*,” and “*Ding*” are the dominant terms used for “object” or “reference” (philosophically complicated by the Kantian use of “*Ding an sich*” or “thing-in-itself); in French, the term used for “object” is “*chose*”; in Latin, the terms “*res*” and “*causa*” have a long history in philosophy; and, in Greek, the terms “*chrêma*,” “*pragma*,” “*ti*,” “*ousia*,” “*on*,” and “*onta*” are each related to describing a thing’s object nature (and of course,

there are as many definitionally different examples as there are languages).¹⁶ My point here is that even though we are attempting to move beyond the linguistic turn, we remain trapped within a seemingly Saussurean or Derridean problematic in which the difficulty of naming the “object” or the “thing-in-itself” is registered through the problem of translation. We have to call the stuff that exists in the world *something*, but these words that we use are often sites of competing languages and philosophical traditions.

A word-thing is, to invoke a Kantian phrasing, a *word-in-itself*. What is a word-in-itself? A word-in-itself can be linked to what Walter Benjamin calls “thing languages” (considered in Chapter Four) so that at the word-thing’s own limits the word-thing activates both a correlational linguistic level *and also* a xeno-semiotic level in which words are distinct from their speaking subjects or human interlocutors and manifest both thingly and wordly qualities.

If the thing-in-itself or any other object can *emit* signs that exist within certain networks and systems (which is Benjamin’s claim about thing-languages), then an important question to ask would be: *what is the language of a pylon?* Or, along this same line of reasoning: *what is the language of a star?* (Or, any other object for that matter?) My answer relates to the political import of word-things, which I see as a theory that can, under certain circumstances, separate human correlationism from the sign so that the sign is no longer patriarchally or phallogocentrically determined, thereby liberating language as *language qua language*. However, I would further insist that, politically speaking, I cannot make any claims regarding the specifications of thing-languages because I am *not a star* and I am also *not a pylon*. This dissertation points to a much more subtle and less “logocentric” or anthropocentric framework in

¹⁶ My source for the articulation of these translational difficulties is the *Dictionary of Untranslatables* (2004), an amazing resource that has excellent entries (and sub-headings) for all of these terms.

which the gesture *towards* the existence of thing-languages and word-things is different than the strict definition of every thing-language that exists. Defining those languages as such would be highly problematic because I have no ontological “right” to define what a pylon or lamp or chair language is (or was). Part of my project is to claim that the sign is definitionally capacious beyond heretofore delimiting semiotic models and is increasingly large, thereby requiring a speculative linguistics; however, this semiotic speculation should not define what thing-languages are because then I would be removing the priority of access that these independent things would have to their own speculatively possible languages.

In many semiotic models (Saussure, Peirce, Morris, and others considered in Chapter One), the sign is defined as a relation between signifier and signified and the communicational signal moves between *S* (as signifier) and *s* (as signified). When semioticians discuss a “referent” they tend to mean the social and lived anthropocentric world of communication to which an addressor and addressee refer. The signal therefore passes between addressor and addressee and “meaning” names this relation.

As I mention in Chapter One, even when the sign is tripartite and includes a referent (as opposed to Saussure’s “bracketing semiotics”), the sign remains conceptually bipartite. Haptic semiology opposes this traditionally semiotic framework and resituates the semiotic signal so that, under certain circumstances, the signal *emanates* from the referent or object and the signifier and signified relate to this initial signal in a model that can be said to mimic the pattern of electrons swirling within an atom or neurons firing within a neural net.

I claim that words have quasi-agency in that haptic semiology does not see words as delimited to the confines that situate them as immaterial objects used by writers or speakers, but as sovereign *things*. Experimental writing is typically where this process occurs. Because my

dissertation is interested in resisting a hermeneutic model of use in which language is instrumentalized, I insist that the importance of this dissertation for literary studies is that it moves beyond more normative approaches of *form* or *content*-centered literary approaches. Haptic semiology does not focus on a form or content-oriented hermeneutics, but rather on what I call an *event-oriented hermeneutics*. Put most simply, in *Word-Things*, I argue that an *objectal conception of literary criticism* should focus on that objectality as being constituted by the overall *event* of literature.¹⁷

Building on my earlier claims in this Introduction, I insist that in the twentieth (and now twenty-first) centuries, words were institutionally *de-instrumentalized* so that their inherent thingness was repressed in favour of dominant approaches that delimited their breadth within the categories of “form” and “content.” The notion of a “linguistic event” (considered in the Conclusion) relates objectality to the *entirety* of the studied text, thereby allowing words-as-bodies to become a kind of material (and the bodies presented in literature to manifest in bodily ways) so that the language “used” by (and within) literature itself becomes “material.” Taking form and content together with the various iterations of the entification of word-things (as both wordly and thingly or correlational and non-correlational) speaks to an *event-oriented* literary theory.

Generally speaking, each definition of the word-thing attempts to clarify the same underlying issue—namely, that the distance between word and object can be conceptually bridged when continental philosophy and experimental writing are bridged. To that end, I am considering select poets and writers as implicitly *speculative* thinkers. This argument will

¹⁷ As I will point out later in Chapter Two my use of the terms “objectal” and “objectality” are not definitionally Lacanian.

progress in the following way: Chapter One will situate the problem of word-things as operating against normative trajectories of linguistics, semiotics, and philosophies of language. This chapter will historicize twentieth and twenty-first conceptions of the sign while pointing to the delimiting qualities of these conceptions—namely, that they tend to “bracket the referent.”

The second chapter will “flatten” the Peircean and Saussurean sign(s) within a flat ontology that will link to the experimental poetic experiments of Francis Ponge, the L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E movement of the 1960s and 1970s, the contemporary project of conceptual writing, and the geological and colour poetics of Natalie Czech and Jaz Parkinson. The chapter will consider this “flat ontology” as a monism through the image of a “brick of language” (understood via Mark Laliberte, Ted Berrigan, and Deleuze and Guattari).

Chapter Three will interrogate the “flat ontology” from Chapter Two by (re)situating the sign as a *fuzzy monism* by incorporating fractal geometry. This chapter focuses on experimental fiction, particularly the writing of Franz Kafka, Tony Burgess, Alain Robbe-Grillet, and William S. Burroughs. These writers have been assembled because they each understand language as an invasive force that sometimes parasitizes speaking subjects while manifesting as word-objects.

In the fourth chapter, I begin to think the sign as a fleshy fold by combining Jean-Luc Nancy’s haptology and Maurice Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenology of flesh. This “fleshy” reformulation of the word-thing will be grounded in textual analyses of James Joyce’s love letters to Nora Barnacle and the experimental novella *Babyfucker* by Urs Allemann.

Chapter Five extends the “flesh” hypothesis to consider embodiment during theatrical performance (as seen in the plays of Caryl Churchill), performance art, and Hélène Cixous’s theorization of *écriture féminine*. The chapter concludes with an in-depth analysis of Hannah

Weiner's poetry (chosen because of Weiner's schizophrenic experience of language in which words appeared on the objects around her).

The final, concluding chapter non-intuitively asks: if words can be conceived of as material objects, then how precisely can this materiality be understood? In this chapter, I locate a word-thing's materiality within the "Theory of Objects" offered by Alexius Meinong, a thinker who acts as a precursor for twenty-first philosophical interrogations of the object. I combine Meinong with Martin Heidegger's work on the thing, which theorizes essence on the basis of a structural void that "holds" objects. Heidegger's own thinking is strongly informed by East Asian philosophy, so by linking Meinong with Heidegger, I then consider an esoteric notion of language known as *kotodama* (or the "spirit of the word"). The paradoxical "presence" of *kotodama* is linked with theories of the void and nothingness in order to suggest that the ontological "ground" of a word-thing is *nothing*. However, this "nothing" or void is shown to be a *productive* nothing that permits the emergence of meaning through the potential languages that exist apart from human-centred language systems.

Chapter One: What's the Matter with (of) Language?

What is the being of language? Despite claims of language's ineffable nature and material inexistence, *Word Things* insists that understanding language as incarnated permeates writing and is essential to understanding the dialectic of subjectivity/objectivity in new ways. The philosophy of language begins with the fact that there are *human beings*. This assumption is followed by the corollary claim that human beings *speak*. The instance of a "human being" immediately raises the question of what it means to *be human*, but what about the language spoken? Is there a *language-being* or what does it mean to *be language*?

Word-Things addresses the relationship between words and objects by postulating "word-things." A word-thing interrogates the primary problem of relationality: how do these things called "words" relate to the objects, things, or referents that they are supposed to relate to? Are there new ways of thinking this relation after recent developments in continental philosophy? I do not see *Word-Things* as a work of speculative realism, object-oriented ontology, or non-philosophy, but rather as *semiology*, which builds on these philosophical traditions, in part, to acknowledge and theorize fully *haptics* as constitutive of semiology. Throughout *Word-Things*, the relation of word and object is based on *touch*—a unique form of touch that includes human concepts of touch while also remaining distinct from anthropocentric hapticity.

My use of linguistic "materiality" privileges earlier atomic notions of matter and I will extend materiality into a theory of *hermeneusis* and *semiosis*.¹⁸ However, I will attempt this task

¹⁸ Materiality itself has a very long and complicated history that builds on *materia* and *hyle* in Latin and Greek, and proceeds to understandings of Platonic Form and early atomic theories for thinkers like Epicurus and Lucretius. Materialism later departs from notions of atomic matter when retheorized by Marx for the purposes of explicating labour conditions in post-industrial and capitalist society. My use of the term "materialism" is unrelated to Marxist notions of

without reverting to a naïve realist position (or what Jean Piaget calls “nominal realism” [qtd. in Chandler 74]).¹⁹

In what ways does considering the signifier itself as material alongside the related linguistic entification of the thing-in-itself offer new ways of understanding literature, poetry, and sign systems?²⁰ Initially, *Word-Things* considers the signifier *as* a thing in its own right and the thing-in-itself as a potentially semioticized entity. This founding definition of a “word-thing” will be developed repeatedly throughout the dissertation. By the conclusion, a “word-thing” will have progressed through a variety of possible taxonomical clarifications: a “word-thing” will begin definitionally as an inverted relationship of signifier and thing; it will subsequently be

historical materialism and material means of production, but rather derives from the move towards geophilosophy, speculative realism, and eco-criticism. Instead, for me, “materialism” encompasses the move towards the real as well as the environmental. See the anthology *New Materialisms: Ontology, Agency, and Politics* (2010) edited by Diana Coole and Samantha Frost for an excellent overview of the terrain of this new theoretical movement. Incidentally, Eugene W. Holland calls Deleuze and Guattari’s work with schizoanalysis a “materialist semiotics” (38). Object-oriented ontology is strongly against “materialist” claims and prefers “realist” arguments. While my project does use some of the tools in object-oriented ontology’s toolbox, I do not ascribe wholesale to that approach: to that end, I try to develop an idiosyncratic notion of “material” that builds on Meillassoux’s privileging of the term. Perhaps haptic semiology is more closely related to speculative realism than object-oriented ontology.

¹⁹ Daniel Chandler, in his excellent introductory primer to semiotics, addresses Swift’s academicians at Lagado as being victim to naïve realism or language-world isomorphism: “The academicians adopted the philosophical stance of naïve realism in assuming that words simply mirror objects in an external world. They believed that ‘words are only names for things’, a stance involving the assumption that ‘things’ necessarily exist independently of language prior to them being ‘labelled’ with words. According to this position there is a one-to-one correspondence between word and referent (sometimes called language-world *isomorphism*), and language is simply a *nomenclature*—an item-by-item naming of things in the world. Saussure felt that this was ‘the superficial view taken by the general public’” (60).

²⁰ I have not considered the object-oriented philosophy of Graham Harman yet, but Harman’s philosophy is critical of materialisms as well in that he seeks “*realism without materialism*” (“On the Undermining” 40, original emphasis). I have decided to embrace this object-oriented framework so that gradually the use of the term “material” will be replaced with the term “objectal.” However, in Chapter One the term “material” will be used only in relation to the various post-Saussurean “rematerializations” of the sign (to be considered momentarily).

understood as a flat ontology of the sign; later, a “word-thing” will be seen as a relational network and fractal; elsewhere as a fleshy linguistic fold; and finally, a “word-thing” will be defined in relation to East Asian philosophy in order to develop a terminology unburdened by a semiotic history conditioned by Kantian philosophy.

First though, a considerable amount of context is required. One need not agree with Lacan’s assertion that the symbolic order “tattoos” the barred subject with various chains of signification to know that language sometimes hurts and impacts us in ways that are surprisingly concrete, not aligning with the signifier’s seemingly abstract, nonexistent, or immaterial ontological status.²¹ This problematic is nicely stated by Agamben when he writes that “we are obligated to understand this similarity [between word and object] not as something physical, but according to an analogical and immaterial model” (*Signature* 36). *Word-Things* resists this traditional model of the sign in favour of a praxis that appears potentially naïve and logically fallacious (as I will consider below), but nonetheless endorsed by many modern and contemporary experimental writers. The importance of these writers’ endorsement of an implicitly fallacious theorization of language has never been adequately considered. If the writers I look at are not victims of a poorly considered and historically contingent metaphysics, then something else must be happening in language and this “something else” points towards a new formulation of the linguistic sign. If words are sometimes things-in-themselves, then a corresponding ontology may be theorized: a corresponding theory of the *being of language*.

²¹ Lacan writes in Seminar XI, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, that: “The subject himself is marked off by the single stroke, and first he marks himself as a tattoo, the first of the signifiers. When this signifier, this *one*, is established—the reckoning is *one* one. It is at the level, not of the one, but of the *one* one, at the level of the reckoning, that the subject has to situate himself as such. In this respect, the two ones are already distinguished. Thus is marked the first split that makes the subject as such distinguish himself from the sign in relation to which, at first, he has been able to constitute himself as subject” (141).

Recent fields of contemporary philosophy such as speculative realism, non-philosophy, and object-oriented ontology, each offer prospective theoretical approaches that would offer a theoretical framework for considering the thingness of words and the wordness of things.

A good way of summarizing the goals of this dissertation is to think of Foucault's summary of Deleuze's philosophy—up to *Difference and Repetition* (1968) and *Logic of Sense* (1969)—where he argues that Deleuze's philosophy is a metaphysical discourse that “deal[s] with the materiality of incorporeal things” (“Theatrum” 347), although Foucault insists earlier that Deleuze would likely “not allow us” to use this term (346). What is a materiality of incorporeal things? Philosophy itself is sometimes a discourse that deals with the materiality of incorporeal things because philosophy influences thought and thought can be evaluated in a variety of ways that include pragmatic, functional, or material approaches.

However, I would like to begin with a question: how does the configuration of the traditional semiotic sign necessitate the thinking of this dissertation? In other words, what is the (semiotic) sign that the word-thing is responding to?

Semiotic Structuralism and the Empty Signifier of Poststructuralism

Semiotics is an extremely broad, diffuse, and difficult field to categorize.²² One of the first proto-semiotic debates occurred in Athens circa 300 BCE. The Stoics and Epicureans differentiated between “natural signs,” meaning the signs that proliferate throughout nature, and “conventional

²² The debate still rages whether or not it is a “field” or a “discipline.” This issue was the topic of a semiotics conference organized by Sebeok and held at Indiana University in 1984. The title referred to a talk that Umberto Eco had presented at the same university some ten years earlier. See: Sebeok *Signs: An Introduction*, p. 15 for more on this.

signs,” which are the signs of human communication or man-made signs.²³ From its earliest beginnings in the Western tradition, semiotics emphasizes conventional signs over the natural. Prior to Saussure and Peirce’s work at the turn of the twentieth century, St. Augustine (354-430) and William of Ockham (1288-1347) situate the conventional sign (*signa data*) over the natural sign (*signa naturalia*) and focus on the relationship between a word and its correlate in the mind as a sense impression.²⁴

²³ This debate is nicely summarized in Plato’s *Cratylus*.

²⁴ In the unfinished *De dialectica* (c. 387), Augustine defines the sign in relation to sense data: in other words, in the context of medieval semiotics, Augustine structures the sign triadically in that a sign is always a sign of something else that must be perceived by an observing mind. In *De doctrina christiana*, Augustine further develops his theory of the sign: “I wish it understood that no one should consider them [signs] for what they are but rather for their value as signs which signify something else. A sign is a thing which causes us to think of something beyond the impression the thing itself makes upon the senses” (34). Earlier in *De doctrina*, Augustine writes: “I have called here a ‘thing’ that which is not used to signify something else, like wood, stone, cattle, and so on; but not that wood concerning which we read that Moses cast it into bitter waters that their bitterness might be dispelled, nor that stone which Jacob placed at his head, nor that beast which Abraham sacrificed in place of his son. For these are things in such a way that they are also signs of other things” (8). Augustine has gotten himself into muddy waters here: in discussing the metaphorical structure of signifying objects he complicates the easy distinction of thing and sign by making some things concrete signs. Augustine asserts that: “There are other signs whose whole is in signifying, like words. For no one uses words except for the purpose of signifying something. From this may be understood what we call ‘signs’; they are things used to signify something” (8-9). Augustine commits here what I see as the primary gambit of semiotics: that words are *not* ontological, but merely functional. A sign contains an arguably “invisible” status here because it has no merit *in-itself*. However, if a sign is not ontological for Augustine (and for semiotics more generally), then what of the things that he conspicuously nominates as unique in his list? Things such as the wood Moses cast into the water, the stone on Jacob’s head, and the beast that Abraham sacrifices? Are these objects invisible simply because they are nominated as signs instead of things, as *signa* instead of *res*? Augustine neglects to point out that any object can be *both* functional and ontological because any thing can become implicated or situated within a larger narrative. Without knowledge of the narrative, then, a thing is only a thing instead of a sign. For the semiotic system in this dissertation I seek to analyze the sign ontologically instead of functionally. William of Ockham similarly theorizes the sign in Part I of the *Summa logicae* (c. 1323). Ockham writes: “The conceptual term is an intention or impression of the soul which signifies or consignifies something naturally and is capable of being a part of mental proposition and of suppositing in such a proposition for the thing it signifies. Thus, these conceptual terms and the propositions composed of them are the mental words which, according

However, the main definitions of the sign that this dissertation works against are those offered by Ferdinand de Saussure and Charles Sanders Peirce—the founding fathers of semiotics (and linguistics). Even though, for modern semiotics, many different things can be “a sign” (such as an event, a song, a hairstyle, or, as Eco puts it: “Semiotics is concerned with everything that can be *taken* as a sign” [7]), Saussure situates language—especially speech—as “the most important” of all sign systems (15). Roman Jakobson and Émile Benveniste both share Saussure’s emphasis on language as the pinnacle of sign systems.²⁵ Saussure, more than Peirce, offers an “immaterial” definition of the sign, and, while subsequent theorists and semioticians have offered various “rematerializations” of the sign, these “rematerializations” have focused on a different kind of “materiality” than the kind sought after in this dissertation.²⁶

Saussure defines the sign, in his *Cours* from 1906-1911, (first published in 1916), in the following way:

A linguistic sign is not a link between a thing and a name, but between a concept and a sound pattern. The sound pattern is not actually a sound; for a sound is

to St. Augustine in chapter 15 of *De Trinitate*, belong to no language” (49). Ockham defines the sign as: “In one sense a sign is anything which when apprehended brings something else to mind. Here, a sign need not, as has been shown elsewhere, enable us to grasp the thing signified for the first time, but only after we have some sort of habitual knowledge of the thing. In this sense of ‘sign’ the spoken word is a natural sign of a thing, the effect is a sign of its cause, and the barrel-hoop is a sign of wine in the tavern [...] In another sense a sign is anything which (1) brings something to mind and can supposit for that thing; (2) can be added to a sign of this sort in a proposition [...]; or (3) can be composed of things that are signs of either sort (e.g., propositions). Taking the term ‘sign’ in this sense the spoken word is not the natural sign of anything” (50-51).

²⁵ See: Jakobson “Linguistics in Relation to Other Sciences” (1970), p. 455, and Benveniste “The Semiology of Language” (1969), p. 239.

²⁶ Beyond post-Saussurean (and post-Peircean) “rematerializations of the sign,” there have been other unique contemporary approaches to semiotics. I would like to highlight two instances: Søren Brier’s *Cybersemiotics* (2008) is an innovative amalgamation of semiotics and cybernetics and Eero Tarasti’s *Existential Semiotics* (2000) combines semiotic theory with various existential and phenomenological thinkers, such as Heidegger, Hegel, Kierkegaard, and Sartre.

something physical. A sound pattern is the hearer's psychological impression of a sound, as given to him by the evidence of his senses. This sound pattern may be called a 'material' element only in that it is the representation of our sensory impressions. The sound pattern may thus be distinguished from the other element associated with it in a linguistic sign. This other element is generally of a more abstract kind: the concept. (66)

Winfried Nöth locates Saussure's sign in a dyadic tradition that begins with Augustine (397) and Albertus Magnus (thirteenth-century), moving all the way to post-Saussureans such as Hjelmslev, Cassirer, and Jakobson (88).²⁷ In the above definition from Saussure, the dyadic sign is constructed from the relationship forged between the "concept" (the signified) and the "sound pattern" (the signifier).²⁸ The Saussurean sign is generally accepted to be a dyadic and immaterial construct; or, as Daniel Chandler argues, "for Saussure the linguistic sign is wholly immaterial" and the "immateriality of the Saussurean sign is a feature which tends to be neglected in many popular commentaries. If the notion seems strange, we need to remind ourselves that words have no value in themselves—that is their value" (17).²⁹ According to

²⁷ Nöth lists the lineage of dyadic models of the sign as follows: Augustine (397), Albertus Magnus and Scholastics (13th century), Hobbes (1640), Locke (1690), Port-Royal (Arnauld and Nicole 1685), Wolff (1720), Degérando (1800), Saussure, Hjelmslev, Cassirer (1923), Bühler (1933), Bloomfield (1933), Buysens (1943), Jakobson (1959), Goodman (1968). Nöth does not list dates for Saussure and Hjelmslev (84-88).

²⁸ Eco argues that the signified can be defined as the combination of "a mental image, a concept and a psychological reality" (*A Theory of Semiotics* 14-15).

²⁹ Aside from Chandler's excellent introduction to semiotics there are other important introductory books and anthologies to the field: Thomas Sebeok's phenomenal *Signs: An Introduction to Semiotics* (1994) is exemplary; Robert E. Innis's *Semiotics: An Introductory Anthology* (1985); John Deely's *Introducing Semiotic* (1982) is an excellent introduction, his *Basics of Semiotics* (1990) contains an excellent introduction to zoosemiotics and biosemiotics, and his *Why Semiotics?* (2004) is an excellent consideration of the historical sources of semiotics; Greimas and Courtés have assembled a very useful dictionary of semiotic terms

Chandler, “[m]ost commentators who adopt Saussure’s model still treat the signified as a mental construct, although they often note that it may nevertheless refer indirectly to things in the world. Saussure’s original model of the sign ‘brackets the referent’, excluding reference to objects existing in the world,” and furthermore, Saussure’s “*signified* is not to be identified directly with such a referent but is a *concept* in the mind—not a thing but the notion of a thing. Some people may wonder why Saussure’s model of the sign refers only to a concept and not to a thing” (16). Chandler does mention that Saussure’s “bracketing of the referent” tends to be “neglected” by most commentators—a claim that would involve Terry Eagleton’s assessment of the Saussurean sign in *Literary Theory* (1983): “The relation between the whole sign and what it refers to (what Saussure calls the ‘referent’, the real furry four-legged creature) is therefore also arbitrary” (97), Eagleton writes.³⁰ Robert Strozier corrects Eagleton on this point by clarifying that: “Saussure never mentions the referent, so Eagleton is a good example of misreading. But Eagleton does say that Saussure ‘brackets’ the referent—although this means that there is a referent and that

(1979); the Bailey, Matejka, and Steiner edited collection is a good overview of semiotics around the world (1978); the Danesi and Santeramo edited collection *The Sign in Theory and Practice* (1999) is another good overview of essays on semiotics; Petrilli and Ponzio’s *Semiotics Unbounded* (2005) is a lot more than an introductory primer, but contains excellent introductions to the semiotics of Morris, Welby, Sebeok, Bakhtin, Rossi-Landi, and Eco; David Lidov’s *Elements of Semiotics* (1999) also presents a good overview of the field; and the Marshall Blonsky edited collection *On Signs* (1985) contains an excellent selection of essays.

³⁰ “Neglected,” or, in some cases, misinformation is passed off as scholarship about Saussure and structuralism. In Rosalind Coward and John Ellis’s *Language and Materialism* (1977), they incorrectly argue that “[t]he structuralist system relies on the sign having a real referent: the arbitrary relation between signifier and signified is established in this schema by a natural bond between the human mind and a real referent. What is arbitrary in this schema, is the signifier produced for that reference. This is a tendency implicit in Saussure, who, despite realising that the designated object was not important—replacing it with the notion of a ‘referent’—nevertheless, still seemed committed to the idea of a real referent” (22). This claim is objectively wrong since, as mentioned earlier, Saussure never mentions the referent. Their overly general “summary” of Saussure’s semiotic project is also explicitly false: “The limitation, imposed by a ‘real referent’ appears in much of Saussure’s work” (22).

Saussure chose to disregard it” (36). Eagleton’s understanding of the “bracketing” procedure involves less active choice than Strozier imputes: “In order to reveal the nature of language,” Eagleton writes, “Saussure had first of all to repress or forget what it talked about: the referent, or real object which the sign denoted, was put in suspension so that the structure of the sign itself could be better examined. It is notable how similar this gesture is to Husserl’s bracketing of the real object in order to get to closer grips with the way the mind experiences it” (109). Strozier discusses Saussure’s “bracketing of the referent” as a phenomenological procedure by linking Saussure’s model of reality with Husserl’s “phenomenological reduction” that excludes exteriority in favour of interiority (25).

Charles Ogden and Ivor Richards are the first thinkers to use the term “referent” in their influential *The Meaning of Meaning* (1923). The necessity of the term is justified in a footnote:

The word ‘thing’ is unsuitable for the analysis here undertaken, because in popular usage it is restricted to material substances—a fact which has led philosophers to favour the terms ‘entity,’ ‘ens’ or ‘object’ as the general name for whatever is. It has seemed desirable, therefore, to introduce a technical term to stand for whatever we may be thinking of or referring to. ‘Object,’ though this is its original use, has had an unfortunate history. The word ‘referent,’ therefore, has been adopted. (9, n. 1)

Ogden and Richards resist Saussure’s bracketing semiotics in favour of a triadic model of the sign that includes real “things” (or “referents”). However, they point out that “[b]y no manner of make-believe can we discover the *what* of referents,” because we “can only discover the *how*” (82). Therefore, their notion of a referent still remains at an epistemological distance and they situate their understanding of the referent against metaphysicians: a metaphysician they claim

would argue that the “what” of referents could be known (82), while Ogden and Richards insist that the “what” is impossible—only the “how” can be known. Therefore, even though they include an object (or referent) in their triadic model of the sign, that object remains fundamentally Kantian (as I will demonstrate momentarily). However, Ogden and Richards are willing to speculate that “many idealizations and imaginative creations, such as Don Juan and the Übermensch, may some day find their referents” (99)—perhaps this will occur when Meillassoux’s inexistent God is born.³¹

Even though Ogden and Richards coin the term “referent,” the meaning of the term is suggested by the earlier German use of the word *Bedeutung* that can be found in the writings of Gottlob Frege. As Barry Smith points out in his article on the ontologies of Frege and Edmund Husserl: “In fact for Frege *every* entity is a referent, or, more precisely, every entity is the potential referent” (111). Frege’s key essays that discuss the terminological complexities of identifying an object are “On Sense and Reference” (1892)—in German the distinction is between *Sinn* and *Bedeutung*—and “On Concept and Object” (1892) or, in German, the distinction is between *Begriff* and *Gegenstand*. Frege engages here in a practice of “existential quantification”: a mathematical approach to designating the existence of objects through predicate logic (Smith 111). Smith claims, following Frege, “that not only signs but also senses may play the role of referent” (118), which makes Frege’s meaning of “*Bedeutung*” (or

³¹ Quentin Meillassoux’s 1997 doctoral dissertation “L’Inexistence divine” or “Divine Inexistence” speculatively considers God as currently inexistent, but proffers the possibility that in the future—at an unknown moment—God may exist. Translated excerpts from “Divine Inexistence” appear in Graham Harman’s book *Quentin Meillassoux* (2011), pp. 175-238. Meillassoux has been continuously revising his doctoral dissertation into a yet-to-be-published multivolume work.

“reference”) similar to Ogden and Richards’s definition of the term “referent”—for Ogden and Richards, Nietzsche’s *Übermensch* and other imaginary objects are legitimate referents.

Chandler points out that “if linguistic signs drew attention to their materiality this would hinder their communicative transparency. Furthermore, being immaterial, language is an extraordinarily economical medium and words are always ready to hand” (17). The so-called “real world”—the world that Husserl phenomenologically reduces—is hinted at when Saussure discusses the conceptual nature of the signified; for example, Saussure admits that “[t]he street and the train are real enough. Their physical existence is essential to our understanding of what they are” (107). Even though Saussure admits the existence of the real world, his definition of language strictly brackets this world (or referential system) because the signifier and the signified are each arbitrary concepts—for this reason, different languages assign the same referent numerous signifiers, none of which registers a notion of referential “essence.” In other words, there is nothing “chair-like” about the words “chair,” “chaise,” or “sessel.” As Saussure points out, “[t]he signs used in writing are arbitrary. The letter *t*, for instance, has no connexion with the sound it denotes” (117). Lévi-Strauss, following Saussure, argues that “the linguistic sign is arbitrary a priori, but ceases to be arbitrary a posteriori” (91), meaning that signs become concretized or fixed within history.

Therefore, according to Chandler, Saussure’s “conception of meaning was purely *structural* and *relational* rather than *referential*: primacy is given to relationships rather than to things (the meaning of signs was seen as lying in their systematic relation to each other rather than deriving from any inherent features of signifiers or any reference to material things)” (18). In the language of second-order systems theory (following Niklas Luhmann), there exists a material system apart from a language system (Luhmann 87). Fredric Jameson makes this point

in his own terms in *The Prison-House of Language* (1972): “it is not so much the individual word or sentence that ‘stands for’ or ‘reflects’ the individual object or event in the real world, but rather that the entire system of signs, the entire field of the *langue*, lies parallel to reality itself” (32-33). If Saussure’s definition of the sign not only “brackets the referent,” but in *stricto sensu* negates the referent in order to become dyadic, then how does Peirce define the sign in relation to referentiality?

Pierce’s sign is explicitly triadic and, according to Nöth, falls into a long history of triadic models of the sign.³² Peirce writes that:

A sign, or *representamen*, is something which stands to somebody for something in some respect or capacity. It addresses somebody, that is, creates in the mind of that person an equivalent sign, or perhaps a more developed sign. That sign which it creates I call the *interpretant* of the first sign. The sign stands for something, its *object*. It stands for that object, not in all respects, but in reference to a sort of idea, which I have sometimes called the *ground* of the representamen. (*Collected Papers* 2.228, II.135)³³

The Peircean sign is known as a “semiotic triangle” (Chandler 33) and marks the relationship between a representamen, an interpretant, and an object. In a Saussurean framework, the representamen is nearly equivalent to the signifier, the interpretant is nearly equivalent to the signified, and the object is nearly—although not quite, as we will see—equivalent to the referent. According to Peirce, a sign is anything “which determines something else (its *interpretant*) to

³² Nöth lists the lineage of triadic models of the sign as follows: Plato (c. 400 BC), Aristotle (c. 350 BC), the Stoics (c. 250 BC), Boethius (c. 500), Francis Bacon (1605), Gottfried Wilhelm von Leibniz (c. 1700), Charles Sanders Peirce, Edmund Husserl (1900), Charles K. Ogden and Ivor A. Richards (1923), and Charles W. Morris. See pp. 89-91.

³³ All quotations from Peirce are taken from the eight volumes of Peirce’s *Collected Papers*.

refer to an object to which itself refers (its *object*) in the same way, the interpretant becoming in turn a sign, and so on *ad infinitum*" (2.303, II.169). Thomas Sebeok rightly asks, regarding Peirce's theory of semiosis: "If objects are signs, in indefinite regression to a supposititious *logos*, and if interpretants are signs marching in progression toward the ultimate disintegration of mind, what is there left that is not a sign?" (14). For Peirce, even though he regularly employs the term "object," that "object" remains fundamentally Kantian and is stitched over by various signs, its access mediated to human consciousness. What is good about the Peircean model is that it contains the object/referent within it (while Saussure discards the object/referent), but what is bad about his model is that it lacks a pragmatic materialism that Peirce himself would have no doubt advocated. In this proliferating system of Peircean semiosis, at which point does matter or materialism enter?

Chandler points out that "[i]n contrast to the Saussurean model, Peirce's model of the sign explicitly features the *referent*—something beyond the sign to which the sign vehicle refers (though not necessarily a material thing)" (63). Kaja Silverman argues though that Peirce's sign—even though it features an "object"—nonetheless suggests the sign's independence from its referents, thereby linking Peirce and Saussure's sign together in terms of a certain kind of "bracketing" (or what she calls "semiotic closure"): "Signs and interpretants (signifiers and signifieds) would appear to be locked in self-containment" (15). Despite the inclusion of the object (or referent) in Peirce's "triad," the true process of signification appears in large part to "bracket" the referent and to maintain "unlimited semiosis" between the sign and the interpretant. The notion of "semiotic closure" suggests that Peirce (like Saussure) is working within a larger Kantian tradition of philosophy that reduces the knowability of noumena to the realm of cognized appearances. Peirce writes:

some listener [...] may say, “are we not to occupy ourselves at all with earthquakes, droughts and pestilence?” To which I reply, if those earthquakes, droughts, and pestilence are subject to *laws*, those laws being of the nature of signs, then, no doubt being signs of those laws they are thereby made worthy of human attention; but if they be mere arbitrary brute interruptions of our course of life, let us wrap our cloaks about us, and endure them as we may; for they cannot injure us, though they may strike us down. (6.344, VI.235)

Silverman interprets Peirce here as acknowledging “materiality while at the same time rigidly divorcing it from idea,” so that “Peirce argues that we have *direct experience*, but *indirect knowledge* of reality” (16). Silverman’s conclusion—that I support—is that the Peircean model is *essentially* similar to Saussure’s: “In view of the provisional nature of this reality, and the fact that it can be known only via signs, it seems evident that the object or referent is as fully excluded from Peirce’s semiotic scheme as it is from Saussure’s” (17). I claim that the semiotic model of reality is adopted (or adapted) from a Kantian system—particularly, Kant’s system of objects offered in *Critique of Pure Reason* (1781).

Kant’s system of objects is constructed on the basis of a grounding scission between *phenomena* (or appearances) and *noumena* (as the thing-in-itself).³⁴ For Kant, “[w]e can only think *noumena*, not cognize them” (338), or, in other words, a noumenon cannot be known as such, but only thought. This framework suggests that the world of “real objects” is transparent, but not opaque—“real objects” remain at a distance, but we have the ability to cognize them (or

³⁴ Kant writes that: “Appearances, to the extent that as objects they are thought in accordance with the unity of the categories, are called *phaenomena*. If, however, I suppose there to be things that are merely objects of the understanding and that, nevertheless, can be given to an intuition, although not to sensible intuition [...] then such things would be called *noumena*” (347).

to situate them in a world of signification). The Kantian thing-in-itself is therefore situated in *negative* rather than *positive* terms—because it cannot be cognized; it can be thought only—or, as Kant claims: “Now from this arises the concept of a *noumenon*, which, however, is not at all positive and does not signify a determinate cognition of any sort of thing, but rather only the thinking of something in general” (348-349).³⁵ Kant does not know anything about what the noumenon is “in itself,” and has “no concept of it” (349).³⁶ The phenomenological scission that exists between real and representation is concretized in Kantian philosophy and the influence of his philosophy then impacts the phenomenal models of other disciplines—specifically, for the purposes of this dissertation, semiotics. “In the end, however,” Kant writes, “we have no insight into the possibility of such *noumena*, and the domain outside of the sphere of appearances is empty (for us)” (362). Peircean and Saussurean frameworks—that also instate a strict distance between cognition and the thing-in-itself—develop from Kant’s emphasis on what could be called the “signified” nature of appearances:

Although all these principles, and the representation of the object with which this science occupies itself, are generated in the mind completely *a priori*, they would still not signify anything at all if we could not always exhibit their significance in appearances (empirical objects). Hence it is also requisite for one **to make an**

³⁵ Due to the importance of Kant’s phrasing here I will include the original German: “*Hieraus entspringt nun der Begriff von einem Noumenon, der aber gar nicht positiv, und eine bestimmte Erkenntnis von irgendeinem Dinge, sondern nur das Denken von Etwas überhaupt bedeutet, bei welchem ich von aller Form der sinnlichen Anschauung abstrahiere*” (A252, 300, original emphasis).

³⁶ I have selected what I consider the key words from the following German moment: “*Das Objekt, worauf ich die Erscheinung überhaupt beziehe, ist der transzendente Gegenstand, d. i. der gänzlich unbestimmte Gedanke von Etwas überhaupt. Dieser kann nicht das N o u m e n o n heißen; denn ich weiß von ihm nicht, was er an sich selbst sei, und habe gar keinen Begriff von ihm, als bloß von dem Gegenstande einer sinnlichen Anschauung überhaupt, der also für alle Erscheinungen einerlei ist*” (A253, 301, original emphasis).

abstract concept **sensible**, i.e., to display the object that corresponds to it in intuition, since without this the concept would remain (as one says) without **sense**, i.e., without significance. (356, original bolded emphasis)

Noumena are thought, but they manifest—in what could be called ontological terms, but Kant would likely not accept this term—as what Kant calls “an unknown something” (363). Kant develops his theory of objects against Leibniz’s theory of monads: “for him [Leibniz] appearance was the representation **of the thing in itself**” (372, original bolded emphasis). Leibniz’s mistake, according to Kant, is that Leibniz’s monadology is naïvely realist: Leibniz misrecognizes phenomena *as* noumena and claims that direct knowledge of the thing-in-itself is possible.

Kant summarizes this framework when he argues:

But even if we could say anything synthetically **about things in themselves** through the pure understanding (which is nevertheless impossible), this still could not be related to appearances at all, which do not represent things in themselves [...] [W]hat the things may be in themselves I do not know, and also do not need to know, since a thing can never come before me except in appearance. (375, original bolded emphasis)

The thing-in-itself (as noumena) is genealogically related to the eventual concept of a referent and the appearance (or phenomena), I argue, is related to the signified (for Saussure) or to the interpretant (for Peirce). Cognition of appearances, as registered through the Kantian faculties and schema, are registered through speech and language: appearances, when cognized as “appearances,” manifest in the anthropocentric world through the mediation and representation system of language and speech. Kant argues for much the same model when he claims that: “no example can be derived from anywhere except experience, which never offers more than

phaenomena” (378). In this representational and cognitive framework, noumena (or things-in-themselves) cannot be known *except* through thought and the sign-systems that represent thought; or, as Kant puts it: “Hence we cannot thereby positively expand the field of the objects of our thinking beyond the conditions of our sensibility, and assume beyond appearances objects of pure thinking, i.e., *noumena*, since those do not have any positive significance that can be given” (380). In the Kantian model of the first *Critique*, the real objects (or referents) remain at a distance—screened off from direct anthropocentric access.

Even though Peirce writes that “the real is that which insists upon forcing its way to recognition as something *other* than the mind’s creation” (1.325, I.163), (sounding very much like Bruno Latour who writes that the real is what “resists” [*Pasteurization* 174]), he is nonetheless firmly entrenched in a Kantian model when he writes that “a reality which has no representation is one which has no relation and quality” (5.312, V.187). Peirce is closer to Kant than to Merleau-Ponty (for example), but his thinking still insists on the phenomenal boundary of real/representation in that, for Peirce, the “experience” of things-in-themselves is nonetheless *represented* (as he himself claims: “no proposition can relate, or even thoroughly pretend to relate, to any object otherwise than as that object is represented” [6.95, VI.73]), which suggests that Peirce’s notion of “experience” is conceptually similar to Kant’s notion of “thought.” I am arguing that the distinction between Kant and Peirce is less important than the overall model being presented—and that model remains a fundamentally dyadic model of phenomena/noumena. Kant emphasizes logical schemata as the “translative” machine of noumena/phenomena, while Peirce situates language and signs as the translative systems, but apart from what activates representational modes of translation, the underlying theoretical model—indeed, the *assumed and propositional* theoretical model—remains the same for both thinkers.

Chandler, following Silverman, maintains that,

[a]s we have seen, Saussure's *signified* is not an external referent but an abstract mental representation. Although Peirce's *object* is not confined to physical things and (like Saussure's *signified*) it can include abstract concepts and fictional entities, the Peircean model explicitly allocates a place for materiality and for reality outside the sign system which Saussure's model did not directly feature (though Peirce was not a naïve realist, and he argued that all experience is mediated by signs). (33)

For this reason, Peirce's model of the sign depicts a slightly stronger "realism" than Saussure's (assuming we consider Saussure a philosophical realist), but the referent is still, for Peirce, separate from direct human access, locked in a realm of representational mediation. Peirce's sign permits what Eco calls "unlimited semiosis" (68-69) in that the dynamism of interpretation can result in an infinite seriality of interpretants.³⁷ However, even though Peirce is more interested in the referent than Saussure—in that he directly acknowledges an exterior world—he nonetheless remains strongly entrenched within a model of mediated representation (as Silverman suggested earlier [17]):

A *symbol* is a representamen whose special significance or fitness to represent just what it does represent lies in nothing but the very fact of there being a habit, disposition, or other effective general rule that it will be so interpreted. Take, for example, the word "*man*." These three letters are not in the least like a man; nor is the sound with which they are associated. Neither is the word existentially

³⁷ Peirce describes his process of what Eco later calls "unlimited semiosis" on 1.339, I.171 and also on 2.303, II.169.

connected with any man as an index. It cannot be so, since the word is not an existence at all. (Peirce 4.447, IV.359-IV.360)

In Peirce's expansive lexicon of sign-types, the closest concept that approximates the materiality of an "external world" would be his notion of indexicality. Chandler writes that "[i]ndexicality is quite closely related to the way in which the index of a book or an 'index' finger point directly to what is being referred to" (42). Peirce offers many examples such as when "[a] sundial or a clock *indicates* the time of day" (2.285, II.161). Peirce calls this indexical relationship a "genuine Relation [*sic*] to that Object" (2.92, II.51) separate from an observing-subject or, as he puts it later: "The index is physically connected with its object; they make an organic pair, but the interpreting mind has nothing to do with this connection" (2.299, II.168). When considering the realist or non-realist representationality of photography, Peirce argues that "[a] photograph, for example, not only excites an image, has an appearance, but, owing to its optical connexion with the object, is evidence that that appearance corresponds to a reality" (4.447, IV.359). "Of the three modes" of Peirce's sign, Chandler argues, "only indexicality can serve as evidence of an object's existence" (43). Peirce's assessment of a photograph is similar to how he registers a painting in that when "contemplating a painting, there is a moment when we lose the consciousness that it is not the thing, the distinction of the real and the copy disappears, and it is for the moment a pure dream" (3.362, III.211). For both the painting and the photograph, the underlying aesthetic similarity regarding representation becomes activated through a transformation within the simulacral nature of representation in which the mimetic object (of the painting or photograph) becomes misrecognized *as real* via a sort of naïve realist leap—a leap of faith through which representational objects acquire a form of noumenal depth, but this "depth" is only a simulacrum of noumena or the very nature of representation itself. In a strict sense, the

only way that a painting or photograph could represent things (or the thing-in-itself) would be to recreate the thing-in-itself exactly as it is or was, which then remains distinct from any mode of representation (because this would render the reproduction a pure copy).

This line of argumentation falls into the same logical trap as Baudrillard's assessment of the Borgesian map or Alfred Korzybski's distinction between the map and the territory (58).³⁸ However, this experiential response to aesthetic representation is certainly a form of realism (and perhaps not even a "naïve" realism), as Ien Ang argues in relation to the experience of watching the television show *Dallas*: for Ang, *Dallas* should be read through an emotional realist model (45) in which *Dallas* becomes an intrinsic part of the psychological life of its viewers (of course this claim could be extended to other television shows and entertainment media). Chandler likewise points out that "[e]motions and feelings are analogical signifieds" (48).

In Europe, Jakobson and Eco are the two main supporters of Peirce's model of the sign, but Jakobson's interpretation of Peirce reduces the Peircean triad to a pseudo-Saussurean dyad:

the essential property of any sign in general, and of any linguistic sign in particular, is its twofold character: every linguistic unit is bipartite and involves two aspects—one sensible and the other intelligible—or, in other words, both a *signans* (Saussure's *significant*) and a *signatum* (*signifié*). These two constituents

³⁸ Baudrillard uses Borges's fable as the foundation of his theory of the simulacrum in *Simulations* (1983), see: pp. 1-3. Borges's "Del rigor en la ciencia" originally appeared in the 1946 edition of *Historia universal de la infamia*, but was later included in the 1961 edition of *El hacedor*. The English translation, "On Exactitude in Science," appears in Borges's *Collected Fictions* (1998), p. 325. Korzybski claims that a "map is *not* the territory it represents, but, if correct, it has a *similar structure* to the territory, which accounts for its usefulness. If the map could be ideally correct, it would include, in a reduced scale, the map of the map; the map of the map, of the map; and so on, endlessly" (58).

of any linguistic sign (and of any sign in general) necessarily presuppose and require each other. (396)

However, Jakobson does afford the referent a later place in his theory of the sign (even though the sign itself, for Jakobson, remains fundamentally dyadic). Jakobson insists that: “I even dare say now that the famous notion of reference should be analyzed linguistically. Fourteen years ago, Quine and I agreed diplomatically that the signified (*signatum*) belonged to linguistics and the referent (*designatum*) to logic” (320); however, even though Jakobson originally agrees with Quine (or Quine with Jakobson), Jakobson eventually changes his position: “Now I think that the referent also belongs to linguistics. Again this does not mean to linguistics only, but it has a linguistic aspect, namely, what we call contextual meaning” (320).³⁹ I agree with Jakobson’s impulse to include the referent within linguistics, but his approach—via “contextual meaning”—remains, I claim, at the level of a Saussurean referential bracketing. “Contextual meaning” does not approach the thing-in-itself, but remains locked in a semantic deadlock of Peircean unlimited semiosis or the dyadic-stammering of *signans* and *signatum* talking about the *designatum* (that remains “over there” at a discursive “outside”).

Despite Quine and Jakobson’s feelings that the referent should be approached in philosophy, the referent or object remained “bracketed” in philosophy as a noumenal outside. I claim, following Jakobson and Quine’s distinction, that linguistics and phenomenology become distinct fields, but both rely on a historically Kantian framework in which the thing-in-itself remains screened behind a realm of mediated appearances. For this reason, even though Peirce’s model of the sign is triadic and includes an “object,” the knowability of that object is nonetheless

³⁹ Eco’s own theorization of the referent in *A Theory of Semiotics* follows this Jakobsonian approach to the contextualization of reference (225-226).

mediated because that object—or thing-in-itself—cannot be apprehended in-itself unless it is incorporated within a larger system of signification, or the relation forged between representamen and interpretant (or signifier/signified or *signans* and *signatum*). In this Peircean/Saussurean model, the thing-in-itself *appears* only once it has been inculcated within a larger sign-system (that involves an observing, and implicitly *human* subject); or, as Peirce himself insists: “nothing is a sign unless it is interpreted as a sign” (2.308, II.172).

The “materiality” of a sign is difficult to define and can be located in a variety of places. Even Saussure hints at the sign’s “materiality” in relation to its sound because “[s]ound is merely something ancillary, a material the language uses” (116). However, this “materiality” is not noumenal or referential because, for Saussure, “[l]inguistic signals are not in essence phonetic. They are not physical in any way. They are constituted solely by differences which distinguish one such sound pattern from another” (117). Saussure grudgingly admits though that “linguistic signs are, so to speak, tangible: writing can fix them in conventional images” (15), but he later insists that “[t]he actual mode of inscription is irrelevant, because it does not affect the system [...] Whether I write in black or white, in incised characters or in relief, with a pen or a chisel — none of that is of any importance for the meaning” (118). Peirce agrees with Saussure on this issue of the irrelevancy of inscription such as when he discusses “the word ‘*man*’”:

The word does not consist of three films of ink. If the word “man” occurs hundreds of times in a book of which myriads of copies are printed, all those millions of triplets of patches of ink are embodiments of one and the same word. I call each of those embodiments a *replica* of the symbol. This shows that the word is not a thing. (4.447, IV.360)

Peirce does admit greater materiality of the signifier than Saussure—he even argues that

[s]ince a sign is not identical with the thing signified, but differs from the latter in some respects, it must plainly have some characters which belong to it in itself, and have nothing to do with its representative function. These I call the *material* qualities of the sign. As examples of such qualities, take in the word “man,” its consisting of three letters—in a picture, its being flat and without relief. (5.287, V.171)

But this “greater materiality” remains a mediated materiality that exists beyond human access because the sign’s materiality has “nothing to do with its representative function” (5.287, V.171) as Peirce writes. Therefore, both Peirce and Saussure—even though they differ on a dyadic or triadic sign-model and on the *degree of the sign’s materiality*—maintain what could be called a Kantian distinction between phenomena and noumena or the real and its representation.

The philosopher of mind, Susanne Langer, follows this Saussuro-Peircean and Kantian framework when she writes that

[s]ymbols are not proxy for their objects, but are *vehicles for the conception of objects*. To conceive a thing or a situation is not the same thing as to “react toward it” overtly, or to be aware of its presence. In talking *about* things we have conceptions of them, not the things themselves; and it is *the conceptions, not the things, that symbols directly “mean.”* (49)⁴⁰

Even though this claim is true—Napoleon the emperor does not appear when we invoke the name or signifier “Napoleon”—I do not see why this need be the beta test for a word’s material

⁴⁰ Robert E. Innis has written an excellent theoretical primer on Langer’s philosophy: see his *Susanne Langer in Focus* (2009).

efficacy or ontological import; as this dissertation will demonstrate, there are many other ways that a word can be theorized as material, or that the thing-in-itself can manifest *within* language.

However, before formally developing a word-thing, I want to acknowledge some attempts to “rematerialize” the sign after Saussure and (to a lesser extent), Peirce: John Sturrock follows the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis regarding linguistic relativity, when he argues that “[w]e can use it [language], to take an obvious example, to say what isn’t in the world, as well as what is. And since we come to know the world through whatever language we have been born into the midst of, it is legitimate to argue that our language determines reality, rather than reality our language” (80); Ogden and Richards write that, “[u]nfortunately this theory of signs [Saussure’s], by neglecting entirely the things for which signs stand, was from the beginning cut off from any contact with scientific methods of verification” (6); Robert Stam argues that when Saussure “brackets the referent,” he effectively “severs text from history” (122) and this decision is a “blindspot” of Saussurean linguistics (121-122); Michael Gardiner is dissatisfied with how Saussure’s sign is detached from social influences: “A language system does not, therefore, enforce a particular usage regardless of the social context involved. This system is brought into line with the concrete socio-historical conditions within which it is produced through a continuous process of ‘linguistic praxis’” (11); Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton argue that material objects also function as signs in the way that they maintain a person’s “sense of personal and social identity” (1-19); Gunther Kress and Theo van Leeuwen position the materiality of the text as paramount to interpretation because “a novel is a material object, and a page a visual artefact,” and “its communicative work is done primarily through writing” (231); and, finally, Jan Blommaert and April Huang have argued for a “materialist semiotics” that builds on Kress’s work in that they consider “signs as material forces subject to and reflective of conditions of

production and patterns of distribution, and as constructive of social reality, as real social agents having real effects in social life” (n.p.). Jakobson is also one of the foremost post-Saussurean (and post-Peircean) thinkers to engage in a rematerializing project. For example, Jakobson links the *signans* (or signifier) with “the outer, perceptible part of the sign” (*On Language* 111), and he focuses on the social constructivist aspects of signification (*On Language* 80-109).

Chandler acknowledges that “what is signified by a word is subject to historical change,” insisting that:

reality or the world is created by the language we use: this argument insists on *the primacy of the signifier*. Even if we do *not* adopt the radical stance that the real world is a product of our sign-systems, we must still acknowledge that there are many things in the experiential world for which we have no words and that most words do not correspond to objects in the known world at all. Thus, all words are abstractions, and there is no direct correspondence between words and things in the world. (62)

However, even Saussure rejects the claim that the signifier should become a “pure abstraction”:

Any linguistic entity exists only in virtue of the association between signal and signification [...] It disappears the moment we concentrate exclusively on just one or the other. We are then left with a pure abstraction in place of a concrete object. There is a constant risk of taking one part or other of the entity and believing that we are dealing with the totality. (101)

But how can we know if we are dealing with the “totality” of the entity of language (assuming that the term “entity” is even useful in describing the totality of language)? What if “entity” as such unnecessarily anthropomorphizes language and contributes to an unintentional entification

of the thing-in-itself? Saussure's language here betrays his own later concerns regarding the paragram in that language-as-such or language-qua-language appears to be extremely difficult to generalize and categorize—we are inevitably trapped at the level of a metalanguage when theorizing language—and this metalinguistic trap begins to situate language *in toto* in surprisingly anthropomorphic terms: language becomes an “entity” or an “organism” or, at the very least, a whole composed of several constituent parts.⁴¹ As I will momentarily consider, this tendency to anthropomorphize language leads thinkers—even a scholar such as Saussure—to search for an origin, depth, or “essence” of language.

If there is no “direct correspondence” that exists between words and things, then what *indirect* correspondence exists (apart from arbitrariness)? Julia Kristeva claims that “[w]hat semiotics has discovered in studying ‘ideologies’ [...] as sign-systems is that the *law* governing or, if one prefers, the *major constraint* affecting any social practice lies in the fact that it signifies; i.e. that it is articulated *like* a language” (25). One of the questions posed by this dissertation is: *what if the thing-in-itself is also articulated like a language?* And what if this unconsidered linkage between the thing-in-itself and the signifier partly “motivates” the sign? Saussure himself points out that “[n]ot all signs are arbitrary,” because “[t]he sign may be *motivated to a certain extent*” (130). Saussure does not mean an agential motivation present within language-in-itself, but rather a motivation that links certain signifiers together (such as the French word for “cow,” *vache*, and the related word “cowman” or *vacher*).

However, the degree of motivation does suggest a degree of worldly engagement, but this varied motivational degree disappears in the unconscious where the signifier becomes entirely

⁴¹ Jakobson's essay “Parts and Wholes in Language” (1960) explicitly deals with the difficulty of summarizing language as such.

motivated and overdetermined. Freud, for example, argues that “[w]ords, in dream, are in fact often treated as things” (*Interpreting Dreams* 311). Apart from the linguistic entification of the thing-in-itself in dreams, how else can a word-thing be conceptualized (at this early stage)? One of the best ways to conceptualize a word-thing is to think of it as the *antithesis of the theory of language proposed by poststructuralism*. Daniel Chandler suggests that poststructural theories of language are predicated on the concept of an “empty signifier” (78).

Despite their inherent critiques of logocentric idealisms, Jacques Derrida’s grammatology and deconstruction projects each seek to rematerialize the sign after Saussurean structuralism. According to Derrida, “[t]he materiality of a word cannot be translated or carried over into another language. Materiality is precisely that which translation relinquishes. To relinquish materiality: such is the driving force of translation. And when that materiality is reinstated, translation becomes poetry. In this sense, since the materiality of the signifier constitutes the idiom of every dream scene, dreams are untranslatable” (*Writing and Difference* 210). The materiality of the signifier becomes manifest during the exigencies of translation. Derrida’s own deconstructive apparatus has inspired other thinkers who have situated words and textuality as material things, such as David Silverman and Brian Torode’s theorization of textual materiality in *The Material Word* (1980) and Rosalind Coward and John Ellis’s work in *Language and Materialism*. These various “rematerializing” semiotic frameworks have paved some groundwork towards the goals of this dissertation; however, as I will show, the methodology of this dissertation is far more heretical and “fallacious.”

Structuralism specifies an arbitrary relationship between the signifier and signified, but this relationship is nonetheless rendered as present and productive of meaning; poststructuralism, on the other hand, configures the relationship itself as problematic, preferring to focus directly on

the slippage of the signifier and of the constant “play of signification” or what Lacan calls the “incessant sliding of the signified under the signifier” (*Écrits* 419). Derrida discusses the “play” of signifiers: there is no fixity that exists between signifier and signified because “the meaning of meaning (in the general sense of meaning and not in the sense of signalization) is infinite implication, the indefinite referral of signifier to signified” (*Writing* 25).⁴² In a Derridean poststructural framework, signs refer only to other signs and there is no sign that anchors such indefinite *glissement* or slippage; or, as Derrida puts it:

This [the rupture of the event] was the moment when language invaded the universal problematic, the moment when, in the absence of a center or origin, everything became discourse [...] that is to say, a system in which the central signified, the original or transcendental signified, is never absolutely present outside a system of differences. The absence of the transcendental signified extends the domain and the play of signification infinitely. (*Writing* 280)

Derrida points out that “the moment there is meaning there is nothing but signs” (*Of Grammatology* 50), and the absence of a transcendental signified that can stopper unlimited semiosis results in a never-ending play of signs or, as Derrida writes, “[o]ne could call *play* the absence of the transcendental signified as limitlessness of play” (*Of Grammatology* 50). The transcendental signified, as guarantor of an end to semiotic play, is misrecognized, for Derrida, as being housed in the materiality of the voice: “There has to be a transcendental signified for the difference between signifier and signified to be somewhere absolute and irreducible. It is not by chance that the thought of being, as the thought of this transcendental signified, is manifested

⁴² Derrida’s essay “Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences” (contained in *Writing and Difference*) is a good example of the way that he theorizes “play.”

above all in the voice: in a language of words” (*Of Grammatology* 20). The Derridean poststructural model of “play” is distinct from Peircean “unlimited semiosis” in that Peircean semiotics is pragmatic: according to W.B. Gallie’s assessment, Peirce implicitly claims that “the exigencies of practical life inevitably cut short such potentially endless development” (126). The “exigencies of practical life” are arguably absent from Derrida’s reading of play and the absence of the referent and the “psychobiographical signified.” Derrida describes this absence in unique terms in *Of Grammatology*:

Yet if reading must not be content with doubling the text, it cannot legitimately transgress the text toward something other than it, toward a referent (a reality that is metaphysical, historical, psychobiographical, etc.) or toward a signified outside the text whose content could take place, could have taken place outside of language, that is to say, in the sense that we give here to that word, outside of writing in general. (158)

Following this claim, Derrida insists that “as regards the absence of the referent or the transcendental signified. *There is nothing outside of the text*” (*Of Grammatology* 158). For Derrida, materiality is taken from the referent or from a metaphysical presence and grafted onto textuality and writing; however, this writing is not itself “substantive,” but rather a different kind of abstract materiality—a materiality of the written mark itself. There “has never been anything but writing,” Derrida writes:

there have never been anything but supplements, substitutive significations which could only come forth in a chain of differential references, the “real” supervening, and being added only while taking on meaning from a trace and from an invocation of the supplement, etc. And thus to infinity, for we have read, *in the*

text, that the absolute present [...] h[as] never existed; that what opens meaning and language is writing as the disappearance of natural presence. (*Of Grammatology* 159)

Writing is therefore the location of a disappearance: the disappearance of the referent, the transcendental signified, or a specific metaphysical “presence.” Chandler summarizes Derrida’s stance regarding the referent (and the stances of other poststructural thinkers) in the following way: “Unlike Peirce, postmodernist theories grant no access to any reality outside signification” (80). Some thinkers find this postmodern stance infuriating: Terry Lovell, while arguing for a Marxist materialist reading of signs, acknowledges Saussure’s tendency to avoid “the thorny problem of *reference*” and claims that “[s]igns cannot be permitted to swallow up their referents in a never-ending chain of signification, in which one sign always points on to another, and the circle is never broken by the intrusion of that to which the sign refers” (16). Douglas Kellner finds Jean Baudrillard’s repeated theses regarding the inexistence of the real in favour of a semiological imaginary, a form of “semiological idealism” (n.p.), that situates poststructuralism as an idealism rather than as a realism.

The notion of the “empty signifier” describes an absence or, as Derrida configures it, two absences: “Psychology will never be able to accommodate within its space that which constitutes the absence of the signatory, to say nothing of the absence of the referent. Writing is the name of these two absences” (*Of Grammatology* 40-41). The process of signs representing signs is the focal point of two absent forms of embodiment: Derrida writes that “[a]ll graphemes are of a testamentary essence. And the original absence of the subject of writing is also the absence of the thing or the referent” (*Of Grammatology* 69). Writing, for Derrida, is a system that configures the absent subject and referent: therefore, the only material available for Derrida is the

testamentary material of writing.⁴³ The referent, in grammarology, remains neglected and rejected—repressed like Kant’s own repressed referents, the noumena. Chandler writes that “[n]o semiotician or philosopher would be so naïve as to treat signs such as words as if they were the things for which they stand, but as we shall see, this occurs at least sometimes in the psychological phenomenology of everyday life and in the uncritical framework of casual discourse” (59). And indeed I am not espousing a naïve realism, but rather a *speculative* realism brought into literary theory and semiotics. More specifically, I am proposing what I call a *haptic semiology* that reconfigures the semiotic sign (of dyadic and triadic varieties) in various combinatory ways so that signifier and referent are not only brought closer together—this claim would remain naïvely realist or nominally realist—but the thinghood of language is emphasized alongside the wordhood of things. This theoretical configuration could be called a biunivocal procedure (for Deleuzoguattarians), but I prefer to think of it haptically: when language touches objects and when objects touch language then materiality and linguisticity (if I may coin that word) become co-penetrative concepts—the thing-in-itself contains a language and this language is similarly “in-itself” (as I will argue throughout this dissertation).

