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My wife was very beautiful in the film *Days of Heaven*, you thrive
under the direction of Terrence Malick

—Cecilia Corrigan

I screamed and ran to smash my favorite slot machine. I said to Mabel, I said, 'I wanted to write a romantic poem in the Schlegel sense of romantic poetry, so a novel in the Bakhtin sense of a novel, and it does that for me. And I like the idea of purely mechanical seams cause I think trying to make the facilitating part of artworks smooth or interesting or pleasant ruins art. And I wanted to do something with the papers I wrote in the first few years of grad-school, that were playful and weird and not part of a larger intellectual project and I wrote because I liked the way they 'looked' as part of my life at the time. So I'm happy with it, especially now that I figured out the epigraph. Oh, and I like that blogs are the one thing that we read backwards, and I think for things that don't involve complicated spatial action seeing things unfold backwards is a lot more instructive and suspenseful than seeing them unfold forward, and makes for a better form of narrative thinking, for the standard Kierkegaard reason. And the few reverse chronological things that people made are about relationships, which is one big story running through the text, but this is framed as a bildungsroman and I think that a reverse chronological bildungsroman is cool. Also I like the idea of a biography that includes only the super-intentional, and my blog includes only

things that I thought were my perfected self for at least a month after writing them (otherwise I'd delete), and it's kind of cool that the first thing I said on my blog the week I moved to the states was 'I want to be only the best of me all the time.' Also I like the idea of framing these five years as my negotiation with America, which they are though I never think about it. And 'I said to Mabel, I said' is this Simpsons line that was a slight meme online back in 2005 and is rumored to be from Gatsby and rumored to be from Wodehouse and is from neither so I love that it's this ghostly stand-in for the depiction of casual speech in literary fiction/an internet hallucination of a hilibrow cartoon's memory of the literary representation of casual speech. And I like the Thomas Bernhard endless-monologue style of novel and wanted to do something like that. And I figured, the actual contents are really strong so people who haven't followed my writing in the last five years might find it compelling even if they're not the post-langpo/post-conceptual crowd who could get any of the above from the act of cut-and-pasting a blog and adding 'I said,' though I mean the people who can get any of the above from that are also people who don't care about the above because it's sorta literary fiction patter, way more a response to Elif's dissertation and to 'The Possessed' than to avant-garde poetics, not because I want to but because I was thinking about Trisha's post-conceptual narcissism and trying to think about my life-in-text-generation, my ideas and jokes and notes and comments that I'm so invested in, along some aesthetic category and it turned out to me that my mode of production in saying things is so novelistic, that when I make a joke the asymptote is it integrating into a novelistic continuum/tension with the rest of the things in the world, so I'm stuck with the tradition of the novel as the category for thinking about myself. And I like how there are papers in there that I wish were shorter cause they ruin the book for me by being too long but make it unreadable as a novel even though the novel was

supposed to be this form that can take anything into itself, so it's not a novel but the fantasy of a novel, the idea that the novel is supposed to be able to take in materials that are too affectively weak for a certain kind of poetry and too affectively strong for a different kind of poetry.'

And I said, I said, 'at least the N+1 piece on the cultural politics of drinking cider instead of beer hasn't come out yet so happiness is still possible.' And I said, I said, 'irony represents the real relationship of individuals to their imaginary conditions of existence.' And I said, I said, 'is there a name for the kind of cold-on-hot aesthetic that's the one in lots of artscene synthpop and performance and also like Spring Breakers and some tumblr and Lana Del Ray? Like a super tactile sensuality left in the freezer to ice-over thing? Like booty-melancholia or something?' And I said to Mabel, I said, 'I used to know a person who was so upset that people who put a lot of time into learning things get to be considered more scholarly than her and I thought it's an insane thing to even feel but I'm kind of upset that people who are all-in artscene synthpop experimental film noise whatever people get to be considered more artscene synthpop experimental film noise whatever than me.' And I said, I said, 'like [Ngai](#) I also wrote an essay that takes Schlegel as the framework for conceptual and post-conceptual aesthetics. (Mine isn't as good.) I think beginning with Ngai's incomplete take on Schlegel's concept of 'the interesting' and its relation to his later endorsement of romantic poetry is a good way to see how Ngai's painfully good paper gives an incomplete picture of the relationship of conceptual art/literature to 'the interesting' as an affect, to 'interesting' as a term of aesthetic evaluation, and to the artistic practice of the 'merely interesting' as a specific subgenre of conceptualism. Ngai takes Schlegel to be the first advocate of a type of art that is cool (emotionally and ideologically unattached), low-

affect, and particular (as opposed to concerned with the absolute or universal or infinite or total) —an art which Schlegel first judges negatively as ‘merely interesting’ and later comes to endorse, thereby presumably endorsing the ‘merely interesting’ as an aesthetic goal. Schlegel’s initial aesthetic judgement of what he calls the art of the interesting is indeed exactly what Ngai calls a judgement of interestingness, but it is not a judgement about art that’s cool, low-affect, and particular, and Schlegel’s reevaluation of (a part of) what he called the art of the interesting is neither a judgement about art that’s cool, low-affect, and particular nor a judgement of interestingness. Both these issues stem from the fact that while Ngai’s analysis of interestingness as a cool, low-affect, particularist experience is maddeningly spot-on, and her view that the judgement of the interesting is expressive/assertive of this affect is surely right, there exists only a loose relationship between the first-order affective content of an aesthetic experience and the n-th order affective content which its aesthetic judgement typically expresses. The first issue illustrates this simply, by reminding us that the aesthetic judgement of the interesting (and the aesthetic judgement of the ‘merely interesting’) can be applied to works whose first-order affect is e.g. to be thrilling or hilarious or agonizing. The second issue has to do with the special role that irony plays in the dynamic of affect and meta-affect, since it is exactly irony —often casually mentioned in Ngai’s discussion of both Schlegel and conceptual art but without much fanfare or a distinct role —that transforms that second-order affect of interestingness that Schlegel gets from modern poetry into a third-order affect of ‘the romantic.’ My contention is that irony, in a specifically Schlegelian sense, also crucially transforms the affect of interestingness in the kind of art that Ngai nicknames ‘merely interesting conceptual art’ (a reference both to its indictment by Fried as ‘merely interesting’ and to Judd’s claim that a work needs only to be interesting), and that in fact the aesthetic experience of

interest that Fried condemns as artistically valueless even when justified is not identical to the aesthetic experience of interest Judd advocates. The experience that Judd advocates is closer to an experience of the romantic in Schlegel's sense than to Ngai's affect of interestingness, and has to do with the experience of interest transformed by romantic irony to an experience of (something like) an art-historical totality. (Really this is almost explicit in manifestos like Sol Lewitt's paragraphs on conceptual art, but more on this later.) The art that Schlegel judges as merely interesting is hot (emotionally or ideologically invested, expressing a 'one sided', particular and subjective passion), high-affect, and particular. Its highest manifestation, philosophical tragedy, is (per Schlegel) hot, high-affect, and universal in ambition but falling short of universality because of its 'hotness': in the philosophical tragedy the subject matter is universal in scope, but the boundedness of the insight to a particular point of view due to its hotness means it isn't truly universal. (Schlegel even admits in his discussion of Shakespeare that hotness and particularity may ultimately be one and the same.) Schlegel's argument in 'Studium' is that the striving of philosophical tragedy towards an insight universal in scope must lead away from hotness towards the discovery of a new cool objectivity because an insight universal in its scope must also be universal in validity to be properly universal. Schlegel's judgement of this literature as 'merely interesting' is an evaluation of this literature's final-order affect as an unfulfilled or deferred or provisional promise of universality to come, closely bound to the Kantian distinction between the subjective (the 'interested') and the universal. So Schlegel's judgement of art as 'merely interesting' is, in this sense, purely the complement of the judgement of universal aesthetic value, making its domain of application much wider than just works whose main affect for the judging subject is Ngai's affect of 'interestingness': it can be applied to works that are thrilling,

chilling, mind-blowing, hilarious, painful, dizzying, devastating, or ecstatic. Where Ngai and Schlegel do meet is in the second order affect embodied in Schlegel's judgement of a work as interesting: to judge a work as interesting, per Schlegel, is to judge that it might in some way be a stepping stone to future universal aesthetic value. This is surely an instance, if perhaps not a paradigm-case, of the affective attitude of 'the interesting' as Ngai analyzes it. (There is also a close but misleading relationship between Ngai's analysis of the interesting as an affect and Schlegel's analysis of the consumption habits of the public of his day: Ngai talks about a cool pursuit of low-affect, particular novelty, and Schlegel diagnoses in the German reading public a cool pursuit of high affect, particular novelty. Making too much of this affinity, however, would blend the interesting together with 'the exciting' or what have you.) Schlegel's later reevaluation of philosophical tragedy, motivated by his discovery of romantic irony as the expression the universal via the subjective, recasts philosophical tragedy as cool, alternating between high affect and low affect, and *universal* via the activity of romantic irony as the embedding of the space of all known perspectives in the negative space of the active perspective... ' And I said, I said, 'I mean seriously the things you did to me, the things you forced me to force myself to think and say and feel, the knowledge that you did them cause you were trying to optimize the relationship for your needs and not because you were desperate and confused, I can't function with it. Knowing that in all this time you were making a cost-benefit analysis. I thought we were trapped in a dysfunctional relationship by loving one another too irreplaceably to let go despite the stress and pain we were causing each other but since ****'s party you insist that it was a really nice relationship and you broke up with me because being with me made you feel self-conscious about wanting to be famous so guess what, that means it was an abusive relationship. I do think you loved me a lot in some sense, but for

god's sake tell me that you're sorry for emotionally abusing me until I became as codependent as you wanted me to be when you knew that your codependence was about you and not about me and that I was replaceable by any other boyfriend with respect to it and that my induced codependence was about you and not about me and will leave me psychologically destroyed when you inevitably have a change of plans like you did and already knew you probably would.' And I said, I said, 'I mean, it's easy in a kind of bad way to do super intense art when you have the weight of an already self-theorizing tradition bearing down on you so any fidget you make is super theoretically charged by virtue of its interaction with it, and it can turn art practices into some kind of lawyer/theologian shadowboxing in a hell of your subculture's own making, but it's better than making art that's not super intense.' And I said to Mabel, I said, 'Buffy Speak is the best language to express ideas in the humanities because it lets you: a) control the implicatures about how precise you're being on a word-by-word basis b) control the implicatures about how epistemically sound you're being on a word-by-word basis c) define terms on the go d) be transparent about the prototypes you use to approximate unfamiliar things c) be transparent about the lacunas in your conceptual machinery.' And I said, I said, 'like the opposite of romantic irony but weaponized.' And I said, I said, 'I think that that relationship I can't get over was actually pretty seriously emotionally abusive and that's why.' And I said to Mabel, I said, 'my acquaintance Trisha Low's [new book](#) of post-conceptual-post-teenage-angst is stunningly good. And if you have my temperament it will make you cry hard. It's also really funny and kind of a joke. (I'm so happy we're all doing the [grotesque & arabesque](#) again.)

And I said, I said, 'wake me up when someone in NY writes an experimental poem that isn't a playful hybrid of the language of

Marxian theory and something.’ And I said, I said, ‘camp is the dissonance, intentional or unintentional, between how much emotional energy was invested in the idea of x-ing and how much of an effort was made to figure out how to effectively x.’ And I said, I said, ‘the day you realize there are super smart people with a really different sensibility from yours ages you awfully or makes you cruel.’ And I said, I said, ‘theories in the humanities aren’t models but feature-spaces. (At least the part of them that’s actually of value.)’ And I said to Mabel, I said, ‘Guy Ben Ner Cecilia K. Corrigan Grant Morrison Maria Bamford.’ And I said, I said, ‘I think that to survive you needed to consider yourself selfish rather than defeated, and that I accepted yours as the authoritative point of view and started seeing myself as betrayed rather than as defeated. (In my language here now two people can be both defeated by the limits of their interaction but selfishness involves a winner and a loser.) And it’s time for me to recalibrate but it is fucking hard because you’ve moved past your old guilt — which you chose to like pay in instead of in grief way back when — and when I try to evoke a mutual grief to take the place of your old guilt and my hurt you resent my trying to evoke again the guilt that you already payed in. So you can’t help me and I have to recalibrate alone in my own head and it is hard and lonely and does not feel real. I still have daydreams where I just like ask ‘were you in too much pain to stay together?’ and you say ‘yes’ and like a peace settles over the land. But then again I want you to feel guilty for stealing all the guilt and leaving me with all the hurt. Guilt is ego-affirming and hurt shuts a person down. Then again when we were together I was guilty all the time and you hurt all the time and it was two years that we were together and it’s been two years since, so maybe it’s an allegory on how guilt that doesn’t turn to empathy is not guilt but a trick to fend off a more helpless kind of pain. At least mine was. And still I don’t know what to do about the fact that when we actually talk about it you cite moderate pragmatic

reasons for you leaving and also insist that all of the out of control emotional intensity of the relationship wasn't playacting. It really is one or the other here, considering how things were when we were together — you either left defeated or you left a liar. But you can never agree to be either, and I can't hold on to a narrative about you all on my own. I can never believe anything about you if I can't get you to approve it, and you can't approve anything, and my mind's stuck, and I am tired and I can't let go. I love you very much and hope that we'll be good friends all our life! When do you want to hang out we can watch a movie and then maybe you either break down in tears apologizing or break down in tears talking about the pain that you were in and then we'll do fun friendship things.' And I said, I said, 'cultural politics discourse is not a truth-directed discourse and we all agree that this is ok/necessary/bad-to-fight-against (pick one or all), right? But, like, the painful question is does there also need to be a truth-directed discourse on the empirical and modal subject matter that features in cultural politics discourse — like, claims about causal connections between social and economic and cultural phenomena and about what movements and reforms and revolutions can effect what changes — and if so what relationship it should have to cultural politics discourse and can that relationship be anything other than bitter to all involved.' And I said, I said, 'I have too many fits of metaphysical anxiety to do super well at anything where I can't use them.' And I said to Mabel, I said, 'don't have thoughts nowadays but I did get a [shout-out](#) at the Paris Review for [my piece on conceptual writing](#). Let's read it again?' And I said, I said, 'the Tomer-Peli tragicomedy hypothesis: tragicomically deluded characters (like Michael Scott, Hank Kingsley, Gob) are defined not by having a belief that some false proposition p is true — they don't, at least not in the sense of acting so as to maximize expected utility given p— but by their policy of acting so as to maximize the chance of eliciting confirmation that p is true while

keeping the chance of eliciting a conclusive refutation* of p at near zero. (*There's an 'absence of evidence is evidence of absence' issue here, but we can say that they ignore each instance of sufficiently weak negative evidence, so instances of 'I could have received confirmation of p but didn't' don't stack up.)' And I said, I said, "the rage of Caliban seeing the photo of someone who looks a bit like Caliban." And I said, I said, 'I think the 'idea' expressed in a work of art is often of the form 'a bunch of things not previously known to be related are related.' One way to express an idea of this kind is to eloquently lay out one's thesis re: these things and their relation. Another way to express an idea of this kind is to create a text that the reader can relate to each thing in the bunch of things with surprising ease. Take 'At North Farm', which is equally close to being a reversal of Yeats' 'Sailing to Byzantium', being a retelling of Kafka's 'A Message from the Emperor', being a description of waiting for Santa Claus (cf. leaving out milk) as a child (cf. having no agency + having your material needs super provided for in mysterious ways), being a description of waiting for love as an adult living in a city (cf. again having no agency + having your material needs super provided for in mysterious ways), and being a 'the ambassadors' style memento mori where the traveller is a grim ripper thing which you are hiding from amidst the worldly riches. And, relatedly, the poem also plays on all these shared structures between something being very habitual and something being super eschatological — with the glass of milk connecting to casually leaving out some milk for the street cats that come by at night or for your house cat, connecting to Santa Claus, connecting to folk-religion things of leaving out food to appease/distract spirits that might come during the night —, and the way that things done for the sake of some eschatological hope or fear end up sort of indistinguishable from normal minor daily habits after enough iterations of the eschatological thing not happening.' And I said, I

said, 'the (partly real, partly fake, partly vague) prog-rock/art-rock* divide as a guide to the (partly real, partly fake, partly vague) American Postmoderns/avant** divide. Core for each pair I think is the latter side's rejection of complexity as a sufficient condition for high art*** in favor of not-fitting-known-schemata as a sufficient condition for high art. So, two version of what Modernism was. (*Art-rock = Bowie-Eno-Reed-Cale-Nico-Wyatt-Ferry et cetera, unto proto-punk unto post-punk unto noise-pop/freak-folk **The American kids who are into L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E and Delany and Stein and Tan Lin and Kathy Acker will fuck with Pynchon or Gaddis but not with the rest of them ***Insisting on these terms cause the right side in each pair considers the left side as middle brow even if good at it.)' And I said to Mabel, I said, 'age might be a useful mundane formal analogue for gender: everyone is clear that you can't disentangle the roles age plays in our life (in structuring our choices, shaping our desires and our self-perception, and placing social onuses implicit or explicit, playful or severe) into the strictly 'voluntary' and strictly 'coercive.' No one has the need to play dumb about why it is that people 'act their age' — it's sitcom common knowledge that it's a clusterfuck of habits, urges, fears, internalized expectations, narrative-building vis-a-vis self, narrative-building vis-a-vis others, and cold hard PR.'

And I said, I said, 'Melnick's [A Pin's Fee](#) is the best book of poems by a living author. Go make up for years you spent not knowing this.' And I said, I said, 'I am trying to work out (for PhD) a theory of 'mood' or 'vibe' as the thing most really good art's actually 'about.' It's so weird because, like, I think that implicitly everyone knows this but explicitly it comes up mostly in turn-of-the-century German philosophy. Wes Anderson really experimented with the line between story and vibe. The thing that fucked me up about The Royal Tenenbaums when I was 14 was how characters

communicated by just vibing at each other — I think that's what's behind the whole notorious thing with Wes Anderson characters constantly saying "I know" to each other. Like, what there is to be said has already been vibed out thoroughly. Like, what there is to talk about is why things generally are behaving the way that they are and the vibe is its own explanation better than the things the characters could say explicitly about the vibe. I think the way Wes Anderson made that almost explicit was a first and is the reason we all got so flipped out about him in the turn of the century. Alice Gregory (otherwise never wrong) says Tumblr made Wes Anderson redundant, but I think it's cause she doesn't have the liberal-arts-aspergers personality type that experiences drama through vibes better than through narrative. TV shows turn vibe into an objective entity, keeping them as trade secrets passed to the initiated like the recipe to Coca Cola or the Buddha-nature or something. Like, no one person's mind had ownership over the early Simpsons vibe, even though it was a super subtle, precise vibe, but rather a few dozen people who've been trained knew how to manifest it when they wrote a Simpsons episode. In this sense vibes as a property of art are really similar to vibes as properties of places and people and cultures — you can be trained in early-Simpsons vibe by coming up in a Simpsons writing room in the early 90's like you can be trained in having a Jewish vibe by growing up Jewish. What I think is really interesting, also, is that people have a massive tolerance for pure vibe in lyrics — people get profoundly attached to e.g. Dylan, Belle and Sebastian, Wu Tang, Nas, Dipset lyrics without really knowing what per se is going on except on a vibe-level.' And I said, I said, 'I submit that 'There Will Be Blood' was sort of like a film of Kafka's 'A Report to the Academy,' the story of the monkey that learned how to talk for purely instrumental reasons. Plainview's basically a feral dog that figured out how to do things with words: Excepting that one conversation with his brother, Plainview never once makes use of

language for its stated purpose of communicating an interior state. Like, the default story about language is that we use language to give voice to our state of mind. He uses language like a complicated digging tool. While instrumental-Plainview's having complicated business talks real-Plainview can grasp only single phrases like 'take care of your son' or 'Union Oil,' responding to them as immediate context-independent triggers. Like a dog who can pick up on words ('walk', 'bath'), but not on syntax. Real-Plainview cannot cognize people as existing independently of their relation to him. So he e.g. can't comprehend that the Standard Oil guy who said the thing about his son a year before has no idea what Plainview's 'proving' to him at the restaurant. The phil. of mind distinction (cf. Peacocke) between human comprehension and animal comprehension's often drawn in terms of the detachability of objects of cognition from our immediate experience of them in human comprehension, and the lack thereof in animal comprehension. The parenting we see Plainview do is, like, grooming-massaging-holding-humming. It's given an external narrative justification but come on. Also when Plainview's son says he's leaving the company Plainview physically growls at him for half a minute after saying 'you're my competition.' Like, come on, in the last scene he is sleeping in his mansions on the floor and chewing on a steak bone. Plainview by the end starts needing to use language to give voice to his own self but not communicatively but (as Lexi called it) 'purgatovely', venting his soul into these individual barked mantras crudely matched-up to the situation ('draaaaainage! draaaaaainage!'). Like nothin' but a hound dog cryin' all the time.' And I said, I said, 'anybody else remembers having basically no thoughts or feelings till turning fourteen or so?' And I said to Mabel, I said, 'computational aesthetics, super-short. Jürgen Schmidhuber's Theory Jürgen Schmidhuber, an AI theorist and theoretical computer scientist, has proposed a computational account of aesthetic judgments. On his view, a stimulus is judged to

be beautiful or attractive by a subject T to the extent that the stimulus is compressible for T. Schmidhuber's notion of compressibility is taken from algorithmic information theory, but concerns actual rather than ideal compression: it refers to the actual # of bits in T's mental representation of the stimulus, bounded and fallible as T may be. Beholden to the limitations of T's computational resources, two kinds of stimuli should be the most compressible: stimuli with evident internal structure (e.g. fractals or a chessboard), and stimuli with noticeable similarities to stimuli already stored in T's history¹ (e.g. English words or the sight of a friend's face). Experimental psychology supports both a preference for stimuli with internal patterns and a preference for stimuli with a similarity to past stimuli. There are obvious problems with this account if we take it as a full account of beauty. A chessboard, while very simple, would rarely be called beautiful. Moreover, it seems that the most profound aesthetic experiences often come from complex stimuli: the city of Rome, the philosophy of Plato or Wittgenstein, art by Picasso, Joyce or Stravinsky. Schmidhuber argues for explaining beauty as compressibility, but it may be better to identify compressibility with attractiveness, pleasantness, or niceness. Schmidhuber explains the lack of strong preference for very simple stimuli by their not being interesting. Schmidhuber gives interestingness a simple formal analysis in terms of compressibility. Whereas beauty (or attractiveness, etc.) is the subjective compressibility of a stimulus, interestingness is the rate at which the subjective compressibility changes over time as T processes the stimulus: Beauty (etc.) of stimulus S for subject T = # bits in T's mental representation of S Interestingness of S for T = rate of change in the # of bits used to represent S by T over time = $d(\text{Beauty}) / d(\text{Time})$ Extending Schmidhuber: art, compressibility, and 'compressiveness' I think that 'interestingness' puts Schmidhuber on the right track, but that considering a stronger property relating a

stimulus to compression progress can further contribute to our understanding of aesthetic objects in art, math, philosophy and music. Recall that (if you accept Schmidhuber's basic approach) when a subject T encounters a novel stimulus S, T searches for ways to compress S. Could this search have implications beyond determining the length of T's representation of S? I believe it can: If T's search reveals multiple different effective ways to compress S using (respective) different objects in her history, this may give T indication that she can use S to improve the compression of her extant history². In the strongest case, it may indicate that T should use S to encode the various objects that could have each been used to encode S. More modestly, it may indicate that there is an unexploited compressive relationship between the various objects that could have each been used to encode S. We can define a property called 'compressiveness' to formalize the above idea.³ Vitanyl et al. present a metric called the normalized information distance ('NID') between two strings, defined by $NID(x,y) = \max\{K(x|y), K(y|x)\} / \max\{K(x), K(y)\}$ where $K(x)$ is the Kolmogorov complexity* of x. Let us define SK(x) as the subjective complexity of a string x, s.t. SK(x) is the length of the subject's actual program for generating string x. Let us now define a subjective normalized information distance, SNID, by replicating NID in terms of SK. We can now use SNID to define compressiveness: Compressiveness: A stimulus z is compressive for a subject T if it violates the triangle inequality $SNID(x, y) \leq SNID(x, z) + SNID(z, y)$ for some objects x, y in the subject's history. The idea is the following: Because the triangle inequality always holds for the objective NID (Vitanyl et al.), if T detects that her SNID violates the triangle inequality for z, T learns that there are unexploited patterns in her history, and that z is the 'key' to these patterns. Compression gains reducing SNID(x, y) to SNID(x, z) + SNID(z, y) or below follow under plausible assumptions. (Prima facie, compressiveness is a stronger property

than Schmidhuber's 'interestingness': exposure to compressive stimuli constitutes a net reduction in the absolute # of bits used to represent one's history.) Informally, a novel stimulus S is 'compressive' for T if S is tractably (for T) related to multiple other objects whose relation to one another was not independently tractable (for T). We might think of compressive stimuli as previously undiscovered 'prototypes' for objects in T's history of stimuli, allowing the construction of new prototype-based concepts that cluster previously disparate objects together. (Compare with Poincaré: "The mathematical facts worthy of being studied are those which, by their analogy with other facts, are capable of leading us to the knowledge of a mathematical law... They are those which reveal to us unsuspected kinship between other facts, long known, but wrongly believed to be strangers to one another. ... Among chosen combinations the most fertile will often be those formed of elements drawn from domains which are far apart." Also see Caramello on 'bridges'.) I suggest that compressive stimuli have a key role in aesthetics. A major part of modern aesthetic discourse concerns stimuli that 'resonate' with many previously disconnected things one has encountered, felt or thought, and in so resonating reveal new affinities between these previously disconnected things. One often praises an artwork for being 'uncanny' or 'strange yet familiar', or for being 'richly evocative', or for 'concentrating a very great number of experiences' (cf. Eliot) or 'revealing the before unapprehended relations of things' (cf. Shelley). These aesthetic merits are often understood to be closely related to the capacity of art to define new concepts via prototype (cf. Shelley, Coleridge, Carnap, Dilthey): when the novel affinities revealed by an artwork are sufficiently strong, one talks about an artwork 'articulating' a general phenomenon or pattern that is otherwise hard to pin down, or about an artwork serving as the prototype that defines a category that is hard to otherwise define. (E.g. 'Kafkaesque experience',

‘Pinteresque conversation’, ‘Orwellian society’.) The idea of compressiveness thus seems strongly implicit in certain aspects of modern aesthetic discourse, both in aesthetic theory and in the practice of literary criticism. One sees a particularly strong connection to the role of indeterminacy and abstraction in Modernist art and literature: the ideal stimuli for ‘breaking’ the triangle inequality between two objects are the minimal — i.e. the most compressible — exemplars of a structure common to both objects (or of a structure closely resembling the respective structure of each object.) For example, it is often stated that Kafka’s short stories capture a structure of experience — the ‘Kafkaesque’ — that one finds in a range of disparate experiences (or conceptions of experiences), making a Kafka story equally evocative of e.g. the experience of going to the bank, the experience of being broken-up with, the experience of waking up in a daze, the experience of being lost in a foreign city, or the experience of a police interrogation. The story functions as a nearly-minimal concrete model of the abstract structure shared by the disparate experiences that fall under the predicate ‘Kafkaesque,’ allowing to group together experiences that embody structure at some level of abstraction. (See dissertation prospectus for a literary-theoretical application. Also see two informal examples. For application to an avant-garde, rather than Symbolist/Romantic context, see here. For relationship to the social performance theories of taste see here.)

1 We can define a basic ‘programming language’ L for T and then define the compressibility of a stimulus S as T ’s shortest known efficient program (in L) for generating S given use of T ’s stored history of stimuli, or we can regard T as constantly optimizing her ‘programming language’ to match observed probabilities and define the compressibility of S directly as T ’s shortest known efficient program for generating S .

2 Of course, this only applies to imperfect compressors like humans. An optimal compressors would simply come up with S a-priori.

3 Notice that a drive to discover compressive stimuli is already implied by Schmidhuber's 'compression progress drive,' which we accept without modification. We differ from Schmidhuber in differently relating the compression progress drive to aesthetic judgements of stimuli, by distinguishing compressive stimuli from merely interesting stimuli as the class of stimuli whose relation to compression progress corresponds to aesthetic beauty. 4 One might tentatively analyze the 'Kafkaesque' structure of experience as consisting in a breakdown in one's model of the world in conjunction with the belief that a different, successful model is held in common knowledge by others. Parts of the text are taken from shared work with Owain Evans, MIT. 'And I said, I said, 'I used to regard the, like, blushing-buzzing-breathless agitation of the mind and body from a book or movie as peak aesthetic experience. I now think that's a category error: it's your body's way of telling you your brain is reeling-in a real big fish, but all of this interoceptive ruckus hardly makes for a rich apperception of the book or movie. Like, I haven't so much watched my first Godard film ('Week End') as just had two hours of euphoric nausea while my brain rewrote its source-code. It's your second Godard film you actually get to watch.' And I said, I said, "'you are old, Father Ubu', the young man said.'" And I said, I said, 'my favorite thing is non-narrative genre fiction. Like, stuff that clearly involves a made-up universe with made-up characters and made-up events but doesn't try to do anything too much like telling me a story about it. 'Les Chants de Maldoror' comes to mind as the platonic form here, and also as the prototype of bitterness over non-narrative genre fiction losing out to the realist novel.' And I said, I said, 'Brit-sitcom buffoonery reinterpreted as expression of death drive?' *I'm not positive, but I think what makes IAP striking is that it produces all the regular shenanigans but via personality flaws rather than via stupidity. Partridge is reasonably intelligent but ends up doing basically what Basil Fawlty or whatever

would do in a given situation — but Basil Fawlty or whatever do it cause they think it's gonna work, while Partridge does it out of desperation and contempt and self-contempt. (But I might be seeing it through a filter of my interest in these Chekhov-like phenomena where there's unusually little epistemic asymmetry between characters or between characters and audience. Is that a genre? 'Nash-equilibria fiction?')

And I said to Mabel, I said, 'me, to Pseudopodium: An idea I just had: you know how Kolmogorov came up with non-probabilistic statistics, that deal not with the probability that a hypothesis underlies the data but with the degree of fit of the data to various structures? It strikes me that this is a good metaphor for how close-reading is practiced in a Langpo readership context vs. how close-reading is practiced in (pardon the crude laziness) Modernist, Romantic or traditional literary readership contexts. Like, in Langpo readership we're no longer dealing with a distribution of credences over candidate worlds/speakers underlying the text, not even for the purpose of regarding the distribution itself as an aesthetic object (as in 'ambiguity' or whatnot) — instead of any epistemic things like that, we're dealing with gaging the degrees of closeness and distance of the text from various textual patterns typically associated with various worlds/speakers. In this sense it's true that Langpo readership breaks away from 'interpretation,' to the extent that interpretation involves at least play-acting that we're working through an uncertainty about what the text represents rather than taking stock of various properties of the text (e.g. the property of having this-much-noise given that model, the property of having that-much-noise given this model, etc). Pseudopodium, replying: "LangPo" covers an awfully ambiguous territory, but insofar as I'm representative of "a LangPo readership," that sounds like a useful analogy which applies to many other more-or-less idiosyncratic

preferences of the readership at hand: Thomas Nashe, parodies, found poems, manipulated texts, certain modes of comic theater and stand-up comedy, Melville, Swift, Flaubert, Russ's and Delany's mid-1970s against-the-genre-grain novels, Lester Bangs, and so on. Come to think of it, my first paid-for publication mentioned why spot-the-textual-model adventures must remain an idiosyncratic preference: they depend on familiarity with a rich pool of candidate models and on a peculiarly hyperlexic attraction to the rules of the game itself. The hard critical problem not being "what are the candidate models & how are we triggered to match or discard them?" (that's the easy and fun part) but "how do we somehow feel the impact of meat behind all that?" How do "A Humument" and "What" and "A Bibliography of the King's Book" and "Son of Paleface" and Will Elder's comics move me? Why do the Blooms and Dedalus seem more heroic and real after being buried under parodies and caricatures? If interpretation and intention are under erasure by scribbledehobble, why can we so easily tell one game-master from another, or embody emotions through paper shuffling? This is a cool way to abstract the paper-shuffling, though! And I said, I said, 'when it comes to how a person's looks shape how we grasp their inner life I'd say it's 50% a distorting factor, 25% justified by the fact that a person's looks are partly shaped by their sense-of-self, and 25% justified by the fact that a person's sense-of-self is partly constituted by a sense of how their looks shape how we grasp their inner life.' And I said, I said, 'there's this beautiful trick that is at the foundation of all of Wes Anderson's films, and also of the best show ever 'Archer.' It's having all the characters have perfect common knowledge* of *each other's* emotions at nearly all times. I think that it's originally Chekhov's?' And I said, I said, 'when I am flourishing life's about moods, when I am crashing it's about emotions. Moods are beautiful and sacred fundamental categories of the psycho-ontological subsistence of the life-world, and emotions

are a nausea with a background story.’ And I said, I said, ‘we’re fucking blessed to be the kind of creature who can find sufficient restitution for its sadness in a good description of its sadness.’ And I said to Mabel, I said, ‘14: Ecclesiastes 15-16: Wittgenstein 17-18: Nabokov 19-20: The L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E scene 21: The anti-Indie [vibe 22-23](#): Wittgenstein 24-25: The LessWrong [scene.](#)’

[And I](#) said, I said, ‘The Common Dead-end at the End of Aesthetics, Philosophy, Family Fights, Lovers Quarrels: that sinking feeling when you can’t come up with an example to back up your abstract claim.’ And I said, I said, ‘I believe in implicitly defined criteria, because, you know, all definition [is implicit](#) definition. And I believe that at various times in the day you actively care about whether the world meets a particular implicit criterion, or about how to make your life meet a particular implicit criterion. So, like, there are value-facts but only in the sense that when we have an implicit criterion in mind and we ask ourself whether something embodies it and care about the answer, which we do a lot, we ask a perfectly good question.’ And I said, I said, ‘we don’t really reject artworks — we reject a mindset implied by enjoying an artwork. It’s not like “this answer is wrong,” but like “the question for which this work is the answer sucks.” And I said, I said, ‘when I first saw this page a bell knelled in my head and I insisted/knew the Black Bug Room’s a thing that means something to me — means something serious to me — but I had no good take on what. It’s not the first supernatural metaphor for “that dark place in your mind” that I’ve seen, but it’s the only one to ever resonate with me at all. I’ve started using ‘Black Bug Room’ colloquially, albeit mostly when I’m having conversations with myself, to mean “that dark place in your mind,” and wrote off as unanswerable the question of why this rendition made this type of metaphor I never cared for so profound for me. A day ago I saw my copy of New X-Men #116 at my friend’s house - I lent it to him but he didn’t read it yet - and started trying to tell him

all about the Black Bug Room and how I just can't tell what makes this scene so special. But instead I found myself explaining, with ease and without any prior reflection, exactly what makes it so special: The Black Bug Room's specifically that place you go when smack dab in the middle of an action or a life you phase out for a second and recall an ancient worry or resentment you could never solve but mostly learned how to let go of, and in this second everything else in your life seems like it is a ploy distracting you from properly attending to that ancient worry or resentment so you tune your life out, and a voice inside your head explains to you reasonably that whatever is the thing that's going on outside right now, when you are back outside it's more important to resolve the issue that we in here at the Black Bug Room are dealing with than just go with the flow you started earlier, so you say "listen to me, there are things we need to talk about, about our relationship." And I said to Mabel, I said, 'a lot of aesthetic merit is explicitly about modeling one phenomenon in terms of another phenomenon or showing how two phenomena can be modelled based on a common prototype. A lot of aesthetic merit is explicitly about finding a short or elegant description that intuitively generates vast data (i.e. deeply evocative descriptions). There is also an explicit subclass of this form of aesthetic merit that is explicitly concerned with finding a short description that intuitively generates vast data that one has previously interacted with (i.e. articulating things in your experience or capturing things you encountered in the world). A lot of aesthetic merit is explicitly about stimuli that 'resonate' with many previously disconnected things you have encountered, felt or thought, and in so resonating illuminate possible connections (similarities?) between these previously disconnected things. Notably we sometimes have a very hard time verbalizing any personal-level reference points (hard to say what does the work resonate with et cetera) even when we are strongly inclined to claim that something like this has occurred.

Often a verbalization comes within a week or two. These three phenomena are at the core of our belief that art can be a form of thinking or of furthering our understanding or what have you. These three phenomena all call on seemingly related unexplained notions like ‘articulate’, ‘resonate’, ‘see connections,’ and so on, and I monomaniacally believe that the best way to cash out these notions has to be in terms taken from the world of data compression and data differentiation. (I mean the world of resource-bounded data compression and data differentiation — so, like, the A.I. research kind, not the pure theoretical computer science kind. Cf. Jurgen Schmidhuber on aesthetic merits of a kind related to but not identical to the phenomena above.) An ideal theory along these lines is one that would use the language of data compression and data differentiation to provide something like a conceptual analysis of the core notions we employ in talking about these aesthetic phenomena, and also plausibly explain the empirical facts about what stimuli+person+context combos cause or fail to cause these phenomena to occur. Realistically, I think that concepts taken from the world of data compression and data differentiation can be used to construct nice approximations of the notions we employ in talking of these aesthetic phenomena, and that our aesthetic reactions imperfectly track data compression-type facts about our processing of things.’ And I said, I said, ‘the strangest visual experience I ever had is looking at a picture of a pizza and then suddenly not seeing it as “pizza” but a dish of hot specialty bread baked in grated tomatoes and cheeses.’ And I said, I said, ‘what makes it so amazing is the language in it is so slightly *gender-correlated*: the subject matter is almost invariably gender-neutral so it’s down to syntax and vocabulary, and occasionally illocution. Also the correlation is itself slight for the most part — like, most of the sentences are like “yeah, a woman’s 10% more likely to be saying that than is a man.”’ And I said, I said, ‘there’s a cute way to unify

verbal irony, dramatic irony, and “isn’t it ironic” irony: a thing’s ironic from perspective *s* if it involves a person with perspective *s* that is less well informed than *s* who for that reason would describe the thing in a way that is opposite of how a person with perspective *s* describes it. In verbal irony *s* is the *speaker* and *s*’ is the simulated speaker. In dramatic irony, *s* is the *audience* and *s*’ a character. In “isn’t it ironic” irony *s*’ is the person during the event and that person *in* its aftermath.’ And I said, I said, ‘when I feel strong I want ideas, people, works that satisfy rigour and maximize novelty. When I feel weak I want ideas, people, works that maximize rigour and satisfy novelty.’ And I said to Mabel, I said, “though there will later be many experiences, none of these experiences will be connected to my present experiences by chains of such direct connections as those involved in experience-memory, or in the carrying out of an earlier intention. ... That is all there is to the fact that there will be no one living who will be me. Now that I have seen this, my death seems to me less bad.” (Derek Parfit, ‘Reasons and Persons’)’ And I said, I said, ‘Evolutionary Psychology: A One Act Play Evolutionary Psychologists: The real motive behind [some behaviour] is [some Darwinist benefit]! Other People: That’s so conceptually confused! Evolutionary Psychologists: That’s why we never said it!’ And I said, I said, ‘a simple point that people forget to explain to outsiders about the consumption of random/plain/goofy/noisy artifacts is that it’s not the random/plain/goofy/noisy artifact that is doing the work but the 3000 years long accumulation of techniques for attentively scrutinizing objects (which developed as a corollary of 3000 years of creating objects that intuitively solicit* new forms of attentive scrutiny) that’s doing the work. A randomly generated text is interesting in as much as the pattern-spotting and analogy-spotting behaviours that 3000 years of literature imprinted us with are interesting.’ And I said, I said, ‘Song: Après Moi Poem: [Ursonate](#)

Book: [Bouvard](#) et [Pécuchet](#).' And I said, "just to explain what the — I think — possible alternative view is: one could theorize that suffering/pleasure is a gestalt that modulates an experience. So the idea would be, rather than that new experiences bring new pleasure, that new pleasures bring new experiences (i.e., that liking experiences you didn't like before involves/creates novel modulations of the experiences). I'm attracted to this view partly because I think that there are ways to describe these modulations phenomenologically: Disliked experiences are experienced as "noise" blotting out your other experiences; liked experiences are experienced as pure signal. Now, I mean "noise" in the sense in which if you are trying to listen to a podcast and someone next to you starts talking on the phone, the person's phone-chatter is experienced as noise: The person's chatter is holding your attention hostage, preventing you from concentrating on the podcast, but without itself becoming a center of attention — your experience of the phone-chatter is low-resolution, flat, and untextured, much as your experience of phone-chatter in your attentional periphery would be, but with the exception that this low-resolution experience is blotting out everything else. When noise blots out your attention, there's a net-loss of detail in your overall experiential state. I think the phenomenology of suffering is the phenomenology of low-detail overall experiential states (or of a sudden decrease in detail), and the phenomenology of pleasure is the phenomenology of high-detail overall experiential states. In pleasure, everything in your experience has the phenomenology of being at the center of attention; in suffering, nothing does. This is a claim about what the phenomenological result of "reward" or "approval" is, rather than about what makes us like things, but it does imply that there should be a deep two-way psychological connection between detail/clarity/attention and pleasure, and indeed the evidence for this are abundant: As a rule (or at least in all cases that

come to my mind), when a normally disliked experience becomes an object of attentive engagement, it becomes liked — for example, artistic descriptions of melancholy, angst, indignation and so forth, which conjure these feelings in a controlled way that opens them to attentive engagement, sometimes cause people to fall in love with melancholia, angst, and so forth. (Notably, clinical depression is usually described as “not being able to feel anything,” which, given that clinically depressed people aren’t super-peaceful, can reasonably be interpreted as meaning that everything feels blotted out by noise.) And pain itself is suffering-free in one of two cases: either when one ignores the pain, or when one is attentively rapt in the pain — like, sometimes the best way to deal with a headache is to concentrate *on the pain* very hard, and in these cases the suffering gets much worse if someone breaks your concentration. And then, of course, there’s the use of meditation to make everything liked, and the Romantic idea that all intense experiences are good, and many other cultural facts of this nature.”

And I said to Mabel, I said, ‘Jay-Z lyrics are so much like that song “hey boy, crazy boy” from West Side Story.’ And I said, I said, ‘unsure re: the amount of things in heaven and earth. (Like, the amount of discourses that are sufficiently non-arbitrary.)’ And I said, I said, ‘I’m pretty sure that I can teach the principles of Modernist/experimental aesthetics by explaining how advice animals work.’ And I said, I said, ‘anyway, Wittgenstenia always just makes me so deeply depressed. It never changes my intellectual inclinations, but always convinces me my intellectual inclinations are childish and shameful. This has been a terrible week.’ And I said, I said, ‘Wittgenstein drastically underplays the role that simulation (I mean, like, imagining another person’s first-person perspective) plays in knowing others’ mental lives. A lot of actual real-life language games concerned with knowing others’ mental lives revolve

around the capacity to have an imaginative experience that counts as a correct imaginative simulation of the other person's experience. Wittgenstein's not oblivious to this, but rarely lets it enter into his depiction of what is involved in our conception of knowing others' mental lives. And, more problematically, when Wittgenstein discusses the claim that one's present (e.g.) sensation of pain can constitute the content of what one believes another person feels, he treats it as a metaphysical coup rather than an obvious fact about the role that simulation — in this case not imaginative simulation — plays in the game of knowing one another's experiences. He does then briefly go on to acknowledge this, but then goes on to never talking about it again. (I'm not thinking about simulation as a condition for recognizing expressive behavior, but as an element of a partially independent game that has just as much of a claim to being a game of what it is to know someone's inner life. Like, I can recognize expressions of experiences I don't take myself to be able to imagine, and when someone's having such experiences in front of me then in one ordinary sense I know what this person is experiencing and in another ordinary sense I don't. When for whatever reason — like more experiences or meditation or a drug trip — my imagination expands, it might expand in a way that counts as now being able to simulate that other person's experience, and know what the other person is experiencing in a sense in which I didn't know before.)' And I said to Mabel, I said, 'now reading 'La vie de Gargantua et de Pantagruel.' I'm real excited, cause for someone living in the Modernist/Avant tradition this is like the episode of Buffy in which Buffy dream-time-travels to see the creation of the Slayer-line.' And I said, I said, 'giving up on: Ever being physics-literate or economics-literate. Not giving up on: All the rest.' And I said, I said, 'the Black Album's still the most sublime expression ever of wanting so bad to sayp, wanting so bad to say ~p, and wanting so bad to be rid of that.' And I said, I said, "but B,

Walter Pater will never be our friend, he's dead." The Renaissance, also, is over, everyone can go home now. Or perhaps, (over theme) "Road trip!" Please I'd like to buy that massive bottle o Perrier, barkeep. You are correct, I'd like to be hated by the proles! Anyway Yeah. so I don't remember anything more because I was still drunk (I know, right?) and wasn't aware how important I was going to become. All my diary entries, Burning alive! Sometimes it strikes me as rotten. Some times she is a clerk. At least now my therapists know that I don't care about gender when I fuck, as long as whoever I'm fucking scares me a little. Das rite I sed it!!! but you won't admit it to me hey, everyone has some mistake he or her has done. Some mentally addled mermaid is listening to LOL smiley face, our song!! Since you left, the cafes have filled up with art school students reading Adorno. Say what you like, but some have those little finger cuts from exactos or monsters ink. So. Uhm, where are you tonight, sweet mm mm? If the future does exist, it will be filled with stupid tall bodies like yours, like the future in some early 90s neve movie which you've seen, your parents worked in stores and listened to oldies, while I was insomniac/bangs listening to Dear Heather, all of which goes to say wait don't—w w wah dot goes to say I'm not allowed to talk about the m word. (pause) (conspiringly) Veronica:"M...A...R..." yeah but I'm not trying to bewitch or differentiate, ok, ok sometimes capital just Moves and i just Notice like "Wait was that a spec—uh, ghost? Or money?" All my stories are about going home for xmas and pretending to believe in G:)d. & U? O, historicize? O, dusty dusty? Uh not to be a snot but your taxonomy is only one bone in Mother's body "O Mother!" Mother: "INFORMATION CLASSIFIED." Ripley: (wiping sweat) "EMERGENCY OVERRIDE: HOW TO DESTROY ALIEN?" O ok for example how about "Victoria's Secret". Right? "Angels" or whatever. Some scent you get in a pink bag, I'm remembering it now. I judged it and you. Historicized pleadingly, watery. Oh yes,

(insane laugh) V's S, that place reminds me of Ms. Tedesco, 7th grade bio teacher, Italian, and major bitch. So. We're in our car in season one of our show on Showtime, you're laughing and I'm driving and I go: B, it's not all about the Benjamins, baby. (pause) (singing) John I'm only mmmmm mm m I got sent to the principal's office for being rude because I wanted to impress her by making fun of Ms. Tedesco. No, not ugh— No, she's just some girl who just came into this a posteriori, some other Italian insano. (singing) mmmmm mm m You see, this is how principles of exclusion and spatial aesthetics get started: through simple misunderstandings. (pause, suspenseful) Girls, fucking you is like Time warp! If the fans are all huh hah Years hah CC Ch- Ch- huh uh ustsuperhardt t tor eresol lves like that movie. uhm Primer it's just hard it's s s s s s s s ssspinning sigh catching sigh skipping Unless you're too scared. Time Warp! baby I Baby, Dear Baby. by New Year's, I'll be totally I'm will be totally third sex and You're so Ringo Starr but(coughs) Surrounded by papers. Surrounded by towers. Ingenue, we've got you surrounded! She just wants to dancing. "I see, a lot of cocaine" Mother: tall girls = short men quod era demonstrandum. Which means I'm not allowed to talk about M —mmm Huh huh huh (singing) fa fa fa, fa fa fa, fa fa fa.' And I said, I said, 'it's always stunning to think Robbe-Grillet was once considered — by fans! — anti-literary. I think the rule is, it takes 50 years for a text's heart of stone to melt?' And I said to Mabel, I said, 'The Avant Garde People Who Don't Like The Avant Garde Analytic Philosophers Continental Philosophers Pop Critics Aesthetes Science Social Theorists Marxists Austrian Economists Multiculturalists Monoculturalists Moderates.' And I said, I said, 'I liked it better when I was inscrutable.' ~~And I said, I said, "it is a concentration, and a new thing resulting from the concentration, of a very great number of experiences which to the practical and active person would not seem to be experiences at all."~~ And I said, I said, '1) A-

good number of women start up on a high-powered path in their 20's, and then when they're older opt out, saying they've been denying their deeper inner bond with domesticity. 2) A good number of American Jews start up not wanting to date/marry Jewish or observe the holidays, and then when they are older change, saying they've been denying their deeper inner bond with Judaism. 3) According to many evolutionary psychologists, '1)' is evidence that women are biologically disposed to prefer domesticity. 4) According to many evolutionary psychologists, '2)' is evidence that Jews are biologically disposed to light candles on Hanukkah?'

————— And I said, I said, 'no TV, so no daydreaming.' And I said to Mabel, I said, 'a joke: orals are in three months and I can't even remember what's the name of the main character in the Inferno.' And I said, I said, '0th degree social performance theories of taste propose that taste-judgements are directly determined* by the subject's (implicit or explicit) expectation of gaining (or maintaining) social status by expressing said taste-judgements. 1st degree social performance theories of taste propose that taste-judgements are (at least partially) determined by the subject's experience of aesthetic pleasure or displeasure, and that the subject's experience of aesthetic pleasure or displeasure is directly determined by the subject's (implicit) expectation of gaining (or maintaining) social status by expressing taste-judgements determined by said experience. On such a view, one's raw feeling of aesthetic pleasure at some x tracks one's subpersonal (i.e. unconscious) calculations of the expected status-gains from a taste-judgement endorsing x. This may be compared to the way in which one's raw feeling of fear tracks one's subpersonal calculations of the likelihood of harm. 2nd degree social performance theories of taste propose that taste-judgements are (at least partially) determined by the subject's experience of aesthetic pleasure or displeasure, and that the subject's experience of

aesthetics pleasure or displeasure is indirectly determined by the subject's (implicit) expectation of gaining (or maintaining) social status by expressing taste judgements determined by said experience. On such a view, one's raw feeling of aesthetic pleasure at some x tracks some autonomously aesthetic property p of one's cognition of x —some unique sort of interaction between x and the rest of one's cognitive landscape—, but relevant aspects of one's cognitive landscape are themselves socially determined. More specifically, such a view contends that relevant aspects of one's cognitive landscapes are determined by one's (implicit) expectation of gaining (or maintaining) social status from the taste judgements that follow from having said cognitive landscape. While this may sound like an intense contention, it is actually largely common-sensical: one's cognitive landscape depends on what one spends one's time consuming, doing, noticing, talking about, worrying about, exploring, avoiding, and so forth—and an important motivation that determines what one spends one's time on is the desire to develop or present a socially-lauded taste. (Compare: people usually don't enjoy beer unless they already have some prior experience with beer, and this prior experience usually comes from trying to enjoy beer because enjoying beer has social-status import.) *Importantly, when I characterize a theory as contending that x determines y , it does not mean that the theory contends that only x determines y .² And I said, I said, 'Seinfeld!' And I said, I said, 'this neat thing Shakespeare does a lot, where syntax borders on the meaningless and the sentence's really just a house for all the words in it to throw a party in.' And I said, I said, 'annoying hipster-on-hipster political-culture criticism works, or is at least auspicious: Indie kids are a lot more interested in rap now. There are lots more minorities in core-hipster-culture itself. There's a 'women in comedy' boom of some sort.' And I said to Mabel, I said, 'Bas C. van Fraassen says applied math is the only science. I believe him, and would like to note that

our culture currently does not: our modern science mascots — Dawkins, CSI, Mythbusters — are way more about dissecting frogs than about crunching numbers. I think it's maybe because math is eerie, and what science as a concept stands for in our culture these days is sobriety (unlike way back when Bohr was dispensing Kōans)? And I said, I said, 'close Reading Wednesday: David Bowie's "Always Crashing in the Same Car" The blanness of the verses is what makes the genius of the chorus possible. Like, the verses are founded on a Creative Writing 101-level trope of likening life to driving a car, and suddenly the chorus then goes psycho and explodes the trope in a thousand directions. I mean, basically it's that you can't crash in the same car over and over again but the same person can life-crash over and over, so the narrative climax of the analogy is also the analogy's extinction — self-destruction, really —, which in this way enacts as a cognitive trauma (the violent falling-apart of sense) the narrated trauma of crashing: The chorus is the crashing of the verses. Then the work of reconstructing sense starts...' And I said, I said, 'likes: environments, noticing things. Dislikes: events, experiences.' And I said, I said, 'mal vu mal dit. the fast-track way to having zero self-deception is to be so bad at reading your own mind that you don't even have suspicions to cheat yourself out of.' And I said, I said, 'what if Malevich painted a black squirrel.' And I said to Mabel, I said, 'different: making a savvy joke, making a joke about the use of savvy jokes. Less different: making a joke about the use of savvy jokes, making a joke about the use of jokes about the use of savvy jokes. Not different: making a joke about the use of jokes about the use of savvy jokes, making a joke about the use of jokes about use of jokes about the use of savvy jokes.' And I said, I said, 'people don't talk enough about how in a normal day you run through about ten completely different frameworks for what life is. Like, consider my grad student-life, with frameworks corresponding to the stages of the day from morning to the dead of night: So for

about an hour to get life right is to have your damn affairs in order,— then it's about whether or not how you're living's hooking you up with a sense of life's/the world's poetic splendor, then whether or not I'm winning at prestige, then it's about whether you are making valid contributions to the human enterprise, then about when's the last time you had real hysterical amounts of fun, then is my life as-sensitized emotionally as they can be in a friends-and-family sense,— then that it's horrible when people are sad about things and maybe let's go Buddhist on this theater of misery cause sadness is so much more bad than happiness is good, then is my writing of smart/funny things online going good or not going good, then am I managing to get at a clear understanding of what arts/math/mind/the world is—and avoiding bad conceptual confusions.' And I said, I said, 'I had the occasion to read some non-technical papers by mathematicians— this week, for phenomenology/cog-science purposes, and I've been struck by how what they are trying to get out of language is so unlike what a good analytic phil philosopher is trying to get out of language. It's as if the (off-duty) mathematician is trying to do a perspective drawing of a 3D object, and philosophers are making graphical projections of a 3D object. And, I mean, I guess that is why analytic phil has such an unpleasant affect so often? Cause it uses language in a way that's terminal rather than generative?— *Which it has right to cause it's founded on the Frege view that sentences are the terminus of thought, but still.' And I said, I said, 'a very snarl of twine: the inner sanctum of my memories are random scenes from children TV programming that got lodged in my memory whole when I was six. These memories are so personal that it astounds me every time when I discover that I can just say out-loud words that express them.'—

———— And I said, I said, 'vita nova: I joined the Los Angeles Review of Books!' And I said to Mabel, I said, 'hey guys I just figured out—

why “something wicked this way comes” is an incredibly good-sounding line. It’s that the syntax roughly maps unto the order of perception in perceiving something that comes at you: first you notice that there’s something, then you notice what’s it like, then notice that it is aligned in your direction, and then that it’s coming at you.’ And I said, I said, ‘ever since I got my glasses I have way too many feelings. All these fucking shapes and colors make things violent.’ And I said, I said, ‘(It’s OK you don’t have to.) Local Optima and Rigour in Philosophy The bullet points below* aim to suggest the following idea: considerations about the measures that a searcher must take in order to avoid getting stuck in a local optimum seem to recommend the value of two (seemingly related) controversial intellectual tendencies that involve “soft” thinking. The two tendencies, which I do not clearly separate in this proto-discussion, are 1) the tendency to maintain interest in some hunch, idea, speculation or intuition even though the best system you know is a local optimum and does not include any proposition that satisfies this hunch, and 2) the tendency to take seriously multiple ‘perspectives’ — i.e. different worldviews or theories or webs of beliefs — and try developing and optimizing them, even if the worldview you have the most credence in implies (if correct) that the others are wrong or not even wrong. In A.I., it’s often necessary for a searching algorithm to break out of local optimums (while keeping record that you found a local optimum), or to iterate the search many times from different starting points in order to find and compare many local optimums. Many very rigorous philosophers succeeded in achieving merely local optimums: they put together systems that can only be made worse by changing any single (sufficiently atomic) proposition of the system. Scientists, and even mathematicians, seem less rigorous than very rigorous philosophers, in the following sense: they to some extent value hunches, speculation, and vague or pictorial talk as an acceptable part of the intellectual inquiry. Very

rigorous analytic philosophers, on the other hand, accept or reject an idea based on checking whether the addition of some regimented-precisification of the idea to their present system as an extra-proposition is beneficial. I think this difference is caused because scientists and mathematicians, both personally and as a culture, adapt to having repeatedly observed that (plausibly) global optima are hardly ever reached by strictly following a series of locally-beneficial steps. (Obviously in the math case this only applies in dealing with mathematical hypotheses—coming up with ideas about how to solve a problem and revising the ideas and trying out totally-different ideas and so on—and not in dealing with extant theorems.) The approach characteristic of very rigorous analytic philosophers, as opposed to scientists or mathematicians, is ideal for finding local-optimums but counter-productive in the search for a global-optimum. If we accept any kind of holism whereby worldviews are better or worse than one another as wholes rather than by their-discrete parts, we have reason to think that it is a bad policy to only consider alternative views by checking whether various sufficiently-atomic propositions attributable to that worldview are beneficial as individual additions/revision to one's own system. For it is very-possible that your system is such that adding the proposition p to your system makes your system as a whole worse even though-proposition p is in fact a proposition of the globally optimal system. This would be especially bad if your system also happens to be a local optimum, cause then there is no hope that it will ever mutate-to a point where it can accommodate p as an individual revision. It might be that part of how extremely smart philosophers end up in-total-stalemates with one another is that they're each at a local-optimum and considering the other's theory in a way that's not-sufficiently global-minded/holistic. It's very hard to win an argument-against someone who's at a local optimum, since arguments are-typically conducted one-proposition-at-a-time, and the person who is-

at a local optimum always has reason to reject any single sufficiently atomic proposition that is not already a part of her system. This also means she'll always have a snappy comeback ready, which explains why hardliners have so much intellectual charisma. These considerations also vaguely suggest an idea about 'scene' influence in philosophical/scientific/intellectual matters: When you spend a lot of time with a group of extremely rigorous people who are locally optimizing a theory they all share, you inevitably spend a lot of time discussing things with them in their own terms. If their system is much closer to being locally optimal than your own system is and — like so many philosophers — you are intellectually monogamous, you're very likely to adopt their system. *Based on a conversation with Owain Evans. 'And I said, I said, 'ok I got to talk about the crazy gender semiotics of the Old Spice Guy commercials. It's, like, a male fantasy of a female fantasy of a male fantasy of a female fantasy of a male fantasy of a female fantasy? Anyway that's probably what makes them genuinely super funny — the weird vibe of "look, we've lost track of whose fantasy this is supposed to be, just go with it.' And I said, I said, 'the girls in this Destroyer video — I'm missing the knowledge for cashing it out, but they're styled up to fit in the uncanny valley between American Apparel ad and 80's workout video?' And I said to Mabel, I said, "A Letter Never *To Be Sent from the Desk of Veronica Lodge, on the Occasion of Reflection on Her Overeducated Ex-Girlfriend,* Cecilia Corrigan.' And I said, I said, 'priorities by rank: 1. Get rest every day. 2. Figure out the least weird worldview on which art does do most of the things art seems to do. 3. Stay in school.' And I said, I said, "The Argument from the Fine-Tuning of the Universe: how lucky are we that you can't make a portmanteau out of *literati*, *glitterati*?" And I said, I said, 'I'm a scientist now! I have a blackboard and everything! And I'm going to prove art!' And I said, I said, 'my girlfriend made [this](#) video last night.' And I said to Mabel, I said, "Harry Potter and the Wings of

the Dove” “Harry Potter and the Golden Bowl” “Harry Potter and the Tree of Knowledge” “Harry Potter and the Jolly Corner.” And I said, I said, ‘are they just turning types of dating into movies now—like they turned children toys into animated TV shows in the 80’s?’

——— And I said, I said, ‘one aspect or kind of semiotics is—cognitive: it (hopefully) identifies dependencies between our ways of thinking about various things, like for example how the way we think about James Bond stems from the way we think about the glory of the British empire or whatever. The important part is that the dependencies that it identifies are causal dependencies — i.e. that the way that we think about x is the cause of the way that we think about y. Another aspect or kind of semiotics is—phenomenological: it (hopefully) identifies mereological or—analogical relations between what our experience of various things—constitutes in, like for example how the experience of pondering James Bond is partly constituted by an experience of pondering the glory of the British empire. The important part is that the dependencies that it identifies are mereological dependencies — i.e. that our experience of y is partly constituted by an experience of x.’ And I said, I said, ‘academia runs on sugar, adderall, caffeine and shame.’ And I said, I said, ‘the older that I get the more content I am with just defending the pursuit of violently noisy or autistic art to people as “some days you want to have insanely spicy food, drink really bitter beer.”’ And I said to Mabel, I said, “‘intuitive person’ vs. ‘analytic person’: some people understand examples better than definitions, and communicate more aptly through examples than through definitions. “Life has no meaning” vs. “leading a meaningful life”: it looks to me like the feelings that evoke proclamations of meaninglessness or meaningfulness have to do with the absence or presence of a dense network of points of reference to process one’s experiences in relation to — like, the more you have

lots of things you're inclined to compare and contrast your experiences or things around you with, the less you have feelings of meaninglessness.' And I said, I said, 'when I theorize on art my explanandum is Vampire Weekend's "Mansard Roof."' And I said, I said, 'whether or not you need to cash out the experience of some artistic object into an explicit verbal enumeration of patterns you are spotting and comparisons you're drawing to get something intellectually real out of the experience and not just vague impressions is like whether or not you need to cash French out into English to get something intellectually real and not just vague impression out of the experience of reading French. (Which is to say: the answer is dynamic, and depends on the role that French vs. English or propositional vs. non-propositional representations play in your cognition in a certain domain in a certain context.)' And I said, I said, 'one that talks like Doolittle: if you're a certain kind of person, then you have a friend you think is smart but way too narrow minded, and you have a friend you think is smart but way too bullshit. You are the former's friend that's smart but way too bullshit! You are the latter's friend that's smart but way too narrow minded!' And I said, I said, 'future life projects: "The Mnemonic Theory of Art."' And I said to Mabel, for some reason, I said, 'I'm so immersed in politics of culture, at a pretty raw instinctive level, that in secret I feel like I've lived through 1775 to 1848, or like the turning of the 19th century or World War I or something. I was here for the death rattles of the counterculture! I've seen empires crumble, nations born, modes of production torn apart by their antagonisms from the inside! I have seen more rough beasts slouching towards Bethlehem than you can fucking count! (No Authentic Chinese Saying To This Effect Has Ever Been Found.)' And I said, I said, 'NPR should do a story about me. You guys wouldn't know, but it's so hard to be the only person in the world that has all true beliefs. (My sister said I have to say explicitly this is

a joke about Moore's paradox or everyone is gonna think that I'm an asshole.)' And I said, I said, 'I don't think that art is ever any good for working on concrete, real questions of philosophy or theory or science, but I do think that art is 'inquiry,' at least to the extent that the concrete, real questions of philosophy or theory or science about x are coming from and geared toward — in a real way that underwrites the logic of these practices, not in a creepy Hegel way — the question "what's the deal with x?," and art *is* often super-good for working on the question "what's the deal with x?." Solid, no?' And I said, I said, 'life work so far: Can evidential decision-theory ground all your middle-class neuroses? How do you find out you have a headache? What's the deal with Doctor Faustus? Why can't he come up with shit to do with all these superpowers? Isn't talking to somebody who can't see that David Bowie's great-frustrating just in the same way that it's frustrating to talk to somebody stoned when you are not? Doesn't a good formal theory solve hermeneutics? What's so creepy about Nazis and Colonialists? Do you have to be insane to care about the avant-garde? Are you disgusting if you don't?' And I said, I said, 'apocalyptic bliss: the way the British use the phrase "a laugh" is like a step away from giving up on language and instead mapping the world to two or three varieties of grunts.'

—— And I said to Mabel, I said, 'so, yeah, no.' And I said, I said, "it expands the mind by giving freedom to the imagination and by offering, from among the boundless multiplicity of possible forms accordant with a given concept, to whose bounds it is restricted, that one which couples with the presentation of the concept a wealth of thought to which no verbal expression is completely adequate, and by thus rising aesthetically to ideas. It invigorates the mind by letting it feel its faculty — free, spontaneous, and independent of determination by nature — of regarding and estimating nature as

phenomenon in the light of aspects which nature of itself does not afford us in experience, either for sense or understanding, and of employing it accordingly in behalf of, and as a sort of schema for, the supersensible. It plays with semblance, which it produces at will, but not as an instrument of deception; for its avowed pursuit is merely one of play, which, however, understanding may turn to good account and employ for its own purpose.” And I said, I said, ‘if you are a Heideggerian, you think that there is some kind of identity between abstracta and the objects of the feelings we call “feeling of [abstracta].” So, what death is and what you’re sensing when you’re contemplating death, what’s objecthood and what you’re sensing when you’re looking at a chair and feel you’re really contemplating that chair in a pure way, and so on. Now here’s a puzzle: if you’re not a Heideggerian, what’s the call on the relationship between abstracta and the phenomenal states we’re inclined to call feelings of [abstracta]? What makes it right or wrong to call a certain feeling a feeling of (e.g.) nothingness? The only account that I know is the Wittgenstein quietist one (cf. after-the-tumblr-cut). Anyway, I seriously wonder if the real divide in what’s philosophy is not precisely here, in the divide between the people who don’t think that the phenomenology of feelings we call “feeling of [abstracta]” has to do with the abstracta in a way that’s strong enough to be a source of philosophical insight about the abstracta, and the people who do.’ And I said, I said, ‘ok, so, it’s crazy how much liking someone’s writing style makes it feel like you’re agreeing with them.’ And I said, I said, ‘the foundation of the discourse of the Social Justice scene is the (almost explicit) principle that one should argue for p iff people in one’s society who believe p are ceteris paribus more motivated to advance social justice than people in one’s society who believe $\neg p$. It’s a plausible and defensible principle, but nowhere near well grounded enough to be the sine qua non of left political commitment that it is, and I wish there were fora of

social justice discourse that operate otherwise. Like, I think the speculation that it would be good if Social Justice people became known for their intellectual honesty, painstaking rigour, and unyielding devotion to truth is worth testing out, so I wish there were some fora of social justice discussion around where the norms of assertion are epistemological rather than motivational.’ And I said to Mabel, I said, ‘for one thing, it’s idiotic to imply that [there’s](#) an intra-hipster taste war being fared along class lines. The intra-hipster taste war’s being fared between publishing/internet/cultural-journalism/literary-mag oriented type hipsters, who don’t like things that are too cute, too noisy, or too skinny, and gallery-world/musician/art-cinema/new-media-art oriented type hipsters, who only like things that are too cute, too noisy, or too skinny. This division doesn’t cut across class lines in any recognizable way.’ And I said, I said, ‘LOLBourdieu is judging you.’ And I [said](#), I said, ‘I’m not one for simulation: I prefer my video games in the 3rd person, can’t stand guided imagery type meditation, and my dreams are usually isometric. Eliot’s ‘Preludes’ [though, if](#) you ask me, are the single human artifact to ever nail how space-time feels like from the inside.’ And I said, I said, “Blessed with the charisma and good looks of a domestic cat, Ansari is an outlier in standup’s spectrum of personae: he’s not mad at you for liking shitty music or misusing the word ‘irony,’ he doesn’t wonder what the fuck is Facebook for or makes a fool out of himself in front of black people because the etiquette of race is really complicated in this country, and he didn’t realize one day how actually super weird sex/dancing/marriage/owning dogs/birth/golf is when you look at it from the outside. Where most comedians achieve communion with their audience by appealing to our universal imposter syndrome, telling us they know we’re just pretending that we understand the world or have a clue what we are doing with our lives but there’s no need to be ashamed no more cause everybody else is faking too and

we're all brothers in our ignorance, Ansari has the talent to create a deep bond with the audience based on our shared human predicament of being competent at things. He's our first comedian-of-savvy. As a more-or-less observational stand up, Ansari's working a tradition founded on the pathos of not getting it ("I don't get Facebook/Kanye/Craigslist/R&B") — but Ansari's comedy demands facility, projects facility, is pretty much about facility. Ansari gets Facebook and Kanye and Craigslist and R&B pop stars and hipsters and art films, believes that you also get Facebook and Kanye and Craigslists and R&B pop stars and hipsters and art films, and is psyched to talk about how cool it is that we can understand each other well enough to talk about how cool all these things are." And I said, I said, 'nowadays we judge people on the quality of their self-judgement more than on anything else, no?' And I said to Mabel, I said, 'On My Girlfriend: I bet Walter Benjamin was hard to date.' And I said, I said, 'biographical notes on Simone de Beauvoir often get real excited about how although she professed to be all into having an open relationship, in truth her diaries and correspondences are bursting with expressions of intense romantic jealousy and misery on its account. Keeping this in mind, it's fun to imagine a hypothetical biographical investigation to the effect that although x professes to love playing video-games, in truth x is often cursing at the screen and throwing the controller on the floor in deep exasperation.' And I said, I said, 'I've only recently had cheffy food for the first time. My call is that it is for real a different thing from normal food. It's kind of like the difference between tv shows and movies (as traditionally conceived). I'm going to say more when I have things more figured out, but it all has to do with how taste becomes kind of a more cognitive experience when you sense that what you're eating's oriented towards realizing a maximally specific antecedent ideal object.'

——— And I said, I said, ‘when I go to sleep I do a lot of real bad—metamathematics. Last night I dreamed the set of all the things that aren’t members of the same set isn’t empty and it fucking freaked me—the fuck out.’ And I said, I said, ‘do people ever stop secretly feeling kinda badass about drinking alcohol?’ And I said to Mabel, I said, ‘top 1 Thing I Hate in Life: ritualistically iterated cultural criticism—superimposed on arbitrary objects in the target milieu. I’d name—names but then nobody will be friends with me.’ And I said, I said, “Taylor Swift is to urbane 20-something girls what T.S. Eliot is to experimental American poets in the 50s: hated by them for a good reason, but nevertheless great in a way that anyone outside the fray will see as congenial to their project.” And I said, I said, ‘my—dissertation’s gonna be about the phenomenon of getting attached to a concept, such that you’re more sure that you care about whatever it is that x will turn out to mean than you are about what x means. It’s going to be part intellectual history, part analysis of how this—phenomenon is manifested in literature or reflected upon by—literature. It could be good!’ And I said, I said, ‘Heidegger holds that the “not” that you find in the “not-p” of logic is one and the same as the nothing you feel in the nothingness of the mood of objectless—anxiety. Here are some further, original suggestions: “XOR” is the taste of a rare steak, the material conditional is the sensation of—waking up with a dry mouth, “NAND” is the jazz-piano solo in—‘Aladdin Sane.’ And I said, I said, “Continental philosophy is—philosophy which takes things that “stand out” in human life to also—“stand out” philosophically, and analytic philosophy is philosophy—that doesn’t.” And I said to Mabel, I said, ‘I invented a new game. It’s called “hungry or nausea?” and I hate it.’ And I said, I said, ‘an idea for the foundation of a systematic pragmatics: every utterance has the implicature that this situation is similar to other situations—where the utterance is used. This is very helpful in explaining why—synonyms can make a huge pragmatic difference.’ And I said, I said,—

‘the arts and humanities blues: it’s just so fucking tiring to spend my life trying to cater to some implicit unclear intuitive internal-criterion of making or saying or doing things that are ‘genuinely-interesting’ or ‘insightful.’ And I said, I said, ‘I’d sleep better if I had an audiobook of Terence Tao [narrating](#) bedtime stories.’ And I said, I said, ‘unnerving!’ And I said to Mabel, I said, ‘next birthday: I want either a MacArthur or a soda fountain.’—

——— And I said, I said, ‘this week’s trope: the slow climb of domestic flights toward real painfulness over the years does make you think about the grade school science rumor that it’s possible to cook a frog without pertrubing it by heating the pot very gradually, doesn’t it?’ And I said, I said, ‘half the time it just means acting-shocked that value judgements involve value judgements. “I will argue that our cultural sanctification of the individual reflects a hierarchy that privileges individuality...”’ And I said, I said, ‘fabolous prizes: can you name a philosophical tradition that’s not-founded by a Nazi?’ And I said, I said, ‘the success of Joan of Arc shows other women of the middle ages were just lazy.’ And I said to Mabel, I said, ‘it’s like ‘Entourage’ but misogynic.’ And I said, I said, ‘for Kant, the dispositions of a human mind are part contingent, part direct-expression of the structural invariants of cognitive beings qua cognitive beings. Kantain aesthetics is the view that art-not-entertainment is art-not-entertainment to the extent that structural-invariants of cognitive beings qua cognitive beings play a direct role in determining our experience of the artifact. Nowadays we have a kinda promising framework for distinguishing between essential-(vis-a-vis our being cognitive beings) and incidental dispositions of a human mind: theoretical computer science. Presumably, some-question about why our minds are such that we react to x in way y have answers that invoke interesting theoretical computer science issues as part of the explanation in a non-trivial way, and others—

don't. So: I submit that Neo-Kantian aesthetics is the hypothesis that proper explanations of the roots of our experiences of the most arts-artifacts will depend non-trivially on theoretical computer science. Neo-Kantian aesthetics is the only mystical belief that I allow myself.' And I said, I said, 'I've started a new side-blog, for [ideas](#) that lack resonance and charm but are, like, interesting in a drab way.' And I said, I said, "something for everyone: Lakatos's own key-examples of pseudoscience were Ptolemaic astronomy, Velikovsky's planetary cosmogony, Freudian psychoanalysis, 20th century Soviet Marxism, Lysenko's biology, Bohr's Quantum Mechanics post-1924, astrology, psychiatry, sociology and neo-classical economics.'" And I said, I said, 'this week: studying some math because I always wanted superpowers and I don't have perfect pitch.' And I said to Mabel, I said 'George Lucas' "Theory of the Novel" (Concept: Jessie-Ferguson, Paul Kerschen, Peli Grietzer)' And I said, I said, 'when you verge on seeing insights about taste-as-social-signal as denying that aesthetics is a real thing, one good trick is to recall how obviously taste-in-food-as-social-signal coexists with the reality of flavor.' And I said, I said, 'a related phenomenon is that it's an intuitive logical truth that the first name of John Mayer is John, or that the first name of Brad Pitt is Brad, but a counterintuitive logical truth that the first name of Robert De Niro is Robert.' And I said, I said, 'Nitsuh says: [SEE ALSO: figuring out](#) what approach to "good art" turns out to be the best match for your particular skills/flaws. (E.g., "I have a weak voice, therefore I have to find a musical-aesthetic where my weak voice is a point of interest instead of a problem")' And I said, I said, 'how much of artistic talent is about the things that you can do just happening to be the things that make art good, and how much of artistic talent is about ability to figure-out or sense what good art's gonna take and learn to do whatever that turns out to be?'

——— And I said to Mabel, I said, ‘notes on Das Racist: being a total stoner is our culture’s last remaining uncontested signifier of authenticity. I give it a year.’ And I said, I said, ‘a strategem for reconciling the two cultures: give kids in AP science classes ‘Prufrock’ after their first sexual rejection.’ And I said, I said, ‘Adventures with Abstract Books and the People Who Don’t Read Them III: I’m still waiting for the person who will argue that nobody enjoys coffee and it’s all a way for people who drink coffee to feel more sophisticated than the people who admit that coffee’s bitter. I’m still waiting for the person who will argue that nobody enjoys coffee and it’s all a way for people who drink coffee to feel more sophisticated than the people who admit that coffee’s bitter.’ And I said, I said, ‘Flön Chef: I love foodie shows so much because I’m not a foodie. I’m addicted to the beauty, cold and austere like that of a sculpture, of procedures I don’t understand applied to items I don’t recognize for purposes I can’t imagine.’ And I said, I said, ‘I used to think that the most unintuitive well argued thesis is the smartest one. Now I don’t like that heuristic anymore.’ And I said to Mabel, I said, ‘I always have to solve semi-coherent riddles or distorted logic problems or strategic situations in my dreams, and then I wake up so dead fucking tired from the effort. As far as I can tell that’s not a clinically recognized phenomenon, but it can’t be that I’m the only person in the world that has that.’ And I said, I said, ‘what I talk about when I talk about art: Jay Z’s ‘The Black Album’ and ‘Reasonable Doubt’ John Webster’s ‘The White Devil’ Viktor Shklovsky’s ‘The Zoo’ and ‘Theory of Prose’ The Bhagavad Gita Catullus’ polymetra and epigrams Daniil Kharms’ ‘Kind Feelings’ Alfred Bester’s ‘The Stars My Destination’ Clark Coolidge’s ‘Own Face’ David Bowie’s ‘Berlin Trilogy’ Belle & Sebastian’s ‘If You’re Feeling Sinister’ Gertrude Stein’s ‘Tender Buttons’ Henry Fielding’s ‘Tom Jones’ Borges’ ‘Dreamtigers’ Frank O’Hara’s ‘Mayakovskiy’ and ‘Memoir of Sergei O.’ and ‘Song (Is it dirty)’

Jacques Brel's *Les Bourgeois* Mitch Hedberg's standup John Cale's
 'Fear' and 'Paris 1919' and 'Helen of Troy' Alfred Jarry's *Doctor
 Faustroll* Fumito Ueda's *Shadow of the Colossus* Andy Warhol's
From A to B and Back Again Herzog's *Nosferatu* Dante's *Inferno*
 Duchamp's *Nu descendant un escalier n° 2* MIA's Arular Salinger's
Nine Stories Ovid's *Metamorphoses* Tarantino's *Inglorious Bastards*
 Swift's *Hints Towards an Essay on Conversation* Godard's 'Weekend'
 and 'La chinoise' Brian Eno's 'Here Come the Warm Jets' and
 'Taking Tiger Mountain (By Strategy)' Nathalie Sarraute's *L'Usage
 de la parole* Nas' 'New York State of Mind' Swedenborg's *A
 Theologian in Death* Andre Breton's *Nadja* Herzog's *Fitzcarraldo*
 Melville's 'Bartleby, the Scrivener' and 'Moby Dick' Hanoch Levin's
 'Queen of a Bathtub' and 'The Gigolo from Congo' Mississippi John
 Hurt's 'Pallet on the Floor' Bruce Andrews' *I Don't Have Any Paper*
 So Shut Up Tori Amos' *Under The Pink* Charlotte Bronte's *Villette*
 Lautremont's *Maldoror* The Ern Malley Hoax Poems Dorothy
 Parker's one liners Raymond Roussel's *Locus Solus* Liz Phair's *Whip
 Smart* Goethe's *Faust* David Avidan's 'Something for Someone' and
 'Impossible Poems' The Larry Sanders Show Emily Dickinson's *The
 Poems of Emily Dickinson* Deerhoof's live shows Georg Büchner's
 'Woyzeck' and 'Danton's Death' and 'Lenz' Cole Porter's 'You're The
 Top' Peter Milligan's *X-Statix* Fassbinder's *Why Does Herr Raab
 Run Amok* El Greco's 'A Lady in a Fur Wrap' Stoppard's 'Travesties'
 and 'Jumpers' Buñuel's *The Discreet Charm of the Bourgeoisie*
 Kleist's *Kohlhaas Lil'* Wayne's '3 Peat' David Melnick's 'PCOET'
 and 'A Pin's Fee' Stillman's *Metropolitan* Tears For Fears' 'Mad
 World' Tan Lin's *7 Controlled Vocabularies* Iggy Pop's *Lust for Life*
 John Donne's 'Oh My Black Soul!' Gilaad Kahan's *I Forgot How to
 Eat* Kafka's 'A Report to the Academy' and 'Jackals and Arabs' Oscar
 Wilde's *Salome* Ian McKellen doing Shakespeare Nisim Aloni's *The
 Deceased* *Gone Wild* Family Guy *Destroyer's* 'City of Daughters'
 Joyce's *Dedalus* chapters in *Ulysses* Eliot's *Prufrock and Other*

Observations Ashbery's 'As One Put Drunk Into the Packet Boat' and 'They Dream Only of America' Pavement's 'Brighten the Corners' Caroline Bergvall's 'Goan Atom' Zukofsky's "A" Johnny Cash's 'Cocaine blues' Pere Ubu's 'The Modern Dance' Kubrick's 'Paths of Glory' and 'Barry Lyndon' 'The Wire' Henry James' 'The Beast in the Jungle' Nabokov's 'Prin' Beckett's 'Nohow' On Beck's 'Mutations' Kinji Fukasaku's 'Battle Royale' Montaigne's 'Essays' Chappelle's 'Chappelle's Show' David Lynch's 'Wild At Heart' Jack Handy's 'Deep Thoughts' Tom Lehrer's 'Werner von Braun' and 'Vatican Rag' Tatlin's 'The Monument to the Third International' Stern's 'Tristram Shandy' Regina Spektor's 'Après Moi' Aristophanes' 'The Frogs' Wu-Tang Clan's 'I Can't Go To Sleep' Mondrian's 'Composition No. 8' Wes Anderson's 'The Royal Tenenbaums' Browning's 'The Bishop Orders his Tomb at Saint Praxed's Church' Rilke's 'Autumn Day' Joanna Newsom's 'The Milk-Eyed Mender' Pound's 'Pisan Cantos' Danger Doom's 'The Mouse and the Mask' Orson Welles' 'Macbeth' Alain Robbe-Grillet's 'Repetition' Homer's 'Odyssey' Kenny Goldsmith's 'No. 111.2.7.93-10.20.96' Malevich's 'Supermatist Painting' (1916) Guy Maddin's 'The Saddest Music in the World' and 'Coward's Bend The Knee' Peter Greenaway's 'Prosper's Books' Hahamishia Hakamerit-Marlowe's 'Doctor Faustus' Grant Morrison's 'The Filth' and 'Seaguy' Hideo Kojima's 'Metal Gear Solid' Valve's 'Portal' Elif Batuman's 'The Possessed' Alan Moore's 'Watchmen' 'The Ramones' 'Blitzkrieg Bop' Perec's 'W' Mayakovsky's 'Cloud in Trousers' Pushkin's 'Eugene Onegin' Will Ferrell's acting Chekov's 'Uncle Vanya' and 'Late Blooming Flowers' 'Vampire Weekend's 'Vampire Weekend' Ron Silliman's 'Tjanting' and 'Sunset Debris' Kruchenykh's 'Victory Against the Sun' Cortazar's 'Blame No One' Bercht's song lyrics Bergman's 'The Devil's Eye' Robert Musil's 'The Man Without Qualities' Michael Moorcock's 'Elric Saga' Jean Cocteau's 'Les Enfants Terribles' K Dick's 'The Simulacrum' Calvino's 'Six Memos for the Next Millenium' Frank Tashlin's 'Son of Paleface' 'Talking Heads' 'Once in a Life Time' and

‘Psycho-Killer’ Kurt Schwitter’s ‘The Ursonate’ Carol Reed’s ‘The Third Man’ Cervantes’ ‘Don Quixote’ Cam’ron’s ‘Purple Haze’ Ecclesiastes Jack Spicer’s ‘Imaginary Elegies’ and ‘Three Poems for Fish’ The Epic of Gilgamesh Billy Wilder’s ‘One Two Three’ and ‘The Private Life of Sherlock Holmes’ Lea Goldberg’s ‘The Sonnets of Therese du Meun’ Khlebnikov’s ‘Zoo’ Euripides’ ‘Medea’ Lope De Vega’s ‘Acting is Believing’ Coen Brothers’ ‘Miller’s Crossing’ and ‘Barton Fink’ The Story of Burnt Njal Cukor’s ‘The Philadelphia Story’ Arthur Russell’s ‘Janine’ Hezy Leskli’s ‘Dear Perverts’ and ‘The Mice and Lea Goldberg’ Keita Takahashi’s ‘Katamari Damacy’ Richard Kelly’s ‘Southland Tales.’