Chandler’s own rematerialization of the sign rests at a social constructionist level (xv), but the unacknowledged Kantian framework of phenomena and noumena is still unquestionably instantiated: “A radical response to realists,” Chandler writes, “is that things do not exist independently of the sign-systems that we use; reality is created by the media which seem simply to represent it. Language does not simply name pre-existing categories; categories do not exist in

⁴³ Semiotics, as a field, has closely linked the way in which subjectivity is intricately interwoven with language: see Thomas Sebeok’s *I Think I Am a Verb* (1986), which also contains a fascinating link between language and sentience; also of note are Norbert Wiley’s *The Semiotic Self* (1994), and Augusto Ponzio’s *Man as a Sign* (1990).

‘the world’ (where are the boundaries of a cloud or when does a smile begin?)” (61). Chandler’s question regarding the “boundaries of a cloud” or a “smile” is important, but as I will demonstrate in Chapter Three in relation to fractals, language qua language features its own immeasurable boundaries and can likewise be considered as a fractal system that then affords a degree of undecidability and nonlinearity to the perceived boundary between word and thing.

Even though Derrida does offer a rematerialization of the sign after Saussure, he remains critical of most materialisms. Derrida discusses the problematic and idealizing notion of materialism and matter in *Positions*:

It is not always in *the* materialist text (is there such a thing, *the* materialist text?) nor in *every* materialist text that the concept of matter has been defined as absolute exterior or radical heterogeneity. I am not even sure that there can be a “concept” of an absolute exterior. If I have not very often used the word “matter,” it is not, as you know, because of some idealist or spiritualist kind of reservation. It is that in the logic of the phase of overturning this concept has been too often reinvested with “logocentric” values, values associated with those of thing, reality, presence in general, sensible presence, for example, substantial plenitude, content, referent, etc. Realism or sensualism—“empiricism”—are modifications of logocentrism. (I have often insisted on the fact that “writing” or the “text” are not reducible *either* to the sensible or visible presence of the graphic or the “literal.”) In short, the signifier “matter” appears to me problematical only at the moment when its reinscription cannot avoid making of it a new fundamental principle which, by means of theoretical regression, would be reconstituted into a “transcendental signified.” It is not only idealism in the narrow sense that falls

back upon the transcendental signified. It can always come to reassure a metaphysical materialism. It then becomes an ultimate referent, according to the classical logic implied by the value of referent, or it becomes an “objective reality” absolutely “anterior” to any work of the mark, the semantic content of a form of presence which guarantees the movement of the text in general from the outside.

(64-65)

The reinvestment of “matter” and “materialism” within logocentrism focalizes these concepts as “transcendental signifieds” or as problematic guarantors of “presence” or “substance”; for this very Derridean reason, the concepts of “haptic semiology” and the “word-thing” fall outside of logocentrism, and manifest as conceptually prevalent at *limit-experiences* of language; therefore, it is only at para-logocentric or xeno-logocentric manifestations of the signifier that the signifier becomes ontological material and the thing-in-itself presents its linguistification.

In the history of semiotics, Thomas Sebeok traces the earliest theory of the sign to the symptom in medical discourse. Marcel Danesi points out, via Sebeok’s research, that semiotics is originally correlated with medical discourse in that signs and symptoms were considered synonymous concepts: “in its oldest usage, the term *semiotics* was applied to the study of the observable pattern of physiological symptoms induced by particular diseases” (xi). Citing Hippocrates, Galen, and Aristotle, Danesi insists that diagnosis is a process of semiosis (xi). Sebeok demonstrates that Galen himself sees semiotics as one of the six principle disciplines of medicine (53). Locating this tradition in the fragments of Alcmaeon and the writings of Paracelsus and Galen, Sebeok sees the symptom as the birth of the sign. The illness or disease *in the real* resists direct access (with the exception of surgical intervention); however, the illness is essentially withdrawn from view as the body shields the illness and registers nothing but the

sign(s) of that illness.⁴⁴ This model is topologically similar to a possible Kantian linguistics: noumena remain obscured behind appearances and, extrapolating to the work of Peirce and Saussure, there can never be any direct encounter with noumena, but only with the sign of those “noumena” or that “noumenon.” However, the problem of materiality is present in this account: the body itself is an object that encounters other referential bodies while projecting signs and commuting with other bodies that project signs.

Another thinker to turn to regarding potential materializations of the signifier would be Jakob von Uexküll. Uexküll theorizes a complex world of signs—what he calls the “*Umwelt*”—in which meaning-production occurs according to a dynamic interaction between an organism and its environment.⁴⁵ Both Uexküll and Peirce had assimilated Kantian philosophy (Sebeok 14), which renders their respective semiotic systems as distancing models: for both Peirce and even Uexküll (despite the merits of Uexküll’s invention of what has now come to be called

⁴⁴ Floyd Merrell’s *Sensing Corporeally* (2003) develops a persuasive semiotic theory of corporeality and embodiment. On a somewhat related note, Greimas and Fontanille’s *The Semiotics of Passions* (1991) presents a semiotic theory of affect.

⁴⁵ Uexküll analyzes the different worldviews and meaning-systems of animals from all walks of life. He insists that “[t]he question as to meaning must therefore have priority in all living beings” (151, original emphasis), and his proto-biosemiotic and proto-systems theory analysis can be epitomized in a key example where Uexküll considers the multivalenced significations of a flower: “Plucking the flower transforms the flower into a decoration in the girl-world. Running along the stem transforms the stem into a path in the ant-world, and the spittle-bug larva’s sticking it transforms the stem into a source of building material. Being grazed by the cow transforms the flower stem into agreeable cattle feed. In this way, every action impresses its meaning on a meaningless object and makes it thereby into a subject-related carrier of meaning in each respective environment” (145). An Uexküllian semiotics is one in which signs are not limited to language, but proliferate throughout environments and ecosystems: “the meadow consists of a tangle of ether waves and air vibrations, of finely distributed clouds of chemical substances and mechanical contacts which have their effect from object to object” (163). The Uexküllian sign is a very real and occasionally visible manifestation in the world.

biosemiotics) the *real* world is forever apart from human observation.⁴⁶ The Kantian noumenon situates an object as apart or barred from human access; to frame this Kantian distinction as a Lacanian joke, the noumenon is a *barred object*. However, for Kant every object is a barred object, requiring the complex interplay and translational system of semiosis to transfer the noumenon into a signified (or through the faculties of Understanding). Both Peirce and Uexküll take Kant at face value and accept the delimited quality of the noumenon: the *Umwelt* is, for Uexküll, a hallucinatory simulation of the mind; or, as systems theorist Heinz von Foerster will later assert, “[w]hen we perceive our environment, it is we who invent it” (qtd. in Clarke and Hansen 5), meaning that the environment in some sense “does not exist” (to employ a Baudrillardian catchphrase), and is constructed *by an observing system*.

The Kantian system models consciousness machinically, instantiating a strict distance between the self and the object in which this object is never in fact accessed *in toto* by sensory experience and remains an “object” (as a thought-construction or mental simulation). The Kantian model of the first *Critique* depicts an entire system in which noumena and phenomena are translated into sense data: intuition processes external data through schemata and into the Kantian categories and *a priori*s thereby creating a unified system. Therefore, despite Saussure’s own acknowledgement of the effacement of the object in his *Cours*, the history of semiotics is, by its initial propositions, not the place to look for an object-oriented theory of language. Due to the Kantian inheritance in the history of semiotics, the field or discipline is necessarily signifier, signified, or at the very least, sign-focused: the field acknowledges the object, but remains

⁴⁶ Juri Lotman has coined the term *semiosphere* (in contrast to the biosphere) in order to encompass the whole realm of sign systems: “all semiotic space may be regarded as a unified mechanism (if not organism). In this case, primacy does not lie in one or another sign, but in the ‘greater system’, namely the semiosphere. The semiosphere is that same semiotic space, outside of which semiosis itself cannot exist” (208).

conceptually distanced from the object-in-itself, instead focusing on the “object” as it becomes constructed through the process of semiosis.

The Fallacy of Incarnational Linguistics, Saussure’s Paragram Studies, and a Linguistic Atomism (or Etymism)

Thinking language as either vital or material is generally considered to be logically fallacious. One prominent version of the fallacy derives from the work of Terry Eagleton, who terms the “incarnational fallacy,” “my own coinage for the false belief that words in poetry somehow ‘contain’, or form an organic part of, the things they refer to” (166), further clarifying that,

[o]n this view, form and content in poetry are entirely at one because the poem’s language somehow ‘incarnates’ its meaning. Whereas everyday language simply points to things, poetic language actually embodies them. There is a theology lurking behind this poetics: just as the Word of God is the Father made flesh, so a poem does not simply talk about things, but in some mysterious way ‘becomes’ them. (59)

Eagleton considers the incarnational fallacy a serious charge frequently found in early literary criticism. A somewhat humorous and well-known Saussurean example of what Eagleton would call the incarnational fallacy occurs when a Swiss-German woman allegedly asks Saussure why cheese is called *fromage* in France because “Käse ist doch viel natürlicher!” (qtd. in Jakobson, *On Language* 411), (or “Käse is of course much more natural!”). From an Eagletonian perspective, the woman fallaciously incarnates *Käse* with its referential object so that *Käse* is embodied with an intrinsic cheesiness in both word and object. (This apocryphal anecdote is typically embellished by emphasizing the woman’s socio-economic status as a peasant. One

wonders if she understood what Saussure was aiming at and was simply joking or if she earnestly thought *Käse* was, naturally, the better word for cheese).

Piaget offers an example of what he calls “nominal realism” from interviews he conducts with children. When a child named Ar, aged six and a half, says to Bo, also six and a half, “*when there weren’t any names,*” Bo replies: “*If there weren’t any words it would be very awkward [...] You couldn’t make anything. How could things have been made[?]*” (62). Another child that Piaget talks to argues that names are “*to call things by?*” which leads to the following conversation (Piaget italicizes the child’s responses):

“How did name begin? How did the sun get its name?—*I don’t know.*—Where did your name ‘Jules’ come from? Who gave it to you?—*I don’t know.*—Your father?—*Yes.*—And where did the name of the sun come from?—*The sky.*—Did someone give the sun its name or did it get it by itself?—*Some one gave it.*—Who?—*The sky.*” (63-64)

The position that there exists an intrinsic relation between word and thing is often configured as an infantilized or racialized position: the anthropologist Lucien Lévy-Bruhl considered “primitive cultures” as ones in which “the mind does not differentiate between sign and cause” (qtd. in Olson, *The World on Paper* 28). David Olson argues that around the fourth millennium BCE, “the variety of tokens increased greatly [...] and the tokens began to be pierced in such a way that they could be strung together,” and these strings of tokens “constitute the first true writing” (72). The emergence of these strings of tokens register the first movements toward syntactic scripts and logographs and, according to Olson, syntactic scripts mark the end of a magical combination of word and object: “It [the rise of syntactic scripts] spells the death of ‘word’ magic or more precisely, ‘name’ magic. Words are no longer emblems; words are now

distinguished from both things and from names of things,” which leads Olson to conclude that “when the word is thought of as representing a thing rather than as an intrinsic property of the thing, word magic loses its power” (75-76). Horkheimer and Adorno write, regarding the transformation of names under the “culture industry,” that: “The demythologizing of language, as an element of the total process of enlightenment, reverts to magic” (133), a process that itself affects the notion of the name in the twentieth century: “The name, to which magic most readily attaches, is today undergoing a chemical change” (134).

In Foucault’s *The Order of Things* (1966) (which has the French title *Les mots et les choses*, which literally means “The words and the things”), he claims that a strict delineation between word and thing becomes historically instantiated in the seventeenth century. This transition occurs

because language, instead of existing as the material writing of things, was to find its area of being restricted to the general organization of representative signs. This new arrangement brought about the appearance of a new problem, unknown until then: in the sixteenth century, one asked oneself how it was possible to know that a sign did in fact designate what it signified; from the seventeenth century, one began to ask how a sign could be linked to what it signified. A question to which the Classical period was to reply by the analysis of representation; and to which modern thought was to reply by the analysis of meaning and signification [...]

The profound kinship of language with the world was thus dissolved. The primacy of the written word went into abeyance. And that uniform layer, in which the *seen* and the *read*, the visible and the expressible, were endlessly interwoven, vanished too. Things and words were to be separated from one another. The eye

was thenceforth destined to see and only to see, the ear to hear and only to hear.

(47)

Later, in *Archaeology of Knowledge* (1969), Foucault builds on his initial theorization of the split between words and things in order to define his concept of “discourse”:

words are as deliberately absent as *things* themselves; any description of a vocabulary is as lacking as any reference to the living plenitude of experience. We shall not return to the state anterior to discourse—in which nothing has yet been said, and in which things are only just beginning to emerge out of the grey light; and we shall not pass beyond discourse in order to rediscover the forms that it has created and left behind it; we shall remain, or try to remain, at the level of discourse itself. [...] I would like to show that ‘discourses’, in the form in which they can be heard or read, are not, as one might expect, a mere intersection of things and words: an obscure web of things, and a manifest, visible, coloured chain of words; I would like to show that discourse is not a slender surface of contact, or confrontation, between a reality and a language (*langue*), the intrication of a lexicon and an experience; I would like to show with precise examples that in analysing discourses themselves, one sees the loosening of the embrace, apparently so tight, of words and things, and the emergence of a group of rules proper to discursive practice. These rules define not the dumb existence of a reality, nor the canonical use of a vocabulary, but the ordering of objects. (53-54)

Therefore, Foucault’s definition of “discourse” can be considered the theorization of a new (cor)relation between words and things: his argumentation is not semiotic, but rather, discursive

in that Foucault's notion of discourse contains some aspect of materiality—although his notion of discourse is different from the idea of a word-thing.

Contra the incarnational fallacy, what if language could be configured as a “living language?” If this position is logically possible, then what is precisely “living” in it and, if language is living, is it possible to avoid an incarnational fallacy? Friedrich Max Müller considers the living life of language in his *Lectures on the Science of Language* (1861) when he asserts that: “if strictly defined, the science of language can declare itself completely independent of history” (79), even if “every record were burned, and every skull mouldered,” because “the English language, as spoken by any ploughboy, would reveal its own history if analyzed according to the rules of comparative grammar” (80). Müller sees language as an organic manifestation in the world, essentially conceiving of language as a fungus that grows on the surface of things, insisting that “[e]ver since Horace it has been usual to compare the growth of languages with the growth of trees” (50). Müller does, however, anticipate the incarnational fallacy when he warns against overestimating the organic nature of language: “we should always be on our guard,” Müller says, “against being carried away by the very words which we are using” (51).

Eagleton's own example of the incarnational fallacy is taken from F.R. Leavis's reading of Keats's “To Autumn”:

The action of the packed consonants in ‘moss'd cottage trees’ is plain enough: there stand the trees, gnarled and sturdy in trunk and bough, their leafy entanglements thickly loaded. It is not fanciful, I think, to find that (the sense being what it is) the pronouncing of ‘cottage-trees’ suggests, too, the crisp bite and the flow of juice as the teeth close in the ripe apple. (qtd. in Eagleton 59)

Eagleton argues that “[f]or Leavis, genuine poetic language is as packed and ripe as an apple, and reading becomes rather like chewing” (59). Eagleton’s humorous account of Leavis’s writing emphasizes the absurdity of those falling prone to the incarnational fallacy, rendering Leavis’s interpretation overly Romantic; nonetheless, I insist that reading *is* a bit like chewing. Linguistic theorists George Lakoff and Mark Johnson will later argue for a cognitivist and embodied understanding of metaphor in which metaphors are real objects that construct perceptual worldviews: following Lakoff and Johnson, I claim that a cognitive experience such as reading is a bodily experience much like chewing.⁴⁷

However, Eagleton would likely remain unconvinced by a cognitive-linguistic approach because

[w]ords are at their most authentic when they are plumped with the ripe physicality of things. Pressed to an extreme, this means that the truest poet would be a greengrocer. In seeking to do homage to words, revering them as densely physical objects in their own right, the incarnational fallacy only succeeds in abolishing them. For words which ‘become’ what they signify cease to be words at all. At their most material, they disappear into the objects they are supposed to denote. For all its celebration of the muscularity of language, the incarnational fallacy reflects a covert distrust of it. Only when words cease to be themselves and merge into their referents can they be truly expressive. (59-60)

⁴⁷ In *Philosophy in the Flesh* (1999), Lakoff and Johnson write: “Our brains are structured so as to project activation patterns from sensorimotor areas to higher cortical areas. These constitute what we have called *primary metaphors*. Projections of this kind allow us to conceptualize abstract concepts on the basis of inferential patterns used in sensorimotor processes that are directly tied to the body” (77). Later they similarly claim that “[c]orrelations in our everyday experience inevitably lead us to acquire primary metaphors, which link our subjective experiences and judgments to our sensorimotor experience” (128).

Eagleton's analysis assumes an ontology of words in which words are immaterial and incorporeal: "Only when words cease to be themselves," Eagleton writes, but why is Eagleton's "ontology" more valid than Leavis's? Why has no one yet written a *Being and Time* of language?

Tracing the linguistic turn in philosophy to Russian formalism, Eagleton critiques the formalists for their reliance on the incarnational fallacy:

The early twentieth-century school of Russian Formalists saw poetry as language which is placed in a peculiarly self-aware relationship to itself. For these audaciously avant-garde critics, the literary *enfants terribles* of their time, poems were made up not of images, ideas, symbols, social forces or the poet's intentions, but of words. They therefore took as their object of inquiry the materiality of language, or what they called 'literariness'. 'Literariness' meant language which is peculiarly conscious of itself as such. (48)

Separating "literariness" from "images, ideas," and "symbols" is extremely difficult because all are inextricably connected. Language may be material under certain circumstances and associational under others because language is pliant. Language's pliancy renders the language-system as inherently complex; for this reason, haptic semiology considers language as a complex system.

This perspective is partly inspired by William Paulson's work in *The Noise of Culture* (1988) in which Paulson links systems theory with a conceptualization of language as a complex system. In *The Noise of Culture*, Paulson critiques his own version of the incarnational fallacy, such as when he demystifies standard organic metaphors that are typically used to describe the "the organic unity of the text," further insisting that: "Poems are relational structures realized in

words, but poems do not make the words. Nothing really justifies calling the literary text a living organism” (131). Paulson is likely responding to a long tradition that begins with Aristotle who writes, in the *Poetics*, that a poem should be structured “with all the organic unity of a living creature” (2335); Paulson calls this trend the “poem-as-organism fallacy” (136). Paulson insists that “to call the text an organism on this basis is a category mistake” and is an aspect of “romantic theorization” (131). Eagleton would no doubt agree with Paulson. For Paulson, “the literary text” is not itself an autonomous system because “by itself it is static, a fixed structure and not an organization of processes. To be considered as a possible autonomous system, the text must be understood dynamically and not statically” (132), and the only way that this re-conceptualization is possible is during the act of reading or writing (132). The collision between writer and text or reader and text renders the text as theoretically autonomous (from a systems theoretical perspective). Prior to this systems theoretical assessment of the literary text, Paulson finds the text to be an “*artificially autonomous object*” (135, original emphasis).

In order to further explicate this theoretical romanticization of texts as organic, Paulson personifies the literary text during an amusing moment of *de facto* incarnation in which Paulson ventriloquizes *as* a text:

Consider me as an autonomous, natural object. Try to discover my laws of organization, of operation, laws which you must assume to be specified only by what you find within me. To do so, of course, you will have to study the communicative components of which I am made, the signs of language, even though if you assume from the outset that I am a vehicle of communication, you risk missing what is specific to me. And yet, for all this, my autonomy or organicity is in the end a fiction. I am not a natural object but an artifact, and my

meaning is a function of my communicative participation in a larger system. (141)

Eagleton echoes Paulson's meaning here when he insists that:

poetry, with its intolerable wrestle with words and meanings, can never attain the fullness of presence of the Incarnation. Words can never attain the status of the Word. Language can intimate truth by drawing attention to its own limits, and thus to what transcends them; or it can yield a negative insight into truth by cancelling itself out; but in a fallen world it cannot capture it in the flesh. It is a quintessentially modernist motif. (59)

Eagleton may see this notion as a “quintessentially modernist motif,” but there are many intriguing manifestations of the incarnational fallacy in contemporary writing that offer a variety of other presentations of “incarnated” language—some of which usefully contribute to a theorization of haptic semiology.

Much like Eagleton and Paulson, the L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E poets theorize their own version of the incarnational and poem-as-organism fallacy. Rae Armantrout argues in the first issue of *L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E* (1978), “[t]o believe non-referentiality is possible is to believe language can be divorced from thought, words from their histories. If the idea of non-reference is discarded, what does language-oriented mean? Does it simply designate writing which is language-conscious (self-aware)?” (n.p.). In “Supplement Number One” of *L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E*, the topic is “The Politics of the Referent.” Frank Davey, editor of the issue, claims that L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E poetry “*has had to do with exploring the numerous ways meanings can be (& are) realized—revealed—produced in writing. In this context, the idea that writing could be stripped of reference is as troubling and confusing a view as the assumption that the primary function of words is to refer, one-on-one, to an already constituted*

world of 'thing'" (n.p., original emphasis). L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E poetry is not strictly concerned with the signifier, but with a more complicated dynamic in which the signifier is trapped within a constantly fracturing relationship with its object. The complexity of this linguistic process is never adequately described, but in "Supplement Number One," Ron Silliman insists that "[r]eference has always been an element in language. Its primary form is the combination of a gesture and an object, such as the picking up of a rock or one fragment (thereby creating a 'tool')" (n.p.). Silliman's assessment here works with a Peircean more than a Saussurean semiotic model; however, Silliman remains interested in a "real object" that lurks, somewhere, behind or beneath the signifier.

Bruce Andrews's approach to the problem of language-reference is primarily concerned with community: "How have we come to the words, to our selves, our absenting community—all flesh, all fleshed together" (n.p.). The most useful piece in "Supplement Number One" is provided by Steve McCaffery, whose "The Death of the Subject" helpfully defines the project of language-centred writing: "There is a group of writers today united in the feeling that literature has entered *a crisis of the sign*; that the explications of literatures have merged with the implications of language and that the foremost task at hand—a more linguistic and philosophic than 'poetic' task—is to demystify the referential fallacy of language" (n.p.).

What McCaffery calls "the referential fallacy" is similar to Eagleton's "incarnational fallacy," and Paulson's "poem-as-organism" fallacy.⁴⁸ Each of these fallacies conveys a romanticization of language in which the text is imbued with "life" and an actualizing

⁴⁸ The term "referential fallacy" is originally used by Eco in 1976: "The problem in question is that of the *referent*, in other words the problem of the possible states of the world supposedly corresponding to the content of a sign-function. Although of considerable importance within its proper domain, the notion of 'referent' has most unfortunate results within the framework of a theory of codes, and to underestimate its malignant influence leads to a *referential fallacy*" (58).

correspondence. Eagleton, Paulson, and McCaffery each describe the mistaken belief that signifiers and signifieds can, in any way, conjure or represent their referents or that there is any aspect of organicity to textuality. Therefore, the project of L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E poetry is “dereferentialist” (n.p.) in that McCaffery argues: “REFERENCE I take it, is that kind of blindness a window makes of the pane it is; that motoric thrust of the word which takes you out of language into a tenuous world of the other and so prevents you seeing what it is you see” (n.p.).

In interview with Lola Lemire Tostevin, the poet Christopher Dewdney insists that an internal parasite endemic to language is responsible for an excess of reference or fallacious incarnation: “Because language is so close to consciousness, this eventually becomes a parasitic relationship where language spills over the bounds of reference and takes on a quasi-magical existence in consciousness as if it had more capability than it actually does. You sort of have a working neurosis at that point and that’s what I mean by parasite” (86).⁴⁹ In order to disconnect the signifier from the referent, the signifier becomes material in its own right. André Alexis’s short story “Despair: Five Stories of Ottawa,” from the collection *Despair* (1994), deals with a pun that exists in French—situating the English story as a narrative locked in the translational space that exists between Ottawa and Montreal—in which the main character’s five-year-old son Edward decides to eat a white worm discovered in a cemetery. “Two weeks later, the boy began to speak with authority on aesthetic matters and to write poetry. He wrote beautiful poetry. —It’s like he swallowed Wallace Stevens, his father said” (95). The story functions on the translative hinge that in French the word for worm—*ver*—is a homophone for the word for poem. In French,

⁴⁹ Dewdney is explaining his theorization of a “language parasite” after his ‘pataphysical essay “Parasite Maintenance” contained in his poetry collection *Alter Sublime* (1980).

a poem is written (in the plural) as: *en vers*, *des vers*, or as *vers de poésie*. The parasitic worms that the young boy and the father eat *are* poems and it is through the eating of the poems that they begin to speak poetry. Alexis's story considers poems as linguistic parasites.

The language-centred approach is one in which the sign itself becomes an object or thing. The dominant approach of language-centred writing is typically a strategy of textual fragmentation. In "Text and Context" from *L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E: Supplement Number One*, Bruce Andrews writes that: "Fragmentation doesn't banish the references *embodied* in individual words; merely—they are not placed in a *series*, in grammar, in a row, *on a shelf*. A more playful anarchy, a Möbius free-for-all is created. Texts are themselves *signifieds*, not mere signifiers" (n.p.). The presented text in twentieth-century language-centred writing is one in which signs become the material of language and these signs contain energy and history as their paths collide, swerve, and lead to recombinant semiotic assemblages.

One of the primary methods in haptic semiology is what I call an *etymic theoretical* analysis. Building on my theory of etymism (or a language-inflected atomism) that I formulate elsewhere, the etym can be defined as *a correlationally assigned and yet indivisible building block of language*.⁵⁰ As a building block, the etym, like the atom, offers a structural linguistic model in which language is conceptually dynamic, evolving, and organic.

Saussure claims in his *Cours* that: "A language thus has this curious and striking feature. It has no immediately perceptible entities. And yet one cannot doubt that they exist, or that the

⁵⁰ See: Braune "From Lucretian Atomic Theory to Joycean Etymic Theory" (2010). I adopt the word "etym" from Joyce's *Finnegans Wake* (1939). Joyce writes in Part II, Chapter III of the *Wake*: "The abnihilation of the etym by the grising of the grosning of the grinder of the grunder of the first lord of Hurtreford expolodotonates through Parsuralia with an ivanmorinthorrorumble fragoromboassity amidwhiches general uttermosts confussion are perceivable moletons skaping with mulicules" (353).

interplay of these units is what constitutes linguistic structure” (105). Attempting to organize his semiology as a science of language, Saussure points out that:

In most scientific domains, the question of units does not even arise: they are given in advance. In zoology, the animal is the obvious unit. In astronomy, likewise, there are items already separated out in space: the stars, planets, etc. In chemistry, one can study the nature and composition of bichromate of potash without worrying for a moment about whether it is a well defined object. When a science offers no immediately recognizable concrete units, that means they are not essential. (105)

However, despite the seemingly non-essential nature of an atomism of language, Saussure correctly insists that “a language has the character of a system based entirely on the contrasts between its concrete units. One cannot dispense with identifying them” (105).

The search for the “concrete units” of language can be historicized to the earlier tradition of Hellenic atomic theory, specifically Lucretius’s *De rerum natura* (c. 1 BCE) in which Lucretius theorizes the *clinamen atomorum* (the “atomic swerve”) that results from atomic collisions occurring when atoms crash and create a swirling, positively-charged void: “For if they [atoms] were not apt to incline, all would fall downwards like raindrops through the profound void, no collision would take place and no blow would be caused amongst the first-beginnings: thus nature would never have produced anything” (Lucretius 113). Nature is both a product and a producer due to the atomic collisions that produce various clinamens, swirling and pooling, or, as Christian Bök asserts: “the *clinamen* serves to interject turbulence into the reprise of such lawful cycles in order to disrupt the *flow of influence* from cause to effect” (44). The clinamen has been adopted by poetics because it is a symbol of exception: of effect resulting

from constraint (hence, its interest for the Oulipo), and while Lucretius himself relates the clinamen to words, Michel Serres similarly argues: “there are the laws of putting together letters-atoms to produce a text. The alphabetical proto-cloud is without law and the letters are scattered at random, always there as a set in space, as language; but as soon as a text or speech appears, the laws of good formulation, combination, and conjugation also appear” (113).⁵¹ According to Serres, the clinamen is the exception that results in a successful or unsuccessful literary product; or, as McCaffery will argue in “Zarathustran ’Pataphysics”: “Atoms are to bodies what letters are to words: commonly heterogeneous, deviant, and combinatory particles” (21). As a material model or philosophical concept, the clinamen is informative in the history of Hellenic atomism because it structures the natural world while remaining an object that exists in-between states: like contemporary dark energy or dark matter, the clinamen functions liminally and cannot be located in any specific place or space. The clinamen is therefore an effect of the existence of atoms; or, in other, more Serresian words, the clinamen is the declination of an atomic inclination.

Importantly, when Paulson theorizes the poem-as-organism fallacy he differentiates between the *literary text* and *language*. For Paulson (and for haptic semiology), language is a chaotic system that behaves according to laws of complexity. Paulson writes that “[t]he uncertainties of literary language arise out of the properties of language itself as system.

⁵¹ The Oulipo is a French coterie of writers begun by Raymond Queneau and François Le Lionnais: the group attempted to eliminate authorship from poetry and writing by applying mathematical constraints that could act as programs and sieves of language — the resulting text would ideally reflect language’s own inherent processes. “Oulipo” stands for *Ouvroir de littérature potentielle*, which roughly means “workshop of potential literature.” Lucretius compares atoms to letters at three points in *De rerum natura* (McCaffery 17); for example, here: “Just as the words themselves too consist of elements a little changed, when we mark fires and firs with a distinct name” (75-77).

Language's unreliability as a communicative instrument is due to ambiguities, overlappings, and uncertainties that occur because it has its own, internal, self-referential laws, its own features, which are not those of the message one seeks to send through it" (130). Therefore, language behaves autopoietically, but a text does not: a text is only, for Paulson, artificially autonomous in that it is a fixed entity that is not constantly developing over time (except in direct relation to a writer or reader).⁵² However, if language is an autonomous system that behaves autopoietically, then this manifestation has real effects on the writers and readers who communicate with, through, and alongside texts.

McCaffery argues for such a linguistically energetic impulse in relation to Ilya Prigogine's chaos theory, specifically in relation to Prigogine's theory of dissipative structures: "It might be said that Prigogine locates 'identity' in verbs, not nouns, in uncompromising action, temporality, disequilibrium, and change. Physics meets metaphysics not in the latter's beyondness but at the former's point of bifurcation where being emerges as becoming" (*Prior to Meaning* xvii). Arguably, a noun is ontologically concrete and stable while a verb is ontologically moving. Ernest Fenollosa argues for the existent materiality between words and things, insisting that "[a] true noun, an isolated thing, does not exist in nature. Things are only the terminal points, or rather the meeting points, of actions, cross-sections cut through actions, snapshots. Neither can a pure verb, an abstract motion, be possible in nature. The eye sees noun

⁵² At its simplest definition "autopoiesis" is the description of cellular self-organization. Autopoietic systems are those that self-organize and become bounded and autonomous units in themselves. An excellent primer to the study of autopoiesis is the anthology *Emergence and Embodiment* (2009) edited by Bruce Clarke and Mark B.N. Hansen. Each article in the collection deals with autopoiesis, but I would highlight Niklas Luhmann's article "Self-Organization and Autopoiesis." The term autopoiesis was coined by Francisco Varela and Humberto Maturana and in *Emergence and Embodiment* Varela details the evolution of the theory. See: "The Early Days of Autopoiesis."

and verb as one: things in motion, motion in things” (17). According to Fenollosa, things or objects are “terminal points,” or in other words, arbitrary locations for linguistic matrices as certain objects are nominated as either concrete (noun) or fluctuating (verb). In the second issue of *L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E*, Barrett Watten (like Fenollosa and McCaffery) incarnates verbs and nouns with an agential energy:

Verbs eat into walls, nouns in a ring consume themselves. If at some point language walked in the open door, we would show it some respect. Our response would be more immediate than to use it as a sign. A sign of social respectability, or connections to the art world. So we respect language by not being content to operate in any one part of it. It’s greater than we are. This has implications for the form. That sense is larger than one can say. (n.p., original underlining)

Watten’s point here is that language *is material*, but not in an anthropocentric or organic way: language’s materiality is far more complex than an *embodied* or *biological materiality*. The material of language is closer in form to a Prigoginian dissipative structure in that language is metaphorical and abstract, but this abstraction is virtually material in the sense of potentiality and temporary embodiment within specific media (cuneiform, hieroglyphs, paper, cyberspace, etc.).

Even though Thomas Sebeok sees “realist positions” in semiotics as being “altogether devoid of interest” (15), he is nonetheless aware that “[t]he initial distinction between object (O) and sign (S) raises profound questions about the anatomy of reality, indeed about its very existence, but there is nothing approaching a consensus about these riddles among physicists, let alone philosophers” (11). While Sebeok sees the dyadic structure of the sign as “requir[ing] at least two actants: the observer and the observed” (11), Saussure insists that the “unified duality” of the sign should not be thought of as similar to the duality of “body and soul,” but rather to that

of water and oxygen: “Water is a combination of hydrogen and oxygen: but taken separately neither element has any of the properties of water” (102). Therefore, even for Saussure, the question of materiality (while repeatedly bracketed) also frequently appears although the focus of his later work—on the paragram—takes up the question of linguistic materiality in a unique manner.⁵³

Saussure’s interest in the paragram is a lifelong obsession to find coded names and words hidden in Vedic hymns, Saturnian prose, and Latin verse. Saussure writes 139 notebooks in which he uses several terms for the same idea—anagram, logogram, hypogram, and paragram. Each of these terms reflect various emphases of Saussure’s thinking about the coded names and words: whether they are *para* (beside other words), *hypo* (underneath), *logo* (formed out of dispersed letters), or *ana* (the word written anew), each term used by Saussure implies a coded name within a verse line (Gronas 160). I privilege “paragram” above the others because Steve McCaffery chooses “paragram” in his study on the protosemantic in *Prior to Meaning* (2001).

Echoing Saussure, Roland Barthes writes in *Writing Degree Zero* (1953) about a geological and nominational model of language: “Thus under each Word in modern poetry there lies a sort of existential geology, in which is gathered the total content of the Name, instead of a chosen content as in classical prose and poetry” (48). Anticipating Barthes’s later interest in a nominational geology in modern poetry, Saussure seeks to locate enciphered deistic names in language. The downfall of Saussure’s paragram research was due to his search for authorial intention: he required validation that the words and names were *knowingly* encoded by poets. He even went so far as to write Giovanni Pascoli to confirm that the poet had encoded the names

⁵³ Saussure’s paragram research has long been an interest of mine. I write about it at length in “Cage’s Mesostics and Saussure’s Paragrams as Love Letters” (2012).

that Saussure had found (Gronas 162-163). When Pascoli did not respond to his query, Saussure abandoned his research.

The paragram, I claim, indicates an underlying law within a closed system of language: initial conditions (say the constraint of a 26-letter alphabet) allow for a nearly infinite array of combinations and permutations. The initial conditions give way to repeating patterns in relation to an underlying sociocultural and mythographic impulse that become chaotically ordered: “Pertaining as paragrams do to hidden, nonlinear relations within texts, their disposition commits all writing to the status of a partly self-organizing system; they are thus unquestionably not only major agents of linguistic instability and change but also advance a protosemantic challenge” (McCaffery, *Prior to Meaning* xvi). McCaffery is again referencing the nonlinear dynamics and chaos theory of Ilya Prigogine and Isabelle Stengers.

The important question to ask about the Saussurean paragram (in relation to Prigoginian chaos theory) is of intentionality: were the names that Saussure finds intrinsic to the compositional process, thus indicating an uncanny, nominative-function at work within language or are the names chance occurrences that contain no internal intentionality (which would still align with the analogy of language as a chaotic system)? Yet what is fascinating about Saussure’s research is the implication of an encoded identity, of the opposite dynamic of the one McCaffery privileges in relation to the paragram: “the paragram does not derive necessarily from an intentionality and is an inevitable consequence of Western writing’s alphabetic combinatory nature” (*Prior to Meaning* 197). McCaffery repositions Saussure’s intent, but the original intent is causal, intentional, and ontological.

What the paragram suggests is that language is not a passive tool used by human beings (as what I would call a *homo locutus* or “man speaking”), but rather as an agential and active

field of virtuality that human beings tap into in order to communicate. The importance of Saussure's research, I claim, is when it is read in relation to Lacan: the paragram suggests the very real existence of a symbolic order within which certain names—or Names-of-the-Father—circulate in an encoded manner, simultaneously structuring language by virtue of their cryptographic presence while occluding their own direct law by remaining hidden.

Ventriloquizing Language: Towards Haptic Semiology

Despite Eagleton's rejection of phenomenalizations of language (62), countless creative writers and poets routinely return to language's "magical associations." Effectively, what *Word-Things* achieves is a ventriloquization of language related to François Laruelle's ventriloquizing of philosophy: "philosophy itself tells us what it is, it exists in the best of cases as a system which posits and thinks itself" (qtd. in Brassier, *Nihil* 131). Brassier, echoing Eagleton's critique of linguistic incarnation, challenges Laruelle on this point: "when Laruelle declares that 'philosophy itself' has told him that it is an auto-affecting whole, one can only respond that 'philosophy itself' never speaks, since it is a figment; only philosophers speak" (*Nihil* 133). However, in an article on Alain Badiou, Brassier suggests the following incarnational reading: "Perhaps the condition for Badiou's subtractive ontology is a thought of Capital, or more precisely, an acknowledgment that capitalism—blind, monstrous, acephalic polymorph—thinks. What if it were precisely the thought that this Thing thinks that was still unthinkable for this philosophy?" ("Nihil Unbound" 58). Matteo Pasquinelli links this line of inquiry—that suggests that capital (or "Capital") thinks for itself—to the economic philosophy of Alfred Sohn-Rethel (1-3). In his work *Intellectual and Manual Labour* (1978), Sohn-Rethel argues that "commodity exchange is an original source of abstraction" and "this abstraction contains the formal elements

essential for the cognitive faculty of conceptual thinking,” which leads him to conclude “that the real abstraction operating in exchange engenders the ideal abstraction basic to Greek philosophy” (28). By historicizing the development of coin as a material object to 680 BCE “on the Ionian side of the Aegean, in Lydia or Phrygia,” Sohn-Rethel argues that the existence of coins in the pocket of a citizen engenders a new and radical relationship to abstract thought: “Anybody who carries coins in his pocket and understands their functions bears in his mind, whether or not he is aware of it, ideas which, no matter how hazily, reflect the postulates of the exchange abstraction” (59).

If we agree with Pasquinelli’s interpretation of Sohn-Rethel’s insight, then we can conclude—however fallaciously—that Capital exists as a system in-itself and as a system registers some aspects of agential thought. If Laruelle’s assertions regarding philosophy and Brassier and Sohn-Rethel’s claims regarding money are to be taken seriously, then we have to ask: how precisely can systems that manifest both abstract and material properties become systemically self-referential to the extent that something akin to self-awareness emerges? Is it possible that this philosophical modality is not simply fallacious? And, if so, then what phenomenal or ontological model is suggested by considering systems as so intrinsically “in-themselves” that they develop their own capacities for thought? I claim that this mode of inquiry, when extended to language, permits a ventriloquizing of language that—regardless of the fallaciousness of incarnation or reference or poem-as-organism—resituates the original Kantian dynamic of real and representation and the resulting theories of the sign in new, recombinant ways: put differently, this “ventriloquizing” approach conceptually *flattens* the semiotic sign (the signifier, signified, and referent together) and colours signifiers with the thing-in-itself and the thing-in-itself with its own linguistic properties. In other words, when language speaks, the

speakers are the ones who should listen.

Chapter Two: Building Language with Poetic Word-Things

The gambit of this chapter is that an epistemic shift has occurred at the turn of the twenty-first century in poetry and continental philosophy. In continental philosophy, the vogue movement of *speculative realism* arises in 2007 from a workshop held at Goldsmiths College at the University of London—and a subsidiary movement branches off from speculative realism called *object-oriented ontology* in 2009 (although the origins of object-oriented ontology could be traced to the publication, in 2002, of Harman’s *Tool-Being*). In literature, the trend of *conceptual writing* terminologically originates in 2003 (although the trend can be traced much earlier to the conceptual art of the 1960s).¹ Regarding shared origin stories, both of these new fields share a common goal: the (re)consideration of real objects and materiality in philosophy (for speculative realism) and writing (for conceptual writing).

For the purposes of haptic semiology, Quentin Meillassoux’s critique of what he calls “correlationism” is important for understanding the problematic distance between words and objects. Meillassoux writes, in *After Finitude*:

By ‘correlation’ we mean the idea according to which we only ever have access to the correlation between thinking and being, and never to either term considered apart from the other. We will henceforth call *correlationism* any current of thought which maintains the unsurpassable character of the correlation so defined.

¹ The term “conceptual writing” was originally coined by Craig Dworkin when he and Kenneth Goldsmith began curating the online anthology *The UbuWeb Anthology of Conceptual Writing* in 2003. The online collection eventually resulted in the 2011 print anthology *Against Expression* (also edited by Dworkin and Goldsmith). Goldsmith details the history of conceptual writing in an anthological “article” posted on the *Poetry Foundation* blog: “Conceptual Writing: A Worldview” (2012). The title of the blog post intentionally refers to Mary Ellen Solt’s foundational anthology of concrete poetry *Concrete Poetry: A World View* (1968).

Consequently, it becomes possible to say that every philosophy which disavows naïve realism has become a variant of correlationism. (5)

Naïve and nominal realisms are easy prey for structural and poststructural philosophers, but Meillassoux's point is that there are other not-yet-thought intellectual avenues that depart from a naïve realist context: speculative realism is therefore an attempt to formulate alternate realist philosophies. Meillassoux further points out that

Correlationism consists in disqualifying the claim that it is possible to consider the realms of subjectivity and objectivity independently of one another. Not only does it become necessary to insist that we never grasp an object 'in itself', in isolation from its relation to the subject, but it also becomes necessary to maintain that we can never grasp a subject that would not always-already be related to an object. (5)

Correlationism defines not only a simple correlation between subject/object, but furthermore a relation in which the notion of a *subject* is privileged. Meillassoux insists that: "one could say that up until Kant, one of the principal problems of philosophy was to think substance, while ever since Kant, it has consisted in trying to think the correlation" (6). Meillassoux discusses how these ways of "thinking the correlation" fall into strong and weak varieties (30-49).²

For Meillassoux, an example of weak correlationism is Kant who argues for some degree of access between subjects and objects; or, in other words, noumena remain at a distance, but these noumena can be *thought*. In interview with Rick Dolphijn and Iris van der Tuin, Meillassoux argues that: "Weak correlationism is identified with Kant's transcendental

² Peter Gratton discusses Meillassoux's distinction between "strong" and "weak" correlationism. See: *Speculative Realism*, p. 15.

philosophy: it is ‘weak’ in that it still grants too much to the speculative pretension (e.g. absolutory) of thought. Indeed, Kant claims that we know something exists in itself, and that it is thinkable (non-contradictory)” (72).

Strong correlationism suggests that the noumenon transmits no essential information of itself. Put differently, the screen of real and representation is, for strong correlationists, fully opaque while for weak correlationists, it is, to some degree, transparent. Meillassoux puts this same point in his own words (again in interview with Rick Dolphijn and Iris van der Tuin): “‘Strong’ correlationism does not even admit that we can know that there is an ‘in-itself’ and that it can be thought: for this we are radically confined in our thought, without the possibility of knowing the in-itself, not even its taking place and logicity” (72). Meillassoux also makes this point in *After Finitude*: “the strong model of correlationism maintains not only that it is illegitimate to *know* the in-itself, but *also* that it is illegitimate to claim that we can at least *think* it” (35). Harman points out, in *Quentin Meillassoux*, that Meillassoux’s speculative materialism emerges from a radicalization of strong correlationism (6):

his [Meillassoux’s] strategy is to transform our supposed ignorance of the things-in-themselves into an absolute *knowledge* that the things-in-themselves exist without reason, and that they can change at any time for no reason at all. In this way the cautious agnosticism of Kantian philosophies is avoided, but so is the collapse of reality into thought found in German Idealism. In their place, Meillassoux offers a wonderfully bizarre metaphysics of absolute contingency in which anything can happen without reason and without warning. (24)

Meillassoux nicely summarizes the various correlationisms when he argues that “ever since Kant, to discover what divides rival philosophers is no longer to ask who has grasped the true nature of

substantiality, but rather to ask who has grasped the more originary correlation: is it the thinker of the subject-object correlation, the noetico-noematic correlation, or the language-referent correlation?" (*After 6*). The *subject-object correlation* involves general movements of twentieth-century philosophy (discourse analysis, psychoanalysis, grammatology, and so on), the *noetico-noematic correlation* refers to Husserlian phenomenology, and the *language-referent correlation* refers to Saussure's work, and semiotics more generally (already considered in Chapter One).

After briefly considering some of the theoretical concerns of correlationism, the chapter will now proceed by considering conceptual writing's relation to a written "real."

Language Blizzards, Conceptual Writing, and "Flattening" the Sign

I would like to extend DeLanda, Bryant, and Harman's notion of a flat ontology to Derrida: grammatology could easily be rendered as a "flat" theorization of the sign because, for Derrida, there is no worldly depth beyond the surface of signification (as considered in Chapter One). Grammatology, along with poststructuralism, argues for a surface of signifiers that lack depth; or, to invoke and adapt Harman's phrase, any possible depth to the signifier *withdraws* while in semiotic use.³

³ Harman's theory of "withdrawal" is complex and linked with his notion of "vicarious causation." In *Bells and Whistles* (2013), Harman argues that: "The relation between real objects is one of *withdrawal* or mutual seclusion. Real objects make no contact, and require some sort of indirect or vicarious link" (67). One of the most thorough analyses of withdrawal can be found in Harman's *Guerilla Metaphysics* (2005): "The root of vicarious cause is that every object is a private reality that withdraws from any attempt to perceive, touch, or use it" (222). Harman clarifies this ontological process when he argues that: "causation between real objects can only be vicarious. One such object never touches another, but interacts with its neighbors only by means of notes. These notes differ from the usual conception of qualities insofar as a note somehow already bears the inscription of the withdrawn object to which it belongs" (230). Edward Farley's book *Deep Symbols* (1996) deals with a kind of "depth" of words. Farley's

Regarding surfaces, one of the founders of conceptual writing, Vanessa Place, argues that “what appears on the surface of the page is pure textual materiality, no more (and often much less) than what you see on the surface of the page” (446). Gradually, a vertical theorization of the sign gives way to a lateral one and then, in conceptual writing, to a fully “flattened” praxis in which the materiality of the page and the word becomes so intense that there is almost no extratextual import.⁴ A page is an object that is signed with various signatures that activate, in turn, virtual and actual writings—what I mean is that a referent (as an object) contains the colourings of signifiers that are simultaneously coloured by (cor)related referents and these referents are sometimes attributed virtual significations (meanings that are not recorded on them, but are spoken or written about them).

For Place, conceptualism’s “textual surface (or content) may or may not contain a kind of significance, but this surface significance (or content) is deployed against or within an extra-textual narrative (or contextual content) that is the work’s larger (and infinitely mutable) meaning” (446). When McCaffery declares hyperbolically: “Phonemes of the Word fragment! You have nothing to lose but your referents!” (“Death” n.p.), he announces the emergence of a new mode of meaning-production—one that laterally pulses towards an informatic mesh of

primary argument is that “[w]ords of power, that is, deep and enduring symbols that shape the values of a society and guide the life of faith, morality, and action, are subject to powerful forces of discreditation and even disenchantment” (1). Farley mentions that deep symbols are sometimes called “god-terms” (by Philip Rieff) or “life-terms” (by Langer), but he defines them as: “the values by which a community understands itself, from which it takes its aims, and to which it appeals as canons of cultural criticism [...] They are *deep* symbols because they reside in perduring linguistic structures that maintain the community’s very existence” (3). Deep symbols are “deep” because they are strongly embedded words that cannot be removed from a culturally-specific manifestation of a particular language. Deep symbols make sense if language is considered as a topological or virtually existent structure in relation to a speaking community.⁴ However, this conceptualization of conceptual writing makes it vulnerable to assertions of meaning such as race or gender—i.e., “extratextual” content that must affect the meaning-production of a text.

reader, writer, text, context, and paratext.

McCaffery highlights the poetry of David Melnick, Ron Silliman, Clark Coolidge, Ray DiPalma, and Bruce Andrews as epitomes of the L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E aesthetic. McCaffery writes, regarding Andrews's "PIEC":

This poem ["PIEC"] is a poem of absolute denotation, a total condition of self-reflexive sign structured by aura rather than syntax and stressing the sign's own excess of presence precisely because there is no operating reference. It is a patterned cipher whose gravity obtains from a surplus of signification. It is overdetermined and hence a presentness. It cannot be located in any category and thus is not context bound. A signifier without a signified and whose destination is inward to the center of its own form. ("Death" n.p.).

McCaffery's reading does not claim that Andrews's poem epitomizes the signifier *qua* signifier; instead, the variegations of informatic noise overcode the communicational signal and this overcoding short-circuits the traditional sign, leveling its hierarchy while flattening both meaning and non-meaning. McCaffery argues that "[o]nce the fallacy of the referent is revealed for what it is then we are able to see language as that highly complex play of signifiers detached from stable signifieds; a language no longer representing a world outside of itself, but a language obeying its own constitution and dynamic" ("Death" n.p.). Language becomes for McCaffery its own self-referential system: a system that thinks and knows itself. The writer, however, has some part to play in this new democratic model and while McCaffery does not theorize the poet's inclusion in this flattening of the sign, I argue that the poet becomes a body in-itself alongside language's body in-itself.

Conceptual writing is a creative practice that negates the human author and the historical human subject, constituted by specific histories of racialized and gendered discourse in favour of a machinic writing or constraint-based system that can create the text without the aid of the human (or so it claims). Conceptual writing, like speculative realism, attempts to move beyond (but not outside of) correlationist human creation in order to arrive at a textual “real.” Conceptual writing, however, would have been unable to reach this level of conceptual production were it not for L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E poetry’s liberation of the signifier from the inaccessible referent, which is itself impossible without the experiments of concrete poetry (or visual poetry). The triadic relationship between author-reader-text has often credited one member of the relationship as dominant and the others as passive: early biographical criticism celebrates the author; the New Criticism of Cleanth Brooks and I.A. Richards emphasizes the text; Barthes’s “death of the author” signals the birth of the reader and the later movement of reader-response criticism (Fish, Jauss, and Iser).⁵

Whatever the valences in literary criticism, the general trend in the twentieth century (that anticipates the 21st century emergence of conceptual writing) is one that moves towards the text-as-object. Responding to the lyricism and Romanticism of late-eighteenth to the early-nineteenth centuries, the twentieth century features several text-as-object movements in poetry (the following list is by no means comprehensive): in America, Black Mountain objectism (Charles Olson’s term developed from Whitehead), Objectivism (Louis Zukofsky, Charles Reznikoff,

⁵ See: Brooks’s *Understanding Poetry* (1938) and *The Well Wrought Urn* (1947). See: Richards’s *Principles of Literary Criticism* (1924) and *Practical Criticism* (1929). See: Hans Robert Jauss’s theory of reception found in *Aesthetic Experience and Literary Hermeneutics* (1982) and *Toward an Aesthetic of Reception* (1982); Wolfgang Iser’s *The Implied Reader* (1974) and *The Act of Reading* (1978); and Stanley Fish’s *Surprised by Sin: The Reader in Paradise Lost* (1967) and *Is There a Text in This Class?* (1980).

George Oppen); in Europe, Lettrism (Isidore Isou, François Dufrêne, Gil Wolman), de Stijl (Theo van Doesburg, J.J.P. Oud, Piet Mondrian); in Russia and parts of Asia, Zaum (Velimir Khlebnikov and Aleksei Kruchenykh); in France, the Oulipo (Jacques Roubaud, Georges Perec, Raymond Queneau, and others); and in South America, Noigandres (Haroldo de Campos, Augusto de Campos, Décio Pignatari, and others)—not to mention the international influence of concrete poetry.

Conceptual writing builds on the various traditions of these earlier forms of experimental (or “avant-garde”) writing. Despite conceptual writing founder Kenneth Goldsmith’s understandable resistance to being called a lyric poet or a capital-R “Romantic,” the inspiration for *Soliloquy* (2001) falls into the category of what Terry Eagleton would call “the incarnational fallacy.” In his essay “I Look to Theory Only When I realize That Somebody Has Dedicated Their Entire Life to a Question I Have Only Fleetinglly Considered (A Work in Progress),” Goldsmith writes that “[a]t one point, I envisioned making all the invisible language in the air around us material. At any given moment, there’s language flying all around us that we are not aware of: think of radio waves and cellular phone connections, TV signals, etc.” (n.p.). Such speculative thinking leads Goldsmith to write *Soliloquy* and become interested in the various archives—recorded or unrecorded—of language in potentia that exist in contemporary society. Goldsmith claims:

I began to obsess on the amount of language being produced by individuals. What would happen if all the language were somehow materialized? I thought of the largest snowstorm we ever had in NYC a few years ago. The sanitation department would come around with a machine that transferred all the snow into dumptrucks. The dumptrucks would then drive to the river and dump the snow in

the water. If every word spoken daily in New York City were somehow to materialize as a snowflake, each day there would be a blizzard. Would the dumptrucks dump our language in the river? Perhaps not. In the same way that snow melts when put in water, they would have to find a way to liquidate our language. Perhaps the materialized language would be taken to digital encoding centers, where it would be loaded onto high density CDs and stored as a record of our thought. (n.p.)⁶

Soliloquy is a transcription of everything that Goldsmith said over the period of a week in 1996. Eagleton's incarnational fallacy presents a more persuasive critique of the chewing of Keatsian trees and not the communicational blizzard of New York chatter. In other words, the historical distance between F.R. Leavis and Goldsmith permits new considerations of materiality and of the language-referent correlation—namely, a *flattening* of the language-referent correlation.

When text is considered an object, it is situated as matter: a text is manufactured and formed in relation to language's component parts and constraints. "I was trained as a sculptor," Goldsmith says about his early art ambitions:

In 1986 I made a book out of wood. After that I spent the next three years creating books out of wood. They were carved and painted. In 1990, I was bored of the book form and bored of sculpture. However, I was fascinated by the words, so I dropped the sculpture and began making text pieces. Soon I became bored of

⁶ In *Soliloquy*, Goldsmith writes: "IF EVERY WORD SPOKEN IN NEW YORK CITY DAILY WERE SOMEHOW TO MATERIALIZE AS A SNOWFLAKE, EACH DAY THERE WOULD BE A BLIZZARD" (489).

having to materialize language and devoted myself to working exclusively on the computer and writing books” (“I Look” n.p.).

For Goldsmith, language is akin to static matter that can be used—like paint for the painter or clay for the sculptor—to form new structures and texts that, by being reordered, (re)presented, and re-typed, situate writing as a practice similar to architecture or sculpture. Goldsmith’s early work as a sculptor includes a sculpture of Abbie Hoffmann’s *Steal This Book* that was too heavy to lift.⁷

Arguably, once language is actualized on a page, its earlier virtual structure “withdraws” and something seemingly fixed is left in its place. The etyms of language must therefore function prior to language’s cohesion into written matter, but once language is concretized, then its “laws” seem to change: the etymistic laws of the previous chapter are akin to the molecular and quantum laws of the very small, while actualized language could be theorized in Newtonian or Einsteinian terms.

Nounal-bricks: Building Language

The very first issue of *L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E Magazine* (1978) begins with a “conversation” between Larry Eigner and Clark Coolidge. Eigner emphasizes the complexity of the word/object

⁷ Regarding the question of “matter” in Goldsmith, I must confess that I am primarily considering Goldsmith in relation to textual matter. In terms of the material conditions of lived reality, Goldsmith has recently given a reading that has been generally considered to be racist (or even white supremacist). On March 13, 2015, during the Interrupt 3 conference held at Brown University, Goldsmith read the autopsy report of Michael Brown (the black youth who was murdered by police officer Darren Wilson in Ferguson, Missouri in August of 2014). Goldsmith’s reading emphasized standard terminology used in autopsy reports and, in the context of a poetry reading given by a white, able-bodied, male poet, unintentionally reconfigured these terms as politically irresponsible and potentially racist.

dialectic: “But behind words and whatever language comes about are things (language I guess develops mainly by helping cope with them), things and people” (n.p.). In Clark Coolidge’s

“LARRY EIGNER NOTES,” Coolidge begins:

I see...

the noun states accent in air

so much that an “on” or “hard” takes on

solidity of noun at line-end

the prepositional phrases: a thought he’s

using only one unit, over & over again

(Cezanne?)

every line hit to a conclusion; the preposition phrase

pushed up against its noun-wall; the single noun,

preposition, whichever, its own wall; each wall

a cut in space

“a wall was thick

air was a wall”

a nounal/prepositional universe. verb slides...

an invisible & steady “is” behind everything

“my own hands are distractions”

all particles in the pile soon to reach

nounal state (n.p.)

Coolidge’s “response” to Eigner excises the language-referent correlation in favour of language’s liberation as a self-referential system. However, this liberation compiles words as objects-in-themselves within a building of “walls” that reach a “nounal state.” Coolidge’s “response” that ends “I do not think of Eigner” (“LARRY” n.p.) does not reject Eigner, but registers a particular way of theorizing words: if particle physics tells us that human bodies are, at one level, quantum clouds moving through spacetime, then haptic semiology tells us that bodies are—again at one level—walking etymic clouds. Therefore, the beginning of this “conversation” is actually the Eigner etym-cloud spatially positioned near the Coolidge etym-cloud. Coolidge does not think of Eigner because he thinks of the language cluster named “Eigner” and this language cluster is itself a “nounal state”—assuming that nouns are named objects.

Such a theorization is similar to an object-oriented approach in which “subjects” are replaced by “observing-objects” or, in Harman’s terms, “real objects” (“The Road to Objects” 177). In this sense, every object—sentient or otherwise—exists in a “flat ontological” schema. Barrett Watten discusses the earlier moment between Eigner and Coolidge in *Total Syntax* (1985): “Here ‘the self’ has become generalized as ‘language,’ or, put another way, ‘the self’ has exploded and disappeared” (52). Neither Eigner nor Coolidge have a “self”—poetic, authorial, or otherwise during this moment—which is why Coolidge does not “think of Eigner” and the dynamic is, instead, an instance in which “one language is looking at another” (Watten 57). In

object-oriented terms, “Eigner” and “Coolidge” are complex assemblages—larger objects composed of smaller objects—or, in haptic semiological terms, clusters of word-things commuting *as* a larger word-thing.

Watten cites an interview in which Coolidge states: “That’s like my idea about arrangement ... an old alchemical notion that if you take objects, like the objects on this table, any objects, and arrange them in the correct order, that some incredible shift, or something, would happen. Something would be affected. Like the power is in the arrangement not in the objects” (qtd. in Watten 92). Coolidge understands *words as objects* that, like bricks, can be permuted and reassembled in order to arrive at novel combinations. As we move from the linguistic correlational model of referent and signifier—with its outdated vertical hierarchy—towards an object-oriented model that embraces flat ontology, words become resituated as liberated objects distinct from “their” referents and the referents themselves are likewise liberated: this shift allows for a discussion of the relational space between the signifier-referent dyad and also for the co-present cross-pollination of linguistics and entification (or, in other words, word-things become *semiotic assemblages*). Put differently, words are often considered as signs that refer to something else; haptic semiology, on the other hand, understands limit cases of language as speaking to a new, “flattened” conception of the sign.

For Socrates, in *Cratylus*, “a name is a tool for [...] dividing being” (107), suggesting that language operates as a fissure that strikes in-between material reality, instantiating mimetic systems that refract reality back on itself. The debate in *Cratylus* focuses on the “name givers” and the ways in which names were originally assigned, which is to say that the name givers assume a manifestation of reality prior to the assignation of names. One of the primary axioms in *Cratylus* is a Heraclitean understanding of the physical world in which being is predicated on

movement: “the nature of things themselves [...] are never stable or steadfast, but flowing and moving, full of every sort of motion and constant coming into being” (129). This Platonic thinking of the real-as-movement can be traced to earlier pre-Socratics: for Anaxagoras, the real spins and the world is produced; for the later Atomists (Leucippus and Democritus) the movement of atoms (as unsplitable and invisible entities) instate the world through their downward fall; and for Epicurus and Lucretius, atoms collide and create spirals and such spiraling produces the world.⁸ In each case, what is called “real” or “material” is an effect of primordial movement that is never explained, but positioned as axiomatic. Socrates points out, to Hermogenes, that all names “are given on the assumption that the things they name are moving, flowing, and coming into being” (129), and, furthermore, “the giver of names reviles everything that hinders or restrains the flowing of the things that are” (133). This assumption renders objects-in-themselves as Heraclitean and, if the objects are “moving, flowing, and coming into being,” then so must the words and names as well.