——— And I said, I said, ‘kill me now: the reason the humanities are so bad is it’s so hard to find out who’s genuinely good at the humanities that only people who are genuinely good at the humanities can do that, but there’s not enough of them for demographic power.’ And I said, I said, “‘fuck, [Alice](#), I just had a vision: in two years we’re gonna write a book together, called ‘The Book of Recreational Semiotics,’ and it’s going to be massively popular and make us set for life.” ‘ And I said, I said, ‘boring thesis: rappers like Jay-Z and Kanye West are into indie acts like Bon Iver cause indie acts like Bon Iver signify ‘smartness,’ and Jay-Z and Kanye want to show they’re smart. Cooler thesis: rappers like Jay-Z and Kanye West are into indie acts like Bon Iver cause indie acts like Bon Iver try hard to show they’re smart and rappers like Jay-Z and Kanye West try hard to show they’re smart, and they are bonding over this affinity of sentiments.’ And I said to Mabel, I said, ‘do you like feats of amazingness that change your understanding of what space means vis-a-vis the human body but just wish that parkour videos didn’t act like a bad 80’s action movie?’ And I said, I said, ‘here’s how you know if a Shakespeare rendition’s worth watching: Fast forward to the first byzantine turn of phrase. Does the speaking—

character look kinda pleased, the way a skateboarder who pulled a kickflip would? If yes then yes, if no then no.’ And I said, I said, ‘I like my beers cold and my Shakespeare middlebrow.’ And I said, I said, ‘also wait till you all read my ‘Aziz Ansari and the Comedy of Facility’ in there around next week. It’s gonna be amazing!’—

And I said, I said, ‘ha weird, I forgot that I spent about three months every year till around high-school freaking out about the fact that I’m eventually gonna die.’ And I said to Mabel, I said, ‘say no to Calvinist cultural criticism. There are two senses to ‘critiquing’ some aesthetic preference x : there’s saying things that are supposed to make people who have aesthetic preference x develop a new, different aesthetic preference instead, and there is saying things that are supposed to make people who have aesthetic preference x feel bad about themselves for being of the damned who have aesthetic preference x .’ And I said, I said, ‘note on a future polemic: hyperbole is an important concept to remember, as the only term we have to designate a middle ground between “they’re saying it and meaning it” and “they are saying it and meaning just the opposite.” I hope that when the talk about [Das Racist’s fratty fuck tales](#), class, race, masculinity and hipsters starts, people will argue over what Das Racist’s use of fratty alpha maleness as hyperbole for artsy-geeky-stonery alpha maleness means, instead of argue over whether it’s real fratty alpha maleness or ironic fratty alpha maleness or “ironic” fratty alpha maleness.’ And I said, I said, ‘artistic talent has two parts. The first part is comparable to being good at a severely narrow branch of cognitive psychology: knowing what’s funny, knowing flavor, knowing style. The second part is more comparable to being good at solving Rubik’s cubes: playing with syntax till the right phrasing appears, computing what ingredients are gonna taste like cooked together, mixing and matching geometric properties to find out what dresses can coherently exist. We can MAYBE say the first is

being good at the semantics of your artform, and the second's being good at that form's syntax. What's really interesting though is that the first concerns an understanding of the human mind whereas the latter is about an understanding of your medium — sounds, foods, fabrics, language or whatever — as a physical (or formal) system. That's clear enough when we think about Bach or how to cook a pot roast, but it's also true in cases that are not as obviously physical as trying not to burn a pot roast and are not as clearly formal as composing counterpoints.' And I said, I said, 'explanandum: ex-religious people tend to be real cocky people. Explanation: ranking your own judgement over that of all the smartest people that you know worked out, so you stick with it.' And I said, I said, 'Adventures with Abstract Books and the People Who Don't Read Them II: imagine you only heard operas. Then the first time that you hear a symphony or something you'd go "wtf? I can't make out words and it's only nonsensical sounds; to like this gibberish postmodern 'opera' you've got to be pretentious assholes who pretend they understand what these sounds say and won't admit that these sounds aren't words." And I said to Mabel, I said, 'I love [the way Scott Aaronson represents computer science theory](#). It's like it's to Hegelian dialectics what tech is to magic: close enough and real instead of make-believe.' And I said, I said, 'the books I can't stand are the ones that — as a habit — say something concrete while knowing full well what abstracta are expressed by the concrete thing they just said. (So, like, all 'normal' literary fiction.) Like, if the abstracta were good enough you'd just say the abstracta, cause you'd want my mind to be all fresh and anxious to find out where these abstracta take me rather than exhausted from the busywork of getting from the concrete thing to the abstracta. But you know you got banal abstracta so you take me for a ride to tire me out first.' And I said, I said, 'patent pending.' And I said, I said, 'the reason David Bowie's never called a literary genius is he lacked Bob Dylan's

gift for singing louder than the instruments.’ And I said, I said, ‘some raw ingredients: Psychoanalysis is not good science. Freud used cocaine a lot. Freud was very smart. Cocaine is known to make you overconfident. Freud had poor quality control.’ And I said to Mabel, I said, ‘do you think of it as grilled-cheese sandwich or as grilled cheese-sandwich?’ And I said, I said, ‘let’s all read my essay again: Just give it to us straight, Ezra Koenig. Are you saying rich girls deserve their money, or are you saying rich girls are dumb whores? Do you taunt the 57% of America that can’t take real summer vacations, or do you mock the 43% that go on holidays? Was “Mansard Roof” an endorsement of roofs or an anti-roof satire? 800px-Mansard_(PSF) sans toit Mansard Roof Anti-Roof The Vampire Weekend wars are about class, maybe, but they are also about classification: the lyrics in Contra keep trying to do things we don’t allow pop lyrics to do. We can all adore Jean Renoir (prep-school kid, Popular Front activist, had a rags-to-riches dad) for making films that treat the rich with worship, scorn, anger, affection and grief, but apparently we’re not gonna let a pop album start getting all fancy on us trying to pull that shit off. Books and films are supposed to confound us with layers of ideas and conflicting emotions; pop lyrics need to fess up or shut up. Them’s just the rules. There’s Ezra Pound and then there’s Ezra Koenig and the whole way that we talk about pop lyrics is about not getting these mixed up. So Koenig pleading that his lyrics “aren’t ‘about’ anything but have levels of meaning” can come off like someone yelling “Checkmate!” in the middle of a poker game —obnoxious or confused or both at once. But if I have to choose between Vampire Weekend and the logic of our pop-talk I choose the Vampires. Partly because Vampire Weekend can be kind of great, but mostly cause I really hate the logic of our pop-talk: mixing up the fun and the pretentious is exactly what makes pop culture the best culture ever. Artsy lyrics are as much a part of pop as the distortion pedal. Since

at least the '60's (early Kinks, late Beatles, "The Velvet Underground And Nico") pop songs have been awesomely and miserably Warhol-damaged, Joyce-Damaged, Brecht-damaged and Dada-damaged. If you love these damages you call them avant-garde and if you hate these damages you call them Art School, which is fair enough—people do become artsy in Art School. But the point is that the last 150 years of trying out new ways to make meanings in art made a big fucking impression on a lot of kids, and a lot of these kids started bands. And other, younger kids who couldn't care who Gertrude Stein was get the virus listening to Patti Smith and Bowie and the Pixies, and sometimes one of those kids turns out to be Kurt Cobain and then weird abstract lyrics infect the entire pop bloodstream. And the Wu-Tang Clan weren't nothing to fuck with either. But the way that we talk about pop lyrics never caught up. It's not that we don't talk about the artsy lyrics of the artsy kids and all their artsy-kids bands. It's just that in our pop-talk "artsy" mostly means "a crush on Charlotte Gainsbourg" or "this band sings about reading Georges Bataille books." Because pop-talk is lazy about lyrics, and discussing lifestyles takes a lot less effort than discussing writing styles. It's so easy to profile the Godard-affectations of Liberal Arts youths, and it's harder to honestly ask what a "Week End" fixation might say about a band's approach to sense and nonsense and ideas and images. And if you hate Godard films in the first place, then the easy way is better—but I love Godard films so I'd love to find a little bit of "Week End" in my pop. Most of what Contra is up to owes more to traditional novels (Waugh, Fitzgerald) than to weird films or experimental poetry, but the whole thing lives or dies on the natural liberties of avant-damaged lyrics: abstraction, collage, contradiction, self-reference. Koenig doesn't string his crisp, descriptive sentences into narratives but stacks them in layers. Which is beautiful and resonant and complex, and also means that Contra can't do anything to stop you if you want to believe it's a

country-club anthem. So music critics Googled for the price of Wolford Tights and compiled lists of vacation destinations, but never asked themselves why does this pool-party-album keep compulsively referring to The Clash. Or why do songs that start with “every dollar counts, and every morning hurts” end with a trust fund, and songs about holidays flash to Iraq. Or why it’s called “Contra.” “Contra” talks about conflicts a lot—small and comfortable ones at first, like wanting to be rich so you can buy the modern art that you don’t want rich people owning (“White Sky”), or loving your self-made-man father but hating the cultural myth that this kind of success represents (“Dad was a risk taker/ his was a shoemaker”). We also get all sorts of breakups between Koenig and rich girlfriends, and arguments with girls and music-critics about class, and a couple of political and sexual identity-crisis. But what really puts the “contra” in Contra is the things that Koenig does with words: On “Horchata” it’s the way that Koenig rhymes “drinking horchata” (road trips, multicultural culture, left-liberal college kids) to “foot on Masada” (Birthright Israel trips where they tell Jewish kids to marry Jewish). On the break-uppy “I Think Ur a Contra,” it’s accusing the ex “you’re a contra” (you’re a hater), and then accusing the ex “you’re not a contra” (you’re not a revolutionary), and then defending —from the ex? from critics?—with “don’t call me a contra” (don’t call me anti-revolutionary). All throughout Contra words fight it out with each other or divide against themselves. masada Horchata Masada Even the punk song “Cousins” is a hissy fit that self-destructs with wordplay: everything Koenig is yelping works both as a rant against posh music critics with self-righteous attitudes and as a hysterical caricature of the Vampires themselves. Koenig sings “You, greatest hits 2006, little listmaker” and you can’t tell if it’s an insult for a critic that made the list (wrote the list) or for a Vampire that made-the-list (got listed). Which is kind of the point that the repeating chorus of “Me and my cousins and you and your

cousins...” is trying to make—that personal animosity requires a whole lot of common context. Vampire Weekend can get pretty bitchy when it comes to critics who demand to hear them tell rich people to go fuck themselves, but Contra is obsessed with punk and politics in its own terms. You don’t call an album “Contra” and then pack it up with references to The Clash unless you’re aching for a face-off with Joe Strummer’s angry ghost. And every time the shadow of The Clash shows up to haunt the lyrics (“Taxi Cab,” “Diplomat’s Son,” “I Think Ur a Contra”) Koenig gets dead serious and apologetic, and melancholically tries to explain why he can’t do heroic political anger. Koenig is in love with being in the middle—all “You’re not a victim, but neither am I” and “Never pick sides, never choose between two, but I just wanted you”—and honestly he’s doing a good job there. If you’re going to occupy a middle ground in life, then it’s a great idea to use it for creating nuanced, fragile songs about how politics and love and money interact while also constantly reminding us about The Clash.’ And I said, I said, ‘a radical new account: no one’s ever stoned enough to really talk stoned in good faith. What getting stoned does is to make you stoned enough to think that talking stoned is funny.’ And I said, I said, ‘1. They successfully negotiated a girl’s last transitional object and first sexual crush into a single body. 2. He walks like a plush toy but talks like a man, is what I am saying. 3. The rhetoric’s in perpetual superposition between Usher and Barney the Purple Dinosaur. The distance from “I love you, you love me,” to “You know you love me,/I know you care,” isn’t much of a distance.’

And I said, I said, ‘today I recalled how I got to become literary: I was listening to David Bowie at thirteen and realized I have to figure out what makes the sentence “Time takes a cigarette, puts in your mouth” explode my mind.’ And I said to Mabel, I said, ‘call for papers: why is ‘The Fresh Prince of Bel-Air’ burned into our

generation's sense of self?' And I said, I said, 'the most beautiful sound in the world is the three-tiered laughter of audiences at an underplayed joke. **First wave:** people getting the joke. **Second wave:** people informed by the first wave that there's a joke they didn't get getting the joke. **Third wave:** people informed by the second wave that even if you didn't get the joke immediately you might still get it if you think of it again getting the joke. It's the closest that you'll ever get to hearing neurons firing.' And I said, I said, 'listen once for the punchline, twice for the narrative structure, and another hundred times for all the ghosts-of-untold-stories screaming beneath every word.' And I said, I said, 'developmental psychology: did you also think everything vague on TV or in books or in songs was about having sex, after vague things you asked about turned out to be about having sex?' And I said, I said, 'the world is intractably busy and large. The supernatural pares the world down to a tractable, narrativizable size: In True Blood every state in the U.S. has an extended-family worth of vampires in its body politic; in Harry Potter every country is a boarding school's alumni club. Like celebrities or the idea of the mafia, supernatural shows give a world that is networked and global but so small that everyone matters. The supernatural's about community, is what I'm saying.' And I said to Mabel, I said, "Once he created a gun machine," chuckles Bowie. "He had a chair like this and a little rack in front with a .45 aimed there, right at the head of whoever was to sit in the chair. And there was a sign on it that said: 'This gun has a bullet in the chamber and it is timed to go off sometime between now and 100 years time.'" Bowie starts cackling maniacally. "And it was your choice to go and sit in the chair for a second or two, or going, like [sneaking into the chair for a millisecond, then dashing back out] Hahahahahaha!! Just to say that they did it. Cause you didn't know when it was gonna go off." And I said, I said, "It's Always Sunny in Philadelphia' is the best depiction ever of the truth that friendship's not about affection

but about a shared epistemology. Strength of friendship = number of inference patterns you share.’ And I said, I said, ‘one last big heist: I want to win at everything so I can take my ego out of it.’ And I said, I said, ‘1. The very you are very different. They have more to them. Architects also raise dogs but they know not to think much of it they can’t look out in NY it was made with a lake for a heart and a taste for the uncanny. Old resources have it going for them still. In the continent’s strong air your personality on tape uncomfortably high-pitched, thin chance at eluding psychology drawn from the world famous smoke of tobacco. The very very you are. Very different from the very me. All the objects left Europ we looked at the tan-lines left after them by the sun of the mind it is not tired to do this it is almost new 2. Dear acquaintances your second language. First europ Dear acquaintagonists after the money’s gone and you’re as good. The best of your ridiculous powers all there after a sleep so good that it was practically unverifiable. Get stabbed in the habitus once and me as a culture is over it [and out and over] 3. Leaving in bad faith from x-ing to trying-to-x never looked or aside. So much theater left in this old piece of junk. 4. years after years that it took us to solute the difference. grone-over. speak soon. miss yours and yourare. age- ing ag-ain-’t to far. to here’s and hers lookit up akrazors. run out. 5. your gohs rixes zfis to mi qwi irz run asfor itme lo— es hithered rinse landings dier ef tix araf oh haartiest 6. but but-an-after-dinner-smoke. but we have standards. but but the details will speak on their own.’

And I said, I said, ‘make your own Zizek paper: Write down a list of things going from best to worst. Switch places between the last item and the second item.’ And I said, I said, ‘a question for perople who want to have kids: aren’t you afraid they’ll turn out not too smart or interesting?’ And I said to Mabel, I said, ‘C-beams Glitter in the Dark Near the Tannhauser Gate: reading Bourdiue is

the real version of what people who read Derrida pretend to be doing. Every page is like a thousand galaxies exploding and will age you by a million years.’ And I said, I said, ‘what if there were “preciousness charges” like there are obscenity charges? And I were the best goddamn defense lawyer in the county?’ And I said, I said, ‘oulipean challenge: let’s write scathing reviews without the word “privilege” for a month.’ And I said, I said, “Inception’ was smart the way gangsta rap lyrics about fallen homies are honest.’ And I said, I said, ‘who will teach me about dialectics using ‘Eat, Pray, Love?’ And I said to Mabel, I said, ‘Peli Grietzer Comp. Lit English 220 : Cultural Mobility Nothing Personal: Interpreting agency in ideology. In this paper I will present and discuss the English colonial tract ‘New England’s First Fruits’ as exemplifying a type of textual encounter (a conjunction of a text and of a readerly context) that unhinges our understanding of what it is for a text to express social forces. The type of text/context I have in mind could be called an encounter with the ‘insidiously misguided’: historical documents that we read simultaneously as embodying a calculating malice of (often) world-historical order and as embodying a catastrophically misguided good-faith belief in an ideology. I will argue that a modern reader encounters the impeccably pollyannaish text ‘New England’s First Fruits’ as chilling, cynical, manipulative and at times almost ironic, even while recognizing the probable good faith of its author. While a general sense of impersonal insidiousness can be well explained as awareness that ‘First Fruits’ is historically (and perhaps structurally) entangled with catastrophic or criminal aspects of New England colonialism, its power to transform our interpretive grasp of the text’s rhetoric, meanings, logic and tone is fantastically strange to experience and stranger to theorize. In the pressure of the encounter, what Foucault called ‘the author function’ becomes destabilized, and does not automatically anchor the individual writer’s control over even the first-order meaning of his

text. Without a traditionally configured ‘author function’ to demarcate the distinction between textual meaning and the various objective meanings a text generates as externalities —be it historical significance, political function, or determination in the order of discourse —our reading becomes vexed. Readerly experience of ‘First Fruits’, I will suggest, collapses the fundamental division between a self-presenting textual meaning sanctioned by the author and between an underlying ideological structure that takes disinterring. The hermeneutic and the archeological become a single, laid-bare textual surface tense with contradictions of agency, purpose, meaning, intention and action. Working from the ground up, I will try to establish and develop this problematics in relation to three interdependent concerns: readerly experience, textual meaning, and authorial production. My discussion will (with some effort), flow back and forth between these foci in order to trace their interactions. I take it that readerly experience, for all its capriciousness, is the compass by which we form our conceptual understanding of the text as a hermeneutic object —and that readerly experience is, in turn, responsive to changes in our understanding. And I take it that interpretation (‘hermeneutics’), although it deals in semantic and intentional concepts that never reduce to bare empirical facts, must be thoroughly grounded in insight about the text’s production. To an extent, this paper is an exploration of just how robust can we demand of these interconnections to prove. The first of this paper’s two parts presents the initial problem, and through a dialectic of incomplete solutions and new difficulties fleshes out the interpretive gridlock in ‘New England’s First Fruits’, while also going some of the distance towards an explanatory account. In the paper’s second part, I go on to argue that the dead-ends we encounter in trying to coherently theorize an interpretation of ‘First Fruits’, are isomorphic to explanatory lacunas that Pierre Bourdieu’s ‘Theory of Practice’ critiques in previous

theories of agency. I then suggest what an interpretive approach inspired by Bourdieu might look like, theoretically and methodologically, and finally try apply such an approach to interpreting ‘New England’s First Fruits’. Before moving on to the study itself, however, a reflexive apology/apologetics is due. The inquiry I am offering is overwhelmingly theoretical in its interests, and could almost be better defined as theory of literary scholarship than as literary scholarship. As a result, many practices that are natural givens for contemporary literary criticism will be in its course ‘rediscovered’ from the ground up—not, I hope, as a reinvention of the wheel, but as a study into the understanding of interpretation and of textual meaning that underlies critical reading practices. ‘New England’s First Fruits’: Meaning, history, and action

The 1643 colonial tract ‘New England’s First Fruits’, variously attributed to John Eliot, Thomas Weld and Hugh Peter is made in three parts: a report on the conversion of the Indians, a report on the then-new Harvard College, and a report on the state of agriculture, industry and trade in New England. It is the section ‘On the conversion of the Indians’ that will be the central primary source used in this paper, as an anchor for the methodological inquiry and as the measure of the inquiry’s practical benefit. Because the unique features of ‘First Fruits’ and the methodological questions motivating this paper are intended to interactively bring one-another into view, both the latter and the former remain somewhat abstract as we begin. But the purpose of this paper is to progress from the abstract to the concrete in every sense, culminating with a close reading in ‘On the conversion of the Indians’ using a new (that is to say, newly argued for) method of interpretation. ‘On the conversion of the Indians’ is primarily a series of anecdotes of demonstrations of Christian piety by individual Indians—the titular ‘first fruits’ of New England—and of the role of Puritan ministers in effecting those conversions. This

following is a typical example: ‘Divers of the Indians Children, Boyes and Girles we have received into our houses, who are long since civilized, and in subjection to us, pain- full and handy in their business, and can speak our language familiarly ; divers of whom can read English, and begin to understand in their measure, the grounds of Christian Religion; some of them are able to give us account of the Sermons they heare, and of the word read and expounded in our Families, and are convinced of their sinfull and miserable Estates, and affected with with the sense of God’s displeasure, and the thoughts of Eternity and will sometimes tremble and melt into teares at our opening and pressing the Word upon their Consciences; and as farre as we can discerne, some of them use to pray in secret, and are much in love with us, and cannot indure to returne any more to the Indians.’ (p.5)With ‘On the conversion of the Indians’ packed to the brim with similar passages, I believe ‘New England’s First Fruits’ poses an immediate and urgent puzzle for a modern reader. These stories are told as theological testimonies pointing towards the redemption of the colonized and the ultimate harmony colonized and colonizer when all will be Christians. But Given that ‘First Fruits’ends with a thanks-giving to God for sending a plague to kill Indians and make room for the English (p. 37), conjuncted to a presentations on the topic of New England’s infinite growing-potential, one hardly gets the sense that the Indians’ well being in this world or the next is of primary concern. Furthermore, I would speculate that few modern readers sense nothing unnerving in the conversion-narrations themselves, and quite apart from any animus a reader might have towards Christianity qua Christianity. Indeed, scholarly references to ‘First Fruits’ casually cite the tract as composed of (e.g) ‘accounts of vanquished savages’ that are ‘littered with Indian corpses as the trophies of war,’ (Stevens, p. 115) despite there being only a single mention of violence in the text. In reading many of these narratives

of nominally joyous or theologically deep Indian conversion one might feel that there is an underlying story of trauma and coercion being recounted at the same time—and that one hardly needs to dig very deep to let this story peer out, at least to modern eyes. But more importantly, even when (or if) we are inclined to accept the factual psychological accounts regarding the converting Indians, a more profound sense of insidiousness remains. ‘First Fruits’ describes the conversions as benevolent events auspicious for the Indians as a people, leading to civilization and salvation. But I believe it is phenomenologically self-evident that as we read ‘First Fruits’ we take ‘conversion’ to mean ‘political domination’, in a strong sense that has hermeneutic implications: one doesn’t think of the utopian naivety of the tract’s author, or of a failed dream that turned into disaster. ‘First Fruits’ appears to almost-chillingly herald an enterprise of cultural and ultimately geopolitical takeover, rather than tragically misconstrue a historically catastrophic course as auspicious for all. If, as per Althusser, to understand the workings of ideology in a text is to grasp the text’s systematic misrecognition of the world, then the puzzle in ‘First Fruits’ is exactly the readerly sense that ‘misrecognition’ is an inadequate description of this text’s relation to the historical situation around it. We intuitively read these passages of ‘First Fruits’ as not meaning what they say, and furthermore as meaning what they don’t say. ‘First Fruits’ does not read as an incorrect description of the Indians’ new predicament portending the dawn of their salvation; it reads as an apposite description of a people gradually subjugated on the road to de-facto removal. The idea of missionary conversion as a method of control based on what Greenblatt calls ‘subversion and containment’ operations asserts itself immanently in ‘First Fruits’—one needn’t even ‘peer’ beyond the text to any determining infrastructure of power to disinter it. To the contrary, that conversion has this useful capacity appears to be a message of the text, an advertisement

delivered with a certain rhetorical dexterity. If this apparent meaning really is a feature of the text, its communication in 'First Fruits' might be intended as a progress report, as a secret confession, as a tactful way of speaking of unpleasant matters or as an indulgence in irony. But is there any sense in applying intentional concepts of this variety to the presence of this content? Is there a human act of communication in this unveiling of historical violence? A modern reader faces this text not only uneasily but unsurely. It appears undeniable that a purpose of 'Fruits' is to imply to London clearly and deliberately that in religious preaching New England found a method for controlling the native population. But so far this is a watch without a watchmaker — a clear sense of intentional agency without a clear sense of where this intentionality originates. The calculating maliciousness that is a phenomenally manifest object of our reading experience demands some kind of hypostatization: that is to say, it needs to be located somewhere in the authorial end of the text. Since we still must also take into account the known psychological complexities of the writer, the problematic task becomes finding a place within or beside or around the psychologically distinguishable writer in which to place the historical criminality, so to speak. Or as more structuralist sensibility would define the same: the problematic task of tracing in the historical crime the shape of a psychologically distinguishable writer. It is hard to hold the unqualified hypothesis that whoever Puritan scholar composed the tract was consciously in the business of promoting or reporting on a psychological war to neutralize the indians into eradication by attrition. Even if one prefers to ascribe a far milder 'coded' purpose to the writers, the attribution remains awkward. Any purpose vicious enough to account for the resonant conjunction of talk of indians dying of plagues, talk of the need for a living space, talk of the growing colony, talk of the power of the priests over the indians, and talk of the relation of defeat to

conversion is impossible to fit-in wholesale with Puritan self-perception. Even attention to the flow of the text halts any such attempt at a straightforwardly cynical reading, as the dynamics of 'On the conversion of the indians' undeniably follows a properly religious logic: the narration of the anecdotes demonstrates a great interest in various shades and degrees of salvation attained by the indians and their grasp of Christian theology. On two separate occasions (p.8, p.12) 'First Fruits' even makes a great show of an Indian expressing knowledge that despite his full obedience to Christian morality and commandments he is not saved until he directly experience the working of Christ on his soul ('Me die, and walk in fire ... because I know not Jesus Christ') —the supposed spontaneity of the understanding reached by the savage thus used to reaffirm this hallmark of Puritan theology. If there is a level at which the religious will plainly reduce to the geo-political, it is not that of the writers' intentionally designed architecture of the text. The contrasting possibility is to find a form of 'objective meaning' that will be adequate to carry the load of agency. By 'objective meaning' I am referring the the whole range of relations between action and significance that is opened up by what Lévi-Strauss calls in *Tristes Tropiques* '.. the Marxist critique, which frees man for his initial bondage —by teaching him that the apparent meaning of his condition evaporates as soon as he agrees to see things in a wider context.' (p. 412) The structural conditions of life systematically shape agency not only in its point of origin but also in its point of impact, making possible an account not only of objective explanation transcending individual psychology but of objective purpose transcending individual intention. A readerly sense of textual meaning may turn out to track, in a text whose present context of reading violently embeds it in a 'wider context' (in Lévi-Strauss' sense) through our historical memory, some such form of meaning: cooperative, natural, economic, historical, evolutionary,

social, ecological, and on and on. Every field with a profound enough sway on our sense of 'what the world is about' stands a chance make a claim on the meaning of actions, of speech, and consequently on textual meaning. A crude but effective form of objective meaning is that of pure natural association; one could argue that 'salvation' when it appears in this text means 'subjugation' like the sight of smoke means fire. On such an account we read certain words, sentences, and phrases in 'Fruits' through what Paul Grice called 'natural meaning' and Charles Peirce called 'indexing': the relation of a sign and its referent by virtue of their consistent correlation in nature. Perhaps the history stretching between 'Fruits' and its modern readers fixes the reference of all talk of the 'expanding Christianity unto the indians' variety occurring there and then to mean de-facto genocide or at least geopolitical domination, no matter what the speaker intended it to mean. Intentional meaning and natural meaning are usually coextensive when human language is concerned, given that one of the prime purposes of a word is to point out the existence of its object in some present or past coordinate (supposedly most utterances of the word 'horse' are causally related to a horse one way or another). But it may be that when the two come apart natural meaning takes the lead in terms of salience, eclipsing the subtle logic of interpretive intentional meaning by the power of its unmitigated claim on reality. Even on the scope of their entire history of uses in English words like 'salvation' have a somewhat questionable record of correlations (at least in the eyes of a non-Christian). But the words in 'First Fruits' can be regarded as instances of a more specific sub-type than that defined by their recurrences within English utterances: we might want to fix the historical natural meaning of an expression like 'long since civilized' (p.6) based on recurrence of the word 'civilized' in utterances specifically by colonialists. The consistency of colonialist catastrophes and the magnitude of the

worst colonialist catastrophes are more than enough to demarcate from the rest of the language all colonialist talk of bringing civilization to savages, transforming appropriate instances of its vocabulary from hermeneutics-worthy expression of an individual consciousness into direct markers of catastrophe. Still, taking such a view of language comes at a price. Historical natural meaning promises a transformation of (some) language to a brute pointing at reality, uncomplicated by agency and intention. As such, the 'passion of the linguistic real' that seeks to anoint a text's natural meaning as its proper meaning is inherently violent. Indeed this passion's most iconic (and hypnotic) expression is in the anti-Semitic rants of the Modernist-Fascist author Louis Ferdinand Céline : 'Penser 'sozial'! cela veut dire dans la pratique, en termes bien cms: 'penser juif ! pour les juifs! par les juifs, sous les juifs!' Rien d'autre! Tout le surplus immense des mots, le vrombissant verbiage socialistico-humanitaro-scientifique .. n'est que l'enrobage mirageux, le charabia fatras poussif...' (qtd in Apter, p.31). Of course ,this is not to serve as an indictment of the mode, or in any way as a refutation of the possibility that a sense of historical natural meaning is the best empirical explanation of the phenomenology of discomfort in reading 'First Fruits". But there is a sort of flattening of history that occurs when the subprocesses and lateral movements that constitute a culture are overlooked as epiphenomenal, in favor of the clean contours of imperialism as seen from a great distance. Natural meaning unmediated by any dependence on the role of the speech acts as actions or as elements in a process gives up not only making sense of individual agency, but making sense of anything at all. A more fine grained way to understand 'First Fruits' impersonally is as a speech-act to be interpreted according to the collective activity of New England colonialism, rather than that of any one individual—an activity that doesn't replicate the 'ideological blindness' of the subjects that constitute it, and transcends the agency of the

individual writer of a text through which it finds expression. Indeed there is a clear sense in which any ‘objective meanings’ that ‘First Fruits’ bears in the context of its relation to the colonialist enterprise can be seen as the text’s meanings simpliciter: the writing of ‘First Fruits’ is not just some structural consequent of New England colonialism, but an act of consciously and explicitly taking-up the role of New England’s representative. On this view even if the claim for expanding Christianity for the benefit of the Indians was in good faith meant by the writers of the tract, what the claim means is a derivative of what this claim served to precipitate — a derivative of the function that such claims had in the structure of the colonialist enterprise that systematically produced people who produced such claims. There may be some use here for an analogy prominent in the philosophy of biology, between the purposefulness of an intentionally designed object (the purposes of ‘First Fruits’ as designed by its writer) and between evolutionary ‘purpose’ as determined by blind natural — or in this case, social — selection (the purposes of ‘First Fruits’ as selected-for by social processes): in both cases an effect of some object or feature is its ‘purpose’ if the fact that this type of object/feature has this type of effect explains the production of the current object/feature. People build computers because computers process information, mammals have hearts because hearts pump blood. Let us consider the applicability of this approach for contending with two particularly insidious-sounding anecdotes in ‘On the conversion of the Indians’: ‘One of them, who for some misdemeanor that laid him open to publique punishment, ran away; and being gone, God so followed him, that of his owne accord he returned home, rendered himselfe to Justice, and was willing to submit himself, though he might have escaped. An Indian Maid at Salem, would often come from the Word, crying out with abundance of tears, concluding that she must burn when she die, and would say, she knew her self naught for present; and like

to be miserable for ever, unless free Grace should prevent it; and after this grew very careful of her carriage, proved industrious in her place, and so continued.’(p. 7) ‘[The Indian captain Wequash], a few years since, seeing and beholding the mighty power of God in our English Forces, how they fell upon the Puquits, when diverse hundreds of them were slaine in an houre... from the time he was convinces and persuaded that our god was a most dreadful God. (...) He grew greatly in the knowledge of Christ ... hating and loathing himself for his dearest sins, which were especially these two lust and revenge.’(pp. 11-13) The details of these accounts are at no point bereft of religious interest, which is presumably the writer’s own motivation for recounting them. They are sufficiently determined by the value of obedience to one’s betters as evidence of obedience to god, and by the theologically legitimate embodiment of god’s favor in military success. Yet it is also unarguably the case that these passages have the effect of pointing out the capacity of conversion to facilitate harnessing the Indians as a labour force, and of pointing out the capacity of military dread to facilitate conversions among the indians and to thus remove their martial inclinations. If these effects are not just historical accidents, the phenomenology of our natural reading (as historically-informed modern readers) could be understood as locking-on to the appropriate scope, at which these effects can be seen to consolidate into purposeful meanings by getting systematically selected-for. It is enough if there is some point of selection along the infinitely long social causation leading to ‘First Fruits’, at which the text’s ‘factors of production’ were socially reproduced because of their conduciveness to power. I believe that even a very modestly ‘Materialist’ view of social history can assume orders within orders of processes that socially-select for ideas that benefit the hegemony, calibrating one another’s operation ever more precisely. As bad as we are at saying how these selections concretely operate (Althusser says

school, cops, and the pantheistic totality), we can often see clearly enough the joints within joints where ideology turns and turns again toward power. Different theories of politically critical 'objective hermeneutics' would articulate joints of different orders of magnitude as their horizon of meaning. In this sense the question of a text's meaning (its purposeful effects), and even of the meaning of particular elements within it, can become a question of priorly choosing the scope at which we define the process of textual production. Indeed, one could argue that Frederick Jameson's hermeneutical method in 'The Political Unconscious' pre-determines in just this way its hypothesis that '[political interpretation is] the absolute horizon of all reading and all interpretation.' (p.17) Fixing the meaning of a semiotic object to the political reproduction of the eonic 'sign system' to which it belongs, as per Jameson, will by definition produce interpretations that are both political and absolute. On the view that I am suggesting, by contrast, the ultimate origin of a text's objective meaning is wherever we define it to be. Still, for every reading that seeks to go beyond attribution of individual bad faith, one particular nexus of selection remains a bare necessity: what Bourdieu calls 'the habitus', right at the cutoff point between the psychological autonomy of the writer and the impersonality of social structure. A modestly Materialist reading of 'First Fruits' will posit that the reproduction of the upper-class-Christian habitus in 17th century England is conditioned on, or at least precipitated by, the fact that this habitus systematically produces behaviors that strengthen the ruling class—and in particular that one such systematically produced useful behavior is the invention, practice and documentation of strategies for general social domination of weak individuals or groups (without intending to specifically do so). A Puritan acting out of religious passion will consciously act to realize the mandate according that those without religious authority must come to defer to the religiously

authoritative class for their salvation. In following this mandate the Puritan will unintentionally but consistently track a different principle that is systematically correlated with the religious mandate: the general subjection of the sociopolitically weak to a sociopolitically powerful stratum. Like the judgements of taste studied by Bourdieu in 'Distinction' that aim only to judge artifacts as tasteful or distasteful, but inevitably operate with a notion of 'distasteful' that correlates with 'upper class' and a notion of 'distasteful' that correlates with 'lower middle class', the severe hierarchies involved in Puritan salvation inevitably cut along the lines of material power and disempowerment. If such correlations have consequences, and if their reproduction is encouraged by these consequences, we can properly designate as 'social meaning' the informative and performative effects with which such correlations imbue the talk of brining salvation to the Indians in 'First Fruits'. The writing of 'First Fruits' is both a report on actions performed in following the religious mandate, and in itself such an action, being an attempt to advertise the conversion project and gain support for it in London. If the religious mandate indeed takes a new meaning when viewed from the scope of its social reproduction (as opposed to the scope of an individual's psychological devotion to the mandate), then the text of 'First Fruits' inherits these social meanings as a form of textual meaning. A description of how the New England ministers are bringing the spiritually ignorant into the fold is for socially systematic reasons bound to be a description of the political subjugation of a weak population by a stronger population. Consequently, to encourage the addressees in London to support a project by describing it in those bound terms is (due to this same social systematicity) to encourage the London audience to support political subjugation of the weak to the strong. Because it is based on 'translations' through correlations, this theoretical scheme is uniquely suited for the combined task of both giving an

empirical explanation of how the manifest sense of insidiousness in reading 'First Fruits' arises, and providing this sense with a properly cognitive object to follow. If the assertions made in 'First Fruits' participate not only in the structure of correspondences (correspondences to situations, ideas, objects et cetera) that voluntary intentional meaning determines for them, but also in another structure of correspondences that is equally robust, we can as easily end up tracing either one of them in our reading. The structure of social meaning can, in some conjunctions of text, reader, subject-matter and context, become both more urgent and easier to track than the structure of individual voluntary meanings. In 'First Fruits' the structure of social meaning is so bluntly apparent —or rather, its marks on 'First Fruits' are so salient from our own historical vantage point —that one needn't be a structuralist anthropologist or a Marxist historian to read it with a perfect clarity. But have we thus explained everything that needs explaining, and substantiated or condemned every readerly sense that seeks to be substantiated? The theory I have so far tried to sketch only partly attends to the readerly experience of 'New England's First Fruits', defined at the outset as a tense simultaneity of sincerity and of horrendous bad faith. In (so to speak) rendering to the subject the meanings which are the subject's, and to society the meanings that are society's, one attends to the sense of sincerity and to the sense of bad faith but not to the sense that there is a genuine tension between them. While one could try explain-away this tension as being merely a side effect of comprehending a text on multiple scopes at once, I would argue that this tension points at a fundamental dilemma. This tension, I believe, is bound with our sense of textual meaning as a facet of a communicative action —an action that is incomprehensible apart from distinctly personal parameters of reason and belief that define an agent's relation his actions. In comprehending a communicative act such as a text, the inevitable

upshot of tracing meaning is to evaluate the communicating agent as operating in good faith or in bad faith: to communicate in good faith is to put oneself accountable to one's meaning, to communicate in bad faith is to try communicate some meaning without revealing one's intention to communicate it. Because a text is by definition a single communicative action, the opposing urges to evaluate 'First Fruits' as written-in-good-faith and as written-in-bad-faith engage in a direct 'tug o war' over the nature of this communicative action; simple separation won't do unless we are willing to denounce the idea of 'interpretively reading a text' as lacking a genuine object and therefore incoherent or ill-defined. On the one hand we are drawn to read the text as if the author is culpably channeling the structural mechanisms of the historical enterprise in which he participated into a form of direct agency, functioning as an avatar who personifies the the structural 'deceitfulness' of colonialist discourse in his act of communication in bad faith. On the other hand the poignancy of the difference between this abstract bad faith of 'the discourse' and the concrete good faith we have reason to attribute the actual writer highlights the specificity of the ideologue's (the author's) cognition and intentions. While this tension may be relatively palatable in reading 'New England's First Fruits', enough so to be partly assuaged by the separation of personal meaning and structural meaning, I will argue that to be thus satisfied is to give-in to an unprincipled bias: our insistence understanding people as full-fledged moral agents tends to arbitrarily diminish the further into history we delve. By and large we are more willing to exclude pre-industrial agents from the scope of our (ever-tense) sense of action and responsibility. It is all too easy to subject 17th century Puritans to what P. F. Strawson calls 'the objective view' —reducing their actions to mere chains of causation —as we would never do among ourself or to the most alien figures of the 20th century. This very same kind of tension between error and bad faith becomes

unbearable if the urgency of moral comprehension reaches a pitch that can't be ignored or quailed by the abstract diffusion of agency. To turn to an extreme case, consider the most notorious passage from Heinrich Himmler's October 4 speech to the assembled SS-Gruppenführer at Posen: 'It is one of those things that is easily said. 'The Jewish people is being exterminated,' every Party member will tell you, 'perfectly clear, it's part of our plans, we're eliminating the Jews, exterminating them, ha!, a small matter.' And then along they all come, all the 80 million upright Germans, and each one has his decent Jew. They say: all the others are swine, but here is a first-class Jew. And none of them has seen it, has endured it. Most of you will know what it means when 100 bodies lie together, when there are 500, or when there are 1000. And to have seen this through, and —with the exception of human weaknesses —to have remained decent, has made us hard and is a page of glory never mentioned and never to be mentioned.' (qtd in 'Holocaust-History.Org', <http://tinyurl.com/k6pbd>) I take it as evident that no entirely utilitarian account is adequate to this passage. Its associative, almost dream-like compositional logic exceeds anything I can recognize as an affectation of fervor —I can recognize it as nothing other than real, actual fervor. Yet no one could whole-heartedly reject the typical accounts of the architecture of SS ideology: that 'it was Himmler's master stroke that he succeeded in indoctrinating the SS with an apocalyptic 'idealism' beyond all guilt and responsibility, which rationalized mass murder as a form of martyrdom and harshness towards oneself' ('Jewish Virtual Library', <http://tinyurl.com/ntw7el>). To remove 'bad faith' from the indoctrination, replacing with zealotry the calculating selection and optimization of philosophical ideals for psychological engineering, lets Nazism become a series of errors. In the face of Nazi atrocities our theoretical grasp of the difference between persons and historical processes seems to melt away from our hermeneutic experience of

the text. The near undeniable ‘good faith’ of Himmler’s own speech-act enters into a dialectical tension with our knowledge of the process/enterprise of Nazi anti-Semitism as an apotheosis of ‘bad faith’ (one must ultimately ask whose bad faith could this refer to, but for now there’s the brute fact that unlike for example abstract Bolshevik dogma, abstract Nazi dogma can hardly be described as ‘erroneous’). Levels of analysis that are properly foreclosed to each-other collide and interact in competition to guide our engagement with the text, turning the text into a weighted sum of the personal and of the supra-personal. In such a reading we lose our grasp on, or perhaps surpass, the categorical separation between what belongs to agency and what belongs to social forces. Yet keeping this exact separation in working order is key to every sophisticated form of ‘theoretical anti-humanism’, in the widest sense of ‘theoretical anti-humanism’ as sociological or historical inquiry whose analysis goes beyond the ascription of consciously held, autonomously generated motives to individual agents. After all, what keeps modes of (de facto) morally charged, ideology-centered textual analysis such as Marxist readings from being conspiracy theories or a cynical besmirching of human character, and keeps Foucauldian discourse analysis from being a theory of intellectual enslavement or of ubiquitous conformism, is precisely the independence of person-talk and structure-talk. For mature genealogy/archeology a rhetorical performance is not ‘about’ its structurally determined symptomatic meaning instead of ‘about’ its agent-envisioned meaning. This non-competition is a necessary condition for the analytic status of ‘theoretical anti-humanism’ —there isn’t an empirical quantitative question of the relative dominance of the subjective or of the objective in determining human actions that will decide between theoretical humanism and (in the loosest sense) structuralism, because for structuralism objective explanation explains the subjective explanation rather than competes with it. The urgency of

this distinction for the practice of critically reading ideological documents is evident from its centrality in Foucault's "The Archeology of Knowledge", arguably the single most important and realized methodological treatise on symptomatic reading. In the mock-dialogue serving as the archeological study's 'conclusion', Foucault goes on to diagnose the conflation of the different levels at which personal agency and structure (discourse) exist to be at the root of his imaginary interlocutor's opposition to his work: 'I'm afraid you are making a double mistake: about the discursive practices that I have tried to define and about the role that you yourself accord to human freedom. The positivities that I have tried to establish must not be understood as a set of determinations imposed from the outside on the thought of individuals, or inhabiting it from the inside, in advance as it were; they constitute rather the set of conditions in accordance with which a practice is exercised, in accordance with which that practice gives rise to partially or totally new statements, and in accordance with which it can be modified.' (p. 230) In reading a text like Himmler's Posen speech or 'New England's First Fruits', or at least in trying to make our intuitive reading of such a text conceptually intelligible, we inevitably find ourselves on the brink of a double-error of this same fundamental nature. Readerly interpretation of a text differs from analyzing a text as a piece of empirical evidence, exactly in that reading seeks to integrate the various properties of a text into a (sometimes 'undecidable' or self-deconstructing) whole. For historical texts intimately related to malignant human enterprises, this means first and foremost to develop from our collected insights into the text's individual and collective origins, determinations and consequences an idea of the text as an action. Interpretation seeks to make something of the shifting aspect of Puritan theology in 'First Fruits', superpositioned as the text's highest telos and as a middleman for geo-politics, manifest on the structural scope. But to

integrate individual purposes and structural determination into one communicative action would require to somehow locate 'discursive positivities' on the same order as the writer's personal psychology, as things with which a person can negotiate, or struggle or collude. Should we reduce 'discursive positivities' to a personal force (a force within a person, a force controlling a person), or perhaps attribute structural comprehension to subjects? Prima facie this puts us a pace away from either misrecognizing ideological structures as too much like a spirit that manipulates a possessed subject to do its will, or taking the other horn of the dilemma and misrecognizing subjects as choosing to embrace or reject an ideological structure from a bird's eye view. In either case the realignment distorts both the concept of subjectivity and the concept of structure, as subjectivity is taken to be either the victim or the master of structural entities, and in any way their competitor. It is this meltdown that now takes us to the second part of this paper. In what follows, I will try ask whether these distinctively 'literary' problems of reading historical texts have any bearing on the more scholarly concerns of academic critical reading. Arguing that the dissonance of authorial agency in 'First Fruits' is not a hermeneutic mirage, I will draw on Bourdieu's theories of agency to suggest how a critical reading might unpack a rich textual and social dynamics underlying such dissonances. Towards A Narratology Of Ideology This then is the meta-question that hovers over this paper: who is it that we read when we read ideology? Such stakes may appear overstated considering the dependance of the current problem on the curiosities of experientially reading 'First Fruits' —the textual impression of an agency integrating psychological innocence and an ideal manifestation of power may belong more to naïve readerly experience than to the analytic historical project of 'reading ideology'. But despite annoyed accusations to the contrary, symptomatic literary scholarship is still as interested in the symptom

as in whatever disease. Unlike in pure archeology or pure genealogy, for (so-called) symptomatic literary scholarship a text rarely becomes just an instrumental point of access to ideological structures. Often it is wholly the other way around, and almost always the immediately meaningful text is an object of fascination as the site in which the structural and the individual uniquely conjunct in a performance that produces meaning. When for example Greenblatt argues that ‘works of art, however intensely marked by the creative intelligence and private obsessions of individuals, are the products of collective negotiation and exchange’ (1988, P. vii), the revisionism isn’t just a matter of pointing out the causal dependance of writing on its originating culture, but an opening up of authorship and meaning to social forces. And yet the matter is made infinitely more complicated by the ‘however’: there’s no getting around the sense of a struggle for dominance between the meanings that are in a text because somebody put them there and the meanings that environmentally imprint themselves into a text. For even the most theoretically informed reading that is still a reading, the interactive tension —interactive without knowing what might this interaction constitute or amount to —between the two kinds of meaning remains a datum. And so a more focussed question emerges from the meta-question: should we just give an account of this datum, or should we take this datum into account ? To do the first would mean to work toward theorizing textual meaning as a phenomenal artifact of our readerly minds, and to offer a semiotics or psychology of how the mind amalgamates different scales of context and function, different orders of meanings, different facets of an interpretive indeterminacy to form the chimera of lived textual experience. It might also mean that ideological analysis of historical textual production must in some sense put away experiential reading as a childish thing. To do the second —to incorporate the experienced tension into our analysis of ideology and agency in writing —would

mean granting the readerly experience of textual meaning some cognitive authority; to take readerly experience to be tuning into something that is going on somewhere on 'the other side' of the text, where production takes place. The choice is, in a way, between taking textual meaning to be an aspect of the theory of reading, and taking textual meaning to be an aspect of the theory of practice. Fortunately, one doesn't have to make this choice based solely on an affection (or lack thereof) for experiential reading. I have referred to the sense of tension between the subjective and the objective as the surplus that 'social meaning' analysis leaves unaccounted-for on the reader's side. But there might yet be a surplus left unaccounted-for on the other side, the side of the historical production of the text: what Bourdieu in his theory of practice calls 'strategy'. For although the analysis so far made frequent recourse to Bourdieuan concepts, in the most important sense it remained a properly structuralist analysis, of the sort Bourdieu's theory of practice critiques. The primary lesson of Bourdieu's 'habitus' can initially seem indistinguishable from the lesson Foucault so elegantly expresses in his dialogue (perhaps contra the 'invasive' view of ideology in Althusser and the 'robotic' rule-following in Lévi-Strauss): that it is not subjects who follow/obey/enact structural rules, but rather the practical logic of their subjectivity as a whole that organically grows along structurally-determined lines while maintaining its 'freedom'. But for Bourdieu the creation of dichotomies of the subjective and the objective—dichotomies such as the separation between the writer's own purposeful act of communication and the social purposes that structured the writer's purposes—must always constitute only a first diagnostic move, on the way to a new integration of the subjective logic of practicing and of the social logic of the practice. Consider Bourdieu's famous discussion of gift-giving, in certain passages of which 'gift' could be easily replaced with 'text'—not so much by

uncanny coincidence as by certain correspondences of the two as communicative artifacts. Bourdieu holds that the social meaning of a gift (its being an economically binding exchange) would not only be impossible to sustain if the practitioners of gift-giving were aware of it, but also if they were entirely unaware of it: 'Phenomenological' analysis and objectivist analysis bring to light two antagonistic principles of gift exchange: the gift as experienced, or, at least, meant to be experienced, and the gift as seen from outside. (...) If the system is to work, the agents must not be entirely unaware of the truth of their exchange, which is made explicit in the anthropologist's model, while at the same time they must refuse to know and above all to recognize it' (p. 5)Bourdieu finds the occasion, indeed the necessity, for this integration in the microscopic variations with which every act of gift-giving is uniquely adapted to its specific circumstances —variations that not only align the 'subjective' action with what is efficacious on the 'objective' playing field, but most importantly obfuscate this very alignment. If 'everything takes place as if agents' practice, and in particular their manipulations of time, were organized exclusively with a view to concealing from themselves and from others the truth of their practice", then no organizing principle wholly extrinsic to the agents could be refined enough to pre-arrange this, and no unconscious imprint within an agent could be dynamic enough to explain this. In other words, the efficiency of the production of misrecognition (in oneself and in others) could only be explained by an appeal to awareness; a society in which subjects lack any cognitive access to the objective meaning of their practices could not systematically maintain its inscrutability. The objective and the subjective become integrated in the necessity of awareness-without-recognition for maintaining their own separation. Could there be any such integration of a writer's or speech-maker's 'intra-ideological' understanding of his text, and the (to any degree) Materialist

analysis of ideology? For the remainder of this paper, I will attempt to motivate and sketch the theoretical contours of such an integrative critical reading, and finally to practice it to some extent. After presenting a view on how Bourdieu's observations on gift-giving could be modulated to a theory of the practice of textual meaning, I will conclude by offering a reading of the central passage of 'First Fruits'—the story of the conversion and Martyrdom of the Indian Captain Wequash. Bourdieu's finds in the complexities of timing in acts of gift-giving an implicit rhetoric with which an act advocates its own independence from its objective meaning. We face the much easier task of finding in the complexities of rhetoric in a text an implicit, or even explicit, rhetoric with which the text advocates its independence. If Bourdieu as I read him is right, these movements of rhetoric will be bound with their complementing and codependent form of strategy: the optimization of the implicit transmissibility of the same 'objective' meaning that must be kept inscrutable to direct recognition (by the intended reader or by the writer). In perhaps the strongest correspondence of this textual theory to Bourdieu's analysis of gift-giving, here too manipulations of time proves to be of primary concern — albeit in a mostly different sense. As narratological and Biblical scholarship by Meir Sternberg extensively demonstrates, the rhetorical content of a text by far exceeds what is ultimately demarcated as the 'best interpretation' when the reader completes its reading. The culmination of the hermeneutic process in meanings recognized by the reader as the text's own is just the final moment in a far richer transmission of cognitive effects: while the reader moves through a text interpretive hypothesis are constructed, tested, put aside, revisited, shaken and bolstered. The more salient of these hypotheses generate ideas and moods and emotional affects that often outlive their originating hypothesis long after it's out of the running. While this is emphatically not to say that (e.g.) a twist

never negates the notions generated by its set-up, it is to say that most of a reader's transitory hypotheses die a far gentler death than by direct counter-point. Such is exactly the stuff awareness-without-recognition is made on. The communication of ideas that must never be positively recognized as a purpose of the writer naturally finds its medium in this temporal space of semi-discarded meanings. The dynamics of awareness-without-recognition require a form of performative denial that is indisputable, inconspicuous and powerless; the 'disappearance' of a transitory interpretive hypothesis fits every count. The first two counts it fits by definition, and as to its powerlessness, there is some general validity in the rule once stated by poet Fernando Pessoa, that "the wound hurts as it hurts, and not in function of the cause that produced it". A Materialist reading on the lookout for the codependent expression-suppression of a text's 'historical not-quite-conscious' might well find it in the subtleties of a text's temporal organization. Curiously enough (or suspiciously enough), a critical reading operating on the Bourdieu-inspired theory I am advocating will thus heavily recourse to the toolkit of Formalist and Narratological scholarship. What such a critical reading can uniquely promise to give us is not just a legitimation of the readerly sense that objective and subjective meaning are tensely bound together in the author's agency, but a way of tracing this tension in the text itself. Whether it can actually deliver anything in practice will undoubtedly remain an open question—but I will now try answer it to the extent that I may, in analyzing the Wequash story from 'On the conversion of the Indians'. The story of Wequash the Indian Martyr (pp. 11-14) is declared in 'First Fruits' to be 'the story which coming to our hands very late, was indeed the occasion for writing all the rest'. It is of course the story most deeply concerned with spirituality, extolling the capacity of an Indian not only to be put aright but to attain a profoundly Christian life edging on holiness. Wequash is even

described as ‘like that poor Woman of Samaria’ —the Biblical woman sometimes identified as St. Photina, whom Jesus personally converted (John 4:1–4) despite her inferior status as a Samaritan and as a woman, and was to become the first Evangelist and by later accounts a Martyr. One could argue, however, that this is not the only sense in which the story of Wequash stands out as providing a crux for ‘First Fruits’. A review of the contents of the entire ‘On the conversion of the Indians’ section of ‘First Fruits’ reveals that the narration of Wequash’s story has several more unique features: it is the only occasion (excluding the text’s poetic prologue) on which the Indians are charged with Satanism, the only occasion on which violence is mentioned as a catalyst of conversion, and the only occasion allowing to infer that conversion prevents retribution. In fact, those passages contain the only reference in the text to military hostilities between British New Englanders and Indians. It is my suggestion that the theological momentum of the Wequash story artfully both occasions and obscures the introduction of all those themes, which are themselves introduced for their efficacy rather than by documentary allegiance to Material reality. The most conspicuously ‘aware’ turn of this process is the precise lining up of (partly apocryphal) elements to put in motion an inference whose conclusion the text not only leaves unspoken, but actively omits from its final tally. For the account in ‘First Fruits’ labors both to evoke the idea that Wequash is a potential enemy neutralized by the power of Christianity and to efface any unambiguous marks of such labor. Wequash is introduced as a mighty Indian Captain who witnessed on the battlefield ‘with great terror’ the slaughter of Indians in droves by the English; what remains inexplicably ambiguous in this description is Wequash’s role on that battlefield. Wequash in fact fought alongside the English, leading a troop of warriors from the Narragansett nation (himself being a defector from the Puquits to the Narragansetts) that joined with the English for an attack on