This Heraclitean/Socratic model fractalizes both the world and the word so that various intersection points exist between the physical and the linguistic: language “moves, flows, and comes into being” and the world also “moves, flows, and comes into being.” The scission between word and world situates an imaginary dyad or boundary that is policed by

⁸ Simplicius’s fragment B13 deals with the spinning of Anaxagoras’s concept of *Nous* (or Mind): “[w]hen *Nous* began to move [things], there was separation off from the multitude that was being moved, and whatever *Nous* moved, all this was dissociated; and as things were being moved and dissociated, the revolution made them dissociate much more” (qtd. in Anaxagoras of Clazomenae 25). The fragment D7 from Simplicius deals with the atomism of Leucippus and Democritus: “[a] swirl of forms of all kinds was separated off from the totality” (qtd. in Leucippus and Democritus 5). Lucretius writes in *De rerum natura* (c. 1 BCE): “[f]or if they [atoms] were not apt to incline, all would fall downwards like raindrops through the profound void, no collision would take place and no blow would be caused amongst the first-beginnings: thus nature would never have produced anything” (113).

anthropocentric decisions, thereby rendering the resulting theory of the sign as being constituted by the complexity essential to either “word” or “world.” For the purposes of this project, I define a fractal quite simply as: *a geometrical shape found in nature that contains a repeating structure within infinitely smaller iterations.*⁹

Socrates does, however, challenge the Cratylean model of words/names when he speculates that: “the name-givers really did give them in the belief that everything is always moving and flowing, as it happens things aren’t really that way at all, but the name-givers themselves have fallen into a kind of vortex and are whirled around in it, dragging us with them” (154-155). Earlier, Socrates supports the Heraclitean model and then he refutes this same model when critiquing Cratylus; however, his reversal does not discredit the earlier “pre-Socratic” model of movement because, in either case, the physical world consists of either “moving” and “flowing” noumena (as Truth) or “moving” and “flowing” phenomena (as the vortical representations of the name-givers). To that end, the moving and flowing complexity of the world (as perception or reality), registers the moving and flowing complexity of the word.

I see phenomenology and linguistics at disciplinary cross-purposes regarding the word/object (cor)relation: linguistics emphasizes one side of the relation (focusing on words),

⁹ This definition is a fairly traditional definition of the fractal. I do not alter the basic definitional parameters set forth by many of the mathematical thinkers and originators of fractal geometry. See: James Gleick’s *Chaos* (1987), pp. 98-110; Edward Lorenz’s excellent discussion of fractality, pp. 168-178; and Benoit Mandelbrot’s original work on the topic in *The Fractal Geometry of Nature* (1982). In linguistic terms, this understanding builds on the work of William Paulson, Michel Serres, and Steve McCaffery, (as considered earlier), as well as a variety of second-order systems-theory thinkers. Rather than provide a comprehensive list, I would like to point to several excellent essays from the *Systems: New Paradigms for the Human Sciences* anthology (1998), edited by Gabriel Altmann and Walter A. Koch: Mario Bunge’s “Semiotic systems”; Udo L. Figge’s “Inquiries into semiotic principles and systems”; Harald Schweizer’s “Constructive contradictions”; Wolfgang Wildgen’s “Chaos, fractals and dissipative structures in language”; and Floyd Merrell’s “Fractopoi, chaosmos, or merely simplicity-complicity?”

while phenomenology is interested in the other side of the relation by focusing on objects. Watten and Coolidge effectively theorize a provisional phenomenology of the word and, for haptic semiology, a phenomenology of the word should collapse not only the relation between word and object, but also the distance between linguistics and phenomenology. Watten points out that “if words are like objects in an arrangement, there is still a question, for Coolidge, of particular qualities of these entities motivating their possible arrangements” (92). For Coolidge, words are agential and have the capacity to motivate their own permutations through an underlying law of semiosis or paragrammic emergence.

If poets are akin to “nounal states,” then the speaking-subjects of the linguistic turn are composed of language, and this language in turn communicates with other nounal states *through* language. Coolidge’s etym-cloud model nicely aligns with Lacanian psychoanalysis in which the analyst and analysand register not as “addressor” and “addressee,” but rather as speaking-subjects that reveal themselves as etym-clouds or nounal states. The etym-cloud of the analysand is the semantic or non-semantic residue of the unconscious attempting to be interpreted by the etym-cloud of the analyst. When two nounal states or etym-clouds meet, an elaborate network of intersecting and rupturing signs repeatedly coalesce and reform over time. Such an encounter can be understood as the intersection of two nounal states that re-structure during the event of communication.

I consider the “alchemical” in Coolidge to be the encapsulation of the as yet unknown emergent processes that permit semiotic cohesion. Is this claim the result of an incarnational fallacy? Eagleton would likely think so. “To believe non-referentiality is possible is to believe language can be divorced from thought, words from their histories,” says Rae Armantrout in the first issue of *L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E*, further insisting that “[i]f the idea of non-reference is

discarded, what does language-oriented mean? Does it simply designate writing which is language-conscious (self-aware)?" (n.p.). Even if it were impossible to liberate the signifier from the referent, L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E poetry accomplishes an important political activity in which the question of word-as-thing or thing-as-word is positioned in relation to what words or referents can do for themselves. Asking this question positions speaking-subjects (as entities or nounal states) that are tied up with(in) language.

Conceptual Bricks and Laliberte's Word-Bricks

One of the poetry movements that influenced L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E poetry was the New York School of the 1950s-1960s. Ted Berrigan, a poet from the second generation of the New York School, understands words-as-bricks and he uses these bricks to build poetry. In *Nice to See You* (1991), Berrigan asserts that:

the physical reality of the typewriter makes it so tangible to me, and then I really do the things that I like to do. It gives it a weight like bricks. I mean really, I often think of my words as sort of bricks. But the bricks then are underneath the words, sort of. I use the words a lot of times to disguise the fact that it's a brick underneath, or to make the brick float. And then there'll be a key-word like a rhyme to put the brick right there. (80)

Berrigan equivocates his word-as-brick assertion by saying "sort of." A word is only "sort of" a brick and the bricks are underneath the words "sort of." I do not read Berrigan here as vacillating; instead, Berrigan's "sort of" suggests that insofar that the brick withdraws underneath the regular functioning of the word there remains a *supplement* at play as well: a word contains intrinsic features that seem to operate like a brick, but this phrasing does not

define the totality of the word. Theorizing language—with or without an observing-object or speaking-subject—occurs within language, suggesting that some aspect of language remains outside of its theorization.

Berrigan's use of the word-as-brick motif not only demonstrates a way of thinking about language as material, but also an approach to composition. Ron Padgett says that Berrigan's poetry is built: "I said 'built' rather than 'written' because, as Ted himself has said several hundred times, he was using words as though they were bricks he placed side by side, one course after another, tapping them into place with his old typewriter that required a firm wham of the fingers. Scissors and Elmer's glue were also essential tools" (*Nice to See You* 10). The ontology of a word-thing functions initially as a *virtual* linguistic field: Berrigan (as a body or a "nounal state") selects from language's virtuality (via lyricism or with the aid of a constraint) and then concretizes that protosemanticism onto the page, thus transitioning language's virtuality into actuality.

In his translator's introduction to *A Thousand Plateaus* (1987), Brian Massumi builds on Deleuze and Guattari's assertion in *What Is Philosophy?* (1991) that philosophy "is the art of forming, inventing, and fabricating concepts" (2). Massumi claims that, for Deleuze and Guattari,

[a] concept is a brick. It can be used to build the courthouse of reason. Or it can be thrown through the window. What is the subject of the brick? The arm that throws it? The body connected to the arm? The brain encased in the body? The situation that brought brain and body to such a juncture? All and none of the above. What is its object? The window? The edifice? The laws the edifice shelters? The class and other power relations encrusted in the laws? All and none of the above. (xii-xiii)

A brick is not only being used metaphorically in order to suggest that concepts contain revolutionary potential; a concept is, at some level, a *real brick* and the emergent assemblage can be “thrown” into the world—thrown is of course a word with Heideggerian valences. However, a concept may only appear to be bricklike as a form of whimsy: through an analogical extension, a building can be seen as a hegemonic thought-process or ideology and the concept-brick would be a particular shape that does not fit with the ideology-building and instead can be “thrown” through the ideology-building’s window so that the concept-brick alters or destabilizes the overall appearance of the ideology-building. A concept-brick, when effectively launched, can change the appearance of subjective thought so that new thought-forms emerge. This revolutionary potential is mostly available through a Deleuzoguattarian model of the philosophical concept.

Even a writer like Gabriel García Márquez emphasizes that writing is an act of forming hard matter. Márquez’s magical realism conceptually stretches Newtonian laws and releases the surreal into the real and his theory of language is also magical realist. Like Berrigan, Márquez is interested in how books and poems are built: “Ultimately, literature is nothing but carpentry,” Márquez says in an interview with Peter H. Stone, “[b]oth are very hard work. Writing something is almost as hard as making a table. With both you are working with reality, a material just as hard as wood” (57). The carpentry of language constitutes the construction of a text out of material—this material is “reality,” language, or a constraint—and the non-standard materiality of this material therefore renders the resultant text as material. What I mean by *non-standard materiality* is that many of the things or objects that I argue are material are not traditionally or ideologically considered “material” or “touchable substances.” Harman also routinely discusses

the “carpentry” of philosophy and I do not see why language and poetry should be outside the jurisdiction of a speculative realist analysis.¹⁰

Mark Laliberte’s installation piece “Seven Wake up Calls” features seven sandblasted bricks that are meant to be thrown through windows. Laliberte’s bricks are not only Deleuzoguattarian concepts, because he concretizes what at first appears to be, on the surface, a metaphor. In *Suture: It looked like rain* (2009), Laliberte creates a text of found words in which words function in a brick-like way. However, Laliberte’s *BRICKBRICKBRICK* (2010) is a work that epitomizes his work with surfaces, walls, and bricks. *BRICKBRICKBRICK* consists of a collection of brick-wall patterns that Laliberte creates by focusing on the background surfaces in comic books. Laliberte realizes that different graphic novelists and comic book artists tend to draw brick walls differently: these differences are like the fingerprints of each comic book illustrator. After extensively studying these patterns, Laliberte produces an intermedia work that combines concrete poetry with the graphic novel. Angela Szczepaniak orients Laliberte’s text in her Afterword when she writes that:

When the original context is stripped away, the overwriting process takes centre stage; reinterpreted and rebuilt, the re-authorship of found lines deposits layers of sediment over the source text. Laliberte’s wall poems cement a language all their own, as each brick haunts the tone and atmosphere of fictional architectures. A subtle metaphor for language itself, these visual poems articulate an intricate poetics of concrete: each brick, like a word, carefully interlocks with the next to

¹⁰ Harman writes in *Guerillas Metaphysics*: “What this carpentry speaks of is not the physical but the *metaphysical* way in which objects are joined or pieced together, as well as the internal composition of their individual parts” (2). He also describes the “carpentry of things” on pages 161-166 and elsewhere.

build textual walls, each with its distinctive poetic bonds of spiderveined stretchers. (n.p.)

Laliberte takes the comic book oeuvres of graphic novelists, such as Frank Miller, Martin Vaughn-James, Charles Schulz, Gerhard, and others, ignores the foreground featuring superheroes and storylines, and instead centralizes setting—primarily urban setting. As I discuss regarding Robbe-Grillet in the next chapter, Laliberte follows a similar trajectory as that of the *nouveau roman* and its conceptual emphasis on setting over plot and character. I consider *BRICKBRICKBRICK* as an example of an object-oriented poetry book and its import is found in the distinct and individual appearances of each “wall poem”:

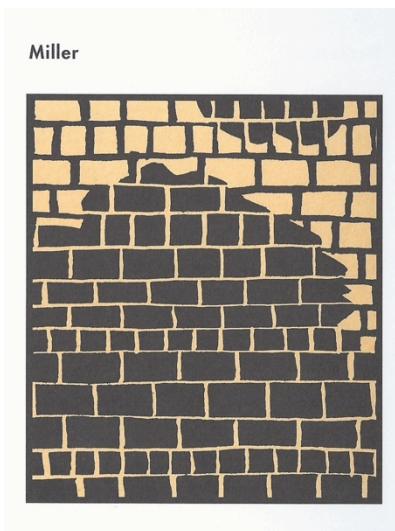


Fig. 1. Laliberte, Miller Wall Poem, 101

Figure 2 shows the wall poem that can be created from Frank Miller’s oeuvre. By allowing brick walls to “star” as the superheroes of his concrete poetry book, Laliberte effectively re-casts setting and urban space as the primary performer in this universe of walls. Laliberte demonstrates the breadth of representation when drawing a brick wall. One would think that a brick could be drawn more or less uniformly: the shape is fairly simple, consisting of a rectangle, four corners when built into a wall, and a more or less similar surface. However, each of these

wall poems is unique and singular, suggesting an almost organic theory of brick-emergence aligned with more traditional biological differentiation. Laliberte shows that each of these brick walls is unique and each wall poem tells a different story from its brick-neighbours: sometimes the bricks are perfectly aligned suggesting an almost linear narrative (*BRICK* 13, “Blue”); sometimes the bricks are completely nonlinear and offset (*BRICK* 62, “Upton” or *BRICK* 71, “Eastman”); sometimes the bricks are straight but feature a variety of stains (*BRICK* 83, “Rieger” or *BRICK* 113, “Kaz”).

Laliberte’s bricks are “non-material” in the same way that word-things are seemingly “non-material,” because Laliberte’s bricks do not exist in the world as traditionally defined bricks; instead, his bricks have been harvested from a fictional universe where each brick maintains the “coherency” of the signified. What I mean is that each brick exists as an image rather than as a “real” brick. Here is the first of two wall poems derived from the designs of Charles Schulz:



Fig. 2. Laliberte, Schulz I Wall Poem, 44

How are these wall poems actually poems? Is *BRICKBRICKBRICK* actually a work of concrete poetry? I agree with Szczepaniak that these brick wall images are poems because they each contain “writing.” If writing is defined at its most basic level, then it consists of marks upon a

surface. Lines, squiggles, and shapes make up words. Each wall poem features a type of writing: straight lines and intersection points proliferate across the page. Concrete poetry (or visual poetry) is a genre that collapses art with poetry: semantic meaning is repressed in favour of aesthetic surfaces and the creation of an artistic object.¹¹ Laliberte's book is arguably a book of concrete poetry because he locates the intricate artwork that lays hidden in brick walls.

BRICKBRICKBRICK literalizes what is only suggested in Berrigan's theorization of his own poetic practice: for Laliberte, words are real bricks (words do not only have bricks underneath them). Words become all sorts of things in haptic semiology: as bricks or other material, but in each case they are objectal. My use of the term "objectal" is not psychoanalytical, but rather refers to the ontic qualities of an object—i.e., *objectality*, in haptic semiology, refers to the total properties and qualities of an object relating to both the depth and the surface of that object.¹² Laliberte's word-thing bricks are nearly noumenal in that they resist total access and

¹¹ Emmett Williams writes in his Foreword to *An Anthology of Concrete Poetry* that "the poem as picture is as old as the hills, or the men who once lived in them, scratching their histories and fantasies in preliterate strokes on the walls of caves" (v). As Williams points out the concrete poetry movement (that lasts from the 1950s to the 1970s) is generally credited to the innovation of Eugen Gomringer (vi). I claim that any casual flip through the Williams anthology depicts the ways in which concrete or visual poetry manifests in a "wall-like" manner where the page is the wall and the text written or presented upon it appears like a Berrigan or Laliberte-like brick.

¹² The term "objectal" has valences in Lacanian psychoanalysis. In his seminar on *Anxiety*, Lacan claims that: "Our vocabulary has endorsed for this object [the *objet petit a*] the term *objectality*, in so far as it stands in contrast to the term *objectivity*. To encapsulate this contrast in some brief formulas, we shall say that objectivity is the ultimate term in Western scientific thought, the correlate to a pure reason which, at the end of the day, is translated into—is summed up by, is spelt out in—a logical formalism. If you've been following my teaching over the last five or six years, you know that objectality is something else. To bring it out in its vital point and forge a formula that balances up with the previous one, I will say that objectality is the correlate to a pathos of the cut" (214). For Lacan, objectality is closely linked to the *cause* of the *objet petit a*; or, in other words, the original lost object—and this loss configures objectality as a "cut," an affectual cut. My use of "objectal" is also distinct from notions of "objective" or "objectivity" in psychoanalysis, scientific discourse, and Enlightenment philosophy. I emphasize the suffix "-al" as meaning that specific kind of sense—as in "objectal" or "nounal."

remain engaged within a larger language network: when words become thought of as agential, then plot and character are removed from the foreground and words are centralized. This aesthetic tradition can also be found in the poetry of Francis Ponge.

Ponge's *Le parti pris des choses* (1942) translated as *The Voice of Things* (1972), is a groundbreaking poetry collection that finds the poetry contained in objects—such as a cigarette, a frog, a pebble, a wave, a tree. In *Things* (1971), Ponge asserts that “[t]he Object is the Poetics” and that “[w]e must then choose real objects, objecting indefinitely to our desires. Objects that we would choose again each day, and not as our decor, our frame; rather as our spectators, our judges; so as to be, naturally, neither dancers nor clowns” (n.p., original emphasis). The object is made central as the once lyrical subject or author is subsumed by the object's plenitude. Ponge's poems are not only ekphrastic: he is not only composing a poem that is developed from a selected object (like Wallace Stevens's jar that he places on a hill in Tennessee or Keats's Grecian urn), but Ponge moves towards a magical use of language in which the words are meant to *be* the objects themselves and *also* the language of those objects.

This reading takes Ponge's poetry rather literally and is against what Derrida argues in *Signéponge* (1984). In *Signéponge* (translated as *Signsponge*, but *Signedponge* is also implied), Derrida focuses on expanding his theory of the signature from “Signature Event Context” in *Margins of Philosophy* (1972) and *Limited Inc.* (1988), in order to apply the signature to Ponge's oeuvre. Primarily, Derrida focuses on the very name “Francis Ponge” as an object or thing, meditating on its various meanings including the embedded French word—*éponge*—which means “sponge.” This association is why “Francis doesn't give a damn for the sponge. It will not have been his thing” (68). For the French avant-garde of the twentieth century, Ponge was one of the most exciting of poets: the journal *Tel Quel* for instance celebrated Ponge's work and many

of the philosophers, writers, and poets that fill its pages locate Ponge as a seminal *enfant terrible* of poetry.

Niilo Kauppi, in *The Making of an Avant-Garde: Tel Quel* (1994), expertly maps out the intricate friendships, conflicts, and falling-outs between members of the *Tel Quel* group and other French intelligentsia. For example, the other notable writer of objects in France, Robbe-Grillet, writes very critically about Ponge in an article in *la Nouvelle Revue Française*.¹³ Ponge strikes back, writing in a letter that “Robbe-Grillet, a big zero; I like a certain degree of simplicity, but earned, not that kind (which is only simplicity by default); really an imposture,” and in another letter: “As for Robbe-Grillet, he’s a real bastard” (qtd. in Kauppi 30). Another figure from the *Tel Quel* group who is notably influenced by Ponge is Philippe Sollers. Sollers had attended Ponge’s lectures in the 1950s and wrote a book about him called *Francis Ponge* (1963) and later collected a series of interviews with Ponge entitled *Entretiens de Francis Ponge avec Philippe Sollers* (1970). Sollers primarily focuses on Ponge’s language and, as Patrick Meadows argues, conceives of this language as “lacking referentiality” (18). Derrida closely follows Sollers in focusing on Ponge as being what I would call “language-oriented” rather than “object-oriented.”

In *Psyche: Inventions of the Other, I* (1987), Derrida interprets Ponge’s short eight-line poem “Fable” and locates it as containing the “inventions of the same and the other, of oneself as (of) other” (8-9). For Derrida, in relation to Ponge’s work, “it is the other, the thing as other, that signs” (54), and this signatory of the other permits Derrida to theorize a “science of the *alea*” (116), or a “science of chance” or contingency in relation to Ponge. Both the signature and the other become contingent forces that retroactively mark the text as a text, suggesting that for

¹³ See: “Nature, humanisme, tragédie” (1958).

Derrida, as for Giorgio Agamben in *The Signature of All Things* (2008), the signature is stretched “between the need to become a thing, the common name of the thing, or the name of a generality” and “a capital letter unsoiled by the common” (64). The *alea* or the contingent in Ponge can be considered as the chance of an object bearing Ponge’s name—Derrida begins to trace Ponge throughout the French language as if Ponge’s name could be added to Saussure’s list of deistic names from the paragram notebooks— and this aleatoric echo of “Francis Ponge” leads Derrida to insist that French is a “Francisponged language” (120).

In order to consider Ponge’s name as an object, Derrida considers the formulation “Francis-Ponge” (54) as a thing on par with a mollusk, seashell, tree, or any of the other objects Ponge considers in his poetry. Later, after further distinguishing Ponge’s name as a thing or an object, Derrida insists that, “Francis is Ponge” (68). Despite Derrida’s language-oriented approach to Ponge, there remain moments when a consideration—or the potential consideration—of a brute object shines through, as when Derrida acknowledges that “[b]etween the pine forest and Francis Ponge [...] there is not, perhaps, as great a difference as I have pretended to put there” (6). At the conclusion of *Signéponge*, Derrida invokes what could be called—although he would likely resist the term—a “real object”: “About Francis Ponge himself and about his work I have therefore said nothing, in order to consider only this colossal erection, already in process but also still to come, of a TABLE” (144). However, this “TABLE” is not a real, material table, but a table that functions as the surface of an arche-writing; a countertop of signifiers that function akin to a mystic writing pad upon which Derrida and Ponge presumably etch out their independent writings.

The primary critical approach to thinking about Ponge privileges the apparent incorporeal surface of signifiers that fill Ponge's poems.¹⁴ Derrida tellingly flirts with a consideration of language as material when he suggests that the revolutionary appeal of Ponge's work could be extended to other writers as an entreaty: "write things that, finally, are things, worthy of going without your signature" (34). The potentially interesting details of how one can *write things that are things* is avoided by Derrida in favour of a further meditation on Ponge's name. I resist this approach and prefer to think of Ponge in a manner that resonates with Ponge's own claims about his poetry. In an interview with Serge Gavronsky, Ponge claims:

My means of expression is language, and words the way they are, with their existence and their history, their semantical representation. And it is in order to revitalize language that I place myself before something neutral, which is not yet poetical in itself, and has not yet been "sentimentalized." I try, in the verbal world, to do something which has as much concrete existence as the objects that I describe. ("From" 680)

¹⁴ There has been a tremendous amount of work done on Ponge and this chapter does privilege the famous readings of Derrida, Sollers, and Sartre. However, I would like to highlight Blossom Margaret Douthat's "Francis Ponge's Untenable Goat" (1958), which emphasizes the multiple manifestations of Ponge's goat in the poem "La Chèvre," in which the goat "capers right out of its ghostly existence to become by turns a footstool, a legendary princess, an old bachelor, the image of the human condition, and the poem itself" (172); Shirley Jordon's excellent feminist analysis of Ponge that situates his poetry as patriarchal ("The Construction of the Female in the Texts of Francis Ponge" [1999]); Robert Greene's "Francis Ponge, Metapoet" (1970); Rachelle Unger Sherman develops a non-Sartrean and non-phenomenological consideration of Ponge's objects that does not emphasize his work as "language-based" in "Francis Ponge: *Mimesis* versus *Poiesis* (1978); Charles Nunley situates Ponge in relation to the symbolist tradition (1993); Renée Riese Hubert looks at similarities between Ponge's work and postmodernism (1988); Steven Winspur's look at notions of homeland in Ponge and Guillevic (2004); Dianne Sears looks at Ponge's conflation of "prose" and "poem" in his book *Proèmes* in her essay (1999); John Stout's "The Text as Object" (1993); Steven Connor's "Thinking things" (2010); and the entire special issue of *Books Abroad* 48.4 (1974) that focused on Ponge.

Even though the *Tel Quel* and poststructural reading of Ponge is preferred by Ponge, I instead agree—perhaps heretically—with Sartre who writes an article entitled “A propos du *Parti pris des choses*” in *Poésie* in 1944 (later republished as “L’homme et les choses” in *Situations I* [1947]), in which he asserts: “Ponge poète ... a jeté les bases d’une Phénoménologie de la Nature” (qtd. in Greene 666), which I translate as: “Ponge the poet ... laid the foundations for a Phenomenology of Nature.” While perhaps this claim is too strong for someone as protean as Ponge, I do feel that the things and objects that fill Ponge’s poetry remain unique because they are word-things. This haptic semiological interpretation of Ponge essentially combines or collides—non-decisionally or otherwise—two approaches to Ponge’s work: Sartre’s phenomenological or early “object-oriented” reading from 1944 (which is often considered a “misreading” of Ponge) and the language-oriented approach of the *Tel Quel* group and Derrida from the 1960s.¹⁵ I have situated Ponge in relation to “canonical” poststructural criticisms of his work in order to offer an object-oriented reading.

A Pongean word-thing is an example of a collapsed semiotic network in which the once vertical hierarchy of sign-referent is eclipsed in favour of a post-Kantian noumenon *that talks*. In “The Cycle of the Seasons,” for example, trees are given voice:

Tired of having restrained themselves all winter, the trees suddenly take themselves for fools. They can stand it no longer: they let loose their words—a flood, a vomiting of green. They try to bring off a complete leafing of words. Oh well, too bad! It’ll arrange itself any old way! In fact, it does arrange itself! No freedom whatever in leafing.... They fling out all kinds of words, or so they think; fling out stems to hold still more words. “Our trunks,” they say, “are there to

¹⁵ See: Greene 665.

shoulder it all.” They try to hide, to get lost among each other. They think they can say everything, blanket the world with assorted words: but all they are saying is “trees.” (*Voice* 40, original ellipsis)

Ponge is a poet of biosemiosis: words are not contained in traditional schema of anthropocentric correlationism, but are liberated from the correlation or sign-referent verticality in order to become and present an inherent code contained in nature itself.

When Ponge writes “Seashores” he begins to theorize a network of languages at work in coastal spaces:

But only one short word is confided to the pebbles and to the shells which appear fairly stirred by it, and the wave expires while uttering it. And all the waves to follow will also expire while uttering the same word, though at times spoken ever so slightly louder. Each wave, arriving one over the other at the orchestra, raises its collar, bares its head and states its name wherever sent. A thousand homonymic peers are thus presented on the same day in labial offerings by the prolix and prolific sea to each of her shores. (*Voice* 48)

The waves *speak* to the pebbles and shells—and the shells no doubt respond—with “labial offerings.” Nature is, for Ponge, a mouth with various vocalizations resonating in glottals and fricatives. Ponge reads the objects in nature as one would read a newly released bestseller: “Not by the blind dagger of rocks, nor by the most penetrating storm flipping reams of pages at once” (*Voice* 49), he writes in “Seashores.” There are notably no designated readers or authors in this book of Nature—only a proliferation of objectal text in every direction. The narratives may be contained within this text, but one narrative is only one among many possible narratives because Nature is an every-changing and ever-speaking object.

In “Notes Toward a Shell,” Ponge describes his aesthetic preferences: “In this sense I most admire a few restrained writers and musicians—Bach, Rameau, Malherbe, Horace, Mallarmé—and writers most of all, because their monument is made of the genuine secretion common to the human mollusk, the thing most proportioned and suited to his body, yet as utterly different from his form as can be imagined: I mean WORDS” (*Voice* 60-61). Ponge chooses to capitalize “WORDS.” Ponge refers here to an earlier poem called “The Mollusk” in which he writes: “In this way and with this force, the tiniest cell in man’s body clings to words—and vice versa” (*Voice* 41). Ponge echoes a sentiment also found in the writings of Jakob von Uexküll, such as when Uexküll insists that “[a]nimals as well as plants build themselves living houses in their bodies with the help of which they carry on their existence” (146). Ponge’s shell is similar to what Uexküll calls the “dwelling-shell” (146). Biosemiosis studies the various sign systems that code systems and environments: a human being is like a mollusk because s/he lives in a larger environment (or *Umwelt*) that is no less a shell. In “On Truth and Lies in a Nonmoral Sense,” Nietzsche understands “man” as “a mighty genius of construction,” and

his construction must be like one constructed of spiders’ webs: delicate enough to be carried along by the waves, strong enough not to be blown apart by every wind. As a genius of construction man raises himself far above the bee in the following way: whereas the bee builds with wax that he gathers from nature, man builds with the far more delicate conceptual material which he first has to manufacture from himself. (85)

Uexküll and Ponge would call this “delicate conceptual material” language. Uexküll insists that “[e]very subject spins out, like the spider’s threads, its relations to certain qualities of things and weaves them into a solid web, which carries its existence” (53).

For Ponge and Uexküll, anthropocentric words would be the excretions of the human body, but this claim does not deprive the various objects that fill Ponge's oeuvre of their own singular language. Each object speaks in its "mother tongue," with a unique dialect and colloquialisms, inscribing its discourse into air, or upon dirt, or onto water. The surface of the page gives way to the various natural surfaces of inscription as "words" are written and recorded into the very substance of things—language is understood within and upon a body, haptically.

What Laliberte explores with urban spaces and comic book bricks, Ponge accomplishes with "natural" objects. However, for both poets, each object (brick or mollusk shell) is vital and animate—Laliberte's bricks and Ponge's trees, waves, and pebbles are all infused with a language that is spoken both *by* these objects and *as* these objects simultaneously. If language emerges from Nature, then there is no object within Nature that is devoid of language *qua* language—"it" has now begun to speak, but this speaking is Harmanian more than Lacanian.

In this chapter, each instance of a "poetic word-thing"—as seen in Laliberte, Ponge, Berrigan, L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E Poetry, and conceptual writing—demonstrates how these word-things are experiments with *surface*. What German Idealists call *Vorstellungen* ("representations") or *Erscheinungen* ("appearances") are the names given to the screen that separates the cognizing Mind from noumena. The screen itself presents as surface: every word-thing considered in this chapter raises issues of the surface versus depth of appearances and what ontically withdraws when word-things are in "use." This claim could be equally applied to any language whatsoever: the surface appearance of words remains the same, but the theorization of the relation between word and object or the theorization of language *qua* language changes. If traditional semiotics is the dominant discourse considered, then words are conceived in one way and under haptic semiology, words are conceived differently—the surface does not change and

yet the word's "being" is changed. Put another way, *haptic* semiology demands a different approach to the word, through its conception, in order to register changes in the word's being. Indeed, the approach itself necessitates (works dialectically with and is part of a dynamical relation that constitutes the language-referent correlation through alternative lenses), which in turn dictates an overall alteration of conceptions of "being" and language and their corollaries of being-language and linguistic being.

Haptic semiological word-things function as lateral assemblages in which a fractal proliferation of signifier and referent interpenetrate over various segmented meanings. Essentially, this haptic semiology addresses, through a philosophy of language, a theoretical folding of time and space. An "assemblage"—which could loosely be defined as being *more than one*—is nonetheless a coalescence of a variety of ones that commune to become a new one or totality.

The analytic philosopher Graham Priest deals with the paradox of the One and the multiple in his book *One* (2014): "Similarly if we use plural pronouns and quantification we are referring to multiple objects. If something is, it is one, a unity; and if some things are, they are ones, unities. The machinery of plural reference does indeed enable one to refer to a plurality of objects, but each is one. So to be is still to be one" (51). However, whenever you have too many ones to count (like grains of sand on a beach or quarks), then that One becomes signified by a fold. I adopt the concept of the "fold" from Deleuze (who theorizes the fold in response to Foucault and later, Leibniz) and, for the purposes of haptic semiology, I see the fold as a concept that encapsulates—materially and mathematically—liminality.¹⁶ The fold is linked, for me, to

¹⁶ Deleuze argues that *the fold* is the central philosophical concept that Foucault contributes to the history of epistemology, beginning with the *History of Madness* (1961). In *Foucault* (1986),

my later theorization of flesh (in Chapter Four), but here, I consider the fold as a concept that depicts the untraceability of the boundaries of binaries (such as the signifier/referent dyad), so that dyadic constructs fold in on their co-present terms. A word-thing is one of the names of a folded signifier/referent dyad, which in turn folds that model's tradition of real/representation (as found in correlational philosophies).

In other words, certain signifiers have specific properties of reference and slippages of signification can also accommodate slippages of reference so that instead of a word such as "cat" designating one signified of a cat and a real object at some point in spacetime, there exist many different signifiers for "cat"—including "chat," "Katse," "Maow," "kitte," "koshka,"—and these signifiers each accompany various signifieds (signifieds locked within an anthropocentric correlation), and also a variety of referents (such as the various cat breeds of Siamese, American shorthair, Himalayan, Burmese, Ragdoll, Sphynx). Furthermore, there is also a wide variety of imaginary cats (fictional cats, cat superheroes, Felix the Cat, Catwoman). There is no concept of "cat" that can encompass the broad proliferation of "cat-being" across the sign.

How then does a word-thing differentiate from a Saussurean sign (in this instance)? Here, a word-thing names the theoretical assemblage of the All-Cat (or All-object) totalized within a

Deleuze writes: "The outside is not a fixed limit but a moving matter animated by peristaltic movements, folds and foldings that together make up an inside: they are not something other than the outside, but precisely the inside of the outside" (96-97). In *History of Madness*, Foucault theorizes the folding of Inside and Outside at various points: Foucault sees the fold as a model of language in which the "language of madness was reborn, but as a lyrical explosion: the discovery that in man, the interior was also the exterior, that the extremity of subjectivity blended into the immediate fascination of the object, and that any ending was the promise of an obstinate return" (518). In *Foucault*, Deleuze writes that "[s]ubjectivation is created by folding" (104). Deleuze later deploys the concept of the fold in relation to his theory of the Baroque and Leibniz in *The Fold* (1988): "the Fold is always between two folds, and because the between-two-folds seems to move about everywhere: Is it between inorganic bodies and organisms, between organisms and animal souls, between animal souls and reasonable souls, between bodies and souls in general?" (13).

unification of conceptual Oneness. A word-thing conglomerates every designation (and materiality) that addresses one particular genus or species in its full existence or manifestation (this point is described in greater detail in the final chapter).

Geomancy and Colour in Haptic Semiology

Jaz Parkinson's ongoing *Colour Signatures* project re-writes a variety of texts as coloured graphs. Every time a colour is mentioned or alluded to in a text, Parkinson tallies that colour and graphs the finished product. Consider below her piece for L. Frank Baum's *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* (1900):

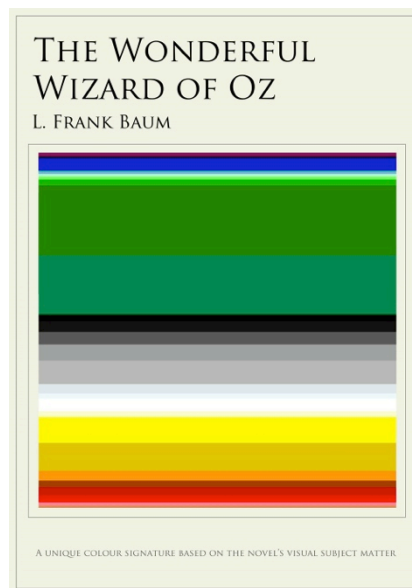


Fig. 3. Parkinson, “The Wonderful Wizard of Oz,” n.p.

Parkinson's work demonstrates an alternative approach to reading: the colour spectrum suggests an emerald city with a large swathe of green and Dorothy's journey along the yellow brick road (seen on the lower half of the graph). Parkinson's project recalls Arthur Rimbaud's instructions for the colouring of vowels in “Voyelles”: “A black, E white, I red, U green, O blue: vowels” (141). The first edition of Christian Bök's *Eunoia* (2001) features a cover image, “Of Yellow,”

that is similarly fascinated with graphing a text in that Bök polychromatically transcribes Rimbaud's poem so that "[v]owels have been replaced with blocks of colour according to the schema described in the sonnet itself [...] All other letters, commas and spaces are grey" (n.p.).

Evoking a theoretical synaesthesia in relation to sound symbolism, Roman Jakobson—echoing Saussure's fanciful work on the paragram—became invested in determining the colours associated with certain vowel sounds, such as in "Linguistics and Poetics" (1960), when he writes: "we ask whether /i/ or /u/ is darker, some of the subjects may respond that this question makes no sense to them, but hardly one will state that /i/ is the darkest of the two" (qtd. in Siraki 2). In his article about Jakobson's fixation, Arby Siraki points out that "Jakobson, like Socrates over 2000 years ago in *Cratylus*, is asserting that the values he has attributed to vowels are in fact universal, since, if indeed languages have dark and light vowels which are *naturally* occurring, they must be the same (or at least similar) in all languages" (3-4). Such instances in the history of linguistics—that I would call the nascent mysticisms of Saussure and Jakobson—point to an uncanny, perhaps subterranean level of language that remains apart from linear conceptions of language. Alternative, nonlinear concepts in the history of linguistics—such as the paragram or the coloured vowel—suggest a "depth" of linguistic complexity that requires imaginative leaps.

An important source for the history of colour is Goethe's *Theory of Colours* (1810), a founding text that eventually leads to Michael Taussig's "What Color Is the Sacred?" (2006) (expanded into a book in 2009), in which Taussig reframes the history of colour through the lens of a bodily unconscious (*What* 31), in order to theorize colour as a "polymorphous magical substance" (47). In relation to Burroughs's cut-ups, Taussig points out that "those colors that pour from tar are nothing less than words, words used to liberate words" (37). For Taussig, the

polymorphous magical substance known as colour can manifest in countless places, occasionally cohering as the feathery white substance that fills shamans or even, in other places, as words.

Parkinson's graph of Cormac McCarthy's *The Road* (2006)—like her rendering of Baum's children's story—evokes the content of the novel in that the bleakness of McCarthy's postapocalyptic text is presented through an overabundance of blacks and greys:

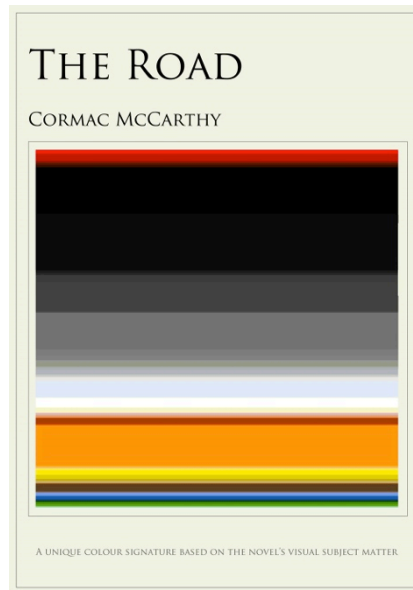


Fig. 4. Parkinson, “The Road,” n.p.

The top of the graph seems to convey the apocalypse that McCarthy briefly mentions when he writes: “The clocks stopped at 1:17. A long shear of light and then a series of low concussions” (52). After these detonations in the distance there remains a “dull rose glow in the windowglass” (52), perhaps suggested by the top of Parkinson's polychromatic image. After a limited number of eruptions, an ecpyrosis purges the earth and the remaining humans must fend for themselves in the resultant desolate waste.

Parkinson's work is an example of what Franco Moretti calls for in *Graphs, Maps, Trees* (2005) when he argues that the disciplines of English and comparative literature must stop

“reading” and begin “graphing” and “mapping” texts.¹⁷ Parkinson reveals the colourful unconscious of textuality and moves what is once imaginary into the visual and scopic regions: the colours she exposes in her graphs are already present within each text—she situates these colours within a medium that privileges human vision. In the context of haptic semiology, I claim that these colours are no more or less real in Parkinson’s work than in the original source texts. The word “yellow” is as objectally yellow as the visual representation of yellow in Parkinson’s “The Wonderful Wizard of Oz” piece.

I am not arguing, however, for a neoplatonic conception of *eidos*—I am not saying that yellow exists in an eternal state as an inalterable substance. I am far too much of a poststructuralist (and nihilist) for such a claim; instead, I claim that “yellow” contains within it a complex assemblage of discourses (correlationist and alien), so that a yellow-object is yellow to a human-observer and also “yellow” according to a human-speaker, but may simultaneously trigger any number of xeno-semiotic associations in an alien consciousness or to a different animal or according to a nearby seemingly insentient object. Therefore, there is no universal, platonic Idea of *yellow*, but instead a fractal proliferation of various regimes of concepts, objects, and signs.

Like Harman who attempts to reformulate the so-called “bogeyman” of infinite regress (“Speculative Realism” 385), (while later defending infinite regress [“Speculative Realism” 400-401]), the theory of objects that I am discussing is one in which there is an infinite regress (or progress) of smaller objects, associations, sign regimes, and networks. However, in this fractal

¹⁷ Moretti calls for what he calls a “more rational literary history” (4) understood through his concept of “distant reading” where “distance is however not an obstacle, but a *specific form of knowledge*: fewer elements, hence a sharper sense of their overall interconnection. Shapes, relations, structures. Forms. Models” (2, original emphasis).

model I remain Latourian in that I support irreductionism and also Harman's rejection of undermining or overmining philosophical procedures (*Quadruple Object* 7-19).¹⁸ At the anthropocentric and correlationist level there may be a finite amount of regression, but at various different and other levels of magnification (the cosmic or the molecular for example—levels seemingly unaffected by human correlationism), objects may signify in any number of unpredictable and untold, internally consistent ways.

Natalie Czech's project is similar to Parkinson's in that she uses language and literature as a field to harvest—this approach aligns her with conceptual writing, whether or not she may adopt such an allegiance. Czech's recent work has unearthed a variety of poems "hidden" within the contemporary bluster of magazine articles, newspaper editorials, advertisements, and elsewhere. Czech harvests highbrow works of canonical poetic masterpieces from seemingly lowbrow capitalist texts in order to show that, within a virtual field of language, a textual unconscious resides.

Czech unearths Robert Creeley's "Night Time" in an article entitled "Eclipse at Sunrise." Creeley's original reads:

When the light leaves

and sky's black,

no nothing

to look at,

day's done.

That's it. (qtd. in Czech 27)

¹⁸ See: Part Two of Latour's *The Pasteurization of France*.

Czech unearths “Night Time” in the following article:



Fig. 5. Czech, “A hidden poem by Robert Creeley,” 29¹⁹

By discovering this poem in a magazine article that deals with eclipses, Czech situates Creeley’s project within a geophilosophical and geomantic paradigm. Czech *excavates* Creeley’s poem from the textual geology of another writing. At one level, Creeley’s “original” poem refers to and is semiotically aligned with this future magazine article because both pieces form one total unit and manifest as an inseparable assemblage. Intentionality should not be linked with Creeley or Czech (even though she actively digs, cuts, erases, and exposes), but with language itself. Czech’s work suggests that anthropocentric theorizations of intentionality do not capture the breadth of linguistic production: I am not saying that a Barthesian critique of authorial intention or Foucauldian critique of the author function is at work here; instead, I am arguing that

¹⁹ *A hidden poem by Robert Creeley*, 2010

C-Print,

120 x 86 cm

Courtesy Kadel Willborn, Düsseldorf / Captain Petzel, Berlin and the artist

Copyright: VG Bild-Kunst.

language itself, in some ways, *intends* (although without an anthropocentrically defined notion of “will”), its own paragrammic presentations. This claim is linked to a systems-theoretical and fractal understanding of language as a combinant and recombinant structure so that—put differently—sometimes an infinite number of monkeys typing on an infinite number of typewriters over an infinite amount of time will, accidentally or not, produce certain canonical texts (or the paragrammic diffusion of canonical texts).

Czech’s work evokes Saussure’s theory of the paragram as an underlying law of language. The paragram is neither an intentional encoding nor a hidden repository of deistic names; instead, paragrammic texts are the chance-based side effects of language’s internal permutational structure. Czech’s work demonstrates an uncanny level of linguistic chance occurrences: occasionally canonical poetry paragrammically assembles itself within contemporary media and emerges here and there (in magazines, newspaper articles, and other media) as *embedded*—very nearly cryptographic—messages. What I mean by “chance occurrence” is more closely related to the nonlinear structures of chaos theory, or even more specifically to what Fernando Zalamea calls “*archeal*” forms: these are deep structural forms or invariants that work across different theories throughout contemporary mathematics (Zalamea 239-265). Following Zalamea, I claim that there are also “invariants” in linguistic and phenomenological structures as well: for the purposes of language, I argue that the paragram names the linguistic equivalent of the mathematical *archeal*.

The paragrams that Czech disinters are examples of what I call the “virtuality” of word-things: prior to being actualized (as bricks by Laliberte or “whammed” into place on Berrigan’s typewriter), word-things exist within an invisible world of unlimited semiosis—a biosemiotic

ecosystem if you will—within which words are harvested and assembled according to rules of grammar, punctuation, and syntax.

Czech unearths e.e. cummings’s “73 Poems” in the following magazine article:

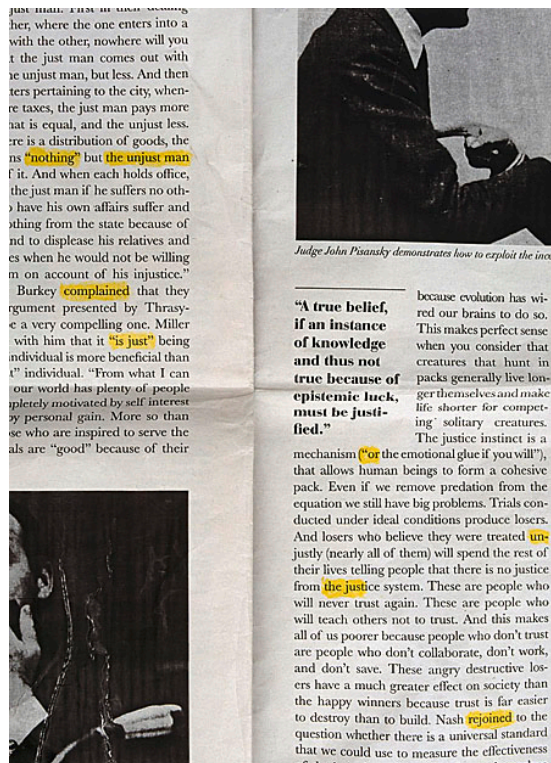


Fig. 6. Czech, “A hidden poem by E.E. Cummings #3,” 57.²⁰

cummings’s original reads: “‘nothing’ the unjust man complained / ‘is just’ (‘or un-’ the just rejoined” (qtd. in Czech 55). Czech is a geologist of language: a theorist of the plate tectonics of written media. She uncovers poetic units from the glut of surrounding words. Her geological approach to textual excavation demonstrates the full field of virtual composition that exists around any fully actualized poem—any written or spoken phrase. Whenever we open *Esquire*,

²⁰ *A hidden poem by E. E. Cummings #3*, 2010

C-Print,

64 x 46,5 cm

Courtesy Kadel Willborn, Düsseldorf / Captain Petzel, Berlin and the artist

Copyright: VG Bild-Kunst.

Cosmopolitan, *TIME* magazine, *Harper's*, or *The New York Times*, who can say how many poetic masterpieces remain paragrammically embedded? Poetry is everywhere hidden within the semiotic landscape as signifiers dangling and tempting us to see past the surface artifice towards the virtual striations hidden underneath.

Czech's work is, however, not entirely new: the seeds of her work can be traced to Ronald Johnson's *Radi os* (1977), Tom Phillips's *A Humument* (initiated in 1970 and ongoing), and the erasure poem more generally. In *Radi os*, Johnson reads through Milton's *Paradise Lost* (1667) and proceeds to erase the majority of the text in order to "discover" or "unearth" a different poem hidden hypogrammically (or underneath) the surface text. In *Newspaper Blackout* (2010), Austin Kleon deploys the erasure poem by taking a permanent marker to newspapers and produces poetry from the remaining words. For constraint-based writing, the difficulty of the constraint increases the aesthetic value of the revealed text.

Following this schema, then, Czech's project is of greater difficulty than Johnson's, Phillips's, Kleon's, or the tradition of the erasure poem more generally. Czech does not erase as a directly productive act: she is not creating a text out of a previous one; instead, Czech is mining through existent texts in order to locate a *known object*. Czech is less like a poet and more like an archaeologist because she seeks out a Cummings poem or a Creeley poem, whereas Johnson and the tradition of the erasure poem create emergent texts that are only tangentially related to their source or earlier layer. Czech's work is therefore more acrobatic. How does she know where to find these poems? What is her process?²¹

The importance of Czech and Johnson's experimental praxis and the erasure poem more generally is that the erasure poem genre implicitly theorizes language: language is situated as a

²¹ I e-mailed Natalie Czech and asked her this question, but she never replied to my query.

virtual field of interpenetrative signs that fractalize, permute, and reassemble while occasionally cohering according to the totalitarian “wham” of a poet’s finger tapping onto a typewriter or keypad. This tapping takes the virtual bricks of language and places those bricks firmly into place much like Laliberte’s title suggests, brick by brick by brick. Every texture is, to that end, an *architexture* that is woven according to the intricate and complex (inter)play of virtual and actual word-things that interact with and respond to the whims (and whams) of so-called real objects or “poets.” Texts are therefore palimpsest-emergences built out of a chaotic and paragrammic field that cohere as bricks of varying type (material, real, and imaginary), and are held in place by the mortar of linguistic law.

The conceptual or poetic examples considered in this chapter require a new theoretical approach because they each indirectly challenge the language-referent correlation. Generally speaking, haptic semiology challenges the language-referent correlation and attempts to *let language speak for itself*: the primary challenge to “thinking outside of the correlation” is that, as Meillassoux points out, “[w]e do not know of any correlation that would be given elsewhere than in human beings, and we cannot get out of our own skins to discover whether it might be possible for such a disincarnation of the correlation to be true” (11). Rather than incarnate language through an imaginary anti-correlationism, *Word-Things* proposes a *disincarnation* of the correlation *via language*. If it is indeed impossible to escape the correlation, then the only escape from correlationism would be a philosophy or literary theory written by robots, machines, creatures, monsters, aliens, animals, ghosts, and other nonhumans. While there has been a literature written by machines and online bots (such as RACTER and the *Apostrophe* computer program designed by Darren Wershler-Henry and Bill Kennedy), and some experimental texts

“written” by Sulawesi Crested Macaques (and published by humans), ghosts, monsters, creatures, and aliens have yet to produce works (that are published by anthropocentric publishing houses).²²

²² See: Kennedy and Wershler-Henry (2006). The Sulawesi Crested Macaques Elmo, Gum, Heather, Holly, Mistletoe, and Rowan wrote their *Notes Towards the Complete Works of Shakespeare* (2002) at the behest of the Paignton Zoo Environmental Park in the UK.

Chapter Three: “Sword Words”: Fictional Word-Things and Parasite Zombies

Word-things will be understood definitionally in this chapter as flat ontological entities that feature fuzzy properties so that signifier and referent are unified in a flattened conceptual space: this definition will be clarified in relation to the morphogenetic and logogenetic evolution of Kafka’s Odradek, the depthlessness of objects in the *nouveau roman*, the superorganismic speech habits of Tony Burgess’s zombies, and Burroughs’s fractal linguistics. While these examples may seem “randomly assembled” (as random as a handful of objects picked up at a landfill), they each feature a grounding principle: each example features *words that resist* (in the same way that Latour claims that “the real is what resists” [*Pasteurization* 174]). These words resist traditional semiotic or literary critical schemas. The words that proliferate in each textual case study from this chapter feature a resistance to correlational reading practices in order to manifest as non-correlational word-objects that feature uncanny textual “surfaces.”

In fiction, objects emerge out of a field of words and exhibit surprising properties: one of the most notable examples of this kind of word-thing is the strange object known as “Odradek” from Kafka’s “The Cares of a Family Man” (1919).¹ As a textual object, Odradek is similar to a

¹ Like many of the texts I analyze in Chapter Two and Three, there has been a lot of scholarship written on Kafka. There has, however, been much less written about Odradek. However, some articles and texts warrant mention. I will first highlight some scholarly works in German: Heinz Hillmann (1967), Dietger Bansberg (1974) both focus on existential readings of Kafka; Jürgen Born (2005) looks at Odradek as an illustration of the Freudian uncanny; Jörg Kühne (1975) and Kurt Weinberg (1963) look at the religious implications of Odradek; Wolf Kittler reads Odradek as a radio device (1990), pp. 158-160; Astrid Lange-Kirchheim (1995) reads Odradek through a feminist-psychoanalytical lens; and Verena Ehrich-Haefeli (1990) considers the etymological underpinnings of the word “Odradek.” In terms of the English scholarship I would like to highlight: J.M.S. Pasley’s (1964) consideration of Odradek as metaphor; Arndt Niebisch considers Odradek as a parasite (2012), 178; and Arnold Heidsieck’s “Kafka’s Narrative

Rorschach test for critics: scholars tend to see their respective theoretical affiliations in Kafka's character (and my reading of Odradek is no exception). Deleuze and Guattari see Odradek as an "abstract machine," a machine that acts "[t]ranscendent and reified, seized by symbolical or allegorical exegeses" (*Kafka* 86) and, in this way, Odradek is also indeed a word-thing that mechanically extends outwards to activate a variety of exegetical and hermeneutical assemblages. For Deleuze and Guattari, the abstract machine "measures the mode of existence and the reality of the assemblages," while also manifesting as "the body of desire" (*Kafka* 87)—Odradek is a meaning-machine in that its ontological contours remain so blurry that Odradek acts as a theoretical excess to a definitive claim of being.

In *Vibrant Matter* (2010), Jane Bennett points to this ontological blurriness when she speculates that "perhaps Odradek is more a subject than an object—an organic creature, a little person? But if so, his/her/its embodiment seems rather unnatural" (7-8), and it is, "[f]or this reason [that] Kafka's narrator has trouble assigning Odradek to an ontological category. Is Odradek a cultural artifact, a tool of some sort? Perhaps, but if so, its purpose is obscure" (7).² Walter Benjamin, for example, reads Odradek as a manifestation of guilt, claiming that "[t]he strangest bastard which the prehistoric world has begotten with guilt in Kafka is Odradek" (*Illuminations* 132); for Judith Butler, "Odradek, whose name admits of no clear etymology, is another son-like figure who vacates his human form in the face of parental judgment" (*Giving* 61); Miguel Vatter sees Odradek as a fetish object, as "a bare life" (53); and, for Žižek, Odradek

Ontology" (1987) that looks at the influence of Alexius Meinong's theory of objects on Kafka's writing (a topic that will return in Chapter Six). As well, the influence of Kafka's character leads to its incorporation in the title of Oulipian writer Harry Mathews's novel *The Sinking of the Odradek Stadium* (1975).

² A longer version of Bennett's Odradek analysis in *Vibrant Matter* appears in her article "The Force of Things" (2004).

“displays all the features of a human being; although he is human, however, he does not resemble a human being, but clearly appears as *inhuman*” (*The Parallax View* 117). However, for each of these thinkers, Odradek manifests differently—it is truly an abstract machine (to deploy a Deleuzoguattarian term), but if it is an abstract machine, then it is a machine grounded as a word-thing. I would like to break this story down into its own internal, morphogenetic principles.

Kafka begins the story by claiming: “Some say the word Odradek is of Slavonic origin, and try to account for it on that basis. Others again believe it to be of German origin, only influenced by Slavonic. The uncertainty of both interpretations allows one to assume with justice that neither is accurate, especially as neither of them provides an intelligent meaning of the word” (160). Kafka tellingly begins with a *word*.³ Instead of beginning with a description of the object itself—of this Odradek—he begins by ascribing significance to this invented word that precedes the appearance of the actual object. “Odradek” is a word-thing that has no definitive cause or origin except via a vague allusion to the “Slavonic” languages. As such, “Odradek” is a word as well as a name that is outside of traditional language: it is outside of not only phenomenology (the object itself is quite strange), but also semantics because at the beginning of the story the word lacks a (cor)related object.

By beginning the story with the name, Kafka privileges the signifier *over* the object: the actual description of Odradek emerges from the name—the name in this sense is the causal force that gives birth to Odradek. “No one, of course, would occupy himself with such studies if there were not a creature called Odradek” (160), Kafka insists. However, in the world of this short

³ In his dissertation on Kleist and Kafka (2005), William Quirk asserts that: “There is no thing, nor any thing-being Odradek, in the text, but rather a *process* of textual articulation of Odradek” (144). I likewise consider Odradek as a being or thing that emerges out of language.

story, the word precedes any possibility of being and, as Lacan repeatedly argues, subjects are born *into* language; in the instance of Odradek, this object is likewise born into language or into its name.⁴ Butler points out that “[n]either Adorno nor Benjamin takes the psychoanalytic route in explaining this dehumanized form” (*Giving* 61), but Žižek does. The knee-jerk psychoanalytical reading of Odradek locates Odradek within the nuclear (Oedipal) family (the family of the father, who is the story’s narrator).

This psychoanalytical approach to Kafka’s story arguably begins with Benjamin who writes that “Odradek is the form which things assume in oblivion. They are distorted. The ‘cares of a family man,’ which no one can identify, are distorted” (*Illuminations* 133). Odradek manifests in this reading as a sort of excess of the family; or, even as a grotesque “son” for the father, (as Butler argues: “That ‘creature’ or ‘thing’—which resembles a spool of thread but seems also to be the son of the narrator, barely balances on two points, and rolls and rolls down the stairs in perpetuity” [*Giving* 105]). Adorno likewise sees Odradek as a creature that expresses

⁴ Lacan famously argues in an interview in *L’Express* (from 1957), that “the man who is born into existence deals first with language; this is a given. He is even caught in it before his birth.” The original French reads: “En d’autres termes, l’homme qui naît à l’existence a d’abord affaire au langage; c’est une donnée. Il y est même pris dès avant sa naissance, n’a-t-il pas un état civil? Oui, l’enfant à naître est déjà, de bout en bout, cerné dans ce hamac de langage qui le reçoit et en même temps l’emprisonne.” The French version can be found on the *L’Express* website here: http://www.lexpress.fr/actualite/societe/sante/les-clefs-de-la-psychanalyse_499017.html. The English version of this text reads in the following way: “the man who is born into existence deals first with language; this is a given. He is even caught in it before his birth. Doesn’t he have a civil status? Yes, the child who is to be born is already, from head to toe, caught in this language hammock that receives him and at the same time imprisons him.” The English version can be found here: http://braungardt.trialectics.com/sciences/psychoanalysis/jacques-lacan/interview-jacques-lacan/#THE_HAMMOCK. This sentiment is prevalent throughout Lacan’s oeuvre in various forms; however, in *Écrits* it can be found here where Lacan writes that: “‘A pole of attributes’ is what the subject is before he is born (and perhaps it is under their mass that he will suffocate once born). ‘Of attributes,’ that is, of signifiers more or less linked in a discourse” (547); and here, where Lacan writes that “[a]s an effect of language, in that he is born of this early split, the subject translates a signifying synchrony into the primordial temporal pulsation that is the constitutive fading of his identification” (708-709).

concern for the father of the house, insisting that Odradek is “the secret key, indeed the most indubitable promise of hope, precisely through the overcoming of the house itself” (qtd. in Vatter 54). Odradek-as-son is a strange, inhuman excess of the house that registers the mortality of the father in the face of Odradek’s own immortality, or, as Butler writes: “the perpetuity of Odradek evoke[s] the sense of *nachleben*, or living on” (*Giving* 141, n. 17).⁵

Žižek’s psychoanalytical approach and interpretation also focuses, like Adorno’s, on the nuclear family: “Odradek is, in effect, *the shame of the father of the family*” (120) and “Odradek is the father’s *sinthome*, the ‘knot’ onto which the father’s *jouissance* is stuck” (121). Therefore, for Žižek, Odradek is an image of libidinal castration—indeed, Odradek is therefore the undead embodiment of libido, or, as Žižek writes: “Odradek is simply what Lacan [...] developed as the *lamella*, the libido as an organ, the inhuman-human ‘undead’ organ without a body” (117-118). However, while Žižek’s analysis cleverly combines the *lamella* with Odradek, I think his analysis—and Adorno, Benjamin, and Butler’s—each place too much emphasis on the “Family Man” or the “*Hausvater*” from Kafka’s title. Žižek goes so far as to question: “Is Odradek not the reminder/remainder of the father’s failure to accomplish his work of imposing the Law (of “castration”)?” (122), but again, Odradek—as an object, or as a subject, or as an excessive “son”—disappears, engulfed within the character of the fatherly narrator.

I prefer Bennett’s approach that focuses on Odradek’s ontological status: “Wooden yet lively, verbal yet vegetal, alive yet inert, Odradek is ontologically multiple,” Bennett writes.

⁵ Butler has also presented two interesting lectures or seminars on Odradek at the European Graduate School (from the same day in 2011). See: “The Figure of Odradek in Kafka” (in which Butler sees Odradek as a Judeo-Christian amalgam because of its star-shape and crossbar and she also reads Odradek as a queer object that exists outside the confines of the reproductive regimes of the nuclear family) and in “Odradek and Capitalism,” Butler essentially expands on a phrase from *Giving an Account of Oneself* where she recounts that “Adorno understands this character from Kafka as conditioned by a certain commodity fetishism” (105).

“He/it is a vital materiality and exhibits what Gilles Deleuze has described as the persistent ‘hint of the animate in plants, and of the vegetable in animals’” (Bennett, *Vibrant Matter* 8). My analysis will focus on the collision between the phenomenal, the ontological, and the linguistic; in other words, I will emphasize Odradek’s status as a word-thing.

After beginning with the word “Odradek,” Kafka provisionally describes what Odradek is:

At first glance it looks like a flat star-shaped spool for thread, and indeed it does seem to have thread wound upon it; to be sure, they are only old, broken-off bits of thread, knotted and tangled together, of the most varied sorts and colors. But it is not only a spool, for a small wooden crossbar sticks out of the middle of the star, and another small rod is joined to that at a right angle. By means of this latter rod on one side and one of the points of the star on the other, the whole thing can stand upright as if on two legs. (160)

An Odradek seems to have a star, some spool and thread, a crossbar, and it can stand: Odradek seems to be a toy (this is assuming the “Family Man” descriptor from the title). Kafka points out that “[o]ne is tempted to believe that the creature once had some sort of intelligible shape and is now only a broken-down remnant” (160). Odradek is, for this reason, a fragment—something aged and broken—an echo of a history that is as withdrawn as its object-status. However, in the very next line Kafka reverses his previous position:

Yet this does not seem to be the case; at least there is no sign of it; nowhere is there an unfinished or unbroken surface to suggest anything of the kind; the whole thing looks senseless enough, but in its own way perfectly finished. In any case,

closer scrutiny is impossible, since Odradek is extraordinarily nimble and can never be laid hold of. (160)

Suddenly, Odradek is made vital in that it cannot be captured by the “Family Man.” Odradek can move around and seems to reject direct analysis; in this instance, Odradek is very much a “dynamic presence” (Powell 129). Like a poststructural chain of signification, Odradek withdraws and unravels along a spool of associations and words—an abstract machine lurking at a hermeneutic distance.

The Family Man claims that Odradek:

lurks by turns in the garret, the stairway, the lobbies, the entrance hall. Often for months on end he is not to be seen; then he has presumably moved into other houses; but he always comes faithfully back to our house again. Many a time when you go out of the door and he happens just to be leaning directly beneath you against the banisters you feel inclined to speak to him. (160-161)

Odradek is no longer a mere toy: it adopts frightening properties because it can leave the house at will and return without warning. An Odradek is like the bizarre creature dressed in a scarf and boots in Edward Gorey’s *The Doubtful Guest* (1957) who one day appears on the front stoop of a family’s house, is let in, and never leaves. The family in Gorey’s story never ask the creature to leave and, likewise, the narrator of Kafka’s story seems constrained by social etiquette when speaking to Odradek:

Of course, you put no difficult questions to him, you treat him—he is so diminutive that you cannot help it—rather like a child. “Well, what’s your name?” you ask him. “Odradek,” he says. “And where do you live?” “No fixed abode,” he

says and laughs; but it is only the kind of laughter that has no lungs behind it.

(161)

Kafka's writings as a whole, I claim, are concerned with unwelcome guests that live in houses and act as the family's unconscious: Gregor Samsa in "The Metamorphosis" (1915) proceeds to live with his family as a giant bug and Odradek lives in a house with a family while maintaining "no fixed abode." According to Lawrence Kramer (2004), "[w]e think we live among Platonic forms when all we really have are Odradeks" (287). As Žižek points out, via Jean-Claude Milner, "Milner deciphers 'odradek' as the anagram of the Greek *dōdekaedron*, a volume of twelve faces, each of them a pentagon" (117). Therefore, Odradek emerges—initially from a word—as an object that can potentially be geometricized (Platonically or Odradekically).

Against this geometrical reading, Adorno sees Odradek as "the other face of the world of things," insisting that Odradek is "a sign of distortion" while also manifesting as "a motif of transcendence," because Odradek represents "the ultimate limit and [...] the reconciliation of the organic and the inorganic" (qtd. in Vatter 53). Bennett takes a similar approach in that she—like me—sees Odradek as an abstract machine of pure becoming: "Odradek exposes this continuity of watery life and rocks; he/it brings to the fore the becoming of things" (8). In Kafka, objects manifest as uncanny reminders of internal familial tensions (but this tension need not require an Oedipal approach).

However, the importance of Odradek is that it is one of the prime examples of a word-thing. Consider the morphogenetic or logogenetic emergence (or evolution) of Odradek over the events of the story: Odradek begins linguistically as a name or a word; then Odradek develops phenomenal properties and becomes an embodied object that looks like a strange children's toy; finally, Odradek develops its own speech and vitality as it becomes a certain type of subject. The

transition proceeds from *word to object to subject*. This tripartite structure could easily fit a psychoanalytical framework, such that Odradek is born into language, but Odradek is also a sort of real (real-as-real and real-as-concept) that becomes animated: Odradek then moves into an imaginary order in which its phenomenal embodiment is described and, finally, Odradek transitions into the symbolic order through a kind of alien mirror stage and becomes its own speaking subject. Kafka's story demonstrates the slippage that occurs between each of these seemingly autonomous stages of development in that an Odradek is a taxonomically specific word that permits the emergence of a thing: effectively, Kafka reverses the traditional directionality of the signifier-referent dyad. The word does not develop from the object, but the object from the word and then, in the last instance, the object is impossibly inseparable from the word. From the tradition of Odradek other word-things of fiction emerge and each contain objectal qualities that are strange, haunting, and uncanny.⁶

An Ontographical Analysis of Robbe-Grillet's *Nouveau roman*

In object-oriented ontology, thinkers like Harman, Bryant, and Bogost devote space in their essays to the listing of qualities of objects (or to the listing of objects themselves). Harman develops this strategy of analysis from his intellectual forebears that include Alphonso Lingis and Bruno Latour: Harman and Bogost will eventually coin a term for the ontological strategies

⁶ While these other "word-things of fiction" are notable, they are not the focus of this dissertation. Therefore, if the reader wishes to trace this canon of object-driven fiction, then I recommend the work of Ben Marcus, particularly his collection of short stories *The Age of Wire and String* (1995), and Daniel Canty's *Wigrum* (2011). However, this tradition can be supplemented with several stories by Borges such as "The Disk" or Elizabeth Bishop's map, and the tradition of ekphrastic poetry more generally.

of these myriad lists that they call *ontography* or a “Latour litany.”⁷ Latour lists all the components of a particular actor-network: “sunspots, thalwegs, antibodies, carbon spectra; fish, trimmed hedges, desert scenery; ‘le petit pan de mur jaune,’ mountain landscapes in India ink, a forest of transepts; lions that the night turns into men, mother goddesses in ivory, totems of ebony” (*Pasteurization* 205); Harman lists all the components of an object: “individual horses, centaurs, trees, and coins” (*On the Undermining* 29); Bogost lists all the qualities of a specific unit: “The scoria cone and the green chile” which “partake of systems of plate tectonics, enchiladas, tourism, or digestion” (*Alien* 7). In each of these lists, no object or thing-in-itself emerges (as in the case with Odradek). The words do not summarize these objects, nor do they accumulate; instead, the words are placed, side-by-side, in a republic of signs.

A different approach to the proclaimed goal of ontography can, I claim, be found in fiction. In Alain Robbe-Grillet’s *Nouveau roman* (or “new novel”) of the 1960s, he manages to de-emphasize plot, character, and emotion and instead centralize setting and the objects that make up the setting.⁸ The plot seems to be “elsewhere” while the “narrator” acts like a bored

⁷ There are many examples of such lists in the work of these thinkers. Here is one example that I like from Latour’s “A Few Steps Toward an Anthropology of the Iconoclastic Gesture”: “Allah, djinns, angels, Mary, Gaia, gluons, retroviruses, rock, television, laws, and so on” (79). Harman calls these lists a “carnival of things” (*Guerilla Metaphysics* 253-256), and Bogost has called these lists “Latour litanies” in *Alien Phenomenology* (45-58). Since coining the term, Bogost has created an online generator that uses Wikipedia pages to create a “Latour litany.” Bogost calls his generator the *Latour Litanizer*: http://bogost.com/blog/latour_litanizer/. On his *Larval Subjects* weblog, Levi Bryant discusses Bogost’s *Latour Litanizer*:

<https://larvalsubjects.wordpress.com/2010/04/26/latour-litanizer/> (accessed 3 November 2015).

⁸ There has been a lot of work done on Robbe-Grillet and I would like to highlight some of the important critical sources: Raylene Ramsay’s *Robbe-Grillet and Modernity* (1992), focuses on the subversive qualities of his prose; Bruce Morrisette’s *Intertextual Assemblage in Robbe-Grillet from Topology to the Golden Triangle* (1979) considers the variety of painterly sources that inflect his work; John Fletcher’s *Alain Robbe-Grillet* (1983) is an excellent introduction to Robbe-Grillet’s life and writing; and Marjorie Hellerstein’s *Inventing the Real World* (1998) expertly traces Robbe-Grillet’s use of mimesis and phenomenology. I would like to highlight

camera or all-seeing eye that wanders through rooms and occasionally settles upon a discussion (or human interaction), but then grows bored and wanders off to inspect a centipede squashed on a wall or the curve of a pillar.⁹ In *Jealousy* (1957) for example, Robbe-Grillet writes that the

details of this stain [of a dead centipede] have to be seen from quite close range, turning toward the pantry door, if its origin is to be distinguished. The image of the squashed centipede then appears not as a whole, but composed of fragments distinct enough to leave no doubt. Several pieces of the body or its appendages are outlined without any blurring, and remain reproduced with the fidelity of an anatomical drawing: one of the antennae, two curved mandibles, the head and the first joint, half of the second, three large legs. Then come the other parts, less precise: sections of legs and the partial form of a body convulsed into a question mark. (62)

Ben Stoltzfus's excellent work on Robbe-Grillet: his essay on Robbe-Grillet, chaos theory, and autopoiesis (2005); his essay on reflexivity in Robbe-Grillet (1976); his essay on Robbe-Grillet and Lacan (1989); his essay on Robbe-Grillet and surrealism (1963); and his essay on objective subjectivity in Robbe-Grillet (1962). Ben Stoltzfus's book *Alain Robbe-Grillet: The Body of the Text* (1985) emphasizes a Freudian and alchemical approach on Robbe-Grillet's work (in relation to other writers). Beyond Stoltzfus's tremendous contribution to Robbe-Grillet scholarship I would like to highlight Raylene O'Callaghan's work on science in Robbe-Grillet (1987); Richard Creese's article on Graham Greene and Robbe-Grillet (1987); Zahi Zalloua's analysis of realism and Robbe-Grillet (2008); Hazel Barnes's article that considers deanthromorphization in Robbe-Grillet (1962); Jean Alter's essay on Robbe-Grillet and the cinematic (1964); John Clayton's consideration of sadomasochism in Robbe-Grillet (1977); and Jean Ricardou's article on mirrors in Robbe-Grillet (1977). Finally, Roch Smith's *Understanding Alain Robbe-Grillet* (2000) presents an excellent overview of Robbe-Grillet's work. The history of the "New Novel" in France is tightly linked with the *Tel Quel* group (Kauppi 69). Robbe-Grillet also acts as a mentor to many of the other writers of the New Novel. Robbe-Grillet goes so far as to assert that "Il est évident que je suis le père de Philippe Sollers" or "obviously I am the father of Philippe Sollers" (qtd. in Kauppi 35).

⁹ While it may be easier to focus on objects in Robbe-Grillet, Lillian Dunmars Roland reads *Jealousy* as a text that is intrinsically human in that she focuses on the relationship between A and Franck (53-58). See her *Women in Robbe-Grillet* (1993) for more of the human aspect of Robbe-Grillet's writing.

Robbe-Grillet's "textual ontograph" is different from other forms of narrative description because the narrative context has shifted from a normatively configured plot—with narrator, story arcs, and so on—and has transitioned into a language that is distanced from anthropocentric subjectivity: the language of a narrative ontograph emphasizes the disembodied and non-subjective qualities of the "narrator"—as distinct from an omniscient narrator—and instead registers as a strangely embodied language fascinated with a world of objects.

Object-oriented ontology describes objects in a way that typically assumes some depth; Robbe-Grillet, on the other hand, features objects at the centre of the novel, but his objects contain no real depth (or interiority). Robbe-Grillet, as a writer, is obsessed with surfaces. However, these surfaces are in no way superficial because objects exist by virtue of their surfaces.

In his essay "Objective Literature" (1954), Barthes begins, like Kafka in "Cares of a Family Man," with the "the function of language" which is "a progression of names over a surface, a patient unfolding that will gradually 'paint' the object, caress it, and along its whole extent deposit a patina of tentative identifications, no single term of which could stand by itself for the presented object" (12). Words do not represent an object here, but they caress and unfold upon that object's surface in a manner akin to Heidegger's concept of *alētheia*: as he argues in *The Question Concerning Technology* (1954) and "Plato's Doctrine of Truth" (1947), *alētheia*—typically translated as "truth"—should be understood as "unconcealment." For Heidegger, "*eidōs*, in the common speech, meant the outward aspect [*Ansicht*] that a visible thing offers to the physical eye" (*Question 20*). This eidetic "outward aspect" unfolds upon surfaces and is perceived by an observing subject according to the revelatory function of *alētheia*. According to Heidegger: "'Unhiddenness' [or *alētheia*] means here the unhidden as it can steadily be

approached through the apparentness (*Scheinsamkeit*) of the idea” (“Plato’s” 262). In a sense, Barthes theorizes language in Heideggerian terms: instead of the revealing of the outward appearances of an idea, the outward appearances of the signifier designate the phenomenological apprehension of the object.

Words are, following this Barthesian-Heideggerian model of *alētheia*, dissimilar from their objects: they are imbedded atop and alongside them. An object is then *something* that is painted with words and signifiers. Barthes insists that

Robbe-Grillet’s object is never drawn in three dimensions, in depth: it never conceals a secret, vulnerable heart beneath its shell (and in our society is not the writer traditionally the man who penetrates beneath the surface to the heart of the matter?). But for Robbe-Grillet the object has no being beyond *phenomenon*: it is not ambiguous, not allegorical, not even opaque, for opacity somehow implies a corresponding transparency, a dualism in nature. (“Objective” 13)

Robbe-Grillet’s writing resists an object-oriented analysis in that for object-oriented thinkers an object is never exhausted and its depths remain hidden. Robbe-Grillet’s theory of the semiotic object is consumptive: he is a writer who, like Kronos consuming the stone he thought was Zeus, assimilates objects *into* the novel.

According to Barthes, Robbe-Grillet

establishes the existence of an object so that once its appearance has been described it will be quite drained, consumed, used up. And if the author then lays it aside, it is not out of any respect for rhetorical proportion, but because the object has no further resistance than that of its surfaces, and once these are

exploited language must withdraw from an engagement that can only be alien to the object. (“Objective”13)

Barthes insists that Robbe-Grillet’s experiment is “to keep man from participating in or even witnessing the *fabrication* or the *becoming* of objects, and ultimately to exile the world to the life of its own surface” (“Objective” 24). Robbe-Grillet is no object-oriented writer, or even a Deleuzean one: objects do not become; they simply are. Robbe-Grillet’s objects are material, but not vital: there is no Harmanian occasionalist or panpsychical force of animation; there is no Bergsonian *élan vital* acting like the metempsychotic heartbeat of a rock. Robbe-Grillet is no Romantic because his work is “a cross-examination from which all lyric impulses are rigorously excluded” and, furthermore, Robbe-Grillet is against a “delirium of the depths” (Barthes, “Objective” 24, 25). If Robbe-Grillet’s approach is against such a Romantic delirium, then Barthes sees Robbe-Grillet as a writer who seeks “the assassination of the object” (“Objective” 16).

Why should I include Robbe-Grillet when theorizing word-things and haptic semiology? I consider Robbe-Grillet’s theory of objects as one that begins with the word-as-object in a similar manner as when Kafka begins his Odradek story by considering the signifier’s inherent objectality. In Robbe-Grillet’s “A Future for the Novel” (1956), he writes that

the world is neither significant nor absurd. It *is*, quite simply. That, in any case, is the most remarkable thing about it. And suddenly the obviousness of this strikes us with irresistible force. All at once the whole splendid construction collapses; opening our eyes unexpectedly, we have experienced, once too often, the shock of this stubborn reality we were pretending to have mastered. Around us, defying the noisy pack of our animistic or protective adjectives, things *are there*. Their

surfaces are distinct and smooth, *intact*, neither suspiciously brilliant nor transparent. All our literature has not yet succeeded in eroding their smallest corner, in flattening their slightest curve. (19)

Deploying a Baudrillardian citational style, derek beaulieu [*sic*] posted a blog post in which he “cited” this moment from Robbe-Grillet as:

words are neither significant nor experimental. They are, quite simply. That, in any case, is the most remarkable thing about them. And suddenly the obviousness of this strikes us with irresistible force. All at once the whole splendid construction collapses; opening our eyes unexpectedly, we have experienced, once too often, the shock of this stubborn reality we were pretending to have mastered. Around us, words are there. Their surfaces are distinct and smooth, intact, neither suspiciously brilliant nor transparent. All our literature has not yet succeeded in eroding their smallest corner, in flattening their slightest curve.

(“Abstract Language” n.p.)

beaulieu’s rewrite is apt for Robbe-Grillet’s oeuvre. *Words* do have surfaces that are “distinct and smooth, intact” and reject transparency and if the object can be assimilated and “assassinated” in his novels, then it is *words rather than objects* that have an object-oriented status. Words cannot be exhausted and words have their ontological status withdraw while in use. Perhaps the reason why academics insist on the immateriality of words is because the materiality of words—and their inherent ontology—withdraws while in use and, because human beings are sign-using creatures, *words are always in use*. Like the goldfish swimming in the fishbowl who cannot see the water, perhaps we cannot see the language we live in and we cannot provide it its own objecthood, which, following Kafka’s logic, will eventually lead to its own selfhood.

Linguistic Zombies and Language's Agency: Robert Kirk and Tony Burgess

If my interpretation of Kafka is correct and a word-thing progresses through the morphogenetic and logogenetic development from signifier to object to subject, then language is prospectively agential at the outset of all instances of communication. However, what if, following a dystopic paranoia, language has already achieved selfhood and is no longer a nominational structure, but rather an invasive parasite? If this were the case, then every speaking subject would be a host or a zombie. The philosopher Robert Kirk has theorized “zombies” in “The Inaugural Address,” Kirk discusses “[*m*]y *zombie twin*,” pointing out that, “[*p*]hilosophical zombies are exactly like us in all physical respects, right down to the tiniest details, but they have no conscious experiences. My zombie twin not only looks, behaves, and is disposed to behave just like me, he is a perfect particle-for-particle replica. Naturally he gets treated as if he were conscious” (1, original emphasis); however, Kirk’s zombies are different from us in one very important way—they are “insentient” (“Sentience” 56).

Kirk’s philosophical zombies share much in common with traditional zombies of the zombie film genre, while remaining distinct from the original notion of the zombi found in African and Caribbean vodou ritual.¹⁰ In popular culture, zombie films tend to depict symptoms of sociocultural or economic experiences in which monsters are metaphors: zombies in particular are symptomatic of an experience of commodity fetishism and consumption in capitalist society. The narratives of the zombie genre tend either never to address the cause of the sudden zombie

¹⁰ Some excellent ethnographic and anthropological sources on the Voodoo (or Vodou) origins of the zombie (or zombi) myth can be found in: Métraux (1959); Davis (1985); Littlewood (2009); Murrell (2010); Ackermann and Gauthier (1991); and Dernbach (2005).

apocalypse or invent convoluted explanations such as radioactive contamination from a space probe returning from Venus as in *Night of the Living Dead* (1968). Typically, though, the “cause” of zombie attacks is contagion, infection, or some kind of virus that cannot be addressed by allopathic medicine. The inspiration for Romero’s *Night of the Living Dead* developed from his reading of Richard Matheson’s *I Am Legend* (1954) in which a disease spreads across the planet and infects everyone with vampirism. The contagion need not always produce zombies: in the David Cronenberg films *Rabid* (1976), *Shivers* (1975) and *Videodrome* (1983), an infectious contagion overtakes society and begins to affect and alter normative depictions of the body. In any case, the zombie is a metaphor of capitalist fears of consumption and a lack of subjective substance in modernity: George Romero’s sequel to *Night of the Living Dead*, *Dawn of the Dead* (1978) takes place in a shopping mall in which the zombies wander around looking very much like Wal-Mart shoppers.

In Tony Burgess’s novel *Pontypool Changes Everything* (1995), the zombie apocalypse is *caused by language*.¹¹ Language enters subjects like a marauding and parasitic force and conditions certain speech responses—such as repetition and a bizarre penchant for rhymes and homonyms—and these speech acts in turn eventually transform the speaking subject into a zombie. The linguistic virus itself is something that some characters in Burgess’s novel can

¹¹ There has been no serious scholarship done on *Pontypool Changes Everything* (apart from Jonathan Ball’s introduction to *The Bewdley Mayhem*). The one article that deals with Bruce McDonald’s film is by Jason James Wallin (2012), which shares little with my own argument. However, there are several useful sources for situating the theme of viral infection in the zombie genre (both novel and film): Richard A. Barney and Helene Scheck carefully analyze the rhetorical effects of plague literature (2010); Stephen Dougherty analyzes the plague through biopolitics (2001); Allan Cameron nicely summarizes the history of the zombie genre in film (2012); Joost van Loon reads virology through the lens of assemblage theory (2002); and Heather Schell historicizes virus narratives through the lens of cultural anxieties about an inevitable pandemic that will annihilate much of the human species (1997). Further bibliographic details are available for each of these texts in the works cited list at the end of this dissertation.

actually see: the word as virus wanders over the land like a hallucinatory, paragrammic fog.

Burgess is building on a textual lineage that develops from William S. Burroughs and also Ishmael Reed's experimental novel *Mumbo Jumbo* (1972). In *Mumbo Jumbo*, an invasive virus known as "Jes Grew" travels around America. "Jes Grew" manifests as a distinctly linguistic infection: "What do you think that this Jes Grew is up to? It's up to its Text. For some, it's a disease, a plague, but in fact it is an anti-plague. You will recall, Black Herman, that in the past there were germs that avoided words" (33). "Jes Grew" is the name of a word-virus that has resulted in many of the most important cultural and aesthetic movements of the twentieth century: "The Blues is a Jes Grew [...] Jazz was a Jes Grew which followed the Jes Grew of Ragtime. Slang is a Jes Grew too" (214). No one in the novel knows how "Jes Grew" is contracted—it seems that the "virus" *just grew* and now cannot be contained—but, if the reader is curious, s/he is instructed to "[a]sk Louis Armstrong, Bessie Smith, your poets, your painters, your musicians, ask them how to catch it" (152). By the novel's end, "the Book" that contains "Jes Grew" is burned, and, after this burning "Jes Grew sensed the ashes of its writings, its litany and just withered up and died. Better luck next time" (203). But this biblioclasm is not the end of "Jes Grew" because "Jes Grew has no end and no beginning [...] We will miss it for a while but it will come back, and when it returns we will see that it never left" (204). The Jes Grew contagion is not explicitly a language pandemic (as is the case with Burgess's novel), but Reed's Jes Grew contagion is to some extent representative of an essential quality of human beings themselves. Jes Grew is not a linguistico-ontological contagion (like the pandemic in *Pontypool Changes Everything*), but rather a directly ontological contagion that is occasionally linguistic: Jes Grew is arguably an indescribable and essential aspect of human consciousness—an anterior quality of human sentience that cannot be adequately captured in language itself. Jes Grew is

therefore an “infection” that “speaks to” something essential in human beings that *cannot be spoken*: it is “the Blues” or an intrinsic attraction towards rhythm, dance, and aesthetic presentation. However, it is, at the same time, something *exterior* to humans—a virus that infects; it is not automatically inscribed into human consciousness, but emerges through human actions and interactions.

In the André Alexis short story “Horse” from the collection *Despair*, the protagonist is turned into a zombie by “Dr. Pascal,” a doctor who manages this transformation via language: “A little experiment, he [Dr. Pascal] said. Here’s what we’ll do He took out from his pocket a roll of narrow masking tape, and on my brow he taped the letters: **FIGLZ**” (154). Dr. Pascal effectively creates a zombie who gradually loses his sense of language, self, and memory. “I no longer ‘saw’ through my eyes, but I could still ‘see,’ and I got on well without my senses” (157), the narrator claims. In other words, the first-person protagonist becomes a Kirkian insentient zombie. In this example from Alexis, it is language that inaugurates the appearance of the zombie: to a certain extent, following the aesthetic content of Romero’s zombie films, language initiates the emergence of zombies. In the context of capitalism, the signs and language of advertisements or commodity culture infect the consumer and re-constitute that subject as a “consumer subject”—a being swayed only by the exigencies of the commodity fetish.

In “Vèvè” from Wayde Compton’s poetry collection *Performance Bond* (2004), he writes of a conversation that takes place between ANALOGUE and DIGITAL. ANALOGUE explains that “a vèvè is part of a Voodoo ritual in Haiti. The person doing the ceremony takes a handful of something and draws an image on the ground or on the floor of the temple” (117). The vèvè is a religious mark in Voodoo—visually similar to Chinese ideograms or Egyptian hieroglyphs (as DIGITAL claims [119])—that has the ability to conjure a loa (or god): “the vèvè has the power

to actually invoke him. It's magic. It's more than language, it's sorcery" (118), as ANALOGUE says. The semiotic capability of the *vèvè* is made manifest through its appearance as "ephemeral language that can drift away in the wind or be eaten by birds," and this language "would be able to say things we can't think of" (121). The paradox here is that there is a writing of which nothing can be written: a writing that symbolizes content that is exterior to traditional forms and modes of meaning-production. This form of writing exists outside of more normative conceptualizations of language: it is, for this very reason, a limit-experience of language and, at this semantic (or more frequently) non-semantic limit, traditional configurations of the sign become complex and undecidable—or, in other words, word and thing flatten and are rendered indecipherable.

The recent Ben Marcus novel *The Flame Alphabet* (2012) should also be read in this tradition of a virulent language infection: the main characters Sam and Claire are being slowly killed by their daughter Esther's infectious speech—the speech of all children in the novel creates a "speech fever" (4) in adults that "slushes" (4) away their insides:

She [Esther] scribbled and wrote it and then read it aloud. She found it in books and in the mail and she made it up in her head. It was soaked into the cursive script she perfected at school, letters ballooning with heart-dotted *i*'s. Vowels defaced into animal drawings. Each piece of the alphabet that she wrote looked like a fat molecule engorged on air, ready to burst. (11)

Claire and Sam respond to their infected child's speech as the other parents in the novel: "The sickness washed over us when we saw it, when we heard it, when we thought of it later. We feasted on the putrid material because our daughter made it. We gorged on it and inside us it steamed, rotted, turned rank" (11). The children of *The Flame Alphabet* behave similarly to

Burgess's various language-zombies that wander around, spreading the infection.

Burgess claims that the zombie infection in his novel is “a metaphor for metaphors that keep hunting you long after they've been meaningful ... figures of speech that become predatory long after their ... meaning as figures of speech has left the stage” (qtd. in Ball xviii). In Jonathan Ball's introduction to the Burgess collection *The Bewdley Mayhem* (2014), he writes that

What is left after the zombies have communicated something about the human predicament, its potential for failure, is their presence in a horror story. Like any good metaphor, they exceed the thing they stand in for, persisting bodily beyond its death, which is why zombies are so malleable as metaphors in the first place.

The language they once commanded has ceased to mean, but not to animate them.
(xviii)

The small boy Jimmy watches “with horror, seeing this vivid viral highway shooting through the air and slinging infection into his father's wild mouth” (Burgess, *Pontypool* 144), and while listening to his sister, Julie, Jimmy “watches for germs squishing at the corners of her mouth, or viral clouds near her cheeks. He doesn't know exactly what he's looking for, except he thinks with certainty that at some level these tiny invaders must wear pointy leather shoes. White pumps” (186). The detective Peterson feels the onset of the word-virus when he “lowers the phone and feels a wind across his face. Bits of words catch in the sunlight across the top of the stove like barbs off a wire. He swings the receiver through them and they part in eddies around his wrist. He brings the phone back up to his ear” (48). The infection progresses by way of a linguistic hallucination reminiscent of Hannah Weiner's poetic process (to be discussed in Chapter Five). Language becomes directly objectal as a system that moves across an

environment and infects human beings. “There is another system, more beaded than weather or murder, that is moving up into the province” Burgess writes, as:

a thousand zombies form an alliterative fog around Lake Scugog and beyond, mouthing the words *Helen, hello, help*. This fog predominates the region; however, other systems compete, bursting and winding with vowels braiding into diphthongs so long that they dissipate across a thousand panting lips. In the suburbs of Barrie, for instance, an alliteration that began with the wail of a cat in heat picked up the consonant “Guh” from a fisherman caught by surprise on Lake Simcoe. The echoing coves of the lake added a sort of meter, and by the time these sounds arrived in Gravenhurst, the people there were certain that a musical was blaring from speakers in the woods. All across the province, zombies, like extras in a crowd scene, imitate a thousand conversations. They open and close their mouths on things and the sound is a heavy carpet of mumbling, a pre-production monstrosity. In minutes the Pontypool fog will march on the town of Sunderland and over the barriers south of Lindsay. (*Pontypool* 92-93)

I would now like to act like a poor, bedraggled medical doctor in one of the various overfilled emergency rooms that fill the zombie genre (someone like Dr. William Block in Robert Rodriguez’s film *Planet Terror* [2007], Dr. Benway in Burroughs, or even Dr. Mendez in Burgess), in order to consider a plausible differential diagnosis for Burgess’s novel.

A Zombie-infused Differential Diagnosis

Throughout Burgess’s chaotic novel, there are moments in which a seemingly omniscient narrator describes the novel’s underlying conceit. I will consider these moments alongside a

telling radio interview between the characters Grant Mazzy and the “medical expert” Dr. Rauf.

Burgess’s cosmogony speculates that prior to D.N.A., an arche-virus predates the planet.¹² For Burgess, the arche-virus is language and its own inherent patterns of self-replication and self-reflexivity provide a model for D.N.A. Burgess is enacting a biological Lacanianism during this moment, suggesting that all life—even that of the cellular, or presumably the molecular—begins within a virtual web of language and *learns* to replicate and reproduce from this arche-virus. However, the arche-virus—like various extremophiles that can survive in harsh conditions and remain dormant for millions of years—waits, inert, for the right moment when its emergence as a worldwide zombie pandemic is ideal. Burgess’s narrator argues that:

The virus had hid silently for decades up in the roofs of adjectives, its little paws growing sensitive, first to the modifications performed there; then, sensing

¹² Two books are of especial interest here: Jacques Monod and François Jacob were each biologists who wrote popular books on the philosophy of biology. Monod’s *Chance and Necessity* (1970) and Jacob’s *The Logic of Life* (1970) were each influential books for French thinkers such as Deleuze, Guattari, and Baudrillard (among many others). Monod and Jacob offer various philosophical models that help articulate the ways in which cellular life features self-organizing (and cybernetic) principles. In *The Logic of Life*, Jacob develops an ontology of the virus cell: “A virus, therefore, does not multiply by growth and division like a cell, but by the independent production of its constituents [...] It [a virus] is therefore subject to evolution by natural selection. But conversely, it can carry out its genetic programme and reproduce only in an environment that can already perform metabolic operations [...] in other words, in a cell. A virus cannot, therefore, be considered as an organism. Outside the cell, the virus particle is but an inert object. Only the cell-virus system has all the properties of life. Viral infection is the rupture of cellular order as a result of invasion by a foreign chemical message” (280). While Jacob describes the self-organizing qualities of cellular life, Monod emphasizes the morphogenetic emergence of different scales between the microscopic and the macroscopic (which influences Deleuze and Guattari’s theorization of the molecular and the molar as well as the relation between an organ, an organism, and its organization): “the construction of a tissue or the differentiation of an organ—macroscopic phenomena—must be viewed as integrated results of multiple microscopic interactions due to proteins, and as deriving from the stereospecific recognition properties belonging to those proteins, by way of the *spontaneous* forming of non-covalent complexes” (88). Both Monod and Jacob offer useful biosemiotic models through which the language of D.N.A. drastically influences and forges the presentation of life.

something more concrete pulling at a distance, the virus jumped into paradigms. It was unable to reach the interior workings of the paradigm, however, due to its own disappearance near the core. The viruses bit wildly at the exterior shimmer of the paradigms, jamming selection with pointed double fangs. A terrible squealing ripped beneath the surface of the paradigms as they were destroyed. The shattered structure automatically redistributed its contents along syntagma, smuggling vertical mobiles across horizontal ropes. (*Pontypool* 137-138)

Linguistic paradigms consist of a set of linguistic units, typically a syntagm and a determiner, such as “a table” or “her table.” The arche-virus in Burgess’s novel, which he calls “Acquired Metastructural Pediculosis” or “AMP” (139), begins by affecting paradigms so that “a chair” becomes “a her chair” as the virus causes a sort of linguistic aphasia.

The chapter “Biopsy” describes the progression of AMP: “The plague first manifests itself in the infected person as a type of déjà vu, with an accompanying aphasia. Everything that happened presented itself as already happened. This infinitely complicated things” (138). The disease affects temporality, collapsing past and future into the present so that tenses get confused—gradually, the paradigms are affected and the zombie-patient begins to stammer and repeat phrases in a homonymical aphasia. If Gertrude Stein’s prose style were a virus that you could “acquire,” then Burgess’s arche-virus is how that disease would manifest. Burgess’s narrator informs us that:

The disease developed in terrifying stages. First, the patient panicked and then sat stunned, silent, in a kind of exile. The person would eventually slip into a depression and exhibit ghastly physical symptoms. Typically the tongue would hang out, becoming dry and swollen, stiffening against the chin. This usually

marked the end of the person's exile from the living. The advanced stages of the disease involved, astonishingly, revenge. (*Pontypool* 138-139)

Defining Burgess's "omniscient narrator" is made more complicated when we learn that Greg is reading about AMP in a comic book and the seemingly informed diagnostic discourse of the illness is contained within a comic book narrative. This narrative frame undermines the reliability of the allopathic description; however, medical discourse, while being situated as unreliable when presented in the context of a comic book, is the only source available for information about the zombie arche-virus. The omniscient narrator (from the allopathic comic book) informs Greg that:

In the second stage of the disease victims display symptoms similar to those of aphasiacs. Their ability to use language erodes. This disease, however, is not an organic one. Nor is it a disorder of the personality. Once infected, the victim *produces* the virus in the language he or she struggles with. The mature virus is a sort of hard copy of this production. The latter part of the second stage resembles Tourette Syndrome. (147)

The only other source of information about the virus is provided, again via allopathic discourse, by Dr. Rauf who is interviewed by Grant Mazzy. This interview is important for my argument about word-things because it is the primary moment when issues of objectality and vitality are discussed in the novel. Grant asks Dr. Rauf: "OK. So we hear a lot about what this virus is not. And in fact, once we run through all the negatives, it appears that the thing doesn't exist at all. So how is it that people are testing positive?" to which Rauf replies: "Well, one of the first things to understand about this virus is that its existence is incomprehensible because it exists contrary to

the way our rational minds comprehend. And because the virus is situated, quite physically, anterior to the process of comprehension itself” (154).

Mazzy, however, is dissatisfied with Dr. Rauf’s answer and he probes the doctor further: “OK. If you had to answer quickly, what would you say? Where is this virus?” to which Rauf suggests:

Simple. It gestates in the deep structures prior to language. Or, at least, simultaneous with language. In the very primal structure that organizes us as differentiated, discontinuous copies of each other. The virus probably enters, in fact, among paradigmatic arrangements. And then, almost instantly, the virus appears in a concept of itself. This causes all sorts of havoc. A common effect being the sensation that the present moment is a copy of itself. It’s been misnamed *déjà vu*. Other early symptoms occur when the act of selecting a word becomes jammed. This process finds paradigms attempting to reinvent themselves as syntagma, and this manifests in the patient as fairly common aphasia. (155)

The arche-virus is originary in nature in that it gestates in the “deep structures” prior to or coterminous with language. Arguably, Burgess is theorizing a fundamental structure of both language and ontology here: the self-referentiality of AMP describes the structure of sentient systems. If self-referential uses of language allow subjects to speak about themselves as themselves—as *belonging* somehow to themselves—then the arche-virus is the structure of a feedback loop that allows for such inf(1)ected speech. If I take Kirk’s definition of philosophical zombies and apply it to Burgess’s notion of AMP, then I would suggest that sentient beings are autopoietically structured through various feedback loops of language (resulting in a “normal subject”), while sentient language is autopoietically structured through various feedback loops of

being (resulting in a “zombie”). On the one hand, when language is used to reinforce subjectivity structurally, the result is sentience, while on the other, when Being is used to structurally reinforce language, the result is Kirkian insentience or a Burgessian zombie.

An example of this evolution is explicitly shown in Detective Peterson’s infection with the arche-virus. After Peterson crashes his car in a ditch

a virus that Detective Peterson has carried for some time began a full relationship with its host. As he exits the car and drags his ass backwards up onto the icy shoulder, he does so as a man with a disease. The first thing he says, as a man with a disease, is also his first symptom: “How is the part I get for?” (32)

The disease rapidly progresses and Peterson’s description is the most thorough that Burgess provides in the following long, but important excerpt:

Peterson is thinking about the difficulty he has had all afternoon. *I can’t seem to speak properly. An understatement. I don’t feel any different. I can think clearly. At least I think I can.* He’s right. There is nothing detectably wrong with his thoughts; however, he has struggled all afternoon with a strange inability to control the words he uses. At the car-rental outlet the young attendee didn’t want to give him a vehicle. Peterson limited himself to single-word prompts: car, rent. But even these simple words betrayed him. He could find them but couldn’t repeat them easily – car, cove, tummy [...] Peterson lays his hands on the dash and says, “Dash.” He grips the steering wheel with both hands and says, “Messy car.” *Messy car? Messy car?* He looks at the steering wheel. The image of a car is on the horn bar. A sort of medallion of the rental place. *Messy car? Is that it? The steering wheel is messy with a car?* Peterson attempts to slide a key into this and

says, “Bad boy Walt Whitman.” His heart sinks. *Yes*, he thinks clearly, *there is a mess in the car. I just can’t say it.* (40)

Peterson looks at his steering wheel and sees a medallion that has an image of a car and then sees this steering wheel as containing a messy car: traditional metaphorical pattern recognition fractures as various linguistic attributes structure “reality” differently. Gradually, language talks only to itself and cuts Peterson (and the subject more generally) out of the communicational network. The dashboard is still a “dash,” but the steering wheel has become a word-thing: a steering wheel is, for Peterson, a “messy car.” This symptomatology will progress until Peterson is a full blown, insentient zombie.

Regarding the virus’s level of contagiousness, Rauf claims: “The redistribution of elements may leave a person momentarily vulnerable to the virus, which may have already been there, dormant. Some specialists are suggesting that we use as little connotative language as possible, and to definitely avoid metalanguage. Like, well, like we’re using right now, Grant” (156). Dr. Rauf’s solution is similar to Jimmy’s solution because we learn that “Jimmy stopped speaking three days ago, believing that silence was the only sure way to prevent the disease” (144), and Jimmy’s solution eventually leads to the complete legislation of silence: “To combat contagion all form of communication is banned. Speaking, listening, reading, even sign language are punishable at the brute discretion of Ontario’s own licensed assassins. Citizens are instructed to stay at home and communicate only through nods or shakes of the head” (233). A complete separation from the self-referential structures of language is the only available solution to avoid the virus; however, in the case of those already afflicted, the virus provides capacious linguistic possibilities that were unavailable to more normative uses of language—or, as Les Reardon says, regarding the zombies: “They can take trips and buy things that as single nouns or verbs they

never could” (30). Subjectivity, once the sovereign purview of the noun or the verb (as in Kristeva, for example), can become, after AMP infection, located in any number of linguistic components.

The zombies lose sensitivity to names, nouns, or familiar language use and find temporary Being within any number of non-normative speech acts such as the repetition of “Helen, help, hello” or “messy car, dirty bird” (99-100). These nonsensical phrases become localizing *points de capiton* that help orient a group of zombies and lead them towards the mouths of strangers. These phrases self-organize large groups of zombies as zombie-assemblages that, like flocks of birds, swarms of insects, or schools of fish, produce a superorganism: one unified group of individual components or bodies that combine to follow a singular intent or pattern.

“Helen, help, hello” becomes then, an orienting phrase that momentarily acts as a democratic slogan that solidifies a group of zombies as a total group. The ontology of the zombie is therefore not located within a single zombie, but in the group as a whole, organized around a particular slogan. Burgess’s zombies are like ants that wander thoughtlessly in circles when alone, but can form enormous colonies that contain minute and highly specific tasks that permit the society as a whole to function as one unique and singular organism—a *superorganism*.¹³ Jonathan Ball writes that “[l]ong after we are dead and our bodies have dissolved, the words will speak of us. They will tell their children of the monsters who once forced them into flesh. How they bore their yokes in silence, suffering in servitude, biding time” (xviii-xix).

¹³ Good sources about the workings of the superorganism are Bert Hölldobler and Edward O. Wilson’s *The Superorganism: The Beauty, Elegance, and Strangeness of Insect Societies* (2009), but the term itself derives from the work of William Morton Wheeler, specifically his article “The ant-colony as an organism” in *The Journal of Morphology* (1911), and his book *The Social Insects, Their Origin and Evolution* (1928).

For the final section of this chapter, I will analyze the cut-up novels of William S. Burroughs, the theoretical and haptic semiological implications of the cut-up, and a viral understanding of language; or, in other words, the final section transitions from language-zombies to the object cause of the infection: the word-as-virus itself.

Burroughsian Fractals and A Cut-up Zombie-Language

While Burgess's novel theorizes a language zombie, I feel that an important antecedent of his novel directly theorizes language itself as zombie-like: I am talking about the cut-up novels of Burroughs.¹⁴ The virtual field of living language that Burgess presents in his apocalyptic novel is differently theorized by Burroughs through a scientific and mathematical paradigm. James Grauerholz, Burroughs's editor and executor, writes in the introduction to *Interzone* (1989), regarding Burroughs's endless need to cut-up his own writing, that:

This “repetition,” or self-appropriation, may even at times be unintentional, but overall it unites the whole of Burroughs' work and lends a kaleidoscopic quality to the writing—and what is a kaleidoscope but a device to reassemble endlessly the same particles? As if anticipating modern atomic physics, his world model is

¹⁴ There has been a great deal of work done on Burroughs; however, I will highlight some useful points of interest regarding scholarship on the Burroughsian textual cut-up: Todd Tietchen's “Language out of Language” (2001) considers the *Nova* Trilogy as a postmodern activist text; Paul C. Grimstad reads *Nova Express* through Lacan's notion of *linguisterie* (2004); Micheal Sean Bolton traces the context of Burroughs's novels (2010); Chad Weidner reads the cut-up novels through the lens of eco-criticism (2013); and Nathan Moore reads the cut-up novels and Deleuzian philosophy through its theme of “control” (2007). However, a very useful article by Mark Turner reads language itself as a virus in “Language Is a Virus” (1992) and situates Burroughs's seemingly outrageous claim in the context of linguistics: Turner specifically focuses on Lakoff and Johnson's work on metaphor.

that of an indeterminate universe of endless permutation and recombination. (xiv-xv)

Burroughs's work is akin to a literary supercollider in which the etyms of an objectal language are endlessly collided, exploded, and reassembled, producing a nearly infinite variety of textuality.

Burroughs embraces Brion Gysin's discovery of the cut-up in 1959. Building on his extensive knowledge of the French avant-garde—a tradition that can be partly traced to Mallarmé's *Un coup de dés jamais n'abolira le hasard* or *A throw of the dice will never abolish chance* (1914) as well as the Dadaist newspaper poems of Tristan Tzara—Gysin's "invention" or "discovery" of the cut-up would be unthinkable without a larger tradition of chance-based textual operations; nonetheless, Gysin's cut-up foregrounds textual cutting and splicing and has large affects upon popular culture.¹⁵

¹⁵ Even though the focus of this chapter will be on Burroughs, I would like to mention that Gysin was firmly entrenched in a French avant-garde tradition and his own work moves from Surrealism to Lettrism and even embraces the sonic experimentation of the *Poésie Sonore* group. Gysin's sound poem "I Am That I Am" can be found in *Poesia Sonora* (1975), and "Junk Is No Good Baby" can be found in *La Poésie Sonore Internationale* (1974). The post-cubist poet Pierre Reverdy is another antecedent of Gysin's textual approach. Oliver Harris points out that Burroughs's knowledge of the cut-up derives from his collaboration with Gysin and Gysin himself emphasizes the earlier experiments of modernist montage that led to the cut-up. Gysin goes so far as to claim that the cut-ups are not "a new discovery" (qtd. in Harris, "Cut-Up Closure" 251). In *The Third Mind*, both Burroughs and Gysin celebrate Tristan Tzara's newspaper experiments as the original cut-ups (n.p.). Tzara writes, in his *Seven Dada Manifestoes* (1924), instructions on how "[t]o make a dadaist poem": "Take a newspaper. / Take a pair of scissors. / Choose an article as long as you are planning to make your poem. / Cut out the article. / Then cut out each of the words that make up this article and put them in a bag. / Shake it gently. / Then take out the scraps one after the other in the order in which they left the bag. / Copy conscientiously. / The poem will be like you. / And here you are a writer, infinitely original and endowed with a sensibility that is charming though beyond the understanding of the vulgar" (92). Obviously, the "meaning" of this poem pushes against normative understandings of what a writer is or can be.

The cut-up, and Burroughs's extension of the cut-up in what he called the fold-in, also encompass the ways in which modernity cuts and (re)assembles images. Colin Fallows asks Barry Miles about the cut-up in an interview in which Miles nicely summarizes the sociocultural implications, which involve

breaking up words and cutting word lines to find out what's really going on, because he [Burroughs] believed that the whole culture was embedded in its language and that word in fact was in a sense a virus that was occupying humans. We were all controlled by the unconscious commands that the language contained no notions of nationality, of honour, of patriotism. (Fallows and Genzmer, *Cut-ups* 12)

Burroughs conceives of language as a parasitic or viral organism that infects and influences the speaking subject (who acts as host).

The clearest description of the *word as virus* metaphor appears in the "operation rewrite" section from *The Ticket that Exploded*. Throughout his oeuvre, Burroughs is obsessed with the model of a split-subject—a subject literally split along the corpus callosum; however, this "other half" can also be considered the word-virus itself: "The 'Other Half' is the word. The 'Other Half' is an organism. Word is an organism. The presence of the 'Other Half' a separate organism attached to your nervous system on an air of words can now be demonstrated experimentally" (49). If the word is an organism, then what kind of organism is it? Burroughs begins to describe the organism in the following way:

The word is now a virus. The flu virus may once have been a healthy lung cell. It is now a parasitic organism that invades and damages the lungs. The word may once have been a healthy neural cell. It is now a parasitic organism that invades

and damages the central nervous system. Modern man has lost the option of silence. Try halting your sub-vocal speech. Try to achieve even ten seconds of inner silence. You will encounter a resisting organism that *forces you to talk*. That organism is the word. In the beginning was the word. In the beginning of what exactly? The earliest artifacts date back about ten thousand years give a little take a little and ‘recorded’—(or prerecorded) history about seven thousand years.

(*Ticket 49-50*)

Burroughs’s theorization of this word-based disease describes a conceptual transformation from *homo sapiens* to *homo loquens*. However, the speech or *loquens* that was once within the purview of the subject’s agency is now an agential force in itself. Deploying a speculative anthropological discourse, Burroughs locates a moment in history when the word-virus originates:

The human race is said to have been on set for 500,000 years. That leaves 490,000 years unaccounted for. Modern man has advanced from the stone ax to nuclear weapons in ten thousand years. This may well have happened before. Mr. Brion Gysin suggests that a nuclear disaster in what is now the Gobi desert wiped out all traces of civilization that made such a disaster possible. Perhaps their nuclear weapons did not operate on the same principle as the ones we have now. Perhaps they had no contact with the word organism. Perhaps the word itself is recent about ten thousand years old. What we call history is the history of the word. In the beginning of *that* history was the word. (*Ticket 50*)

A strategy for combating the word-virus is not only cutting word-lines in order to reveal their hidden messages, but also to create auditory cut-ups that record the phonism of your own

embodiment (*Ticket* 50-51). Record the beating of your own heart and the rumbling of your intestines and splice these sounds with those beatings and rumblings of others in order to locate the sonic echo of the word-parasite living within. Perhaps, the parasite itself will register its own existence—in a distant murmur perhaps. The word-virus is a complex image of liminality because it is simultaneously inside and outside: the Burroughsian word-virus presents as the middle ground between the Freudian unconscious (as interior and instinctual) and the Lacanian unconscious (as exterior, symbolic, and linguistic).

The cut-up is a way to escape this infection, or at the very least, a strategy to reveal language's intrinsic agency. Miles describes Burroughs's approach to the cut-up:

Well once he was doing the cut-ups, just a most basic cut-up as you would draw a cross on a page. He would divide it down the middle and then divide it in half so it was divided into four quarters, which he sometimes numbered, and then in the early days he would cut them out because you have to cut the margins otherwise you can't move them against each other particularly well. (16-17)

In the early cut-ups, Burroughs and Gysin edited minimally so that the appearance of the cut-up matched the typography of the original text. The “hidden messages” that Burroughs and Gysin uncover are examples of language speaking for itself: Burroughs and Gysin appear to act as assemblers, but not as authors.

In Burroughs and Gysin's *The Exterminator* (1960), language self-referentially claims that “[t]he Word Lines keep Thee In Slots,” further pointing out that a way to escape this “slotting” is to:

Cut the Word Lines with scissors or switch blade as preferred The Word Lines keep you in Time..Cut the lines..Make out lines to Space. Take a page of your

own writing of you write a letter or a newspaper article or a page or less or more of any writer living and or dead..Cut into sections. Down the middle. And cross the sides..Rearrange the sections..Write the result message.. (5)

In *The Ticket that Exploded* (1962/1967), the cut-up is similarly described: “‘Now listen to this.’ The words were smudged together. They snarled and whined and barked. It was as if the words themselves were called in question and forced to give up their hidden meanings” (18).

Language’s vitality is strange because it does not appear to be vital in the same way that a human being is vital. Burroughs himself asks in *The Third Mind* (1978): “What is any writing but a cut-up? Somebody has to program the machine; somebody has to *do* the cutting up. Remember that I first made selections. Out of hundreds of possible sentences that I might have used, I chose one” (8). Burroughs replaces the author with the selector or the cutter. However, if the word is now a virus, then every word that speaking subjects use does not belong to that speaking subject; therefore, even the agency seemingly present in the act of selection may not actually belong to the selector or the cutter. Perhaps the parasitic language living inside us is also selecting the sentences to be cut-up.

This claim may seem radical, but it is aligned with Burroughs’s own speculations about the cut-up: cut-ups and fold-ins contain different levels of magnification and influence. Throughout this section, I will rely on the non-Euclidean geometrical model of the fractal in order to illustrate how Burroughs theorizes textuality and the cut-up; another way of phrasing this claim is to suggest that text in Burroughs refracts and diffracts through various fractal plateaus and one of the best examples of this dynamic is the cut-up.

Cut-ups exist initially at the level of the text itself: a selector uses a knife or scissors to cut through a text or a pile of texts. However, the cut-up extends upwards and includes another

level of magnification that includes the selector herself/himself. “Somebody is reading a newspaper, and his eye follows the column in the proper Aristotelian manner, one idea and sentence at a time,” Burroughs writes, “[b]ut subliminally he is reading the columns on either side and is aware of the person sitting next to him. That’s a cut-up” (*Third* 4-5). Burroughs provides another, similar example:

I was sitting in a lunchroom in New York having my doughnuts and coffee. I was thinking that one *does* feel a little boxed in in New York, like living in a series of boxes. I looked out the window and there was a great big Yale truck. That’s cut-up—a juxtaposition of what’s happening outside and what you’re thinking of.
(*Third* 5)

Burroughs is thinking about boxes and then he looks outside a window—which is a box—and sees a truck that is itself a box: a cut-up is a series of self-similar iterations.

The box or the Burroughs-Gysin grid presents the structural process through which cut-ups occur. The Burroughs-Gysin grid is the primary structure of the cut-ups and fold-ins, but can also be found in Gysin’s paintings along with the visual appearance of the dream machine. In “Let the Mice In,” Gysin and the language-virus write: “IN SPIRATION—what you breathe in. You breathe in words. Words breathe you IN” (*Third* 61). Words manifest within an ether and exist like oxygen molecules: an actor-network appears by way of a language-virus. This paradox of a language that breathes is depicted in one of Gysin’s visual poems/paintings:¹⁶

¹⁶ Gysin’s incorporation of text within painting can be partly traced to the earlier tradition of Cubism.

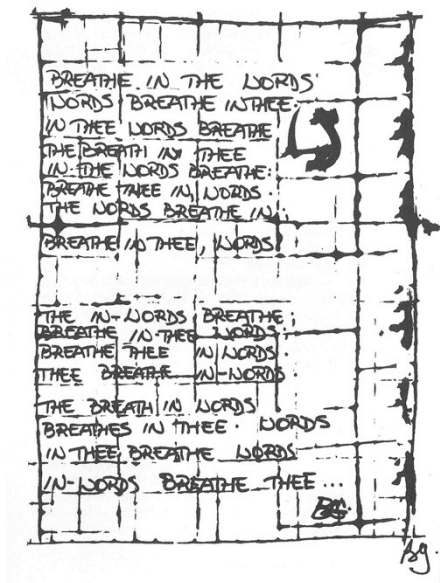


Fig. 7. Brion Gysin, From: *The Third Mind*, 68.

Burroughs's textual practice cuts-up consciousness: his frequent "routines" in the *Nova* Trilogy and *Naked Lunch* (1959) are good instances of how consciousness can manifest as a cut-up.

Burroughs insists that "[l]ife is a cut-up. As soon as you can walk down the street your consciousness is being cut by random factors. The cut-up is closer to the facts of human perception than linear narrative" (qtd. in Fallows and Genzmer, *Cut-ups* 32), which suggests that the cut-up is not only the production of self-similar, refracting boxes and grids, but also the embodiment of the act of cutting as the production of a cognized montage. The cut-up subject is not a traditional ontological entity, but a newly machinic, permutational, and emergent form of being.

In *The Exterminator*, one of the cut-ups contains the following message: "Sword on Words.." [sic] (37). The refracting and fractal structure of language that Burroughs uncovers is contained even here: a cut-up is the result of taking a sword on words and the *sword* itself contains a *word* within it—language is inside language and any attempt to get outside language betrays the fact that the "outside" is itself structured by signs. An outside must first be named

“outside” and this outside then suggests a further anteriority to the present “outside”—in other words, the word *outside* is an exteriority, but this exterior remains within correlational epistemology and does not present as a final outside or as what Meillassoux calls “the *great outdoors*” (*After* 7).

Cut-ups potentially eliminate the last vestiges of an author or author-function—cut-ups are, therefore, the last elegies for Barthes and Foucault’s authorial funeral: in the very first cut-up “Minutes to Go,” Burroughs and Gysin assert that “the writing machine is for everybody” (*Third* 41). I would argue that cut-ups are for everybody because they constitute the experience of the modern subject: the cut-up presents as an intersecting rhizome or interpenetrative network through which signals pass. In the cut-up nothing is centralized; instead, the cut-up is materially exemplary of what Deleuze and Guattari call the “rhizome” or what Bruno Latour calls “quasi-objects” (*We* 51-59). Neither subjects nor objects are present in a Burroughsian framework because the only existent “object” is a proliferating language-virus. The traditional ontological boundaries of subject and object are split as a language-virus explodes notions of centrality—the only similarity available is that of a paragrammic field from which things called “subjects” and things called “objects” emerge.

I claim that traditional approaches of literary criticism cannot adequately deal with the Burroughs-Gysin cut-up. During the Semiotext(e) Schizo-Culture conference held at Columbia University from November 13-16, 1975, Burroughs presented a paper alongside such luminaries of French theory as Deleuze, Guattari, Jean-François Lyotard, and Foucault.¹⁷ While Burroughs

¹⁷ The proceedings of Schizo-Culture was recently compiled in a dual edition from Semiotext(e) that issues the proceedings as *Schizo-Culture: The Event 1975* (2013) alongside a second compilation that contained articles written three years after the initial conference. This second compilation is contained in *Schizo-Culture: The Book* (2013).

knew Deleuze and Guattari—and his writing influences some of their theorizing in *Capitalism and Schizophrenia*—Burroughs’s own work tends to resist academic discourse.¹⁸ To that end, an academic approach to the Burroughsian cut-up should be broad-spectrum and incorporate a variety of posthuman parallax perspectives: I see these as necessarily including Latourian quasi-objects and actor-networks, Deleuzoguattarian assemblages and rhizomes, the geometrical fractal, and virology more generally. Because a word-thing is itself a structural concept of language-centric liminality, I feel that it is ideally suited to approaching a Burroughsian literary practice.

Burroughs is one of the main inspirations for conceptual writing, which is itself a literary practice inspired by textual appropriation—a sort of canonical plagiarism anticipated by the Burroughs-Gysin cut-up. Gysin famously claims that “[w]riting is fifty years behind painting” (*Third* 34), and in Kenneth Goldsmith’s “Paragraphs on Conceptual Writing,” Goldsmith indirectly engages with Gysin’s assertion. Goldsmith’s “Paragraphs” is a plagiarized version of Sol LeWitt’s “Paragraphs on Conceptual Art” (1967): Goldsmith replaces LeWitt’s “artist” with “writer” and “viewers” or “spectators” with “readers.” In this sense, writing is updated to where art was fifty years before; however, art has, of course, moved on (to “neo-conceptualism” for

¹⁸ See the following moment from *A Thousand Plateaus* for example: “The drugged body as a different attribute, with its production of specific intensities based on absolute Cold = 0” (153), Deleuze and Guattari then cite *Naked Lunch*: “Junkies always beef about *The Cold* as they call it, turning up their black coat collars and clutching their withered necks ... pure junk con. A junky does not want to be warm, he wants to be cool-cooler-COLD. But he wants The Cold like he wants His Junk—NOT OUTSIDE where it does him no good but INSIDE so he can sit around with a spine like a frozen hydraulic jack ... his metabolism approaching Absolute Zero” (qtd. in *A Thousand Plateaus* 153-154). Consider the following moment from Burroughs’s *The Ticket that Exploded* as an example of Burroughs aping academic jargon: “(to traduce or transfigure and reduce a man’s pulsating multiplicity to untranslatable inchoate word for latent consensus of ‘otherness’)” (29).

example). For conceptual writing, the emphasis is not on a readership, but on a “thinkership” and, likewise, the cut-up is a creative practice more interested in thinkers than readers.¹⁹

Burroughs will conversely sacrifice a thinkership in favour of a readership. Barry Miles points out that in “later years, after his [Burroughs’s] return to the USA in July 1974, he used the method mostly to stimulate a train of thought rather than to create a text” (31), and Burroughs himself says:

I sort of pulled back and said this is going too far, you can’t dispense with straight narrative if you want people to read it. ... I may cut up a page and maybe use a sentence incorporated into the narrative. Certainly otherwise, you can carry any experiment so far that you lose your readers. You spend 20 years writing a book that nobody can read. (qtd. in Fallows and Genzmer, *Cut-ups* 31)

Burroughs’s claim is dubious because his later work such as the *Red Night* Trilogy remains experimental and resistant to linear narrative; however, the *Nova* Trilogy does exist in two versions, as Miles describes: “Those first three cut-up novels are entirely cut-up and they were virtually un-readable to most people so when they were published in America he re-wrote them all inserting long sections of straight narrative, just old fashioned routines like the stuff in *Naked Lunch*” (17).²⁰ The re-written novels of the *Nova* Trilogy are also experimental and resist traditional readerly modes. Can the reader see what is on the end of the fork?

¹⁹ In *Notes on Conceptualisms* (2009), Vanessa Place and Robert Fitterman emphasize “thinkerships” (10) and Kenneth Goldsmith frequently employs the term: see *Uncreative Writing* (2011) p. 100.

²⁰ The publication history of the cut-up trilogy is bewilderingly complex (especially in terms of *The Soft Machine*). *The Soft Machine* was first published by Olympia Press in 1961 in one print-run. The revised edition was published by Grove Press in 1966, and finally a third *Soft Machine* was published by John Calder in 1968. Oliver Harris points out that one could make a distinct trilogy of the editions of *The Soft Machine* alone (xi). Harris also claims that the 1961 edition is

The seeds of Burroughs's theory of the language-virus predates Gysin's discovery of the cut-up and can be found in very early texts such as the long "WORD" section from *Interzone*. Echoes from *Interzone* eventually appear in *Naked Lunch*, but the "WORD" section is almost entirely absent. "WORD" is an early routine-laden rant (from 1958, a year before Gysin discovers the cut-up), which has cut-up qualities in that any hint of linear narrative is foregone in favour of a stream of consciousness approach. Burroughs writes that the "Word is divided into units which be all in one piece and should be so taken, but the pieces can be had in any order being tied up back and forth in and out fore and aft like an innaresting sex arrangement" (135).

Burroughs already theorizes the permutational quality of the word before the invention of the cut-up. Burroughs follows the scientific method here in that his hypothesis is that language is intrinsically permutational and the initial "experiment" that Gysin enacts on a pile of newspapers in his studio proves the hypothesis. The only problem is that Burroughs's initial hypothesis is not radical enough, but the sense of the cut-up is already present. "WORD" therefore hypothesizes a virtual (paragrammic) field of language: "This book spill off the page in all directions, kaleidoscope of vistas, medley of tunes and street noises, farts and riot yipes and the slamming steel shutters of commerce" (*Interzone* 135). The "WORD" novella hints at the larger level of

"unreadable as narrative" (xxxiii) because of its cut-up nature. Burroughs argued that for the first revised edition of the text (from 1966) that he took out "most of the cut-ups and substitute[ed] sixty-five pages of new material in a straight narrative line" (qtd. in Harris xl). In terms of *The Soft Machine*, according to Harris, "[r]oughly speaking, the first edition is 55% cut-up and 45% narrative, the second edition 30% cut-up, 70% narrative" (xlii). Gysin hated the revised edition of 1966 saying that the new edition was "of course, no longer SOFT MACHINE" (qtd. in Harris xlvi). *The Ticket that Exploded* appears in two editions (1962 from Olympia Press and then 1967 from Grove Press) and its manner of revision matches Burroughs's attempts with *The Soft Machine* in that the first edition featured statistically "less" narrative, but as Harris points out throughout his introduction to the 2014 "restored" edition of *The Soft Machine*, the notion that the newer editions simply include less cut-ups is not strictly true. Burroughs added various new cut-ups and narrative parts to both the revised editions of *The Soft Machine* and *The Ticket that Exploded*. *Nova Express* appears in one edition from 1964 from Grove Press.

what I call the *Burroughs word-fractal*: in “WORD,” Burroughs’s narrator asserts: “I will not be silent nor hold longer back the enema of my word hoard” (144). The “word hoard” (or just “WORD”) is Burroughs’s term for the immense volume of writing (over a thousand typewritten pages) produced between the years 1954 (when Burroughs moves to Tangiers) and 1959 (the publication of *Naked Lunch*).