Puquit non-combatants (Bross, p. 190). Yet no reader distant enough from the affairs of New England to be the target audience of 'First Fruits' could fail to gather from the text that Wequash is, if not a warlord vanquished by the English then at least a grieving witness to the fall of his brethren. And sure enough the very next claim in the account, that after this terror Wequash desperately sought the English God day and night until an Englishman 'did meet with him' further hinders any perception that Wequash was already an English ally. In the following descriptions of the fruition of Wequash's military dread into a religious dread and finally into a deep Christian transformation, a great deal is made of how the conversion of Wequash quailed his vengeful nature. But the item that will conclude this chrono-logical series is vanished, for when the story delves-in to explore this quailed vengeance it is revealed that its object would have been anti-Evangelist Indians: 'His repentance

for [the vice of vengeance] was testified by an eminent degree of meekness and patience, that now, if any did abuse him, he could lie down at their feet, and if any did smite him on the one cheeke, he would rather turne the other, than offend them: many trials hee had from the Indians in this case.' (pp. 12-13) This anti-climax however does not negate any of the previous inferences to which the reader was nudged, but rather serves to distance the author's explicit interests in telling the story from any and all nudging that might have occurred. To wit, it is immediately followed by an addendum abstract enough to take whatever meaning the reader imagines for it: "Thirdly, by going up and down to those he had offered violence or wrong unto, confessing it, and making restitution". In particular because this passage is followed by the narration 'Afterwards he went among the indians...', a reader would hardly be at fault to infer that it describes Wequash making amends Englishman he made war with. But neither the

reader nor the writer are forced to believe that this is a purpose of the writer—in fact the passive narrow-avoidance demonstrates the writer's indifference to these meaning, that are so far from his thoughts that he is ignorant of their interpretive proximity. If the above brief textual analysis is any good at all, then this paper's quest to conceptualize and hypostasize the reading experience of 'New England's First Fruits' concludes on a very affirmative note. A theological message about salvation and a geopolitical message about control really are dancing around one-another in the textual flow of 'First Fruits'. There indeed looms large in 'First Fruits' a form of meaning that is neither fully within the bounds of the 'author function' nor fully without it. Most importantly, the writer's communicative action occupies a liminal moral space, as a limiting case of 'speaking in good faith' and of 'speaking in bad faith'. And the 'bad faith' itself, although its last determination at the point of execution is psychological, is a social institution—a participation in a collective system of bad faith communication and bad faith comprehension. Even the readerly desire for a unified communicative action, for a unified human agency that can be morally understood through a compromise between the two diverging fields of meaning, turns out to have been compatible with the opposing sense that the two meanings belong to mutually exclusive interpretations of the communicative act. In opening up the dimension of time, we find room for the two mutually exclusive meanings to each assert itself, taking up different points in the temporal process of reading. If writing strategically communicates not only a meaning, but a process of meaning, then between what 'New England's First Fruits' means and what 'New England's First Fruits' does not mean there is a vast twilight zone of what this New England tract meaningfully 'un-means'. It would seem that the theoretical-interpretive journey I undertook in this paper, driven as it was by an excessive insistence on anchoring interpretation in

clear-cut and feasible theoretical foundations, nevertheless ended up a little fantastical. Bare oddness aside, my proposed narratological interpretation could be justifiably held in suspicion for its extensive appeals to the writer's internally unrecognized machinations — unrecognized rhetoric, unrecognized compositional strategy, unrecognized half-lies. Are these not, ultimately, appeals to an ad-hoc psychological homunculus ('the unrecognized') within the writer? Although I can hardly dream of saying anything well-principle on the subject, I would suggest that internally unrecognized intentions are just literally intentions that did not get internally recognized: we have many intentions, some which we are lucky enough to spot and some of which we aren't. In other words, our colonialist author 'un-means' a message of geopolitical domination in much the same way that he 'means' a message of Christian salvation, only a lot more quietly. Althusser, Louis, and Fredric Jameson. *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*. London: Monthly Review Press, 2001.

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Strawson, P.F. *Freedom and Resentment and Other Essays*. New York: Routledge, 2008. 'And I said, I said, 'the empirical sciences.' And I said, I said, ' - I wish that I could publicly obsess over the lyrics of Regina Spektor's 'Après Moi' without it coming off all, you know, obsessing over the lyrics of Regina Spektor's 'Après Moi.' - I wish that I could talk shit about post-structuralism without it come off all, you know, talking shit about post-structuralism. - I wish that I could say that Gossip Girl is a way better show than Mad Men without it coming off all, you know, saying Gossip Girl is a way better show than Mad Men.' And I said, I said, 'is a Nelly Yuki spinoff.' And I said, I said, 'why do all contemporary body washes work an afternoon tea theme?'

And I said, I said, 'starts slow but there's a vampire apocalypse.' And I said to Mabel, I said, 'Cecilia: just do a really

quick analysis fast & dirty, broad strokes she's asking me if "i" think its good which obviously means "does your friend" Cecilia: sid is really noticing that there isnt much response me: it triggers a hysterical response when people ask me about paintings Cecilia: i think she hates you now me: you're killing me Cecilia: you're doing it to yourself. i'll tell her you think the use of color is really strong and the overall concept is arresting and interesting with a variety of subtexts corroborating to create a synoptic visual thrust me: yes do that we're gonna have a horrible fight about purple academic adjectives one day by the way i already know it Cecilia: we can have it right now if you keep it up. she's twelve, she responds well to poststructural expressivity i know my audience is all.' And I said, I said, 'more powerful heuristics: really good food comes from pans, OK food comes from ovens, and disgusting food comes from pots.' And I said, I said, 'an anatomy of melancholy. I wrote this years ago and though it was about philosophy I sort of think of it as more of an all-purpose manifesto on what essays do that papers don't. And I am going through one of those why-didn't-I-go-be-a-psycholinguist-instead/why-ain't-I-a-real-analytic-philosopher/what-the-fuck's-the-deal-with-the-humanities kind of lulls, so I don't know if I agree today but I still look to it as my best effort to justify my life-choices: "Say what you will about passing-by the linguistic turn, analytic philosophy is still essentially about language in one sense: it deals exclusively with affirming and denying sentences (as opposed to encouraging or hindering manners of cognition as e.g. Buddhism or Wittgenstein or Nietzsche are concerned with). This is only an obvious thing to do given a particular picture of what thinking is — one that doesn't care much for cognitive differences that fall below the level of differentiating propositional attitudes. I'm talking for example 'bout the difference between having only true beliefs regarding the [Monty Hall problem](#) but having a near mental breakdown every time you go over it, and not having any trouble

with the Monty Hall problem. Or maybe the difference between just affirming a plurality of worlds, and thinking about non-actual worlds as often and as seriously and as emotionally as you think about events you're causally detached from in this world. Or the difference between acknowledging the truth of Parfit's metaphysics of identity, and actually feeling your glass tunnel disappear. (Cf. [Lisa Randall](#): "You could think of science as discovering one particular thing - a supernova or whatever. You could also think of it as discovering this whole new way of seeing the world.")" And I said, I said, 'When I Was Young. I thought Agota Kristoff was a funny way to say Agatha Christie. I thought Jay Lenno was a funny way to say John Lennon. I didn't think György Lukács was a funny way to say George Lucas but goddammit I came close.' And I said to Mabel, I said, 'philosophy (analytic) is in the business of two different things, and the two get mixed up because every so often the one turns out to have implications for the other and vice versa (see after-the-cut note), but essentially they're independent objectives: 1) Say shit about necessary truths. 2) Uncover interesting dependencies (real causal psychological dependencies — but of a certain kind only*) between our y talk and our x talk, or between our b behaviour and our cbehaviour, or between our y talk and our b behaviour.*Ones that are 'conceptual' or 'rational' or something. But in the same modest sense that some ceteris paribus laws of linguistic behaviour are syntactic and others are stylistic or social, and syntax only tries to uncover the syntactic ones. Ehm. Yeah. This needs work. *After-the-cut note*: Yeah if you have the "bridge belief" that there are necessary truths about meaning, then all analysis of the relations between different concepts and behaviours and whatnot — let's say an analysis of the relation between y talk and x talk — is gonna imply necessary truths about the logical relation of ys to xs and so on. That's one major way the two concerns may align. Some other ways: you're a non-humean and you think our causation-talk is a good if

imperfect guide to the metaphysical truth about causation; or you have some unusual metaphysical beliefs about rationality, which you take to be expressing necessary truths, and those are going to prescribe what you're gonna accept as the right kind of psychological connection between concepts and practices and so on. BUT my point is that I can totally write a paper for my "Self-Knowledge" class about the relationship between being in pain and knowing that you are in pain without having any more intentions to be dealing with necessary truths than I would if I were writing a linguistics paper or a micro-economics paper. I may even explicitly hold the position that it's uninteresting what exactly the necessary truths in the neighborhood are if there are any, because knowledge is such a non-ontologically-fundamental concept that it's philosophically insignificant what the exact ontological facts are about what is and what isn't knowledge, but still I will be doing philosophy rather than psychology because my paper is interested only in a very particular kind of psychological facts — namely ones that count as a conceptual or rational (rather than emotional, for example) relationship between making judgements about something being pain and making judgments about something being knowledge that one is in pain. The main point is that thinking that there are no necessary truths, or no interesting necessary truths, to be found re: some domain (ethics, attitude ascription, causation, reference — all examples of domains some philosophers take to be bereft of interesting necessary truths) shouldn't entail thinking that there's no philosophy to do about it but only "psychology" to do about it. Because even though, if you're not hunting for necessary truths, your subject matter will be psychological, still as a philosopher you are going to be looking to make very different analyses of that subject matter than psychology as a discipline does.' And I said, I said, 'correlation? Raise your hand if you like Sofia Coppola, Christopher Hitchens, or bleached jeans. These people are gotta be somewhere!'

And I said, I said, ‘[Alice](#): spoken like a boy so aryan looking he can’t not be guilty of something.’ And I said, I said, ‘it’s Mitch Hedberg that invented Twitter-funny. You know, the passive-aggressive quotidian non-sequitor punny melancholy precious chilled-out-stacatto punctured by anxiety kind of funny. Twitter-funny.’ And I said, I said, ‘Gesamtkunstwerk: I am working to promote the [union](#) of literary forms, philosophy, the essay, semiotics and the i-hate-my-life teenage blog.’ And I said to Mabel, I said, ‘wtf? did you know that sometimes you can put a lot of effort into something and not get a great result? What’s up with that shit?’ And I said, I said, ‘Cecilia: heheh people write some funny books:
[http://www.amazon.com/Freuds-Drive-Psychoanalysis-Literature-Discourse/dp/0230275494/ref=sr_1_5?](http://www.amazon.com/Freuds-Drive-Psychoanalysis-Literature-Discourse/dp/0230275494/ref=sr_1_5?ie=UTF8&s=books&qid=1276347160&sr=1-5)
ie=UTF8&s=books&qid=1276347160&sr=1-5 3:54 PM what kind of color scheme would you use for a book about freud and film not that one, i’ll warrant 3:55 PM this cover is hott tho:
[http://www.amazon.com/Critical-Excess-Overreading-Derrida-Deleuze/dp/0804763062/ref=sr_1_25?](http://www.amazon.com/Critical-Excess-Overreading-Derrida-Deleuze/dp/0804763062/ref=sr_1_25?ie=UTF8&s=books&qid=1276347285&sr=1-25)
ie=UTF8&s=books&qid=1276347285&sr=1-25 reminds me of something can’t decide if its a fractal or a vagina me: oh my god fractal should be the new euphemism Cecilia: wait that’s so good 3:57 PM i was going to say cixous has that problem all the time “which one is it THIS TIME?” me: it’s a million dollar game show idea Cecilia: AH wow you are better when you’re not exhausted 3:59 PM “Shakespeare and Youth Culture” 3:59 PM can that be the name of our cat if we ever get a cat?’ And I said, I said, ‘rant in analytic’s clothing: my problem with a lot of cool ‘iconoclastic’ social justice discourse nowadays is that there is this rhetorical method of intention-based utilitarianism. Like, one does the utilitarian calculation by measuring real damage vis-a-vis intended benefit, regardless of whether the damaging act is in fact efficacious with respect to the intended benefit. Like, if I convince some people that

I punched you in the face to promote racial equality I would have a whole bunch of defenders saying racial equality is more important than the right of one person to not-getting-punched-in-the-face, and not thinking too hard about whether this punch to the face did a lot to promote racial equality.’

And I said to Mabel, I said, ‘me and my aunts and uncles on a family trip to Jaffa! No I am kidding it is the “The Western Canon in a Digital Age” research workshop these people are all super smart international profs.’ And I said, I said, ‘Pour Musil: things that aren’t true are always funny.’ And I said, I said, ‘some times I’m afraid that I’ve gone crazy but will never find it out because I’m in a Literature department.’ And I said, I said, ‘the one and the many: if I were a cartoon-network type rapper I’d make a song explaining respective similarities to Musil’s Diotima, to the Notes from Underground unnamed narrator, to Jenny Humphrey, and to Elric of Melniboné.’ And I said, I said, ‘I’m against a blanket boycott against Israel but I support reactive sanctions. In case you wanted an Israeli vantage point. Anyway, back to my regular scheduled programming of semiotics and preciousness. Update: Maybe I am for a blanket boycott against Israel.’ And I said to Mabel, I said, “right before the final battle starts, the villain of the spy-thriller video-game “Metal Gear Solid” delivers a bitter soliloquy: “Can you understand,” he asks you, in a fit of oddly effective faux-Shakespearean voice acting, “what it’s like to know that you’re garbage since the day you were born?” For anyone who’s looking for a tag-line —or a good synecdoche — about the cultural predicament of video-games, I would offer this oddly piercing moment of melancholy speech from “Metal Gear Solid”, nested as it is within a game-series that’s already notorious for its compulsive use of metafiction and its proclivity for turning story-lines into an allegory about video games. The villain believes that he is a genetically inferior clone of your common

ancestor, a long-dead legendary warlord from whose D.N.A the government tries to create tomorrow's soldiers. "You and I share the same genes", the villain (code-name: Liquid Snake) tells the protagonist, "but all the dominant genes are expressed in you and I was made to manifest all the recessive genes." The villain went insane trying to prove that he can be more similar to your ancestor than you are even despite having been made inferior, and now he can't decide whether he's fighting to glorify the memory of your ancestor or to wipe it out, and ends up just trying to sow general chaos.

This is hyperbolically, what we imagine video games to be like, on occasion —and, more importantly, what video games imagine themselves to be like, on occasion. Rejected, all-powerful, worthless, destructive, unstoppable, inferior, bitter; can't decide if they want to become the "serious culture" that preceded their birth or destroy serious culture for good. (Like many other things, this kind of discourse is bigger in Japan, where many leading game designer regularly give out tortured interviews about their existential angst qua leading game designers.) Some of the later "Metal Gear Solid" games provoke the possibility of being read as full-fledged allegories about video games, but I would absolutely not suggest to holistically order this first "Metal Gear" on an allegorical paradigm of that kind. It is one of those moments of metaphorical slippage that just flicker for a second, impossible to ignore, at the conjunctions of the game's obsessions with heredity, metafiction, oedipal complexes, cultural memory and the meaning of video-games. I am not a historian of video-games, but I am a gamer and a semiotician —and "Metal Gear Solid" was the first game I played that had really tried hard to mean something. (And, I would argue, "Metal Gear Solid" is indeed the first blockbuster game to aspire to some sort of aesthetic or cultural "deepness.") It is not a coincidence, I believe, that "Metal Gear" is also the first video game that I know of to try

and engage in a straight-up old fashioned literary allusion: the “Metal Gear Solid” video games were created by Hideo Kojima, a then-young Japanese auteur of video games, whose two great loves in culture are the techno-thrillers of Tom Clancy and the novels and films of Jean Cocteau. In that same cinematic cut-scene that precedes the final battle, the villain, code-name “Liquid Snake,” reveals that you — that is to say your avatar within the game, the protagonist, code name Solid Snake —and him are twins —you are two clones created by the government in a super-secret military project. The project’s name? As the villain Liquid Snake enthusiastically informs you in his faux-Shakespearean inflection: “Les Enfants Terrible! The Terrible Children!” What is Cocteau’s 1929 Surrealist classic doing here, in the middle of a techno-babble dialogue, while you —I mean the player —are just waiting with your finger on the Playstation controller for the fight to start? Is this how a video-game makes a grab for cultural capital —is it simply a way for the game to ‘class up the joint’? Or is it a real live literary allusion? But a literary allusion that means what? Or, in a more semiotic tone, we might ask —what gets activate here, in this act of intertextual contact? Is it Cocteu’s text, or some faint archi-text of what Cocteu’s text is — or perhaps just the cultural-aesthetic framework of Surrealism at large, or even just some general notion of “literary fiction”?) [...] “It is, perhaps, not altogether strange for an avant-damaged pop culture artifact like “Metal Gear Solid” to reach for a pop-damaged avant-garde artifact like Cocteu’s “Les Enfants...” to be its aesthetic or cultural anchor. In the imaginary Venn Diagram of culture, there existed for a good few decades now a circle that we might call “cult” or maybe “artsy cult” that overlaps with both the margins of canonical high art and the margins of commercial pop culture. To evoke Cocteau, I think, is not so much to storm the gates of the canon as it is to request admittance to that other more eclectic space of “artsy cult” where nobody cares if you’re

trashy as long as you're weird and ambitious. The preceding is, I think, a decently strong rule of thumb for understanding the general way in which culturally ambitious video games try to position themselves on the cultural map. The intertextual reference points that these artsy blockbuster games reach out to in establishing their coordinates are always ones belonging to that space where the official canon's seal of approval overlaps with the category of "cult favorites": Jean Cocteau and Giorgio de Chirico, who are probably two of reasons that "it was so surreal" is an everyday English expression. Dante's *Inferno* and *Paradiso* —longtime favorites of heavy metal fans —, and Lewis Carroll, the unknowing and reluctant forefather of psychedelia; esoteric chapters from the earlier and weirder sections of the Bible, or the cinema of Andrei Tarkovsky. It's the kind of high art that you can certainly find on a syllabus in Oxford, but also find as easily on a college-kid's dorm bookshelf next to some punk-rock CD's and vintage Italian horror film DVDs and maybe a bong. Of course, while it is well and good that "artsy" blockbuster video-games know where they're trying to go, we haven't yet answered the —perhaps —more important question of why are they trying to get there. With regard to the "Metal Gear Solid" case, the contextual factors that I have discussed say something, I hope, about what makes Cocteau's "Les Enfants Terribles" accessible to intertextual advances from a video game — why a game like "Metal Gear" can try to establish a resonance with Cocteau's corpus much more feasibly than with e.g. the corpus of Henry James. But, beyond the bare fact of its cultural possibility, what does this resonance do? What is it for? If I think about Cocteau while I am mashing buttons to try punch the "Metal Gear" villain Liquid Snake in the face, how is this different —as a gameplay experience? as an aesthetic experience? as an act of cultural consumption? —from mashing buttons to try punch Liquid Snake in the face without thinking about Cocteau? A question like this can be broken down

into a generic, theoretical question and a specific, interpretive question. As interesting—and worth revisiting—as the poetics of “Metal Gear” are to interpret, what one would really like to know is what role can these methods of cultural-aesthetic meaning-making play in a video game. (And, complimentarily, what role can a video game play in cultural-aesthetic meaning-making.) “Metal Gear Solid” is a weird piece of culture for reasons other than its identity as a video-game, so we might turn our considerations to some simpler cases of aesthetic use of intertextuality in video games at this stage.”[...]”We might also consider the somewhat unusual first-person-shooter game STALKER. STALKER came out in mid 2007 despite weak graphics and problematic shooting mechanics had achieved impressive sales and universal accolades, almost entirely on the strength of its strong atmosphere and plot, and generally being an “unusual experience” for its genre. Like Tarkovsky’s 1979 film “Stalker,” and the 1972 novel “Roadside Picnic” by Arkadi and Boris Strugasky, the game takes place in a desolate radioactive no-man’s land surrounded by mysteries and paranomral phenomena, known by the name “The Zone.” “The Zone” draws nomads from across the eastern block, drawn in by the promise mystical treasure and in particular a mythical room at the heart of “The Zone” that is said to make wishes come true. The game derives its particular variant of “The Zone” from a synthesis of “Roadside Picnic” and the Tarkovsky movie: the book and game but not the movie have a subculture of nomadic treasure-hunters populating the outskirts of “The Zone,” whereas the game and movie both but not the book involve a wish-fulfilling room. Compared to the Trakovsky film, the game—which by no means ever represents itself as an “adpation” of the film of the book in any official capacity—is a very concrete piece of science fiction. Many element which in the film remain romantic mysteries are give technically detailed explanation in the game: the zone is controlled by an Artificial Intelligence gone mad, the wish fulfilling

room is a misdirection the AI created to keep Stalkers from discovering the nature of The Zone. This is all very concrete COMPARED TO TARKOVSKY FILM. Compared to first person shooter video games, on the other hand, the game is atmospheric, plotless, incomprehensible, wild. Even technically, the game abounds in unorthodox bouts of user-unfriendliness —the player has to spend long, long minutes walking through an empty wasteland in some stretches of the game, an experience that is both suspenseful and boring. (And, as we all know, the difference between art and entertainment is that art is boring —or, less jokingly, that art sometimes uses boredom tactically —and who knows this better than Tarkovsky). Most of the Russian dialogue around you remains untranslated. (And, as we all know, the difference between art and entertainment is that art is incomprehensible). It has many different endings, 5 of which leave you without much of a clue about the plot. It's a confusing game. So much so that some have suggested that in order to understand the game one should consult the far more abstract film and book. As one game critic wrote: "The 5 "false" ending sequences may seem a bit weird, almost Twilight Zone material, but keep in mind that STALKER is based on the 1997 movie with the same name, directed by Andrei Tarkovsky, movie which in turn is based on the Sci-Fi short novel Roadside Picnic. I would advise you to dig a little on the Internet for information about the movie and novel to understand the core ideas on which the story was based and why the 5 false endings are they way they are." This is remarkable, I think, because the only way that the film — where nothing is explained at all — can "explain" anything about the game is aesthetically. The reviewer is telling you, in practice, "think about Tarkovky's "Stalker" film when you are thinking of the game and you will have a better time."The intertextual relationship between a video game and a canonical "high" artifact is never, I think, a very profound act of commentary, interpretation, or

parody. A game can't be all dialogue and cut-scenes —you do spend most of the time in e.g. Stalker shooting mutants — and shooting mutants can't amount to great Tarkovsky scholarship. The ideal of intertextual resonance for video-games, I'd say, is more comparable perhaps to what the Surrealists call "juxtaposition," or the New-Criticism's idea of metaphor. The resonance between two artifacts — between the game and the canonically artistic intertext —has a power to frame our experience of the game, recontextualize it and transform its emotinal and aesthetic tone. It has a power create affinities between our experience of the game, whether we're watching a cut scene or butchering mutants, and our idea of the novel or painting or poem or film. An ideal illustration for an this kind of idea of intertextuality can be found in the 2003 game ICO —a sort of platformer with hardly any jumping and action game with hardly any fighting, that never the less was quite popular. Ico, by the admission of the still-young video-game auteur Fumito Ueda, was partly conceived as a Girgio de Chirico painting come to life. ICO is a beautiful game to look at, eerie and gorgeous, but it doesn't really look much like a de Chirico painting until someone suggests that you to start looking at it like a de Chirico painting. Fortunately, someone does: the cover picture of the package ICO ships in is a rough reproduction of de Chirico's "Nostalgia of Infinity." The activation of the de Chirico intertext, which I here offer as a model for all evocations of high-culture intertexts in blockbuster video-games, is like a cognitive serving suggestion, a road sign or a guideline for the orientation of your mind in 'taking in' the game — and more specifically it is, I think, a suggestion having the form of a metaphor. It is a suggestion for the player to try see two very different things as belonging together, as being of a kind, and when it works right it's as hard to explain as a good metaphor. (One fruitful direction of inquiry may be to approach these intertextual activations as instance of what cognitive scientists call "priming" —

the effect whereby one stimulus implicitly structures a person's interpretation of further stimuli without reliance on a conscious interpretive integration of the two stimuli.) There are many more or less interesting things to say about the way that Cocteau's "Les Enfants Terribles" and "Metal Gear Solid" could work as interpretive codexes for one another, when we consider "Metal Gear" purely as a mass of text and characters and stories and ideas. Like Cocteau's twins the Metal Gear "Enfants" are glorious but aimless and placeless. Like Cocteau's twins the two are half-mystically codependent (Liquid Snake to Solid Snake: "I could never die as long as you live!"). The Cocteau novel also helps to land the punchline that the story of Metal Gear Solid is not so much a spy thriller as a sibling psychodrama, Solid Snake and Liquid Snake both bound by the inexplicable rules of their morbid relationships than gradually overshadows the techno-thriller premise of the plot. But the heart of the matter I think—the one thing that envelops both the parts of the games that you watch and the parts of the game that you play, sneaking and jumping and shooting—is that the allusion invites you, for a moment, to play "Metal Gear Solid" in the key of Cocteau." And I said, I said, 'it's lowbrow stuff I know but somebody should really do a thing about how there are two types of persons out there namely ones who want their girlfriend's exes to be cool and ones that don't.' And I said, I said, 'I challenge all of you all to find anything better in life than this Bowie self-cover.' And I said, I said, 'aphorism garage sale: our* least cynical choice is choosing who (real or imagined) we aspire to impress. It's kind of like falling in love only it's deeper and less reasoned. And seriously it's a heartwarming fact of human living if you look at it right. (*Except for you! You love only knowledge and first-order pleasure!)' And I said, I said, 'say did we ever talk about how weird it is that people who find biochemical determinism horrifying yearn for astrological determinism?' And I said to Mabel, I said, 'Tolstoy: "Ask my wife of

48 years if I am a misogynist!” And I said, I said, ‘annual report: my favorite essay that I read this year is the one where Coleridge says that writing for the theater is hard because if any of the words in your play sound like dirty words the audience will laugh. So, yeah, “that’s what she said” jokes are the midwife to modernity.’ And I said, I said, ‘Kazimir Malevich, *Black Squirrel*.’” And I said, I said, ““The well-known capacity that thoughts have —as doctors have discovered —for dissolving and dispersing those hard lumps of deep, ingrowing, morbidly entangled conflict that arise out of gloomy regions of the self probably rests on nothing other than their social and worldly nature, which links the individual being with other people and things; but unfortunately what gives them their power of healing seems to be the same as what diminishes the quality of personal experience in them.”[Robert Musil, *The Man Without Qualities*]

And I said, I said, “There is a mind beating in that pile of rubble you call your mind. It occasionally astonished me. ”Etonez moi” said Diaghilev to Nijinsky. Who immediately didand went crazy. A crazy notion in a gray society. What you hear is what you have heard from. What you wish is what someone has wished from a great distance. A long line with no bait and a single hook. Nijinsky danced nice. He was *The Spectre Of The Rose*. (I am not sure who is Diagalef and who is Nijinsky.) But the both of them also died. [Jack Spicer, From *”Three Poems for Tish”*]

And I said to Mabel, I said, ‘philosophy is hard.in philosophy I get uneasy when I’m on the verge of endorsing some p as a necessary truth, but still find ~p totally conceivable (only less “plausible” than p). And philosophical decisions like that come up all the time! Some ways to cope: Go Quinean and deny modality and with it the distinction between necessary and contingent truths*? I’ve tried going Wittgensteinian-or-something and renouncing every question that

requires the endorsing of a “deniable” necessary truth like that, but that was too far out there for me. I remember feeling optimistic about Carnap at one point (feeling like he finished figuring out things in the way that I was starting to and getting stuck), but nowadays I’m too confused about how “real” or “substantive” Carnap takes the differences between theories that agree in their sense-data predictions to be and what his pluralism actually means. *I’m like 90% that Quine denies the necessary/contingent distinction and not just the analytic/synthetic distinction.’ And I said, I said, “Adderall PM”. And I said, I said, ‘people who “outgrow” T.S. Eliot are the fucking worst’ And I said, ugh I said, ‘with lovesongs of the incredibly gender-specific variety, empathy diverges then converges. In some mediate stage of aesthetic cognition I’m more the guy who’s “naked half awake about to shave and go to work” than the Liz Phair that’s with him in the room, but in the end the situation that the self-insertion lets your experiential imagination into matters more than the position that you self-insert into within it. I used to ask my sister all the time how come we have the same response to very male-on-female angst songs. This is what Borges’ “The Theologians” is about.’ And I said, I said, ‘HOLY FUCK MY WHOLE BLOG IS IN IAMBIC HEPTAMETER.’ And I said to Mabel, I said, ‘as far as 90’s songs explaining tricky concepts go this does a better job than Sesame Street or Alanis Morissette.’ And I said, I said, ‘how [many iterations](#) do you have to go before you run out of google?’ And I said, I said, ‘that the word processor log into my brain and extract the paper I’m supposed to write via extrapolating from my present dispositions to two weeks into the future. That I have as much access to everyone as I would if we were childhood next door neighbors who grew up together. That Crab Cakes taste as good as they ought. That when I’m doing semiotics or philosophy correctly, some Super Mario Bros related sound will sound to have me know I got it right.’ And I said, I said,

‘Ray Davis is the best essayist. You should read him.’ And I said, I said, ‘hey, [person who wrote this](#), *whistle*, over here: Here’s my issue. You can make anything sound terrible by naming the qualities that are intended to make it appealing and matching them to people’s tendency to find these sorts of things appealing. But I like the writing style that this guy is dissecting. It’s a good writing style! The fact that he can name some of its properties is neither here nor there. So Tumblr-culture uses “and” and “!” a lot. OK. The later Henry James used many, many commas. Joyce was into swearing and alliterations. Buffy-speak is big on verbing and on pronouns. Rappers use internal rhyming to mark virtuosity! Art-punk bands use shrill sounds to sound artsy. In Tumblr-culture we use “!” and breathless “and” to get a tone of sprightly intimacy going. It’s fine.’ And I said to Mabel, I said, ‘CAUSATION.’ And I said, I said, ‘x-ray specs. I’ll always feel like knowing what pot smells like is some kind of crazy superpower that we get around our mid-teen years. You’re walking down the street and suddenly you know a private thing about the people in the house you passed and what they’re up to right now and what kind of life they’re leading even though there is a wall there.’ And I said, I said, ‘we used to fucking own the place.’ And I said, I said, ‘abstract labor: I spend a ton of time thinking about the gender politics of the commercial where the bottle of beer is dating the bouquet of barley.’

And I said, I said, ‘keep it pretentious, keep it funny, keep it rigorous, keep it confusing. This is dating advice **and** writing advice!’ And I said to Mabel, I said, ‘OMG. Now you want to read 20 pages on cause, purpose, genre, metaphysics, structure and theology in Marlowe’s Doctor Faustus?! You people are insatiable! Genre And Ontology In Doctor Faustus.”That was the cause, but yet per accidens”— Mephistophilis, ‘Doctor Faustus’ Marlowe’s The Tragical History of Doctor Faustus is a broken play. Whether one

admires Faustus despite of the drama's malfunctions or for them, it's hard to deny that by period-appropriate criteria we are dealing with damaged goods: the crack that runs through Doctor Faustus shows itself in the drama's failure to form a coherent generic identity, to hold on to a constant theological perspective, or even to sustain any consistency of characterization or tone. By coming to better understand the nature of this disjunction, we may end up learning why these structural failures all seem to just make Faustus more compelling. In this paper, I will argue that by closely exploring the narrative logic of Faustus we can come to discover an exact structural weak-point where Marlowe broke the play —indeed, my claim will be that Marlowe's otherwise meticulously loyal transposition of the materials of The English Faust Book actively collapses the logic of the book's 'tragic history', by systematically omitting a key ingredient from the dramatic representation of the story. This manipulation results in a deeply discontinuous plot that is neither Aristotelian nor a legitimately non-Aristotelian 'episodic' plot: while the discontinuous progression of a legitimate 'episodic' plot is a series of discrete, self-contained scenes, the plot of Marlowe's Faustus is rife with pathways leading nowhere, turning-points that don't do anything, and choices without consequence; each of the mismatching narrative parts of Faustus is thoroughly oriented towards an absent narrative whole. The puzzle of Faustus, I will suggest, is at its roots a narratological puzzle, for all of its remarkable power to variously incarnate as a puzzle of theology, a puzzle of ideology, a puzzle of genre and a puzzle of metaphysics. Marlowe has (re)created a self-incapacitating plot, and the vexed terms of the drama's participation in each of these discursive fields in whose spaces it plays out are in a meaningful sense the extensions of the plot's unique refusal to operate. Importantly, however, my narratological aetiology for Faustus is not aim to obviate the cultural-historical study of the drama's inner tensions but rather to

enrich it. The narrative short-circuit of Doctor Faustus can be understood as the purposefully dissonant interweaving of two mutually exclusive modes of narrative causation, each of the two anchoring the drama within a discursive framework that is at once literary, metaphysical and ideological. Taking a cue from the common identification of mid 16th century homiletic tragedy as the nearest ancestor in the tortured generic pedigree of Faustus¹, we may venture to call these two modes (and their respective originating discourses) the tragic and the homiletic. By breaking the designation ‘homiletic tragedy’ into its verbal elements to form this dyad, I aim to both to allude to the dual heritage of this specific historical genre—a 16th century hybrid intermixing high Greco-Roman form whose natural object is ‘our betters’ with populist Christian thematics meant to instruct common men—and to set up a more abstract opposition between ‘tragic’ discourse on the one hand and ‘homiletic’ discourse on the other. The Narrative Structure Of Faustus The assertion that Doctor Faustus has a dysfunctional plot might seem like a quaint proposition; after all, the drama’s basic story-line is simple, coherent, and immensely affective: a learned genius turns to the study of magic, and uses sorcery to summon a devil before him; he signs a contract in his own blood, pledging the devil his soul in exchange for two dozen years of unlimited power on earth; after twenty four year, the devil comes to claim his soul. Viewed at this scope, the plotting of Faustus is hardly a puzzle—one would be hard pressed to find in all of Western drama a plot whose stakes are higher than eternal damnation and ultimate power, or a plot whose logic of action and consequence (that is to say, its narrative logic) is more tightly knit than the logic binding magic to knowledge, devils to sorcery, and payment to contract. Indeed, who better to practice magic than a learned genius, and who could better enforce a usurious contract than the

devil? What substance but blood could have served to inscribe a man's soul into a contract, and what price could the devil accept but the deed to one's soul? Compelling and evocative as this narrative logic may be, however, we will come to see that this logic is not truly the narrative logic of Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus*—that in fact, various features of *Faustus* are geared to specifically abjure this intuitive causal unification of the drama's plot. In the close-reading that follows I will try to demonstrate that every one of these ready-made causal connections, which so easily arise even from just a bare catalogue of the drama's materials, is completely expunged in the course of Marlowe's play. Indeed, I will argue that Marlowe dramatically plays up the prospect of each of these presumed connection at various stages in *Faustus*, often with pomp and fanfare, only to have them dissipate inconspicuously a scene later. I will begin my reading with a detailed study of the 'rise and fall' (so to speak) of the idea that magic is a form of scholarly knowledge: every speaker in scenes 1-2 of *Faustus* incessantly heralds the scholarly genius of Faustus as the key to devil conjuration, until finally in scene 3 we are informed by Mephistophilis that the secret to conjuration is simply to 'rack the name of god'. Yet Marlowe does not serve us this reversal of knowledge in the form of a major plot event—as would have been the case with an Aristotelian *anagnorisis*—but as an affectless (and effect-less) correction interred in the flow of the conversation between Faustus and Mephistophilis. If, as I will try to demonstrate, anticlimactic revisions of this sort are typical of *Faustus* all the way through, then we can truly say that the iconic constituents of the *Faustus* narrative—magic, blood, genius, negotiation, and debt, to recall a few—are from a narrative perspective just a lot of sound and fury signifying nothing. From the start of the play, the theme of learning and power takes center stage. The opening Chorus in *Faustus* already declares in unambiguous terms that the unity of the drama's plot lies in the