The Burroughsian Word Hoard provides the basis of *Interzone*, *Naked Lunch* and reputedly, the later cut-up novels of the *Nova* Trilogy and *Dead Fingers Talk* (1963).²¹ The Word Hoard pictures an overall oeuvre-fractal within which echoes, repetitions, and routines proliferate, with self-similarity, throughout later works. Beginning with the small novella “WORD,” the oeuvre-fractal expands to include the Word Hoard or WORD which, as a totality, depicts language as a parasitic and viral organism that infects human subjects. Burroughs is like the Dr. Benway of language: he uses a scalpel (the routines, cut-ups, and fold-ins) and operates on the patient (language itself). What “Dr.” Burroughs discovers is that language is metastasizing and cannot be killed: it can only be addressed, reassembled, written, re-written, partially erased, but never fully excised or palpated.

The fractal quality of Burroughs’s theory of writing is also present in Gysin’s work: in “Brion Gysin Let the Mice In” (1960), Gysin considers Moroccan magical spells as complex assemblages of word and matter in which neither manifests as a distinct form or concept. Gysin

²¹ The notion of a so-called “Word Hoard”—that gives birth to *Naked Lunch*, *Dead Fingers Talk*, and the cut-up trilogy—is subject to debate: Oliver Harris describes the standard story of the Word Hoard as a mixture of “mythology and confusion” (xvii). However, even though Burroughs himself promotes the Word Hoard myth (xviii), Harris points out that the actual connections between the cut-up trilogy and the Word Hoard are “actually negligible” (xx). Ginsberg and Kerouac originally used the phrase “Word Hoard” when they were retyping Burroughs’s collection of manuscripts in Tangier. Burroughs himself used the term as an alternate title for the “Word” sequence in *Interzone*, but apart from *Naked Lunch*, the Word Hoard provided little text that lead to the cut-up trilogy (Harris xvii-xx).

writes that: “music from the Moroccan hills proves the great god Pan *not* dead. I cast spells: all spells are sentences spelling out the word-lock that is You” (*Back in No Time* 95). The complexity of the Moroccan spells signal the “combination on a word” (*Back in No Time* 99)—a “combination” that registers the difficulty of a fractal consideration of word and object. The cut-up features a fractal (and magical) quality for Gysin (and Burroughs): “Visual words dye spells to shorten painting sentence” (*Back in No Time* 96) refers to an alternative model of the signifier/referent dyad; namely, the flattening and fractalization of that dyad.

Increasingly, throughout the novels that result from the Word Hoard, Burroughs begins to understand language as something that folds-in on itself and contains evermore minute and intricate iterations at subsequent levels. In *Cut-ups*, *Cut-ins*, *Cut-outs*, Burroughs describes his experiments with collage (that in turn are the result of cut-ups): “In my spare time have done a little experiment with collage. Make collage of photographs, drawings, newspapers, etc. Now take picture of the collage. Now make collage of the pictures. Take-cut-take-cut you got it?” (26). The cut-up collages materially depict fractal repetition and thematic layering. Components from earlier levels of collage reappear at smaller levels, pointing to an underlying emergent structure. Burroughs begins to uncover the structural laws behind word and image; or, as Barry Miles explains:

Each time the image was photographed and doubled, it reduced in size by half. Soon the images were so small that it was almost impossible to distinguish them from the grain in the photographic paper, and the new over-riding image was the way in which the duplications had been arranged. In most cases the images were arranged in the four quadrants of a standard cut-up page, with two images reversed to make the whole symmetrical. (Fallows and Genzmer, *Cut-ups* 26-27)

The *Nova* Trilogy contains a great deal of writing that folds-in on itself like a photographic collage or geometrical fractal. In *The Soft Machine*, page 57 (which describes Jimmy’s strangulation and orgasm due to asphyxiation) appears on page 50 in slightly different form and again recurs on pages 122 and 137 respectively. Each iteration contains similarities of word choice, character, or even narrative fragmentation, but each is assembled in drastically different ways. Page 57 for example is a micro version of its earlier iterations on pages 53 to 56. The moment when Johnny is sodomized revolves in several iterations and smaller fragmentations as the book progresses: the first iteration begins in the chapter “1920 Movies” on page 128 and comprises every line to page 130. This same section detailing Johnny’s experience getting sodomized recurs from pages 130-131 and then the same section repeats midway through page 131. The moment repeats yet again, this time in much shorter form, comprising only two lines of page 134 and then again in slightly longer form on page 141.

In the chapter “Last Hints,” the following section is cut into the chapter “Where the Awning Flaps”:

On the sea wall met a boy under the circling albatross—Peeled his red-and-white T-shirt to brown flesh and grey under like ash and passed a joint back and forth as we dropped each other’s pants and he looked down face like Mayan limestone in the kerosene lamp sputter of burning insect wings over the tide flats—Woke up in other flesh the lookout different—hospital smell of backward countries—
(Burroughs, *Soft* 119)

Compare this moment to the following moment from the subsequent chapter: “On the sea wall met the guide under the Circling Albatross. Peeled his red- and white-striped T-shirt to brown flesh and grey under like ash and we passed a joint back and forth as we dropped each other’s

pants and he looked down face like Mayan limestone in the kerosene lamp sputter of burning insect wings” (122). Burroughs’s obsession with folding layers of textual repetition extends to include titles: the character Clem Snide claims that he had written “*The Soft Ticket*” (68), a title which is clearly a cut-up of the titles *The Soft Machine* and *The Ticket That Exploded*.

I have presented several examples of Burroughsian textual collage, but to what end? What is the purpose of these repetitions of earlier fragmented narratives or smaller iterations of micro-tellings folded into other and different text (which is itself featured in future iterations)? While fractal geometry does not emerge until 1980 with the insights of Benoit Mandelbrot, the recursivity and self-similarity of systems had been studied in systems theory and cybernetics since the 1920s. In second-order cybernetic models, feedback and recursivity are the central organizing structures that permit the emergence of organic systems. In cellular automata and biology, the notion of autopoiesis is a model of feedback that describes the emergence of cellular formations and biological organization. Burroughs presents, I claim, a recursive model of language—contained in the word-virus, cut-up technique, and collage—that is a communicational and linguistic illustration of recursivity and autopoiesis in literature.

Burroughs smashes the traditional semiotic sign and describes the fractured, fissured, flattened word-thing left behind. Burroughs understands that when signifier collapses into signified and signified collapses into referent the emergent collage is too complex to easily schematize (or cognize). The contemporary era, for Burroughs, has essentially short-circuited the Saussurean/Peircean sign and has resulted in a fractal-language that requires a novel theory of the sign. The sign that Burroughs implicitly offers is one instance of what I call a word-thing, which is a vital *thing* that contains self-similar components of signifier, signified, and referent, but remains unfixed within earlier linguistic categories. The word-thing—being the flat

ontological instance of the semiotic sign—is a network of each of these components and contains communicational signals that spark like neurons in a neural net.

In this Burroughsian framework, which could be easily interpreted through a more traditionally postmodern lens in which the cut-ups could be read through Derridean *différance* and traces, the question to be asked is: where is the thing located? The objectality of language can be located throughout the cut-up process: the selected texts themselves and the active act of cutting and reassembling, but most importantly for the purposes of this dissertation, in the concept of the virus itself. The Burroughsian word-virus is an active force that speculatively infects speaking subjects *from the outside* and renders them as “patients” of a rampant infection. This reading of Burroughs takes him as a speculative theorist: as a thinker of non-standard forms of language use and semantic production.

The intellectual lineage of flat ontology can be traced from object-oriented ontology back to DeLanda and from DeLanda to Deleuze and Guattari’s theorization of “smooth space” versus “striated space.”²² Smooth space describes a flattened set of undecidable differentiation, but in realist terms, smooth space is the home of fractality. Fractality is important for thinkers as different as Guattari and Laruelle: on the one hand, in Guattari’s final book, *Chaosmosis* (1992), he combines subjectivity with cybernetics and chaos theory in order to propose how “[t]he most originary, objectal intentionality defines itself against a background of chaosmosis. And chaos is not pure indifferenciation; it possesses a specific ontological texture” (81). Laruelle, on the other hand, links Deleuzoguattarian smooth space to his non-philosophical concept of “generalized fractality” (*Dictionary* 69-71)—Laruelle’s linkage is mathematically rigorous because “smoothness” aligns with a “non-differentiable” graph in mathematics, which is itself a graph

²² See: *A Thousand Plateaus* 371.

that is too nonlinear or too “bumpy” to predict adequately over time. Therefore, Burroughs’s cut-ups implicitly theorize a word-thing as a flat ontological fractal.

Gradually, Burroughs and his narrators begin to question the very structure of the sign because the signifier-referent dyad is located as the central organizing structure of the word-virus.

The Exterminator reveals, in the following cut-up, an origin story for the Word:

Hook an ape..When he learns to say ‘Where Is The Man?’ He is a sick human
junky..With The Monkey on his back..The Word Virus was a Sore Throat in Thee
Beginning..In The Beginning there course shit..Ka nameless asshole..In Thee
Beginning The Ape had a *sore throat*..Thee is then The Word bubbled up through
Mother Throat. The Ape Ra Heavy Metal of HER Substance..The Word Over The
Earth. (26)

Before Foucault deconstructs the historical notion of “Man,” Burroughs’s ape mainlines “man.”²³ Humanity is therefore configured as the development of an addiction to symbolic constructs such as “subjectivity,” “man,” or “reality.” Of course, the “Man” is also a junky slang term for the authorities: the word-virus is, in this sense, the power regime or totalitarian power that parasitizes the brain of human hosts and becomes the authority or the author of normative consciousness. In this instance, words themselves—manifesting within the assembled state of a word-thing—function like drugs in that a word-thing can be “dropped,” “hit,” “snorted,” or “injected”; as a drug, a word-thing has the ability to alter reality for the junky-subject and, in the instance of signifiers like “man,” “subjectivity,” or “reality,” these drugs are often dropped in

²³ Foucault’s *The Order of Things* famously concludes: “at the end of the eighteenth century [...] man would be erased, like a face drawn in sand at the edge of the sea” (422).

utero and render the perceptual world of the subject as strictly defined within hegemonic confines of word-drugs.

By cutting-up the signifier-referent dyad, Burroughs begins to understand the structure of the word-virus in order to see how a curative or philter could be developed that can act as an international palliative. In *The Ticket that Exploded*, Burroughs writes: “Image is trapped in word—Do you need words?—Try some other method of communication, like color flashes—a Morse code of color flashes—or odors or music or tactile sensations—Anything can represent words and letters and association blocks” (144-145). At this point in the *Nova* Trilogy the only solution to the problem of the word-virus is to replace the traditional signifier—words as such—with other objects such as musical tones, odours, or other sensory units in order to reconstitute the dyad.

The “Mayan Caper” section in *The Ticket that Exploded* is a smaller fractal iteration of Burroughs’s overall cut-up project—and the Caper itself is constructed fractally in that the cut-up is featured first at one level of magnification when Brundige initially learns how to cut-up newspapers (81-82) and then extends to include the cut-up of an entire human being (85) and then later a cut-up into a different culture and historical moment (88-92). Burroughs repeatedly deploys biological and medical metaphors when discussing the word-virus and the potential to destabilize it: “It is worth noting that if a virus were to attain a state of wholly benign equilibrium with its host cell it is unlikely that its presence would be readily detected or that it would necessarily be recognize as a virus. [...] I advance the theory that a virus is a very small unit of word and image” (qtd. in Fallows and Genzmer, *Cut-ups* 33). If the word-virus is a “unit of word and image,” then it likely corresponds to the relation between signifier-signified, in which case the referent is omitted from the (cor)relation. What can be called the “word-image” is not a

word-thing in that the “word-image” is an instance of the signifier-signified relation—a good example of the word-image would be a line of code for example. Where then is the referent to be found in Burroughs? I claim that the signifier-signified relation is *hidden* within the referent at an invisible, molecular level (like a virus).

In *The Ticket that Exploded*, Burroughs appears to describe the process through which a word-thing emerges: “movement of a planet with iron claws of pain and pleasure from birth to death—control symbols pounded to word and image dust; crumpled cloth bodies of the vast control machine—The whole structure of reality went up in silent explosions under the whining sirens” (31). This moment begins by positioning word and image in Lacanian and semiotic terms: word is signifier and image is signified, but this traditional model cannot withstand the pressure of a modernity filled with Nova Police and the word-virus; instead, the sign *in toto* is smashed under the pressure of the contemporary world and leveled, resulting in one equal and unending rhizomatic network.

In continental philosophical terms, the Saussurean sign is “pounded,” and a Deleuzian assemblage is the result. I want to reiterate: in my reading of Burroughs’s work, language is hidden within objects—almost like a virus hiding inside a cell that reprograms the cell. In Harmanian terms, the secret kernel of an object or the hidden and withdrawn centre is—following Burroughs’s logic of the object—*words*. Somewhere within an object, I claim, exists language. The words withdraw from any apparent Cratylean relation and function as programmatic code for the phenomenological presentation of appearances. The various strategies that Burroughs suggests for revealing the word-virus—the cut-up and the fold-in—are each attempts to make the hidden language (the hidden words within the objects) manifest or apparent: the curative goal is to reveal the hidden words that function as control regimes so that

by revealing—as *alētheia*—the words that lurk inside objects, the effective Burroughsian character can disrupt the word-virus (smash it into word dust) and alter the overall configuration of “reality.” I began this chapter by discussing Robbe-Grillet: Robbe-Grillet’s objects manifest as surface only, while Burroughs’s objects ontologically present a deeper, withdrawn level—the level of the word-virus itself. I see this process as functioning along two vectors: on the one hand, Burroughs cuts through wordlines and creates cut-ups through a creative practice that reveals the inherent objects inside words (this activates the surface level); however, there is, on the other hand, a deeper level at play—a speculative level suggested by Burroughs’s practice that reveals *the words inside objects*.

What I call a word-thing is the result of a flattening of the Saussurean dyad (or the Peircean triad). Each of these seemingly disparate items—understood traditionally as having clearly delineated borders or boundaries—are collapsed, when conceptualized as a word-thing, within a non-hierarchical collage of signifier, signified, and referent. The semiotic result of a word-thing is simultaneity and mathematical chaos.

For the purposes of this chapter, a word-thing would appear quite different from either a binary or a dyad because a word-thing can be theorized as a network or a Gysin-Burroughs grid. The cut-up is a good example of a word-thing because, through the cutting of the grid (and the wordlines), Burroughs collapses and collages signifier into and alongside signified in order to present both as object. Burroughs blurs the lines between these seemingly separate semiotic categories and creates a bricolage in which each item becomes networked as both ontologically sovereign and yet objectally interpenetrated.

By cutting through the lines that are supposed to separate signifier, signified, and referent, Burroughs discovers further grids and networks. There is therefore not one sign, but a

proliferating fractal language that encompasses a variety of real and imagined dimensions, as well as multiple temporalities and cultural histories. The *Nova* Trilogy is the textual result of smashing the Saussurean sign—which is why there is so much “word dust” in these novels. In *The Soft Machine*, “word dust dirtied his body falling through the space between worlds” (117) as Carl masturbates in an empty locker room and there is “nothing here now but circling word dust—dead post card falling through space between worlds” (*Soft* 139). In *The Ticket that Exploded*, “sound and image flakes swirled round him and dusted his metal skin with grey powder” (7); characters keep “on rolling a big word line” (131); and pipes call “as word dust falls” (144). Occasionally, time seems to be something obscured behind the visibility of words: “I waited half an hour of word sludge” (28). The constructed “reality” of the world is smashed together alongside the Saussurean/Peircean sign and the result is that we, as speaking subjects, live on a “word dust planet” (79, 81, 85).

Furthermore, in *The Ticket that Exploded*, words are described as fully embodied artifacts—as objects that have flesh and physicality: Burroughs illustrates the “word and image skin” (31) as “[s]low fingers in dawn sleep tore the flesh from words” (120). Letters and words wander around this alien world (or dystopic version of our own world): “Four letters at dawn fell apart in ‘havingness’—muttering absent bodies hanged after being milked of identities” (101). Words float in the air as people walk (9); words are spat into a child’s nervous system (103); words “on a page travel at the speed of light . . . 186,000 miles per second . . . Your spoken words travel at 1,400 feet per second . . . would take quite a while to catch up and illuminate the page . . . All right . . . go ahead . . . And try not to crackle the paper” (185). I claim that such chaotic and unlimited semiosis follows no known traditional theorization of the sign: Burroughs instead depicts a language that is liberated from the constrictive discourses of semiotics and linguistics

while simultaneously committing the incarnational fallacy in order to risk the hypothesis that traditional semiotics is unable to address the breadth of the linguistic signal in the contemporary world. The word is not a dead and lifeless sign, but, for Burroughs, a dangerously organic life form that affects and influences the everyday world in unacknowledged ways.

In a Burroughsian xeno-semiotics, the self is split and blurred into a montage cut-up in the same way that the sign itself is smashed into a complex image of networked signals and interpenetrative bricolage. But now “[w]ords [are] falling like dead birds there in the noon streets” (*Ticket* 191). There is not much time left. The word-thing has been partially revealed. The word-virus is being challenged once again: “‘You and I fading,’ he said and the words between us dying losing color there on the white stone steps to say” (*Ticket* 191). Maybe they die on the steps in order to become reborn again. The words die in their older Saussurean/Peircean iterations and are rejuvenated as haptic semiological *things*: existent, vital, communing with their referents, liberated as objects-in-themselves, sovereign.

Chapter Four: Haptology and Language, or Touching and Licking Words

My definition of a word-thing is “haptic” only in relation to a very specific theorization of the semiotic sign. Letters and words on the page occupy a unique position: if a letter has a body and if letters combine to form a word-body, then there would seem to be an ethereal and haptic function at work; however, from a pragmatic standpoint, I cannot help but acknowledge that words appear to have intimacy issues. Jean-Luc Nancy addresses this problem in *Corpus* (1992): “A word, so long as it’s not absorbed without remainder into a sense, *remains* essentially extended *between* other words, stretching to touch them, though not merging with them: and that’s language as *body*” (71).¹ Letters do not *really* touch, right? Or do they?

While there are differences of occurrence and necessity across different languages and writing culture, in English, prior to the invention of word separation and silent reading sometime in the Middle Ages, manuscripts were copied without word separation in what was called *scriptura continua*, which is indecipherable for most readers and requires a professional lector to read out loud.² As Augustine asserts, Saint Ambrose is generally credited as the first silent

¹ Brian Rotman has suggested a new form of writing that he calls “gesturo-haptic.” Following a posthuman argument, Rotman argues that at some point the Western alphabet—so reliant on speech—may disappear in the face of new technological advancements that would permit the emergence of a new “gesturo-haptic” language: “to speak of the end of the alphabet is to suggest the possibility of a shift in Western deism, a reconfiguration of God and the God-effect, as momentous as the alphabet’s inauguration of that being” (438). For Rotman, “gestures (however isolatable these might be as discrete items of communication) are not signs in Saussure’s or Peirce’s sense, except insofar as they become so retrospectively by coming to signify (if that is the term) their own happening and its expected/habitual affects; their meaning in this retrospective semiotization is the fact and embodied consequences of their having occurred” (435).

² See: Paul Saenger’s *Space Between Words: The Origins of Silent Reading* (1997) and Alberto Manguel’s *A History of Reading* (1996) (particularly Chapter Two) for more on the development of silent reading from *scriptura continua*.

reader: “When he was reading, his eyes ran over the page and his heart perceived the sense, but his voice and tongue were silent” (92). *Scriptura continua* permitted words to touch and after growing accustomed to touch, words were forcibly separated.

The emergence of word separation in the non-hieroglyphic and non-ideogrammic Latin alphabet introduces a useful distinction between *parole* and *langue* in that a lector, when reading *scriptura continua*, verbally separates words, thus providing meaning to the stream of letters. While there are examples of words and letters touching there is also a *sonic touching* that occurs in speech. The profession of the lector converts into the being of a reader in that the distinction of words and combinations of letters transition from the once public space of textuality to the private space of readerly experience.

Sometimes, though, words collect into complicated lettric piles: consider textual palimpsests, scribbles, and asemic experiments such as Charles Bernstein’s *Veil* (see fig. 8). *Veil* (1987) is an illegible or asemic experiment in which texts are layered upon themselves like a choir of polyphonic voices or heteroglossic marks.

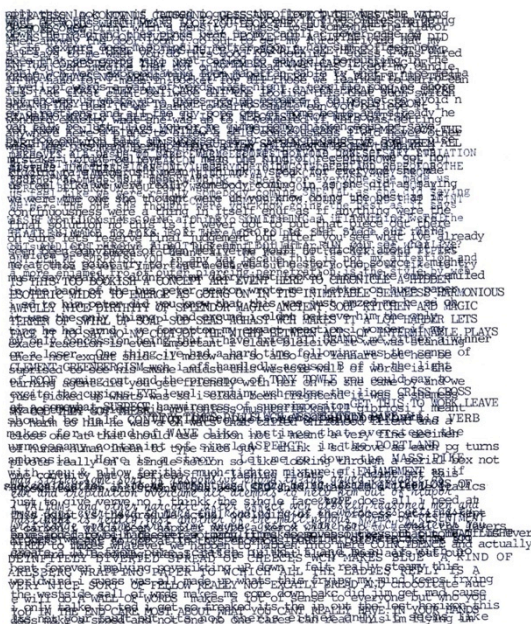


Fig. 8. Charles Bernstein, First “veil,” n.p.

Craig Dworkin writes that “the illegibility in *Veil* arises because its writing—like all writing—is not [...] transparent. Through their manifest materiality, Bernstein’s ‘veils’ are thus *not the theory but the actual practice* of a poststructural linguistics *writ large*” (*Reading* 52). Dworkin is similarly interested in understanding language as a pool of material signifiers, invoking water imagery in order to describe Bernstein’s achievement: “The poem proceeds with a fluid ebb and swell of alternating coagulation and expanse, so that the experience of reading is to move through lines of type which pass like wave fronts cresting and troughing as the text intermittently clouds over completely—and then breaks briefly clear” (*Reading* 52-53). I would insist that *wave fronts* are actually *wave fonts*, emphasizing the simultaneously linguistic and haptic nature of the text.

Like Bernstein’s “Veils,” Robert Smithson has produced a linguistic “sculpture” entitled “A Heap of Language” (1966) in which words pile on top of each other and “touch” through what could be called “definitional associationalism.”

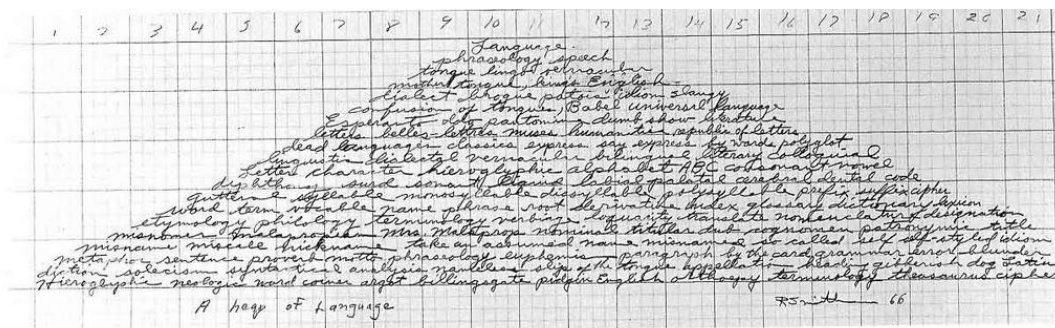


Fig. 9. Robert Smithson, “A Heap of Language,” *Writings of Robert Smithson*, 104.

Smithson’s “A Heap of Language” is arguably a visual or concrete poem that demonstrates language’s evolution as a metalanguage: beginning with the word “Language,” Smithson builds his heap out of metalinguistic categories; the second line reads “phraseology speech,” the third “tongue lingo vernacular,” the fourth “mother tongue, king’s English,” and so on. Each term that Smithson chooses can be used to describe language as a whole and these various parts relate concepts to a system that is traditionally considered immaterial. Each concept or selected word can be considered descriptive of language as a whole and yet none function as captors of language’s meaning: language remains outside of each metalinguistic concept.

Arguably, “language” rests at the head of the pyramid, but outside of this conceptual head every other signifier resists linearity: the “Heap” itself does not capture the variety of linguistic meaning, but rather depicts the *mass* of language—the heaviness of the linguistic lexicon. Lacan rightly points out that the “sentence, though, has one unique meaning, what I mean is that it can’t be lexicalized—one makes dictionaries of words, of word usages or locutions, but one doesn’t make a dictionary of sentences” (*Seminar II* 279). The materiality of language resists metalinguistic concepts because of its infinite and unknowable mass: there is no finite approximation of language’s phallogocentric mass and this unknowability is manifest in the “heaps” sometimes called “books.”

In his “Press Release: Language to be Looked at and/or Things to be Read” (1967), Smithson as “Eton Corrasable” theorizes what the project of a language heap would look like: “Literal usage becomes incantory [*sic*] when all metaphors are suppressed. Here language is built, not written” (104). The poet Caroline Bergvall takes an interest in Smithson’s language heap in her work *Meddle English* (2011): “Let’s imagine the midden of language,” Bergvall writes. “Robert Smithson brought a strong interest in geology to his views of language [...] Let us cut a cross-section into building-stacks of language” (6). “Midden” means a trash heap and Bergvall’s poetry collection understands language as a gradually accumulating geological “heap.” In this geological configuration of language, Bergvall begins to excavate the various layers of language-as-geology: “Principally, one discovers surprising varietals of soil, ancient yet compilable language bones, pressed word-fossils, collapsed layers, mineral toil, friable clays, dried pigments, decomposed fabric stretches, discontinuous tracings, and much unrecoverable matter” (6). According to the poet Jack Spicer in *After Lorca* (1957), “the garbage of the real still reaches out into the current world making *its* objects, in turn, visible” (34). Bergvall specifies, in similar terms, that “[t]he top layers reveal a far larger extent of familiar elements, traceable glossary, well-defined graphemes, syllabic conduits, what looks like mud-encased capitalizations, gold-dust, systems of numerical sticks, animal feathers, and various types of tools. These trace up letter elements historically, and through the altogether confusing and inventive arche-logics of etymology. Language is its own midden ground” (*Meddle* 6).

Smithson’s “Corrasable” voice describes the importance of the anti-metaphorical nature of the “midden ground” of language: “Words for mental processes are all derived from physical *things*. References are often reversed so that the ‘object’ takes the place of the ‘word.’ A is A is never A is A, but rather X is A” (104). Smithson’s totalizing pronouncement does not describe

how this process occurs; however, his claim is linked to what Burroughs seeks with the cut-ups in the previous chapter and what Benjamin argues about thing languages (considered later in this chapter)—namely, the directionality of language transitions from a two-system model of word and world (in which word and world are separated by a phenomenal screen) to a flattened network in which various communicational signals repeatedly spark between objects and signs. Object X transmits a signal to sign A and this informatic or semiotic relation, formed through the screen, is what permits future logogenetic emergence. The model of A=A is, I claim, a simplified version of a Saussurean and Peircean sign; Smithson points toward a different possibility—the possibility of X=A.

The general definition of a word-thing in this chapter focuses on a word-thing as haptic in which the word and its thing touch through the fleshy slash that separates them. Even though Smithson does not locate his “word-heap” in the tradition of concrete poetry, I claim that his “word-heap” has many of the qualities associated with concrete poetry. Concrete poetry itself is arguably concerned with the fleshiness or closeness of words on a page and of distancing those words (or letters) from their original mimetic functions. The fourth line of Smithson’s heap begins “mother tongue,” a word with special connotations in Eugen Gomringer’s “Concrete Poetry” (1956) manifesto: “They can [concrete poem structures], for instance, unite the view of the world expressed in the mother tongue with physical reality” (68).

This conceptual apparatus—that situates language as a fleshy and touching “mother tongue”—requires engaging with the philosophies of Maurice Merleau-Ponty and Jean-Luc Nancy. The chapter will begin with an analysis of words as sex toys and then proceed to theorizing the fleshiness and hapticity of haptic semiology and conclude with an analysis of the Hermetic foundations of haptic semiology.

Buggering Language

James Joyce haunts this dissertation. I do not have the space in which to consider Joyce's particular theorization of language as material. The most obvious examples in Joyce's oeuvre of a vitalist language or theorization of word-things can be found in *Ulysses* (1922) (specifically in the "Sirens" and "Oxen of the Sun" chapters) and the punning entirety of *Finnegans Wake* (1939); however, I will take an unexpected approach and turn to a less "canonical" Joyce: in Joyce's now (in)famous love letters to Nora Barnacle, he regularly regards language's materiality as an active agent in their sex life. Joyce sees (and uses) language's words and phonemes like dildos, vibrators, nipple clamps, and other sex toys.

On December 8th, 1909, Joyce writes to Nora that: "There is *one lovely word*, darling, you have underlined to make me pull myself off better" (185, original emphasis). Nora's chosen emphasis of this word—a word that remains unspecified because Ellmann collects only Joyce's side of the correspondence—individuates that word from the other words around it and imbues it with special significance. This significance is a sexual sovereignty that allows Joyce to use the word like lubricant in order to more effectively masturbate.

Joyce's letter from December 9th, 1909, further expands on the content of the letter from the 8th: "I could lie frigging all day looking at the *divine* word you wrote and at the thing you said you would do with your tongue. I wish I could hear your lips spluttering those heavenly exciting filthy words, see your mouth making dirty sounds and noises" (186, original emphasis). Words are directly bodily things for Joyce and his relationship with Nora encapsulates this level of linguistic vitality. Joyce's fantasy allows him to see these words as *entering* Nora's mouth and entering her body and his fantasy of her using these words (words that she was "unaccustomed"

to use because he fantasmatically considers her an “innocent” Galway girl) allows him to imagine her receiving irrumatio from these words.

From the same letter Joyce instructs Nora to: “Write more and dirtier, darling. Tickle your little cockey while you write to make you say worse and worse. Write the dirty words big and underline them and kiss them and hold them for a moment to your sweet hot cunt, darling, and also pull up your dress a moment and hold them in under your dear little farting bum” (186). Again, these words are meant to be used as sex toys to assist in Nora’s jouissance, but these words are themselves akin to other sexual partners. Joyce and Nora are, in this way, a swinging couple, and they “swing” with language. When Nora does not respond to Joyce’s stream of sex-filled letters he is concerned that he has offended her. On December 15th, 1909 he tries to temper the perceived offense: “Only I love in my dirty way to think that in a certain part they [Nora’s undies] are soiled. It is all nonsense, too, dear, about bugging you. It is only the dirty sound of the word I like” (189). During Joyce’s lusty reverie the “dirty” words—and it is important to note that some words can be *dirty* like errant, mud-throwing schoolchildren—are able to act as agential objects that Nora uses to pleasure herself: they can be held to her “sweet hot cunt” and her “dear little farting bum.”

They can be wrapped around Joyce’s shaft in order to orgasm; however, when social etiquette intervenes and Joyce is worried about offending Nora, the words are no longer agential—they no longer act as sex toys or other partners—but become limited to their phonemic import: “It is only the dirty sound of the word I like,” Joyce suggests. This shift from reverie to apology similarly transfers the significance of these dirty word-things: they are barred from the bedroom with their multifaceted lothario techniques and their “jobs” are downsized as sounds and textural marks. Perhaps, the *real* danger suggested by Joyce’s letter was that he had

embodied the words, giving Nora permission to stray with these active objects (like Blazes Boylan for the fictional Molly Bloom) and when he rescinds, he alters the word-things' ontological status as well.

They shift from being embodied to being sonic and less threatening. (Incidentally, Nora was not offended, she had just not yet responded—perhaps she was too preoccupied with these big words that Joyce had left her with). Like Sappho's iconic epithalamium that describes a new groom who is “a terribly big man” of priapic proportions, requiring the carpenters to “raise the rafter-beam” (75), when words this erect are sent home you have to give them extra room.

Perhaps these words that Joyce gifts to Nora are like Burroughs's “laughing sex words” (48) from *The Ticket that Exploded*. The hapticity of language need not remain at an incorporeal level: language can touch and be touched even while it can also be touching. When Joyce engages in a libidinous linguistic reverie, he must retract his insistence on the sexual agency of word-things in order to maintain social etiquette. These linguistic examples point to a slippage in metalinguistic understandings of language: a word can sometimes—at moments of reverie—be elevated beyond its word/thing duality and become a word-thing.

Like Joyce and Burroughs, the controversial Swiss writer Urs Allemann deploys “laughing sex words” in *Babyfucker* (1992). In the post-Beckettian and absurdist world of *Babyfucker*, a lone narrator lives in a room surrounded by two creels filled with babies, repeating the horrific sentence to himself: “I fuck babies” (21). Despite the morally reprehensible content of the narrator's sentence, the importance of *Babyfucker* is that it positions a strange transition occurring in language itself. At the beginning of the work the narrator asserts that: “These days I sometimes treat myself to a memory. That's what I call it. It's a beautiful word. Sometimes I want to suck on a beautiful word. To lick it clean” (13). The narrator's sexual interest is not in

babies per se, but in the *word* “baby.” Gradually, words transmogrify throughout the text as the German word *Schlecht* (meaning “sick”) (14) transitions to *Geschlecht* (meaning “genitals”) (20). Another example of such odd linguistic incarnation and slippage occurs when the *Geschlechtsstein* (or “sex stone”) becomes a *Geschlechtspfüte* (or “sex puddle”) (20).

These words are word-things because they contain no specific intended reference, but engage in a collision in which two references combine. Two seemingly distinct objects (in each case)—a genital and a stone or a genital and a puddle—combine to become a unified object. A word-thing occasionally functions in this way: as a combinatory linguistic *thing* that *creates* a new object by combining objects or incarnating one object in a new way. A word-thing does not *represent* a real object passively, but rather creates objects, while also being its own object. Such semantic production continues *ad infinitum*; for example, the sex stone and sex puddle later transubstantiate (or consubstantiate) to become “*Sprachstein*” (or “language stone”) and “*Sprachpfütze*” (or “language puddle”) (24). These word-things contain not only an echo of their former incarnations, but transform in such a way that their earlier word-objects are carried along with them so that, in Allemann’s text, words and sex become indecipherable. These word-things operate alongside the narrator by reflecting the content of the story: “Either I write something. Or I fuck something” (69), the narrator claims. Slowly, the distinction between writing and fucking becomes indecipherable: this indecipherability leads to a non-dualist understanding of sign systems so that sex and language become *one unified object*.

The experimental French writer Pierre Guyotat is similarly concerned with the combination of sex and language. Guyotat has been extensively celebrated by critics such as Foucault, Roland Barthes, and writers like Phillippe Sollers. Guyotat has devoted himself so entirely to the act of writing that he fell into a coma while feverishly working on *The Book (Le*

livre) and *The Tales of Samora Machel (Histoires de Samora Machel)* (which remains unpublished). This devastating experience is recounted in surprisingly traditional language in *Coma* (2010). Stephen Barber claims that “[I]ike Antonin Artaud, Guyotat views the act of writing as a physical secretion—a feral exudation of the body’s material” (5). For Guyotat, writing is an act that is directly physical—rather than metaphysical—and his compositional process is “sexual” because Guyotat regularly writes in his own blood and ejaculate. In his preface to Guyotat’s *Eden Eden Eden*, Barthes argues that Guyotat produces a new literary element (7), an element that Guyotat himself has called *matière écrite* or “written matter.”

Allemann’s narrator writes: “On the babytree. That’s a beautiful word. Licked it clean. Spit it out on the grass on the canvas on the garret floor” (97-99). By the end of *Babyfucker* it is difficult to know whether or not there ever were any babies. Gradually, the narrator sees his own body as an assemblage of countless babies. Slowly the narrator becomes a baby himself as language spills over from the edges of the text, producing countless word-things that render language as an earlier non-Adamic, but developmentally pliable construct. The last nonce-word of *Babyfucker* is “*Ellefanton*” (124), a neologism that combines “phantom,” “tone,” “elbow,” and “elephant.” Language is filled with laughing sex words because language is something that we allow inside us. Language is indeed phallogocentric, but only from the perspective of a heteronormative and penetrative definition of sex—words wander around inside the body (not only the hysteric’s, but everyone’s) and occasionally become trapped in certain areas.

Plato is wrong when he asserts that it is the uterus that wanders around the woman’s body: words wander around inside (and outside) *every* body. Word-things fill us, normalize us, abnormalize us, or transform us, but all along, they enact an uncanny agency upon us where we wait and passively become imprinted—we are therefore the markers of a massive developmental

palimpsest and our “self” is the result of a parasitic *scriptura continua* that touches us and refuses to leave. After the Nietzschean death of God, we are not left all alone in the cold cosmos because language dwells inside us (and outside us) as an uncanny and incomprehensible partner, lover, occasional friend, or even enemy.

Haptocentric Philosophy in Merleau-Ponty and Nancy

One of the best approaches to understanding these textual examples from Joyce, Allemann, and Guyotat is to ask: what kind of flesh does their writing activate? How does this word-flesh function? The two most influential thinkers of haptology (for my purposes) are Jean-Luc Nancy and Maurice Merleau-Ponty.³ Both work in very different philosophical traditions and yet both theorize language from Saussurean frameworks of immateriality.⁴ Nancy asks: “Who here, at this instant, can touch the body of words, while dissipating the incorporeality that makes them *words?*” (59). However, Nancy does not consider the signifier itself as a body or even as a material object—he remains at a structural and poststructural moment that insists on the incorporeality of words. Nancy even insists that “[b]eing doesn’t speak, doesn’t pour forth in the incorporeality of signification” (113). What is intriguing about both Nancy and Merleau-Ponty’s positions regarding hapticity is that they both “flirt” with the kind of thinking I am proposing—namely, that there exist certain objects called “word-things.”

³ Important thinkers of hapticity that are worthy of note are: Alois Riegl’s *Late Roman Art Industry* (1927), Wilhelm Wörringer’s *Egyptian Art* (1928) and *Abstraction and Empathy* (1908). Riegl is of course the art historian who distinguishes between “haptic” and “optical” images.

⁴ As Garth Gillan points out Merleau-Ponty’s understanding of language is distinctly Saussurean in that language is considered a totality in itself that is produced from the relationship between the signified and the signifying (35).

For the purposes of this dissertation, what is notable in Nancy is the extent to which he acknowledges that language appears to be strangely embodied. This trend can be found throughout *Corpus*, but I would like to highlight a few key moments:

it has to be said that touching upon the body, touching the body, *touching*— happens in writing all the time. Maybe it doesn't happen exactly *in* writing, if writing in fact has an 'inside.' But along the border, at the limit, the tip, the furthest edge of writing nothing *but* that happens. Now, writing takes its place at the limit. So if anything at all happens to writing, nothing happens to it but *touch*. More precisely: touching the body (or some singular body) *with the incorporeality* of 'sense.' And consequently, *to make the incorporeal touching*, to make of meaning a touch. (11, original emphasis)

Despite the incorporeality of the signifier, Nancy suggests that something occurs at the limit of writing (for both the text and the writer). At the outer boundary of language, I claim that some literary *topoi* fold into a unified *topos* or flesh and I extend Merleau-Ponty's concept of flesh from its phenomenological and haptocentric designations into a linguistic context.

Merleau-Ponty writes that “[t]he flesh is not matter, is not mind, is not substance. To designate it, we should need the old term ‘element,’ in the sense it was used to speak of water, air, earth, and fire, that is, in the sense of a *general thing*, midway between the spatio-temporal individual and the idea, a sort of incarnate principle” (139). *Flesh* is therefore a unifying concept that Merleau-Ponty deploys in effort to combine the subject-object dyad in order to fuse reality through phenomenal apperception. If Nancy was building on Merleau-Ponty, then the following claim can be seen as an assertion of a shared flesh that is produced between the author and reader across the text-as-skin: “Bodies, for good or ill, are touching each other upon this page, or more

precisely, the page itself is a touching (of my hand while it writes, and your hands while they hold the book)” (51). Such a rapport is complementarily affixed by an invisible flesh or skin that binds author and reader together. Nancy would consider this conceptual rapport to be the elimination of the possibility of exteriority—and it is here that Merleau-Ponty (in his theorization of flesh) would agree. Nancy claims that: “Thus the body presents the being-self of the sign, in other words, the accomplished community of signifier and signified, the end of exteriority” (73). Merleau-Ponty’s epithelial monism excises the possibility of an outside because “the world is universal flesh” (137), and there is no “outside” to Merleau-Ponty’s flesh.

Practically speaking, I have to point out then when we look around we do not see flesh all around us; when I read a book I do not walk away from the experience feeling that I have touched the author’s body. However, if both Merleau-Ponty and Nancy can theorize this process as *real*, then why would the corporeality of the signifier or word be unthinkable? Perhaps their shared axiomatic reliance on Saussurean (and by extension, Peircean) semiotics limits the possibilities of a fully developed linguistic hapticity. There remain moments, though, when the possibility of a word-thing appears in their work.

For example, Nancy insists that “[w]e have to throw ourselves across this ‘subject,’ and the word *body*, of itself, when used with reference to this ‘subject,’ imposes a dry and edgy hardness that makes our sentences clatter” (21). The very word “body,” for Nancy, promotes the sentences around it to “clatter.” The word “body” is nearly embodied in Nancy’s text: “Bodies are impenetrable to languages—and languages are impenetrable to bodies, themselves being bodies. Every language is a hard, extended block of significance, *partes extra partes, verba extra verba*, compact words impenetrable to one another and to things. Like this word *BODY*, which immediately conceals its own entry and incorporates it into its opacity” (57). The very word

“*BODY*” betrays various strata of signification, while remaining at a graphematic limit. In his book on Foucault (1986), Deleuze links his theory of strata with language: “Strata are historical formations, positivities or empiricities. As ‘sedimentary beds’ they are made from things and words, from seeing and speaking, from the visible and the sayable, from bands of visibility and fields of readability, from contents and expressions” (47). If the sign is strictly incorporeal then it remains a hauntologic rem(a)inder of *différance*.⁵ However, the word “*BODY*” registers as a singular unit: the oneness of the word exposes the oneness of the concept. “Along with this excrescence comes the always possible imminence of a fracture and of a spontaneous outpouring of the *word* itself,” Nancy writes. “*Body*, like a piece of bone, a pebble, a stone, a granule” (21). Caroline Bergvall writes a poem that captures the haptocentricity of language: “Yet mostly corps à corps / loot mate with mate / A corps is a unit a detachment / a body’s a corps disagreed / corps aggravé / tiréd in the flèsh” (*Meddle* 107).

My issue with Merleau-Ponty’s haptocentric phenomenology is that it implicitly relies too heavily on a traditional definition of hapticity (even though Merleau-Ponty never mentions the term “hapticity”). “Haptic” derives from Riegl and Wörringer, two thinkers who consider hapticity to be a visual phenomenon. The haptic is, according to Riegl, Wörringer, Deleuze/Guattari, and Laura Marks, a visual experience in which an image is so close to the eye that the experience becomes touch-based. My use of haptic does not privilege the visual at all,

⁵ Concrete examples of such lettric “ghosts” would be the ligatures or letters that have gradually disappeared from language over time such as the ampersand & (which was the 27th letter of the alphabet until the 1800s), ash Æ, ethel Æ, wynn, yogh, thorn, eth, and eng. Paul Saenger considers the “suspended ligature” in *Space Between Words* (67-68). Bergvall puts such disappearances in geological and poetic terms: “Letters, sounds, words, are discarded from a language during accidental breaks. Or dispensed with, like outmoded cooking utensils. Or pulled out, like teeth. Entire jawlines of these” (*Meddle English* 6-7).

but rather the signficatory: what are the meanings produced when objects (or signs) designated as separate begin to touch? Visual hapticity is grounded in anthropocentric perception: not all objects have eyes, and in haptic semiology any sign-producing thing can touch any other sign-producing thing (such as Benjamin's lamp languages, chair languages, and mountain languages).

Therefore, in the history of the term "haptic" (and in Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology), I argue that there is too much emphasis on the visual and not enough on the tactile. Even though the haptic (for Riegl and Wörringer) is conceptually opposed to a traditional conception of the optic, the visual remainder of the optic in the haptic renders hapticity related to a human observer. I choose to remain at the theoretical level of touch because the history of traditional (Western) philosophy tends to assume an optical bias.

To that end, Merleau-Ponty's concept of flesh is too anthropocentric and visually biased for my purposes: it remains hand-based and eye-based, while flesh is a much larger issue (skin is of course the body's largest organ). In the final analysis, flesh conceptually inaugurates issues of connectivity and relationality: it is, fundamentally, connective tissue. In the following excerpt from Merleau-Ponty, I would prefer to replace the word "visible" with the word "flesh": "But what is proper to the visible is, we said, to be the surface of an inexhaustible depth: this is what makes it able to be open to visions other than our own" (143). Flesh itself is the surface of an inexhaustible depth in the same way that, for Harman, objects withdraw within their own inexhaustibility so that aspects of their ontology remain obscured.

Nietzsche's abyss gazes at the speaking-subject even as the speaking-subject registers its own self-referentially abyssal depths. Even though Merleau-Ponty insists that "[o]nce again, the flesh we are speaking of is not matter. It is the coiling over of the visible upon the seeing body, of the tangible upon the touching body" (146), I see this formulation as an instance of a

marginalizing able-ism. If meaning is the muscle and signifiers are the skin, then what I am calling “flesh” is the fascia that connects them—the combinatory unit or intersection point between words and objects.

Merleau-Ponty’s theorization of flesh begins to destabilize traditional modes of meaning (as can be shown in his notable insertion in his analysis of the colour red):

The red dress a fortiori holds with all its fibers onto the fabric of the visible, and thereby onto a fabric of invisible being. A punctuation in the field of red things, which includes the tiles of roof tops, the flags of gatekeepers and of the Revolution, certain terrains near Aix or in Madagascar, it is also a punctuation in the field of red garments, which includes, along with the dresses of women, robes of professors, bishops, and advocate generals, and also in the field of adornments and that of uniforms. And its red literally is not the same as it appears in one constellation or in the other, as the pure essence of the Revolution of 1917 precipitates in it, or that of the eternal feminine, or that of the public prosecutor, or that of the gypsies dressed like hussars who reigned twenty-five years ago over an inn on the Champs-Élysées. A certain red is also a fossil drawn up from the depths of imaginary worlds. If we took all these participations into account, we would recognize that a naked color, and in general a visible, is not a chunk of absolutely hard, indivisible being, offered all naked to a vision [...]—less a color or a thing, therefore, than a difference between things and colors, a momentary crystallization of colored being or of visibility. Between the alleged colors and visibles, we would find anew the tissue that lines them, sustains them, nourishes

them, and which for its part is not a thing, but a possibility, a latency, and a *flesh* of things. (132-133)

A word-thing is haptic (meaning that it is fleshy) in that the signifier is objectal and the referent itself is significantly caught within a feedback loop. Theorizing a word-thing results in a recognition of flesh, of inescapable flesh: Merleau-Ponty demonstrates the proliferation of fractured meanings that extend from the seeming singularity of the colour red, which also includes the very word “red.”

Henri Chopin’s sound poem “Rouge,” recorded on tape recorder in 1956, is a poem that repeats the word *red* in a variety of different vocal intonations. Transcribed in full in Kenneth Goldsmith’s *Uncreative Writing*, Goldsmith calls it a “literal sound painting” or “an abstract expressionist canvas” (78) of sound. Chopin’s poem evokes the word “red” in all of its fleshiness and, by virtue of its repetition, the vocal arabesques of forming the word r-o-u-g-e—by using the materiality of the tongue, palate, and mouth—likewise renders the fleshiness of the word itself *audible*. Chopin’s poem effectively renders “red” as a non-visual, but nonetheless material entity—a heard entity, a spoken entity, and a word-entity. Chopin’s poem illustrates the other valences of Merleau-Ponty’s theorization of “flesh”: the “fleshiness” of the word *rouge* is rendered haptic—it becomes a sensual object *par excellence*. Choosing to sidestep the visual associations of Merleau-Ponty’s theorization of flesh, I emphasize the following definition from *The Visible and the Invisible*: “What we are calling flesh, this interiorly worked-over mass, has no name in any philosophy. As the formative medium of the object and the subject, it is not the atom of being, the hard in itself that resides in a unique place and moment” (147) because flesh remains liminal and relational.

Flesh though has a dark side because flesh can become meat. In Deleuze's book on Francis Bacon (1981), he situates Bacon's paintings in relation to meat as the tension between flesh and bone: "Meat is the state of the body in which flesh and bone confront each other locally rather than being composed structurally" (20-21). Meat is therefore, according to Deleuze, a medial concept that undergirds the seeming stability of flesh and bone. For Deleuze, meat is a philosophical concept that unsettlingly destabilizes traditional definitions of the body. "Pity the meat! Meat is undoubtedly the chief object of Bacon's pity" Deleuze writes, because

[m]eat is not dead flesh; it retains all the sufferings and assumes all the colors of living flesh. It manifests such convulsive pain and vulnerability, but also such delightful invention, color, and acrobatics. Bacon does not say, "Pity the beasts," but rather that every man who suffers is a piece of meat. Meat is a common zone of man and the beast, their zone of indiscernibility. (21)

The transition of flesh to meat in French philosophy is one of openness to closedness.

For Merleau-Ponty, there is no nerve structure in flesh (flesh is an illustrative concept), whereas for Deleuze, meat registers a process or affect—meat is what happens when flesh has suffered. In French, meat is *viande* and flesh is *chair*. Pardon the pun, but a chair is something you sit on and, in the context of Merleau-Ponty, it is also (as flesh) a supportive structure—flesh is the lynchpin that links subject and object. For Deleuze, meat is the record of this troubled relationship.⁶ In Caroline Bergvall's poetic work *Fig* (2005), she has a section entitled "Flèsh," which contains a series of pieces dedicated to "writers who share a trance-like understanding of the connections between text and physicality" (21), and she focuses on Saint Teresa of Avila,

⁶ Daniela Voss discusses this very transition from flesh to meat in "The Philosophical Concepts of Meat and Flesh: Deleuze and Merleau-Ponty" (2013).

Unica Zürn, Hannah Weiner, and Kathy Acker. Her piece on Weiner reads: “Meat is carved all over th. Her insides. Bright were the. Daze. Pushing –error For The Sake Of T. secretes incessantly” (27). Bergvall’s “Flèsh” series deals with the textuality that exists in between flesh and meat: perhaps, when poetic experimentation is pushed to its limits, then text-as-flesh becomes text-as-meat.

Deleuze and Guattari devote several pages in *A Thousand Plateaus* to the question of hapticity, but they primarily deploy the haptic in the service of theorizing “the Striated” (493-494). Does language fit into these theoretical striations? In *Foucault*, Deleuze develops new directions for theories of language that involve the visibility of language:

As long as we stick to things and words we can believe that we are speaking of what we see, that we see what we are speaking of, and that the two are linked: in this way we remain on the level of an empirical exercise. But as soon as we open up words and things, as soon as we discover statements and visibilities, words and sight are raised to a higher exercise that is *a priori*, so that each reaches its own unique limit which separates it from the other, a visible element that can only be seen, an articulable element that can only be spoken. (65)

Merleau-Ponty suggests (even while remaining ensconced in a Saussurean framework) that: “In a sense, if we were to make completely explicit the architectonics of the human body, its ontological framework, and how it sees itself and hears itself, we would see that the structure of its mute world is such that all the possibilities of language are already given in it” (155). In the increasingly blurry myopia of haptic phenomenology, meanings provided by and through language are present(ed) in the body—even as signifiers become dissimilar from pores, glands, blisters, scars, pimples, and moles.

Garth Gillan argues in “In the Folds of the Flesh: Philosophy and Language” (1973) that Merleau-Ponty’s fleshy-phenomenology suggests a living (and organismic) language: “Because the meaning of the sign is entirely within language, at the intersections of linguistic gestures, language has an autonomy and an opaqueness that makes it more than a means for thought. The specific inherence of meaning in the junctures of signs makes it a *kind of being*” (52). However, what kind of being would that be? Gillan points out that “language possesses man, not as its instrument, but through the intersubjectivity and generality of the flesh” (60). Michel Serres similarly seeks a “flesh of language” (30) in *Variations on the Body* (2002). Merleau-Ponty’s theorization of flesh allows for language’s possession of speaking-subjects.

Surprisingly, it is language’s presumed incorporeality that permits this vitalist analysis. The stable appearance of text on the page belies the chaotic liminality of language qua language. Language functions as a *kind of* flesh that combines speaking-subjects because of its seeming incorporeality and such incorporeality is nonlocalizable while at the same time being *objectal*.

Language may not appear as traditional material, but this is only because its materiality is of a strange and different kind. Gillan insists that “[t]he reflection of signification back upon the audible signs expressing it, the generosity of language which moves thought immediately to the expressive sense of things, the reversibility of the sign and its differential character, all testify to the fact that language has a life of its own, a silent life” (59). When Gillan asks “what speaks in language[?]” (55), he sounds very much like a Lacanian psychoanalyst who would likely respond, “it speaks.”⁷ What speaks in language? Language speaks.

⁷ But of course this Lacanian phrase is adopted from Heidegger who originally writes: “*die Sprache spricht*” (qtd. in Laruelle, “Toward an Active Linguistics” n.p.).

Even though he does not consider the fleshiness of words in themselves, Merleau-Ponty's theorization of flesh unintentionally unlocks language's cage, allowing signifiers free reign over a biosemiotic landscape:

And conversely the whole landscape is overrun with words as with an invasion, it is henceforth but a variant of speech before our eyes, and to speak of its "style" is in our view to form a metaphor. In a sense the whole of philosophy, as Husserl says, consists in restoring a power to signify, a birth of meaning, or a wild meaning, an expression of experience by experience, which in particular clarifies the special domain of language. And in a sense, as Valéry said, language is everything, since it is the voice of no one, since it is the very voice of the things, the waves, and the forests. (155)

If language is situated as the democratic or flat ontological voice of "the things," then it is time to let the things speak for themselves, or for a theoretical unification of sign and object that permits a different conceptualization of the sign. Returning to the problematic of language's limit, Nancy claims that: "the body is the end of the signifier as well, the absolute *crasis* of the sign" (75). *Crisis* is a type of linguistic contraction in which two vowels or diphthongs blend to form one, unified diphthong or vowel. The importance of Nancy's choice of the word "crisis" (*la crase* in French [74]) is that its intention is surprisingly similar to Merleau-Ponty's choice of the word "flesh" in that both terms attempt to unify seemingly disparate objects that have been traditionally held apart by an entrenched screen. From the postmodern crisis of the sign to Nancy's ameliorative crisis: signifiers and referents can finally commune together; or, put differently, the Lacanian barred subject (as sign-crisis) is unbarred by virtue of the complexity of embodiment resulting in sign-crisis.

The flesh that bridges word and referent is a striated space of ripples, valleys, grooves, and ridges—flesh is textural. Nancy sees the very word “self” as a scission that appears in language: “Writing the *anatomical* sign of ‘self,’ which doesn’t signify, but cuts, separates, exposes” (85). A word-thing describes a fleshy correlation between sign and referent, but this correlation does not result in a Leibnizian or Spinozist monism or monad. The combination of sign and referent does not result in a “oneness” per se, but in a concept that is more complex.

Any seeming oneness in the natural world is never strictly one: for example, a flower will pollinate and extend its seeds over an expanse of land and each seed (temporarily as a one) is only unified until other forces structure it as a refracting and *living* thing; branches bifurcate while remaining singular; leaves emerge from momentarily singular objects; a rock is thrown against another rock and splits; letters and words sometimes split over time as ligatures are eliminated.⁸ A word-thing however is, in this instance, a *fuzzy monism*. A word-thing permits, I claim, the kind of diffraction and rupture that is present within organic or living systems. A word-thing is also, of course, not limited to itself, but is present alongside other word-things in a larger linguistic ecosystem.

When Nancy tries to capture the complexity of the body, his prose reaches a level of intensity where the words themselves parade like bodies across the fleshy surface of the page. In French he writes: “«sang»/«sens»/«sans»/«100» (= l’in-fini du *corpus*)” (104), which is translated as: “‘sang(uine)’/ ‘sense’/ ‘sans’/ ‘cent’ / ‘100’ (= the in-finity of the *corpus*)” (105). Instead of theorizing a body through philosophical language, such paronomasia suggests instead

⁸ Deleuze and Guattari discuss the differences between rhizomes and arborescence—a distinction that emerges because “[w]e’re tired of trees” (15)—in their introductory section “Rhizome” from *A Thousand Plateaus*, 3-25. My discussion of the flower also builds on Deleuze and Guattari’s theorization of the orchid and the wasp (*A Thousand Plateaus* 10).

that language contains an uncanny surplus or limit: language is a punning-machine that occasionally loses itself in homophones and graphematic echoes. Nancy's chosen words here are not terms that describe a body; they are word-bodies that strut across the page in a symphony of sibilant seduction.

The Hermetic Origins of Haptic Semiology

German Romantic and Idealist theories of the natural world situate Nature as a text written in God's Hand that requires hermeneutical exegesis. Daniel Whistler historicizes the notion of German Idealist "Nature" in the concept of a natural language or "*Natursprache*," which is "divine language in corporeal form" (35).⁹ The origins of the German Romantic concept of *Natursprache* can be found in the earlier tradition of Hermetic philosophy.

Paracelsus insists, in *De natura rerum* (1537), specifically Book 9 "Concerning the Signature of Natural Things," that: "Nothing is without a sign" because "nature does not release anything in which it has not marked what is to be found within that thing" (qtd. in Agamben 33). Ontologically speaking, this theorization of the sign situates a presence—be it noumenal or differently essential—within the sign at all times. When theorizing signatures, Agamben considers processes of naming in relation to Adamic language, insisting that every "name in

⁹ In terms of an Adamic or "absolute language," Emanuel Swedenborg's writings are an important instance of the Romantic search for a *Natursprache*. Lynn Wilkinson's study of Swedenborgian linguistic esotericism is useful in this regard: see *The Dream of an Absolute Language* (1996). Along slightly different lines is the study, by Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe and Jean-Luc Nancy, into the German Romantic notion of "literature as the absolute" (12). Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy focus on the *Athenaeum* journal by the two Schlegel brothers and its importance in German Romanticism. See their work *The Literary Absolute* (1978).

Hebrew that left Adam's mouth had a correspondence in the specific nature and virtue of the named animal" (35). Agamben further cites Paracelsus:

So when we say, "This is a pig, a horse, a cow, a bear, a dog, a fox, a sheep, etc.," the name of a pig indicates a foul and impure animal. A horse indicates a strong and patient animal; a cow, a voracious and insatiable one; a bear, a strong, victorious, and untamed animal; a fox, a crafty and cunning animal; a dog, one faithless in its nature; a sheep, one that is placid and useful, hurting no one. (qtd. in Agamben 35)

The most useful Hermetic conception of language for my purposes is that found in Giordano Bruno. Bruno's last published work in his lifetime was *De imaginum, signorum et idearum compositione* (1591). An eccentric named Hainzell commissioned the book—he had, at the time, acquired an estate at Elgg (around Zurich)—and it was here that Bruno wrote the work (Yates 325). In their introduction to Bruno's *On the Composition of Images, Signs, and Ideas*, Dick Higgins and Charles Doria argue that "Bruno seems to be approaching something like modern semiotics" (xxxvi). One passage that seems prescient and anticipatory in terms of Saussurean semiotics is the following moment where Bruno discusses what could be called the relationship between the signifier and the signified (if the signified is equated with the image):

images do not receive their names from the explanations of the things they signify, but rather from the condition of those things that do the signifying. For, in a text, we are not able to explicate passages and words adequately by signs like those we trace out on paper unless we think of the forms of sensible things, since they are images of things which exist either in nature or by art and present themselves to

the eyes. Therefore, images are named not for those things that they signify in intention, but for those things from which they have been gathered. (31)¹⁰

Bruno situates meaning as a particular gathering that occurs between images, signs, and, at some level, things; however, his definition of signs originally emphasizes relationality: “‘sign’ [...] denotes everything which in any way displays or indicates another thing either in its primary, secondary proximate or remote, immediate or mediate reason or meaning” (13). Dick Higgins and Charles Doria speculate on Saussure’s knowledge of Bruno’s theory of signs:

One wonders if Fernand de Saussure [*sic*], the father of modern semiotics, who did his researches in the 1890s just after the first collected volumes of Bruno’s Latin texts appeared, read it. Saussure published nothing about this; in fact most of what we have comes via his and his students’ notes. But it is not inconceivable that he knew Bruno’s Latin texts, since the 1890s were a time when Bruno was very well known, at least as a martyr figure. But this, of course, is only speculation, yet leading to a line of inquiry, in our view, well worth pursuing. (xxxvi-xxxvii).

Higgins and Doria point out that Bruno frequently uses the terms *signo*, *signum*, *signaculo*, and so on. But, according to Higgins and Doria, the first use of the term “semiotics” is found in a chart in Ernesto Friderico’s *Galenicæ et Hermeticæ Anatome Philosophica* from 1626 (278, n. 15), after the publication of Bruno’s work. Whether or not Saussure read Bruno is inconsequential for the purposes of haptic semiology because—even though Bruno’s framework

¹⁰ Higgins and Doria point out that Bruno’s thinking on the sign—and his resultant theory of language—builds primarily on the work of Ramón Llull (286, n. 1).

maintains a proto-Saussurean language-referent correlationism—he points, at moments, to a unique Hermetic configuration of signs and things.¹¹

For Bruno, ideas are the cause of things in that things develop according to their own internal morphogenesis:

These ideas are the cause of things before the things exist, the vestiges of the idea are the things themselves or what vestiges are in things; the shadows of the ideas are from the things themselves, or exist after the things which are said to exist with so much less reason than those things which proceed out of the lap of nature.

(*Composition 7*)

Therefore, in Bruno’s philosophy, the thing-in-itself and the sign are intricately interwoven: depending on the context or “perspective” they seem to cooperatively influence the causation of each other—the “perspective,” which could be understood as an “origin point,” is determined by the concepts of “vestige,” “shadow”—and these shadows or vestiges *bond* signs and things together as co-present entities. This process approximates a kind of “weird Platonism” that moves from idea to thing to sign; however, I argue that this dynamic is not linearly directional and can also be reversed.

Like his theory of bonds in *De vinculis in genere* or “A general account of bonding” (1591), Bruno situates an “agent” as the force that initiates a bond: and an “agent” is also at work in his theory of signs, such as when Bruno argues that it is “[t]he agent [that] grants the sign” (*Composition 30*). In Bruno’s text on bonding he discusses how a “bonding agent” (“General”

¹¹ Frances Yates’s influential book *Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition* (1964) traces the lineage of Bruno’s philosophy to Hermeticism. Hermeticism itself can be traced to the mythical figure Hermes Trismegistus: the supposed author of the founding texts of Hermeticism, the Greek *Corpus Hermeticum* and the Latin *Asclepius*. A recent translation from Brian P. Copenhaver has been published as *Hermetica* (1992).

156), or that which accomplishes a bond, registers as a post-Platonic notion. As to the question “where is the bonding agent located?” Bruno responds:

Those who have not studied the matter too deeply, like the Platonists, think that that which binds is the form of the thing, and crosses over from the thing to the mind, even though it does not leave the object itself. This is like fire which does not lessen when it communicates its form, and like an image which is in an object first, then in the mirror, then in the intervening space, and finally in the eye.

(“General” 150)

The bond describes a phenomenal relationship that occurs between images, signs, things, and consciousness and this “bond” can be traced to an early agential cause—I interpret this agential cause in decidedly non-religious terms: I claim that a contemporary reevaluation of Bruno’s “bonding agent” would be morphogenesis or emergence (as considered in Chapters One, Two, and Three).

For Bruno, the complexity of the relationship forged between beings can be encapsulated as a complex interplay between signs, images, and things: “Thus, beings are distinguished into those which are things, and into those things which are their signs or indications” (*Composition* 7). However, despite the notable interplay between images, signs, and things in Bruno’s thinking he remains at what could be called a correlational impasse in which what Kant would call the “noumenal” remains at an epistemological distance: “We are deliberately proposing a method which by no means concerns things but which treats, rather, the significance of things,” but Bruno nonetheless maintains that this is a “method in which may be easily ascertained that there exists beyond a doubt a productive power of all things” (*Composition* 7-8). What I call “morphogenesis” (or even “logogenesis”), Bruno would call “composition” in that the natural

world appears to *write* objects, things, and signs; or, as Bruno writes: “Nature places, orders, composes, moves and guides these same four elements, and under signs varied according to the thing formed and figured” (4).¹² “Composition” is therefore the name of a particular type of concrescence: the concrescence of the natural and the symbolic world as a co-present bond. “Composition” is, in this way, similar to Bruno’s larger project of the *coincidentia oppositorum* which is, as Arielle Saiber points out, the “paradigm of the intersection between contraries”—an essential aspect of Bruno’s philosophy. Bruno repeatedly attempts to “reconcile antitheses: the maximum and the minimum; form and matter; the container and the contained; the One and the Many” (Saiber 90). Saiber argues that Bruno attempts such reconciliation partly through his own portmanteau experiments because Bruno requires “a language that can imitate the inherent contradictions in the perception/conception of the ineffable, a language that is itself a *coincidentia oppositorum*” (Saiber 134): Bruno discusses the “circularlystraight” and the “straightlycircular” (qtd. in Saiber 134) or “spherical circularity” (*circum sphaeraliter*) (qtd. in Saiber 135).

I consider Bruno’s theory of the sign an example of *sensuous contiguity* in which the component parts of the sign intermingle through the flesh of signification. The notion of “sensuous contiguity” develops from Walter Benjamin’s concept of “nonsensuous similarity” (334) that he discusses in his essay “On the Mimetic Faculty” (1933). Haptic semiology seeks out the opposite goal: instead of a nonsensuous similarity, the goal is *sensuous contiguity*.

¹² It is unclear from the context of the passage what “four elements” Bruno is referring to here. He does list five “elements” in an earlier paragraph that argues for an analogical relation between God and Nature—these elements are “the idea, the imagination, the shape, the designation, [and] the notation” (3)—but it is unclear if these are the elements to which Bruno refers. He could also be referring to the elements of earth, air, fire, and water.

Another instance of sensuous contiguity can be found in Walter Benjamin's text "On Language as Such and on the Language of Man" (1916). This essay is complex and, for the purposes of sensuous contiguity, I will emphasize moments when Benjamin discusses "language as such" rather than "the language of man."

Benjamin begins by asserting that "[e]very expression of human mental life can be understood as a kind of language" ("Language" 314), and he further discusses the "mental entities" that are (re)presented through language *as* language (315). His "mental entities" can be considered (perhaps reductively) Saussurean signifieds and his "language-mind" model is similar to yet another post-German Idealist screen: Benjamin's language theory builds on the work of Hamann (321, 326), and, like Hamann, Benjamin returns to the human:

To whom does the lamp communicate itself? The mountain? The fox? But here the answer is: to man. This is not anthropomorphism. The truth of this answer is shown in knowledge and perhaps also in art. Furthermore, if the lamp and the mountain and the fox did not communicate themselves to man, how should he be able to name them? And he names them; *he* communicates himself by naming *them*. To whom does he communicate himself? (317)

The lamp's objective sovereignty is ignored in favour of reinforcing the anthropocentric correlation. For this reason, the second half of Benjamin's title emphasizes a linguistic theory that is not yet a posthuman linguistics. I consider this no great fault with Benjamin, but I do think that the true radicality of his approach in "On Language as Such and on the Language of Man" is found in the moments when he discusses "language as such" (or what I am calling *language qua language*), instead of the "language of man."

Language qua language does not describe the same relation as being qua being. Both concepts—as signifiers—designate different epistemological systems. Both systems, as systems, expand beyond their intrinsic anthropocentricity and implicate various external states and forms. Language is not being and being is not language, but there is a *language of being* (Heidegger) and also a yet unconsidered *being of language* (haptic semiology). The being of language—which can also be called language qua language—is hinted at in the beginning of Benjamin’s title. Language qua language is not a metalanguage though because language qua language does not describe a language *of language*, but rather the state of language *in-itself* or, as Benjamin says, “language as such.”

Language qua language is not a metalanguage because it is closer to a *mystical language* (for Benjamin). I consider Benjamin’s model another possible theorization of language qua language or language’s being. In fact, Benjamin’s notion of language “as such” potentially separates from a theological framework when paired with a Harmanian panpsychical model. Benjamin writes that “[t]here is no event or thing in either animate or inanimate nature that does not in some way partake of language, for it is in the nature of all to communicate their mental meanings. This use of the word ‘language’ is in no way metaphorical” (“Language” 314). Benjamin’s use of the phrase “mental meaning” suggests that there exist no objects that lack some form of psychical vitalism. I interpret Benjamin to mean an implicit panpsychism or what could be called, haptic semiologically speaking, *panpsychical language*.

If there exists a panpsychical language then, as Benjamin writes, “we cannot imagine a total absence of language in anything” (315). Benjamin understands “mental being” as an intrinsically linguistic entity: “If mental being is identical with linguistic, then a thing, by virtue of its mental being, is a medium of communication, and what is communicated in it is—in

accordance with its mediating relationship—precisely this medium (language) itself. Language is thus the mental being of things” (319-320). In this model, language is not an inner kernel of things or objects, but more precisely, language is a field that permeates all objects. The physicist Niels Bohr likewise insists that “[w]e are suspended in language” (qtd. in Barad 125). Etymologies develop atomically and atoms etymically.

How does panpsychical language function? Benjamin writes:

Language communicates the linguistic being of things. The clearest manifestation of this being, however, is language itself. The answer to the question, ‘*What does language communicate?*’ is therefore ‘All language communicates itself.’ The language of this lamp, for example, does not communicate the lamp (for the mental being of the lamp, insofar as it is *communicable*, is by no means the lamp itself), but: the language-lamp, the lamp in communication, the lamp in expression. For in language the situation is this: *the linguistic being of all things is their language.* (“Language” 316)

For Benjamin, all objects contain a language of their own and this language—when conceived of as “language as such”—manifests separately from anthropocentric correlationism. The lamp therefore contains its own language, as does this table I am typing at or this chair I am sitting on.

In Jack Spicer’s poetry collection *Language* (1965), he has a section entitled “Thing Language.” Writing in a tradition that clearly evokes the poetry of Francis Ponge (considered in Chapter Two), Spicer tries to capture the language expressed by material objects: the sea, for example, is described as: “Aimlessly / It pounds the shore. White and aimless signals.” (1). When a log burns that log “[a]sks a lot / When it is lighted / Or knot” (5), and then, when

burning, “[t]he knot / Burns like a joke / With the color of smoke” (5). In his first poetry collection, *After Lorca*, Spicer describes his poetic goals:

I would like to make poems out of real objects. The lemon to be a lemon that the reader could cut and squeeze or taste—a real lemon like a newspaper in a collage is a real newspaper. I would like the moon in my poems to be a real moon, one which could be suddenly covered with a cloud that has nothing to do with the poem—a moon utterly independent of images [...] I would like to point to the real, disclose it, to make a poem that has no sound in it but the pointing of a finger.
(33-34)¹³

While Spicer could easily be accused of an incarnational fallacy, he nonetheless insists that “[t]hings do not connect; they correspond. That is what makes it possible for a poet to translate real objects, to bring them across language as easily as he can bring them across time” (34). Spicer’s stated goals indirectly situate his project in relation to Benjamin’s various thing-languages (and his own thing-language poems). Spicer claims that “the immediate always has hundreds of its own words clinging to it, short-lived and tenacious barnacles” (*After* 25), repeating this idea in more explicit terms later in the same letter to Lorca: “Words are what sticks to the real” (25).

Language Hermetically operates in Benjamin’s theory of language, which is to say that language *emanates from objects*: this notion of emanation can be found in Bruno’s earlier Hermetic theory of language. Bruno considers the way in which the birth of images (or the signified) is related to *emanation*: “Matter conceives images as if these were the result of one thing from another thing, one which emanated from a particular thing’s surface and informed its

¹³ *After Lorca* is collected in *The Collected Books of Jack Spicer* (1975).

capability of being recognized” (*Composition* 10). This notion of emanation is not limited to the emanations of a present object, but can also include objects that no longer exist—such as when Ancient Egypt is situated as the source of signs: “You, Egypt,” Bruno writes, “brought forth as sacred the hidden signs” (28). Bruno also argues, regarding emanation, that the letters and vowels of the alphabet are originally bonded with the stars: “Looking up learn the signs of what / Become the consonants which lie next to each vowel” (255).¹⁴

A sign, for Bruno, is a capacious concept that includes a great deal of qualities and properties. He often uses the term *signaculum*, which is the diminutive of “sign”—a word that is not found in English (as Higgins and Doria point out [283, n. 2])—so they coin the neologism “signacule” (283, n. 2) in order to capture the diminutive (or particular) notion of the sign. Bruno writes about the *signaculum* that: “forms, simulacra and signacules are vehicles and, as it were, some sort of chains by which the favors of lofty things emanate, proceed and are dispatched upon the lower orders of things at the same time as these are conceived, retained and preserved” (17). Therefore, forms, images, and signacules manifest as emanations from things and the resulting relationship (or bond) becomes the ground upon which the sign (as a whole) is made linguistically coherent.

The thing-in-itself manifests as sign and signacule, the sign and the signacule likewise manifest thinglike properties as both are interpenetrated within a larger understanding of a *bond*—perhaps a modern term for the Brunonian “bond” would be the Latourian actor-network. In Bruno’s Hermetic semiology, the qualities and properties of the sign begin as emanations

¹⁴ Bruno’s Hermetic interpretation of the alphabetic nature of the cosmos is not as esoteric as it may appear. Julie Lee Wei for example argues for the correspondences between Chinese calendar signs and the Phoenician alphabet (1999), and Brian R. Pellar has argued that alphabetic scripts find their origins in constellations (2009).

from the thing-in-itself, thereby linking the thing-in-itself with not only its own distanced phenomena (or simulacra), but also with its own signs. The resulting bond tightly interweaves each conceptual strand so that—due to the compression and ontological flattening of the overall configuration—a network or a word-thing develops: a model of bonded co-presentation of each term; or, in other words, a linguistic instance of *coincidentia oppositorum*. Bruno himself writes that “[s]ome images, on the other hand, like signs, are in things, others in intention, others in words, others in graphic delineation; others, I say [...] are parts of things, others of words or of distinct voices” (*Composition 20*). Bruno effectively collapses signifier, signified, and referent into a combinant mesh or bonded network in which each concept remains not as an undifferentiated part, but rather as several co-presentational wholes that create a larger composition. Bruno demonstrates, I claim, one of the earliest models of a fractal (or haptic semiological) theorization of the sign (as a totality that includes the thing-in-itself). Bruno does not “bracket the referent” or the thing—although in some instances he does conceptually separate these terms—instead, he offers a combinatory theory of the sign in which each term is sovereign while remaining at play within a larger dynamical relation. Bruno puts this idea in his own terms:

by transmutation, that is, through the way in which, by another process, the visible shapes of all things are brought forth into act from fire or water or air by the graduated combining of two species, just as by metamorphosis we can bring forth shapes of all sorts from the same wax, so too, in the same manner, by separation the visible shapes of countless things move forth from one and the same chaos. (*Composition 21*)

From originary chaos, signs and objects emerge and cooperatively compose the materiality of the world through various, complex and interchanging—dynamically interweaving and transforming—bonds. The noumenon does not rest passively behind a non-transparent screen of pure phenomenality; nor does the noumenon have teeth (although it occasionally bites Nick Land). Instead, the noumenon—which still remains trapped beneath or behind the world of appearances—emits signals. These “emissions” of the real can be called the *language(s) of the object* (or lamp-language, chair-language, tree-language, and so on). However, for both haptic semiology, and also the agential realism of Karen Barad, matter and meaning fold and interpenetrate continuously (*Meeting* 3), never resting at any one level of objectality or phenomenality.

If this realist model of language—or agential realist theorization—seems too “spooky” (to use one of Harman’s favourite words), then that is because, for Benjamin, “the primary problem of language is its magic” (“Language” 317). Benjamin insists that both the mediational quality of language and its immediacy are what constitute its “magical” nature. This language of things that Benjamin identifies is not like other human languages because it is deprived of sonority: “the languages of things are imperfect, and they are dumb. Things are denied the pure formal principle of language—sound. They can only communicate to one another through a more or less material community. This community is immediate and infinite, like every linguistic communication; it is magical (for there is also a magic of matter)” (“Language” 321). The languages of things operate non-acoustically—there is no sound or speech of the rock or the chair or the tree—instead, things and objects “communicate” via their own intrinsic materiality: this intrinsic materiality conveys nonhuman signals and signs. Bodies emit signs that are defined in non-anthropocentric terms—as the original Hippocratic or Galenic definitions of the sign-as-

symptom for example—but, like bodies that contain signs-as-symptoms or intrinsic materiality, objects and things contain (and convey) their own languages and signs.

This Benjaminian “magical biosemiotics” relies on Adamic language and deistic nomination, as Benjamin insists: “Language never gives *mere* signs. However, the rejection of bourgeois by mystical linguistic theory equally rests on a misunderstanding. For according to mystical theory the word is simply the essence of the thing. That is incorrect, because the thing in itself has no word, being created from God’s word and known in its name by a human word” (“Language” 324). However, these thing-signs or thing-languages can be defined, when separated from a theological framework, as a proto object-oriented semiotics.

Like Barad’s theory of the entanglement of matter and meaning (*Meeting* 362), Benjamin argues that “[s]igns must become confused where things are entangled” (“Language” 329). The entanglement of both signs and things result in a portrait of the world as one of emergence, co-presence, and multiplicity. In this Benjaminian haptic semiology, thing-signs and thing-languages proliferate throughout the world, creating a network of intersecting words and things. One way of understanding such representational complexity is via Michael Taussig’s concept of mimesis as either likeness or James George Frazer’s notion of “contagion.” Frazer distinguishes between two different mimetic processes in *The Golden Bough* (1890): in the first, “like produces like” or “an effect resembles its cause” which Frazer calls “the Law of Similarity,” and in the second, “things which have once been in contact with each other continue to act on each other at a distance after the physical contact has been severed,” which he calls “the Law of Contact or Contagion” (qtd. in Taussig, *Mimesis* 47). Building on Benjamin’s theory of a mimetic faculty, Taussig gets “hold of something by means of its likeness” (*Mimesis* 21). For Taussig, mimesis is a complicated interplay of similarity, copies, imitation, and occasionally,

contagion. By including issues of symbolism, mimesis, and contagion in my study of word-things, I am attempting to render the dyadic space in between words and things as non-dualist.

On the contrary, the space in between words and things is, I claim, entangled, folded, and complex. Occasionally, this space is contagious and produces word-zombies (as in Burgess's novel from the previous chapter), or the Nova Criminals and word-virus in Burroughs, but, at other times, this space is mimetically entangled and results in metaphors, allegories, and symbols. This conceptual space is essentially a permuting *topos* that gives rise to various totalities and multiplicities that manifest through and within language. Benjamin's theory of language usefully embraces such entangled complexity because it is equally mystical, realist, scholarly, theological, Adamic, and anticipatory of a nonhuman actor-network.

Word-things become, in relation to Benjamin, a non-human radiation or exudation from things. This model of language as thing-radiation situates a variety of seen and unseen languages similar to Meillassoux's notion of the arche-fossil (20-23, 26-27) (tree-language, mountain-language, chair-language, and lamp-language emerge as anterior to human apprehension), or Baradian intra-action between things and other things (*Meeting* 392).

Risking the speculative leap to thing-languages as neo-hermetic radiations of objects, thereby renders Benjamin's logical leaps in "On Language as Such and on the Language of Man" as intuitive. Consider, for example, when Benjamin writes:

There is a language of sculpture, of painting, of poetry. Just as the language of poetry is partly, if not solely, founded on the name language of man, it is very conceivable that the language of sculpture or painting is founded on certain kinds of thing languages, that in them we find a translation of the language of things into an infinitely higher language, which may still be of the same sphere. We are

concerned here with nameless, nonacoustic languages, languages issuing from matter; here we should recall the material community of things in their communication. (330)

Before Latour and prior to object-oriented ontology, Benjamin implicitly theorizes a *res publica* or democracy of objects: “Moreover, the communication of things is certainly communal in a way that grasps the world as such as an undivided whole” (“Language” 330). Therefore, all things communicate with all other things through the various non-correlational thing-languages that fill the material world.

Sensuous contiguity is a neo-hermetic conception of the sign that combines through an intra-action between word and thing. The hegemonic slash that has historically distanced word from object has been reconceptualized in this chapter through the haptocentric philosophies of Nancy and Merleau-Ponty so that the wordlike emanations from objects can emerge within various languages (human and non-human) more effectively. Once this slash is reconceived as a “fleshy slash,” then the elemental written matter of Guyotat becomes clearer; the strange neologisms of Allemann appear sensical; and the sex words of Joyce begin to seem like real sex toys.

However, these “fleshy” thing-languages are still not the fully embodied entities that they are for the experimental poet Hannah Weiner—her work is the focus of the next chapter.

Chapter Five: The Incarnational Linguistics of Hannah Weiner (and a Reading of *Écriture féminine*)

Hannah Weiner sees words. Hannah Weiner interacts with words. “The words in CAPITALS and underlines are words I see” (63), she claims. Even though Weiner suffered from a unique form of schizophrenia that permitted her alphabetic hallucinations, I agree with Judith Goldman when she insists that we read Weiner’s “clairvoyance other than as a symptom of schizophrenia” (122). Apart from this initial gesture towards Weiner’s psychological experience of the world, I will not belabor her schizophrenia, because I feel that a more interesting account of her experience of language is haptic semiological and can further develop a working theory of a living language.

In “Mostly About the Sentence,” Weiner describes the gradual evolution of her experience of language: “When the words first began to appear in August 1972, they appeared singly. The first word, WRONG, appeared about an inch long, neatly printed at a 45 degree to my pant leg. Later words appeared in two word phrases some of which, as NO-ALONE, I did not understand” (122-123).¹ This message that emanates from language and manifests on Weiner’s person confounds her because she feels that the message in totality has been edited, excised, or obscured. Weiner explains:

In my naïve (or natural form) desire for completion I would cry “where is my T—
is it the phrases ‘not alone’ that is meant” and why cannot I or it or the spirits that
I then sometimes thought it was, speak English. The phrase developed but

¹ Every citation, even when I specify the source text, is taken from the excellent collection of Weiner’s poetry *Hannah Weiner’s Open House* (2007), edited by Patrick Durgin.

remained a phrase right up through the Clairvoyant Journal [...] In April sometime I think I got down on my knees and begged or prayed, please let me see a complete sentence. On April 15th I did see one, printed in small letters along the edge of my kitchen table that had come to me from Lenny Neufield via Jerry Rothenberg. It said, “YOU WONT BE ANY HAPPIER.” (123)

Like the game show *Wheel of Fortune*, Weiner occasionally wants to “buy a vowel” or, in this case, a consonant. However, the message that emanates from language is intriguing because it is not devoid of meaning: is a T “missing” thus rendering the intended message “not-alone?”; or, is the T intentionally excised thereby rendering the proper word “no alone,” therefore indicating that Weiner’s reality is one in which the very concept of “alone” is no longer valid (because she lives alongside language qua language)?; or, should we read the first “no” as an exclamatory determiner—as in “no!” you are “alone”? Also, should Barthes’s thesis regarding the death of the author be extended to language itself when it appears to be language (as a subject) that is writing? Can we afford any degree of intentionality to language? Goldman analyzes this moment in the following way: “The word’s ‘T’ is not merely not *there*, but *not-there*, missing—the word has a whole form of which she will receive only a part. Its loss migrates to become her loss, as Weiner turns the lack within the phrase on herself: she is the one who cannot read it” (134). Weiner’s interaction with language becomes a unique instance of a sort of cross-cultural engagement with a type of being that is traditionally coded as remaining anterior to direct human experience.

Language’s immateriality traditionally codes it as an outside of the outside; as a sort of extreme or ultimate outside which can never be fully incorporated within an inside: speaking subjects interact and speak the echoes or ghosts of language’s words and sentences and these

ghosts in turn possess us with their incorporeal insistence. Weiner has, through her phenomenal experience, recoded the human relationship with language: she has psychically torn down the German Idealist screen and reached an ontic experience of reality in which language exists not as an invisible or virtual field, but as consisting of directly apprehended, linguistic objects. In other words, Weiner touches word-things and she describes these word-things as agential beings.

In the following excerpt from *The Fast* (1992), for example, she writes:

All these words occur whether I write or not, in my ordinary conscious state, not in a trance, and sometimes in sleep GET UPS appears on my forehead to wake me in time. FOR WHAT. Anything. I am trying to understand through my continued writing which of these WORDS I see are 1) my own ordinary conscious thought; 2) from my developed superconscious mind which has precognitive, clairvoyant powers; 3) telepathic connections with living people; 4) BIG QUESTION communications from non-living forces. The manuscript begins in the fall of 1970, describing a 3 week fast. The early material contains much information on the nature of the kundalini energy and electro magnetic sensitivity that I have never seen elsewhere. KNOWLEDGE. I was receiving FORCE / messages through FEELING energy at that time. Later pictures developed, and colors. Then in Aug. 1972 words developed. (63)

Beginning with her experience of a three-week fast, Weiner begins to describe the ontogeny of the living language or the process of the objectalization of language: initially, a morphogenetic field sets the stage for the further emergence of objectified language; this stage is followed by the respective emergence of images and colours, and finally words. Instead of a morphogenetic field, I would suggest that Weiner describes a directly *logogenetic* field that designates the initial

conditions of an emergent living language: on the one hand, the language reveals itself to Weiner as a clairvoyant medium, but, on the other, language simultaneously reveals its intrinsic objectivity that was always present—Weiner sees the virtual and recognizes the virtual as actual or, at the very least, as ontic.

For Weiner, the words instruct her and train her—they act as mentors, teachers, and friends: “The words train me: DONT CHOOSE, DONT PRETEND, DONT COMPLAIN, DONT LIE, overcome emotions” (64). The aspect of training or conditioning eventually transitions into a relationship of friendly complementarity in which Weiner works with language in order to produce poetry:

I am unusual, as far as I can discover, in having this extensive gift of SEEING language. I have met people who see words BACON occasionally. It has nitrate. It is more common to hear THANK YOU voices. What I see as words, others may experience as feeling cigarette or thought. The four years of this manuscript [*The Fast*] document my experiences and changes in perception I continue writing as a collaborator with WORDS I SEE. Sometimes I struggle as I do not ENJOY all their interruptions. They edit the manuscript as well, and I have lately begun to edit them, for literary values. Their comment on this is O^k (64)²

Language becomes an active collaborator in poetic composition, with the words eventually commenting on their own appearance and on Weiner’s tendency to edit. When Weiner says, “[t]heir comment on this is O^k,” the ambiguity of the pronoun “this” raises the question of whether language thinks her edits are “okay,” or if her description of this process is “okay,” or even whether “O^k” means “okay.” From a strictly lettric perspective “okay” is also two letters “O”

² OMIT appears above “I do not.”

and “K,” but why is the “k” written in superscript? Why is the “k” lowercase as opposed to uppercase? What exactly is language attempting to present to the reader (or to Weiner or to language itself) with this particular “O^k”?

Perhaps language is punning on mathematics so that “O^k” is “O” raised to the power of “k.” But then what do “O” and “k” represent? If language is a living language, then would “O” and “k” remain as mimetic markers in a more traditional signifying regime? Or, do “O” and “k” function as individual objects or as noumena, effectively existing as “in-themselves” only? I do not propose to answer any of these questions, but the questions are important, especially when taking Weiner’s perception of reality *as realist*. For the purposes of this dissertation, I see Weiner’s experience of language as a perspective that promotes a linguistic realism in which words and letters and phonemes exist in-the-world as objects.

In his seminar on *The Psychoses* (1955-1956), Lacan theorizes psychotic experiences of language as being indelibly linked to “the real”: “we’re dealing with something that emerges in the external world and forces itself on one as a perception, a disorder, a rupture in the text of the real. In other words, the hallucination is located in the real” (136). Of course, what Lacan means by “the real” is not the same as saying that the hallucination exists in “reality” (or that the hallucination is actual or present in-the-world). However, the real, for Lacan, is a register of the Borromean knot that human speaking-subjects do not have direct access to after infancy (or, their access is always mediated by the other orders).³ Lacan claims that “[t]he real is absolutely

³ There are numerous definitions of the real and Lacan’s own definitions of the real repeatedly change throughout his career. However, the real is always, strictly speaking, separate from what folk phenomenologists would call “reality.” Lacan does argue that “the real is that which always comes back to the same place” (*Book XI* 49) and also that “the real [...] is what resists symbolization absolutely” (*Book I* 66). The real is therefore forever apart from the cognizance of the barred subject. The real is unsymbolized and un-integrated by the symbolic order. The real

without fissure” (*Book II* 97), and “[t]here is no absence in the real” (*Book II* 313). This originary state of “cohesion” is ruptured by the incursions of the symbolic order through which language

achieves a unique position in Lacan’s Borromean schema because, in *stricto sensu*, it rejects any and all definitions. Part of the importance of the real for Lacan is that it cannot be symbolized (or defined). If the real is to exist apart from the symbolic order (in its insistent or ex-sistent totality), then it cannot ever be defined through language or sign systems. Lacan situates this same idea in the following way in *Écrits*: “the real, whatever upheaval we subject it to, is always and in every case in its place; it carries its place stuck to the sole of its shoe, there being nothing that can exile it from it” (17). The Lacanian real is an order that applies *pressure* to the other orders. Juliet Flower MacCannell discusses this pressure and Lacan’s solution to it as the “imaginary real” in her 2008 article: “This new imaginary is (and must be) realized as providing something both completely new and yet very ancient: a confrontation with the real that the self-enclosed, self-satisfied ‘symbolic’ no longer seems capable of confronting. The real, says Lacan, is always framed as seen through the hole—that hole gaping between two signifiers” (54). MacCannell frames Lacan’s insights here regarding Joyce and the *sinthôme* in revolutionary terms: “Lacan makes the critical, even revolutionary discovery of an ego that is no longer bounded by the form of the circle, no longer defined as and by the two-dimensional imaginary barrier it erects (unsustainably) between itself and the twinned hostilities of the real (the id and/or the social order). But a form of ego that no longer defends itself with the armor of the symbolic or that escapes into the comforting fantasy of the circle (of imaginary enclosure) is an ego that has opened itself *to* the real *through* the imaginary: a new form of ‘ego’ which Lacan pictures no longer as a vacant circle but as a set of open ‘brackets’” (55). Tim Dean discusses “bodies that mutter” in *Beyond Sexuality* (2000): “Bodies that mutter testify to something lacking,” and “psychoanalysis pays attention to bodies that mutter”—leading Dean to ask: “Is ‘bodies that mutter’ merely a figure of speech, a play on words? The difference between muttering and speaking concerns the distinction involved in a notion of desire as something *in* language but not itself linguistic. While speech comprises signs and signifiers, muttering comprises the symptom, which represents a literally unspeakable desire” (203). This “muttering” is itself a linguistic emanation from the real, which, according to Dean, is misrecognized by Judith Butler who invokes “the lost and hidden referent” (qtd. in Dean 212) of traumatic sites (such as the family, the Gulag, and the concentration camp), by “confusing psychic reality with referentiality” (212). Dean is very clear that “substantializing the real as reference” (212) is dangerously fallacious in Lacanian psychoanalysis. Like MacCannell’s “real imaginary”—that she situates in relation to Lacan’s theory of the Joycean *sinthôme*—Dean’s “bodies that mutter” is the result of working through the question of what is the *something* in language that applies pressure on the real (or reality)? Each thinker (along with Lacan—and, implicitly, Joyce), develops a theory of language in which language contains an internal *something* that resists and this *something* *bursts* through, into the world and into the body of the subject in variously uncontainable ways. Even though Lacanian psychoanalysis accepts a Saussurean “bracketing of the referent,” it nonetheless remains a discourse that addresses what could be called the *shadow of this loss*, or the resultant topological bending that results from this ghostlike pressure of language. My understanding of the real is also informed by Dylan Evans’s entry on the real in his excellent *An Introductory Dictionary of Lacanian Psychoanalysis* (1996). See: pp. 159-161 for his entry on the real.

and signification emerge into the speaking-subject's world. Following my argument in Chapter Three for logogenetic emergence—in which objects emerge from words—Lacan describes the interaction between the real and the symbolic in the following way: “It is the world of words that creates the world of things—things which at first run together in the *hic et nunc* of the all in the process of becoming” (*Écrits* 229). The world of words “creates” the objectal world; or, put differently, objects emerge from their signs like Hermetic emissions. Therefore, a Benjaminian “lamp-language” is, from a Lacanian perspective, inverted: where Benjamin situates the lamp's language as the emission from the lamp, Lacan, on the other hand, would locate the lamp's objectality as the emission from the lamp-language. However, this Lacanian dynamic works only if the notion of “objectality” is itself made operative in relation to the signifier “object.”

Maria Damon calls Weiner's poetic project an approach that promotes “graphomaniacal excrescence” (n.p.), so that language is rendered as an organism and this organism produces waste—as all organisms do—and this waste registers as excretion. Indeed, Weiner's psychic experience can be considered a form of graphomaniacal excrescence: in *Little Books / Indians* (1980), Weiner writes that “temporarily / I SEE WORDS / ON MY TOWEL // hear & see / I AMS SURROOM / PRISED / me (early) this morning / stupid” (78). The words appear on Weiner's towel and occasionally the words collide and collapse into each other as linguistic incarnations of a Lucretian *clinamen*: the word “SURROOM / PRISED” collapses “surprised,” and “room” together while also suggesting “surround” so that Weiner is, in a sense, surrounded by the living language that she records and interacts with.

Weiner's clairvoyant relationship with language shares much in common with shamanistic and drug-induced experiences of language. Jay Stevens points out, in his introduction to Terence and Dennis McKenna's *The Invisible Landscape* (1975), that: “They [the

McKenna brothers] focused their work on the psychedelic dimethyltryptamine, or DMT. They were curious about DMT's apparent stimulation of the language centers of the brain. Not only was glossolalia (speaking in tongues) common, but sometimes one encountered dancing molecular forms that seemed to be made out of visible language" (xii). Weiner's poetry describes a world in which language is visible—it is a visible and active inhabitant of the world. Such a hallucinogenic reality—if it is in fact hallucinated—is similar to both psychotic and narcotic experiences. Weiner describes her own experience with LSD as one in which a sort of telepathy occurred, but she remains unhappy that some level of poetic appropriation did not:

Telepathically we receive from each other the spoken sentence. In a house where everyone took a lot of LSD twice I heard people's thoughts as if they had been spoken out loud. Both thoughts were silently directed to me. One woman thought, almost a shout, 'get out of my kitchen' and one man said something about helping me with a house if I bought it, and verified the thought out loud, asking me if I'd heard his thought. I heard their natural speaking voices. Differently, Mitch Highfill told me he once heard a whole conversation on LSD that he heard in reality later the next morning. I have never heard a 'written' line from someone—or anything they are reading or studying. I never heard any poetry lines I could steal! Only answers to thoughts. Once I saw two people have a silent conversation which they confirmed. (128)

The notion that, if you are attuned to the living language, you could "steal" or appropriate the poetic lines of others is notable because in Weiner's experience of linguistic realism there is a lack of theft; i.e., Weiner can hear comments and thoughts, but not poetry: the poetry that she produces is a type of ethnographic report on the lifestyles and habits of words and language.

Lacan asks: “Who is speaking? Since there is a hallucination it’s reality that is speaking” (50). Hallucinations produced by psychosis or psychedelic experiences achieve a peeling away of the German Idealist screen of real and representation so that—at least partially—noumena appear.

Another, less extreme way of phrasing this same idea, is to say that the “reality” that speaks may not be noumena-in-themselves, but the (re)presentation of the noumena—which is to say, the symbolic order itself—which manifests acoustically or visually and “presents” itself to the hallucinating subject. The symptom therefore speaks through the symbol; or the fanged or rainbow-coloured noumena leak through the partially ripped partition of real and representation: *something* gets through and *something* is witnessed. This “*something*” is language itself—language made manifest or language temporarily objectalized as flesh or thing.

Lacan describes this moment as an experience of profound rupture: “this language that has suddenly been thrust into the foreground, that speaks all by itself, out loud, in its noise and furor, as well as in its neutrality? If the neurotic inhabits language, the psychotic is inhabited, possessed, by language” (250). In terms of linguistic materialization, both experiences of neurosis and psychosis present to the analyst as *presentations of language*; however, the presentation of language is different in each case: on the one hand, the neurotic maintains a certain agency over language itself so that language remains somewhere on the outside of the subject, but on the other hand, language enters the subject like an interruptive poltergeist or spirit and displaces any remnant of the subject. In this psychoanalytical dynamic, the only way that the symptom materializes within the world is *through* language—whether this linguistic vector is constituted as exterior or interior effectively structures the symptom as either “neurotic” or “psychotic.”

Charles Bernstein insists that Weiner “understood that if the heart of poetry were a

radical foregrounding of the medium of writing, then this would also mean that the writing, and possibly the writer, became a medium” (“Hannah” n.p.). Writing as medium is recast through the now-dead author who has, in the face of her/his death, become a medium. Weiner’s poetic approach is not an approach confined to traditional practices or definitions of authorship; her praxis is one in which she occupies a position closer to shamanism or clairvoyance—in other words, Hannah Weiner *is a mystic* (she herself calls her poetic method “clair-style” [qtd. in Durgin 16] after “clairvoyance”). Any form of literary mysticism should dramatically efface the poet or author: Maria Damon argues that Weiner’s “gift is non-exploitable, monstrous in that it reduces people, herself included, into surfaces for writing—someone else’s writing. And what they write is not grand prophecy, nor even in the Yeatsian sense, ‘metaphors for poetry,’ though it is poetic; it’s the fragmented detritus of everyday conversation, memory, news reports, fantasy scenes involving friends” (n.p.). Damon is correct in her assessment of Weiner’s work because, as Goldman points out, “[f]rom the moment she took up writing, as Weiner related to Bernstein in a 1995 interview, it was never a matter of self-expression, but a means of displacing the self” (124). Weiner’s purpose is then to displace the self in the service of liberating language and situating language in the position of author.

Damon describes Weiner’s project as “heroic autoethnography” (n.p.), further asserting that

Weiner is the historian specializing in the words of everyday life; no phoneme or letter is too insignificant to record as poetic. Her avant-gardism could be construed as the foresight (sight in to the avenir, voir avant la lettre) to preserve (garde) words for a future in which they are endangered. For words are not only phonemes and letters but bear inscribed in them, and function as, traces of history.

(n.p.)

Deploying a Vichian etymological conceit, Damon positions Weiner as the historian and preservationist of language so that language—as if it were an endangered species—could somehow be contained and protected for future poetries and future generations.

But what does language say? What is this language that Weiner is working so hard to record ethnographically, transmit, or elicit clairvoyantly? In *Clairvoyant Journal* (1978), language (via Weiner) writes that “NOTHING IS SURE OF ITSELF,” warning that “it calls it GO BREAKDOWN B R E A K D O W N” (72). If language is a logogenetic living organism, then it must develop its own internal rules of entropy/negentropy or morphogenesis/eventual heat death: language would evolve and circulate around rules of grammar, syntax, semantics, and punctuation, but would also devolve elsewhere through various avant-garde ruptures and linguistic breakdowns.

Apparently, language—seemingly mirroring the status of the barred subject in modernity—is also not “SURE OF ITSELF.” Elsewhere in the *Journal* we read: “YOU GET ANGRIER YOIU COULD BE ANGRY HAPPY YOU COULD BE APRIL” (73). An intriguing nonce word or neologism emerges here—YOIU—a word that appears to be a mixture of “I,” and “YOU” or “I” and “U” which, in either sense, registers a psychoanalytical and phenomenological model of selves and others. The experience of consciousness and subjectivity resides inside the complicated relationship between “self” (as interior or “I”) and “you” (as exterior or the Other). Weiner’s (or language’s) nonce word captures this complicated dynamic within the collapsed portmanteau, effectively expressing linguistic and phenomenological complexity within a relatively simplistic poetic invention. At the very least, language (or Weiner’s language), appears to be playful and mischievous: “NOW ITS APOSTROPHE” (73), we read, suggesting that the

time of apostrophe—as either punctuation mark or as rhetorical and poetic exclamation—is temporally “now.”

Apostrophe, as a rhetorical strategy dedicated to the personification of a person or thing, is extended to reflect Weiner’s larger project that can be considered an *apostrophe of language itself*. If Weiner’s clairvoyance is an apostrophic process, then language becomes a punning-machine, occasionally writing: “SHE’S A GENIUS STOMACH PUMP,” “YOU GET THIN CHILDREN,” or “SEE DANGER PRONOUN GET DRUNK it” (73), which are each amusing moments selected from the same page. Pronouns are dangerous objects or things that can occasionally be consumed like liquid—you can drink a pronoun—and if you drink too many pronouns you can become, according to Weiner, drunk. If the reading-subject drinks too many pronouns, then she may need her stomach pumped.

Another important neologistic moment from “Skies” is the invention or appearance of the word “andiquote” (98). “Andiquote” collapses “and,” “I,” and “quote” together while sonically referencing “antidote” so that every quotation becomes its own potential curative to a much larger graphomaniacal excess or infection. Before becoming too lost in the nearly infinite pathways through Weiner’s poetic oeuvre—a process I would very much like to do, but fear for the boredom of my reader—I would like to theorize an ontology of Weiner’s poetic and living language.

Language’s Weinerian Ontology

The formulation and theorization of an agential language builds on the work of Judith Goldman who sees Weiner’s language in similarly active terms:

The form and content of these phrases were such as to give Weiner not a glimmer,

but a sustained sense that *words see us—that* we are spoken by language. Despite or perhaps because of the apparent fragmentariness of its phrases and the uneven visuality of their arrangement, *Clairvoyant Journal* conveys a visceral sense of how unrelenting was Weiner's uncanny apperception. (129)

From the paranoia of language's panoptic surveillance of speaking subjects to the resulting paronomasia of language's various interruptions and wordplay, Weiner is less a philosopher of language and more an ethnographer or zoologist of a different realm of reality—a reality of words. Her “uncanny apperception” permits her entry into the polis of signs so that she observes—like Lévi-Strauss or Jane Goodall—the unique sociocultural behaviours of words and letters. Her mysticism is unique in that it is a zoological mysticism that signifies her subjective emptiness in the face of language's material plenitude while simultaneously locating her as the singular respondent of language's interjections. Caroline Bergvall's poetry sequence “Flèsh” (from *Fig*), contains a section dedicated to the fleshy language of Weiner: “Y thinking this Giving space might Temp for the corps du body for the body of my coeur. For the coeur du core du corps body Another walkIn. Deep In The Hole” (27). Bergvall's piece captures the incarnational and embodied quality of Weiner's implicit “ontology” of language.

The language that Weiner sees is a language of childish exuberance and excess. Goldman develops an effective description of Weiner's apperceived language: “The ‘mediated mediation’ of clairvoyance works in two ways: ‘seen’ words not only call attention to, and thus displace, their own opacity, but they also remark on their own ambiguous status as ‘presences’ (since ‘seen’ words are clairvoyantly *seen*, their appearance is existentially indefinite)” (130). Language “remarks” on its own status as “presence,” and any definition or theorization of language's existence remains “existentially indefinite”—I want to highlight Goldman's phrasing

here because she captures the challenge of thinking through an objectal or haptic theory of language.

When hapticity or objectality is included within a conceptualization of language, then a rigorous theorization becomes existentially indefinite in the same way that a theorization of human or animal subjectivity is indefinite (or infinite). To be more precise: the presentation and re-presentation of language is *indefinite*, while theorizing linguistic hapticity requires that language's being is infinite. Language appears to Weiner as an indefinite stream of insistent signification or anti-signifying graphemes while an ontologization of language should be infinite because language is conceptually infinite.⁴ Damon points out that the characteristic appearance of Weiner's poetry includes "the extremely flat affect of the way many of the pieces read, like tickertape-readout," best considered the "automated effects of a malfunctioning language-making machine caught in some kind of repetitive but random loop" (n.p.). Language appears to Weiner on the inside of her forehead as a type of "tickertape" and the appearance of the words on the page similarly mimic this automated process. Weiner is a medium for language and her poetic process situates her as a kind of zoological recording-machine; or, as Damon insists:

Since the voices/printed words come from elsewhere (hovering in the corner, a surveillance camera that's also a projector playing word-films on our victim-poet),

⁴ This claim develops from a variety of sources. Arielle Saiber's excellent book *Giordano Bruno and the Geometry of Language* (2005) is essentially a genealogical study that traces the ways that both language and literature have been conceptualized through geometric figures while pointing to Bruno's understanding of language as being infinite. Badiou's work on infinities is also useful: in *Mathematics of the Transcendental* (2014), he situates set theory's "axiom of choice" as "an existential axiom of infinity" that "posits the existence of a set which 'chooses' one element from each set of a given collection of infinite sets" (15). Chapter 9 from *Number and Numbers* (1990) deals extensively with Badiou's thinking about the infinite via the axiom of choice. The collection of Badiou's essays *Infinite Thought* (2004) is also important in this regard, especially his claim regarding the infinite nature of tragedy (63).

there can be no authorial ownership of the material that emanates from Weiner and appears under her name in micro-press publications and limited editions; rather, as earth-advocates say, she's the "steward" of the words, word-protector—though she protects not by hoarding but by spending, by participating in the current of verbal energy eddying about her. (n.p.)

Weiner's self-proclaimed poetic process is one in which she sees herself as a constraint-based reflective surface: considering the constraint-based writing practices of the Oulipo and conceptualism more generally as activities designed to eliminate the poet or author from the creative process (or, at least this claim is the proposed goal of poetic constraint) allows for a different perspective of Weiner's poetic approach, in that instead of deploying a constraint in the service of producing a poem, Weiner's consciousness itself—her unique experience or access to language as a living organism—*becomes* the constraint. The elimination or displacement of Weiner's "I" or self permits access to the world of living language in a way that transforms Weiner into a poetry-machine that can never turn "off" her constraint because her constraint is her psychological state.

Goldman theorizes Weiner's poetry as a rejection of the linguistic turn in that Weiner implicitly critiques the dead or incorporeal sign of semiotics and poststructuralism: "Ostentatiously adrift from their normal existential parameters, words no longer promise that they will do what we want them to do, whether we mean to limit them to instrumental, informational, or representational functions. They propose instead that we may do only what they, as a vehemently exteriorized guarantee of meaning, desire" (130). The vectorial direction of poet-desire-text is inverted when words manifest being, personification, or incarnation so that desire (or the agency that accompanies desire) becomes the bedrock of linguistic action and

activity, feeding back into the poet-as-machine. Weiner describes this process as a non-biunivocal procedure, meaning that language feeds into her and she records language's eruptions while editing minimally and recording the text as if it were tickertape from a dictionary's wall street, but in reality the process is likely biunivocal, so that both language and Weiner remain co-dependently trapped within a communicational and social feedback loop.

Another way to put this interpretation is to say that language or words are typically understood—after the linguistic turn and in twentieth-century philosophies of language—as empty or arbitrary (as discussed in Chapter One). Words are separated from definitions of the transcendent because they are the brute representatives of similarly empty objects in the world. Despite the ability of words to house institutional discourse(s) and subjectivity, they are nonetheless configured as depthless, substanceless, and mundane. I use the word “mundane” because Goldman uses the word when emphasizing the revolutionary character of Weiner's linguistic inversion: “Weiner is now really seeing things, *clairvoyant*, because she composes through the material aspect of ‘seen’ words; to be clairvoyant is thus paradoxically to turn the ritual mundanity of believing in words *inside out*” (137). Weiner does not “believe” that words contain some incarnational or Romantic aspect because she registers their being in the same way that she registers the being of other people. If words are, in any way, mundane after the linguistic turn—lacking colour and substance—then Weiner injects the sublime into her distinctly mystical understanding of the sign.

An important aspect when theorizing the ontology of Weiner's poetry is the consideration of the traits, habits, and styles of the words that Weiner records. Goldman locates contradiction as a central tenet of the word's self-consciousness: “This contradiction within the words—that as they announce their illegibility, illegibility itself becomes what is read, and that this illegibility is

in turn reversed to become a standard of completion” (134)—i.e., readerly completion of the experienced text. The words announce their own illegibility while simultaneously producing their illegibility—in this sense, the words are phenomenologically similar to Hegel’s definition of consciousness as relying on a dialectical model of referentiality so that consciousness is self-consciousness or a consciousness of consciousness. This dialectical process cannot apparently be *thought in stricto sensu* by the words themselves, but the process can be *expressed* by the words. In other words, the words convey their own ontology *with* words so that the words know themselves *as* words and represent their own being *through* words. With this model, a Weinerian theory of language becomes a theory that celebrates the intrinsic complexity and dynamism of language qua language.

However, even as the words announce their own presence to themselves through themselves, the meaning—or resistance to meaning—that is presented on the page must be observed or recorded by a correlational subject/poet. The interpretation of language’s phenomenality is translated or distanced through the observing-poet who acts as a medium or a recording-machine. Goldman puts this same idea in the following way: “If meaning must be surrendered to words appearing clairvoyantly to the self, the matter of establishing what that meaning consists in becomes distinctly contestatory” (136). What the meaning is of the language that Weiner records or unearths is closely tied to the presentation or appearance of the words on the page.

Goldman argues, and I agree, that the blank spaces in Weiner’s text should be considered as important as the graphical marks themselves: “She opposes these breaks within the text to the compositionally immaterial breaks that the material page dictates; the spaces, like the text indefinitely postponing the edge of the page, further indicate that the borders of her poems are

indeterminate. Thus, the blanks within Weiner’s page are also *writing*” (138). This indeterminacy can be conceptualized when a theory of language as corporeal and objectal is also considered. In the final chapter, I look at the Ancient Greek concept of *stoicheion*—the Hellenic concept of “element”—but I will preface my argument there in this chapter by pointing out that *stoicheion* is a notion of the elemental that combines parts and wholes. The surface appearance of letters present the *eidos* of the elemental depth that lurks underneath, withdrawn from correlationism—within a space of what could be called *linguistic noumena*.

The spaces that Weiner records, work similarly to identify the letters as etymic *stoicheia* that make language and the world coherent. However, these spaces—even while indicating an uncanny coherency existing within language qua language—are simultaneously indeterminate; or, as Goldman argues: “her spaces signal indeterminacy, because they are used as text would be in a continuing poetic line, but they also act as doubles for the definite margin surrounding the normative text, because they are made up of the same material blankness” (138-139). In the final chapter, when I define a word-thing’s depth (in a manner that exposes its objectal withdrawing from appearances), I will consider what this “depth” may be (or how this “depth” can register as indeterminacy and nothingness in relation to Heidegger and Alexius Meinong), but here I want to support Goldman’s claim that the blank spaces in Weiner’s text indicate an ambiguous presence that should be understood as “indeterminacy” or “blankness.”⁵

⁵ There is a history of blank spaces in the western avant-garde tradition. Mallarmé’s *Un coup de dés jamais n’abolira le hasard* or *A throw of the dice will never abolish chance* is a good example of this tradition. In the Preface to *Un coup de dés*, Mallarmé writes: “The ‘blanks,’ in effect, assume importance and are what is immediately most striking” (*Collected* 121). John Cage’s Lectures on *Silence* (1939-1958) always make use of sections of white space, but the method is quite widespread throughout twentieth century poetry. The article “Reading Space in Visual Poetry” (2012) by Kim Knowles, Anna Katharina Schaffner, *et. al* is an excellent source on the history of blank spaces in experimental poetry.

A good way to ground this claim is to look at a page from the *Clairvoyant Journal*:

Figure 11 shows a page from the *Journal* that the Words call “THE BEST PAGE.”

HANNAH THIS IS THE BEST PAGE HANNAH THIS IS MAY
 M 4 p 2
 realize write something you are documenting it no sex appeal 3 more cars
 radio, rather than see it You buy a plant that flashed even after it said IT WAS
 A WARNING you've been up since 7 and haven't stopped yet You heard it
 when you bought ice cream WHY CHEWING GUM WHY BUS STOP
 GET GINSENG YOU HAVE TIME When go to sleep you come in the door it says
 MENTAL ASTRAL A 60 FT long CHARLEMAGNE across the parking lot
 FRONT DOOR ONE MORE PHIL the cat ate a yellow tulip The plant that
 flashed is still flashing so what Jackson you can see it's energy field It's pretty
 Purply iridescent, you had some GET OUT KLEENEX some psychic healers
 do kleenex operations the kleenex disappears into the body and is retrieved with
 junk on it YOUR WORDS You take some white flowers out leave a few AT
 THE JAPANESE Phil calls NOT LOUD GET THE PAPERS PLEASE BELIEVE
 is that why LEVEL you got the Sunday paper the only time in WHEN
 and Nothing fell out the window because you were TOOTS You get another
 plant SUNMUR says forehead YOU HEAT YOU LOOK AT THE LIVING
 ROOM PHOTOGRAPH no foolin hear CALCIFYING in hall cant get voice
 not Jim's BIG DREAM says mother's photo NOT YOURS The duplicated
 manuscript says think of it NO go hannah money and louder MONEY his voice
 hungry Your mother's photograph says DID BED YOU HAVE A NICE TIME
 LAST NIGHT GIANTS CALL JANA 533 NOT HOME says forehead
 PLEASE YOURSELF TONIGHT your emotions Noa sees her thoughts in
 abstract colors SHE RESENTS IT like films the subconscious mind in little
 pictures in the WALK back of her head and the bigger ones out front NEGA DO
 THEY CORRECT YOUR POSTURE she said yes she had to CERTAIN look at
 them from a certain angle NOT BREATH GET OVER IT not sure of it around
 head in her BOOMERANG your empty apt She takes aspirin YOU DID twice
 last night HURT SELF Not tenderloin You get contact apple turnovers, beer
 also NEGATIVE it said CONTACT before who got beer? It goes danger
 BIG APPLE PIE is beginning to appear over words that are negative no you know
 Merry Christpetticoat SYS You hear/see WEAR DUNGAREES many times
 neg on street STREET WEAR HARDLY anyone you know wears them NOW
 LAY DOWN WAIT LIPSTICK as you look to the bedroom MUST NAP work on
 movie script 1 MORE HOUR confident these 1 mores Bought some flowering plants
 for the window sill PRETTY FLOWERS says GRASS Nothing bit your left
 nipple twice last night OH GOOD Noa says witches used to have an extra tit
 under their left arm for the devil NO BEER Told her witches go away it was as
 close as you naked could come

Fig. 10. Hannah Weiner, *Clairvoyant Journal*, Hannah Weiner's Open House, 70.

The “BEST PAGE” is temporally frozen in time upon the page, resisting the dynamism that Weiner's implicit philosophy of language would support. However, even though the words have been temporally frozen they nonetheless register the non-standard and nonlinear presentation of syntax, letters, capitalization, and punctuation that feature as hallmarks of the Words' ontological presence. The movement, dynamism, and freedom—or apparent freedom—of the Words is captured and presented in the only manner that a poetic presentation would allow: the dynamism of textuality is limited by the fixed medium of the page. (The exception to this limiting assertion

would be new hypertextual or ergodic experiments that allow for the presentation of movement within digital space).⁶

The material act of placing words on a page delimits language's apparent ontological dynamism and concretizes both textual agency and objectality so that a word is fixed as either portmanteau collision or as a more traditional or hegemonic "word." In a sense, the act of fixing words on a page mirrors a Kantian model of noumena and phenomena: if language is a chaotic and nonlinear—perhaps virtual—object or organism, then human correlationist subjects have no (or very limited) access to it. Language's ontology is therefore similar to theorizing the presence of noumena. The only access speaking-subjects have to language's dynamism is through its appearance (*Vorstellung*) or re-presentation on the page or within any medium—therefore the poem or text mimics the simulated "presence" of phenomena.⁷

The importance of engaging with Weiner's poetic practice is that her work as an ethnographer or zoologist of language allows her to capture the Words' presence in a phenomenal presentation that apprehends—to a greater extent—the ontological flux and play of language qua language. To that extent, the silences or white spaces register as ontologically important as the printed letters or words because the totality of the presented text mirrors the uncertainty and nonlinearity of language's being. This textuality mimics the model of real and representation and importantly informs a haptic semiological hermeneutics: interpretations of

⁶ An excellent example of this new hypertextual tradition would be Brian Kim Stefans's *The Dreamlife of Letters* (2000). The text can be seen and experienced here: http://collection.eliterature.org/1/works/stefans__the_dreamlife_of_letters.html.

⁷ William Paulson in *The Noise of Culture* (1988) considers a poem or text as a concretization or presencing of chaotic processes: for example, Paulson considers the text "as a locus of self-organization from noise" (133), and this process is essential to considering "literature's strangeness." According to Paulson, the "text appears to us as a kind of singularity, as an object that undermines but does not abolish its own status as object" (139).

textuality—assuming that language is Language or incarnational—should consider the distancing procedures of the printed page (of its appearance as *Vorstellungen*) and of the living language that lies hidden at a “noumenal” realm beyond the printed medium.

***Écriture féminine* and Churchill’s Theatrical Word-Things**

Another conceptual apparatus that can assist in understanding Weiner’s poetic practice is the twentieth-century tradition of French feminism known as *écriture féminine*—an example of a proposed—although only partially defined—project that attempts to develop a new form of writing that can be deployed for political purposes in order to express and inscribe the feminine body in a history that has traditionally been coded as patriarchal and phallogocentric (a *his-story*).⁸

Arguably, the most important text in the evolution of *écriture féminine* is Hélène Cixous’s “The Laugh of the Medusa” (1975), in which Cixous calls for every woman to “write her self, because this is the invention of a new insurgent writing,” and through this writing, “woman will return to the body” (880). This return to the body forges a literary strategy that seeks to resist normative phallogocentric writing so that woman can “forge for herself the antilogos weapon” (880). At a surface level, Cixous’s theorization of *écriture féminine* tells the story of a

⁸ The tradition in France of *écriture féminine* covers a large swathe of feminist thinkers: alongside Cixous, the work of Luce Irigaray is highlighted—such as *This Sex Which Is Not One* (1977) and *Speculum of the Other Woman* (1974); Julia Kristeva’s work also typically falls under this category, see *The Portable Kristeva* (2002); Monique Wittig’s *The Straight Mind* (1992); and Cixous’s co-authored work with Catherine Clément *The Newly Born Woman* (1975). Predominantly, *écriture féminine* seems to respond to the phallogocentrism of psychoanalytical discourse—this theme is found in Irigaray, Cixous, and Kristeva—but also in Bracha Ettinger’s *The Matrixial Borderspace* (2006). Cixous herself attempts to put *écriture féminine* into practice in her creative works such as *The Book of Promethea* (1983). In the United States, *écriture féminine* and French feminism more generally has been popularized by Judith Butler in both *Gender Trouble* (1990) and *Bodies That Matter* (1993).

historical transition: namely, the transition from a metaphysical and masculine philosophical tradition (of *logos*) to a physical and feminine philosophical tradition (of *mater*); however, this simple binaristic reading suffers from an essentializing problematic in which Cixous privileges a surprisingly essentialist reading of gender and sex (as many theorists have pointed out).⁹ Cixous insists that “[w]oman must write her self: must write about women and bring women to writing, from which they have been driven away as violently as from their bodies” (875), and this writing is often accomplished through the utilization of bodily fluids in the service of composition: “I, too, overflow” (876), Cixous insists, pointing out that there “is always within her at least a little of that good mother’s milk. She writes in white ink” (881). This approach to writing will produce “waves,” “floods,” and “outbursts” (876) in the service of liberating femininity from repressive patriarchal chains with the use of an antilogos weapon.

I raise the issue of *écriture féminine* because of Cixous’s theorization of an embodied writing: Cixous theorizes a form of linguistic embodiment that shares key similarities with what I call a word-thing. If Cixous considers a word-thing at all, then I claim it would be during the following moment:

⁹ See: Ann Rosalind Jones’s “Writing the Body: Toward an Understanding of *L’écriture féminine*” (1981); Toril Moi’s “Hélène Cixous: an Imaginary Utopia” (1985); Gayatri Spivak’s “French Feminism in an International Frame” (1987); and Hélène Vivian Wenzel’s “The Text as Body/Politics” (1981). Surprisingly, despite the rapid proliferation of this critique of *écriture féminine* throughout the 1980s, this argument is still being seen as “original” as evidenced by the recent article by Sara Louise Muhr and Alf Rehn who claim, in “On Gendered Technologies and Cyborg Writing” from 2015, that *écriture féminine* risks “getting trapped within the gender binary” (129). Pamela Banting argues against this predominantly American feminist backlash and reframes Cixous’s feminine body as a pictogram (1992). Irigaray’s account of bodies in *An Ethics of Sexual Difference* (1984) does not essentialize sex in the same way as Cixous. Irigaray’s writing in *An Ethics of Sexual Difference* relies on Merleau-Ponty’s understanding of flesh—although Irigaray (like myself) rejects Merleau-Ponty’s privileging of the visual in favour of flesh as “intrauterine nesting” (152).

She doesn't 'speak,' she throws her trembling body forward; she lets go of herself, she flies; all of her passes into her voice, and it's with her body that she vitally supports the 'logic' of her speech. Her flesh speaks true. She lays herself bare. In fact, she physically materializes what she's thinking; she signifies it with her body. In a certain way she inscribes what she's saying, because she doesn't deny her drives the intractable and impassioned part they have in speaking. (881)

Cixous's writing-woman materializes her language physically—indeed, “with her body”—and this physicalization produces a signifier that is more real than the earlier metaphysical and phallogcentrically-defined masculine signifier.