(dangerous, treacherous) power of learning: “So soon he profits in divinity,/The fruitful plot of scholarism graced,/ (...) Excelling all, whose sweet delight disputes/In heavenly matters of theology,/”Til swollen with cunning of a self conceit,/His waxen wings did mount above his reach.” (p. 139) Basic principles of relevance alone should already suggest to any reader of this passage that the nature of Faustus’ ‘waxen wings’ must have to do with his previously mentioned excellence in learning; but more importantly still, the Classical reference to Daedalus’ invention evokes the power of human wit to (nearly) transcend Man’s limits, strongly implying that this is the subject of our story. These hypotheses are soon substantiated further, when we learn that the metaphor of ‘waxen wings’ refers to the practice of necromancy; and that scholarship and necromancy are so closely related that overindulgence in one leads naturally to the other: “And glutted more with learning’s golden gifts/ He surfeits upon cursed necromancy.” (ibid.) The buildup of this theme continues throughout the first scene, further establishing both that sorcery is a scholarly practice and that Faustus is uniquely qualified for it by his power of learning. First Faustus himself implies that the potency of magic requires intellectual potency, in referring to his upcoming quest for magical power as a test of intellect: “A sound magician is a mighty god: Here Faustus try thy brains to gain a deity.” (p. 141) Later, Valdes and Cornelius explicitly confirm this, most notably in the opening of Valdes’ speech: “Faustus, these books thy wit and our experience,/Shall make all nations to canonize us” (p. 143) Topics relating to the dependence of magic on learning also dominate the latter half of the ensuing conversation between Valdes, Cornelius and Faustus, carrying on for the remainder of the first scene; the magicians converse with Faustus about the intellectual and practical training required for magic, about the books of religion and philosophy that a practicing magician needs to have at hand, and so on. In the conjuration scene itself, the motif of

learned power peaks before deflating. As Faustus prepares the conjuration ritual, he attests to using all manner of scholarly arcana as elements in his spell: “Forward and backward, anagrammatis’d,/The breviated names of holy Saints,/Figures of every adjunct to the heavens,/And characters of signs and erring stars.” (p. 145) Subsequently we are treated to a long harangue in Latin culminating in the appearance of Mephistophilis, who silently obeys Faustus’ command to go change form. The vindicated Faustus then joyously celebrates his own power, fully pleased that he had tested it sufficiently: “Such is the force of magic and my spells./Now Faustus, thou art conjurer laureate/That canst command great Mephistophilis.” (p. 142) It is during the ensuing dialogue between Faustus and Mephistophilis that the ‘turning point’ finally arrives for the supposed theme of learning’s power, when the summoned Mephistophilis reveals that Faustus’ conjuration was just ordinary blasphemy: “It was the cause, but yet per accidens;/For when we hear one rack the name of God;/(...) We fly, in hope to get his glorious soul.” But this is a reversal that arrives mutedly and casually, without pathos or even any acknowledgement of its implications. When Faustus discovers that Mephistophilis is not obligated to heed his commands, his first question is not whether his conjuration has any power or not, but whether Lucifer has endorsed Mephistophilis’ arrival —perhaps this is the reaction of a man too preoccupied with getting the infernal deal underway to worry much about the past, or perhaps just a crude artistic seam for holding together two incongruous phases of the plot. In any event, the question of the conjuration’s power comes up only second, and although Mephistophilis’ answer catastrophically undoes everything we have known of the drama right up to that point, Faustus simply moves on to the next order of business. This lack of affect, it would seem, applies not only to Faustus but to the reader as well: secondary literature rarely if ever regards the advent of this revelation as a key

dramatic event in *Faustus*, even though the revelation's content (the claim that magic is simple blasphemy) is taken into account often enough in discussions of the metaphysics of *Faustus*². While I intend to make much of the exact metaphysical nature of Mephistophilis' revisionist account of the conjuration ("... but yet per accidens") later on, for now we should be content simply to note its deflationary implications for the entire premise of *Faustus*. The conjuring of a devil, it turns out, requires neither the experience of Valdes and Cornelius, nor the wit of *Faustus*, nor their treasuries of books. The same pattern of buildup and muted reversal reiterates itself, on a larger scale, in the theme of *Faustus*' blood-contract with Lucifer. Starting from the middle of Scene 3, the play mobilizes its entire artistic apparatus to support the drama of *Faustus*' choice to accept or to reject the contract for his soul. In Scene 5, for example, the dialectic of *Faustus*' conflicted soliloquy is bolstered by the voices of the two bickering angels, coming either from within Faust's own deeper psyche or from above (and below). Furthermore, the drama of the decision permeates not only *Faustus*' struggling speeches but also his blood and his skin: the warning 'Homo fuge!' ('Man, fly!') inscribes itself in ghostly writing on his arm; the life-blood that *Faustus* requires for ink freezes up in his veins ("What might the staying of my blood portend?/Is it unwilling I should write this bill?" (p. 152)). The only way for us to make any sense of such pathos as we see in Scene 3 through Scene 5 is to assume that the contract is fatal; and yet, no critic or scholar who has studied *Faustus* subscribes to the opinion that *Faustus* genuinely doomed himself to hell in the act of signing his soul away to Lucifer³. In fact, the very pathos with which the play surrounds the act of signing already begins the process of its own seamless reversal: the warning 'Homo fuge!' appears on *Faustus*' arm during the speech in which *Faustus*' declares the completion of the contract's signing ("Consummatum est: this

bill is ended”) (p. 153), but oddly enough it is the declaration that comes first and the warning that comes second. If there is still time enough for heavenly warnings even after the blood finalizes the deed, then the implication of the message ‘Homo Fuge!’ must be that a blood-contract signing one’s soul to the Devil isn’t all that fatal an affair. Indeed, it is this implication exactly that will now sustain the plot of Faustus from the present point to the drama’s end—in the course of the remainder of his tragic life, Faustus will repeatedly encounter and deny innumerable guide-posts that point at a path to salvation. The scope of the present paper forbids me from trying to offer a detailed account of the further progression of Faustus’ damnation. What’s more, one could hardly improve on Bevington (pp. 19-22) for a discussion of the many fascinating theological ambiguities that bear on the tally of Faustus’ sins (and on his prospects for salvation) as the play progresses. My own present concern, instead, is to review certain details pertaining specifically to the blood contract’s echoes in the later stages of the play. I take it to be generally uncontroversial that the Good Angel (p. 159) and the Old Man (p. 177) speak truthfully in saying that contract has no metaphysical hold on Faustus, and so any vital role the contract might play in damning Faustus would have to be psychological. But to demote the contract-signing from metaphysics to psychology is not yet to prove that the signing is a trivial event: If, as Potter (p.127) suggests, Faustus is in part ‘a psychological tragedy of despair’, than it might be the case that the contract-signing makes up in psychological impact for what it lacks in metaphysical efficacy. A separate argument is necessary, then, to show that even when we consider Faustus as a psychological narrative the contract-signing still remains inefficacious. Faustus And The English Faust Book I have previously suggested that the plot of Faustus is not merely dysfunctional, but actively ‘broken’ or sabotaged. Applied to the textual history of Marlowe’s Faustus as an adapted work, this

description acquires a new specificity —for, as I will now argue, it is precisely the functionality of the plot as apsycho-logical narrative that breaks down in the transition from *The English Faustus Book* to *Faustus*. When we compare the structural makeup of *Faustus* with that of *The English Faustus Book*, it becomes apparent that Marlowe’s adaptation of the *Faustus* story knowingly removed the impetus of the psychological causation that held the narrative together in *The English Faustus Book*. In *The English Faustus Book*, the conjuration ritual and the blood-contract are roughly equivalent to their *Faustus* counterparts in every metaphysical regard; what is fundamentally different this time, however, is *Faustus*’ epistemic situation. *The English Faustus Book*, much like its German source text *Historia vnd Geschicht Doctor Johannis Fausti des Zauberers*, is a story of deception and ignorance. To wit, what *Faustus* casually learns about his conjuration in Scene 3 of *Faustus*, he only learns through an intense anagnorisis scene in Chapters 13-14 of *The English Faustus Book*. In learning the truth about his act of conjuration, the *Faustus* of *The English Faustus Book* experiences a total reversal in his appraisal of his own fortune, in his regard for Mephistophiles, and in his evaluation of himself, as do the newly-informed readers: “[The] first man Adam that was made perfect to the similitude of God, was by my Lord his pollicie, the whole decay of man: yea, *Faustus*, in him was the beginning and first tyranny of my Lord Lucifer vsed to man: (...) likewise Dagon our fellow brought to destruction 30000. men, whereupon the Arke of God was stolen: and Belial (...) deceiued King Salomon that worshipped the Gods of the heathen: and there are such Spirits innumerable that can come by men and tempt them, driue them to sinne, weaken their beliefe: (...) thou knowest by thy selfe *Faustus*, how we haue dealt with thee. To this answered *Faustus*, why then thou didst also beguile me. Yea (quoth Mephistophiles) why should not we help thee forwards: for so soone as we saw thy heart, how thou didst

despise thy degree taken in Diuinitie and didst study to search and know the secrets of our kingdome; euen then did we enter into thee, giuing thee diuers foule and filthy cogitations, pricking thee forward in thine intent and perswading thee that thou couldst neuer attaine to thy desire, vntill thou hast the help of some diuell: and when thou wast delighted with this, then tooke we roote in thee & so firmly, that thou gauest thy selfe vnto vs, both body and soule the which thou (Faustus) canst not denie. Hereat answered Faustus, Thou sayest true Mephostophiles, I cannot denie it: Ah, woe is me miserable Faustus how haue I beene deceiued.” (ch. 14)

In order to unpack the full meaning of this revelation in *The English Faust Book*, we should take into our account several background factors that differ between the plot of the book and the plot of Marlowe’s *Faustus*. Interestingly, the most important of these differences are differences of sequencing. In Marlowe’s drama *Faustus* enters the contract fully cognizant of the true cause of Mephistophilis’ arrival—in fact, Mephistophilis’ first order of business is to set the record straight; in *The English Faust Book* Faustus signs the contract while falsely believing himself to have strong-armed Mephostophiles into offering the deal, and only learns the truth of the matter in Chapter 14. What’s more, Chapter 14 strongly implies that on the day of the conjuration Mephostophiles hoaxed Faustus by feigning an effort to resist Faustus’ spells (as per Chapter 2 —“Faustus commaunded that... hee should appeare to him at his house; but the diuel would in no wise graunt”). Indeed, this same proposition is explicit in the German source-text (*Historia vnd Geschicht Doctor Johannis Faustj*), whose description of the conjuration in its own Chapter 2 (Halie, p. 150) tells us that “the Devil feigned he would not willingly appear at the spot designated” and that “the Devil did mystify [Faustus] with the following hoax”; I take it that the maker of *The English Faust Book* (one P. F. Gent) may have subtracted these early revelations to make

Chapter 14 more surprising. The epistemic differences between the drama and the book are even clearer in their bearing on the matter of the blood-contract's impotence and the damning of Faustus. Unlike Marlowe's Faustus, whom the devils and the Bad Angel demoralize with accusations of wickedness but never with false talk of the contract's fatality, the Faustus of *The English Faust Book* is bullied into believing that the contract dooms him. (Mephostophiles: "[If] thou shouldest climb vp to heauen, there to hide thy selfe, yet would I thrust thee downe agayne; for thou art mine.") (ch. 15) In Marlowe's drama Faustus is repeatedly told by the Good Angel⁴, and later by the Old Man, that his repentance will nullify the contract, but in *The English Faust Book* that proposition is laid out for the reader's eyes only: "[Faustus cried out: I haue promised the Diuell my Soule: and therefore it is but a folly for me to hope for grace, but it must bee euen with mee as with Lucifer, throwne into perpetuall burning fire: ah, woe is mee that euer I was borne. In this perplexitie lay this miserable Doctor Faustus [...] neuer falling to repentance truly, thereby to attaine the grace & holy Spirit of God againe, t he which would haue been able to haue resisted the strong assaults of Sathan: For although hee had made him a promise, yet hee might haue remembered throught true repentance sinners comwie againe into the fauour of God;" (ch. 13) The Faustus of *The English Faust Book* is a man who has been mercilessly manipulated by the Devil: first lulled into a false sense of power, then psychologically destroyed with the truth of his actual powerlessness, and finally brought to despair with outright theological lies. In remaking the materials of *The English Faust Book* into *Doctor Faustus*, Marlowe took this terrorized wretch and transformed him into the most epistemically privileged of protagonists: Faustus gets debriefed about the agony of Hell before getting further involved with Mephostophilis; Faustus is told the

true nature of magic; Faustus knows that the blood contract is unbinding; Faustus gets showered with heavenly warnings and promises from the first moment to the last; in short, Faustus knows that nothing in the plot of Faustus matters other than his own ongoing choice to accept or reject the promise of god's grace. Before signing the contract, Marlowe's Faustus is offered a chance at salvation but rejects it because he believes that God will show him no grace: recall how in Scene 3 Faustus declares to himself "Ay, and Faustus will turn to God again./ To God? He loves thee not," (p. 151) and even already in Scene 2 declares to Mephistophilis that "... Faustus hath incurred eternal death/By desperate thoughts against Jove's deity." (p. 147) After signing the contract, Faustus is immediately offered salvation once more, and again he reacts in the same way, for the same reason: "Whither should I fly? If unto God, he'll throw me down to hell." (p. 153) Even at the very end, after his twenty four years of sublime, infernal and worldly adventures, Faustus is offered these same prospects again, and repeats the same consideration: "But Faustus' offence can ne'er be pardoned! The serpent that tempted Eve may be saved, but not Faustus." (p. 179) Faustus already began Marlowe's drama a sinner too conceited and too desperate to ask after God's forgiveness, and remained just that throughout the twenty four year span of the play. The theological despair that prompts Faustus' beginning is the same as the theological despair of his end. The Tragic And The Homiletic As we have seen, Doctor Faustus keeps promising the story of a one-of-a-kind scholar-magician who has made an irreversible mistake, and keeps delivering the story of a sinner who fails to repent. Indeed, for the last few scenes of Faustus the structural contradiction between the requirements of an intricate, linear plot about knowledge and power and the requirements of an open-ended plot about sinfulness and grace becomes almost comically blatant. In Scene 13 (p. 178) Faustus signs the blood-contract again (or at any event, declares his

intention to do so) to undo the effects of a brief repentance, leaving us to ponder the self-defeating logic of this gesture: a second signing of the blood-contract can only make sense if the original signing was not binding, and if this is the case then the second signing will not be binding either —if a brief thought of repentance is all that it took to endanger the Devil’s proprietary right on Faustus’ soul, then the reaffirmation of the deal will be just as metaphysically impotent as the original affirmation. The very idea of Faustus reselling his soul to the Devil embodies in its absurdity the irreconcilability of the two kinds of plots that struggle in Faustus: the story of Faustus the scholar-magician who sold his soul to Lucifer is a tragic plot, structured around the consequences of an irreversible action, whereas the story of Faustus the sinner who failed to repent is a homiletic plot (a ‘morality play’ plot) structured around God’s standing offer to reverse the consequences of sin by repentance. The two kinds of plot in Faustus are really two separate, mutually exclusive historical genres struggling to dominate the play —and even more than that, two irreconcilable views of human agency. A tragic plot and a homiletic plot, I will argue, operate on systematically different conceptions of the relationship between past action and future action: a little roughly, we can speak of the two as opposite conceptions of what it is for an action to bear consequences. Here the sense of ‘consequences’ meaning brunt or significance is as relevant as the sense of ‘consequences’ meaning results, since both of our competing discourses/genres are profoundly teleological (that is to say, they both define a thing’s essence by its resolution into some final state). In tragedy, a man’s action cashes out by directly redefining the space of possibilities; each instance of agency directs the course of events down one path of an unrepeatable fork in the road. In homiletic literature a man’s action cashes out as an incremental⁵ change in the tally of his moral

status. In order to prepare the ground for this comparison between the respective roles of human action in tragedy and in homiletic literature, we must first establish a clearer theoretical view of the relationship between claims about ‘plot’ or ‘narrative causation’ — claims that describe the artistic structure of a narrative artifact — and claims about ‘consequences’ or ‘the role of human action’, that deal with the ontology of the fictional world depicted by that artifact. A narrative event that is ‘necessary’ from the perspective of plot analysis may never the less be a paradigmatic example of meaningful free choice in terms of the fictional reality, and an action that is free of narrative necessity needn’t be a demonstration of the force of human agency. In fact, as I will now argue, a certain degree of narrative necessity is vital for the depiction of meaningful human action. When an agent considers a prospective action in real time, the criterion for significance is simple enough. For some prospective action X to be a meaningful action (in the sense relevant to plot-based drama), action X must literarily make a difference: it must be the case what would follow if one does X is substantially different from what would follow if one does not X. In order to adapt this criterion to our extrinsic and retrospective view of the actions in a drama’s fictional world, we have only to replace our hypothetical ‘ifs’ with counterfactual ‘ifs’: we can ask “Would things have turned out differently in the world of ‘Othello’ if Desdemona held on to her handkerchief?” using the same modality that we use in asking questions like “Would things have turned out differently if Hitler did not invade Russia?” of the actual world. Although our ability and inclination to form ‘beliefs’ about the counterfactuals that follow from a fictional world is of course not unlimited (nobody has any opinions about what would happen if aliens landed in Othello’s Venice), we necessarily form at least crude, broad counterfactual ‘beliefs’ about a drama’s fictional world whenever we make any judgements about probability and causation in the drama. Thus,

we can say that for some action X in a drama's plot to be a meaningful action, it must be the case that what would have followed if X failed to transpire would have been substantially different from the drama's plot. It should now be possible to see why structural necessity, in the Aristotelian sense, goes hand in hand with meaningful action—and why Aristotelian tragedy, for all its determinism, is a genre that accords great power to human actions. The Aristotelian 'necessity or probability' of a tragedy's plot is not simply a tally of the probability of each of the actions constituting the tragedy, but rather a relation between these actions: each of the tragedy's actions must be strongly dependent on the action antecedent to it, and strongly determining of the consequent action. And since tragedy's stock in trade is the generalities demonstrated in its fictional particulars (rather than the particulars in themselves), it is the essence of each event that has to be dependent on the previous events, not just its accidental form: Aristotelian necessity means that if (ex hypothesi) Creon were to mitigate or delay any of his actions then Haemon and Eurydice would not have committed suicide at all, not just that they would have committed suicide slightly later or in a different manner. For this reason, the unique causal structure that gives proper tragic plots their famous inexorability also makes all proper tragic plots counterfactually sensitive—every counterfactual that alters (ex hypothesi) a single action in the tragedy's plot would drastically transform all following events and actions. A tragedy is 'deterministic' or 'inevitable' not because the tragic outcome is inevitable no matter what choices the characters make, but because tragic characters only make principled choices—choices that necessarily follow from their respective *ethē*. Each of these choices, however, has the power to make or break the entire course of the plot. In fact, it is exactly our generic foreknowledge that every choice will prove counterfactually critical that makes us view the ethically

inexorable choices of the tragic character with pity and fear: when we witness King Lear make the choice to banish Cordelia, we know that everything that happens next will happen because Lear made this choice—that Lear had the power (but not the inclination) to set events on a completely different course. Aristotelian necessity means that in a tragedy each choice or action has a qualitative impact on the world. In homiletic literature, by contrast, the impact of a human action is merely quantitative: every action registers as a positive mark or a negative mark on man's record of sins and good deeds, and only influences future events by virtue of its incremental impact on this record. For homiletic literature, a man's action is significant if the fact of having performed this action will be weighted in his final accounting before god—indeed, in one sense this is the only significance of action for the homiletic, grounding all the rest of action's (limited) plot implications. To the extent that human actions can determine or effect future actions and events at all within the homiletic plot, they do so only by modifying the protagonist's 'moral momentum': sinful actions worsen man's proclivity to sin, and virtuous actions diminish it. Thus the plots of morality plays are typically iterative, depicting not a chain of events but a series of similar (but independent) challenges or opportunities in which man does gradually better or gradually worse: there can be plots of attrition like *Mankind*, in which man's positive moral momentum is worn out by endless challenges, plots of accretion like *Everyman*, in which man becomes better poised to take advantage of his moral opportunities with each success, and mixed plots like *The Castle Of Perseverance*, where opportunities emerge to halt man's negative momenta and challenges emerge to halt man's positive momenta. The central actions in Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus* build up as tragedy and resolve as homily. In a properly tragic *Doctor Faustus*, Faustus' infernal deal would have defined his tragic predicament from thenceforth—Faustus' dramatic situation after

signing the blood-contract would have depended on the deal. In Marlowe's drama, although Faustus' deal with the Devil shapes the particulars of his situation, the essence of Faustus' situation would have been the same with or without the deal: the fearful-and-pitiful predicament of Marlowe's Faustus is simply that he is a despairing sinner, and his tragical fate is just the tragical fate of all despairing sinners. Contract or no contract, magic or no magic, the locus of Faustus' existence would still be the continuous, endlessly iterated choice to sin or to repent. The only essential narrative impact that we can attribute to the act of signing is in terms of 'moral momentum': as a deeply sinful act, the signing of the contract worsens Faustus' morality and deepens his proclivity for sinning. If the signing of the blood-contract has any significance at all in Faustus, it is by virtue of its moral negativity. Just like Faustus' own conjuration spell that works only because Faustus "racks the name of God," the blood-contract with Lucifer has impact only because signing it is a sin. While 'moral momentum' is hardly the kind of fork-in-the-road causality that tragic action requires, it provides at least some causal infrastructure to hold the plot of Faustus together. When we measure the tragical superstructure of Faustus against the causal explanations that this infrastructure gives us, it becomes clear that Mephistophilis' scholastic quip in Scene 3 works to describe the entire arc of play: Faustus' magical learning was the cause of his deal with the Devil but only per accidens, and his deal with the Devil was the cause of his damnation but only per accidens. The causal power that underlies the world of Doctor Faustus is not in magical learning qua magical learning but in magical learning qua sin, and not in the soul-trade qua soul-trade but in the soul-trade qua sin. From Genre To Ideology The basic rhetorical form of both tragedy and homiletic literature is argument by demonstration. In Doctor Faustus, Marlowe's own Chorus instructs us to extrapolate from the example

of Faustus' life: "Faustus is gone; regard his hellish fall,/ Whose fiendful fortune may exhort the wise/Only to wonder at unlawful things." (p. 183) Tragedy and homily alike require that the story of Faustus' life serve to demonstrate an entailment between the type of actions that Faustus' actions exemplify and the type of outcome that Faustus' fate exemplifies. But the meaning of this demonstration can only be determined by our characterization of the causation between Faustus' actions and Faustus' fate: the cautionary implications of Faustus' fall depends on our analysis of the conditions that brought this hellish fall about. What a drama has to say about the extra-fictional world, it says by exemplifying generalities in its particulars. We determine what the plot of Faustus is 'about' —what its example signifies or stands-for—in interpreting the causal logic of the drama. When regarding Faustus as a homiletic warning, the one extra-fictional object that matters most for relating our world to the world of the drama is us ourselves: one would like to know, first of all, whether and how example of Faustus bears on one's own life. The drama serves to tell us that acting like Faustus will lead to an end like that of Faustus; but before we can use the lesson of Faustus' damnable life to identify and reject life-paths that are like that of Faustus, we first have to know what the criteria are for being/acting 'like Faustus' in the relevant way. Since the relevant way to be/act 'like Faustus' is (by definition) to resemble Faustus in the respect that caused his fall, ideology must recapitulate ontology. For a drama to work as a homily, the logic of its demonstrations must be applicable to every Christian. The fundamental principle of homily is that a homily must always speak about its audience —no bell can toll within a homiletic drama that does no toll for you. Homiletic literature, then, requires an identity between its subject and its addressee. Let us recall that while the modern audience of Doctor Faustus is highly specialized, the Elizabethan playhouse crowd included nobles, coopers, sailors, clothiers, scribes, brewers—in

short, it included everyone. To state a near-tautology, not everyone is a genius scholar bound to the Devil by blood, whereas everyone is an Everyman who vacillates between redemption and sin. If Faustus is essentially the story of a genius scholar undone by his own wit, then as a cooper or a barber watching Marlowe's play I know that Faustus' fortune has no direct bearing on my life; Given that I am not a genius scholar, nor inanger of becoming a genius scholar, the plot of such a drama leaves me be. On the other hand, if Faustus is essentially the story of an impious man who fails to trust himself to God before the time of his accounting comes, then when the clock "strikeeth twelve" on Faustus' last day (p. 182) it strikes for me as well. For this reason, if the properties that feature in the causation of Faustus were to have any specificity to them then the homiletic framework of the drama would shatter. In order to maintain the implicit universality of the homiletic address the drama's causation has to bypass every idiosyncrasy of its premise, and even more importantly the drama must revert back to a universally applicable status quo after every action takes place. Thus, homily requires that magic be reduced from art to blasphemy, since unlike necromancy blasphemy is a universally applicable temptation. In the same way, homily also demands that the dangers and prospects for Faustus' soul after the conjuration remain much the same as they were before the conjuration; a Faustus who operates in the aftermath of an irreversible action would have been a Faustus whose predicament has come too far apart from that of every man in Christendom to be homiletically serviceable. To put it simply, a drama that must work as a homily can never stray far from retelling the story of Everyman. But although Doctor Faustus does, indeed, abide by the constrains of homily, the drama's aspirational identity is always fully tragic. Let us recall the full arc of the drama's closing lamentation: "Cut is the branch that might have grown full straight, /And burned is Apollo's laurel bough,

That sometime grew within this learned man./Faustus
is gone; regard his hellish fall,

Whose fiendful fortune may exhort the wise,/Only to
wonder at unlawful things,

Whose deepness doth entice such forward wits,/To practice
more than heavenly power permits.” The tragical history
that Faustus purports to have told us is not the story of the downfall
of an Everyman, but the story of the downfall of Pico Della
Mirandola’s ‘Man’ —a story in which the measure of man’s life is the
flourishing of human potential and not man’s accounting before
God. Instead of lamenting the horrors of Faustus’ fate, or decrying
Faustus’ rejection of the universal gift of Christ’s blood, the Chorus
ends Faustus by mourning the loss of the unfinished bough of
wisdom that grew within Faustus. Indeed, the Chorus’ botanical
metaphor acts as a humanist subversion of a famous homiletic
motif: the biblical trope of sinners as cut, burning branches (Psalms
80: 15-17, John 15: 1-6, Matthew 7:19) is changed from an image
of suffering to an image of loss when it is “Apollo’s laurel bough”
that burns. For here the burning bough is not a representation of the
man who sins but the representation of an excellence that “grew
within” the man. What’s more, although the motif of the bough’s
cutting-and-burning comes from the bible, the Appollonian bough
itself mirrors not the biblical trope but rather Pico’s botanical
metaphor for human entelechy in *Oration on the Dignity of Man*:
“Whatever seeds each man cultivates will grow to maturity and bear
in him their own fruit. If they be [...] rational, he will grow into a
heavenly being. If intellectual, he will be an angel and the son of
God.” (p. 6) What is tragical about Faustus’ fate, according to the
Chorus, is that his life was cut short before the Apollonian bough
could mature: the occasion for pity and fear is the loss of a
burgeoning human excellence that could have become fully realized.

The damnation of Faustus to hell, by contrast, has completely fallen by the wayside. Even the Chorus' evocation of a 'hellish fall' serves to punctuate not the damnation of Faustus in the next world but his termination in this one, since it leads to no further discussion of hell. The locus of the closing speech of Faustus is the loss of Faustus' life—the loss to the world of the (imperfect) excellence and promise that Faustus embodied. The entire rhetorical arc of the Chorus' cautionary lament is structured around the poignancy of the statement that "Faustus is gone." It is the pathos of this loss that powers and defines the speech's exhortation ("Only to wonder at unlawful things..."), a Christian warning whose robustly tragical delivery overshadows its confusingly abstract homiletic content. According to the Chorus, the lesson of Faustus comes from witnessing the destruction of a paragon: the bitter fate of Faustus teaches us to dread the "deepness" that can bring "such forward wits" as Faustus into ruin. In the tragic vision that the Chorus gives us, Faustus' life was a unique and unfinished promise. But Doctor Faustus is a tragedy locked in a homily's world, and in a homily all men are Everyman, and life has no entelechy but only a trajectory from birth to death. To ask what Marlowe's Doctor Faustus means is to ask what happens in the collision between this tragic vision and the homiletic reality of Faustus' world. One major result of this collision, which the drama expresses in the character of Faustus himself, is an aesthetic of violent ennui. In a paradoxical moment in Scene 5, Faustus' despair at being damned drives him to thoughts of suicide:

My heart's so hardened I cannot repent. / Scarce can I
name salvation, faith, or heaven,

But fearful echoes thunder in mine ears, / Faustus,
thou art damned. Then swords and knives,

Poison, guns, halters, and envenomed steel / Are laid
before me to dispatch my self,

And long ere this I should have slain my self, / Had
not sweet pleasure conquered deep despair.

Have not I made blind Homer sing to me, / Of
Alexander's love, and Oenon's death,

And hath not he that built the walls of Thebes, / With
ravishing sound of his melodious harp,

Made music with my Mephistophilis? (p. 157) It is, of course, incomprehensible to yearn for suicide because one fears the pains of hell. Faustus' despair of life as a magician only makes sense once we consider it as an extension of his despair of every human enterprise (Logic, Medicine, Law, etc.) at the drama's beginning. The dream that haunted Faustus from the start is the dream of a learning whose power and value are never derivative or subservient. Every discipline that Faustus scornfully rejects ("Settle thy studies...", p.140), he rejects for having no efficacy and no entelechy of its own. But we have seen that no kind of action in Faustus —whether human, infernal or magical —can impact the world other than as a virtue or a sin (no place for efficacy), and that there can be no developments or consequences in the world of Faustus other than further sin or further virtue (no place for entelechy). It is little wonder that Faustus so quickly gives up on his aspiration for "dominion that exceeds... as far as doth the mind of man" (p.141): there is simply nothing meaningful for Faustus to learn or to do in a world where everything but sin and virtue is epiphenomenal. The only use that Faustus finds for his magic is to alleviate the pain of life's impotence with passing pleasures. Both the Chorus' idea of Faustus' potential as "Apollo's laurel bough" and Faustus' own aspirations for "dominion that exceeds... as far as doth the mind of man" imagine learning as

an autonomous domain of human power and achievement. But there is no autonomy, no human power and no human achievement to be had in homiletic drama. Even a deal with the Devil could not deliver Faustus from the clutches of an ontology without consequences and an ideology without unique individuals.’ And I said, I said, ‘Who Wants To Read 20 Pages on The 3rd Critique. Could it be U?! Kant on Aesthetic Normativity and the Relation of Aesthetics to Cognition There are two ways we can approach the question of the role, and the justification, of aesthetic normativity in Kant’s aesthetic philosophy. One approach would be to try to understand the Kantian idea of aesthetic normativity as a properly Kantian philosophical effort, arising from —and contributing to— the systematic Kantian project of transcendental philosophy. A second, different approach would be to try to extract a relatively self-sufficient “module” of aesthetic philosophy from the Critique, and then evaluate its adequacy to our intuitions about aesthetics and its compliance to generic standards of philosophical reasoning. It appears to me, however, that there is no real way to pursue the latter of these two inquiries other than by way of the former: Kant’s philosophy is unapologetically systematic, and a majority of the core arguments of the Third critique explicitly rely on Kant’s general theses about the conditions for communication and for thought. It is true that very few philosophers accept Kant’s transcendental idealism wholesale nowadays, so it might seem that trying to regard Kant’s aesthetics as an independent set of theses is the way to give Kant’s aesthetics serious philosophical consideration. But in light of Kant’s systematic approach, it will only bring about confusion if we attempt to “rescue” Kant’s aesthetics from transcendental idealism by trying to construe the third Critique as a self-sufficient study of philosophical topics in aesthetics. What we may hope for, nevertheless —to the extent that one finds certain aspects of the third Critique compelling, as I do —is that the principles that we discover

in exploring the Kantian edifice will prove to be translatable in worthwhile ways. More specifically, we might hope that Kant's view of the relation between the aesthetic norms and the transcendental conditions for thought will prove suggestive for creating 'neo-Kantian' theories that are congruent with philosophical views of thought that are not Kantian or transcendental. In this paper I will focus on defending (for the most part) the feasibility of Kant's reasoning about aesthetic normativity by Kant's own light — without thereby implying that the resulting edifice is on the whole a successful philosophical theory, or that the premisses of Kant's philosophical method are sound. The motivation for this defense, however, comes partly from my own sense that Kant's theory is exploring a powerful intuition in trying to connect the normativity of aesthetic judgment (an incontestable phenomenon¹, whether we take it to involve real norms or merely a human pathology) to the idea that a subject's aesthetic pleasures are a strong expression of some deeply basic facts about the way that her mind operates. Furthermore, I believe that there is an instantly recognizable truth in certain remarks that Kant offers off-handedly in discussing some "merely psychological" consequences of his theory: In section SS41 of the Critique², Kant offers a brief diagnosis of the human practice of enthusiastically comparing, sharing, and discussing aesthetic experiences in our social (inter-personal) lives. In this diagnosis, Kant strikingly proposes that in human social living, public and interpersonal demonstrations of a concord between the aesthetic pleasures of different subjects are valued (in part) as examples of the depths to which the correlation between the subjectivities of different subjects can extend. Although for Kant providing an account of this "merely psychological" phenomenon is of marginal interest only, I feel that this account does much to demonstrate what is compelling about Kant's approach. Both Kant's

pure philosophical theory of aesthetic normativity and his related psychological account of our enthusiasm for aesthetic discourse tie aesthetic judgement to a sense that aesthetic pleasure is a core aspect of our subjectivity. It seems to me that introspection vindicates the broad idea that our passionate disposition toward aesthetic agreements and disagreements —both our insistence to make our aesthetic judgments “in a universal voice³”, and our desire to engage in aesthetic communion⁴ —is tied to our sense that a concord of aesthetic pleasures (or discord of aesthetic reactions) between subjects is profound in a way that (e.g.) concords or discords of ordinary enjoyments are not. For this reason, Kant’s quest to establish the legitimacy of aesthetic normativity by grounding aesthetics in cognition is of more than historical interest. The Purpose Of Kant’s Argument We should begin our discussion of Kant’s argument for aesthetic normativity by asking first exactly what Kant’s goal is, so that we can separate essential objections to Kant’s reasoning from more local qualms about claims that Kant makes “along the way.” Kant’s purpose, as I understand it, is to establish that the judgement of taste is at least as authoritative as ordinary factual judgments. On my view, Kant’s infamous decision to describe the judgement of taste as “imperative” is not meant to decree that the judgment of taste places a stronger or more urgent demand on our fellow subjects than do empirical judgments, but only to say that the logical form⁵ of the judgement of taste is more akin to the form of an imperative than to the form of an empirical judgement. Kant’s motivation for making this distinction is, I think, the following: An empirical judgment seems to have a mediate (although necessary) relation to a normative demand. For example, my assertion that it’s raining implicates a normative demand to the extent that the act of asserting that p always implicates that I am epistemically virtuous (and therefore a

normative model for others) in my⁶ believing that p. For some philosophers, this implicature may even extend to an endorsement of the perceptual feelings⁷ that underly my belief that it's raining. But it is extremely unlikely, even from a Kantian perspective, that prescribing the epistemic virtue of my belief that it is raining, or the epistemic virtue of the perceptual feelings that underly my belief that it's raining, is the whole content of my assertion that it's raining. On any reasonable philosophical account, the primary or immediate subject-matter of my assertion that it's raining is the weather, rather than my epistemic virtue. A Kantian judgement of taste, on the other hand, is nothing but implicature of virtue: all that a Kantian judgement of taste says is that I am virtuous (and therefore a normative model for others) in my pleasure. Kant's insistence that a judgement of taste differs from an empirical judgement in this manner derives from his explicit insistence that pleasure is absolutely not a perceptual or representational feeling. If Kant were of the opinion that pleasure is a perceptual feeling, then perhaps he would have had occasion to identify the authority of the judgment of taste with the authority of empirical judgments⁸: Kant is arguably sympathetic to the philosophical idea that my prescription that my (e.g.) visual impression of a cat on a mat is a normative model is tantamount to asserting that there is a cat on the mat. So if Kant could grant that a feeling of pleasure is, like a visual impression, a feeling that suggests something empirical about the world, then the judgment of taste that endorses a given feeling of pleasure could (perhaps) be just like an empirical judgment. But so long as Kant holds that pleasure is not a perception, Kant cannot try to take this route. Given the above, what Kant must do in order to establish the authority of aesthetic judgement is to establish that aesthetic pleasure is subject to norms. If the judgement of taste is a judgment of the normative status of an aesthetic pleasure, the

legitimacy of the judgment of taste can only be established by establishing that aesthetic pleasures have a normative status. Kant's task, therefore, is to produce an argument for the existence of aesthetic norms. *The Challenge For Kant's Argument*. There is a practical sense in which every positive philosophical thesis of normative aesthetics faces a very steep climb. While a thesis in the field of (e.g.) normative ethics can sometimes begin with some uncontroversial normative claims, and simply treat these uncontroversial normative claims as a granted foundation, this route is not really available for a philosopher who wishes to do normative aesthetics: Given the fact that the very claim that there exist aesthetic norms is philosophically contentious⁹, it is clear that there are no uncontroversial aesthetically normative claims to be found in the philosophical commons (so to speak). There is no philosophical consensus here to grant philosophers the right¹⁰ to start their argument by taking some aesthetic norms for granted. Nor, indeed, can a philosopher begin by taking it for granted that there are aesthetic norms at all. Every thesis of normative aesthetics has to start with something other than aesthetic norms, and try to somehow make its way into aesthetic normativity from there. When a philosopher argues for some aesthetic norm, or argues for the very existence of aesthetic norms, the first movement of the argument is often a descriptive philosophical theory of aesthetic pleasure. The philosopher will typically elaborate on the phenomenology of aesthetic pleasure, provide an epistemological and metaphysical account of the relations between subject and object in the aesthetic experience, and theorize about the nature of the psychological infrastructure of our faculty for aesthetic pleasure. In terms of the normative¹¹ philosophical project, the purpose of such a descriptive inquiry is to arrive at some idea of what aesthetic pleasure is, such that once we comprehend this idea the transition to asserting norms

about aesthetic pleasure (or to asserting that there are such norms at all) becomes more philosophically facile. One way for this kind of inquiry to succeed would be by showing that aesthetic pleasure, once we analyze it properly, turns out to be answerable to some already philosophically established norms in a sufficiently interesting way. In order to do so, one would have to prove (via only a descriptive analysis of what aesthetic pleasure is) that aesthetic pleasures qua aesthetic pleasures are systematically subject to some already philosophically established normative propositions of ethics or epistemology, in a way that guarantees that these already philosophically established norms consistently deliver verdicts that are relevantly and uniquely sensitive to aesthetics qua aesthetics when aesthetic pleasures are concerned. One might argue that J.S. Mill, for example, attempted to establish a normative aesthetics in roughly this manner. But this is not a path that Kant¹² can take, because providing a proof of this kind would require that Kant bind the judgment of taste (the judgment of the normative status of an aesthetic pleasure) to a definite concept.¹³ Since Kant explicitly and repeatedly defines the judgment of taste by its independence of any definite conceptual judgment, this would obviously be destructive to his project. A second, different way of trying to proceed from descriptive philosophy to normative philosophy can seem immediately wrong-headed, but might in fact be suitable to Kant's predicament: we can try to use our descriptive analysis of aesthetic pleasure as a source of guidance for philosophizing about aesthetic norms. Inevitably, an argument constructed in this manner will involve —implicitly if not explicitly— an attempt to philosophically establish some tenet of aesthetic normativity by appealing to descriptive facts about aesthetic pleasure, but this attempt does not have to involve a fallacious logical derivation of “ought” from “is.” Philosophical reasoning is often a deeply holistic affair¹⁴, such that

different philosophical beliefs¹⁵ and intuitions can legitimately influence each other through a philosophical economy that is quite apart from the logical relations between them. If our philosophical squeamishness about aesthetic norms is motivated by worries about whether the idea of aesthetic normativity makes sense, rather than by a total absence of positive (pro-norms) intuitions, then a descriptive theory of aesthetic pleasure can prove very relevant to our considerations. The benefit that some descriptive theory of aesthetic pleasure carries for the project of aesthetic normativity could, perhaps, be that the aforementioned descriptive theory can make the philosophical terrain of aesthetics more hospitable to some normative intuition that would have otherwise remained frustrated. For Kant, it is a given that we do have intuitions that endorse the idea of aesthetic norms. The problem for aesthetic normativity, as Kant observes in section SS56, is that our inclination to endorse aesthetic normativity clashes with other intuitive notions we have about aesthetics. Against the intuition that there are aesthetic norms stands the opposing intuition that aesthetic sensibilities are too diverse and too personal to be subject to norms¹⁶. I believe that much of Kant's work in the third Critique is aimed at the construction of a theory of aesthetic pleasure that will show that aesthetic pleasures are a suitable subject matter for norms. The Structure Of Kant's Argument A useful paradigm for ordering Kant's argument for aesthetic normativity is to read Kant as making an elaborate reply to the following intuitive denial that there are aesthetic norms, which denial we might call "the enjoyment thesis." According to the enjoyment thesis, (1) the experience of beauty (a.k.a. aesthetic pleasure¹⁷) is a form of enjoyment, and (2) enjoyment is not answerable to norms. Since Kant's opposition to the enjoyment thesis turns on his rejection of the proposition that aesthetic pleasure is a form of enjoyment, and not on a rejection of

the proposition that enjoyment is impervious to norms, it is not necessary to linger over every one of the different exact forms that the enjoyment thesis might take. But since it is vital (if we hope to evaluate Kant) that we understand exactly what Kant is hoping to avoid by denying that aesthetic pleasure is an enjoyment, we should nevertheless pay careful attention to the intuitions at work behind proposition (2) of the enjoyment thesis. There appear to be two largely independent intuitions that are relevant here: the intuition that enjoyment is too philosophically innocuous or insignificant to be subject to norms, and the intuition that enjoyment is too automatic or passive to be subject to norms. Kant explicitly endorses both of these intuitions with regard to enjoyment in the course of the Critique¹⁸: In SS4, for example, Kant proposes that because enjoyment lacks “finality¹⁹” there can be no obligation to enjoy oneself. This, I believe, is an endorsement of the intuition that enjoyment is too innocuous for normativity. And in SS39, Kant argues that because “enjoyment enters into the mind through sense—our role [...] being a passive one,” an experience of enjoyment has no claim to universality. (For Kant, to say that an experience lacks universality is to say that we can neither presuppose that experience in others nor normatively prescribe it²⁰.) This, I take it, is an endorsement of the intuition that enjoyment is too automatic to be subject to norms. As I have already mentioned, Kant’s attempt to vindicate aesthetic normativity starts by proposing that aesthetic pleasure is not an enjoyment. Our brief excursion into the features that intuitively make enjoyment unsuitable to normativity²¹ now equips us to approximate what Kant needs to achieve in making aesthetic pleasure relevantly different from enjoyment. Kant needs to establish both that aesthetic pleasure is significant in some philosophically interesting sense that does not apply to enjoyment,

and that aesthetic pleasure is active in some sense that does not apply to enjoyment. While the above may still be fairly fuzzy, if we consider these notions in conjunction with some core tenets of Kant's transcendental philosophy, then Kant's task becomes considerably more specific. First let us recall that, as Kant reiterates in (e.g.) SS41²², transcendental philosophy must disregard all phenomena that it cannot deduce a-priori. So in order to show that aesthetic pleasure is significant in a philosophically interesting sense, Kant needs to prove that it is a-priori necessary that there exist such a thing as aesthetic pleasure. (As we will see very soon, it is often difficult to say exactly what it is that Kant is trying to assert when he asserts the necessity of some entity using a transcendental argument—but for the moment it is best to leave this matter aside.) This aspect of Kant's philosophical framework makes Kant's task more difficult, since it restricts the available means for establishing the philosophical significance of aesthetic pleasure to means of a-priori reasoning alone. On the other hand, a second relevant tenet of the Kantian framework is in fact quite favorable to the prospect of aesthetic normativity: the Kantian view of the mind as essentially active makes an easier job of construing aesthetic pleasure as being sufficiently active to be answerable to norms. Kant's philosophy of perception, in particular, famously attributes an active dimension to many mental phenomena that are commonly regarded as passive. For Kant, the very apprehension of objects already involves an activity of the faculties of imagination and understanding. Using the resources of transcendental idealism, Kant derives something roughly like the following thesis, which I will call Necessary Aesthetics. Necessary Aesthetics: An aesthetic pleasure is a delight in the harmony between the imagination and the understanding in apprehending an object's form. This is an active pleasure, because the imagination and the understanding are active mental faculties. This

is a prima-facie philosophically significant pleasure because, given any object *o* such that in apprehending *o*'s form the imagination and the understanding are in harmony, the fact that the imagination and the understanding are in harmony in apprehending that specific form, expresses the structure of the imagination and the understanding. This is a necessary pleasure —and therefore a genuinely philosophically significant pleasure —because the universality (necessity) of the imagination and the understanding is given to us transcendently. Necessary Aesthetics marks a clear success for Kant in some respects —it does, after all, assert the activeness, necessity and philosophical significance of aesthetic pleasure. What is not yet clear, however, is how close does Necessary Aesthetics get us to normative aesthetics. Indeed, an opponent of Kant's argument could, perhaps, offer the following critique of the idea that Necessary Aesthetics represents philosophical progress: "Let us grant that aesthetic pleasure is an expression of the structure of our cognitive faculties. Let us also grant that there is one right structure for our cognitive faculties to have. And, finally, let us grant that we are transcendently required to presuppose that everybody has the right structure. Does this not entail the deeply implausible conclusion that it is already the case that every subject makes the same taste judgments as every other subject? If taste expresses the structure of our faculties, and we all have the same structure of faculties, then surely we would simply all have the same taste. This identity of tastes gives us universality but not normativity, and furthermore it is unclear that we can assume such a thing —transcendentalism or no transcendentalism —in the face of an empirical reality that clearly shows that disagreements of taste do exist. More formally, the two objections to the notion that Necessary Aesthetics is conducive to Kant's goals are (1) the claim that Necessary Aesthetics has the implausible implication that everyone already find the same things beautiful, and (2) the claim

that the universality and the necessity that Necessary Aesthetics asserts are irrelevant to normativity. I presented the above objections mixed together in a monologue because I believe that the same general take on Kant's argument motivates both the contention that Necessary Aesthetics has implausible empirical implications, and the contention that Necessary Aesthetics makes no progress toward normativity. Both of these contentions, I believe, follow from an interpretation of Necessary Aesthetics as a purely psychological thesis —its interpretation as a thesis dealing (in an a-priori manner) in the same bare psychological facts that (e.g.) neuroscience deals in. I would like to argue that at least certain critical elements of Kant's thesis are not mechanically psychological in this way. It seems to me that according to Kant what makes one's right aesthetic pleasure an "expression" of one's universal faculties (which are by-hypothesis the right faculties) is not just a causal relation between the faculties and the pleasure. On my interpretation of Kant, being the product of the faculties is not enough for being an expression of the faculties —rather, the relationship between a universal faculty and an expression of that faculty is akin to the relationship between a rule and its successful application. On such a view, some facts about how the faculties behave establish a "rule" that divides other behaviors into "expressions" of the faculty and misbehaviors of the faculty. It might be that logic, according to Kant, is an example of something like this: logic is the universal rule of reason's operation in conceptual thinking, but our reason sometimes messes up in real life. In fact, Kant's most direct discussion of the possibility of aesthetic error laconically endorses a broad parallel between aesthetic judgement and logical judgment, possibly in order to suggest just such an idea²³. I take it that the Kantian assertion of universality always openly involves some form of normativity. For example, it is certain

that for Kant assuming the universality of (e.g.) reason involves assuming laws of reason, and not just the expectation that everybody possess reason like your own as a bare psychological fact. Kantian necessity appears to involve some kind of philosophical symbiosis between normativity and descriptive universality. One aspect of this symbiosis of normativity and descriptive universality in Kant's ascriptions of necessity might be a notion that norms need "something to grab on to," so to speak: we cannot prescribe of a tree that it ought to reason logically, and we cannot prescribe of a duck that it ought to respond to the genius of Homer, because the relevant faculties are wholly absent. On such a reading, Necessary Aesthetics is really in the business of establishing that everyone's taste is the same kind of thing—that everyone's taste refers to the same parameters—rather than that of establishing that everyone's taste is the same. Let us observe, at this stage, that we have now transitioned from descriptive aesthetics to normative aesthetics. By modifying the Necessary Aesthetics formula to allow aesthetic disagreements and aesthetic errors, we have not only resolved the manifest absurdity of a transcendental denial of taste disagreements, but also started to construct a fully functional normative aesthetics by coupling a partial descriptive aesthetic universality to some very minimal and intuitive "new" norms (i.e. the rule following-style norms applied to the universal faculties). I suspect, however, that Kant's argument goes further than this in trying to offset the philosophical arbitrariness of positing new norms. Kant aspires, finally, to show that there must be norms for aesthetic pleasures. For Kant, the division of aesthetic pleasures into expressions of the universal faculties and misbehaviors of one's faculties needs to be made philosophically necessary and not just philosophically harmless. Kant tries to achieve this by arguing that the rightness or wrongness of an aesthetic pleasure is the rightness or wrongness of one's pre-conceptual processing of a given representation. Let us

recall that, per Kant, regardless of aesthetics we already have to assume the universality of ordinary cognition, and that ordinary cognition must start with an interplay of understanding and imagination. In ordinary cognition, “common sense” has the job of determining how to set-up the interplay of the faculties vis-a-vis the object, as the first step toward making objective, cognitive, conceptual judgments about the object. In Kant’s words, “Common sense” picks “the relative proportion [of imagination and understanding] suitable for a representation (by which an object is given to us) from which cognition is to result.” Seeing as failure to apply the faculties in the suitable proportion would make cognition impossible, the capacity to apply the faculties in the suitable proportion is transcendently necessary. This means, if my discussion was at all correct, that (per Kant) there are norms such that the application of the faculties to a given object can go right or go wrong. A particular application of the faculties to a given object can be right, by having a proportion suitable to the object “in respect of cognition²⁴”, or else be wrong, by having a proportion unsuitable to the object. Now, recall that an aesthetic representation²⁵ of an object is, like every other representation, an interplay of the imagination and the understanding. When a subject’s actual faculty of “common sense” sets the relative proportion of imagination and of understanding for the apprehension of that object, it might do that job rightly or wrongly. If the play of the faculties is wrongly attuned (has the wrong proportions), the result might sometimes be a wrongful aesthetic pleasure, or the absence of a rightful aesthetic pleasure. A wrongful Kantian aesthetic pleasure is, I think, quite possible, since for Kant aesthetic pleasure is the feeling of applying the imagination and the understanding in a uniquely balanced proportion²⁶. When “common sense” functions correctly, this uniquely balanced

proportion is only applied if the object is such that this proportion suits it. But when a subject's "common sense" slips, she might wrongfully apply this uniquely balanced proportion to an object for which it is unsuited "in respect of cognition," and experience wrongful aesthetic pleasure. The uniquely balanced proportion is still pleasurable when it is applied to an object to which it is not suited "in respect of cognition," but being unsuitable to that object in respect of cognition means that the resulting apprehension is infelicitous²⁷ as an apprehension. These same principles would also, naturally, give us an account of the possibility of the absence of a rightful aesthetic pleasure. Regrettably, Kant does not indicate exactly what it means for an apprehension to be infelicitous for cognition in the relevant way. Indeed, Kant never at all clarifies the implications of a failure of "common sense." Kant does assert that without "common sense" there could be no thought, but this is just to say that (per Kant) thought cannot exist if there exists no faculty of common sense (or norm of common sense) at all. Kant's explicit discussion does not tell us much about what makes an individual instance of applying the faculties to some object in an unsuitable proportion a cognitive failure. Themes from Kant

The above concludes the properly interpretive part of my discussion of Kant's argument for aesthetic normativity. Although the following is highly tentative, I would like to close this paper by offering a speculative account of the Kantian idea of "common sense". The rough idea behind the Kantian notion of "common sense," as I understand it, is that our orientation in the world starts with a sense that different objects intrinsically²⁸ merit different kinds of attention. By speaking of the kind of attention that an object merits "intrinsically", I mean to say that Kant is here concerned with how we apprehend an object when we have no pre-formulated cognitive goals to achieve with regard to that object. It is possible to

examine a snake in order to determine whether the snake is poisonous or not, or to examine a snake in order to approximate the snake's age, but these two ways of looking at a snake express a particular and contingent interest. We can always apprehend an object with the goal of answering some question that we formulated ahead of time —is it blue or green? how many inches tall is it? —but the (respective) ways we apprehend an object for such tasks cannot give us a universal, common way of orienting ourselves in the world. “Common sense” is meant to be the faculty that determines what thoughts and impressions (out of all the infinitely many true thoughts and impressions one could have vis-a-vis the snake) are involved in apprehending the snake qua apprehending the snake. More precisely, “common sense” is meant to determine what thoughts and impressions constitute apprehending the snake qua apprehending the snake. We might say that common sense determines what it is to neutrally apprehend²⁹ the snake. I believe that Kant might reasonably (given his framework) think that a universal sense of what it is to neutrally apprehend a given object is a condition for all rational communication. “Common sense” defines a neutral, common way of looking at the world, prior to our individual and particular interests. This kind of common ground is, arguably, necessary if we are to orient ourselves within the world in roughly the same way as one another. It is at least somewhat plausible to hold that some degree of correlation between different subjects' experience of the world is necessary for the very possibility of communication. Let us consider, for example, just how immensely difficult it is for a sober person and a stoned person to communicate. The state of being stoned, it seems to me, is exactly what Kant would define as a distortion of one's faculty of “common sense”. Mind altering drugs of the non-hallucinogenic variety (drugs that make a person stoned rather than drugs that

make person “trip”) drastically alter one’s sense of the right way to apprehend the world, without per-se inducing false beliefs. What gets radically altered when a person becomes stoned is mostly not one’s capability to have true thoughts and true impressions, but one’s sense of what thoughts and impressions³⁰ are intrinsically insightful and informative. In others words, what the drug changes is one’s sense of what thoughts and impressions constitute the (respective) neutral apprehension of the myriad objects that one engages. We can perhaps think of “common sense” as a sense of primitive (i.e. irreducible) salience or relevance. It seems plausible to to define such a “common sense,” as Kant does, as a disposition (and corresponding prescription) to use some particular proportion of imagination and of understanding in the apprehension of a given object³¹. On my understanding of Kant, the division between the imagination and the understanding means something like the following: the work of the imagination is to explore the details of an object, and the work of the understanding is to make factual judgments about the object. For possible examples of the congruence between my interpretation of Kant’s “common sense” as being a sense of primitive salience or relevance, and Kant’s definition of “common sense” as a sense of the appropriate proportion of imagination and of understanding, consider the following³². “Common sense”, I think, is for example our inclination to try to grasp every nuance of a human face rather than be content to classify the object (the face) as a lump of flesh and leave it at that. Complementarily, “common sense” is also our inclination to be content to have classified a white wall as white, and not to bother to trace the complex gradations from one shade of white to another that make up the wall’s imperfect whiteness. We can consider the two cases above as examples of the proper regulation of the work of the imagination given the achievement of a

judgment³³ by the understanding. On such an account, to be content merely to have classified a face as a lump of flesh would be to end the imagination's work too soon for what a face merits (per the norms of "common sense"). And, complementarily, to trace the gradations of white on the surface of a white wall we already judged to be white would be pointless busywork for the imagination (per the norms of "common sense"). In a similar way, "common sense" also regulates the work of the understanding. There are infinitely many facts available for the understanding to apprehend in a given representation, but only a limited number of these will be pithy (per the norms of "common sense"). When we apprehend a running river, for example, the imagination has plenty to trace but the understanding quickly runs out of occasions for insightful judgments. The gushing of the water in a running river is too chaotic to allow for many interesting generalizations, so an overly zealous application of the understanding will amount to just a laundry list of irrelevant facts³⁴. Complimentarily, when we apprehend a very regular object such as e.g. the Great Pyramid of Giza, a great deal of the imagination's work should (per the norms of "common sense") occasion judgements by the understanding. For, at the very least, one cannot properly apprehend the Great Pyramid of Giza without forming the judgment that it is a pyramid-shaped object. This is a fairly complex geometrical judgment, however, and the road to forming such a complex judgment would be paved by forming many simpler geometrical judgements all throughout the apprehension process. To apprehend the Pyramid without employing judgements of geometry, the way that one would properly apprehend the gushing of a running river, is to end the work of the understanding too soon for what a Pyramid merits (per the norms of "common sense"). And, complementarily, to geometrically map the the relations between drops of water in a

gushing river would be pointless busy work for the understanding (per the norms of “common sense”). The application of this framework to aesthetics should, I hope, be self-explanatory. I have previously argued that on Kant’s account of aesthetic normatively, to critique someone’s aesthetic pleasure in some object is to say that the aesthetically pleasurable interplay of the faculties is not the right interplay of the faculties for enabling insightful thought about that object. More technically, the contention of such a critique is that the proportion of the imagination and the understanding that makes for the aesthetically pleasurable experience is the wrong proportion for apprehending the object in question. While the above might sound quaint, it is worthwhile to consider that in real-life aesthetic discourse, the grounds for denying a work’s claim to formal beauty are often either that the work is too simplistic, or that the work is too chaotic. A Kantian account of the critique of an aesthetic pleasure on the grounds that its object is too simplistic or too chaotic might be something like the following: When someone finds aesthetic pleasure in (e.g.) a poem that we take to be simplistic, our contention against them is that the poem does not merit as much activity of the imagination as they are applying to it. What we claim is that in applying the aesthetically pleasurable proportion of imagination and understanding to the apprehension of the work, one goes against “common sense” by using the imagination more than the work merits. We contend that the trivial ambiguities and mundane associations that a pleurably active imagination will be occupying itself with in the simplistic poem are just pointless busywork for the imagination, much like tracing the gradations of white in a white wall. Complementarily, when someone finds aesthetic pleasure in (e.g.) a poem that we take to be chaotic, our critique of their aesthetic pleasure is that the poem does not merit as much activity of the understanding as they are applying to it. Our claim would be that in applying the pleasurable proportion of

imagination and understanding to the work, one uses the understanding more than the work merits. We contend, for example, that the poem is so far removed from propositional content³⁵ that any interpretive activity is pointless busywork for the understanding, comparable to the activity of geometrically mapping the relations between drops of water in a gushing river. Importantly, this contention is different from the more verifiable claim that the poem has no propositional content —the contention of the aesthetic critique is that the poem is so far removed from propositional content that detailed judgements about its relation to propositional content have no insight or relevance for its apprehension (per the norms of “common sense”). A defender of the poetry of John Ashbery can, for example, hold that there are always a great many interesting judgement to make about the way that an Ashbery poem almost fits the criteria for expressing some proposition. The aspect of Kant’s argument for aesthetic norms that I find philosophically promising is the suggestion that there is a continuity between values that concern the apprehension of objects in general and aesthetic values. Importantly, however, this praise for the aesthetic usefulness of Kant’s account is quite apart from saying that we should accept Kantian normativity wholesale. I intend to suggest only that Kant’s account seems to insightfully represent the way that we critique someone’s aesthetic pleasure in those (rare) cases in which we grant that the contested pleasure is a genuine but wrongful aesthetic pleasure. The question of whether any of the cognitive criteria involved should be considered universal norms is a separate question, to which I am inclined to answer negatively. But even just to philosophically connect our judgment of an aesthetic pleasure to a judgment about its (the pleasure’s) relation to thought is already deeply interesting, however universal or “personal” we take either judgment to be. Even if we reject —as we probably should —the idea

that all rational communication requires a perfectly uniform “common sense,”³⁶ and consequently reject the idea of a universal “common sense” or universal norms of “common sense,” a continuity between cognition and aesthetics can still prove valuable for defending some form of aesthetic normativity. I have previously suggested that “common sense” is concerned with something like primitive (i.e. non-instrumental) salience or relevance. Even without the framework of Kantian universality, a person’s sense of primitive salience or relevance is a very loaded thing. Indeed, it seems to me that such a sense of primitive salience or relevance is closely related to what Wittgenstein calls “a way of life.” If aesthetic taste can be considered an aspect of a person’s sense of primitive salience or relevance, then perhaps we might say that aesthetic taste is part of something like a “way of life”. If one were to successfully pursue such a line of reasoning, it could potentially open up a range of possibilities for aesthetics normativity: We can, sometimes, contend against somebody who we take to share a common way of life with us that she is wrong by the implicit logic of our shared practice. We can also, in some cases, take a critical or hostile stance towards another way of life, and make an appeal or address a contention to its practitioners. It would be very worthwhile if a philosophical inquiry could show that aesthetic contentions are as substantial as contentions dealing with “a way of life.” And I said, I said, ‘HABITUS HABITUS HABITUS. In your late teens: it’s bad etiquette to say or ask how many people you hooked up with. In your early thirties: it’s bad etiquette to say or ask how much you make. In your preteens: it’s bad etiquette to say or ask what your IQ is. In your early twenties: it’s bad etiquette to say or ask how many followers you have on Tumblr.’ And I said, I said, ‘CONCEPTUAL ART I ENDORSE.’ And I said, I said, ‘if I relied on the internet for gaging what’s deplorable to humans I would come up with a list that

goes: genocide, rape, liking things people can guess that you like, murder.’ And I said, I said, ‘the sublime: if I had to point out one thing in the world that’s definitely indication that I’m dreaming it’s the lyrics to John Mayer’s “Daughters.”’ And I said to Mabel, I said, ‘THIS IS VERY LIKABLE AND PLEASING TO ME.’ And I said, I said, ‘Rousseu’s Second Discourse & You: compliments are the most viciously addictive stuff on earth and some of us are the equivalent of crack babies.’ And I said, I said, ‘Every day is an adventure. There are so many indie icons whose feelings about Lady Gaga I have not yet been informed of!’ And I said, I said, ‘Amy Poehler impressions are like that thing that great 18th century novels do to build a character in one sentence.’ And I said, I said, ‘Help me. I should be denied custody of my body.’

And I said to Mabel, I said, ‘made this Lolbourdieu so that from now on whenever someone I respect gets gamey I can send this out and get back to my life instead of fretting for a week.’ And I said, I said, ‘Casual Decision Theory. Last year I wrote a philosophy paper that mixed decision-theory paradox and white liberal guilt. It’s pretty cool. ” ...I have previously argued that for a deliberating agent to be able to coherently take into consideration a possible scenario that would bear on her present psychology, the scenario must be hospitable to an intentional story about her present deliberation, and in particular must allow to describe the deliberation’s result (in that scenario) as a reasoned decision. This principle does not imply, however, that reasons must always be the exclusive or primary subject matter of these scenarios. Let us recall that adjectival reasoning deals in assumptions of the following form: ‘if the present deliberation resolves into decision d, then I (already) have character-trait c’. Character-trait c must be compatible with every intentional fact that the agent knows to be entailed by resolving into decision d, but at the same time character-trait c can

be radically underdetermined by these facts. In fact, as I will now argue, if character-trait *c* is to be a faithful example of the kind of character-traits that actual people care about, character-*c* will practically never be determinable based on reasons (in the strict intentional sense) alone. The argument against the reducibility of most character-traits to reasoned decisions is simple: when people self-evaluate their own biography they can typically doubt the authenticity of their own virtuous actions and try to explain away their own vices, despite knowing all the basic intentional facts about the relevant reasoned decisions. In order to substantiate this abstract claim, as well as begin to explore its potential implications for adjectival deliberation, let us take-up a detailed example²⁵.

Consider Serena²⁶, an 18-years-old who grew up among the super-rich, so that by default every person she was romantically involved with was upper-class. Despite her origins, Serena deeply loathes snobbery. One criterion for snobbery per Serena is that if a person would only choose to date a prospective mate if that prospective mate is super-rich, that person is by-definition a snob. But although Serena is akrasia-free and has an excellent memory for past reasoned decisions, Serena does not know whether or not she herself is a snob by this criterion. Granted, Serena does know that the reason for which she decided to initiate each past relationships was not that her then-prospective boyfriend was rich, but simply that she felt a physical and emotional attraction to that boyfriend. But this knowledge fails to get at the pivotal facts about which Serena is concerned. What Serena dearly hopes for, in hoping that she is not a snob, is that her feelings of attraction for her boyfriends (the reasons for her actions in initiating a relationship) were never at all caused²⁷ by a boyfriend's economic status. In other words, Serena hopes that it is not the case that her romantic dispositions track wealth by virtue of her being disposed to act on feelings of

attraction that track wealth. Snobbery as conceptualized by Serena is an example of a kind of character-trait that could be called 'oblique' in its relation to intentional action, while foolish glut as conceptualized by Lovejoy could be called 'direct'. To get slightly technical, a character-trait is 'oblique' if it holistically supervenes on one's dispositions, so that to know whether an agent possesses that character-trait or not may require extensive knowledge of one's actions in various counterfactuals²⁸, over and above knowledge of one's actual decisions or actions. The preceding example about Serena involved (near) total ignorance of one's adjectival status vis-a-vis the oblique character-trait, but this needn't be the case. Consider Serena at age 20, after 2 years spent among middle-class students in a public college during which she initiated no romantic relationships: now Serena has indications that slightly favor²⁹ the hypothesis that her romantic dispositions track wealth (by virtue of her innocently acting on her felt attractions). Further indications could add up to strongly favor it. We can imagine Serena feeling increasingly uneasy about herself at age 22, after transferring to a private college with an economically mixed student population, and once again initiating relationships but only with rich students. What is critical, however, is that Serena's knowledge of her own actions only informs (or misinforms) her about her own character by serving as evidence, and does not logically necessitate any facts about her being or not being a snob. Notably, this makes the informative implications of one's actions with regard to an oblique character-trait equivalent in kind to the informative implications of one's actions with regard to the predictor's prediction in a Newcomb case. It is possible, then, that if there are cases of adjectival deliberation in which the 'adjective' is an oblique trait, such cases may turn out to be structurally related to Newcomb cases more than to cases like Lovejoy's Welsh Rabbit. Although I believe that most character adjectives are in fact oblique

in this way, the most clear-cut cases are presented by strongly undesirable adjectives relating to unconscious biases (which may historically depend on psychoanalysis for their salience, but are coherent independent of substantial view of 'the unconscious'): unknowing misogyny, unknowing self-destructive urge, unknowing racism. Accusations and self-accusations of unknowing misogyny or unknowing racism are notoriously biography-transcendent, in the sense that almost any series of actions (let alone a single action) is theoretically compatible with both their complete truth and their complete falsity. This of course is not to say that actions cannot provide extremely strong evidence one way or the other —to the contrary, the point is exactly that even extremely strong evidence are just evidence and not truth-conditions. While certain rare actions may logically entail (e.g.) unknowing misogyny because having a disposition for these very actions is sufficient for misogyny, many actions that are strong evidence for a robust misogynic dispositions do not entail even a minimal or partial misogynic disposition: one can believe of some professor that his (the professor's) good-faith decision³⁰ to recommend for a prize his five obviously weak male grad students over his five obviously strong female grad students makes it almost certain that the professor has sexism issues, yet also believe that if in fact this decision is caused by a bias about hair-color rather than about gender then the professor's action shows nothing misogyny-related. This is in complete contrast with the Welsh Rabbit case, where the reasoned action of eating the Welsh Rabbit manifests foolish glut independently of any further facts about Lovejoy's psyche. As we approach the question of adjectival deliberation regarding one's own oblique character-traits, we can derive from the previous considerations another important potential analogy between reasoning about actions in the context of oblique character-

traits and reasoning about Newcomb cases. If we were given only preliminary data about the professor example, and asked to determine how likely it is that the professor has sexism issues if he chooses the five male students³¹ vs. how likely it is that the professor has sexism issues if he chooses the (female) five best students, we should obviously rate the first possibility much higher. But if some highly informed third-party had complete psychological knowledge of the professor, such that she knew all of the professor's various dispositions pertaining to gender, she would judge that the mere difference between deciding to recommend the male students and deciding to recommend the female students would have made no difference with regard to the professor's sexism or non-sexism provided that all his other dispositions³² remain the same. In scenarios in which the professor is in actuality not-sexist, the professor's choice is not gender-based and therefore counterfactuals in which he performs or does not perform it would mean nothing at all for this topic. More interestingly, in scenarios in which the professor is actuality sexist, including those scenarios in which his choice is an expression of that sexism, the counterfactuals in which the professor performs or does not perform this choice should not be very different from each other in terms of the professor's adjectival status. This is because in the latter scenarios the professor by definition has plenty of other sexist dispositions, and sexism isn't straightforwardly quantifiable. Even though oblique character-traits are networks of behavioral³³ dispositions, the disposition for any one behavior relates to the character-trait the same way that the disposition for each particular sneeze relates to a hay-fever. To take a real-life example, the extent of TS Eliot's anti-Semitism was literary, and yet a counterfactual Eliot who somehow never thought-up the line "And the Jew squats on the window-sill, the owner", or even a counterfactual Eliot who rejected that one line as too anti-Semitic,

would not have been by that very fact less anti-Semitic than the actual Eliot³⁴. But this counterfactual insignificance does not imply that one genuinely sexist (or anti-Semitic) choice does not mean too much in and of itself. To the contrary —one genuinely sexist choice means so much that it cannot be the expression of a single local disposition, but can only characterize an interpretable person if that person has many other such dispositions. In other words, the most probable psychological profiles on the assumptions that the professor chooses to recommend only males are so fundamentally different from the most probable psychological profiles on the assumption that he chooses fairly, that this choice itself is the least of their dissimilarities. Like in the Newcomb case, an agent's choice that has tremendous implications if we frame it by asking 'what is the case given that the agent chooses a and what is the case given that the agent chooses b', becomes impotent if we frame it by asking 'what would have been the case had the agent chosen a and what would have been the case had the agent chosen b'. We should now be able to provide something like a descriptive formula for adjectival deliberation regarding an oblique character-trait, which will permit us to ask whether such a deliberation is rational and whether the occasion for such a deliberation can ever realistically arise. Let 'ADJ' stand for some desirable oblique character-trait adjective or the negation of some undesirable oblique character-trait adjective, and 'ACT' stand for some action. If an agent believes that adjectival deliberation regarding oblique character-traits is rational, then (ceteris paribus) that agent will AC if that agent believes that the probability that she-herself is and already was ADJ given her biography³⁵ so far and her ACT-ing is larger than the probability that she is and already was ADJ given her biography so far and her not-ACT-ing³⁶. Although certain critical complications that arise in every concrete case will have to be ignored in this stage, let us pick

an example to help illustrate the formula. We can posit that Serena³⁷ on her first day of college believes that given her biography so far, dining at the college cafeteria would slightly increase the probability that she is non-snobbish. A compelling way to illustrate the evidential role that cafeteria dining can play here is to think of Serena's character as a finished jigsaw puzzle placed upside-down so that the picture on the puzzle is unrevealed. Every action in Serena's biography reveals the picture-side of one piece of this puzzle (every action entails some minimal corresponding disposition, or at least a past disposition). Serena has specific hopes about the contents of the puzzle's mostly unrevealed picture-side —that is to say, Serena hopes that she-herself is non-snobbish by character. But if non-snobbishness is a picture, then it is a picture that can be drawn in many different variations (for being a character-trait that supervenes on one's dispositions holistically and thus can be realized by many different networks of dispositions), such that the picture-side of each individual puzzle-piece might change drastically from variation to variation. However, some of these variations are much more likely to be printed on a puzzle than others (some networks of dispositions that realize non-snobbishness are common psychological profiles and some are very rare). To say that cafeteria dining increases the probability that Serena is and already was non-snobbish is to say that if the newest revealed piece of the puzzle is cafeteria dining then the revealed section of the puzzle (taken as a whole) indicates more strongly than before, all things considered, that the complete picture would be a variant of non-snobbism. As I have already suggested, there are two major questions to ask of this formula. The first question is whether the formula in its theoretical form describes a rational principle or not; the second question is whether a follower of the formula could ever find a genuine occasion to apply it in the real world. In trying to answer these two

questions, I hope to bring this paper into an acceptable culmination. My proposed (non)answer to the first question is, unsurprisingly, that adjectival deliberation regarding oblique character-traits is rational or irrational to the extent that one-boxing in a Newcomb case is rational or irrational. Seeing as Newcomb cases are sometimes referred to as ‘Newcomb’s Paradox’, the preceding is hardly an unambiguous verdict: to some philosophers an equivalence with Newcomb one-boxing would mean that these deliberations are rational, to others it would mean that they are irrational, and to yet another group it would mean that these deliberations present an unsolvable rational dilemma. My discussion so far offered several arguments to the effect that (evidential) adjectival deliberation and one-boxing reasoning are related, but I have yet to show that the two are genuinely equivalent in all philosophically interesting respects³⁸. Although it is true that the so-called ‘evidential decision theory’ would ground both Newcomb one-boxing and the formula for adjectival deliberation, and that the so-called ‘causal decision theory’ would condemn both of them, I am interested in providing a pre-theoretical³⁹ reason to always take the two together. Of course, it is generally doubtful that one can ever prove pre-theoretically that two cases are equivalent with regard to a measurement as broad and dynamic (not to mention contested) as that of instrumental rationality. What I will try to do, instead, is to briefly demonstrate how blurry the borders can be between the implicit logic of one-boxing in paradigmatic Newcomb cases and between even the narrowest definition of (evidential) adjectival deliberation. We can begin by directly comparing the surface features of (evidential) adjectival deliberation with those of Newcomb one-boxer reasoning. In (evidential) adjectival deliberation, an agent decides at time t to take action in order to, by the very fact of having performed that action, increase her subjective probability for

possessing a desired character-trait at time t . This isn't just a description of the expected utility of the action, in the same sense in which I throw a rock in order to increase my subjective probability for a broken window, but also the only available description of the adjectival decision's instrumental rationale. Similarly, in Newcomb one-boxer reasoning, it is clear that the agent decides to take action in order to increase her subjective probability for some desired state of affairs—but by contrast it is unclear or overdetermined just what this state of affairs is. The problem seems to be an embarrassment of riches, as there are numerous states of affairs that the agent might reasonably be said to be 'targeting' as her instrumental rationale for one-boxing. In a traditional Newcomb case, the agent hopes that there is \$1M in the opaque box, and knows that the contents of the box depend on the contents of the predictor's decision, which in turn depend on the predictor's prediction, which in turn depends on the agent's dispositions at some time t at which the prediction was made⁴⁰. Any one of these states of affairs, including simply the presence of the \$1M, could be regarded as the direct target of one-boxing (since one-boxing is equally good evidence for them all). Nevertheless, I believe that there is at least some sense in which states of affairs regarding the agent's dispositions at time t play a primary role here: the agent's choice to one-box would provide the agent with good evidence for there being \$1M in the opaque box because the agent's choice to one-box is good evidence that at time t the agent had whatever complex disposition the predictor's prediction renders to produce a one-boxing prediction. In this sense, one-boxer reasoning is just (evidential) adjectival deliberation regarding a past, rather than present, character-trait. Whatever one's biography so far is, the addition of the one-boxing action to one's biography radically increases one's evidence that at time t one had the 'character-trait' that supervenes on whatever dispositions make

for a one-boxing prediction by the predictor. Although this is already close to proper (evidential) adjectival deliberation, we can do even better. There could be, for example, a variation Newcomb case in which the predictor predicts not whether the agent will one-box or two-box, but only whether the agent is (at the moment of choice) by character a one-boxer or a two-boxer. This of course makes for only minute differences with regard to the prediction's truth conditions⁴¹, but nevertheless it does build-in a necessary adjectival deliberation into one-boxing: in order for one-boxing to give the agent evidence that the predictor predicted that the agent is (at the moment of choice) a one-boxer by character, one-boxing has to antecedently give the agent evidence that the agent is (at the moment of choice) a one-boxer by character. This Newcomb variation can be further tweaked at will to enrich the adjectival ingredient, such as by modifying the predictor's criteria again so that the predictor's prediction is about whether the agent is typically a one-boxer or typically a two-boxer: Let us imagine that people's real decisions in a Newcomb case sometimes vary based on their mood at the day of the game. A game could be set up which rewards, regardless of their actual current mood, those people that would one-box in 95% of their possible moods. By considering one more twist on this variation, we can also finally arrive at our final question—namely, whether in the real world an agent would ever find genuine occasions for adjectival deliberation. Let us imagine a kind of game in which the predictor places \$1M or \$0 in the opaque box based on a combination of one-boxer/two-boxer predictions and of predictions regarding the psychological meaning of the agent's choice. I am interested in contrasting two hypothetical games of this kind. In game-A, the predictor places \$1M in the box iff it predicts that the agent is (in the moment of choice) both a one-boxer and prudent about this game. In game-B, the predictor places \$1M

in the box iff it predicts that the agent is (in the moment of choice) a spontaneous one-boxer; a spontaneous one-boxer is defined as a person who would one-box in the closest possible world in which adjectival reasoning does not play any explicit or implicit part in her deliberation. Like in the previous variations, the agents in these games are fully informed of these extra conditions.

I believe that in game-A, one-boxing remains unproblematic by the standards of Newcomb one-boxing. First of all, in any Newcomb case, an agent who trusts the principles of one-boxer reasoning is acting prudently by choosing to one-box⁴². More importantly, however, prudence is also tolerant of adjectival deliberation. By 'tolerant' I mean to say that an action is not a-priori less fit to be described as prudent if this action is motivated by an adjectival desire⁴³ to (already) possess the character-trait 'prudence'. A scenario in which an agent one-boxes in order to increase her chances of being a prudent one-boxer (and thus increase her chances of winning \$1M) indicates as much prudence or more prudence than almost any other scenario in which an agent one-boxes. By contrast, a character-trait involving 'spontaneity' is typically highly intolerant of adjectival deliberation. An action chosen by an agent in order to increase the probability that she is (already) spontaneously ADJ is typically not good evidence for her (already) being spontaneously ADJ. This intolerance works on two levels, one of which is already implicit in the definition that I provided for 'spontaneous one-boxer' in game-B. Firstly, an action chosen based on adjectival deliberation is by definition not causally explained by an agent's spontaneous dispositions, and therefore cannot itself be a spontaneous action of any kind. This is why the condition for being a spontaneous one-boxer in game-B cannot be fulfilled by any causal story about the deliberation of an agent who uses adjectival reasoning, but only by facts about how she would act if it wasn't for

her adjectival reasoning. Secondly, an action chosen based on adjectival deliberation is usually not even good indirect evidence for the agent that she would have performed that same⁴⁴ action spontaneously. If an agent knows that if she chooses to one-box then her reason for one-boxing will be her desire to (already) be a spontaneous one-boxer, then prior to any decision this knowledge already gives her some indication that if it wasn't for her adjectival reasoning she would probably two-box. It may be that one-boxing would still make for somewhat more auspicious adjectival evidence than two-boxing, but prima-facie not by enough to counterbalance the \$1T guaranteed by two-boxing. We can regard the contrast between game-A and game-B as the basic model for distinguishing between situations that can occasion adjectival deliberation and between situations that cannot. Some of the character-traits that people hope for in everyday life have a meaningful relation to a certain kind of adjectival prudence, whereas other desirable character-traits can only ever express themselves in spontaneous action bereft of adjectival concerns⁴⁵. On Lovejoy's conception of not being a gluttonous fool, for example, concerns for one's status vis-a-vis foolish glut are just as legitimate a defeater of foolish glut as concerns for one's health. But a character-trait like fearlessness, on other hand, can have nothing to do with the fearless-seeming actions of an agent who stands tall in the face of danger despite her fear because she desires to (already) be fearless. It would seem that with most desirable character-traits, however, adjectival prudence can carry some but not all of the weight of the character-trait: an act can be genuinely courageous even if the agent that performed it would have been overwhelmed by her fear if it wasn't for the fact that she loathes to be a coward, but an agent who only ever acts (seemingly) courageously because she loathes to be coward is pathological rather than courageous. Similarly, one's loyalty can

sometimes guide one's actions by virtue of a high premium that one places on maintaining her self-perception as a loyal person, but it cannot operate only and always in this manner and still count as genuine loyalty. Still, any single loyal-seeming action whose performance depended on the agent's high adjectival prudence regarding loyalty is much better evidence for a loyal character than a perfidious-seeming action would be, and in some situations an agent may face such a binary choice. Let us recall that an action is good evidence that an agent possesses a character-trait iff the addition of this action to her biography increases overall the probability that the agent matches a psychological profile that realizes that character-trait, even if this addition makes the biography incompatible with some such profiles that it was previously compatible with. By performing an action based on an adjectival deliberation, an agent may disqualify herself from possessing a perfectly spontaneous variant of the character-trait, but still increase her overall chances of possessing that trait by sufficiently increasing the probability that she possesses a mixture of spontaneous and prudent dispositions that together amount to that character-trait. There is nothing odd, after all, about the idea that (e.g.) courage or loyalty are deeply related to the valorization of courage or loyalty—the indoctrination of elite soldiers in antiquity, for example, typically stressed devotion to the polis and devotion to one's own stature as a warrior by the same measure. Three factors, then, will determine how common or uncommon occasions for adjectival deliberation can be with regard to a certain character-trait. The first factor defines the conceptual possibility of adjectival deliberation: if the character-trait can only be expressed spontaneously, then by definition no occasion for adjectival deliberation can arise. The second factor defines the power of adjectival deliberation: the more typical it is for people who are ADJ to be prudent about their status vis-a-vis ADJ (and the more atypical this is for people who are not-ADJ), the stronger the

evidence that adjectival deliberation can generate. The final factor defines the necessity (as in usefulness, not as in ‘necessary truth’) of adjectival deliberation: the more likely it is that a person who hopes that she is ADJ will face situations in which if it wasn’t for her adjectival concerns she would prefer some particular action that would give her evidence that she is not-ADJ, the more relevant adjectival deliberation will be. In light of these factors, it should now be clear why unconscious biases of the kind that took center stage throughout this paper are a flammable subject matter for adjectival concerns. To take Serena’s example again, it is practically a prerequisite for a rich person with any kind of social consciousness to obsess about the meaning of her lifestyle choices. And while intentionally avoiding choices that a snob would typically make may count for very little toward proving that Serena is not a snob, these demonstrations of adjectival prudence safeguard her from an alternative course of action that would give her devastatingly strong evidence that she is a snob —namely, her making choices that a snob would typically make. Even if Serena is sometimes naturally inclined to make some particular choice that a snob would typically make, and can clearly sense this inclination, she still has critical evidence to lose or to gain by choosing between the inclination and the adjectival concern. When it comes to unconscious biases such as unknowing snobbism, it generally seems that people who carry a sense of unease that keeps them from indulging certain inclinations that are harmless in themselves but typically expressive of a bad psyche, tend to have less of a bad psyche overall (in the relevant respect) than people who indulge. While one might contest this supposed principle, it is at the very least a principle that an agent might reasonably believe. It makes intuitive sense to hypothesize differently about the respective probable personalities of person-A, who hears a holocaust joke, finds the joke funny, and writes the joke down despite feeling uneasy about savoring a holocaust joke so

much, and of person-B, who finds the joke funny but because she is uneasy about savoring a holocaust joke does not write the joke down. I take it that acting (abstaining) by virtue of this kind of unease is in at least one important sense equivalent to acting (abstaining) by virtue of adjectival concerns. Whether or not this kind of unease can itself be interpreted as a form of implicit adjectival concern, it is certain that adjectival prudence regarding unconscious biases can be interpreted as an expression of this unease—or rather, as an expression of the same psychological qualities that this kind of unease expresses. The critical implication of this equivalence is that adjectival deliberation can for this reason generate any evidence that ‘unease’ can generate. By way of a conclusion for this paper, I will now present a concise technical description of a mundane situation in which all the features that I have recently discussed come together to maximize the evidential power and evidential urgency of adjectival deliberation, while also guaranteeing the undesirability of the adjectival deliberation’s causal result. If the assumptions required to set-up the situation are as modest as I believe them to be, then this kind of situation may be not only realistic, but also real and regularly reoccurring. Let us posit Daniel⁴⁶, a person who holds three entrenched beliefs regarding the consumption of hard⁴⁷ pornography. Daniel believes that hard pornography consumption does not cause any psychological damage to the consumer⁴⁸, but Daniel also believes that (almost) only profoundly misogynistic persons choose to consume hard pornography habitually. Finally, Daniel believes that on the condition that one’s hard pornography consumption doesn’t financially support the pornography industry⁴⁹, it is not immoral to consume hard pornography. Daniel’s related desires are similarly entrenched: Daniel enjoys consuming hard pornography and thus

desires to consume hard pornography habitually, but Daniel also strongly desires for it to not be the case that Daniel is a misogynic person. The latter desire is stronger than the former by orders of magnitude. Daniel believes that on the assumption that Daniel will choose to habitually consume hard pornography, it is almost certain that Daniel is a misogynic person. According to Daniel it is possible, by highly improbable, that Daniel's psyche is such that habitual consumption of hard pornography by Daniel would have a cause unrelated to misogyny. Daniel also believes that on the assumption that Daniel will choose to abstain from hard pornography despite a desire to consume pornography, the probability that Daniel is a misogynistic person is less than 50%. The same probabilities (roughly) also apply given the more specific assumption that Daniel will abstain for adjectival reasons, because adjectival reasons are psychologically similar to common defeaters like unease, non-moral self-disgust, non-moral shame and so on. To lay out the obvious, Daniel has to choose between taking an evidentially disastrous action and between making a useless sacrifice—the same choices that faces the agent in a tradition Newcomb case. By choosing pornography consumption Daniel would voluntarily choose a scenario that Daniel loathes, whereas by choosing to abstain from pornography Daniel would knowingly deny satisfaction to a desire that can be satisfied with no bad consequences no matter what scenario is actual. If I am right to claim that this situation is psychologically feasible (or even common), then it would seem that the work of an omniscient alien predictor with \$1M can be involuntarily reproduced at home by one person with an internet porn problem. My hope is that the open question to emerge from this paper is whether this correspondence should encourage us to take our sense that there's a genuine philosophical dilemma involved in Newcomb's Problem less seriously, or encourage us to regard the complications associated with adjectival desire more seriously.” And

I said, I said, 'were probably real cool the first time: - The "I'd ask for infinite wishes" idea.- The expression "Postmodern."' And I said, I said, 'please explain to me the difference between toffee and taffy.' And I said, I said, "'artifact A is [successfully] artsy for reader R if any reading practice of which R believes that it substantially furthers his understanding of A [as a communicative action] bolsters for R what R believes to be the intended impact of A.'" And I said to Mabel, I said, 'the purpose of a sitcom is to tell us everyone is capable of every behavior. There'll be the episode where the cool guy embarrasses himself compulsively, the episode where the nice girl acts like a jerk, the episode in which the reasonable one acts crazy, and so on. I had a crush on a barista once. I sat by the counter with part II of *The Man Without Qualities* saying to her that I should really be studying French instead because I'll have to be able to write PhD-level papers on Robbe-Grillet soon, once I choose whether I'm saying yes to Yale or Harvard. If I hadn't watched about a hundred episodes of 'Friends' during my tweens I would have had to kill myself that night. ' And I said, I said 'dear Molly, I haven't read or [read someone who read](#) a book that wasn't abstract as all fuck in so long, you got me as confused as a vampire reading the food section! I spent all evening trying to remember: What makes good books good? Are good books good more in the way that good road trips are good than the way that good poems or paintings are good?' And I said, I said, 'why am I explaining the third Critique? Cause Immanuel Kant!' ' And I said, I said, 'for most of us the first horrific stress we ever feel is fear of death. And smart kids that we are we teach ourselves the symptoms - the way everything looks like it's made of cardboard suddenly, and the intense awareness of the blank sensations travelling throughout your body - as the truth of the cognition of non-being. Then it takes another decade and a half before you realize library fees and travel-plans and editing your papers feel just like that too.' And I said to Mabel, I said, 'I

discovered a new precondition for desire. It has to be that you can't, from the desired's day-to-day behaviour, extrapolate how the desired acts within the context of romantic or sexual intimacy. Desire is 30% curiosity what that piece of the puzzle is like.' And I said, I said, "or in the brief glance, heavy with patience, serenity and mutual forgiveness, that, through some involuntary understanding, one can sometimes exchange with [an old picture of Claude Lévi-Strauss]." And I said, I said, 'having a super-ego: not as cool as the words make it sound.' A truly innovative sitcom would include a scene where a gay couple having sex talks about sex but it hilariously sounds like they're straight roommates doing something that's not sex not talking about sex.'

And I said, I said, 'Insomnia Sound-Poem #1.' And I said, I said, 'a person's cultural capital = a person's reluctance to use the word "sarcasm." Is s/he an academic fraud (Y/N)?" = "Does s/he think 'signifier' means the word and 'signified' the object (Y/N)?"' And I said to Mabel, I said, I said, 'Tan Lin Ohal Grietzer Danielle Roth Ofer Seker Keren Sheffi Daniel Bejar Jaonna Newsom Eddie Izzard Elif Batuman Caroline Bergvall Peli Grietzer Carl Wilson David Longstreth Phillip Dmochowski Cecilia Corrigan Nitsuh Abebe Alice Gregory Molly Young Ezra Koenig Sam Cassanos Diana Sue Hamilton Kelefa Sanneh Guy Maddin Darren Wershler Henry Itamar Sha'altiel Owen Pallett Olivier Sural Sivan Ben Yishai Steve McLaughlin Ray Davis David Melnick Jessie Ferguson.' And I said, I said, 'here's the thing about Taylor Swift: the dominant emotion in her songs is some kind of delighted curiosity re: the fact of having emotions. Once you got that part down the differences from here to Henry James are trivial.' And I said, I said, 'INTRO TO PHRENOLOGY. There are 4 ways that people can be interesting: they can be radiant, or eloquent, or analytical, or nuanced.' And I said, I said, 'somebody sent an invitation to a Bartleby event, and I

managed not to make the joke! ’ And I said to Mabel, I said, ‘the intense emotions most familiar to me: - Scared That I’m Doing It Wrong - Ecstatic That My Friends Are Awesome. ‘Glocal’ is such an ugly words, I prefer ‘extortion.’ And I said, I said, ‘the sick-in-bed body is the best picture of the sick-in-bed soul.’ And I said, I said, ‘my subculture is structuralism.’ And I said, I said, ‘so in every movie where a western world type guy enters a primitive world he always becomes the leader of it or something. Also in every movie where a person (any person) enters a world (any world) that person always becomes the leader of it or something. So now let’s say I want to argue that Avatar demonstrates the first rule [EVIL rule! Evil movie!], and you want to argue that Avataer demonstrates the second rule [OK rule! OK movie!]. What would that argument look like? [Bonus points: do our assertions have differing truth conditions?’ And I said, I said, ‘NO, no! go not to Lethe! I remember all the conversations that I had since I was 15. But it is way too freaky saying shit like “actually you had your first boyfriend at **, not ** — we met in 20** and you mentioned reading **** ***** and said that you are kind of ***** and your boyfriend, although certainly not *****, is not overtly *****” to people, so I never get to use this fucking amazing party trick.’