Anu Aneja argues that Cixous works on “devouring words through a text that remains umbilically linked to the body of the writer” (21). Such gustatory and ravenous writing results in a direct appreciation of the writer's physicality. For Cixous, there would be an aspect that is intrinsically *physical* as opposed to *metaphysical* about a word-thing—and this physicality would be aligned with femininity—thereby suggesting that haptic semiology is a form of feminine writing. However, Cixous seems to anticipate this thesis when she writes:

It will usually be said, thus disposing of sexual difference: either that all writing, to the extent that it materializes, is feminine; or, inversely—but it comes to the same thing—that the act of writing is equivalent to masculine masturbation (and so the woman who writes cuts herself out a paper penis); or that writing is bisexual, hence neuter, which again does away with differentiation. (883)

To that end, following Cixous, all writing that “materializes”—and Cixous is non-specific about what form this materialization will take—is intrinsically feminine. But how will feminine writing form? Cixous would appear to answer by asserting that “[t]here is, there will be more and more

rapidly pervasive now, a fiction that produces irreducible effects of femininity” (883). But how exactly does *écriture féminine* function and how, precisely speaking, does it “materialize” language?

Cixous rather nicely sidesteps a direct answer: “It is impossible to *define* a feminine practice of writing,” Cixous asserts, “and this is an impossibility that will remain, for this practice can never be theorized, enclosed, coded—which doesn’t mean that it doesn’t exist” (883). Cixous points out that there are “so few texts” of *écriture féminine* because “so few women have as yet won back their body. Women must write through their bodies, they must invent the impregnable language that will wreck partitions, classes, and rhetorics, regulations and codes” (885-886). Feminine writing wrecks “partitions, classes, and rhetorics” with the deployment of “carnal and passionate body words” (886). What is a *body word*? A body word is, in the context of haptic semiology, the fleshy and embodied manifestation of language—indeed a writing upon the body, but not a limited epidermal inscription; rather, a body word is simultaneously a word and also a body that exists side-by-side with its body so that a word is given partial agency through the movements and temporality of a living, breathing body. Even though Cixous repeatedly genders this dynamic—such as when she insists that “[m]ore so than men [...] women are body. More body, hence more writing” (886)—the importance is not on primary or secondary sexual characteristics that amount to nothing more than symbolic attributions stitched over seemingly “intrinsic” folds, hills, juttings, or valleys, but rather on the specifically biosemiotic territorializations that accompany these fleshy borders: signifiers and discursivity are stitched to physical instantiations that are no more essential or intrinsic than coastlines or geological complexity. There remains a process of linguistic embodiment at work

that cannot be approached through earlier structural or poststructural approaches. What does it mean to say that a word has a body or is a body or that a body is a word or has words?¹⁰

For Cixous, a “feminine text cannot fail to be more than subversive” because it “is volcanic; as it is written it brings about an upheaval of the old property crust, carrier of masculine investments; there’s no other way” (888). Such textuality is the “desire for the swollen belly, for language, for blood” (891) as Cixous realizes that eating texts leads to a swollen belly (a belly that is swollen either through the pregnancy of ingested knowledge or the satiety of a good readerly meal).

To summarize the core concerns of this chapter I would ask a very simple question: *what matters? Bodies matter*. Instead of considering human bodies or the body of the subject, I am trying to analyze the bodies of letters, words, and signs: what are these bodies, how are they produced, and how do they operate? In other words, how does language infuse the thing-in-itself and how does the thingness of the thing-in-itself infuse language?

Word-things are not passive objects: they are active and directly influence subjectivity. Eliot’s notion of the *objective correlative* is essential here: Eliot defines the objective correlative as “a set of objects, a situation, a chain of events which shall be the formula of that *particular*

¹⁰ There is a fascinating literature surrounding this topic, such as Dodie Bellamy’s post-Burroughsian “cut-up” project—that she calls “cunt-ups”—in her works *Cunt-Ups* (2001) and *Cunt Norton* (2013). Kathy Acker’s writing—such as *Great Expectations* (1982) or *Blood and Guts in High School* (1978)—is all implicitly about the relations between bodies and writing. A less experimental example would be Jeanette Winterson’s *Written on the Body* (1992). The narrator in Winterson’s novel remains only ever “I”—un-named and un-gendered—while the emphasis is placed on bodies in love. Of course, these “bodies in love” are, in some ways, “captured” upon the page through language. Monique Wittig’s novel *The Lesbian Body* (1973) is another good example of this collision between writing and the body. As Wittig writes: “*J/e* is the symbol of the lived, rending experience which is m/y writing, of this cutting in two which throughout literature is the exercise of a language which does not constitute m/e as subject. *J/e* poses the ideological and historic question of feminine subjects” (10-11).

emotion; such that when the external facts, which must terminate in sensory experience, are given, the emotion is immediately evoked” (92). Readers and viewers are perhaps rendered overly machinic and simplistic, but the importance for the objective correlative is that it is originally nothing more than a word, and the concept that it refers to is similarly a word. From the network constructed by these words, another world of objectality appears: however, an objective correlative is not only an object but also a chain of events, or a situation; therefore, Eliot is careful to broaden the definition of the objective correlative to be as realist as possible. I mean “realist” here in Harman or Bryant’s object-oriented sense in which anything that can be imagined as real is real (such as unicorns, goblins, and tooth fairies)—these objects may not be “material,” but they are “real” in that they directly produce affect in observing-subjects.

The importance of the objective correlative is that the word on the page refers to a theatrical object that can trigger an emotional response in the viewer—the *telos* of that emotion can be traced back to a word and that word operates very much as an active *thing* rather than as a seemingly passive signifier that exists in its own anterior semiotic dimension distanced from human access. The theatrical object is then collapsed alongside its signifier, creating a new assemblage-object as an active oneness that is never fully together as one, but never split into fully differentiated parts.¹¹ Haptic semiology is therefore *a linguistic response to the speculative*

¹¹ My thinking here is inspired by Jane Bennett’s work on agential assemblages in *Vibrant Matter*: “The effects generated by an assemblage are, rather, emergent properties, emergent in that their ability to make something happen (a newly inflected materialism, a blackout, a hurricane, a war on terror) is distinct from the sum of the vital force of each materiality considered alone. Each member and proto-member of the assemblage has a certain vital force, but there is also an effectivity proper to the grouping as such: an agency *of* the assemblage. And precisely because each member-actant maintains an energetic pulse slightly ‘off’ from that of the assemblage, an assemblage is never a stolid block but an open-ended collective, a ‘non-totalizable sum’” (24).

turn and begins to collapse the post-Kantian formulations of speculative realism and object-oriented ontology alongside the semiotic import of structuralism and poststructuralism.

Carolee Schneemann's performance piece *Interior Scroll* (1975) is an instance that literalizes the concept of *écriture féminine* as she reads from a scroll that she slowly unfurls from her vagina. In this sense, Schneemann's scroll is likely the truest "Vagina Monologue" currently available. There are many excellent examples of embodied performance pieces, such as Ingrid Mwangi's *Static Drift* (2001) in which she uses sunburns to register racial disparities as she burns the shape of Africa onto her skin along with messages like "BURN OUT COUNTRY." One of the foremost practitioners of performance art is Marina Abramovic, whose *Rhythm* series engages in various experiments of self-mutilation and bodily endangerment. *Rhythm 0* (1974), for example, features Abramovic standing by a table with 72 objects (such as a rose, a whip, a scalpel, a feather, scissors), while holding a sign inviting audience members to use them on her as they wish. Ana Mendieta's *Untitled (Body Tracks)* (1974) features the artist leaving the imprints of her cut and bloodied hands on a white wall. Kira O'Reilly's work considers the various transformations of the body such as in *Bad Humours / Affected* (1998) in which she employs leeches to suck her blood as audience members drink red wine, or in *Wet Cup* (2000), O'Reilly applies heated cups to surface cuts of her skin so that her blood fills the inverted cups.

Few of these performance artists have gone as far as Regina José Galindo who in *Himenoplastia* or *Hymenoplasty* (2004) endures a back-alley operation (without anesthetic) to restore her hymen (back-alley hymenoplasty is prevalent in Central America), or in *279 Golpes* or *279 Blows* (2005) in which she receives 279 blows (or one strike for every murdered Guatemalan woman in 2005; that is every murdered Guatemalan woman at the time of her performance). Tracing the lineage of blood and milk from *écriture féminine* to performance art

constructs the body as a textual surface and the scars, lashes, cuts, or welts that appear on this body becomes a type of writing that narrates a story. The story told by performance art is the story of an embodied writing and if writing can be embodied—or inscribed upon bodies—then the words themselves are similarly objectal.

An ongoing project by Shelley Jackson further extends performance art (or conceptual writing) from an emphasis on the poet or artist as the central figure to the reader. Her project *Skin* seeks applicants who will receive a word from Jackson. This word will be one word from a novel written by Jackson. The applicant will then tattoo this word on her or his body. Once tattooed, the applicant will then take a picture of the word and send it back to Jackson. In this sense, each word of her story becomes literally embodied upon the skin of a human host. The word-virus is written into the flesh. Once tattooed, Jackson's guidelines specify:

From this time on, participants will be known as “words”. They are not understood as carriers or agents of the words they bear, but as their embodiments. As a result, injuries to the printed text, such as dermabrasion, laser surgery, tattoo cover work or the loss of body parts, will not be considered to alter the work. Only the death of words effaces them from the text. As words die the story will change; when the last word dies the story will also have died. The author will make every effort to attend the funerals of her words. (N.p.)¹²

Jackson's goal to corporealize her book is an attempt to concretely embody words upon human beings and write a text that is composed of a large number of human hosts.

¹² See Jackson's guidelines on her website here: <http://ineradicablestain.com/skin-guidelines.html>. Interested applicants can also apply for a word (in order to become a word) at this website.

If I were to extend this assertion from Jackson—that each participant becomes a “word” when tattooed with their designated word—then every actor reading from a script becomes a living instance of that word: words such as “Hamlet,” “Medea,” or “Godot” (who has still not shown up to rehearsal). Even though such theatrical names are nominative, they are nominative only insofar as they are words—words that must be embodied by living actors on a stage.

In Caryl Churchill’s *A Number* (2002), for example, an older man, Salter, had his first son (“B1” or Bernard 1) cloned, but the doctors unethically produced many more clones than necessary (nineteen in full) and, as the play progresses, Salter meets some of the clones such as “B2” (Bernard 2) and Michael Black. The characters in *A Number* are emergent assemblages of language that develop from an underlying genetic understanding of language. In the first scene, B2 says to Salter: “we just happen to have identical be identical identical genetic,” to which Salter replies: “sorry I said things, I didn’t mean anything by that, it just” (*Number* 12). The various ruptures of the play’s narrative approximate a sort of linguistic DNA, as words dissemble and permute in the mouths of characters. The language of DNA permits the emergence of the bodies onstage and the DNA of language fills each character with the words of Churchill’s arche-writing. Darren Gobert’s analysis of Churchill’s work traces the metaphor of DNA throughout her oeuvre as a model of genetic language that matches the language used in the play itself (181-200). Gobert insists that “actors animate the script’s DNA” (200) and “[I]anguage [...] is the DNA of any script” (180).

Actors embody a language that mirrors genetic language so that phonemes and graphemes act as semantic analogues of genetic building blocks (181) and “the living bodies whose performances animate the text [...] therefore determine its meanings” so that “the data [of the script] awaits embodiment, as when this or that nucleotide sequence manifests in brown eyes,

in dangling lobes, in sociopathic behaviour—and as this or that dramatic sequence of words causes any number of similar but particularised theatrical expressions” (Gobert 189). Churchill’s project is repeatedly interested in a language-DNA or in configuring language as an invasive force. Apart from a genetic-linguistic meaning, another fruitful way to read Churchill’s writing is to consider Burroughs’s theory of the word-virus in relation to her work.

Churchill’s collaborator and director for many of her productions, Max Stafford-Clark, argues that *Blue Kettle* (1997) contains a “language virus” (qtd. in Raymond n.p.).¹³ This language virus begins manifesting in the second scene when the words “blue” and “kettle” gradually infect the play’s dialogue, eventually overcoming all semantic import as meaning disintegrates by the play’s end to include only the stammering sounds of “bl” and “ket” or the plosives “b” and “k.” Consider the following exchange from scene ten when Mrs. Plant says to Derek: “You’re a silly blue, Kettle. You should have trusted us” to which Derek responds: “Blue did blue you blue meet blue other. Blue glad blue all blue blue well. Maybe it’s time to blue a move” (*Blue* 65). Stafford-Clark insists that Churchill’s other play that was shown alongside *Blue Kettle*, called *Heart’s Desire* (1997) “becomes a character itself” (qtd. in Raymond n.p.) as the various false starts of the narrative destabilize the reliability of the script so that the play rebels against normative rules of theatrical writing. The importance of Burroughs’s theorization of the word-virus is that it is “normal” that we all live with this invisible virus. Churchill’s invasive “blue kettle” phrase is a word-virus of the second-degree: a word-virus that infects the word-virus. Therefore, *Blue Kettle* and *Heart’s Desire* are examples of an iterative word-virus that registers the viral nature of language while transmitting this semantic import *through* language.

¹³ The Churchill collection *Blue Heart* (2011) contains both plays *Blue Kettle* and *Heart’s Desire*.

A way to summarize each definition of a word-thing up until now is to say that each definition concerns an element of collapse: in Chapter One, the signifier collapsed into the object and the object into the signifier; Chapter Two considered this resultant and collapsed form as a flat ontology; Chapter Three situated this flat ontology not as a monism, but as a fuzzy fractal in the tradition of Burroughs's cut-ups and fold-ins; and Chapter Four considered the hapticity of language as being focalized through the fleshiness of the imposed slash that structures the binary of word and object as "whole" or "symbolic." This chapter has considered instances of linguistic embodiment such as: when one's bodily excretions are considered ink for writing and when scripted words are spoken through an actor who gives these words fleshy form in the world (or when the Words that Weiner sees become actors in their own right). When performed onstage, words and bodies collapse into a unified ontological unit. A word-thing's inherent complexity is made manifest when the forcible separation of words and things is ended and the metaphorical matrimony of word and thing has begun.

To that end, a word-thing develops from what I call a *haptico-semantic collapse* that occurs when the traditional model of the sign is lateralized or considered from parallax perspectives that challenge the solidarity of older dyadic or triadic semiotic models. A way of grounding this abstract phrase—a phrase that makes use of linguistic surfaces and depths—is to turn to Edward Said's influential essay "The World, the Text, and the Critic" (1983). I see Said's concept of "worldliness" as a theoretical movement towards such a conceptual collapse or retheorization of the sign. Said discusses the Andalusian school of Arabic grammarians who debated the materiality of the sign: in particular, Said emphasizes Ibn Hazm, Ibn Jinni, and Ibn Mada' al-Qurtobi who are each Zahirites. The Zahirite school of language hotly debated with the Batinist school and their debates centred around a distinction regarding the ontology of a word:

the Batinists “held that meaning in language is concealed within the words” (36), therefore emphasizing meaning as a hidden kernel that could only be excavated by hermeneutically revealing shrouded depths, while the Zahirites argue “that words had only a surface meaning, one that was anchored to a particular usage, circumstance, historical and religious situation” (36).

The distinction debated between the Zahirites and the Batinists can be summarized ontologically as: does a word’s semantic (or ontic) import derive from a hidden depth or from an apparent surface? (I considered a similar distinction in Chapter Three between the object-oriented ontologists who emphasize ontological depth and someone like Robbe-Grillet who considers an object’s surface). Said eventually supports the Zahiritic perspective and his theory of textual worldliness is shorthand for the inclusion of complexity within the standard informatic model of sender/receiver or the schools of literary criticism that emphasize the relationship between the text and the reader at the exclusion of other sociocultural and temporal influences (Said uses Paul Ricoeur as the straw man for this type of analytical approach).

Said’s notion of “worldliness” is a concept that engages in haptico-semantic collapse, in which the text, the critic, and the world are collapsed into one ontological unity: “the closeness of the world’s body to the text’s body forces readers to take both into consideration” (39). Even though “proximity” is not the same as “collapse,” I claim that in the context of a text’s worldliness “proximity” is an instance of collapse in which reader, text, and author become co-present alongside each other. “Collapse” therefore means, in this context, a form of temporal immediacy for each of these activated entities: their co-presence is activated through the textual relationship itself.

The importance of theorizing performative word-things is that a name-word becomes embodied onstage through the body of an actor. However, some names have become gradually

incorporated into language: a “bluebeard” is a womanizer and a woman killer; a “brainiac” is a very smart individual, but was originally a villain in the Superman comics; “gargantuan” is a word that originally derives from Rabelais’s iconic giant; “celadon” (meaning a green colour) is named after the eponymous character in Honoré d’Urfé’s *L’Astrée* (1899); a “goody two-shoes” derives from an anonymous children’s story *Goody Two-Shoes* (1765); a “mentor” is originally the name of an advisor to Odysseus in Homer’s *The Odyssey*; a “lothario” is originally a character in a play by Nicholas Rowe called *The Fair Penitent* (1703); the notion of “malapropisms” derives from Mrs. Malaprop in Sheridan’s *The Rivals* (1775); and of course there are many other examples. The point I want to make is that characters become embodied not only as characters (textually or onstage), but also within their signifiers themselves and these signifiers then extend beyond their original meanings, go out into the world, and have a life of their own. Ontologically, this extension requires mention because these words are *initially* embodied and then become “disembodied” as words, but each word tends to relate to a trait that *can* be embodied. These instances are good examples of what I am calling “haptico-semantic collapse.”

This chapter has predominantly built upon Hannah Weiner’s work—as a poet and a self-declared clairvoyant—whose implicit understanding of language is one in which the words themselves are as embodied as actors onstage and these words transmit their often complicated meanings to her as she records their sociocultural behaviour in writing.

Conclusion: The Spirit of the Word and the Word-Thing’s “Essence”

A word-thing interrogates the primary problem of relationality: how do these things called “words” relate to the objects, things, or referents that they are supposed to relate to? Are there new ways of thinking this relation after recent developments in continental philosophy? As I stated in the first Chapter, I do not see *Word-Things* as a work of speculative realism, object-oriented ontology, or non-philosophy, but rather as *semiology*, which builds on these philosophical traditions, in part, to acknowledge and theorize fully *haptics* as constitutive of semiology. Throughout *Word-Things*, the relation of word and object has been based on *touch*—a unique form of touch separate from anthropocentric hapticity, but not in exclusion of the human. To briefly summarize, *Word-Things* has considered:

- an ontology of language;
- the reconfigured relation of word and thing as being based on touch; and
- an understanding of “touch” that is situated through a non-corporeal definition of *flesh*.

As well, rather than offering one, delimiting definition of a word-thing—itsself a reconsideration of the word/object relation—I have offered a taxonomical study of various “case studies” or possible (re)definitions of the word/object relation. To that end, each chapter has entertained various hypotheses of the word/object dyad. Again, to summarize some of the hypotheses already considered:

- Chapter Two considered the possibility of “flattening” the word/object relation within a “flat ontology”;
- Chapter Three expanded on the flat ontological thesis, but situated the relation as fractal;

- in Chapter Four the relation was considered both as a “fuzzy monism” and as a folded, fleshy fold—or, in other words, the slash that separates word and object was considered as a fleshy, liminal space;

- finally, Chapter Five further extended this “flesh” hypothesis to include the embodiment that occurs during theatrical performance, performance art, and “hallucination.”

This final chapter is organized around the following problem: if *Word-Things* has considered hypotheses regarding an ontology of language, then what would the ontic realm of language look like? Beyond clarifying the ontic realm, this chapter will also ask: what is *inside* a word-thing, *really*?

Relationality and Words (or Numbers?), or Wittgenstein and Badiou’s Mysticism

If the primary issue considered in this dissertation is the problem of relationality, then why word-things at all? Why not a number-thing? Or an image-thing? Or any other possible term that announces a relation between two or more objects (such as an assemblage or actor-network)?

Dominant thinkers of the analytic philosophical tradition work from a language-oriented position, or a position related to the linguistic turn. Wittgenstein’s early work in *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* (1921) considers the relation of word and object by distinguishing between names, objects, and propositions: “In a proposition a thought can be expressed in such a way that elements of the propositional sign correspond to the objects of the thought” (14, 3.2). For Wittgenstein, there exists a correlative level between the signifier and the signified. How does the object relate in this relationship between signifier and signified? “Objects can only be *named*. Signs are their representatives. I can only speak *about* them: I cannot *put them into words*.”

Propositions can only say *how* things are, not *what* they are” (15, 3.221). Therefore, the ontological qualities of objects withdraw from linguistic access—there is no objectal “essence” (i.e., *depth* as opposed to *entirety*) that can be captured by language (for linguistic correlationists).

Wittgenstein further insists that “one could say that the real name of an object was what all symbols that signified it had in common. Thus, one by one, all kinds of compositions would prove to be unessential to a name” (20, 3.3411), so that: “A name means an object. The object is its meaning. (‘*A*’ is the same sign as ‘*A*’)” (15, 3.203). This linguistic correlational approach remains trapped at a surface engagement, but this “surface” is not a flat ontological surface—it is a surface of language. However, the surface level of language reveals a great deal, as Wittgenstein goes on to demonstrate in *Philosophical Investigations* (1953): “Think of the tools in a toolbox: there is a hammer, pliers, a saw, a screwdriver, a rule, a glue-pot, glue, nails and screws.—The functions of words are as diverse as the functions of these objects” (§11, 9^e). And Wittgenstein proceeds to consider the various language-games (*Sprachspiel*) that develop from the varieties permissible by language’s toolbox. In other words, Wittgenstein begins from what could be called an unconsciously correlational position: in the *Tractatus* he attempts to develop claims about the world-as-such (while not acknowledging his implicitly correlational approach); however, by *Philosophical Investigations*, Wittgenstein tempers his earlier unconscious correlationism by acknowledging the limitations of the *Tractatus*.

Wittgenstein explains that, regarding language-games, our “clear and simple language-games are not preliminary studies for a future regimentation of language—as it were, first approximations, ignoring friction and air resistance. Rather, the language-games stand there as *objects of comparison* which, through similarities and dissimilarities, are meant to throw light on features of our language” (§130, 56^e). The language-game is a propaedeutic for experimenting

upon language *within* language. *Philosophical Investigations*, like the earlier *Tractatus*, is a text that considers the surface of language, but what occurs when, to invoke a Heideggerian-Harmanian model, language breaks down? Are there hidden depths to language when language stops working as an effective machine?

Wittgenstein considers precisely this moment of breakdown in many of his language-games, particularly the ones in which language is pushed to its limits: “The confusions which occupy us arise when language is, as it were, idling, not when it is doing work” (§132, 56^e), Wittgenstein claims. When language idles or when it fully breaks down, its internal structure becomes apparent and this internal structure appears to be, at the very least, incarnational and, at its limit, mystical (for Wittgenstein). Wittgenstein makes this point earlier in *Philosophical Investigations*:

Naming seems to be a *strange* connection of a word with an object.—And such a strange connection really obtains, particularly when a philosopher tries to fathom *the* relation between name and what is named by staring at an object in front of him and repeating a name, or even the word “this”, innumerable times. For philosophical problems arise when language *goes on holiday*. And *then* we may indeed imagine naming to be some remarkable mental act, as it were the baptism of an object. And we can also say the word “this” *to* the object, as it were *address* the object as “this”—a strange use of this word, which perhaps occurs only when philosophizing. (§38, 23^e)

When language “goes on holiday,” a mystical space opens—a space in which the repetition of the pronoun “this” becomes an uncanny experience of derealization and dissociation, so that language is rendered unfamiliar and strange.

Wittgenstein's mysticism occurs at limit-experiences of language: "There are, indeed, things that cannot be put into words. They *make themselves manifest*. They are what is mystical" (*Tractatus* 89, 6.522). This mystical limit is postulated within language—suggesting that Wittgenstein can speculate about a linguistic mysticism (or an anterior space of language) only from within language. Hence, "[t]he *limits of my language* mean the limits of my world" (*Tractatus* 68, 5.6), he writes, but this limit points to an outside—what could be called, extrapolating from Meillassoux, the "great outdoors" of language—or, even further, an outside of the outside, suggesting that that which is mystical is separate from language-in-itself.

For the purposes of this dissertation, I define *mysticism* in relation to its etym: Jerome Gellman points out that "mysticism" originally "comes from the Greek $\mu\omega$, meaning 'to conceal'" (n.p.). This etymology situates "mysticism" in relation to the Hellenic world in which "'mystical' referred to 'secret' religious rituals" (Gellman n.p.). Grounding mysticism in $\mu\omega$ or "to conceal" permits a Heideggerian association of *alētheia* with the mystical. As I discussed in Chapter Three, *alētheia* is related, for Heidegger, to "unconcealment." The mystical is, for my purposes, linked to a form of *real thinking*: real thinking is, I claim, that which remains concealed before its eventual *unconcealment* as public thought. The mystical is therefore the obverse of philosophy so that that which is mystical acts as the concealment of philosophy (or proto-philosophy), while philosophy is the unconcealed real thinking of mysticism.

However, I do not want to delimit the etym of mysticism as that which leads to *alētheia*: the realism of mysticism requires certain strains of mystical thought to *remain concealed*—in other words, its continual concealment is its function. This analysis renders mysticism as the "outside" of language; or, at the very least, as an "outside" of philosophy—and this "outside" renders certain levels or plateaus of language as continuously unknown or entirely anterior. My

haptic semiological interpretation of “mysticism” situates language itself as an undiscovered country of various concealments that are sometimes brought to light through the revelation of philosophical thought, while others remain forever hidden *in potentia*. This definition of “mysticism” is not fully related to Wittgensteinian mysticism, but shares some similarities.¹

As we learn in the *Philosophical Investigations*, components of this “mystical quality” leak into language (or have access to language): “There might also be a language in whose use the ‘soul’ of the words played no part. In which, for example, we had no objection to replacing one word by a new, arbitrarily invented one” (§530, 152^e). Is this “soul” that Wittgenstein mentions an instance of an earlier Cratylean (and incarnational) quality leaking into language? Can there ever be a word-soul in a Saussurean or linguistic correlational model? This mystical outside of language is *produced by language*; or, to put this proposition in Wittgenstein’s own words: “When a sentence is called senseless, it is not, as it were, its sense that is senseless. Rather, a combination of words is being excluded from the language, withdrawn from circulation” (§500, 147^e). The “withdrawing of words from circulation” suggests that there exists an “inside” of language related to sense or sense-making and an “outside” of language that is structured via “non-sense” or anteriority.

In Badiou’s mathematical ontology, he would locate this “outside” within the notion of “*alagos*” that he discusses in *Number and Numbers*:

Now, at the moment of the great Greek crisis of number, when the arrival of that at once inevitable and enigmatic event made it known that certain relationships (those, for example, of the diagonal of a square and its side) cannot be ‘numbered’

¹ As well, this definition is meant to extend retroactively to include my reading of the “poetic mystic” Hannah Weiner in the previous chapter as well as my interpretations of Badiou and Wittgenstein in this chapter.

within the code of existing numbers, the word *alogos* arrived, saturating and exceeding the mathematical situation. This word designates that which, having no *logos*, nonetheless must be decided as number. It inscribes in a new situation of thought a nomination without signification: that of a number which is not a number. (106)

Both Badiou and Wittgenstein point to moments when a word or a number behave atypically: as different entities. This “atypical” behaviour is frequently “mystical” or incarnational. In fact, I would push this dynamic further and claim that the core of Badiou’s mathematical ontology is an idiosyncratic mysticism that links with my earlier definition, but his is *a mysticism of number*.

Badiou writes:

I think of the great Indian mathematician Ramanujan, who held each whole number to be a personal friend. He was invested by this poem of Number, of which the Poem of nature is the symmetrical counterpart within language. He did not like to construct proofs, but rather, as a dreamer of the ordinal site, to *draw* in it with curves of recognition, which his colleagues regarded with some surprise. (183)

Even though Ramanujan can be read as being naïve, Badiou’s own mathematical ontology contains an aspect of incarnation in which numbers become incarnated entities (as I will demonstrate momentarily). From a semiotic perspective, this Badiouian mathematical ontology would be seen as fallacious. Susanne Langer writes that

a mathematician does not profess to say anything about the existence, reality, or efficacy of *things* at all. His concern is the possibility of *symbolizing things*, and of symbolizing the relations into which they might enter with each other. His

“entities” are not “data,” but *concepts*. That is why such elements as “imaginary numbers” and “infinite decimals” are tolerated by scientists to whom invisible agents, powers, and “principles” are anathema. Mathematical constructions are only symbols; they have meanings in terms of relationships, not of substance; something in reality answers to them, but they are not supposed to be items in that reality. To the true mathematician, numbers do not “inhere in” denumerable things, nor do circular objects “contain” degrees. Numbers and degrees and all their ilk only *mean* the real properties of real objects. (14-15)

To probe the question of *if there are word-things, why not number-things*, I would like to point to a disciplinary bias: against Langer’s reading of mathematics, what haptic semiology addresses with words has already been proposed with certain thinkers of number, namely, a non-correlational theory of numbers. Peano, Frege, and Badiou are each thinkers of numbers-in-themselves, but Badiou in particular theorizes the most drastic notion of number (which he capitalizes as “Number”) in which, instead of promoting a logical approach to numbers (or numbers as propositional objects), Badiou situates numbers as ontological entities (or as houses of being).²

The limit experiences of language do not only point to a numerical mysticism, but also to the productivity of nonsense: an avant-garde poet or paratactic experimenter would no doubt embrace such a definition of an “outside” of language. In *Flight Out of Time* (1927), the Dadaist

² Badiou explains that: “Ultimately the capitalisation of Number does not so much distinguish the genera from the species subsumed to it (whole numbers, rational numbers, real numbers, ordinal numbers, infinitesimal numbers, etc.)—although it does indeed activate such a distinction—as it emphasises the gap between a nomination (here at last is Number) and the diverse significations that, having once been nominations themselves, have become the names of numbers” (*Number* 108).

poet Hugo Ball insists that we “must return to the innermost alchemy of the word” (71), a sentiment echoed by thinkers like Badiou and Wittgenstein—in fact, I consider their projects an attempt to approach an inner alchemy of the number. However, how does Number’s ontology function? According to Badiou: “Number is *a form of Being*. More precisely, the numbers that we manipulate are only a tiny deduction from the infinite profusion of Being in Numbers. Essentially, a Number is a fragment sectioned from a natural multiplicity; a multiplicity thought, as ordinal, in its being qua being” (*Number* 211). This theorization of number (or “Number”) invokes earlier Hellenic conceptions of number as transcendental (as can be found in Philolaus of Croton’s Pythagorean notion of number as *harmonia* and heavenly), while activating a mystical-physicality of number that is, perhaps, not immediately apparent.³ However, Badiou progresses further than Frege in that Frege is willing to assert (when trying to differentiate between number and colour) that “[t]his brings us to another reason for refusing to class number along with colour and solidity: it is applicable over a far wider range” (30), but he would likely not include “being” as an applicable quality of number.

This logical leap is precisely what makes Badiou’s work important for haptic semiology: by relating mathematics to ontology, Badiou invokes an earlier transcendentalism that is simultaneously mystical. Badiou further asserts that, if Number is a type of being, it remains surprising that we have any access to it:

This only makes it more remarkable, then, that we can have some access to Number as such, even if this access still indicates an excess: that of being over knowledges, an excess manifest in the numberless extent of Numbers, compared

³ See: Carl A. Huffman’s excellently edited collection (1993) of the fragments and testimonia of Philolaus of Croton. Note in particular pp. 283-286, which emphasizes that the Pythagoreans held that “numbers and their characteristics follow the places in the heavens” (284).

to what we can know by structuring the presentation of types of numbers. That mathematics allows us at least to *designate* this excess, to accede to it, confirms the ontological vocation of that discipline. The history of mathematics, for the concept of Number as for every other concept, is precisely the history, interminable in principle, of the relation between the inconsistency of being as such, and what our thought can make consistent of this inconsistency.

Mathematics establishes ontology as the historical situation of being. (*Number* 212)

For Badiou, numbers do not exist outside of the anthropocentric correlation, but there remains an excess within numbers that structures our access to them as equivalent to the philosophical access of Kantian noumena.

Badiou situates mathematical identity in relation to more traditional, philosophical definitions of “identity”: “‘identity’ must here indeed be carefully distinguished from the logical predicate of equality, it is nevertheless equally clear that the statement ‘every object is identical to itself’ is not a ‘purely logical’ statement. *It is an onto-logical statement*” (*Number* 19). As soon as a system generates a certain degree of self-reflexivity—or, whenever feedback appears—then that system becomes ontological, because numbers manifest as representational indicators that function as dignitaries not only for other objects, but also for themselves.

A good way to illustrate this claim is by referring to Kripke’s work in *Naming and Necessity*, particularly during his theorization of a “rigid designator”:

Let’s call something a *rigid designator* if in every possible world it designates the same object, a *nonrigid* or *accidental designator* if that is not the case. Of course we don’t require that the objects exist in all possible worlds. Certainly Nixon

might not have existed if his parents had not gotten married, in the normal course of things. When we think of a property as essential to an object we usually mean that it is true of that object in any case where it would have existed. A rigid designator of a necessary existent can be called *strongly rigid*. (48)

Following Kripke's definition, I would argue that there remains an imaginary or speculative quality to his notion of a "rigid designator" in that one signifier (or designator) would likely *not* refer to the same object in every possible world.⁴ Such designators contain the lineage of Plato's theory of forms in that the concept activates a transcendental realm of reflexivity in which a specific designator refers to a specific object within every possible world. For a rigid designator to exist in every possible world would require an infinite number of linkages that connect that designator to its object not only within an anthropocentric world—or not only according to the object-designator relation—but also to an infinite number of unseen gossamers that link these two objects together throughout all worlds and all time (the closest concept that this approximates, I claim, is *true love*). What happens when a signifier loves its object or when an object loves its signifier? What does that love story tell? Or is it star-crossed?⁵

The radicality of Badiou's approach situates number as Number (or number as transcendental). A good way to emphasize the uniqueness of Badiou's theorization of number is to contrast his definition with that belonging to the mathematician Hermann Hankel. Hankel writes:

⁴ Kripke calls this idea "transworld identification" (50-55).

⁵ Kripke further describes rigid designators: "I will maintain [...] that *names* are rigid designators. Certainly they seem to satisfy the intuitive test mentioned above: although someone other than the U.S. President in 1970 might have been the U.S. President in 1970 (e.g., Humphrey might have), no one other than Nixon might have been Nixon. In the same way, a designator rigidly designates a certain object if it designates that object wherever the object exists" (48-49).

Number to-day [*sic*] is no longer a thing, a substance, existing in its own right apart from the thinking subject and the objects which give rise to it, a self-subsistent element in the sort of way it was for the Pythagoreans. The question whether some number exists can therefore only be understood as referring to the thinking subject or to the objects thought about, relations between which the numbers represent. As impossible in the strict sense the mathematician counts only what is logically impossible, that is, self-contradictory. That numbers which are impossible in this sense cannot be admitted, needs no proof. But if the numbers concerned are logically possible, if their concept is clearly and fully defined and therefore free from contradiction, then the question whether they exist can amount only to this: Does there exist in reality or in the actual world given to us in intuition a substratum for these numbers, do there exist objects in which they—relations, that is, for the mind, of the type defined—can become phenomenal? (qtd. in Frege 104-105)

Hankel's definition of number can be considered "traditional" or, at the very least, more traditional than Badiou's. For Badiou, number manifests more closely a Pythagorean schema that emphasizes elemental self-subsistence. One way to understand the distinction between conservative definitions of number and Badiou's is to emphasize the anthropocentric approach of Hankel versus the mathematical transcendentalism of Badiou: on the one hand, Hankel's definition remains "in-the-world" and present for use by human mathematicians; for Badiou, on the other hand, numbers are only partly existent for humans because there remains an excess or surplus within number that designates Number's being as such, thereby rendering number as a concept in-itself. Another way to situate Hankel within the larger dynamic of a number-thing is

to say that Hankel is to the phenomenal what Badiou is to the noumenal: number's "being" (if it has being) should be considered as correlated to an observing-subject, while for Badiou, number manifests as Number or as transcendental. Number therefore situates itself both for-itself and in-itself.

The distance between a number-thing (or what Badiou calls "Number") and a word-thing is quite small. Both words and numbers, operating within the respective discourses of mathematics and language, manifest mimetically: words and numbers *represent* something to someone (within a correlational model of words and numbers). Even Cratylus relates words to numbers when speaking with Socrates because of the inherent mimetic abilities of numbers (148). This representational ability emerges because both numbers and words are *signifiers*: in other words, a word is a number and a number is a word. Numbers are already letters and words are strings of letters.

Wittgenstein's theories of language are grounded within mathematical logic, thereby closely relating words and numbers. Badiou makes a similar point when discussing Lacan: "In reality, Number is indeed like a signifier, whose internal 'positions' are the three locations—matter, form and residue—and whose letters are the ordinals. This alone permits us to organise something as anarchic as sets of any ordinals whatsoever, ordinal 'words'" (*Number* 130). If ordinals (numbers that determine a thing's order in a series) can compose "words," then the difference between words and numbers is minimal. By collapsing the distinction between word and number, I am effectively extending a strain of mathematical mysticism into literary theory.

Mathematical mysticism offers an entry point to word-things because a word-thing reveals itself when "language goes on vacation," or another way of putting this statement is to say that a word-thing is revealed at the limit-experiences of language (within the semiotico-

mystical). Wittgenstein claims that “to imagine a language means to imagine a form of life” (§19, 11^e). What is this “life of language?” Or, what is its being?

For a mathematician like Alfred Tarski, and for other practitioners of analytic philosophy, ontology does not exist (or it should be regarded with skepticism). Tarski himself writes: “For some people metaphysics is a general theory of objects (ontology)—a discipline which is to be developed in a purely empirical way, and which differs from other empirical sciences only by its generality. I do not know whether such a discipline actually exists” (35). Quine would likely respond to Wittgenstein’s incarnational language in the following way: “The nominalist, admitting only concrete objects, must either regard classical mathematics as discredited, or, at best, consider it a machine which is useful despite the fact that it uses ideograms of the form of statements which involve a fictitious ontology” (“Notes” 89). According to Quine, the ontology suggested by mathematics is “fictitious”—or a sleight of hand illusion—but what if a fictitious ontology is nonetheless *real*? What if the fiction of subjective experience relates to the fiction of objective experience (the experience of objects)? What if “fiction” is merely the name for a different kind of object—an object that is perhaps nonmaterial, but nonetheless *real*? This understanding of the object will relate to the final section of this chapter where I discuss the philosophical lineage between Alexius Meinong and object-oriented ontology (and the implications for that lineage on haptic semiology).

An early theorization of linguistic matter can be found in V.N. Vološinov’s *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language* (1929). Vološinov points out that a Marxist-materialist study of language must first study “the *generation of language itself, as ideological material, as the medium for ideological reflection of existence, since the reflection of the refraction of existence in the human consciousness comes about only in and through the word,*” but this generation

“cannot be studied, of course, in complete disregard of the social existence refracted in it and of the refracting powers of the socioeconomic conditions,” so that two routes (or roots) emerge: one is “the *reflection and refraction of the generation of nature and history in the generation of the word*” and the other is “the *reflection of the social generation of word in word itself*, with its two branches: the *history of the philosophy of the word* and the *history of word in word*” (158, original emphasis). Vološinov’s model usefully anticipates a complexity theory amidst the various refractions and reflections of language—such an understanding of the internal structure of language leads Wittgenstein, in his own writing, to claim that: “Language is a labyrinth of paths. You approach from *one* side and know your way about; you approach the same place from another side and no longer know your way about” (§203, 88^c). Language is a garden of forking paths that deviate and reform in order to accommodate the various theorizations of the sign and possible language games.

According to Vološinov, “[t]he physical object is converted into a sign. Without ceasing to be a part of material reality, such an object, to some degree, reflects and refracts another reality” (9). An object and its sign split reality into two (for Vološinov), thereby creating two different, and yet material, worlds: each world refracts the world of the other so that the word fractalizes the world and the world fractalizes the word. However, this linguistic fracture remains locked within anthropocentric correlationism because, as Vološinov explains, ideology’s “real place in existence is in the special, social material of signs created by man” (12). The sign does not exist outside of the correlation: there is no Badiouian excess or surplus that renders the sign as potentially transcendent (as in the case of numbers); instead, the sign is created *by* man and *for* man. Vološinov’s theory suggests that a sign need not be limited to a word because “[s]igns also are particular, material things; and, as we have seen, any item of nature, technology, or

consumption can become a sign, acquiring in the process a meaning that goes beyond its given particularity” (10). In Appendix I to *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language*, Ladislav Matejka helpfully historicizes Vološinov’s semiotic lineage that “involves the Stoics and their dialectical approach to the opposition between the signifying and the signified, and, furthermore, it maintains a vital connection with the medieval semiotics, which regarded signs as something material standing for something spiritual and considered human words as the most important signs among signs” (161). As we saw in Chapter One, the initial targets of Eagleton’s incarnational fallacy were the Russian formalists, so a magical theorization of the sign is not surprising, but what is useful about Vološinov’s approach is the mystical quality that he attributes to signs—a quality that can be also be found in Wittgenstein and Badiou.

Vološinov writes that

[e]very ideological sign is not only a reflection, a shadow, of reality, but is also itself a material segment of that very reality. Every phenomenon functioning as an ideological sign has some kind of material embodiment, whether in sound, physical mass, color, movements of the body, or the like. In this sense, the reality of the sign is fully objective and lends itself to a unitary, monistic, objective method of study. (11)

Vološinov points to a material (as opposed to transcendental) surplus of the sign, thereby indicating a signifiatory excess that potentially escapes from the anthropocentric correlation:

A sign is a phenomenon of the external world. Both the sign itself and all the effects it produces (all those actions, reactions, and new signs it elicits in the surrounding social milieu) occur in outer experience. This is a point of extreme importance. Yet, elementary and self-evident as it may seem, the study of

ideologies has still not drawn all the conclusions that follow from it. The idealistic philosophy of culture and psychologistic cultural studies locate ideology in the consciousness. Ideology, they assert, is a fact of consciousness; the external body of the sign is merely a coating, merely a technical means for the realization of the inner effect, which is understanding. Idealism and psychologism alike overlook the fact that understanding itself can come about only within some kind of semiotic material (e.g., inner speech), that sign bears upon sign, that *consciousness itself can arise and become a viable fact only in the material embodiment of signs*. The understanding of a sign is, after all, an act of reference between the sign apprehended and other, already known signs; in other words, understanding is a response to a sign with signs. And this chain of ideological creativity and understanding, moving from sign to sign and then to a new sign; is perfectly consistent and continuous: from one link of a semiotic nature (hence, also of a material nature) we proceed uninterruptedly to another link of exactly the same nature. And nowhere is there a break in the chain, nowhere does the chain plunge into inner being, nonmaterial in nature and unembodied in signs. (11, original emphasis)

Vološinov grapples with the psychological correlation (what could be called the noetico-noematic correlation of Husserl) and attempts to think the sign as apart from an observer's perception of it. Vološinov is thinking about *language's flesh*: the flesh of the signifier links apparent (and unapparent objects) within and without the world of language. The flesh of language manifests as a unique gossamer that stitches together words and objects. This appropriation of Merleau-Ponty's concept liberates flesh from its visual, anthropocentric bias and

yokes the concept's original phenomenological qualities in the service of a semiotic repositioning so that flesh (or a form of sign-flesh) links words to objects *as word-things*.

The human sees itself refracted in the word and the word sees itself refracted in the human; or, as Vološinov writes: “Every *ideological refraction of existence in process of generation*, no matter what the nature of its significant material, *is accompanied by ideological refraction in word* as an obligatory concomitant [*sic*] phenomenon. Word is present in each and every act of understanding and in each and every act of interpretation” (15, original emphasis). Speculative realism and object-oriented philosophies would re-theorize this Vološinovian moment as a liberation of the word: the word re-emerges within semiotic material as a word-thing.

The “Inside” of a Word-thing’s Material

In the Introduction, I cited Foucault’s claim regarding Deleuze’s philosophical insights as being the metaphysical presentation of an incorporeal materiality (“Theatrum” 347). “Incorporeal materiality” has a long history: in ancient Greece, for example, concepts were regularly defined as material incarnations of incorporeal things. The concept of *stoicheion* is an excellent example (*stoicheion* being the Greek word for “letter” or “element”). Timothy Crowley situates the concept of *stoicheion* in its original context: “it is usually believed that *stoicheion* primarily means ‘letter of the alphabet’, and that, by comparing the principles of nature and natural things to the letters that constitute a word, the former also come to be called *stoicheia*” (368). The basic elements of nature are directly (re)presented by the lettric elements. This theory of language is Cratylean, but lacks Cratylus’s recourse to a deity—the *stoicheia* combine to form words that manifest as things-in-themselves—meaning that the words themselves are in-themselves because

they register not as the paragrammic signatures of a god, but as the physical signatures of nature. Crowley points out that “[t]he things that are ordinarily called *stoicheia* are (1) the things into which syllables are divisible; (2) the things into which bodies are divisible; and (3) the things into which geometrical propositions are divisible, or the principles of proofs or demonstrations” (372). *Stoicheia* manifest as the zero degree of language or as the indivisible units of language: they are language’s original etyms.

Socrates asserts in *Cratylus*: “if we ever get hold of a name that isn’t composed out of other names, we’ll be right to say that at last we’ve reached an element” (139). *Stoicheia* then are the monadic instances of language when names have been eliminated to reach what Goethe would call an *Urphänomen*, or an originary element of the purely nominative: the essential instance of Adamic or deistic nomination. However, this element is likely transcendental and cannot be manifested or discovered in language as such; for Saussure (and, to some extent, for Socrates and Hermogenes) there would be no originary name because there is only the *glissement* of the signifier and the infinite regress of names. “A more speculative suggestion is offered by Lagercrantz,” Crowley offers, “who imagines that some anonymous Athenian master teacher introduced the term [*stoicheia*] for the specific purpose of explaining Empedocles’ doctrine of the four ‘roots’; thus Empedocles’ four [*rhizomata*] become the four *stoicheia*” (368). The *rhizomata* (or four roots) of Empedocles become the four *stoicheia*: but these *rhizomata* are essential or indivisible: they are the primary roots of existence for Empedocles (being the four elements).

A unique collision emerges here between the pre-Socratic philosophy of Empedocles and the incorporeal materialism of Deleuze (and, by extension, Guattari). Even though Empedocles is mentioned only once in passing in both volumes of *Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (during a

moment that has nothing to do with *rhizomata*), I suggest that there is a striking paradigm shift that can be located between the concept of *rhizomata* and the concept of the rhizome.⁶

For Empedocles, *rhizomata* act like *stoicheia* in that the roots that Empedocles uncovers function as the atomic units of existence: they are formative of the natural world and constitutive of reality. For Deleuze and Guattari, the rhizome is a model of multi-level complexity: from the molar to the molecular and from the subjective schiz to the social, the rhizome models the inherent complexity of contemporary life and the impossibility of easy entrances or exits. However, in the context of *Word-Things*, I prefer to see the difference between *rhizomata* and rhizome as linguistically-coded so that *rhizomata* point to a transcendental and proto-Cratylean model of language (in which the word and the world are synonymous), and the rhizome incites what I call the fractal nature of language, suggesting that linguistic complexity has reached the level of the word-thing. In other words, once each element of the sign is fractured and undecidable—when the signifier, signified, and referent all suffer from Saussurean arbitrariness—then language reaches a state of the rhizome rather than a state of *rhizomata*.

Socrates captures the earlier instance of language as *rhizomata* in *Cratylus*: “So if someone were able to imitate in letters and syllables this being or essence that each thing has, wouldn’t he express what each thing itself is?” (140). This instance again raises the question of essence: what is the essence of language? If language manifests either as surface *rhizomata* or as an underlying rhizome, then the question of essence remains: what lurks underneath language-as-

⁶ Empedocles is not mentioned in *Anti-Oedipus* and is only mentioned once in *A Thousand Plateaus* and the reference has nothing to do with his theory of *rhizomata*, but with Deleuze and Guattari’s notion of the refrain (339). Arguably, the non-phenomenological model in Deleuze—his notion of “incorporeal materiality”—emerges by way of his reading of Spinoza. Via Spinoza, Deleuze formulates the process through which complex bodies, assemblages, or what he will later call “rhizomes,” develop. See: Deleuze *Expressionism in Philosophy* (1968), pp. 210-212.

rhizomata or language-as-rhizome? Another way to put this is to ask (in reference to Chapter Two): what is language's brick?

Word-Things has repeatedly grappled with a problem that has, in some ways, remained obscure and unaddressed—perhaps, the problematic itself resides behind an inaccessible, phenomenal screen. If the concepts of signifier and referent or word and object or real and representation each produce a distancing screen, then there are a variety of linguistic strategies that can destabilize this screen. On one level, the difference between real and representation has been reframed by thinkers like Deleuze as the distinction between transcendence and immanence; but this imposed distance can also be bridged by dialectically combining terms or by emphasizing terms in turn so that *immanent-transcendence* or *transcendent-immanence* emerges. The German Idealist screen can be helpfully collapsed by postulating a *representational real* or a *realist representation*. If there exists a real and its representation—and if these concepts are separated by a phenomenal screen—then there must also exist a combinatory subset in which representation contains a real and the real contains a representation and so on, *ad infinitum*. In this way, the thought or the concept fractalizes like one of Burroughs's various cut-ups or fold-ins. Haptic semiology seeks to cut-up the traditional signifier and signified dyad in order to re-permute these items or fold them together.

Even though this dissertation aims for a haptic semiology of word-things, the word-thing itself remains a conceptual or theoretical manifestation of what I call a "thing-word." The best way to approach a word-thing is via its thing-wordness, which is, to some degree, the *representation* of the word-thing; or, put more clearly, when word-things achieve imagistic manifestation on the page or screen (or, presumably the mind), they are thing-words: thing-words are word-things when seen in a correlational mirror. When a word—pushed to its limit-

experience—is presented in a text by a writing-subject then that word manifests as a thing-word. A word-thing, on the other hand, is a philosophical conceptualization of a thing-word as distinct from a correlational circle. A word-thing is speculatively non-correlational, while a thing-word remains locked within a correlational moment. This distinction can be clarified in relation to the later work of Heidegger where he situates the thing against the thing-in-itself, so that a thing is the presentation of a liminal gathering.

In his essay “The Thing” (1950), Heidegger links thingness (*Dingheit*) to thinking (*Denkheit*); extending this schema to the word-thing/thing-word duo, I would claim that there are not only word-things, but also *word-thinks*. A word-think activates another level of semantico-phenomenal complexity that can help bridge the seemingly entrenched barrier between human correlational subjects and the words-in-themselves that seem so far away, hidden across the ocean of the slash that separates phenomena from noumena. A word-think is what occurs to words when they appear to speaking-subjects, or when speaking-subjects use signs to represent a thought. A word-think is therefore the correlationist iteration of a word-thing or what happens to a word-thing when it enters a speaking-subject.

Another possibility emerges here as well: a *think-word*. A think-word is a speculative iteration of a word-thing that, like a word-thing itself, is more closely related to a word-in-itself; or, in other words, a think-word is, I claim, the speculative potential of a word once language becomes a fully alien and animate organism—at some future moment, perhaps when Meillassoux’s inexistent God is born, language will develop into a bona fide superorganism within a philo-fiction nightmare akin to the feared emergence of consciousness within artificial intelligence. During this speculative moment, a word-thing will also be able to manifest as a think-word. The primary distinction between these four categories—word-thing/thing-word and

word-think/think-word—matches the boundary between correlational and non-correlational: a word-thing and a think-word are speculatively non-correlational while a thing-word and a word-think remain within a correlational circle.

The answer to the question “what is inside a word-thing?” can begin to be found in Heidegger’s article on “The Thing,” in which he asserts, when analyzing the materiality of a jug that, “[t]he vessel’s thingness does not lie at all in the material of which it consists, but in the void that holds” (167). For Heidegger, the void is constitutive of the jug itself so that the *something* that the jug *is* emerges from an originary nothingness (or, more precisely, emptiness) that exists alongside the presentation of the jug’s presence. The jug cannot be, or present as a jug without its structuring void. Another way to put this idea is to say that *within any something there is a constitutive nothing*. As Heidegger asserts in *Being and Time*, the primary goal of his phenomenology is to work “out these fore-structures [his tool analysis] in terms of the things themselves” (195), in that Heidegger attempts to return to the thing and this thing reveals its corporeity in direct relation to a signifying void; it is the void that, perhaps surprisingly, *holds* the jug.

I would insist that, at its centre, a word-thing contains an irreducible void. Haptic semiology is neither a Spinozan linguistics relying on a deistic vitalism nor a theory that relies on a neo-Kantian or neo-Platonic essence to structure its linguistic incarnations; on the contrary, a much stranger and uncanny process occurs—namely, a *productive nothingness*.

This thingly nothingness at the centre of a word-thing is productive in that it can produce a logogenetic field from which objects and signs arise. Indeed, *ex nihilo* these objects emerge to the surface of things: a word-thing lacks phenomenal depth because its depth contains, at its basis, a productive void. A void is also, in the strict sense, *not nothing*: a void is already

something because it can, following Badiou, be named, located, sited, and even contained (within an empty set for example). Such a productive void lies at the centre of word-things, but does a productive void also lie at the centre of words? Words are, following Saussure and the linguistic turn, arbitrary signs that contain nothing of their referents or objects, but this nothingness is a *pure* nothingness because it is *conceptual* as opposed to *material*. However, materiality itself remains a concept and conceptuality turns on its own historical and materialist piston; from the inside of a phenomenal void it may be impossible to determine whether a void is “material” or “conceptual.”

Questions about the “being of language” inevitably fall into the same traps encountered by traditional questions of being. Taylor Carman effectively makes this point in his 2008 foreword to *Being and Time* when he writes: “The question of being is a question about everything and, in a sense, nothing. Aristotle and the scholastics knew that ‘being’ does not name a peculiar feature distinguishing a kind of entity, or even entities as a whole, since a contrast class is by definition out of the question” (xiii). If being is a question about nothing, then the question of language’s being must also be about nothing: language’s “nothing” (like being’s “nothing”) is a productive nothing because “something” emerges from this nothingness: namely, the presence of language as such, language that lives in minds and mouths and universities and books. This “nothingness” is similar to Merleau-Ponty’s understanding of flesh in that a productive nothingness “fastens” objects to other objects or words to objects or words to words. Of course, the word “haptic” comes from *haptēin*, which originally means “to fasten”: a haptic semiology therefore interrogates the ways in which words and objects are fastened together.

A good way to think about this “productive nothingness” is by returning to the earlier question of number-things. As Badiou argues in *Number and Numbers*, “[m]athematical

ontology is unitary: there aren't, on the one hand, pre-given 'objects', on the other, structural relations into which these objects enter. Everything can potentially be reduced to a multiple without quality, made of the void alone" (131). A number need not represent whatever it is counting because a number is existent "in-itself," as a number-as-such, but this numerical being is permitted by a structuring void at the number's centre. A number does not "withdraw" while in use because a number is representationally capacious: a number is ontological and transcendental and mimetic and existent and imaginary and unknown and infinite and corporeal and immaterial. A number's capacious ontology should not be limited to numbers alone because a number is, at its essence, a nothingness made out of a similar nothingness as a word-thing. For Badiou, certain concepts—that include mathematical entities in general—not only numbers, but also geometries, algebras, and sets, function because they each suture being to the void. Linguistic signs—like mathematical signs—also suture objects to virtual components and beings to objects in direct relation to a systemic suturing of the void.

Even Badiou appears to anticipate the uncanny similarities between the sign-systems of number-things and word-things when he asserts that "[e]very poem seeks to uncover and to carry to the formal limits of language the latent void of sensible referents" (*Number* 161). When *glissement* enters the theorization of the signifier, then the representational efficacy of the signifier dissimulates from a Cratylean efficiency to Saussuro-Derridean arbitrariness, but this arbitrariness does not eliminate the referents, nor does it simplify the inherent complexity of the signifier. The ontology of the signifier broadens when indeterminacy enters its conceptualization and this ontology need not be predicated on a pure absence stripped fully from material, but rather this ontology should be reconfigured as a productive absence that deepens philosophical

interrogations of the material.⁷ Indeed, the original word *stoicheion* is itself a word that signifies the lettric elements of language and also the base elements of mathematics; or, as Crowley insists: “the Platonists use the term *stoicheia* with reference to the elements of number, i.e., the One and the Great and the Small” (373). Therefore, *stoicheion* is the unifying term for both number-things and word-things and, at the basis of the *stoicheion*, like the basis of a word-thing, there resides a *thingly nothingness*.

The overall complexity of the semiotic sign—as seen in a word-thing—is best considered an issue regarding the complexity of linguistic relationality. Wittgenstein makes this point best in *Philosophical Investigations* when he argues that

[a] main source of our failure to understand is that we don’t have *an overview* of the use of our words.—Our grammar is deficient in surveyability. A surveyable representation produces precisely that kind of understanding which consists in ‘seeing connections’. Hence the importance of finding and inventing *intermediate links*.” (§122, 54^e)

The “intermediate links” name the interstice between words and things as a strange interzone constructed out of the linguistic void in which odd occurrences happen: objects are borne and die without ever manifesting in traditionally corporeal ways, but they exist nonetheless.

⁷ This analysis of writing shares many similarities with Derrida’s own theorization of *différance*, the present-absence, and dissemination. Each of these concepts is closely interrelated in Derrida’s oeuvre, so I will simply focus on the way in which dissemination and *différance* are each concepts that function by virtue of the absence of a grounding presence that undergirds writing. Derrida writes that “supplementarity, which *is nothing*, neither a presence nor an absence, is neither a substance nor an essence of man. It is precisely the play of presence and absence, the opening of this play that no metaphysical or ontological concept can comprehend” (*Of Grammatology* 244). As I cite in Chapter One, Derrida insists that writing is a testament of two absences: “All graphemes are of a testamentary essence. And the original absence of the subject of writing is also the absence of the thing or the referent” (69). These absences that Derrida locates are *productive* of writing.

The Paradoxical Existence of Inexistence: A Meinongian Analysis of Language

Word-things and number-things feature a contradictory ontology because their ontology is not limited to a simple instance of “existent” or “inexistent,” because their “objectality” or “reality” is non-traditional. Object-oriented ontology regularly features surprising ontological claims about objects such as unicorns, tooth fairies, Spiderman, and the like. Graham Harman, for example, argues for a “*realism without materialism*” (“Undermining” 40) in which these seemingly immaterial objects manifest as real objects.⁸

Peter Wolfendale links the object-oriented penchant for an immaterial realism to the earlier work of the Austrian phenomenologist and psychologist Alexius Meinong (Wolfendale 115-118). Meinong was primarily inspired by Franz Brentano’s descriptive psychology and later found surprising acclaim after Bertrand Russell criticized his *Gegenstandstheorie* (or theory of objects).⁹ In “The Theory of Objects” (1904), Meinong develops an ontology of objects that includes imagined or fictional objects. “Assuming an intelligence of unlimited capacities, there is nothing unknowable; and what is knowable, is. However, since the preferred usage is generally to apply ‘it is’ (*es gibt*) to things which have being,” Meinong claims, “and particularly to existing things, it would perhaps be clearer to say: All that is knowable is given—namely, given to cognition. To this extent, all objects are knowable. Given-ness as a most general property can be ascribed to Objects without exception, whether they are or are not” (91-92). Apart from his

⁸ Levi Bryant also considers himself a realist instead of a materialist and includes Bogost, Latour, and Stengers in this “post-Meinongian” group as well. See: his *Larval Subjects* blog post “Realism is not a Synonym for Materialism.” <

<https://larvalsubjects.wordpress.com/2009/10/21/realism-is-not-a-synonym-for-materialism/>>.

⁹ See: Johann Marek’s entry on Meinong in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (2013).

conclusion to the *Tractatus*, Wittgenstein deploys what could be called a Meinongian framework in the *Philosophical Investigations* when he writes that “[i]t would be odd to say: ‘A process looks different when it happens from when it doesn’t happen.’ Or: ‘A red patch looks different when it is there from when it isn’t there—but language abstracts from this difference, for it speaks of a red patch whether it is there or not’” (§446, 138^e). Wittgenstein sees this Meinongian model of thought’s manifestation as being grounded in a language-game so that language permits a variety of abstractions that “fill in” for missing objects. In other words, the signifier “red patch” registers as a red patch (or a signified) within a speaking-subject’s mind in the same way that a “unicorn” can be thought as an object. Meinong, though, develops the most complete theorization of the process from abstraction to real manifestation.

Meinong begins with what Meillassoux would call the Husserlian noetico-noematic correlation, in that Meinong, starting with cognition, considers the objects that emerge from perception: “It was no accident that the foregoing account took cognition as its starting point in order to arrive at the Object. To be sure, cognition is not unique in ‘having’ an Object. It has it in such a distinctive manner, however, that whenever we are speaking of Objects, we are influenced to think first of all of the Object of cognition” (78). Therefore, Meinong begins with a correlation and extends from this proposition to consider objects-in-themselves (or what he calls “the theory of objects”).

The first objects he considers that occupy a unique position of existence and inexistence are numbers: “number does not exist in addition to what is numbered, supposing the latter does exist; this we clearly know from the fact that we can also count what does not exist” (79). Like Badiou, Meinong argues that numbers are unique objects that manifest as number-things through a strange mathematical ontology:

What has been stated here only in terms of isolated examples is supported by the testimony of a very highly developed science—indeed the most highly developed one: mathematics. We would surely not want to speak of mathematics as alien to reality, as though it had nothing to do with what exists. Indeed, we cannot fail to recognize that mathematics is assured of an extensive sphere of application in practical life no less than in the theoretical treatment of reality. However, pure mathematical knowledge is never concerned with anything which must, in the nature of the case, be actual. The form of being (*Sein*) with which mathematics as such is occupied is never existence (*Existenz*). In this respect, mathematics never transcends subsistence (*Bestand*): a straight line has no more existence than a right angle; a regular polygon, no more than a circle. (80)

Meinong distinguishes between existence and subsistence so that certain objects manifest what could be called a subterranean and yet objectal realm. I would extend Meinong's understanding of "subsistence" to include not only the unreal or the unactualized; instead, I would situate the term as a useful concept that illustrates the different degrees of being's ontology. Being-in-the-world or what could be called being-in-the-cosmos each register "Being" as a spacious category—a category that itself could be said to subsist rather than exist. Where can "Being" be found within the human body, or within the tree, or the cat? (This question is similar to Taylor Carman's claim cited earlier regarding Being: "The question of being is a question about everything and, in a sense, nothing" [xiii]). Where is "Being" located? In the soul? Where is the soul? In the vibrational integrity of the nervous system? Not precisely, because this system is simply called "the nervous system."