And I said to Mabel, I said, ‘ParAdOX!!! So, [like](#), if Andy Warhol counterfeited money, what would happen? Dude! Wow! If they arrest him he could be all “but this fake money is worth money so it’s real money.” So crazy! I’m getting a migraine!’ And I said, I said, ““but men also x!” ≠ “Men have it bad too — they also x!” “But men also x!” = “Men also x therefore x-ing may occur for reasons other than the effects of women-specific societal pressures on a woman! The factors that explain why men x may also apply in some or all of the cases in which women x! An analysis of women’s x-ing in terms of women-specific societal pressures may therefore wrongly

or incompletely explain the mechanisms that lead to x-ing, in some or all of the cases in which women x!”’ And I said, I said, ‘so a complaint you hear sometimes is that feminist bloggers freak out if somebody intrudes with even a well-argued and polite questioning of their paradigm. But, like, is this dynamic really feminists-specific? I mean, absofuckinglutely there are heavyweight unanswered questions about whether the working assumptions that structure the discourse of feminist culture-criticism are viable — but, it’s like, welcome to the liberal arts bitch. There are excruciatingly contentious — not unexamined, not arbitrary, but contentious — assumptions at the foundation of orthodox economics, generative linguistics, every clinical psychology, every cognitive psychology, analytic philosophy, every heterodox economics, and so on and so on. And having super intense arguments about the adequacy of these contentious assumptions is one of the best academic activities ever, but still I’m pretty sure that the congenial analytic philosophers at [‘Thoughts Arguments and Rants’](#) aren’t gonna tolerate some guy who’s chiming-in on a discussion on ‘What is the Equal Weight View of Disagreement?’ with a Wittgensteinian diagnosis of the Equal Weight View of Disagreement as a symptom of analytic philosophy’s fundamental confusion. And that’s OK, and possibly it is OK in this same way exactly in the feminist blog type of case. Because, you know, a physics class is not the time and place to argue about whether you can reason by induction.’ And I said, I said, ‘post-stress stress disorder A.K.A ‘phantom paper.’ And I said, I said, ‘me: most works of art are either too cold to be perfect for me or too warm to be perfect for me. i don’t mean, like, the emotional content of the artwork, but whether the artwork needs your cooperation and tries to find some kind of harmony with you (warm) or maintains a hostile challenging relationship to you and is, like, this autonomous things that doesn’t try communicating with you at all (cold). so, e.g., gertrude stein is just barely too cold for my tastes — she’s probably

the only thing we both know that's too cold for me. almost everything else in the world is too warm for me. but these two brian eno albums are the only two things in the world that are exactly right.' And I said to Mabel, I said, ' if [Coleridge](#) were around today he'd be one of those ones that bitch about 'hipster whimsy' all day long. That's gotta be insulting to somebody right? 'Hipster fancy?' And I once said 'me: btw, something that drives me fucking crazy: the cultural assumption that to depict something as funny is to depict it as not-horrific. i mean, the assumption that's implicit in sayings like "sexual abuse isn't funny" or "the holocaust isn't funny." like, specifically that's something i encounter people saying about family guy a lot, that the constant comical sexual abuse there makes light of sexual abuse, and that's kind of the most natural and ordinary thing to say, but actually that seems insane to me. laughing at something horrific is often the absolute most direct and poignant mode of attending to its horrificness and pondering how horrific it is. shit, that's been the definition of comedy for 2300 years -- comedy is the depiction of the badness of bad things.'" And I said, I said 'I wanna say it's that in daily life we don't try to comprehend random other people as living-out a coherent life project of their own but are content to have discrete local explanations of their actions. An observational memoir is defined by its subscribing to a higher standard of sufficient comprehension, and it's vis-a-vis this higher standard of sufficient comprehension (higher both as in more demanding, and as in requiring a more 'high order' integration of the actions we're observing other people go about) that nobody's sufficiently comprehensible and everybody's mystifying and quirky and whatnot.' And I said —look I said something about the semiotics of the word 'no' being broken and the content's fine I think but a-political and I don't think saying a-political things about consent is a good thing to do. And I said, I said 'dear [Coke Talk](#), I meant — maybe — that Coke Talk's ideal type is [her](#)? She even has

this gorgeous clean apartment and you can bet your ass she is a young professional when she's not throwing up in clubs... So I was thinking of your Coke Talk-self as the most noble incarnation of a dream dreamed by the 90's. So, it's like if 'Highway 61 Revisited' came out in 75', or 'Unknown Pleasures' hit the shelves in 91': it wouldn't make these albums any less amazing, or any less relevant in the deeper sense of relevance — fuck, they're still more relevant to my right now than 99% of the contemporary things I love — but there will be this aftertaste of cosmic deja vu that makes your inner Hegelian ("All night, she wants the young Hegelian, young Hegelian") fidget. But, that said, I seriously fucking love you. In deference, P.' And I said, I said, 'the historical [Salad & Candy](#) papers exposed.' And I said to Mabel, I said, 'I began to get enormously interested in hearing how everybody said the same thing over and over again with infinite variations but over and over again until finally, if you listened with great intensity, you could hear it rise and fall and tell all that there was inside them, not so much by the actual words they said or the thoughts they had but the movement of their thoughts and words endlessly the same and endlessly different.' - Gertrude Stein.' And I said, I said, 'I know! It's before every WNYC podcast. There are a few variations, though always a combination of: biomass energy, cheese, skiing, castles, and Freud. Austria is just such a problematic nation to be 'sponsored by.'” - [Alice](#)'

And I said, I said, 'weekday itinerary: dwell on my liking for things that I like for 4 hours, then dwell on my hating of things that I hate for 6 hours, then watch net-tv for 4 hours, then work for 6 hours, then sleep for 5 hours.' And I said, I said, '[Coke Talk](#) is a weird sort of pleasure for me. The ideal type she's playing for is so archaic and she plays it straight straight straight, but her perfection makes her interesting. She's the whoever-your-favorite-American-

Idol-contestant-is of blogging.’ And I said, I said, ‘if you marry you wil regret it. Four dislikes: 1. Those that construe whatever they are drawn to as embodying the highest philosophical or social noble good. 2. Those that don’t care about if what they’re drawn to embodies the highest philosophical or social noble good. 3. Those that work on themselves to like whatever they acknowledge as embodying the highest philosophical or social noble good. 4. Those that take-up a middle ground on this.’ And I said to Mabel, I said, “but, here’s my issue: to me there’s an intense difference between attending to gender in poetics (and to genderedness of poetics) and building a gendered poetics. And I think lots of the tasks you enumerate fall within the domain of the first, and I don’t think the second is necessary for the first? And, I think there’s a difference between acknowledging disparate places we start, and wanting where we end to be more conditioned on where we start than it is anyway? Like, I’m Jewish in some half meaningful ways already by default and I like that but I don’t want to be double-Jewish. I mean ‘being Jewish’ is that the fact that you’re Jewish has some bearing on your life, so you’re inevitably as much an example of ‘being Jewish’ as anyone can be. Any active effort you take to ‘be Jewish’ on top of that goes towards making you double-Jewish which is a totally other thing. I like this quote from Owen Pallett: “As far as whether the music I make is gay or queer, yeah, it comes from the fact that I’m gay, but that doesn’t mean I’m making music about it.” Which isn’t to say that I want the manifestation of identity to be organic as opposed to reflective or performative — it’s just that knowing that your “starting-point” (identity) is a factor shaping your course and working with it and attending to it seems to me a very different thing than regarding your starting point as the primary coordinate relative to which you interpret your movement... “ And I said, I said, ‘getting older we get less complex because we lose the sense that the basics ‘will take care of itself.’” And I said, I said ‘so, our

progression from watching bad TV ironically to watching bad TV cynically: ‘Watching ironically’ was still holistic in a sense — your special special way of processing the bad TV was meant to feed back into your identity as not-the-kind-of-person-who-would-watch-this. It really wasn’t pretty but it was some sort of activity. But how these new tall elegant rich kids watch their bad TV, it’s something else completely. It’s about minimizing feedback ‘tween your TV-watchin’ and the rest of what you take yourself to be.’ And I said, I said, ‘yo mama so stupid, she thinks ‘The Holy Roman Empire’ is ancient Rome.’ And I said, I said, ‘Half-a-thought on [Viktor Shklovsky’s Zoo, or Letters Not About Love](#), still my favorite novel: “To overlay the Shklovskian analysis of motivation and device on life is to establish, contra Kierkegaard, that life can only be understood foreword. Not because life aspires to a finality, but because life is a generative tactic. The causality of life is overthrown by the unending teleology of motivation toward a device —life-events are the emergence of new possibilities for grounded (as opposed to arbitrary —and therefore non-engaging →) thought and action. Then to be hopelessly in love is to have open up to you the range of activities that only a man hopelessly in love can motivated: not a state of misery but a Quixite-maker, an enabler of mad and wise speech. Already-implicit within [formalist theory](#) in its original domain was the promise that not only is art not about life, but life is hardly about life either. Or at least, that life is not bound by itself, and can always at its worst be regarded as a demonstration of production under constraints.” And I said to Mabel, I said, “it’s never not-wrong* to bitch politically about artworks. but it’s damn right mostly to bitch politically about a community’s cultural diet qua expression+feedback of a habitus. but it’s too difficult to manage the latter sans the former when it’s one’s own community’s, so it invariably degenerates into the former. the critical performance of admiration-without-complicity is possible only across enough of a

class or subcultural gap; hence cultural-upper-classes can adore beyoncé sans dissonance without relinquishing any of their gender-politics sternness, but [by contrast] one gives up some claim to class-warfare by admiring wes anderson. and there is, of course, a less charitable interpretation but let's stick with this. the logic of efficacy underlying this practice is solid, in one direction at least [q: why don't we critique other (sub)cultures anymore? a: because they're not the ones who'll be reading it] no matter how fucking unfortunate its explicit theoretical expression constantly is. but as for the other direction, i don't know. maybe try harder to not-hate-the-player-hate-the-game in your own home? *read: it's useless, it's theoretically confused, it's socially duplicitous.” And I said, I said, ‘boy have we been cryptic lately. Maybe cause spring break is over and I'm knee-deep in arcana once-again?’ And I said, I said, “I hate Wagner but I can endure no other music.” And I said, I said, ‘basically I demand that art do all-and-only everything that nothing else does but I'm not sure that it can.’ And I said, I said, “all I want is access to anyone and anything.” And I said to Mabel, I said, ‘how my pulp novel will start: “Jack Bolton had the kind of face that needed shaving every day.”’

And I said, I said, ‘UNA SOLIDA ESPERIENZA D'AVANGUARDIA 1. THINK DEAD There would be nothing, a dull buzz, a clichéd c/licking off Of seems, where everybody's neverendissimo sexy movements Get lost anyway. The.’ And I said, I said, ‘nowadays’ best genre is the analytic-precious pop song. The analytic-precious pop song is a pop song that is precious and also analytic. Typically it is concerned with dating, clothes, food, political economy and the philosophy of psychology. Top precursors include Gertrude Stein, Frank O'Hara and Liz Phair. Top practitioners are Vampire Weekend and Joanna Newsom. The more you know...’ And I said, I said, ‘Bowie + Cale, 1978.’ And I

said, I said, ‘thing is you wanna say that Lady Gaga is conclusive evidence that culture entered some whatever weird new stage but there is always gonna be more Lady Antebellum than Lady Gaga. The “way that things are now” rarely if ever means a lot more than “the way the few things that are noticeably different now are.”’ And I said to Mabel, I said, “Did Zizek write his surprising essay saying Glen Beck is right yet?”’ And I said, I said, ‘can’t be too long till “vampire” and “werewolf” start showing up as antonyms on SATs.’ And I said, I said, ‘should ol Aquinas be fogot and never brought to mind? There’s the complexity that indicates you’re thinking hard enough and the complexity that indicates you aren’t. Some days you need to step aside and see if you can get HERE in a straight line from the thing you cared about before the dialectic started. If it turns out you can’t it’s not more natural to throw away the dialectic than it is to throw away the thing but either way you’ve done a good day’s work.’ And I said, I said, ‘you should be interested in [Tan Lin](#)* even if you usually avoid the experimental-arts-scene things, and interested in [Elif Batuman](#) even if you usually avoid the normal-literary-culture things. Other than that you can do whatever you want. (*Not a misspelling of Tao Lin)’ And I said, I said, “5. ABOLISH THE FARCE, THE VAUDEVILLE, THE SKETCH, THE COMEDY, THE SERIOUS DRAMA, AND TRAGEDY, AND CREATE IN THEIR PLACE THE MANY FORMS OF FUTURIST THEATRE, SUCH AS: LINES WRITTEN IN FREE WORDS, SIMULTANEITY, COMPENETRATION, THE SHORT, ACTED-OUT POEM, THE DRAMATIZED SENSATION, COMIC DIALOGUE, THE NEGATIVE ACT, THE REECHOING LINE, “EXTRA-LOGICAL” DISCUSSION, SYNTHETIC DEFORMATION, THE SCIENTIFIC OUTBURST THAT CLEARS THE AIR.” - F.T. Marinetti prophesying Seth MacFarlane.’ And I said to Mabel, I said, ‘Zombie T.S. Eliot comes back to kill you all.’ And I said, I said,

‘sashafrerejones: The rhetoric of forgiveness is terminally clumped. The subject, itself a derivative of a distant event, gets lost in the cheap poker of score-keeping. Who is more sorrier? This is an impoverished version of being awake. THE OLD WOMAN But how then can I be in hell? Purgatory, perhaps: I have not been perfect: who has? But hell! oh, you are lying. DON JUAN Hell, senora, I assure you; hell at its best: that is, its most solitary - though perhaps you would prefer company. THE OLD WOMAN But I have sincerely repented; I have confessed- DON JUAN How much? THE OLD WOMAN More sins than I really committed. I loved confession. [From that].’ And I said, I said, ‘people’s lack of skepticism ‘bout the value of their life-projects makes me wanna fucking drink poison.’ And I said, I said, ‘some things are great in ways you just can’t model ahead of the encounter. Did everybody telling you *The Wire* is amazing for a year before you got the DVDs make you not-surprised at its amazingness? Did knowing that *Moby Dick* is indescribably strange make you not go around telling people that you just started *Moby Dick* and it is indescribably strange?’ And I said, I said, ‘Towards a vulgar ‘defense’ of pure ‘critiques’ What does it mean to be avant-garde, and better yet why should I care (why do I care): after Guy Debord purging the Letterist International of Charlie-Chaplin-lovers, and after the Language Writing circle decrying the pathology of narrative fiction, and after Breton and Bataille compulsively playing the old schoolmaster and the hysterical teenager to the tune of each-other’s worst instincts. And after the heartbrakingly serious René Crevel, having failed to reconciled his irreconcilable allegiances to opposing vanguards, signed-out (“cremate my body. loathing”) and turned the kitchen gas on. A century of verbal assassinations and physical suicides over capital so symbolic it barely transforms into lunch-money, of czars that don’t inspire love and not very much fear but some serious loathing... Why volunteer to inhale this much acid and bitterness

now, when living in culture is already toxic enough on its best day? [not to be dumb, but maybe some very specific examples of hyper-modern noxious culture here] To live in a culture— to be a participant in culture—and to have [gains riding on distaste— rephrase this clause slightly, I think. It's a little confusing], is already too much like being a cell in the body of some Kronos gorging on his sons. We involuntarily form attachments of personal identity to cultural objects; [we are each regulated by love of prestige and by fear of insult to work for the symbolic prosperity of our handful of attachments, but mostly to poison with contempt their more numerous competitors. —this is unclear] What emerges in the interplay between our necessary predilections and prejudices is a [collective agency—”collective” I get here, but “agency” seems too vague] with a touch of the monster-god to it, of a culture that creates only in order to despise what it creates and respect itself as one who despises. [this last clause is great] [From any direction of measurement—I think you have to be either very specific here or just cut this first clause] the first principle of culture is contempt: every person dismisses or despises the majority of culture-making he or she knows about, every cultural enterprise is despised or dismissed by most those who hear of it. [list 2-3 examples here: “The X loves himself for hating the Y.” I think this essays strength will come from what yours is (conversationally at least)—clarifying “difficult” things and elevating “low” ones. There isn't much out there to disprove the Bourdieuan dogma that taste is always primarily distaste, which seems to me like a good enough final analysis. And still the avant-garde exceeds even these conditions, becoming something more harsh and even less sensical. [So the avant-garde does abide by taste as distaste but also goes beyond it. What is harsher than hating? This is a question you'll have to answer”] [‘The avant-garde’ —but of course there are different avant-gardes completely dissimilar to each other. Even common critical discourse distinguishes the original

avant-gardes from the *neo*, the Marxist from the decadent, the conceptual from the formalist. The ideological-tactical polemics of art as direct political revolution that inspired hostilities between movements are suspended in political irrelevance until proven different —so much so that I feel fine about psychologizing them into oblivion — but nothing is finished. —I think this whole graph should be a footnote] It takes more end-of-history triumphalism than I can muster to discount the severity of Debord, asserting in defense of his war against the aesthete-nihilist modernity of Robbe-Grillet that ‘a hundred years would tell whether we were wrong’. I don’t know in what direction history goes, just that it’s probably still moving; one of these distinctions between avant-gardes might by 2066 turn out to pivot an irreversible shift in art or in life, and if I’m still alive I won’t feel so clever then. [I’m not sure what this graf is doing. Not to be schoolmarmy, but I think it would benefit a lot from a more explanatory first sentence, before you get specific.] But for the right-now, the only view afforded to us shows every contrasting avant-garde (both past and present) sharing with its others the structural condition of distaste universalized and distinction taken to the edge. One way to see the avant-garde is as an economy of symbolic capital gone rabid. Not even the epic Kronos but more the esoteric Eschraton, cursed to devour himself to death. [this is great, but maybe include more descriptive language here (“distemper” and “foaming at the mouth” come to mind) to expound upon the metaphor. usually I don’t think that kind of things is called for, but here it might be.] The regular zero-sum economy of culture is part of the famous ‘way things are’ — alongside factory-farming, growing old, car wrecks, or the prevalent dysfunctionality of intimate relationships. The way things are might change, but not right now and not for you. These are the defining tradeoffs of pragmatic life, balances of pleasures against pains (sometimes your own pains, sometime of others and

sometimes both) that makes just enough sense to be hard to refuse. [this graf is perfect and beautiful, but I think it comes too early, or at least there should be some “close reading” or specificity between this graf and the one before it] Each [each what? Going to play dumb/Devil’s advocate here... Be careful of indirectness. I know you’re probably worried that the essay will lose its poetry and powers of proclamation if you explain too much or define too thoroughly, but I think it will actually be much stronger] is a take-it-or-leave-it deal and most of us take most of them [again, what is them?], in order to eat steak, to drive around, to have romance. Our fundamental attachment to cultural objects and desire for validation justify bearing the games of distinction. [I agree and this is true, but you need to tease out what each term means. I know it’s obvious in your head, but maybe making a separate, personal glossary of your own terms for yourself could be helpful] By contrast, the avant-garde is an exacerbation of both the dishing and the receiving of distaste, a denial of the very possibility of a payoff, a blocking in its own way; easy to love 80 years after the fact when all manifestos are too old to take personally. No matter an individual movement’s intentions, metaphysics or politics, the actual practice of all avant-garde aspires to the condition of Italian Futurism — pure distinction-pugilism against anyone dead or alive who will face it. Whether a movement’s theatre of symbolic violence accounts for itself as grave measures taken in defense of a sacred project, as it did for Breton, or as the exuberantly violent ‘slap in the face of public taste’ of early Hylaea Futurism, it plays out as the same constitutive ritual. [I don’t get this graf] If there is a method for telling apart (literary) avant-garde from its yuppy neighbors Modernism\Post-Modernism and from its slacker sibling Experimental Literature then it is this: the only avant-garde activity is that of self-assertion as the avant-garde. Even though Dada is outlasted by an amazing corpus of the Dadaist’s literature, art and film, it isn’t survived by it;

Tristan Tzara and Kurt Schwitters are two fantastic artists with strong affinities, but the project of Dada as such happened only along the common border separating both of their practices (and that of a hundred Dada peers) from the acceptable culture of Europe 1919. [I think you need more than one example of why the avant garde is defined—more than any other movement-- by its own performativity. This is a major point and it deserves more expounding and certainly more than one graf] The reason that avant-gardes always happen in group-form is that group politicking is their medium and their object. While a single artist might challenge the current order as a provocateur to the extent that he entertains the public, only a community can successfully practice its own new mode of distinction against the grain of everyone else's. 'The public' doesn't have much of a role to play for literary avant-gardes, who tend to have more use for new members and new enemies than for an audience. [why is this the case?] The obvious perversity of avant-gardes is how they never stop talking of exploding the culture around them but seem much more concerned with the insides of their own new utopian spaces. The avant-garde demands to receive the key to the city but will not even reach out its hand. It makes a claim on the masses and holds on to the margins for its dear life; it calls out to the uninitiated in treatises declaring that those who don't already get it are already dead to these times. [gract!] If the history of avant-garde really is a history of failed revolutionary quests, it is a failure so total it can't even be called that — it would be like saying I failed to become fluent in Italian by re-watching *The Godfather*. Wouldn't it be better to say I was just watching the godfather? In the absence of any sufficiently appropriate action there is no sense of speaking of intension. [again, excellent] So what does the avant-garde want? I can only try understand what is it that I want from the avant-garde, hoping and secretly believing that these two questions end up being the same.

What I can't let go of in that icon, 'The avant-garde', is just the same thing that is keeping me on always on edge about it: some promise-threat at the core of the avant-garde as a form of life, no more possible to untangle from its varieties of symbolic violence (by exclusion, by seclusion, by diatribe) than Black Metal can be untangled from hatred. Of course nothing is its own apotheosis all the time, or even some of the time. But I encounter the avant-garde —always-already thorough its present as the contemporary American scene — in a series of barely-true asymptotes [I'm not sure this is really the right word. "paradoxes" might be better]. "The avant-garde is disavowal of the separation of analysis and experience". "The avant-garde is the collapse of result into process". Which goes, most of it, to say that the very promise drawing me in is the threat that I don't know what's going on. Even involved, active, practicing (even uninvolved, recording, deflating) I can't see the defining contours of this mode ["contours of this mode"—I don't know what you mean], not as a form of writing and reading and not as form of talking about writing and reading. Exactly as it must, it [what is "it"?] starts in misrecognition. When I started half-randomly coming around the network of artists-theorists organized around the persistence of the Language Writing movement (and the new emergence of the UBUWEB community, with its partly continuous partly antagonistic 'conceptual writing'), I was that I found a real-live Modernist outpost in America. [I think all your first-person stuff is really great and totally crucial for what you want to do in this essay, but I think it needs more than just you saying "I" sometimes. Like, here for instance, is a good place to narrate yourself a little bit. Under what circumstances did you "half-randomly" encounter this network? And who are they exactly? Where does UBU fit in?] I expected mutual understanding, intuitive translatability, possibly a homecoming ceremony. It took a month of varyingly imaginary conversations (e-mails, books, weblogs etc.)

across asymmetrical epistemic [where is the asymmetry? That you care more than they do? That it turns out you care about different things?] grounds to unhinge every line in my configuration of culture. The expectation of coming aboard the mother-ship —of finding not just one's own world recapitulated but maybe even having its unknown periphery instantly resonate with others—shuts down the capacity for shutting down, leaves open a chance for disorientation to set-in. [what exactly does this mean? Say explicitly how it made/makes you feel] It's a misrecognition that it doesn't shock but instead wears you out; things were immediately wrong but marginally right. My repertoire was known; its characters largely unusable, sometimes accepted: Pound yes, Lautremont yes, Musil not really, Ashbery yes with a but, definitely not Stevens, Beckett more-or-less and Godard yes but Sarraute not at all. More poignantly, T.S. Eliot was relegated to middlebrow anodyne next to the higher-Modernism of the unfamiliar Louis Zukofsky (this one still hurts five years later). And somehow Kerouac was an innovator. [great!] Deeper rules for the (American) avant-garde taste didn't reveal themselves except in conceits whose exact rules of discrimination were also opaque, partly because the slogans were by no means new but their application was exponentially more stringent than anything I've seen before —anti-expressivism, artifice, language-centered, non-absorptive. The new common landmark was genre-less writing from the 70's and 80's that carried with it its own subterranean academia, where the weirdly magisterial Bruce Andrews, Barrett Watten and Ron Silliman synthesized linguistics and Marxian economics into a theory of poetics and a poetics of theory, and angry underground icons like P. Inman and Tina Darragh reinvented concrete poetry in extreme form . I didn't agree with the theory [remind us again in really clear terms what the "theory" is; schematize it for us, as you imagine it, instead of just listing likes and dislikes] and didn't get much immediate pleasure

out of the work (I still don't agree with the theory). It was so entrenched in parataxis and disjunction that it was impossible to just start from readerly experience and work back to analysis —it was hard to read even impressionistically, which made it [again what is “it”] hard to ignore. Estranged and exceeded, I could interact with the texts only as a perplexed ethnographer, trying to figure out what are they trying to do and why are they trying to do it. To some extent this may still be the best way to read a lot of the work, not exactly hermeneutically and not exactly formalistically but more a hermeneutics of forms, and pleasure does eventually enter the mix. [I like this graf a lot but I think it would be better if you gave a textual example to illustrate] But as nice as curiosity is, what finally got me was probably the throat-wrenching realization that the totality of your tastes and ideas about art fits into just one square in somebody else's taxonomy . The arrival of a new avant-garde is always, before and after any immanent exploration of a new domain of writing, an act of taxonomical aggression —no matter how involuntary the aggressors. [great! Yes!] Even for this American avant-garde, with its almost puritan seriousness and no taste for gamesmanship [here is a case where a very short paranthetical would be helpful and fun—what is something great that they have no taste for, eg], the power to compel outsiders to first engage with its sometime unwelcoming artifacts is the threat of being trivialized from a higher ground. But even putting the psychological symptoms of insecurity aside, there's a very real sense in which each avant-garde offers a leap to a new epistemic plateau for the arts. [I don't quite understand how the first clause relates to the second] To even successfully assert its presence, an aspiring avant-garde movement has to convincingly split in half the field of artistic possibilities so that on one side of the division there is the whole of artistic production so far and on the other side of the division there is only the work of the arriving vanguard. Every artistic

development creates new categories that retroactively structure our history of the arts (a famous point of philosopher-critic Arthur Danto), but a new avant-garde has to design this category as a test that the history of art retroactively fails. [this is very clear and very good] Whatever one thinks of vanguardist writing, its opening gambit at least takes a strong diagnostic mind and a flash of imagination : one has to discover a so-far unobserved invariant of art that holds true even for all previous avant-gardes and find a way to proceed without it. So even movements I dislike give me something to think about. [yes, good, give an example though] Between exploring my way up and down the American counter-canon, coming to terms with Language Writing itself, and seeing the new quasi-movement of UBUWEB conceptualists start producing the most aggravating manifestos I've ever seen along with awesome art, I had too much to think about. I started spending a lot of time thinking up reasons why I didn't—and don't-- need to take these movement seriously. There was too much I didn't like in them. But all my arguments for their triviality, while still reasonably convincing to me even right now, didn't do much to change the fact that no other theories or works made me want to talk to myself about them this bad. [love this] I'm always tired. My nerves breakdown easy. I don't know whether this is the cause, the result, or the limit of my self-granted avant-garde citizenship. Or rather, of my avant-garde visa —but for some things there is just no partaking without belonging, and everybody hates a tourist (even if everyone loves to travel). To participate, passively or actively, socially or by projection, but really to participate and not as entertained voyeur or as bet-hedging opportunist, finally takes letting go of the right to absolute ambivalence. And even when an idea speaks only to a part of you but makes a demand on the whole, there is nothing to say it's not worth it. [incredible] No one, or no one that I understand, just chooses fixed identity over mobile free participation in whatever calls

to you —except that in a room of Marxists there cannot exist weekend Marxists but only Bourgeoisie opposition, and there can be no half-Wittgensteinians in a debate on metaphysics, and no avant-garde omnivores ever. At a point in time you could discover the world disappeared behind when you weren't paying attention, the trajectory of your own habitus is dim now, and the only recognizable forms are the contours of what you refuse to go into but don't turn away from. [you're really hitting your stride] And if you don't know how to proceed from the outside only, and if you are uninterested in finishing-up as some undramatic Crevel (what do undramatic people do at the point where dramatic ones suicide? the same as before it but less), you can surrender your ambiguity and deign to choose your poison kool-aid. But I'm conceding no confession-accusation of cultish conversion ('I was a teenage teenager!'), unless maybe towards everything: to belong is the minimal, functionally-necessary state of knowing apart the people you want to negotiate with from the people you want to dismiss. One's community is exactly and only the set of people you plan to persuade that they're wrong — about something or about everything —rather than talk shit to other people about how wrong those guys are. [at this point, I'm really starting to feel as though I'm in the presence of something Great. This makes me wonder if these grafs might be better up front?] If I am walking straight into the muck of the 'confessions of a..' genre but only in order to emerge with the noble structural insights of a bildungsroman, the avant-garde being something like the limiting-case of culture. [If... then what?? I don't understand the clause that comes after "bildungsroman"] The violence of conversion to a radical community is mostly a rearrangement of the diffused violence of not converting to a radical community. Just one more time sorting out unknowns from dead-ends, limitations from irrelevance, totally obvious failings from totally ad-nauseam attacks —really fundamental shifts of cultural living are those that travel

[(back and forth) across the chasm between (e.g.) “.. the mechanical Derridean objection that ...” and its double “... the worn-out recitation against deconstruction”. Allegiance is so much underdetermined by knowledge that in their near non-friction, a revolution in perspective doesn’t enforce revision or deception. —I don’t understand any of what comes after the bracket I inserted; I think you should word what you mean yourself instead of quoting Derrida] Every agnostic, contrarian, heterodox disagreement against the subsuming community can continue to stand tall in its place: not disturbing and undisturbed by the redrawing of lines-in-the sand over who is worth attending-to (on pains of irrelevance) and what is worth thinking-about (on pains of repression). Call it ‘distribution of the *non-sensible*’, a Petite bourgeoisie politics of who has a claim on the abstract. In practicing/arguing along the grain or against the grain of Situationism, Language Writing, Conceptualism, Écriture féminine, Nouveau roman —and, to venture digressively, Deconstruction, Analytic Philosophy, Historicism, Psychoanalysis, Hipster-culture, Multiculturalism — the direction of practice is minor variation on the fact of participation itself. No distinct theses were harmed in the making of this conversion. [ha!!!] No demolition in order to rebuild, no flash of satori. Friends say you’ve been going on for days about how Ashbery is great and all but doesn’t go beyond romantic subjectivity and how the Surrealist challenges of Buñuel fall short of engaging the cinematic medium itself. Maybe you’re even going on how it doesn’t matter. But I did somehow, I don’t know when but I do see the evidence everywhere, make a choice to belong. To belong really does mean to participate in exclusion, and the avant-garde-- my avant-garde-- excludes any other field of cultural production that might try claim for itself more exclusivity than a pop song or more universality than a hobbyist club. I can only take a person as culturally alive —as genuinely present in culture —if that person experiences culture through a

negotiation with the historically accumulated theses that define the discourse I live in: that 90% of the nominally edgy section of the canon or the critical favorites is tepid (via Debord), that the novel is a shallow form only rarely transcending its limits (via Breton), that art needs to lay-bare its own mechanics (via Shklovsky) and exceed expressivism (via Stein, Hylaea Futurism), and-- most of all-- that new ideas and even new politics still call for **new** forms to engage them (via Language Writing), (and via X) that writing like Eliot or Breton or Mayakovsky or Pound is no longer new. This much is the minimum fault line separating the potentially us from the completely them. The best of us are further-in, working through Language Writing's indictment of hypotactic composition and contending with the crazy ideas of the UBUWEB conceptualist who argue it's time for us all to move foreword to 'uncreative writing' and ready-made texts. On the outside there's a desert (except for pop-culture, which does exist but is a different game entirely). I still enjoy normal literary fiction and lyric poetry. It's just that the kind of artistic production and consumption they express seems deadening in its detachment from any total project of renegotiating its own conditions. I can't understand the sufficiency of literature that doesn't performatively inquire whether to reinvent literature from the ground up. And I can barely acknowledge sparks of life in the people who principally read it or write it (or aspire to write it). Or, perhaps the swerving-point is that I don't see most 'reflective' literature as making an effort that's real enough to count, because I can't see the people who make it as engaged enough to genuinely take up the task. [great] Dismissal is a feedback loop going in self-affirmation from person to project and back to the person. People who don't know that the avant-garde persists here are naïve by definition so their culture-making is shots in the dark. People who appropriate the avant-garde ethos in diluted interpretation to praise the old-dressed-as-the-new of the middlebrow safety zone are acting

in bad faith or out of laziness.

Most aggravating of all are the ones who care about literature as a history-long project but reject another rethinking its foundations, proudly taking on the role of the enemies of the new. It means something that condemning the next wave for going too far is the one surefire way for founding figures to write themselves out of the avant-garde's self-taught histories: the universal dislike of T.S. Eliot in the current American scene, or the lack of interest in Isidore Isou after the Situationist rebellion. Since at least the emergence of the Objectivists in America and of Lettrism in Europe as explicitly 2nd generation movements during the 30's and 40's, avant-garde groups self-consciously take on the enterprise of Avant Gardism in itself. To refuse the arrival of the next authentic avant-garde is to refuse the avant-garde simpliciter, as the continuous tradition of radically reinventing what art is. [great] So much for the rest of the 'high culture industry', then —we have met the enemy and it is everyone, at least everyone who is knowingly practicing a form of cultural sophistication. But finally there are, there have to be, also some people that write and read passionately but care about literature only as a series of unassuming private pleasures in the reading and writing of individual books, and have no use for the nature of artistic practice or the architecture of literary history. We can even imagine them to be consciously indifferent to symbolic capital in the realm of the arts despite having a taste that tastes of conservative refinement, actively uninterested in power-struggles through literature or for literature.

There also used to be, and maybe somewhere remain, another kind of literati: those for whom revolutionary practice in art, in life, in society and in the economy form not just one exact singularity, who reserve for just these occasions something like the Brecht poem of the good man that will be shot by a good bullet from a good gun. But I can't think of any contemporaries this harsh

than maybe Bruce Andrews, and even he is a professor at a private college. The avant-garde may be losing some nerve from decade to decade, converging with Woody Allen's thesis that like the mafia intellectuals only kill their own. But exclusion is a many splendored thing, and between militant contempt and peer recognition there are a thousand gradations of acknowledgement and dismissal to choose. The story goes that when the legendary naturalist philosopher Willard Van Orman Quine was solicited by a Harvard hiring committee to review the dissertation of applicant Stanley Cavell, now celebrated for putting in dialogue the methods of analytic philosophy and literary reflection, Quine's only comment was "it's perfectly fine, if you like that sort of thing". From where I'm standing, one leg in the shallow end of the avant-garde, the looking ["looking"? you need a different word, I think] is unstable: sometimes art as pure experience seems like the sane default from which a few existentially messed up individuals slide down into reified taste-wars, but at other times I see instead of natural healthiness a stringent and almost perverse stoicism. To experience profound emotions towards something —an idea, a person, a practice, even a city or landscape —but have no lingering investment in its life past your immediate personal bounds, not caring about its conditions for being, its meanings, its fortunes and its potentials can seem almost creepy. It's creepy in the same way as is the farmer who raises a cow as a beloved family pet only to cook and eat it, come slaughter season. He who preaches radicalism verses irrelevance (or culture verses barbarism) is not represents not just the mildness of choosing pleasure over self-importance but also of touring through culture in a strictly 'apres moi la deluge' capacity. I still think nobody likes a tourist. But the last possibility, finally, is that I dreamed it all-- everything. No one I interrogate sounds like they're *lying* when they deny that their stake in the arts strays from the paths of pleasure. Maybe my attraction to the avant-garde is just

the fantasy of a community whose [perversion of amour-propre gone out of control and spilling into objects [don't understand this] are worse than my own. I even e-mailed my favorite avant-garde acquaintance, who has been making a very good living this decade off of conceptualizing copy-pasted books that no one can read and lecturing to Ivy League kids that plagiarism without intervention is only true form of literature, and tried to annoy him into saying something scandalous. The worst question I could think of was, "Why should anyone care how avant-garde or radical a work is?" His answer follows. It makes me feel worse about myself but better about the avant-garde, so I suppose things balance out OK for me in the end: "I'm not sure that anyone needs to care about how radical a work is but I do. John Cage once said that once you know an artwork, you're finished with it. Cage preferred music composed according to chance, which ensured you would never get to hum it. And if you think about it, he's got a point. If I, for instance, put on Pet Sounds by The Beach Boys, released in 1966, in particular the cut "Caroline, No," I'm immediately thrown back to the summer of 1992 and the fabulous Westhampton house that Cheryl and I used to go to on weekends with then White Columns curator Bill Arning. When I hear that song, all I can think about is the wonderfully drug and alcohol-induced time that we spent by the pool that summer. It's a fond memory, but, oh, so specific. I love to recall it, but am saddened by hearing the song: shortly afterwards, Bill's father committed suicide, Bill fell into a terrible depression, moved to Boston, went to 12-step, got a job at the List Center (where he is still head curator today), and basically fell out of my life. I still love Bill; I still love Brian Wilson; but both things are tied to a very magical moment for me and can never be unhinged from it. The specific chain of emotions connected with the song is unbreakable. For me, there is only one meaning to "Caroline, No." If, by contrast, I put on, say, Cage's "Variations VI," written in 1966, the same year

as Pet Sounds, a noisy electronic affair made from the feedback of amplifiers, preamps, filters and modulators, I'm out of time and out of space. There is no memory associated with this music; it's happening here and now. What is here and now? A rainy Wednesday in Manhattan, a seemingly forgettable gloomy day in a former industrial space in Chelsea. The music is not something that you would actually care to listen to: a series of deep rumbles that blends in with the ventilation unit outside the window and the tumbling sound of the dryer. I hear the sound of my own mind and begin to track the circular patterns of my own thoughts. I could say that the Cage, blending in with the ambient sounds of the city, leads to introspection, which can take me many places. And the Wilson is shiny and reflective, which keeps ricocheting me back to that summer in Westhampton. In the end, if I was stranded on the proverbial desert island, I would take Cage over Wilson because I know that I'll never be finished with the Cage. Cage would prefer we toss away the disc and instead, listen to the sound of birds and the roar of the ocean on our desert island. Cage wants us to be more present at the beach, really, than the Beach Boys do (when was the last time you actually heard surf music at Jones Beach? and not to mention that Brian Wilson wasn't particularly enamored with either surfing or the beach). I am pretty much finished with the Beach Boys, but I will never get to the end of John Cage." And I said to Mabel, I said, 'I once compared indifference to the avant garde to cooking your own pet and that one still sounds fair.'

And I said, I said, 'Memoir of Sergei O by Frank O'Hara My feet have never been comfortable since I pulled them out of the Black Sea and came to your foul country what fatal day did I dry them off for travel loathsome travel to a world even older than the one I grew up in what fatal day meanwhile back in France they were stumbling towards the Bastille and the Princess de Lamballe was

shuddering as shudderingly as I with a lot less to lose I still hated to move sedentary as a roach of Tiffis never again to go swimming in the nude publicly little did I know how awfulness could reach such perfection abroad I even thought I would see a Red Indian all I saw was lipstick everything covered with grass or shrouds pretty shrouds shot with silver and plasma even the chairs are upholstered to a smothering perfection of inanity and there are no chandeliers and there are no gates to the parks so you don't know wheter you're going in them or coming out of them that's not relaxing and so you can't really walk all you can do is sit and drink coffee and brood over the lost leaves and refreshing scum of Georgia Georgia of my heritage and dismay meanwhile back in my old country they are renaming everything so I can't even tell any more which ballet company I am remembering with so much pain and the same thing has started here American Avenue Park Avenue South Avenue of Chester Conklin Binnie Barnes Boulevard Avenue of Toby Wing Barbara Nichols Street where am I what is it I can't even find a pond small enough to drown in without being ostentatious you are ruining your awful country and me it is not new to do this it is terribly democratic and ordinary and tired.' And I said, I said, 'we switched from watching bad TV ironically to watching bad TV cynically.' And I said, I said, 'I love how quantitative crying is. I mean, take a moderate headache and a decent emotional perturbation and put them together and you really get things going.' And I said, I said, ""an idea for a science-fiction novel to be written seventeen years ago: A young sociologist decides to explore the reason why so many of the era's most celebrated art laments the inability to experience strong, sweeping emotions. With the help of a neurologist friend, he discovers the reason is biological: intense emotional experiences have fulfilled their evolutionary function and grown redundant, and they will disappear over the coming hundred years. They alone must carry the burden of the terrible secret."" And

I said to Mabel, I said, ‘it’s heartbreaking how grateful I am that Gossip Girl is back. Maybe tonight I’ll sleep.’ And I said, I said, ‘I spent the week deciding Kant was the first Modernist, then spent the weekend discovering that Clement Greenberg called Kant the first Modernist. Which is exactly what I hated about childhood the first time around: you thought you and the world were having a conversation but actually you were talking back to the recorded message on the world’s answering machine.’ And I said, I said, ‘Kant’s fun to read for the same reason that he’s hard to understand: he says everything once and only.’ And I said, I said, “everything i learned how to start i by now know how finish. if i catch myself do another semiotic-cognitive reduction of a transcendental proposition i’m going to shoot myself right in the face.” And I said, I said, ‘à clef: Ugh, some of the people writing for ***** nowadays are literati the way Charlotte from Sex and the City was a gallerist. Like, it’s just normal dating and celeb chatter only it’s classy cause classy people are writing it. The default book-length publication by English professors is “____s, ____s and ____s: the ____ in the ____th century ____n imagination.” The lingering effect of getting a MacArthur is the exact inverse of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder.’ And I said to Mabel, I said, ‘I have this fantasy of writing essays that explain phenomena that don’t exist: “Why Hipsters Love ‘Friends’” “The Right-Wing Turn in Culture Studies” “Why Same-Sex Siblings Go After the Same Mates: an Evolutionary Perspective” “Post-Yuppie Culture and the Rise of Upscale Water Parks” “Play That Funky Music, Gringo: How Mariachi Bands Became a Brooklyn Trend.”’ And I said, I said, ‘reading a text that doesn’t manifest any known trope is nowadays an independently thrilling experience regardless of whether the text does anything otherwise compelling. and the same goes for people.’ And I said, I said, ‘i’ll take things seriously as long as they are not events. events are so goofy.’

And I said, I said, ‘because I watched not-many films throughout my adolescence, and six of them had ‘London Calling’ playing, and custom makes us expect, for the future, a similar train of events with those which have appeared in the past, I grew up believing ‘London Calling’ was the soundtrack to a thousand films. I heard ‘London Calling’ play on ‘Friends’ when I was twelve and in ‘Billy Elliot’ when I was fourteen. Then on the new Bond when I was sixteen, and in the airplane movie on my NY flight at seventeen. Then a zombie movie the year after, and another zombie movie on the next. Discovering that ‘London Callin’ only ever featured in nine films was like discovering the sun is only up when I am looking out my window.’ And I said, I said, ‘sitcoms don’t invent new personalities anymore but the good ones invent new cognitive profiles. what really makes a character memorable nowadays is an interesting nuanced map of areas-of-quickness and areas-of-slowness.’ And I said to Mabel, I said, ‘these days I read mostly to try to find a book that can’t exist: it’s gotta be as cold and infinite and scary as reading-avant-garde-literature-and-not-getting-it is and as dazzling and free and telepathic as reading-avant-garde-literature-and-getting-it is. And yes, even I don’t believe that this isn’t transference.’ And I said, I said, ‘reading Hipster Runoff makes me feel like no one’s ever gonna die. After I stopped reading I got freaked out recalling the fact that I’m going to die [I’m not kidding, this actually happened]. I love Andy Warhol a lot and I kind of dislike Hipster Runoff, but I never got this full effect from ‘From A to B & Back Again’ so this godawful kid is evidently talented.’ And I said, I said, ‘this needed to happen.’ And I said, I said, ‘1. i’d love to write a short story where we discover earth18, a planet that’s exactly like 18th century earth, and some anthropologists write a defense of the earth18 british, saying we shouldn’t criticize the ‘primitive’ british imperialists from our ‘enlightened’ post-imperialist discourse. 2. i don’t want to contest the performative necessity of these it’s-not-

as-bad-in-context defenses of african female circumcision or whatnot. but i shudder at the underlying supposition that it's dumb to think that one society is safer/freer than another. the supposition is of course meant to deter from synchronic comparison (us vs. them) not diachronic comparison (us now vs. us then), but the diachronic implication is inevitable and a huge fuck you to anyone who ever fought for anything. 3. problems of multiculturalism are co-extensive with problems of multi-sub-culturalism, or else you're a racist asshole. i take pro-ana self determination seriously.' And I said, I said, 'title for future Gossip Girl episode about Jenny Humphrey: "Oration on the Dignity of Meth." And I said to Mabel, I said 'me: if i had to bet who is the one person who actually exists and everyone else is just a part of that person's dream, i'd bet taylor swift rather than me. that's a possible phd topic: proof that taylor swift is the red king.' And I said, I said 'that the wittgenstein/anscombe 'not a mind in a body but a minded body' thing is really to make us not feel bad about taking hot people's emotions more seriously.' And I said, I said 'it's not that i want my lit avant-garde it's that i want it thorough; i want the negative space around each artistic choice [to be] avant-garde.' And I said, I said 'imminent extinction can be kind of exhilarating. isn't it good to know the work you do now will never not-be-on-the-cutting-edge?' And I said, I said, '1. The very you are very different. They have more to them. Architects also raise dogs but they know not to think much of it they can't look out in NY it was made with a lake for a heart and a taste for the uncanny. Old resources have it going for them still. In the continent's strong air your personality on tape uncomfortably high-pitched, thin chance at eluding psychology drawn from the world famous smoke of tobacco. The very very you are. Very different from the very me. All the objects left Europ we looked at the tan-lines left after them by the sun of the mind it is not tired to do this it is almost new 2. Dear acquaintances your

second language. First europ Dear acquaintagonists after the money's gone and you're as good. The best of your ridiculous powers all there after a sleep so good that it was practically unverifiable. Get stabbed in the habitus once and me as a culture is over it [and out and over] 3. Leaving in bad faith from x-ing to trying-to-x never looked or aside. So much theater left in this old piece of junk. 4. years after years that it took us to solute the difference. grone-over. speak soon. miss yours and yourare. age- ing ag-ain-'t to far. to here's and hers lookit up akrazors. run out. 5. but but-an-after-dinner-smoke. but-we-have-standards. but the details will speak on their own.' And I said to Mabel, I said, 'old question: are dreams object-oriented or pure output?' And I said, I said, 'after enough years you start thinking of your migraines as a personality trait.'

And I said, I said, 'ending a video game is like being born only no one's going to accommodate that.' And I said, I said, 'me: which is a problem. i'm very good at doing a really good job thinking about things, but my savvy for knowing what things to think about is average plus at best. i need a manager. Phillip: thats a beautiful statement.' And I said, I said, 'Julie Stone Peters' idiom for the medievalist [Bakhtin's?] take on comical violence works for me: 'the body bouncing back to life'. It's uniquely good at explaining why is hilarious but is meta-funny at best.' And I said to Mabel, I said, 'edward said jay-z viktor shklovsky.' And I said, I said, '[can't stop almost crying over lévi-strauss. now a fuckton of present's switched into past and there's no one around anymore but us chickens]. And I said, I said, 'the humanities aren't a marketplace where you hawk answers they're a marketplace where you hawk question+answer sets. i trained wrong.' And I said, I said, 'futurist theater invented it's-so-bad-it's-good, as an adaptation precipitated by the encounter with commercial audiences.' And I said, I said, 'are parties good narrative closure cause weddings are parties, or are

weddings good narrative closure cause weddings are parties?’ And I said to Mabel, I said, ‘when is there a there there.’ And I said, I said, “... or upper-middlebrow favorites like Musil” “... or upper-middlebrow favorites like Stein” “... or upper-middlebrow favorites like Pound” “... or upper-middlebrow favorites like LeWitt” “... or upper-middlebrow favorites like Heraclitus” “... or upper-middlebrow favorites like Marx” “... or upper-middlebrow favorites like Breton” “... or upper-middlebrow favorites like Marinetti” “... or upper-middlebrow favorites like Jarry” “... or upper-middlebrow favorites like Swedenborg” “... or upper-middlebrow favorites like Wittgenstein” “... or upper-middlebrow favorites like Zukofsky” “... or upper-middlebrow favorites like Proust” “... or upper-middlebrow favorites like Satie” “... or upper-middlebrow favorites like Brakhage” “... or upper-middlebrow favorites like Jakobson” “... or upper-middlebrow favorites like Spinoza” “... or upper-middlebrow favorites like Schönberg” “... or upper-middlebrow favorites like Büchner” “... or upper-middlebrow favorites like Malevich” “... or upper-middlebrow favorites like Woolf” And I said, I said, ‘The first works we encounter are gonna frame our view of an artist* indefinitely. These sequences of consumption can make the difference between flawed idol and half-redeemed nemesis. [Did you know that the late, great historian of metaphysics Michel Foucault also wrote a history of sex? That the author of Pnin coined the term ‘lolita’? That David Bowie was briefly involved with the glam rock movement?’] And I said, I said, ‘knowledge acquisition is the worst form of escapism.’ And I said, I said, “The Siege of Numantia’ [Miguel de Cervantes], in which we learn that horror burnsthru every pretense ‘till Man is revealed as he is: passive-aggressive.’

And I said to Mabel, I said, ‘The Siege of Numantia [Miguel

de Cervantes] = Battle Royale [Kinji Fukasaku].’ And I said, I said, ‘i’m developing a nasty pop-hegelian affectation in my pop-culture consumption. to wit: vampire weekend as the synthesis of the painfully autarkic liberal-arts-kids-culture of the early 00’s with the sickeningly parasitic liberal-arts-kids-culture of the mid 00’s. but vampire weekend don’t make me pained or queasy.’ And I said, I said, ‘[taylor swift](#) has a genius for walking the line. that song is half abstinence-only, half about how the worst disease sex can give you is inertia-unto-marriage.’ And I said, I said, ‘let’s make a law that people can’t quote the humpty-dumpty-alice-’glory’ paragraph anymore ever’. And I said, I said, ‘political snobbism is the new aesthetic snobbism.’ And I said to Mabel, I said, ‘few to non in the very-arts are nominalists. the worse the metaphysics the higher the art.’ And I said, I said, ‘i only love art that embodies desire. i only respect art that doesn’t [tries not to]. this is not sustainable.’ And I said, I said, ‘is that the first scene is the straight run-thru thru the verse before the band breaks into a punk version on the chorus.’ And I said, I said, ‘modernism = new perlocutions avant garde = new illocutions fuck yeah. solved.’ And I said, I said, ‘nouveau roman [is isomorphic to] abstract expressionism. modernisms misrecognized as avant gardes.’ And I said to Mabel, I said, ‘me: really good lyric poetry before symbolism: do you know any? [...*] ray : Like Paul, I figured this must be a matter of divergent notions of genre or taste. Without meaning to channel Spicer’s pugnacity, my first thought was Spicer’s: “Plainly we are dealing with materials distorted from their original form.” Leaving Catullus, Propertius, and other durned furriners aside, I think of the great period of English lyric as over by 1690 (on my shelves are Wyatt, Sidney, Jonson, Daniel, Campion, Herrick, Herbert, Marvell, Rochester), although probably most of my favorite Romantic poems are either lyric or comic, and Dickinson surely wasn’t much influenced by Baudelaire. But we’re probably talking about different things, you working from an idea of

“lyric” drawn from the symbolists and me working from the nostalgia for poetry-as-song (lyric as lyrics) championed by Pound, Yeats, Zuk, etc. A single Campion lyric might sound as irrelevant as a single Willie McTell or Bob Wills song might to someone immersed in a post-1965 pop aesthetic. me: that’s probably right on the money. my issue here is that i read keats and go ‘wait, that’s kind of like a cole porter song with less puns’. and isn’t it a universally accepted truth that song-lyrics never work on the page... ray: Indeed, I also have the complete works of Lorenz Hart on my shelves... :) [...] josh: reading weimarish lyrics and appreciating how the songiness of the translations was improved on in the german was one of the things that helped me to realize that the earlier-period english lyrics that have been mentioned are quite pleasing. perhaps like you, peli, i always found rhymed lyric in later english poetry to be pretty lame and could never understand the appeal. [...] me: the whole song issue seems relevant to why this is bothering me. maybe what’s really on my mind is: when people affirm that rock lyrics fall flat next to real poetry, what is it exactly that they have in mind? tho i guess this is now shifting to being me bitching about yeats. guess i just don’t understand what’s so high about high culture. i don’t think it’s usually pound or stein that function as the implicit watermark on these occasions, but that’s the only ‘high culture’ i can understand how to tell apart from not-high-culture. josh: ‘Subtlety of expression’, ‘interpretive depth’, ‘great thoughts expressed in fine language’, ‘form’ — the criterion shifts depending on what one wants to reproach a popular lyric for. me: by what i meant more, like, who. josh: ‘who’: 1. shakespeare (‘he’s so much better than anything a rock musician has ever written’) 2. no lyricist in particular (because looking at examples would ruin the whole thing) 3. the dumbest thing they remember hearing when out at a restaurant or when forced to hear their neighbor’s car stereo 4. their favorite lyricist (lennon/mccartney, dylan, etc.) who despite how

great they are and despite how much they love them, still is just not even in the same ballpark ('not even doing the same thing') as _____ (sadly it's not really possible to wage and win arguments under these conditions) ray: "GENRE_X isn't as good as GENRE_Y" never makes much sense, but it makes *least* sense — like, INFINITE NEGATIVE INFINITIES DOUBLE! — when X is a catch-all cross-cultural cross-millennial quasi-anthropological quasi-religious quasi-nationalistic abstraction known (to the vast majority of pundits) only from school and Y is one aspect of an Anglo-American fifty-year-old technology-specific collaborative multimediu. ray: Let $X = Y$, and vice versa. (As you can see, I really was a very poor math major.)' And I said, I said, 'is that i'm not willing to believe anyone is kidding themselves.' And I said, I said, 'not-using-anaphoras is the distortion pedal.' And I said, I said, '1. acromatics whileierst gross sinecured in salts pleasedening-for that ora ange proused pour lestt her moder-er - grieve bettered by ferrels ex tent xtresses offered for ort-gearing parse greifed-griefed-sicily toned placket cresthoned mind mine alls spiral. goed athens tox argate for throves or d-ay sed forscenes tropiqcs doors-up-on net sic an eyther grips do or stales gcod to dze mems hu perser the ir lips your gohs rixes harthden zfis to mi qwi irz run asfor itme lo— es hithered rinse landings dier ef tix araf oh haartiest oh harts 2. torn mint. gae ored uppehils vel. hords writhe her sohrrs upped. mone add her et. her set. indhoarse me. a gainests ,hirm, in, hirms coral arid theons. grone over. miss yours and yourare. age- ing ag-aint, to ful on to el o jins.'

And I said, I said, 'it's never not wrong* to bitch politically about artworks. but it's damn right mostly to bitch politically about a community's cultural diet qua expression+feedback of a habitus. but it's too difficult to manage the latter sans the former when it's one's own community's, so it invariably degenerates into the former. the critical performance of admiration-without-complicity is possible only across enough of a class or subcultural gap; hence cultural-

upper-classers can adore beyoncé sans dissonance without relinquishing any of their gender-politics sternness, but [by contrast] one gives up some claim to class-warfare by admiring wes anderson. and there is, of course, a less charitable interpretation but let's stick with this. the logic of efficacy underlying this practice is solid, in one direction at least [q: why don't we criticque other (sub)cultures anymore? a: because they're not the ones who'll be reading it] no matter how fucking unfortunate its explicit theoretical expression constantly is. but as for the other direction, i don't know. possibly try harder to not-hate-the-player-hate-the-game in your own home?'

And I said to Mabel, I said, '[from afar]: the dominant aesthetic in contemporary sculpture is heavy-industry meets parade-float. it's pretty great.' And I said, I said, 'the more restricted the field of production the better the company. up to a point.' And I said, I said, 'it's hard to see why a mature reader would even not cringe to rely on discrete texts. after so-and-so years of honing your skills it's as if you're still riding a bike with training wheels.' And I said, I said, 'virtue as the sine qua none of any implicit subjectivity in american avant garde literature, modulo the new-york-school.' And I said, I said, 'wish i was harder to impress and easier to please.' And I said to Mabel, I said, 'pets are just a socially acceptable form of schizophrenia.' And I said, I said, '[i'm on vacation].' And I said, I said, 'i am made of groovelessness. nothing just ever just follows.' And I said, I said, 'i'm closer to properly phrasing the problem. the problem is making sense of the relation between the activity of reading and the activity of interpreting [in the loose sense where 'interpreting' = pursuing comprehension]. I don't get how much of reading is interpretation-in-motion and i don't get how much of interpretation is a conceptualization of reading. also i'm so confused and so tired, but it can't be because of this, right?' And I said, I said, 'it's that for every art-object there's a meta art-object: the

hermeneutic dynamics of the art-object [is the meta art-object]. We discuss the meaning of a surprise or of inscrutability just the same way we discuss the meaning of a rhyme or of a camera movement. With every 'difficult' artifact you hear equally much of how it's not 'difficult' because the confusion you get is exactly what the artifact is up to generating and of how the artifact is abiding by its own intrinsic logic. And the worst of it is if you're looking for the meta art-object it won't be there cause the meta art-object can only emerge in the hermeneutic effort to get at the first-order art-object. And then in some artifacts made to travel only in professional circles [avant poetry, video art, conceptual music] we start immediately with the meta art-object, which is as I just said actually impossible to do, so it's a meta art-object of a different pedigree, that does not emerge involuntarily as a pattern in one's hermeneutic efforts antecedent to its reflective articulation — instead it is the by-definition-articulated fruit of a process very similar to normal first-order interpretation, in which we read conventional 'signifiers' of hermeneutic effects [we can recognize that this line gestures at continuity, that that line gestures at indeterminacy, that another line gestures at disruption, but we're not in the game we're checking-out the game from an aerial view]. Almost like cybersex really: 'I'm slowly and sensually disrupting your mimesis. Now I'm constructing a speaker and then abandoning the narrative modality, oh baby'. Though not exactly, because rather than statements of cognitive effects we have quasi-performatives that recognizably gesture at these cognitive effects. The nice thing to do would be to call these illocutions [in the strict sense] that evolved from perlocutions; the mean thing to do would be to call it mythological performatives. Anyway this is all a detour, the main point I'm trying to make here is the the horizon of the art-object, if the art-object is constituted by the operations of an ideal interpretive reading, is both all consuming, in as much as every perlocutionary effect once reflected

upon goes towards the constitution of the meta art-object, and maybe incoherent, seeing as the meta art-object can only emerge if we reject its legitimacy and keep digging for first-order interpretation. Basically in art Wittgenstein's 'Milk me sugar' does mean 'be confused' — every sufficiently developed artistic perlocution is indistinguishable from illocution.' And I said to Mabel, I said, 'when I go insane finally and at last it will be for never managing to understand the relation of object and effect in art. If I could disentangle this one thing I'd stop going insane over this shit all the time.' And I said, I said, 'the six elements of poesis — 1. Mythos [action] 2. Ethos [character] 3. Dianoia [thought] 4. Lexis [diction] 5. Melopoiia [sound] 6. Opsiis [spectacle] — are pretty good for mapping the foci of romantic attraction. You get looks, voice, style, world-view, values, biography.' And I said, I said, 'excess as a source of ecstasy in Bacon Explosion type foods vs. excess as a source of ecstasy in '\$1000 Ice Cream Sundae' type foods. And in general the correspondences and confluences of health and money in defining glut.' And I said, I said, 'are theoretically [as opposed to historically] distinguishable only odd-to-odd or even-to-even. Can I tell you why Symbolism is definitely not just more Romanticism? Fuck no. Can I say why Modernism isn't late Symbolism? Hardly. But then Romanticism vs. Modernism is no trouble.' And I said, I said, 'not narrative vs. parataxis but incantation vs. collection [yes i just made this dyad up] is my aesthetic indecisiveness. incantation = gives you the sense that there is a single non-paraphrasable implicature unique to this exact sequence of sentences. collection = makes sure you don't get the sense that there is a single non-paraphrasable implicature unique to this exact sequence of sentences.' And I said to Mabel, I said, 'with any semiotic artifact, the relevant ways to engage it are those that make you better understand [by your own standards of understanding] the artifact as a communicative action, on the same parameters by which we

understand every action qua action: reasons, causes, intentions, techniques, impact, consequences [and the interrelations of each to each]. in this sense there isn't a difference between what we do when we read an artifact cooperatively and what we do when we read an artifact symptomatically — to read is always to gather information [and form judgments] along these various parameters. reading is 'symptomatic' when the information it gathers about the communication ruins the communication's intended impact. to engage an artifact more comprehensively is to try derive from it a further understanding of the communicative action, in learning more facts or in developing more realized judgments. art is more 'artsy' the more this process bolsters its intended impact [not necessarily by being 'intended' itself, but by harmonizing with the intended impact]. so: artifact A is [successfully] artsy for reader R if any reading practice of which R believes that it substantially furthers his understanding of A [as a communicative action] bolsters for R what R believes to be the intended impact of A. an e-mail from josh of 'josh blog' explains why-and-how our readerly mapping of relevant questions exceeds the questions we're presently asking: i would reckon that two things our conception of a 'more comprehensive reading' tracks are: 1) our awareness that the passive aspects of reading, like the passive aspects of our relation to any speech, are not always within our power to notice, control, and understand while they're happening - but that we can sometimes do so after the fact, particularly when there is a concrete object existing independently of our reading of it, for us to coordinate with. 2) books are just so long, and our (focal) attention to them so variable, that it's too much work to always give them such full attention from word to word. this could be made into an epistemological point, but i think it would be better as a point about response. just like we don't draw on the complete depths of our capacities for response to another in every conversation, every interaction (many of which are

routine anyway), we don't draw on them for response to every moment in a book; but we recognize that a more perfect encounter with the book would remain open to that kind of total response, on every occasion that calls for it. and unlike our responses to others, this doesn't impose an impossibly, frighteningly high standard on books that are to be met with this response. (they won't shrink from it as another person might.) And on his own platform adds: Often, with the non-artsy, I am the one who shrinks away from more comprehensive understanding: I do not want to risk a disappointment great enough to make me give up on any engagement at all.' And I said, I said, 'ricochet from an e-mail argument: i take some comfort in distinguishing 'art' from 'entertainment' on the principle that 'art' is what makes you test its mettle with all your faculties. but is it coherent to compare artifacts as inducing a 'more comprehensive' or 'less comprehensive' readerly engagement? the puzzle is that you can only count as 'comprehensively' [rather than wrongheadedly] engaging an artifact if your reading asks relevant questions, and after all aren't the 'relevant questions' in reading an artifact just all and only the questions that the artifact induces. current take: we often know how to follow generic 'pay closer attention' or 'try a more in-depth reading' or 'really think about what the work is saying' commands for a given artifact [let's say an artifact we are now in the middle of reading]. we don't just try random cryptographic algorithms or try asking how the artifact relates to randomly chosen wikipedia articles. nor do we apply an invariant set of questions to every artifact on which we 'try a more in-depth reading'. prima facie this means that when we read an artifact, we also develop a conception of what reading that same artifact more comprehensively involves. in reading we map more relevant questions than we ask. if i'm still alive this time tomorrow i'll try saying something about what our conception of 'a more comprehensive reading' tracks.' And I said, I said, 'noon

shakes the memory as a deadman shakes a mad geranium.’ And I said, I said, ‘my most favorite art uses getting-a-grasp-on-things as a constituent of losing-a-grasp-on-things as a constituent of getting-a-grasp-on-things et cetera [can be ad infinitum or not and can start from either].’ And I said, I said, ‘waitresses are an extension of high-school.’ And I said to Mabel, I said, ‘i’m getting more and more interested in the idea of brilliance-by-omission. reading a text that doesn’t manifest any known trope is nowadays an independently thrilling experience regardless of whether the text does anything otherwise compelling.’ And I said, I said, ‘yes the default for ‘conventional literature’ is unsure hyperbole that pretends it isn’t. but the european avant response of committing to hyperbole means more to me than the american avant response of rejecting hyperbole.’ And I said, I said, ‘my not-going-away discomfort with the american avant tradition has to do with its by-and-large [with exceptions yes with exceptions] distaste for hyperbole. fuck wcw.’ And I said, ugh, I said, ‘what vanishes when you move deeper into your 20s is [the fact of] girls that are amazing on the power of their reactions alone. the art of pure personality only really lives in the 14 - 21 range [then life stops having an audience].’ And I said, I said, ‘it’s very different presenting aphorisms one at a time.’ And I said to Mabel, I said, ‘an avant garde context is a context for which there’s no differentiating gesture from operation. it would be very exciting if someone redoes aspects of what language-writing did, without an avant garde context [why am i even talking about this now? cause i experience culture synchronously you dumb hegelian fuckers]’ And I said, I said, ‘that a towel analyzes my microphysical constitution destroys then reconstructs it only dry instead of wet as it came in [i’m very sick]’ And I said, I said, ‘Tel Aviv intelligentsia are adept at living their work more so than in working it. Better than the American other-way-around, given we’re not-working most life.’ And I said, I said, ‘who’s the asshole that’s been pressing fast-

foreword every time i sit down to?’

And I said, I said, ‘i’m going to ear-mark a daily hour of summer to work on my series of minimal-intervention conversions.’ And I said to Mabel, I said, ‘fabula = thesis gives rise to replies-to-objections sujet = replies-to-objections give rise to thesis.’ And I said, I said, ‘the unfathomable thinness of writing not-towards-a-mythology.’ And I said, I said, ‘a taste that is not so much ‘experimental’ as “pataphysical”. an inclination less towards artifacts that establish their own mode than towards those that can abduct another.’ And I said, I said, ‘my horrible secret is that i have no phenomenology of the social. my even more horrible secret is that i think others are faking it.’ And I said, I said, ‘it’s an amazing coincidence that i’m the only one without any misguided attitudes.’ And I said to Mabel, I said, ‘maybe the trick is that interpreting a textual artifact can mean [under different conditions] either interpreting an utterance or interpreting the action of uttering it [ascribing the action an intended result]. the two are identical only [but not always] when the intended result involves concurrent recognition by the reader that it was intended.’ And I said, I said, ‘comparing across media could help untangle the mess of the necessity or non-necessity of interpretation [and of mock-interpretation in the case of aleatory texts] in experiencing art. also, i’m way unsure how the difference between interpretation as an intentional act and interpretation as a cognitive reaction is gonna play out in this context.’ And I said, I said, ‘best idea ever: compress some analytic phil paper to ‘theory’ density with inferential skeleton intact.’ And I said, I said, ‘each avant garde gives us exponential increase in the sophistication of cultural analysis, in demonstrating a new projectible distinction that sets apart it [and a handful of protos] from everything else. A new avant garde has to discover a new invariant of art that hold for all previous avant garde and then

proceed without it. Whatever else every avant movement that managed to assert its presence has at least a genius for diagnosis.’ And I said, I said, ‘[in sharp contrast] Debord is much less of a douche when he talks of the future.’ And I said to Mabel, I said, ‘maybe i’m losing the last of my taste for causation. it’s only the thinnest of subsets of ‘why’ explanations that doubles as ‘what’ explanations.’ And I said, I said, “or maybe my grievance is of falling short of confusion. overstatement: lower-order indecipherability collapses into higher-order trope [marketing & neuroscience & violence oh my] nowadays faster than I can yawn. in truth tho it must just be that me being a non-native-speaker i go numb at english texts that don’t tickle my gestalt bone.” + i didn’t since march turn-out a sentence i care to remember. everything i learned how to start i by now know how finish [if i catch myself do another semiotic-cognitive reduction of a transcendental proposition i’m going to shoot myself right in the face].’ And I said, I said, ‘myself to my sister: “if you write a detective novel it’s gonna go on for 800 pages before the murder.”’ And I said, I said, “the current trend in the field’ = the latest position to attain [any real] visibility. ‘the orthodoxy’ = the second to latest position to attain [any real] visibility. this explains why everyone you meet is a maverick.’

And I said, I said, ‘is it that anything can be revealed as unattractive by cashing it out in its bare conditions of satisfaction or is it that that’s not really cashing out.’ And I said to Mabel, I said, ‘are most actors who play actors more successful or less successful than the actors they play? [at the time]’ And I said, I said, ‘i’m properly agnostic to the point incapacitation re: marxist history of forms’ And I said, I said, ‘the good thing about the academic culture of lukewarmness though is that it encourages experimentation. being half-hearted towards an idea of yours is often

a symptom of not knowing very clearly what it amounts to, so being forced to follow through on half-hearted ideas can lead to pastures newer than following through on an idea you are positive is exciting.’ And I said, I said, ‘your community: the people you want to get to admit that they’re wrong rather than want to talk shit to other people about how wrong those people are.’ And I said, I said, ‘Phillip: mm i think self concious social climbing is too tried&true 8:08 PM how else to people get places? by actually being qualified? 6 minutes 8:15 PM me: but you must see it’s not just you that’s suddenly allowed to say you watch movies only for cultural capital and have it increase rather than decrease your cultural capital. there’s a new stirring where taste-spontaneity is no longer the facade we aspire to but rather we aspire to the facade of being the perfect taste-machiavellians 8:16 PM Phillip: eep me: lolz! Phillip: well hm theres just so much media out there 8:17 PM and the internet puts this strange pressure on us we have access to everything so the excuses for not being aware change 8:18 PM me: that’s interesting. you’re very clever Phillip: could you imagine saying something so ridiculous 30 years ago as — no i haven’t seen it BUT its in my netflix queue 8:19 PM me: right it’s again my thesis about success and intention collapsing. now being a good snob is about wanting to be the right things rather than about being the right things. there are so many things you can want to be that shaping the desire itself is so hard you can distinguish yourself based on that alone 8:20 PM i love this idea. it’s deep Phillip: its a good one i have thots but need to do laundry.’ And I said to Mabel, I said, ‘my idea of art i love is this: it gives you an output that’s pungently different from you input. the american avant poetry lineage broke my heart for losing an interest in doing tha’. And I said, I said, ‘do you always start by feeling a practice is substantial then go into believing it’s substantial or ever the other way around?’ And I said, I said, ‘Is it true that a chef needs a palette more precise than that of the average fine-dining enthusiast? And is

it for a conceptual economy cashing-out informativeness of the palette as [constitutive] authority on deliciousness, or for empirical reasons?’ And I said, I said, ‘come up with something to which the epigraph will be: Raisins can be the best part of a cake. - Ludwig Wittgenstein.’ And I said, I said, ‘realizing too late a Milky Way has no crunchy center. fuck you America and your exotic brands.’ And I said to Mabel, I said, ‘Nietzsche’s micro-materialism’s only anomalous next to his next door neighbors. Hardly even that. Montesquieu to Rousseau to Herder are much possessed by food & weather.’ And I said, I said, ‘from: peligrietzer@gmail.com [mailto:peligrietzer@gmail.com] Sent: Tuesday, March 17, 2009 3:31 PM To: Wilson, Carl Subject: do you watch Gossip Girl? I always loved it and do still but now realize it’s a trick played on people like me who think by watching gg they’re slumming it with genuine trash while in fact it’s intentionally designed to appeal to literati who want to feel like they’re slumming it with genuine trash. It’s Franz Ferdinand masquerading as Britney Spears.

----- On Tue, Mar 17, 2009 at 3:40 PM, Wilson, Carl wrote: Well, I don’t think there’s that much “genuine” trash on TV, actually, Peli. It’s all made by rich people, after all, most of them with advanced degrees. So don’t look there for trash authenticity. My favourite current example: The Paris Hilton show The Simple Life as well as Flava of Love were both conceived by a New Yorker with a literary doctorate who is a renowned Nabokovian. I’m sure your basic call on GG is right though.

----- From: peligrietzer@gmail.com [mailto:peligrietzer@gmail.com] Sent: Tuesday, March 17, 2009 3:57 PM To: Wilson, Carl Subject: Re: do you watch Gossip Girl? actually there might be something similar

going on with Spears i think. so much of the later stuff *just is* artsy electronica. i guess my general thought here is that so much of what's taken to be literati\hipsters\whatever breaking beyond taste-barriers [some but not all of what 'poptism' delineates] is more about a certain generation taking over the production of popular culture and catering to its own tastes rather than a generation shifting its tastes towards 'the people'.

----- On Tue, Mar 17, 2009 at 4:05 PM, Wilson, Carl wrote: I'm not sure that culture being made by the cultural class (but consumed by a wider group) is a new development. I think it *is* a newer development (in pop-audience generational terms) for the connoisseurs to realize it.

----- On Tue, Mar 17, 2009 at 4:14 PM, Peli Grietzer wrote: but what i think is a genuine question is whether the level of double-discourse [the same code speaking in a different language to different castes] we're seeing in even the most pop of pop artifacts is a shift, at least relative to the era we've been in since the pop\high "great divide" came about. whether it's possible to reconsider 'poptism' [also] as shifts in production and in targeting rather than just a spontaneous shift in reception.

----- On Tue, Mar 17, 2009 at 4:16 PM, Wilson, Carl wrote:@globeandmail.com> I'd suggest that maybe the targeting followed the reception shift rather than the other way around - I don't think they started making Britney-for-the-bookish until it became clear that was increasingly her main audience (and that teenagers were less & less interested). You could certainly make a case the other way, tho it gets a little conspiratorial-sounding.

On Tue, Mar 17, 2009 at 4:27 PM, Peli Grietzer wrote@fas.harvard.edu>: one can perhaps think of the increasing sophistication of segmentation etc in advertising, and the increasing importance of attracting solvent viewers. or on the other hand ask what would make it more important than ever for this generation of mass-culture-makers to want to produce things that themselves and their friends would enjoy too — which again suggests a reception-production feedback i suppose. i really feel there's so much to be unearthed here though, beneath this Renoir-ish narrative of the elite simply descending towards 'the people' out of world-historical insight

On Tue, Mar 17, 2009 at 4:47 PM, Wilson, Carl wrote: There's research on the reasons for the "omnivorous" shift among elite consumers, some of which credit it to globalization and multiculturalism - that in the post-industrial economic order, it's more important to demonstrate your code-switching skills, and not to seem married to a single set of cultural markers. In that light, you could read it as bad news rather than good news for the 'masses' - the elites are just colonizing everything, and leaving no cultural territory that non-elites can even call their own. Past "low" culture might have been scorned but at least it allowed some form of group identification and belonging. But that seems like an insufficient account to me as well - this high-low breakdown is a pretty massive cultural shift and the progressive-evolutionary reading definitely dominates any more critical and sceptical interpretation. (Other than the nostalgist re-assertion of the highbrow, which remains a prevalent minority opinion, though from a variety of political positions.)
@globeandmail.com>@fas.harvard.edu>@globeandmail.com>@globeandmail.com>

From:
peligrietz@gmail.com [mailto:peligrietz@gmail.com] you know i should have done a better job distinguishing what i'm talking about from explicitly self-conscious trashiness like Ugly Betty etc. the idea is the 'trash' you love passionately without irony having any relation to it neither on the artifact's side nor on the viewer's side, and feel innovative for doing so.' And I said, I said, "'i grab hold of the power in a conversation like the cosmos in a kafka short. i can't make a dent but if you give-in for a second there's no going back'" And I said, I said, 'restlessness as basically reflexive. you're restless in that you take your restlessness to be about something that refuses to reveal itself but could permit you to rename your state.' And I said, I said, 'i'll take things in/around me seriously as long as they are not events. events are so goofy.'

And I said to Mabel, I said, 'I heart Edward Said. But his style reads so much like a NY Times profiling of a classy literary celebrity. "Reluctant to accept my suggestion of restaurant ("I never eat after 6 p.m.")', Mr. Adorno offered instead that we meet at a local Café. He is a powerfully built man with thinning hair, dressed in a conservatively cut black suit that emanates a striking foreignness against the backdrop of jeans-clad Californians " or something.' And I said, I said, 'I'm trying to find a way for 'deep' cultural theory to be otherwise than the speculative tracing of analogies between cultural forms and political forms superimposed on their correlation to produce bipolar causality and mutual constitution.[I'm just trying to find a way for 'deep' cultural theory to be something other than the cultural as a symbol of the political. Product why not, symbol no.' And I said, I said, 'Don Quixote [book] also uses the chivalric romance to get things done. These same structural parallels that let Don Quixote [guy] project also make the chivalric romance an

excellent engine for mapping 17th century Spain. And since that day all meta-genre work that's any good uses its genre performatively and not just symptomatically.' And I said, I said, 'So much for that.' And I said, I said, 'Compare "I don't like type X art" with "I like very little type X art."' And I said to Mabel, I said, 'I dreamed the new Israeli government is given the keys to Harvard and runs it as a video-game-like prison-city where you crawl everywhere to avoid the security cameras trying to get rid of incriminating evidence that they slipped on you while you slept.' And I said, I said, '1. The very you are very different. They have more to them. Architects also raise dogs but they know not to think much of it they can't look out in NY it was made with a lake for a heart and a taste for the uncanny. Old resources have it going for them still. In the continent's strong air your personality on tape uncomfortably high-pitched, thin chance at eluding psychology drawn from the world famous smoke of tobacco. The very very you are. Very different from the very me. All the objects left Europ we looked at the tan-lines left after them by the sun of the mind it is not tired to do this it is almost new 2. Dear acquaintances your second language. First europ Dear acquaintances after the money's gone and you're as good. The best of your ridiculous powers all there after a sleep so good that it was practically unverifiable. Get stabbed in the habitus once and me as a culture is over it and outwards and more.' And I said, I said, 'Analytic dreams are the worst..' And I said, I said, 'half asleep I have Bourdieu fever-dreams where I can see habitus-textures likes it's the fucking matrix.' And I said, I said, 'in which Chef Gordon Ramsay travels the continent teaching the petty bourgeois to man-up and stop getting exploited by workers.' And I said to Mabel, I said, 'the practice of argument-by-tagging: the way you get to say "but this is a blah that is not blahblah" in philosophy and in manifestos and have it stick' And I said, I said 'we need a better theory of rhetoric-by-mimesis [ideology-by-mimesis] that will allow to rigorously

differentiate powerfully implicit premises from instrumental premises, at least as poles on a continuum. Take talking animals in Aesop's fables to mark one pole and everything about Iron Man to mark the other pole, for that matter. There are reasons this is excruciatingly difficult though — it requires deconstructing the 'artifact' to reception and production, and deconstructing reception to N different consumers and deconstructing production to the stage where patterns are born and the stage where patterns become available or ubiquitous and the stage where they get picked up by a particular maker or makers for a particular artifact.' And I said, I said, 'Here's something: any account of the sociology of taste that doesn't mention high-school's quasi-autonomous dynamics is incomplete. And I said, I said, 'as if you could just walk into somebody's conversation and start with 'you're doing it wrong.' And I said, I said, 'A theoretical one liner regarding early Barthes that is misleadingly lyrical-sounding: mythology is fake emergence.' And I said to Mabel, I said, "sickness unto deadline." And I said, I said, 'it's a hardly-to-non existent line between embedding what you have to say in a concrete epistemic position [playing wizard of oz with the curtain up!] and turning your opinions into personality ornaments...' And I said, I said, 'I wasn't kidding about Benjamin and Blackadder. That show is nothing if not History as movement towards the comprehension of itself as a single catastrophe. The space for agency dwindles just so every season as symmetrically comprehension begins to emerge.' And I said, I said, 'I'm not sure I'm in love with Mulhall's idea of the 'inner' as 'aspect seeing' in behavior. To think that someone is dreaming about zeppelins is to see his dreaming about zeppelins in his sleeping face? Awesome. I wish just for once that instead of 'pain' people will talk about "reciting the lyrics of Ziggy Stardust in one's head" as the 'inner' to analyze. I'm tired of those rigged games where we use only 'inners' that have a paradigmatic expression. I say: a few analogies between

beetle-in-a-box and Dummett's anti-realism about the past, and between the impossibility of a mistake about having a pain and the impossibility of a mistake about "being in England" [On Certainty], and the whole thing turns out a red herring.' And I said, I said, 'the divide between 'continental' and non-'continental' thought outside philosophy as such may go a little something like this: what entities need a programme for their (some kind of) reduction to lower-order entities and what length of rope it should allow them. This works at the respective appropriate disciplines for the reduction of the social to the psychological and the reduction of the psychological to the behavioral\cognitive. Or not, but I don't see anyone coming up with a better way to look at this.' And I said to Mabel, I said, 'too much subjectivity this week. Here's a semi-dry one: when Derrida talks of how you're gonna overstate the 16-18th century if you don't know your Greeks [in White Mythology], and when Foucault goes on about how the Occident LOVES writing [in The Order of Things], are they making faces at each other?' And I said, I said, 'I fantasize of one day being important enough that I can afford to have mixed feelings about subjects.' And I said, I said, 'It's either that I rather be stabbed in the habitus a thousand times over and not be bullied into taking anything on its own terms or that I'm just not a very good anything.' And I said, I said, 'Derrida says "Deconstruction is not a sitcom". But a sitcom is exactly that which makes an already established dynamics manifest again and again.' And I said, I said, 'Les Mots et les Choses is fucking amazing. Yes Foucault has a nasty habit of presenting tautologies as historical theses, but.' And I said to Mabel, I said, "'oh but I've been criticized both for being too x and for not being x enough *gasp!*'" And I said, I said, 'fuck yeah! Exhibit A Exhibit B.' And I said, I said, 'Modal characters on TV: in Buffy, Simpsons, more, a character is a range of overlapping personae.' And I said, I said, 'reading [Lenin doing metaphysics](#) is, I don't know, like seeing an actor you know

from a contemporary sitcom in an 80's horror movie.'

And I said, I said, 'say what you will about passing-by the linguistic turn, Analytic Philosophy is still essentially about language in one sense: it deals exclusively with affirming and denying propositions [as opposed to encouraging or hindering manners of cognition as let's say Buddhism or Wittgenstein or Nietzsche are concerned with]. This is only an obvious thing to do given a particular picture of what thinking is — one that doesn't care much for cognitive differences that fall below the level of differentiating (h)propositional attitudes. I'm talking for example 'bout the difference between having only true beliefs regarding the Monty Hall problem but having a near mental breakdown every time you try go over it and not having any trouble with the Monty Hall problem. Or maybe the difference between affirming modal realism and thinking about non-actual worlds as often and as seriously and as emotionally as you think about this world. Or the difference between agreeing with Parfit's metaphysics of identity and feeling the walls of your glass tunnel disappearing so you now live in the open air. This is a mess I should revisit this tomorrow.' And I said, I said, 'account for the process of a metaphysical itch [of the form "but how can x which we cannot do without survive in the absence of y which our worldview can no more accommodate"] ceasing to itch and explain why this never happens in Germany.' And I said, I said, 'thank you: "The goal of this paper is to develop a theory of content for vague language. My proposal is based on the following three theses: (1) language-mastery is not rule-based — it involves a certain kind of decision-making; (2) a theory of content is to be thought of instrumentally — it is a tool for making sense of our linguistic practice; and (3) linguistic contents are only locally defined — they are only defined relative to suitably constrained sets of possibilities.'" And I said, I said, 'I'm vexed about 'the lyrical'. I need it but I have

nothing to say for it.’ And I said, I said, ‘why is L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E never a part of something other? Where’s the whatever the project of which has its roots somewhere else but takes mind of L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E. Punditry follows: An avant-garde is only as good as what you get when you refuse its theoretical foundations. Demiurge knows it doesn’t take a Freudian Gnostic to care about Breton. Then again maybe just give it an extra decade or so [for L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E].’ And I said to Mabel, I said, ‘— “What’s in my pocket?” —”Caesar or nothing” [possibly the tasteless-est thing since Hofstadter’s translation of Eugene Onegin].’ And I said, I said, ‘as soon as an essay makes its first really good point a near uncontrollable desire to stop reading comes down on me.’ And I said, I said, ‘are nowadays all about New-Yorker-izing geekdom! I’m more for than against, though there’s a very Dangerous Minds way about the effort.’ And I said, I said, ‘there’s a lot to worry very much about other than Wittgenstein and Marx.’ And I said, I said, “‘Thus when the ambitious man whose watchword was “Either Caesar or nothing”³ does not become Caesar, he is in despair thereat. But this signifies something else, namely, that precisely because he did not become Caesar he now cannot endure to be himself. So properly he is not in despair over the fact that he did not become Caesar, but he is in despair over himself for the fact that he did not become Caesar. This self which, had he become Caesar, would have been to him a sheer delight (though in another sense equally in despair), this self is now absolutely intolerable to him.”’ And I said to Mabel, I said, ‘I’m at that weird point in my life where I get more kicks out of symptomatic complexity than crafted complexity [in artifacts]. Whatever.’ And I said, I said, ‘[Accidental late-Dada poetry \[title only\]](#)’ And I said, I said, ‘I’m extra realizing why I don’t like Charles Bernstein. [His work](#) is all about putting an end to the rumor that he was a teenager. He’ll be out-habitus-ed over his cold, dead body.’

And I said, I said, 'yet a certain activity of mind however slight is a necessary adjunct to company. no wonder i'm never rested.'

And I said, I said, 'I dare you all to come up with a pun that's not on google.' And I said to Mabel, I said, 'you know the Vampire Weekend video that's either Godard or Anderson? It's only barely not worthwhile to essay-ize on what it means that conditions are perfect for this indeterminacy, or on how little hermeneutic difference it (the indeterminacy) makes. Quickly: the collapse of ideology into identity. Godard & Anderson may point in opposite directions but the root of both arrows is artsy upper class young nostalgic bohemian melancholy etc., and identity is today that much more salient an affair than ideology.' And I said, I said, 'thesis: there's more "obviously" & "of course" in high-Theory [the in-house, vintage stuff — your Benjamins and De Mans] than in basically anything else.' And I said, I said, 'I swear the part where they're all standing together after the speech was patterned after the final scene from Star Wars Episode IV.' And I said, I said, 'I am *not* qualified to talk about dialectics but let's pretend I am: The Man Without Qualities is the opposite because it's a refusal of immanence. The point-counterpoint movement is lateral rather than dialectic — it's a chain of points of views that supersede one another by trivialization, making what was salient in the world from one trivial from the other. They obviate one another rather than overcome one another.' And I said, I said, 'oh have pity for the greeks, the one peoples to not have the option of using a greek term to make a concept fancy.' And I said to Mabel, I said, 'I have solved the paradox of literary interpretation — deriving from the illusory contradiction between 1) "meaning" of a work being not its denotation but its connotation when interpreted for implicated world view same as any other act can be interpreted for an implicated world view 2) the work still being also a text the "meaning" of which is its denotation — and

will now go teach elementary poetry to children in an Austrian village.’ And I said, I said, ‘three things that need reconciling: the reducibility of the language one speaks to an idiolect, the ubiquity of deferential content, and the lack of individual control over connotation [as in De Man’s surprisingly good discussion of “Pain et Vin” vs. “Bort und Wein”]. Actually the first and last of these can maybe give a great distinction between denotation and connotation — denotation is everything that’s determined by a Davidsonian interpretation of one’s idiolect, connotation is everything that’s determined by the idiolects of one’s audience.’ And I said, I said, ‘if you deduct the bad puns from Gossip Girl it’s now actually the best drama on TV. Fuck, tonight’s episode is gotta be the only artifact to really get me these past few months other than Shklovsky’s *The Zoo*. Or maybe my brain is just rotting? But I can isolate some beyond-doubt merits: ingeniously dynamic infrastructure, awesome signal-to-noise ratio plot-wise, unpredictable but coherent agents, objectivity that’s “structuralist” in a more than trivial sense. All are fancied up descriptions of typical soap-opera properties really, but this might just mean that soap-opera is a genre well poised to do awesome things if the stars align right.’ And I said, I said, ‘exciting thetic writing without pathos — I know it’s out there but where though.’ And I said to Mabel, I said, ‘Dear dude who wrote “The Structure of Allegorical Desire”’: while your essay is very clever, and I do want to do all my class readings for once, and according to google you died in your early 40’s which is sad, if you’re not gonna put in the time to find out the difference between a Peircean index and a Peircean icon before alluding to the former then I’m going to stop reading watch another episode of *Mythbusters* and go to sleep.’ And I said, I said, ‘what’s gently repulsive in 20th century German (with a twice-capital G — the cross section of the country & the genre) philosophy (with a non-capital p — so Benjamin + Auerbach welcome) is the unspoken certainty that the fortunes-of-the-sacred-

in-one-way-or-another are where it's at and has been from always till ever. Insufficient imagination! Like insisting at your teens that life as such is about an inner dialectic with one's fear of approaching girls. The historicity of German historicism never seems to run deeper than different pongs to an unchanging ping.' And I said, I said, 'there's a thing that's not exactly analytic philosophy and not exactly Theory that comprises in people not totally being good in telling the difference between the kind of things you can talk about loosely and the kind of things you're not really saying anything about if you're talking about them loosely. If I had a grasp of math I could do a good song-and-dance of how that style of intellectual work would look when applied to math.' And I said, I said, 'there gotta be more options than asserting ironically or asserting genuinely. Analogy: you can entertain a proposition in your mind without believing it to be true or believing it to be false. Transparently saying something you don't believe to be the case can do things besides implying that it's not the case. Even transparently saying something you believe to not be the case can do things besides implying that it's not the case. The idea that we can either assert genuinely or otherwise be engaged in this uni-functional activity "irony" is no good. [there's hyperbole, but that's not what i'm shooting for]'

And I said, I said, 'they should do a TV show called "Acquaintances". It will be like "Friends" only with acquaintances.' And I said to Mabel, I said, 'I need to relearn how to rein in. I've been pacing about all day, re-reading the paper every half an hour. This is not the way to still have hair five years ahead.' And I said, I said, 'I always end up all "oh , so you manage a hedgefund? that's so cool". And I said, I said, 'the greatest song of all time is a sketch by Bowie & Cale (!) called "Velvet Couch."' And I said, I said, 'some people like you (me) immediately and some don't.' And I said, I said, 'I've been watching so much American TV old and new I no

longer know what do 16 year olds actually look like.’ And I said to Mabel, I said, ‘first episodes Final 5 minutes of episodes.’ And I said, I said, “surrealism” [no capitalization] as a vantage point from which Surrealism and English Nonsense are a single genre.’ And I said, I said, ‘the food here is mindblowingly bad. Otherwise things are fun.’ And I said, I said, ‘what shall I wear tomorrow? [sweat drenched shirt from flight!] ? What shall I ever wear ? [sweat drenched shirt from flight!]’ And I said, I said, ‘I have no: clothes, shoes, toiletries, sheets, books.’ And I said to Mabel, I said, ‘[24 hours]’ And I said, I said, ‘I want to be only the best of me all the time.’ And I said, I said, ‘a speech-act-inflected perspective on art makes salient what’s cool in “avant pop” or “art pop” and other scare-quotables: it’s pretty meaningful that an artifact can do stuff in circumstances of reception other than the horrifyingly narrow ones of “sitting down to read\see\hear high art”. And arguments that the felicity conditions for avant pop are as narrow can be countered from Family Guy to Lil Wayne. ‘