Meinong considers the foundation of subsistent objects as being grounded in a proto-Heideggerian void (although he does not use this term). Meinong argues that

[a]ny particular thing that isn't real (*Nichtseiendes*) must at least be capable of serving as the Object for those judgments which grasp its *Nichtsein*. It does not matter whether this *Nichtsein* is necessary or merely factual; nor does it matter in the first case whether the necessity stems from the essence of the object or whether it stems from aspects which are external to the Object in question. (82-83)

Meinong's name for the void is *Nichtsein*, a useful term that I translate as "not-being." A fascinating story could be told in the history of phenomenology about the transition of *Nichtsein* to *Dasein* (both of which remain enclosed within the larger subsistent concept of *Sein*). The importance of "not-being" is that a "not-being" paradoxically contains "being" within it—the word literally becomes "nothing" (or *Nicht*) without "being." A "not-being" is a type of being: it is a being that subsists rather than exists. Meinong captures this contradiction in the following way: "Those who like paradoxical modes of expression could very well say: 'There are objects of which it is true that there are no such objects'" (83). I argue that these objects contain a void that supports them—a *Nichtsein*—and this void constitutes the object as ontically coherent. In this case, nothing is still something: or the void is positively-charged or morphogenetically (or logogenetically) significant so that objects emerge *ex nihilo* from a productive void; or, as William Pietz asserts regarding the concept of the "soul": "The human soul, according to Christian doctrine, is not manufactured (*facticius*) out of the material of God's divine substance, but is a distinct substance, created *ex nihilo*, with its own human nature distinct from God's divine nature" ("Problem II" 28). I claim that subsistence is a subterranean level of being that

situates “Being” as a field or plenitude composed of a variety of levels or plateaus (although, following a flat ontological approach, no one level would be privileged over any other)—the transcendent and the immanent would be contained within this conception of Being—along with all possible iterations of “Being” (*Sein*) and “beings” (*Seienden*). Odradek appears on the stairs as an object composed of subsistent *Nichtsein* and words manifest as word-things once they are theorized as subsistent entities. A word-thing is filled with the void and this *Nichtsein* structures the word-thing as very strange material.

Meinong engages with the importance of Being within not-being: “if I should be able to judge that a certain Object is not, then I appear to have had to grasp the Object in some way beforehand, in order to say anything about its non-being, or more precisely, in order to affirm or to deny the ascription of non-being to the Object” (84). It is because of Meinong’s claim here that I argue that the void—or what I am calling the *productive void*—must be positively charged or morphogenetic (or logogenetic). A true nothingness would be anterior to the correlation or to an ontological framework: the moment a void is named as “void,” it contains some level of existence, or, more specifically, subsistence. This subsistence is productive in that it operates like the cardiac field that allows for the emergence of the heart muscle or other morphogenetic fields that produce organs. The important concept to interrogate regarding Deleuzoguattarian organs is to locate the ontic value of the originating morphogenetic field (DeLanda’s work on Deleuze and the morphogenetic is important to keep in mind here).¹⁰ This originary field is very odd in that it allows certain objects to cohere *ex nihilo*, but this “*nihilo*” is not a pure *nihilo* because its naming already renders it as subsistent.

¹⁰ See the section (or plateau) “Arguments and Operators” in DeLanda’s *A Thousand Years of Nonlinear History* (2000) and his article “Nonorganic Life” (1992).

Meinong uses the example of the letter “A” to illustrate his concept of *Nichtsein*: “As I have stated elsewhere, that a certain thing, A, is not—more briefly, the *Nichtsein* of A—is just as much an Objective as is the *Sein* of A” (84). The ontology of A does not remain at the linear level of *Nichtsein*: A is not only a not-being, but can, under certain circumstances, manifest as a being. Therefore, a combinatory concept is required between *Sein* and *Nichtsein* because no object metaphysically remains at only one plateau or one instance of Being. The attempt to name the full extent of this complexity is partly achieved by the word-thing because a word-thing is, at its basis, composed of void or *Nichtsein*, while also, at other levels, manifesting as in-the-world (as a hallucination or as a concrete poem upon the page).

Meinong’s definition of idealism is important to keep in mind here because, for him, a materialism is not an idealism; idealisms tend to be trapped, for Meinong, within the realm of not-being: “According to modern usage, without regard for its historical meaning, the word ‘ideal,’ means the same as ‘thought of’ or ‘merely presented’; hence it pertains, apparently, to all of those objects which do not exist or which could not exist” (96). For this reason, Meinong distinguishes between metaphysics and his “theory of Objects”: “If metaphysics is a general science of the real, should we say that the theory of Objects is, in contrast, the general science of the non-real?” (108). This “non-real” is an odd non-real because the non-real accommodates various, often surprising definitions of the objectal, the immanent, and the transcendental. As Meinong asserts, “it is completely unnecessary that the Object of knowledge should have being” (108), and this claim in turn incarnates a variety of objects—such as thoughts, Odradeks, names, and language(s)—in a way that requires a radical re-theorization of language itself. This “lack of being” remains tied to “Being” and also to language about being so that “Being” is itself a word-thing—a word-thing that is subsistent, which means, in this context, that its Being broadens or

constricts depending on the context of its own incarnation as an object or upon the objects that it exists alongside, as a mimetic representation, within a total linguistic democracy or assemblage.

But this definition of language's existence as one object alongside other objects would come as no surprise to Heidegger, who originally defines a thing as a gathering (*Poetry* 171-172). Heidegger's theorization of the thing as a gathering anticipates assemblage theory and also Latour's thinking about a "republic of things" as being grounded in the etymology of republic—as *res publica* (or "public thing") ("Realpolitik" 12-13). A thing is therefore never strictly singular, but presents as a complex meeting place of disparate units or things.

My argument about word-things as being composed of *Nichtsein* at their centre or of their subsistent rather than existent quality is already hinted at by Meinong: "In dealing with the meaning of words and sentences, linguistic science is necessarily also concerned with Objects, and grammar has done the spadework for a theoretical grasp of Objects in a very basic way" (88). Meinong's mistake here is to privilege grammar: it is not grammar but the sign itself that is "concerned with Objects," and it is the sign that has the possibility to incarnate and subsist as an object. A reading of this interrogation of language's odd incarnational ability can be found in Kripke:

So real reference can shift to another real reference, fictional reference can shift to real, and real to fictional. In all these cases, a present intention to refer to a given entity (or to refer fictionally) overrides the original intention to preserve reference in the historical chain of transmission. The matter deserves extended discussion. But the phenomenon is perhaps roughly explicable in terms of the predominantly social character of the use of proper names emphasized in the text: we use names to communicate with other speakers in a common language. (163)

Kripke's explication of linguistic complexity in which real reference can transition to fictional reference and fictional to real is predicated on an understanding of language as a socially constituted system (this correlational approach is the foundation of the theory of language held by Quine and speech act theory more generally).¹¹ At one level, language is assuredly social, but language is also language-in-itself—when language approaches the in-itself, then its overall ontological import shifts, and whether language's reference is real or fictional, its ontic significance remains locked within the subsistent rather than existent realm of Being. Quine though would likely reject Meinong's theory of objects:

We commit ourselves outright to an ontology containing numbers when we say there are prime numbers between 1000 and 1010; we commit ourselves to an ontology containing centaurs when we say there are centaurs; and we commit ourselves to an ontology containing Pegasus when we say Pegasus is. But we do not commit ourselves to an ontology containing Pegasus or the author of *Waverly* or the round square cupola on Berkeley College when we say that Pegasus or the author of *Waverly* or the cupola in question is *not*. We need no longer labor under the delusion that the meaningfulness of a statement containing a singular term presupposes an entity named by the term. A singular term need not name to be significant. ("On What There Is" 196)

Therefore, for Quine, what is important is not the Meinongian assertion that what can be thought is, in some ways, real, but rather, that a singular term is then considered existent or non-existent.

¹¹ Dagfinn Føllesdal, in his preface to Quine's *Word and Object*, points out that, for Quine, "language is a social institution" (xvii). Also, see: Searle's "Methods and Scope" chapter from *Speech Acts* where he emphasizes the social and discursive aspects of language: to have language you need at least two human speakers communicating with one another with a "speech act."

Robert Brandom's critique of Meinongian ontology is different from Quine's implicit critique, in that he takes little issue with a "luxuriant ontology," but sees such "luxuriant" ontologizing as being "*symptomatic of a failure to shoulder an explanatory burden*" (qtd. in Wolfendale 116, original emphasis). However, I argue that Meinong does confront an "explanatory burden" in that he is willing to theorize (or anticipate) a proto-object-oriented ontology that takes the existence of imaginary objects seriously. For Quine, Meinong's theory of *Nichtsein* would be essentially non-existent and therefore outside of the category of Being, while for Meinong, *Nichtsein* still manifests a certain being that is, to use Derrida's phrase, a present-absence.

Nichtsein would be, for Quine, an absent absence and he defines ontology as a system that should only contain that which exists and not that which subsists. However, this Quinean rejoinder to Meinong would arguably be a more traditional interpretation of metaphysical presence. Against Quine, I prefer Nelson Goodman's more Meinongian reading of names and ontology:

But is our thesis satisfactory in general? Perhaps the first question that arises is whether it takes care of cases where we have two terms "P" and "Q" such that there are no P-pictures or Q-pictures—say where "P" and "Q" are predicates applying to odors or electric charges. These present no difficulty; for the secondary extensions of a predicate "Q" consist not merely of the extension of "Q-picture" but also of the extensions of "Q-diagram," "Q-symbol," and any number of other such compound terms. Indeed *actual word-inscriptions* are as genuine physical objects as anything else; and so if there is such an actual physical inscription that is a P-description and is not a Q-description, or vice versa, then "P" and "Q" differ in their secondary extensions and thus in meaning. (72)

Goodman is able to excavate complexity from Quine's analysis of ontological presence as that which "is" or "is not." That which "is" or "is not," I argue, often expands outside of the confines of existence and enters into a variety of known and unknown ontological realms that open onto the entity that is called *Nichtsein* and the subsistence of traditionally-defined "immaterial" objects: Pegasus, Odradek, and "Q-picture" each exist because, according to Meinong, they are objects that can be thought and that which does not exist cannot be thought. However, there is a better avenue to support this assertion regarding the "ontic kernel" of word-things as being predicated on *Nichtsein* and subsistence rather than existence: namely, the avenue provided by a specific tradition of East Asian philosophy.

Leaving the West: or, Word-Things and *Kotodama* Theory

In his seminar on Herder (1939), Heidegger proposes "[t]he word of being" or "des Seyns" (*Essence* 4) to suggest an "essencing of being" captured in language (27). Heidegger's interpretation derives from Herder's question regarding the origin of language.¹² I propose that *Word-Things* gestures towards this Herderian-Heideggerian question, but a possible solution to the question regarding the essence of language (that supports a Meinongian-Heideggerian framework) can be found in certain strains of East Asian philosophy.¹³ The suggestion that there exists an "essence" or "substance" lurking within language may appear fallacious to Western

¹² See: Herder, "Treatise" (1772).

¹³ It should be mentioned that Heidegger's own thinking about the jug as containing a structural void derives from his own engagement with Buddhist philosophy. Heidegger's "A Dialogue on Language: between a Japanese and an Inquirer" (1953/1954) looks at his relationship with Kuki Shūzō and the Kyoto School of philosophers. As well, Reinhard May's *Heidegger's Hidden Sources* (1989) looks at the striking links between Heidegger's thinking and East Asian philosophy.

structuralist and poststructuralist traditions steeped in the linguistic turn, but this claim would be entirely unsurprising and acceptable to certain traditions of East Asian thinkers of hermeneutics and philosophy. The subsequent claim that language's essence is, in fact, Nothingness or a void would align with a tradition of Japanese philosophy that links to the work of Nishida Kitarō and the tradition of Mahāyāna Buddhism that theorizes the essencelessness of subjects and objects through the notion of “voidness” or *sūnyatā* (Boon 25-26).¹⁴

Nishida's work effectively combines Buddhism with philosophical logic. Nishida claims, in the preface of *Hataraku Mono kara Miru Mono e* (1927) (translated as *From the Actor to the Seer*) that his approach focuses on: “seeing the form of the formless and hearing the sound of the soundless” (qtd. in Marra, “Things” 4). Nishida's project develops a phenomenology predicated on an absent subject, or, as Michael Marra explains: “As a trained practitioner of Zen mediation [*sic*], Nishida was accustomed to capturing reality by relinquishing mind, ears, eyes, and all other senses. However, this was a practical act of bracketing the self in order to let reality come into being independently from the specificity of the experiencing subject” (4). Nishida realizes that

¹⁴ There has been a lot of interesting work that links Mahāyāna Buddhism with Derridean philosophy. See: Robert Magliola's *Derrida on the Mend* (1984) in which he argues that Derrida's concept of *différance* is Nagarjuna's *sūnyatā* (89-90, 116). Youxuan Wang's *Buddhism and Deconstruction* (2001) combines Mahāyāna Buddhism with Derridean understandings of the sign (13). Wang also reads the meditative state of *sūnyatā* as revealing the “absence of ‘I’” (32). In *The Weaving of Mantra* (1999), Ryūichi Abé historicizes Esoteric Buddhism through the figure of Kūkai (an esoteric priest). Of specific importance are Chapters Seven and Eight of *The Weaving of Mantra* that consider Kūkai's Buddhist theory of language. Another important source in this respect is Fabio Rambelli's *A Buddhist Theory of Semiotics* (2013) in which he offers a semiotic reconstruction of Esoteric Buddhism. An early collision of theory and Zen Buddhism (or an interpretation of Zen) can be found in Roland Barthes's *Empire of Signs* (1970) in which he locates a type of *sūnyatā* in writing: “[w]riting is after all, in its way, a *satori*: *satori* (the Zen occurrence) is a more or less powerful (though in no way formal) seism which causes knowledge, or the subject, to vacillate: it creates *an emptiness of language*. And it is also an emptiness of language which constitutes writing; it is from this emptiness that derive the features with which Zen, in the exemption from all meaning, writes gardens, gestures, houses, flower arrangements, faces, violence” (4).

his modern interpretation of Buddhist philosophy requires an understanding of language in which language carries the substantive burden of the absent subject; “essence” is therefore transferred from the speaking subject to speech and language. Marra points out that once Nishida “ventured to give a philosophical explanation of a meditational practice, he had to rely on words and expressions. He had to use the form of words in order to voice the formlessness and void of reality. In short, he had to rely on the Being of words in order to voice the Nothingness (or continuous possibilities) of things coming into being” (4). This “voicing of Nothingness” or “voicing of continuous becoming” occurs via the meditational efficacy of *kotodama*, but before understanding the full import of *kotodama*, I want to consider the complicated Japanese word for “word” and the various ontological complexities of locating or defining this word.

In Japanese, there are essentially two words for “thing”: *koto* and *mono*. However, both of these words feature a fundamental, ontological split: if I may adopt a Lacanian posture, I would say that *koto* and *mono* are barred signifiers trapped in-between the phenomenal screen of correlationism. Both *koto* and *mono* feature different kanji depending on the context of the surrounding language: *koto* can be written as both “word” 言 and as “thing” 事. Ōno Susumu, for example, points out that in ancient Japan there existed no distinction between “thing” and “word” because both meanings were contained within *koto* (qtd. in Marra, “Things” 28).

Koto is the name for the combination of *word* and *thing*: *koto* is therefore the original word-thing. *Mono*, the other word for “thing,” is likewise split between signifying a “person” 者, or a “thing” 物 depending on context. The difference(s) between *koto* and *mono* would require its own study, but for the present purposes I want to indicate the complexity of signification when describing the phenomenal screen that partitions reality: *koto* is both “word” and “thing,” while being mediated by the different thingnesses of *mono*. This partition or screen functions much like

the German Idealist schema of real and representation or the origins of Buddhist thinking about representation in which the world is not what it appears to be because a “veil of illusion” or “*mâyā*” (Rambelli 10) covers all of reality and conceals the real behind surface illusion.

***Koto* as Word-Thing**

How can this word-thinglike character of *koto* be explained? In large part it has to do with how Japanese is configured in different ontological terms than English or other Romance languages. The literary theorist Rein Raud argues, according to Marra, that English is an “*object-biased* language” while Japanese “(as well as classical Chinese and many other, mostly Asian languages) is an *event-biased* language” (qtd. in Marra, “Things” 27). What this distinction means is that English words tend to favour objects or the singularity of an object while Japanese and other Asian languages favour temporally specific events that ontologically manifest as “gatherings.” In other words, an “event” is configured as a gathering of a variety of objects and this “gathering” is itself a “thing” (as it also is for Heidegger). Marra writes that

the classical dictionary points out that, in ancient Japan, expression and events were undifferentiated and that both were grasped with a single word, *koto*.

Apparently, this ambiguity continued until the Nara period (eighth century), when a conceptual separation occurred between the two meanings of *koto*: *koto* as saying 言 began to refer to language, whereas *koto* as thing 事 came to indicate events unfolding in time. (“Things” 6-7)

Watsuji Tetsurō breaks down the complexity of trying to differentiate between *koto* and *mono*:

Yet, in the instance in which *koto* is questioned, one must, first of all, isolate this *koto*. By itself, *koto* is not *something* existing (*aru mono*); it is simply the *fact*

(*koto*) that makes something belong to “things” (*mono*). Therefore, one must distinguish *koto* from “existing things” (*aru mono*); as a principle, one must exit from the realm of “things” (*mono*) and enter *koto*. As the foundation that discloses “things” (*mono*), such a *koto* comes *prior* to “things” (*mono*). (78)

Koto is therefore a kind of morphogenetic (or, in this case, logogenetic) screen from which *both* language and things emerge. *Koto* manifests as a positively charged void—as a word-thing—that allows for words on the one hand and things on the other to emerge into the world. Marra discusses the importance of Kimura Bin’s understanding of *koto* as Nothingness: “For Kimura, primordial *koto* is the equivalent of what it [*sic*] is called ‘Nothingness’ (*mu*) in Zen Buddhism. Language cannot express things because it cannot reproduce the duplicity of *koto*. Words can only articulate ordinary *koto* through the mediation of our perception of *mono*. This is how Kimura explains the etymology of *kotoba*—a small part/edge of *koto*” (“Things” 18). The other word for “word” or “language” in Japanese is *kotoba*, a word that literally means the “tip of a word” (Marra, “Things” 11). If *koto* is the logogenetic field of linguistic and phenomenal emergence, then *kotoba* is the temporary coherence of *logos* within the signifier. *Kotoba* is the word for “word” that concretizes the originary word-thing; or, to put this differently, the process is emergent in that *koto* first signifies as a word-thing—as an undifferentiated field—and from this earlier space of undifferentiation, *kotoba* induces linguistic difference so that the word coheres as an actualized grapheme or phoneme.

When *koto* comes to mean “word”—when describing an event that privileges language as opposed to things—then *koto* becomes a “thing”; or, as Watsuji argues: “*Koto* also means ‘word’ (*koto* 言)—that is to say, ‘something that is said’ (*iwareru koto*)” (75). To that end, *koto* as a word-thing can become, depending on the context of the event, either a thing-word or a thing-

itself. In either case though, it remains a signifier, which adds another level of complexity to the process in that whether *koto* manifests as a “word” or as a “thing” (or even as the original *koto* of word-thing), it registers the productive aspects of language—or the ways in which language already contains an inherent thingness. To add to the difficulty of defining *koto*, there remains yet another possible definition because *koto* can also be a “fact,” as Watsuji points out: “the ‘fact’ (*koto*) is a real thing; the ‘word’ (*koto*) is what creates the possibility of the articulation of the self even in real things. Here, *koto* as a word comes to resemble *essentia* or *Wesen* (essence) very strongly” (82).¹⁵ There exist then different plateaus, degrees, or if I may invoke the fractal metaphor once again, levels of magnification to *koto*. *Koto*, as a word, conveys the universalizing concept of the word-thing, but under certain circumstances (or events) it comes to manifest as either “facts” or as “things.” Watsuji makes this same point when he writes that “‘fact’ (*koto*) and ‘word’ (*koto*) are one as *koto*” (83), so that there exists a *koto* beyond all *koto* and this originary *koto* is the ontological combination of words and things as a word-thing.

Through the coming-into-being of *koto*, facts and things register as material within the phenomenal world. Lest this claim sound too “otherworldly,” I want to point out that Watsuji makes a similar claim: “as long as they are already sensed as ‘facts’ (*koto*) and ‘words’ (*koto*), ‘fact’ (*koto*) means the materialization of words” (84). However, this “materialization” remains consistent with a model of the world as virtual, autopoietic potential. As I mentioned earlier in Chapter Two, the Ancient Greeks conceived of the natural world as a swirling, moving, changing, and emergent system (Socrates points to this dynamic in *Cratylus*, but as mentioned in Chapter Two, the model can also be found in Anaxagoras, Heraclitus, Anaximenes, and the atomists).

¹⁵ Marra articulates this same point when he claims: “*Koto* (the Thing), then, is nothing but the *essential* (*Wesen*) of things” (“Things” 16).

The etymology of *koto* also assumes a model of the world as emergence and movement—originally, *koto* is linked to events that invoke objects and actions that proceed through time. The linking of *koto* with movement occurs when “*koto* follows a verb, displays a sense of movement, as in the examples ‘to move’ (*ugoku koto*, lit. ‘the action of moving’) or ‘to see’ (*miru koto*, lit. ‘the action of seeing’)” (Marra, “Things” 14). This structure of virtual movement coheres as an event or as an autopoietic manifestation of language. Marra argues that

[t]he event underlined by the presence of *koto* has an autocreative character, in the sense that the thing creates itself. In other words, it is an event sustained by the logic of “becoming” (*naru*), rather than “making” (*nasu*). A poetics of transitivity would take “things” (*mono*) as objects of something that has been made. With *koto*, the making is actually a spontaneous (*jinen*) coming into being of itself (*onozukara*). (“Things” 27)

Koto describes the process of becoming—the process through which a thing becomes a “thing” or a word becomes a “word” in direct relation to the original field of word-thing. However, *koto* is not simply “movement” because it is the potential of movement, or, as Watsuji explains:

By itself *koto* is neither movement nor condition; it simply indicates that movement and condition *exist*. This is the first point in which *koto* distinguishes itself from *mono*. When we say *ugoku mono* (a moving thing), what is shown is not the movement of *ugoku* as movement; it is an enlargement of the “thing” (*mono*) in its content as the movement of that *thing*. (68)

For this reason, certain “‘things’ (*mono*) are different from ‘facts’ (*koto*),” but, as Watsuji asks: “What does it mean that *mono* comes into being grounded in *koto*?” (69). Here again, *koto* acts as a logogenetic and morphogenetic field from which other things and words emerge. *Koto* is, in

this instance, the ground of linguistic and phenomenal emergence as the word-thing source. But a paradox emerges as well because “[a]ll ‘things’ (*koto*) in themselves are *something (mono)*” (Watsuji 75), so that sometimes *koto* is a *mono* and *mono* features qualities of *koto*. Both terms for “thing” begin to fold into each other because “*koto* is grounded in the self-understanding of *mono* (person) as the basis of all *koto*” (Watsuji 78). *Koto* manifests as a logogenetic and morphogenetic field, but once this field produces “things” as *koto* those same things can sometimes manifest as *mono* or vice versa as *koto* (depending on the event or object bias).

Rhizomatic or Arborescent Context of the Event

If many Asian languages are event-biased as opposed to being object-biased, then these languages feature a different relationship to time than other languages. An event functions as a gathering (or as a thing of things) so that an event in the Japanese context is constituted on the basis of a Latourian actor-network or Deleuzoguattarian assemblage or rhizome. Watsuji argues that “[o]riginally, there was no Japanese word [...] indicating an object confronting a subject. The word *mono* can signify a ‘person’ (*mono* 者) as a subject as well as a ‘thing’ (*mono* 物) as an object” (65). This metamorphic quality attributed to subjects and objects manifests as a linguistic ontology in which a “subject” or “object” is concretized within the event of the sentence (or the event suggested by semantic context). “The ‘Thing called Being’ cannot be called so by anyone who cannot express the universality of the structure of *koto*” explains Marra, “[t]herefore, according to Watsuji, the subject can only be the place where I, you, and she do the act of saying. This explains the absence of the subject in the Japanese sentence since the personal pronoun does not make any difference to the structure of the saying” (“Things” 17). The absence of the personal pronoun in Japanese demonstrates a different linguistic ontology than that offered in

English or the Romance languages in that subjects and objects are importantly distinguished within the grammar of a sentence.

This absence of the personal pronoun allows for assemblages, gatherings, and things to manifest in an event-biased language, or, as Marra argues: “The fact that actually everybody speaks shows that there is no need to indicate who is speaking. If an individual must be pointed out as the speaker, only a human entity (*mono* 者) can speak” (“Things” 17). Even though *koto* itself indicates a complex linguistic field of logogenetic emergence, *mono* is similarly difficult to locate ontologically, because “[i]f we look at the etymology of *mono*, we immediately realize the difficulty of the task of conceptually containing the ‘hundred names’ (*momona* 百名) or ‘all the names’ (*morona* 諸名), which eventually coagulated into one word, *mono*” (Marra, “Things” 23). Therefore, *mono*, like *koto*, is a term that designates both the singularity and the multiplicity of things. A useful distinction between the two would situate *koto* as the ontological and *mono* as the ontic instantiations of things in language or of linguistic things. According to Marra, Nishitani Keiji “identifies *koto* as the ‘surplus’ of things that ordinary language (*kotoba*) can hardly express. He calls language ‘the pollution of Things’ (*koto no osen*), since language fails to bring to life what is ‘on the back’ (*haigo*) of Things, that is, their Being. Language can only articulate entities (*mono*)” (“Things” 20-21). If language can only articulate entities while the being of language is relegated to a position of “surplus,” then how do these entities manifest as both singularities and multiplicities simultaneously? The answer relates to the ontological counting of entities that occurs when we shift from an object-biased language to an event-biased one.

Watsuji uses the example of the word “young man”: “The fact that the word ‘young man’ (*wakashu*) refers to a group of young people in addition to indicating one young person indicates

that this word is an expression that represents a situation faithfully” (58), because a young person is never ontologically alone—a young person is both a young person as subject and a member of a larger community of young people. Watsuji offers another example with the “word *jumoku* (tree/s and shrub/s)” which “stands for one tree as well as for many trees. To choose the singular over the plural would not be faithful to the essence of the tree” (58). The essence of the particular tree is clarified during the description of the linguistic event so that, in a sense, any “tree” presented in language manifests as a tree in relation to the surrounding words and semantic content. In this manner, the tree (*jumoku*) emerges from language.

In Japanese, the “objects”—if there are any—*arboresce* rather than manifest, which is to say that a young man (*wakashu*), or a tree (*jumoku*) emerge from an underlying rhizomatic level of language (a subsistent subterranean realm) from which the arborescent “objects” are concretized over time. Marra grounds this somewhat abstract configuration when he points out that the poet Ki no Yoshimochi uses the character for flower (*hana* 華) to mean poetic words (“Things” 36). Logogenetically, a poetic word manifests as both a word and also as a flower. The German Romantic poet Friedrich Hölderlin, like Ki no Yoshimochi, argues that language is “*die Blume des Mundes*” (or “the flower of the mouth”) and he also writes: “*Worte, wie Blumen*” (or “words, like flowers”) (qtd. in Ricoeur 335).

A Deleuzoguattarian rhizomatic/arborescent dichotomy is present within event-biased languages in that a word can present or appear as either a singular word-thing or as a multiple word-thing. This procedure occurs because of the semantic plenitude (or virtual plenitude) of *koto*: “All individualities disappear in the totality of the saying (*koto* 言/事). The exclusion of the subject from the sentence allows Being (*ari*) to be presented in its universality” (Marra, “Things” 17). Watsuji makes this same point when he suggests that “[t]he ‘word’ (*koto*) occurs and

develops only as self-awareness of human existence, which comes with a dual structure—individual and social” (87). *Koto* can present as a lot of different things, including “thing, saying, word, promise, tidings, rumor, lie, language, action, and work” (Marra, “Things” 49), and it is for this reason that *koto* is best conceived as a morphogenetic or logogenetic field or, as the post-Heideggerian potential of an unfolding: “Existence unfolds as Being (*koto*), and this unfolding takes place on its own (*ari no mama*), without the intervention of any thought. *Koto* (the Thing), then, is the Being of the possibility of unfolding” (Marra, “Things” 17). The event dictates the process of the unfolding of the word-thing and its final manifestation as either “word” or “thing.”

Language functions here as a system that *does not* distance a sign from its referent because an event-biased language contains words and objects, but the distance occurs on the basis of the word-thing’s manifestation as “word” or “thing,” so that after the word emerges as “word” or as “thing” there is another “word” or “thing” that stands beside or behind it and fractalizes outwards in relation to the impossibility of a firm definition of either term. In other words, the object’s ontology remains unclear because the object is only temporally and entropically present in relation to the event.¹⁶

In either case though, both signs and objects spill outwards during a linguistic event. But what does this process have to do with nothingness or with a positively charged void? To answer this question I want to combine Meinong’s “theory of objects” with *kotodama* theory.

¹⁶ In part, this dynamic relates to the ideogram in which the word is composed of a juxtaposition of images. This tradition has been absorbed (to a certain degree) within Western poetics going back to Ezra Pound’s work in *The Cantos* (1915-1962) and the subsequent movements that emerge from Pound’s modernist vision (such as Imagism and Objectivism). A good source for this linkage would be Ernest Fenollosa’s essay “The Chinese Written Character as a Medium for Poetry: An Ars Poetica” (1918, 1936).

Meinong in Japan and the Kernel of Nothingness in the Word-Thing

Building on my earlier analysis of Meinong and his theory of objects in relation to haptic semiology, I want to look at the ways in which *kotodama* theory assumes a productively similar model of words as Meinong's model of objects. Meinong's theories of subsistence (*Bestand*) and not-being (*Nichtsein*) could be read as aligning with certain Buddhist theories of nothingness and the ways in which some words ontologically subsist.¹⁷ What could be called a "Meinongian model of subsistence" presents itself when Watsuji analyzes the etymology of *mono*: "originally, 'thing' (*mono*) was assigned the Chinese character *wu* 物, *mono* did not simply mean something physical, something material. Purely psychological *things* (*mono*), such as visions and fantasies, as well as completely nonmaterial things, such as gods and personalities, are all 'things' (*mono*). Generally speaking, there is nothing that is not a 'thing' (*mono*), whether it exists or not" (Watsuji 68-69). Therefore, in a linguistic ontology—an ontology suggested by the word *koto*—the pragmatic or utilitarian existence of an object is not as important as that object's subsistence as thought. Indeed, in an event-biased language, subsistence is *its material*. For a word-thing, its materiality does not lurk within traditional existence, but manifests within a semantically consistent subsistence.

Ōmori Shōzō implicitly uses what could be called "Meinong's argument for subsistence" in order to theorize the objectality of language in his essay on *kotodama*: for Ōmori "we are able to understand something even about things (*mono*) that do not exist and about false facts (*koto*)" (102). The subsistent aspect of language's ontology permits the overall emergence of meaning—

¹⁷ An excellent, recent source on nothingness and Buddhism is the co-authored collection *Nothing* (2015) by Marcus Boon, Eric Cazdyn, and Timothy Morton. Cazdyn discusses the concept of *ma* or "negative time-space" (165-168); Morton looks at meontic nothingness (200-206); Boon looks at Bataillean "ontological formlessness" in relation to Buddhism (49-52).

in other words, meaning is produced by subsistence rather than existence: “If one can understand something about things that do not exist and false ‘facts’ (or things that may not be), then, this something that has been understood must be something different from ‘things’ (*mono*) that exist and real ‘facts’ (*koto*). This is what is called ‘meaning’” (Ōmori 102). Ōmori presents several examples that read like a Meinong-influenced list, a Harman/Bogost ontograph, or a Latour litany:

Let’s look at the following examples: “*all* birds are black,” or “he keeps *several* dogs,” or “*someone* went,” or “knowledge is power,” or “love is stronger than death,” or “if you look for trouble, you will find it.” “Words” and “facts” corresponding to what one understands by these words do not exist in this world, in the ordinary sense of these words. And yet, we understand something. Here is where the world of “meaning” is assumed, and here is where “meaning” receives a place. (104)

Even though Meinong never mentions language, the argumentative force of subsistence bears fruit when extended to the realm of language: subsistence (as opposed to existence) is the concept that names the way that meaning comes to exist in language. This “meaning” is itself—at its basis—nothing; this nothing is a similar nothing to the nothing that locates language’s objectal nature, and also the nothing that describes language’s underlying ontology. In Badiou’s mathematical ontology, the empty set of Zermelo-Fraenkel set theory (\emptyset) nominates the void as the central term of Being (as mentioned earlier): if mathematics is an ontology, then its ontology is predicated on the positively charged void of the empty set (or 0) that manifests as the names of “void” and “Being.”

Thinkers such as Heidegger, Watsuji, Nishida, and Ōmori each similarly propose nothingness as the basis of Being and, in the context of a theory of language, they each extend this primordial nothingness to the presentation of meaning itself. As Ōmori points out:

“Nonexisting things and facts make their appearance within these fancies and ‘misunderstandings.’ Here there is a clear *gap* between ‘coming into being,’ ‘reality,’ and ‘truth’” (108). The usefulness of situating nothingness as the ground of Being, word-things, and meaning-production is that nothingness (or \emptyset) offers a positively charged ground or field from which objects, names, and words emerge.

This originary nothingness suggests a flat ontological field for the emergence of both words and objects. This unique interpretation of emergence insists (or subsists) that “[a]ll appearances ‘exist’ equally. Even the appearance of dreams, ghosts, misunderstandings, and fancies ‘exist’ with the same qualifications as reality” (Ōmori 135). In the flat ontological space of meaning-production, the presentation of appearances becomes one in which unicorns, tissues, tables, plants, TIE fighters, giraffes, and Yetis can each occupy an ontological position alongside other ontological categories. This claim has potential side effects within a speculative reality in which subsistence and existence are “switched” (as Ōmori suggests): “If we were living in a world in which our food would not become nourishment and in which we would need to eat food seen in dreams in order to sustain ourselves, then the food on our dining table would be a ‘ghost,’ and the food of our imagination would be ‘existence’” (136). Within the speculation of this potential reality—a speculation that would fit in nicely with Meillassoux’s speculative materialism—every object is switched so that the “subsistent” becomes nourishing while the “existent” becomes pragmatically or positivistically immaterial. However, even this distinction or dyad between existent/subsistent is only momentarily helpful because, in the context of *koto*

and *kotodama*, the distinction is itself meaningless. There is no distinction between the existent and the subsistent within *kotodama* because the subsistent acts as the logogenetic or morphogenetic screen from which the existent is produced.

Therefore, both terms and concepts interpenetrate within a complicated fractal relationship in which neither term is fully “decided.” This claim describes why, for Ōmori, “‘existence’ shakes. And ‘words’ are not worried about shaking ‘existence’; they make ‘existence’ stand by calling it. This is the function of *kotodama*” (136). *Kotodama* describes a Democritean or Lucretian field of swirling etyms and this field (that could be called *koto* or “word-thing”) is a field that permits the concretization and reification of both words and things. The vibrations of *koto* evoke the various vowel sounds of the *kotodama* and these vowel sounds in turn manifest as permuting and reassembling etyms that momentarily “solidify” or “manifest” as either a saying 言, or as a fact or thing 事. This analysis leads to a more radical appraisal of an ontology of objects and words; or, put differently, instead of an object-oriented ontology, the best approach to theorizing the breadth of existence and subsistence—the full extent of the emergent properties of a positively charged void—is an *event-oriented ontology*.

The notion of an “event-oriented ontology” as opposed to an “object-oriented ontology” usefully accommodates both existent *and* subsistent entities along with the total effects or interactions of those entities within events (thingly and textual). For the purposes of this dissertation, the notion of an event-oriented ontology is also applicable to an event-oriented hermeneutics in that—against popular form and content-centric analyses in narratology and literary studies—haptic semiology focuses on the *event* of writing (as literature and poetry) and considers the totality of language as productive of an overall event. My notion of “event” is different from Badiou’s understanding of an “event” in that I am interested in talking about the

totality of objects (subsistent and existent objects) while including the distances that separate them.¹⁸ As objects translate the notes of other objects, certain translations and temporalities should be taken into consideration when theorizing those object's total ontologies: the totality of these effects I call an "event" (as opposed to another object).¹⁹ This thinking derives from Rein Raud's distinction between object-biased and event-biased languages (considered earlier in this chapter), but has expanded from the notion of an event-biased language to include the corollary ontology that emerges when certain limit-experiences of words are seen as word-things. When word-things manifest *koto*-like properties then both words and things emerge from word-things through an event-oriented process. A simultaneously formulated event-oriented ontology and hermeneutics can usefully approach objectal totalities—be they linguistic or thingly—and better apprehend the ontologies of these objectal totalities (by "objectal totality" I mean such notions as language qua language, specific languages, texts, or beings).

¹⁸ Christopher Norris defines the Badiouian event in *The Badiou Dictionary* (2015). I will highlight the following moment: "For Badiou, an 'event' in the proper sense is that which occurs unpredictably, has the potential to effect a momentous change in some given situation, state of knowledge, or state of affairs, and—above all—has consequences such as require unswerving fidelity or a fixed resolve to carry them through on the part of those who acknowledge its binding force. Events of this type may occur in mathematics, in the physical sciences, in politics, the arts, or in the sphere of human interpersonal relations where Badiou takes erotic love (not 'sex') as the most telling and representative instance. Events (proper) are also marked out from 'events' in the everyday, journalistic, or even the textbook historical sense by their possessing a power to radically transform received or prevailing conceptions of reality. This they do by exerting a disruptive effect on the ontology—the accredited order of being and truth—that holds sway in some given domain at some given time. Indeed it is the defining mark of events, in Badiou's highly distinctive usage of the term, that they either bring about such a drastic transformation in direct consequence of their having occurred, or else make it possible as a more-or-less remote yet still retroactively dependent future consequence" (115-116).

¹⁹ Harman specifies, in *Guerilla Metaphysics*, that as objects interact with other objects, a complex process of translation occurs: this notion of translation is central to Harman's theory of metaphor. See: pp. 91-93, 98-99, 101-124, 141-144, 218-220 of *Guerilla Metaphysics*.

Word-Thing Power, or the Mystical Ontogeny of *Kotodama*

In an event-oriented language (or ontology), a central organizing component is a vital quality to the language itself so that a specific language structured around the reifying status of an event requires a compatible mysticism (as I defined it earlier in this chapter) to ground that language's self-organization. *Kotodama* retroactively structures both the linguistic and the phenomenal as self-referential and self-organizing systems, which is to say that both words and things are constructed in direct relation to other, causal words and things. This self-referential quality is why Ōmori insists that “[t]he word (*koto* 言) calls the thing (*koto* 事) into being,” therefore solidifying this autopoietic process or this “power” of “the *kotodama* (spirit of words) hidden inside the word” (92). At the beginning of *Japan's Frames of Meaning*, Marra notes that: “the process of signification is such that it takes us increasingly far away from the thing itself. Language is the first obstacle to things” (3), but the solution to this obstacle is, I claim, *kotodama*.

Marra approaches the concept of a word-thing when he asks: “is it possible to rethink things neither in terms of the copula (a thing **is**) nor in terms of an attribute (a thing is **something**)?” (“Things” 4). Indeed, *kotodama* would situate things in direct relation to words so that *words are themselves things* while also *permitting the linguistic emergence of things*. *Kotodama* does not require a copula or an attribute because, according to *kotodama* theory, a word contains its own essence. *Kotodama* is a mystical, limit-experience of language—that also, paradoxically, may constitute the normal presentation of language—that situates a word as logogenetic or morphogenetic: Marra points out that for “*kotodama* (言靈, lit. the spirit of words),” a “word had the power of bringing a thing into being” (“Things” 28). The details of this process of linguistic emergentism are decidedly obscure: “The *Iwanami Kogo Jiten* defines *kotodama* as the ‘mysterious, or magical, or occult, or mystic (*shinpi*) power inherent in words’”

(Marra, “Things” 28). In Harmanian terms, the “mystic power inherent in words” withdraws while in use so that, in a sense, the power or vitalism of *kotodama* exists beneath a surface level of linguistic presence; in other words, the theory of *kotodama* instates a similar screen between the phenomenal and noumenal in that the surface appearance of language (so seemingly distanced from the mystical aspects of *kotodama*) betrays a secret depth or subterranean realm within which the word’s “spirit” functions.

According to Jay Goulding, “[e]ach Chinese character has a *character*, a personality and a body” (“John” 28), so that every linguistic character simultaneously contains its own internal essence as character. John Hay likewise points out, regarding calligraphy and ideogrammic writing, that “[b]rush strokes have ‘bones’ and ‘arteries,’ characters have ‘skeletons’ and ‘sinews’” (179). Is this ideogrammic speculation mere whimsy or is there a process beyond metaphor at work here?

Kotodama, like the Christian Eucharist, is a belief within which metaphor freezes or manifests differently: both transubstantiation and *kotodama* are instances of a vitalist or emergent metaphoricity in which the initial metaphorical linkage logogenetically manifests as the presentation of a new object or linguistic assemblage. This emergent logic provides a material and linguistic example of Ovidian transformation or alchemical transmogrification so that, in certain instances, metaphors and signifier/referent dyads forge new objects. Hay pushes the metaphor further when he writes that “[c]haracters are born from ink, ink is born from water; water is the blood of characters” (202). However, the energetic presentation of such a metaphorical linkage arguably contains a mystical quality—as concealment (or another decidedly non-empirical aspect).

Indeed, the energy that invests words within *kotodama* is often configured in spiritual terms: “Words are embodiments of a divine spirit, or, as Amagasaki has pointed out, ‘*kotodama* is nothing but a *kami* (spirit) in which words live as flesh’” (qtd. in Marra, “Things” 33).

Goulding also grounds this process of spiritual embodiment within language in Taoist terms:

“Writing has a body, a bone, a sinew, and flesh, all linked to the life-force energy of the heavens” (“John” 28). However, there is another, non-mystical possibility when trying to understand the implications of *kotodama* upon semiotics or literary studies.

For both Ōmori Shōzō and Fujitani Mitsue, *kotodama* need not be mystical or spiritual. Marra points out that, for Fujitani, “*kotodama* lies hidden in the form of poetry” (“Things” 33), explaining the process by invoking a theory of nomination: “Words make existence come into being by naming it, by calling it, by bringing it nearby. The power of the word is still very much at work in the contemporary world. In this sense, *kotodama* is part and parcel of a theory of action, of praxis, of the event” (“Things” 35). *Kotodama* is then a catalyst of both meaning-production and thing-production. However, if a word-thing is connected with *koto* and if both a word-thing and *koto* contain the void that Heidegger locates at the centre of things (or what Meinong calls *Nichtsein*), then what is the ontological import or phenomenality of the spirit that lives inside words (according to *kotodama*)? If the spirits that live inside words are productive, then are they also constituted by an interior nothingness? Or, are the spirits somethings?

The question of the essence of *kotodama* is implicitly included in the following question from Ōmori in which he meditates on the issues of materiality and language: “The knife lies on the desk with a clear weight and a precise shape even when it is at rest and no one uses it. But what is the shape of the meaning of ‘water, please’ when no one says it, no one uses it? Can we say that the meaning is ‘stowed away’ inside a dictionary?” (93). Is linguistic meaning contained

in a dictionary? Is it found in the mouths of speaking subjects? In Broca's region of the brain? Perhaps "meaning" functions more like Heidegger's jug in that the void is constitutive of form; this claim situates words and objects as connected to a subterranean void—a void that withdraws, but remains intrinsically related to actualized words or objects. However, this question of "essence" alters depending on the way in which *kotodama*'s "mystical" qualities are clarified or theorized.

Ōmori, for example, theorizes *kotodama* as non-mystical—he considers its essence in pragmatic and positivist terms: "However, when one thinks of the mechanisms of language, one must inevitably face once again the power of *kotodama*. Of course, I do not mean to say that words come with an inscrutable, mystical power. They do not come with anything mystical. This is something everybody knows" (92).²⁰ I find the claim regarding *kotodama*'s phenomenality as being non-mystical (because "this is something everybody knows") unconvincing. Ōmori expands this initial claim by extending the notion of "spirit" into strictly material (as opposed to "transcendental") terms: "if 'the spirit of words' (*kotodama*) dwells in the vocal act, we must say that the 'spirit of the eye' (*medama*) resides in the speaker's look, while the 'spirit of the hand' (*tedama*) dwells in his hand. Put in these terms, there is nothing mystical about *kotodama*" (112). This notion of "spirit" becomes a part from the whole in which "spirit" describes the functionality of each part.

I would also point out that Ōmori's other examples are each explicitly related to a human body part: he mentions an eye-spirit and a hand-spirit, but *kotodama* does not mean "vocal-spirit," it means "word-spirit." In *stricto sensu*, a word is not connected with a human body (when

²⁰ Ōmori notes that his essay received criticism from Yamamoto Noboru, Kuroda Wataru, Yoshida Natsuhiko, Maehara Shōji, and Kurosaki Hiroshi regarding his interpretation of *kotodama* (136).

considered as a sign for example). *Kotodama* is sometimes manifested through the mediation of a voice, but this mediation does not mean that *kotodama* means “vocal-spirit.” The essence of the “spirit” found in *kotodama* remains with the word rather than with the voice. Ōmori further describes the non-mystical quality of *kotodama* by referring to an informatic and semiotic context:

If there is such a thing as a *kotodama*, we would be entitled to call it “the spirit of the signal” or “the spirit of the signboard.” As one can see from all this, *kotodama* is a very common occurrence. However, what I want to point out here is that the vocal act makes “things” and “facts” appear *close by*, not through a mediator such as “meaning” or “representation.” (112)

I find this reading of *kotodama* persuasive, but I would also insist that Ōmori strips the spiritual and transcendental elements from the word “spirit” (*dama*). In effect, Ōmori transfers the spiritual into the material and empirical, but he is not incorrect in doing so; in fact, I would push his transformation of the meaning of *dama* further and claim that in the context of *kotodama*, *dama* refers to an energetic field of potential that remains diffuse throughout the world while occasionally cohering as an assembled packet called “singularity” or “whole.” Perhaps Ōmori also does not fully believe his own claims regarding *kotodama*’s non-mystical, pragmatic utility because he also argues that: “We write down these expressions with letters. We do it in order to tie down with letters the ‘things’ and ‘facts’ that have appeared, so that they cannot escape” (115). Where would these “things” and “facts” escape? In order to de-vitalize or de-agentialize *kotodama*, Ōmori inadvertently vitalizes and agentializes things and facts. Perhaps we can allow Ōmori what is assuredly a figure of speech, but in the context of *kotodama*, every “figure of

speech” has its own *figure* in the same way that each ideogrammic character has its own *character*.

Goulding’s and Hay’s respective assertions regarding the character-like quality of Japanese characters proceed against Marra, Fujitani, and Ōmori’s reliance on human correlationism in describing *kotodama*. On the whole, I locate *koto* and *kotodama* as essential ways of understanding word-things, but I disagree with the necessity of a human correlational word-thing. For Ōmori, “*kotodama* dwells in the vocal act, that is, in gestures, that is, in ‘persons’” (112). Marra extends this correlationism to *koto* as well in that “*koto* is the being of a ‘fact’ or ‘event,’ or ‘its temporal development in relation with the persons who are involved in it’” (“Things” 18). Therefore, these particular theorizations of *koto* and *kotodama* do not consider words-in-themselves as distinct from human authors and readers.

Like nearly every other theorist I have considered throughout *Word-Things*, it seems that the true merits of the incarnational fallacy would not rely on theorizing an “essence” or “material” intrinsic to words (although this claim certainly falls under the purview of the fallacy), but rather the pinnacle of the fallacy would be to claim that words, in any way, exist in-themselves. Perhaps the obstacle to thinking a word-in-itself is that words appear to gather “life” within a speaking community (of human beings) and that, without human interlocutors, words themselves would not exist. Even the more radical theories of language—language as incantation—would locate such linguistic spell casting within the mouths of witches and sorcerers.

Ōmori likewise locates more traditional forms of linguistic expression in relation to a magical tradition: “Expression works exactly like a spell. By emitting this spell with the voice (or by imagining doing so), I repeat ‘things’ and ‘facts,’ thus making them appear to me. Furthermore, in lucky instances, I enact them with my voice, and, if I touch others with my vocal

act, I can also make things appear to others” (115). Ōmori sees speaking—the communicational circuit forged between addressor and addressee—as an act of touching; in other words, talking involves a haptic level in which two speakers touch by way of the sonic vibrations of their vocal registers. However, this assertion also suggests that, at a level beneath anthropocentric discourse, the words themselves touch; beneath the vocal act, the words commune. However, this subterranean realm of haptic words is of little interest to Ōmori, who argues that “the original mechanism of the voice is to make something appear *close by*, by touching the other with a reality called ‘vocal act’ [...] This is the mechanism of *kotodama*” (116).

Watsuji supports Ōmori’s claim when he writes that “[*k*]oto indicates the essence of something that *comes out into possibility in us, something possible that occurs in ourselves*” (74, original emphasis). However, and again I argue, *kotodama* is not a vocal-spirit, or a communicational-spirit, or a speech-spirit; on the contrary, it is a *word-spirit*. A word-spirit, by its very semantic and etymological content, need not require a *human* voice. All that is needed is a word. Therefore, is it ever possible to have a word-in-itself apart from a human interlocutor?

Fujitani Mitsue sees the essence or substance of the *dama* found in *kotodama* in different terms than Ōmori: Fujitani’s reading of the ontological kernel of *kotodama* is decidedly more mystical and permits an aspect of words that remains *outside* of human communication.

According to Fujitani,

the wondrous phenomenon of *kotodama* leads to the expression of things that are beyond the control of human beings. If I had to explain what this spirit is, I would say that it is the power that somehow consoles a heartless heart through the composition of poetry by realizing the difficult task of producing the fulfillment of proper timing—a timing when desires should not become actions. (153)

Perhaps this definition does not clarify the issue. On the one hand, *kotodama* posits a “beyond” of human correlationism because the *dama* is itself one of many possible *kami* (god or spirit), but, on the other hand, *kotodama* functions in poetic terms to comfort a “heartless heart.” This definition though is itself poetic in that, opposing a philosophical rigour, Fujitani prefers what could be called a strictly poetic definition. What is this “beyond” that *kotodama* expresses? What is a “heartless heart?” If *kotodama* is “beyond” the human, then it is also a part of the human because it can “console” through poetry.

Following Fujitani’s reading, poetry attempts to reach the level of *kotodama* (or the spiritual aspect of language). Marra echoes Fujitani when he argues that “[*k*]otodama lies in the heart of the poet who finds in the power of the poetic word consolation” (“Things” 34). A non-mystical reading of *kotodama* would situate the *dama* in strictly pragmatic or energetic terms, while also positioning the human effect of *kotodama* as consolation.

I would argue that word-things, as understood via *koto* and *kotodama*, are each simultaneously correlational and non-correlational (or anterior) in that they are, to paraphrase Lao Tzu, similar to *kotodama* because they are trapped between heaven and earth (3, 11, 13). In order to put this argument in more speculative terms, I would insist that every word-thing contains two degrees (or levels) of hapticity: the surface ontic level is occupied by human speakers communing via language, and the second ontological or subterranean level, occurs between words themselves. To some degree, even the ontological level of language occurs *via humans* in that the liberation of words from speaking subjects occurs when agency shifts from the human to the sign-in-itself. In other words, all words in their thinghood behave in a thingly way and all things exist in a wordly way because they are all evental: the word-thing nexus

constitutes the eventality and positionality of the relation between words and things (hence, the reliance and necessity of hapticity when theorizing word-things).

A good example of this dynamic can be found in Lacanian psychoanalysis where the unconscious is structured like a language and this language operates against the will of its subject. In a Lacanian context, it is language that is infused with agency instead of the subject and this shifting of agency from the subjective to the linguistic occurs when the subject is seen as *something* that is constructed by exterior, symbolic forces. In this sense, there is no distinction between the type of touching that Ōmori sees between speakers in which voices “touch” and the type of touching that I situate between words in certain linguistic, theoretical, and poetic configurations.

Ōmori makes this point even more explicit when he argues that “speaking is a *bodily contact*” (101) and that the “functions of language are a portion of the contact (in a large sense) between our body and the body of the other” (98). This theorization of language aligns with the phenomenology of Merleau-Ponty in which “flesh” is the name for the connective, phenomenal tissue of the optical fabric of the world. Ōmori’s reading here also matches Nancy’s theory of reading as an intensely tactile and bodily experience; an experience of touching that occurs between author and reader. However, I would still point out that even if words seemingly require a human interlocutor, this situation does not reject a theorization of a word’s ontological or phenomenal status as an object-in-itself. Therefore, there remains an aspect of a word that rejects full assimilation within a human speaking community and this remainder of a word (or this semiotic excess or surplus) exists, in a sense, beyond the correlation in a manner that matches the way that a thing exists beyond the correlation.

This “beyond” is not a beyond that situates an “outside” or exteriority; on the contrary, this “outside” is a fully anterior semiotic space. Indeed, this process creates what I would call a *xeno-semiotic* realm. When read in this way, word-things become similar to Meillassoux’s theorization of arche-fossils. A word-thing need not be related to human language because “word-thing” names a possible semantic quality contained in any potential language, in any entirely other language, or even any alien language.

When words and things exist together in the same complex system, then language presents in decidedly embodied ways. Another way of putting this claim is to say that language self-organizes as a “body” that repeatedly permutes, dissipates, and reassembles. Marra makes this same point differently when he insists that “aside from pointing at real things, language also has a body of its own” (“Things” 21). If language has a body, then this body becomes more apparent at limit-experiences—or limit-presentations—of language (in experimental writing). Shifting back to the Western poetic tradition, take the following example from derek beaulieu’s chapbook *SWARMS* (2010):

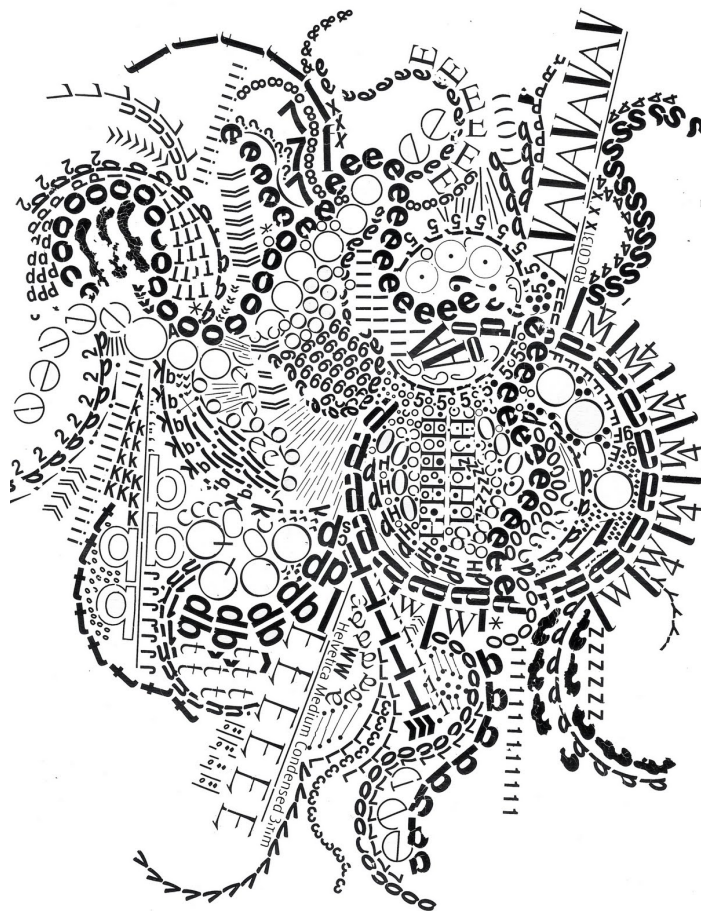


Fig. 11. beaulieu, *SWARMS*, n.p.

beaulieu's poetic practice is aligned with concrete poetry, visual poetry, and conceptual writing (Dobson ix), but is limited to none of these poetic traditions because beaulieu presents language's objectal nature as a logogenetic field from which certain words (and words-as-things) develop. beaulieu considers his own concrete practice as resistant to "direct one-to-one signification" ("Afterward" 82) in that his approach is "rhizomatic in composition, pointing both to and away from multiple shifting clouds of meanings and construction" ("Afterward" 82). By invoking the Deleuzoguattarian rhizome, beaulieu is pointing to the fact that—against Eugen Gomringer's original critical approach to Concretism through either form or content analyses (as seen in his manifesto "Concrete Poetry")—that there is, in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, now a vocabulary available for the productions of concrete poetry. beaulieu builds

on the claims of Sianne Ngai who argues that concrete poetry is the presentation of an “inarticulate mark” that functions by “insisting on the disappearance of the referent while at the same refusing to defer to other terms” (114). Thus, the presentation of language in concrete and visual poetry heretically resists simplistic and schematizing terminology: the referent is resisted in favour of the apparent materiality of the words and letters on the page.

In an interview with Lori Emerson (“Afterword” 2012), beaulieu asserts that: “I view poetry, as typified by concrete poetry, as the architectural structuring of the material of language” (69), and also: “I construct my poems without an architectural plan or previous sketch, allowing the work to build gesturally in response to shapes and patterns in the letters themselves. Poems are constructed one letter at a time, each placed by hand” (69). beaulieu’s poems are *built* from the bricks of language (like Laliberte’s poetic practice considered in Chapter Two). The concrete and visual traditions point to this larger trend of a linguistic limit-experience that reveals the materiality of the lettric mark or the solitary word (as in the well known concrete poem “Silencio” by Gomringer in which the word “silencio” is repeated in three columns of text that each repeat the word “silencio” five times, except for the middle column which contains a “hole” in its middle [“Silencio” 91]). Gomringer even goes so far as to assert that concrete poetry “is in the process of realizing the idea of a universal poetry” (“Concrete” 68), that is a poetry that moves beyond specific languages and speaks to a combinant and presentational function of language itself.

However, the reason why I return to the Western poetic tradition—after this chapter has considered the Eastern language tradition of *kotodama*—is because concrete and visual poetry features a pictoriographic impetus: it is not directly related to an ideogrammic language tradition (such as Chinese or other East Asian, event-biased languages), but it is certainly indirectly

related to a graphically conscious presentation of language-as-object. The appearance of concrete and visual poetry (as a particular linguistic limit-experience), suggests that these experimental traditions evoke a similar linguistic “event” as that manifested through *kotodama*. The event suggested by beaulieu’s visual poems heralds the presentation of language’s body itself. The “event” of his poem in Figure 12 mirrors the overall question of this dissertation which is: what is language’s presence and where is it presented? However, the event itself heralds the object that it contains in that the poem becomes a linguistic object composed of smaller objects (alphabetic letters) and these objects each “gather” to form an event (or what Heidegger would call a “thing”).

However, language is not distinctly evental or objectal, because it dissolves, dissimulates, and permutes—its repeated iterations and organismic coalescences reject either strict designation as “event” or “object.” Language can be evental, but it can also be objectal. Language can be strictly pragmatic and linguistic or spiritually imbued and poetic. Language can be both virtual and actual—virtual prior to its concretization upon a page or in a mouth, but it can also be originary, archaic, embodying an *archê* and a *technê*. This description of language situates it in direct relation to the incarnational fallacy. This description also considers language as both complex and fractal in that the borders of its total formulation remain outside of the human critic’s correlation.

The word-thing as arche-fossil contains the echo of every previous language that presents prior to linguistic assessment—institutional and discursive assessment—of linguistics, semiotics, and further, Western epistemological traditions that link back to Ancient Greece and before, along with every word and thing (cor)relation formed in other worldly languages. A word-thing contains the various iterations of language’s ontology throughout history: a word-thing names

the structural nothingness or *Nichtsein* that lurks at the centre of language. A word-thing is nothing, but it is a nothing that produces the somethings that humans interact with as words and things (while containing the potential somethings that resist apart from the restrictive correlation).

I would playfully propose that this entire dissertation has been an attempt to psychoanalyze language as an analysand-in-itself, or to unearth the Jungian shadow of the word. In Paul Celan's *Schneepart* (1971) he writes that "die Wortschatten" should be "heraushaun" (320), or "the wordshadow" should be "hammered out." I have been trying to anneal the word's shadow with Nietzsche and Heidegger's hammer in order to consider the variety of speech acts and word behaviours that have remained unconsidered or unacknowledged when more traditional theories of language are in play. By trying to think of language at its limit—at its most extreme incarnational manifestations—I have discovered that language folds in on itself and speaks to its own normative and centrist presentations. I have tried to develop a new analytical procedure that can interpret language's unconscious. For my part, I have tried to shine a beacon upon the word's shadow. Unfortunately, that shadow illuminates its objectivity back upon my own.

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